

**25<sup>th</sup> GENERAL CHAPTER  
OF THE SOCIETY OF St. FRANCIS DE SALES**

# **THE SALESIAN COMMUNITY TODAY**

**Documents of 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter**

# **GC25**

**Rome, 24 February - 20 April 2002**









# acts

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

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OFFICIAL ORGAN OF ANIMATION AND COMMUNICATION FOR THE SALESIAN CONGREGATION

**N. 378  
year LXXXIII  
may 2002**

## **THE SALESIAN COMMUNITY TODAY**

**DOCUMENTS OF 25<sup>th</sup> GENERAL CHAPTER  
OF THE SOCIETY OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES**

**Rome, 24 February – 22 April 2002**

Editrice S.D.B.

Edizione extra commerciale

Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco

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*Finito di stampare:* luglio 2002

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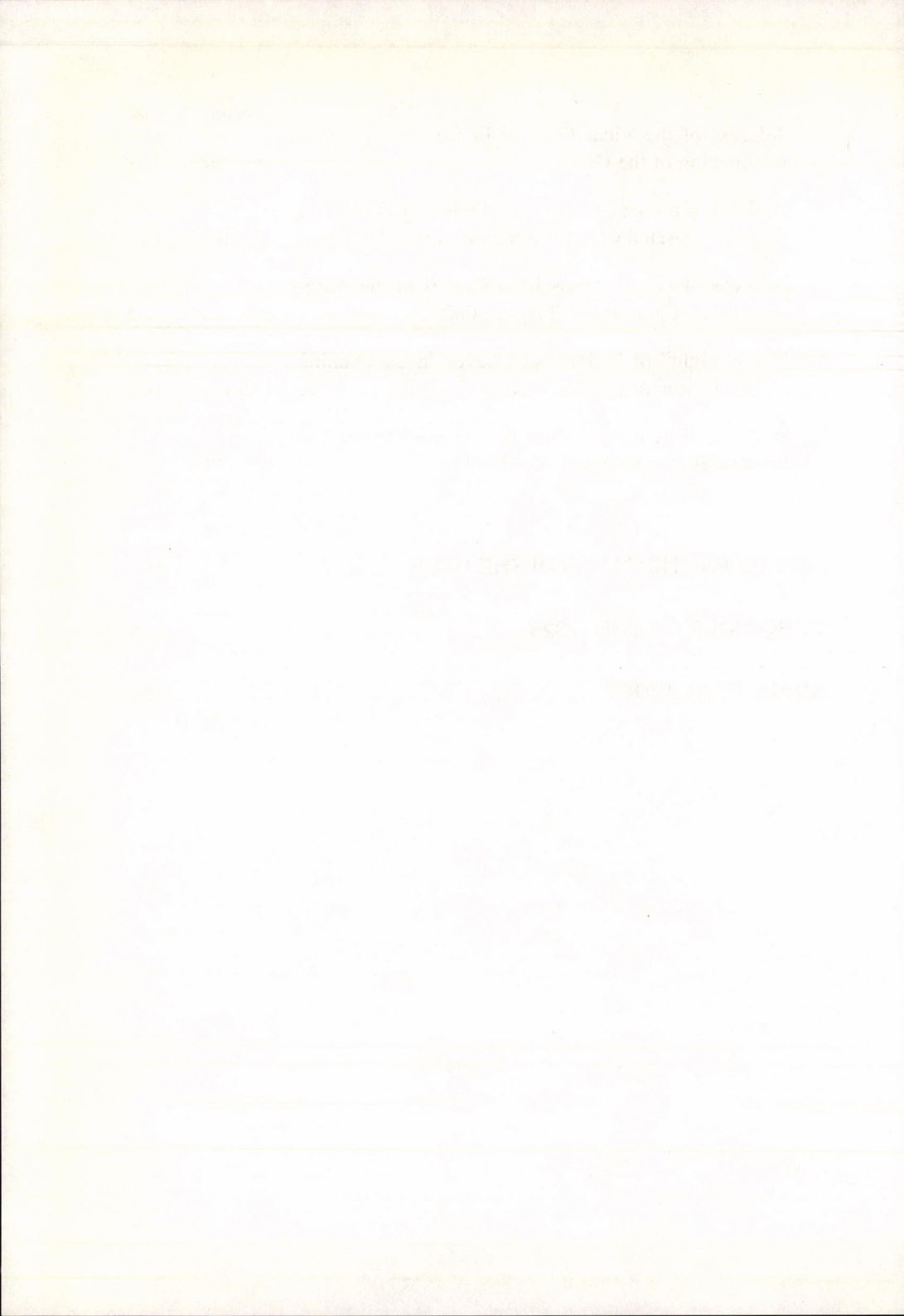
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## SIGNS AND ABBREVIATIONS

|       |   |
|-------|---|
| AGC   | Acts of the General Council                 |
| ASC   | Acts of the Superior Council                |
| BM    | Biographical Memoirs                        |
| C     | Constitutions                               |
| can.  | canon                                       |
| EPC   | Educative and Pastoral Community            |
| FSDB  | Formation of Salesians of Don Bosco         |
| GC22  | 22 <sup>nd</sup> General Chapter            |
| GC23  | 23 <sup>rd</sup> General Chapter            |
| GC24  | 24 <sup>th</sup> General Chapter            |
| GC25  | 25 <sup>th</sup> General Chapter            |
| MB    | Memorie Biografiche                         |
| NMI   | <i>Novo Millennio Ineunte</i>               |
| OPP   | Organic Provincial Plan                     |
| PFC   | Provincial Formation Commission             |
| R     | Regulations                                 |
| Ratio | Formation of Salesians of Don Bosco         |
| SEPP  | Salesian Educative and Pastoral Plan        |
| SGC   | Special (20 <sup>th</sup> ) General Chapter |
| VC    | <i>Vita Consecrata</i>                      |





# PRESENTATION

My dear Confreres,

We are beginning a new six-year period which coincides with the first years of the third millennium, and we do so in the conviction that the 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter has been for us a grace of God and motivated by his invitation to plunge into the vast ocean of the world of today. The bidding to “*launch out into the deep*” is a program of action, not a simple slogan without content. This is how it was understood by Fr Vecchi himself in leaving it to us as a legacy in his last Strenna. This is not a time for nostalgic memories, but rather a time of hope for the future – one that calls upon us to face up boldly to the challenges of the education and evangelization of the young.

We are not unaware of the dangers hidden in the open sea, but in this venture we are enlivened and encouraged by God’s word, who calls us to “cast our nets” where the catch can be greatest. And so with his Word as food for our journey, we prepare to look ahead and launch out into the deep with spiritual and apostolic zeal renewed.

## 1. The Acts of the GC25

I present to you the “Acts” of the GC25. They provide us with valuable material for the renewal of our life and of our educative and pastoral activity. In the first part you will find the introduction, the five practical sections and the conclusion of what was the main theme of the Chapter; the second part contains the evaluation of the structures of animation and central government. These are then followed by the deliberations and guidelines referring to the Constitutions and Regulations and to the Government of the Congregation,

with the practical interpretation of the texts of our Rule of life. You will also find the Messages sent by the members of the Chapter to the confreres on the vocation of the salesian brother, to the Salesian Family, and to Young People, together with an appeal to save the world's youngsters.

By way of Appendices have been added the various addresses and messages of greeting, some of which are particularly significant, such as those of the Holy Father at the beginning of the Chapter and during the audience, that of the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life, the opening address of the Vicar General, the first "Good-night" of the Rector Major and his concluding address.

All these form a collection of documents that gather together the results of the reflections of the provincial chapters and of the GC25.

## **2. The capitular text**

The Chapter Assembly resolutely took up the task outlined by the Rector Major in his letter convoking the Chapter, in which he asked it not to repeat the already well known doctrine on the community but rather "to find effective ways of giving a new motivation to the communities to manifest in a simple and clear manner the religious elements of the new situations; to identify the essential conditions or criteria which allow, or rather encourage, a joyful and humanly significant way of living the fraternity we have professed as followers of Christ".<sup>1</sup>

Under the guidance of the Presidency and the Moderator, the work of the commissions and of the assembly went smoothly ahead with ever greater clarity towards the elaboration of what was not so much a well organized document as a number of independent *schemes of work* after the manner of *practical handbooks*. In this way the literary style of the "capitular text" is already an indication

<sup>1</sup> VECCHI JUAN E., *Towards the 25<sup>th</sup> General Charter*, AGC 372

of how it should be received: as something essentially practical. This is not to say that the text is devoid of theological foundation. The latter, in fact, appears in strongly concentrated form at the beginning of each section, while the sections themselves concentrate largely on challenges and practical guidelines.

It may be opportune at this point to emphasize some points that can be of help in the reading, assimilation and application of the capitular text.

**2.1** As distinct from the GC23 and GC24 which had spoken of the local community as the centre of animation and the strategic setting for the education of young people to the faith and for the involvement and formation of the laity, the GC25 decided to *centre its reflections on the community itself* with all its dynamic characteristics. In fact the community model emerging from the GC25 has as its reference point our apostolic consecration as expressed in art. 3 of the Constitutions. It is a matter of a community called to realize, through the grace of unity, the vital synthesis between fraternal life, the radical following of Christ and our dedication to the mission to the young.

And so the community itself is the real subject of this Chapter. Not only because it is its theme, but also as being its primary agent and protagonist. Consequently every community is invited to welcome the capitular text as a valuable treasure to be exploited.

**2.2** *The scheme* of each section is identical throughout. It opens with a text from the Acts of the Apostles which is meant to be a true source of inspiration for every community with which to reproduce the experience of the Jerusalem community in accepting the Holy Spirit as the guide of its own life. Therefore we should avoid thinking of these quotations from Scripture as so much icing on the cake. On the contrary they should prompt us to make use of the *lectio divina* so as to learn always to begin from the Word of God. This in turn means that we must make our own the attitude of Our Blessed Lady in its regard: listen to it, obey it, make ourselves its disciples, and become believers.



It is the same dynamic Word that prompts the community to interpret social and ecclesiastical history and to recognize in it the *call of God* and of our Rule of life, the expectations of the young, and the needs of the laity and of the Salesian Family.

Hence the community is led to evaluate its own *situation*, to discover its strengths and weaknesses, its openness and resistance, its possibilities and limitations. What it amounts to is a revision of community life.

In this way the community learns to discover the fundamental *challenges* and to face them with hope and courage. It also learns to ask itself the necessary questions and look for suitable replies. This is the purpose of the *practical guidelines*.

**2.3** As far as the fundamental *contents* are concerned, these refer to fraternal life, evangelical witness and animating presence among the young.

*The fraternal life* of the community aims at fostering the processes of the human and vocational growth of the confreres, promoting deep interpersonal relationships, strengthening the feeling of belonging and the family spirit, and helping to build up a community vision that is more widely shared. For this purpose may be found useful the personal life-plan, the practice of community discernment, the good use of occasions of meeting together, and the salesian community project.

*Evangelical witness* calls on us to make outwardly visible the primacy of God in the life of the community, to live the “grace of unity” in its community expressions, to make the following of Christ radical, prophetic and attractive, and to share with each other vocational motivations and the experience of God. The central place given to the Word of God, fostered by the practice of the “lectio divina”, the quality of community prayer and the daily Eucharist will help to deepen the spiritual experience and the manifestation of the central place of God in our life. In the same way the following of Christ, lived in total availability to a joyful obedience, through a practical and austere poverty and the splendour of a vigi-

lant and serene chastity, will make the witness of the community more transparent.

Wherever there is a salesian community there is also present an experience of faith, a network of relationships is built up, and many different kinds of service are offered to the young. The community makes visible its *salesian presence among the young*, animating them and fostering their growth. It is necessary, first of all, to return to the young and be not only a community *for* the young but also a community *with* the young. This is why the salesian community builds up a presence of communion and participation involving the laity and the Salesian Family, and takes its place in the neighbourhood and the local Church. In this way it is transformed into a presence that “educates and evangelizes”, creating settings of a strongly spiritual character, fully aware of the situations of poverty of young people and reacting to them with a pastoral mind and heart, and giving effect to projects and processes that help the young to mature. Finally the community promotes a true vocational culture, in which every young person is helped to discover a plan of life; it explicitly proposes the salesian vocation to those more suitable, by inviting them to have a vocational experience, and following up those who accept.

To be a community that lives fraternity, that gives strong and clear evangelical witness and that becomes an animating presence among young people, it must itself be animated, motivated, directed and followed up. *Animation of the community* takes place mainly through ongoing formation. The community can provide specific moments of spiritual renewal and opportunities for the educative and pastoral updating of the confreres but, without any doubt, the first and most important source of formation is the quality of daily life. The *Rector* has a fundamental role in the animation of the community, involving all the confreres in shared responsibility. His attention must be directed primarily to charismatic identity, the community mission, and fraternity.

Finally, the GC25 sets out some *conditions* which make it possible for a salesian community to be effective at the present day. It is a matter of helping each community to work according to a

common project, of ensuring that it has the right number of confreres with the proper qualifications, of deepening the relationship between the community and the work, of putting into effect the provincial organic project. Some of these conditions apply at local level, but the greater number demand responsibility and decisions by the provincial community.

The capitular text is evidently directed primarily to the community itself, to which it offers five programs to be studied, examined more deeply and put into effect.

### **3. The Event of the 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter**

Clearly the GC25 is not merely a document. Above all it is an intense experience of the Congregation and it is a spirit whose witnesses are the Chapter members who have taken part in this great event. They are the best spokesmen for what they have seen and heard!

Among the features that marked the Chapter there stands out the atmosphere of brotherhood that was created from the very beginning and that everyone greatly appreciated. It was wonderful to experience “the Congregation’s unity in diversity” that article 146 of the Constitutions mentions. This was the result of the desire on the part of the Chapter members to make the Assembly itself an experience of community.

A second aspect was the growing awareness of the worldwide nature of the Congregation, which is reflected in its cultural diversity. The “Good-nights” by the Provincials, the celebrations and ceremonies led by the different Regions, the contributions in the Hall are proof that the charism of Don Bosco our Founder and Father has become ever more inculturated in the most diverse contexts and that the General Chapters themselves have assisted in bringing about a rich synthesis between unity and diversity.

The third extraordinary element was the Beatification – in St Peter’s Square - of three members of the Salesian Family, Brother



Artemide Zatti, Sister Maria Romero and Fr Luigi Variara, which highlighted once again that the salesian vocation is really “a way that leads to Love” (C 196), to holiness, and that this ought to be our natural way of living, the best gift we can offer to the young (cf. C 25), our most significant educational project.

In a special way the beatification of the first salesian Brother – not a martyr – evoked in the Chapter the desire to re-launch this vocation that was so fundamental for Don Bosco.

The fourth significant aspect was the presence of the Holy Father through his opening Message, and the Audience he granted in which he invited us to take holiness as our primary task.

A fifth interesting element was the full media coverage provided by ANS with the collaboration of the Don Bosco Missions in Turin, of the whole event which made possible the immediate communication to the Salesian Family and all the friends of Don Bosco of what was happening in the Chapter.

Finally there should be mentioned the presence of our confrere Mgr Alois Kothgasser who gave the retreat taking as his theme the Strenna of the Rector Major for 2002 – “*Duc in altum!*” – and also that of our confreres Cardinals and Bishops who came to visit us during the Chapter underlining the ecclesial character of our vocation and mission.

I pray that the spirit of the GC25 may spread through all the communities of the Congregation and may help us to respond with generosity to the Lord’s will, which is expressed through this Pentecostal event.

#### **4. The task for the six year period**

As I said in my closing address, after the preparatory stage and the celebration of the 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter there now comes the time to pass from reflection to real life. This presentation has the particular scope of handing over to the Congregation the Chapter

Document, with the invitation to each confrere and to each community to study it and put it into practice.

We must make of the community a personal life plan. Let us believe in it and build it up! It is the task of everyone, young and old, sick and healthy. Let us put to one side tiredness and disappointment as did the Apostles who had laboured all night without catching anything. Our future vitality depends on our ability to create communities that are significantly charismatic today. The essential basis for this is a renewed commitment to holiness. At the Word of the Lord we cast our nets, confident that the Lord will see to it that our efforts bear fruit.

Let us ask Mary Help of Christians the *Star of the Sea* to whom I entrusted the Congregation from the beginning of my period as Rector Major to help us to overcome our fears, to encourage us to “launch into the deep” and to accompany us as we set out on the immense ocean of this world with the enthusiasm and the zeal of Don Bosco, looking on the face of Christ and seeking the salvation of the young.

FR. PASCUAL CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA  
*Rector Major*

Rome, 24 May 2002  
*Feast of Mary Help of Christians*

FIRST PART

# **THE SALESIAN COMMUNITY TODAY**



# INTRODUCTION

- 1 With our gaze fixed on Jesus Christ Our Lord, gathered in prayer around Mary the Mother of Jesus we, the members of the 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, open to the Holy Spirit and to the gift of communion, want to build our life according to the model of the first apostolic community.

We recognize that we are brought together by listening to the Word of God, by prayer in common, by the Eucharist and by having things in common.<sup>1</sup> We are trying to be a community with “one heart and one soul”, with a meaning for all people, that with its life and words bears witness to the Risen Lord;<sup>2</sup> a community filled with joy and the dynamism of the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup>

As a fruit of the Jubilee, which celebrated two thousand years of the incarnation of the Son of God, the Pope, in his Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, invites us to turn our gaze to the person of Christ, to become aware of our vocation to holiness, to be “a house and a school of communion” and to commit ourselves to the new evangelization<sup>4</sup>.

- 2 Prompted by the apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, we are invited as religious to place ourselves in the forefront of this way of renewal and re-foundation, returning with creative fidelity to the evangelical and charismatic roots that express the real meaning of our vocation in the Church.

In the midst of a pluralistic world, searching for new models for life and meaning, yet marked by dramatic situations of

<sup>1</sup> cf. Acts 2, 42. 46-47

<sup>2</sup> cf. Acts 4, 32-33

<sup>3</sup> cf. Acts 13, 52

<sup>4</sup> NMI 16 and 43



poverty and oppression, consecrated life today can be significant if, like the “house built on the rock”,<sup>5</sup> it is founded on the unconditional commitment to Jesus Christ, anchored in the evangelical call to holiness, and placed on the frontiers of the Church’s mission.

- 3** In today’s society and culture important new phenomena have arisen which, while they appear to open up new possibilities for human and social development, raise issues about the present models for human and Christian fulfilment. Secularism, which finds room for the sacred in a great variety of religious expressions but pays little heed to the proposal of faith, is constantly gaining ground in many places, Globalization is spreading from the field of economy into other areas in society creating interdependence, but also profound and unjust inequalities, which give rise to new forms of poverty. The birth of multiethnic, multicultural and multireligious societies and the rise of an exclusive nationalism, and of religious integralism are challenges to the capacity for living side by side, for tolerance and dialogue. While science and technology continue to cause amazement by their new conquests, they raise serious questions about respect for life, human dignity and conservation of the environment. Together with pluralism, universally valued so highly today, there is spreading a relativism, an individualism, a variety of points of reference which are disconcerting, especially for the young. Mass communication and the development of information technology are vehicles for new models and new ways of thinking that require careful attention in the field of education.

In such a complex world, in some ways heedless and in others so disturbed, we feel called upon to accept willingly the invitation of the Holy Father to proclaim Christ, especially to the young, as the perennial model for a new humanity.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Mt 7, 24

<sup>6</sup> cf. NMI 23 (GS 22)



- 4 The Congregation, prompted by the recent General Chapters is living and experiencing a strong call to renewal in order to manifest its vocation in a clearer and more striking way: to be a school of faith and centre of communion for the education of the young,<sup>7</sup> and to take up its special task of the animation of the lay people who share the spirit and the mission of Don Bosco, giving life to a new pastoral model.<sup>8</sup>

The quality of the consecrated life in community, the depth of its spirituality, the effectiveness of its witness, its ability to challenge, are the determining factors that give evangelical force to the realization of the Salesian Educative and Pastoral Plan (SEPP), to the presence of the SDB in the Educative and Pastoral Community (EPC) and to the growth of the Salesian Family.

- 5 The GC25 concentrates its attention on three fundamental aspects: *fraternal life, evangelical witness, and animating presence among the young*. It also considers some conditions: *the animation of the salesian community, ongoing formation and the important role of the Rector, and the organization of its life and work*. These elements are inseparable and characterize our religious community life.<sup>9</sup>

In looking at each one of these focal points and conditions we have started from “God’s call” that allows us to read the situations in which we find ourselves working, discovering and taking up the principal challenges present in them, so as to be able to propose some lines of action and suggest some appropriate strategies to our provincial and local communities.

- 6 The need for renewal has urged us to draw on the sources of the Gospel and our charism.

We are convinced, in fact, that the Preventive System of Don Bosco still retains its validity today not only as an educative

<sup>7</sup> cf. GC23

<sup>8</sup> cf. GC24

<sup>9</sup> cf. C 3

and pastoral method, but also as a source of spirituality and hence as the criterion for our “living and working together”<sup>10</sup>. Don Bosco has given it to us as an experience of life that “permeates our approach to God, our personal relationships, and our manner of living in community through the exercise of a charity that knows how to make itself loved.”<sup>11</sup> This is and becomes for us a school of holiness and fraternity.

The theme of this Chapter is in this way part of the process begun in the previous Chapters: making clearer and more challenging the power of the salesian religious community in educative and pastoral activity among the young and the poor, becoming centres of animation and of communion in the Salesian Family and the vast Movement that draws inspiration from Don Bosco, deepening the roots of our vocation and renewing the dynamism of fraternal life.

<sup>10</sup> C 49

<sup>11</sup> C 20

## I. FRATERNAL LIFE, GIFT AND PROPHECY OF COMMUNION

*"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers... the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul" (Acts 2, 42; 4,32).*

### A. GOD'S CALL AND THE APPEAL FROM THE YOUNG

- 7 Don Bosco, moved by the Spirit and through the motherly intervention of Mary<sup>12</sup>, in communion of life and action with young people, collaborators and the first Salesians, began a powerful experience of family, rich in human and spiritual values, strongly marked by service to the young. We recognize that the first educative service that the young need from us is the witness of a fraternal life that becomes: a response to their profound need for communication, a proposal for a truly human life, a prophecy of the kingdom, an invitation to welcome the gift of God.
- 8 We are also aware that fraternal communion is above all a gift from God in Jesus Christ, as well as a task and the commitment of each one. We make communion visible and we build it up by sharing our life, by fraternal love, and by our participation in the common mission.
- 9 For this reason we commit ourselves to grow in a spirituality of relationships conscious that "God calls us to live in community and entrusts us with brothers to love."<sup>13</sup>

The family spirit, lived according to the preventive system, involves: cultivating a genuine spirit of faith, living deep in-

<sup>12</sup> C 1

<sup>13</sup> C 50



terpersonal relationships, growing in mutual esteem and openness, and in the ability to be reconciled and to share with each other.

- 10** Each confrere develops his capacity for relationships, convinced of the close connection between the maturing of the individual and the community. We all feel committed therefore not to neglect whatever helps in the process of individual and community growth.

## **B. SITUATION**

- 11** Reflecting on fraternal life we highlight some positive aspects:

- greater respect for the dignity of the individual, esteem for each other and for the quality of our interpersonal relationships;
- communication is deeper and the sharing of life is appreciated and fostered by the confreres;
- the need for a personal contact with the Word of God and the desire to share the fruits with other confreres;
- enrichment resulting from the sharing of fraternal life with young people and the laity;
- greater contact with the sources of the charism and a clearer knowledge of salesian spirituality which nourish the commitment to building fraternity;
- the “community day” is appreciated and lived with creativity;
- social communication at local, provincial and world level for growing in the feeling of belonging.

- 12** But we are also aware of difficulties:

- some kinds of conflict that are not handled positively, cases of extreme activity that keep confreres away from the community and instances of a weak sense of belonging;
- the situation of confreres who take refuge in compensatory

- relationships or who search for alternative community or spiritual experiences;
- the existence of communities which in numbers or quality are not consistent, as a result of which fraternal life is difficult to organize;
  - discouragement or lack of motivation of some confreres who are discouraged or lacking in motivation, through negative experiences in the past, through difficulties in adapting to their present situation, a falling off in their sense of faith or through personal failings;
  - the problems of confreres who differ in age, formation, culture and ethnic origin in living together;
  - the situation of elderly or sick confreres who in some cases find it difficult to join in the community life and mission;
  - the intrusion of the means of social communication which take time from fraternal community relationships.

### C. CHALLENGES

- 13** The difficulties met with can be reduced to three areas that sometimes exert their influence simultaneously:
- individual choices and ways of life that gradually lead one away from the community;
  - an organization of community life that does not encourage the human and vocational development of the confreres, undermining the possibility of "living and working together";
  - interpersonal communication in which an insufficient sharing of the life and mission gradually weakens the sense of belonging and identification with the project of salesian life.

And so we ask:

- *How can we foster the processes of the human and vocational development of the confreres in cultural contexts marked by fragmentation, dispersion, relativism and individualism?*



- *How can we overcome the inertia produced by inadequate relationships that weaken the sense of belonging and undermine the fraternal atmosphere of the community?*
- *How can we organize community life and activity so as to improve communication and foster personal relationships?*
- *What procedures should be introduced to promote the learning and the practice of discernment at both individual and community level, so as to foster fraternal dialogue and sharing?*

## D. GUIDELINES

In the face of these challenges we propose the following **guidelines**:

- 14 ***The Confrere***, as the one primarily responsible for his own formation, is invited to give due importance to the “*Personal Plan of Salesian life*”, bearing in mind the following elements
  - a continual evaluation of the human, spiritual, and salesian maturing process, by means of self-assessment procedures, openness to the Word of God and acceptance of fraternal correction;
  - knowledge and practice of the spirituality of the preventive system as the source of new relationships in fraternal life;
  - the progressive growth in maturity in salesian charismatic identity;
  - an active and wholehearted presence at the ordinary and extraordinary meetings of the community ;
  - cultivation of openness to others and availability for sharing.
- 15 ***The Local Community***, as the setting for human and vocational growth.
  - a) *It promotes the practice of community discernment in the light of the Word of God and of the Constitutions. To this end it fosters the development of attitudes that encourage its use:*

- an openness to the real situation, to living in a spirit of faith and readiness to listen;
- a readiness for fraternal dialogue, facilitating and promoting participation by everyone;
- a patient search for convergence of unity and communion.

b) *It encourages specific occasions of community life*, such as prayer together, meetings, retreats, revision of life, council meetings, times of recreation, community day. In these through suitable arrangements the confreres are helped to:

- express the riches of their own interior lived experience;
- share their own worries and problems, plans and educative and pastoral activities;
- practise listening, dialogue, the acceptance of different opinions and fraternal correction.

c) *It draws up the Plan of salesian community life* bearing in mind the actual situation of the confreres and emphasizing the aspects of personal formation, communication and communion and of the commitments implied by the Salesian Educative Pastoral Plan.

**16** *The Provincial and his Council*, through the provincial formation commission (PFC), will suggest methods and provide helps to draw up the *Personal plan of salesian life* and the *Plan of salesian community life*.



## II. EVANGELICAL WITNESS

*"With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all" (Acts 4,33).*

### A. THE CALL OF GOD

- 17 *Called by the Father*, we follow the Lord Jesus<sup>14</sup> our living rule,<sup>15</sup> by the strength of the Holy Spirit. Enlightened by the mystery of God who is a community of love, we live the following of Christ in communities in which we find the response to the deep aspirations of the heart, we are signs of love and unity for the young<sup>16</sup> and our community life becomes a daily experience of spirituality.
- 18 *The first apostolic community*, taking its first steps sometimes with difficulty, remains the fundamental point of reference for all our communities. Its joyful witness to the Risen Lord is expressed in the seeking of the Kingdom realized in fraternal service, lived in sharing and communion, announced in the saving proclamation of the Gospel, and celebrated in prayer in common and in the breaking of bread.
- 19 In the same way our communities become a prophecy for the young in generous service, in fellowship, in proclamation and in festivity. Their *experience of Church* founded on the Word and the Eucharist, becomes the leaven of communion and of new communities, through daily witness to the fullness of life and happiness that stems from the Risen Lord.
- 20 *The community of Valdocco*, led and guided by Don Bosco, strove to live this witness in a complete and harmonious

<sup>14</sup> Mk. 3,14

<sup>15</sup> C 196

<sup>16</sup> C 49

manner. In the dream of the ten diamonds Don Bosco himself, presenting the salesian identity, outlined its fundamental characteristics and the dangers to which it is exposed. Every community is made up of men, living in society, who express the gospel ardour of “*da mihi animas coetera tolle*” with the optimism of faith, the dynamic creativity of hope and the kindness and total self-giving of charity. This commitment is sustained by a strong and essential spiritual support characterized in particular by the ascetical practice of the evangelical counsels and by a hard-working and temperate life-style.

**21** Following Don Bosco’s example, the community testifies to all the educative and pastoral force of consecration by living with joyful enthusiasm its *total donation to God and to the young*. We find by experience that fidelity to our consecration is a process in constant growth and is expressed in the continual seeking of the gospel ideal, following Mary’s path of faith.

**22** *The context of the present day* is marked among other things by secularism, individualism, consumerism and hedonism, but also by a greater sensitivity to what is sacred, by a clearer openness to the transcendent, and a commitment to practical solidarity.

For this reason our communities are called today more than ever in the past to make visible to young people, especially those poorest and most in need, the *primacy of God*, who has entered our life, won us over and placed us at the service of his Kingdom, as signs and bearers of his love.<sup>17</sup>

**23** *Following the obedient, poor and chaste Christ* in the radical consequences of Baptism, the community gives free reign to the best energies of its freedom; it contests the idolatry of power, of possession and pleasure, and thus makes itself completely available for the mission to the young. In obedience it

<sup>17</sup> cf. C 2



seeks the will of God through dialogue and fidelity to the community project and lives and welcomes in a family spirit the service of authority. In poverty it puts all its trust in God, is open to the communion of goods and to solidarity, promoting projects for the benefit of the poor and sharing their condition. In chastity it expresses its love for God and total dedication to the young, with the purity of heart which is the badge characterizing its educative and pastoral mission.

24 Sustained by the experience of God and by total dedication to the salvation of the young, the community lives the *grace of unity* which is a gift of the Holy Spirit and a vital synthesis of union with God and dedication to one's neighbour, of an interior evangelical life and apostolic activity, of a praying heart and working hands,<sup>18</sup> of personal needs and community commitments. In this way is achieved, in the covenant with God, a harmonious integration of the apostolic mission, the fraternal community and the practice of the evangelical counsels.

25 We live this option in the certainty that it contributes to the building of an *alternative model* for humanity and the human family, in the perspective of Christian hope.

In this way we respond to God's gift with a *personal and community process of holiness* towards full maturity in Christ, by means of which we become a sign and prophecy of the ultimate values of the Kingdom of God in the spirit of the Beatitudes.

## B. SITUATION

26 As a result of recent General Chapters, the communities in general strive to live an ever more authentic salesian spirituality. We may note in fact a growth in:

<sup>18</sup> cf. GC23, 332

- the charismatic identity,
- the knowledge and application of the preventive system also among the laity,
- the appreciation of community life,
- assiduous work among young people, especially those at risk,
- the care given to liturgical celebrations and forms of prayer,
- the effort made by many to live the grace of unity by harmonizing fraternal life, prayer and apostolic work.

**27** Alongside these positive signs of growth, we note also some negative phenomena. These include:

- lack of the community sense of the spiritual life;
- absence at times of community prayer;
- a merely formal observance of the practices of piety;
- reluctance to share spiritual experiences;
- over-efficiency and individualism;
- an unbalanced arrangement of times for work, community life and prayer;
- weariness and discouragement in facing a world in continual change.

**28** In the practice of the evangelical counsels there are examples of radical and joyful testimony by individuals and communities even to the point of martyrdom.

- Obedience is lived in a spirit of faith and humility by listening to each other's views and in an effort to put together the community project.
- The seeking for a simpler and more austere lifestyle is made visible in welcoming the poor, in living in contexts of poverty, in solidarity and in transparency in the administration of goods.
- Chastity is manifested in serene self-acceptance, in cordial relationships, in generous availability for service, and in fidelity to a life spent completely for the young.

- 29** At the same time we find that the communities do not always succeed in making their witness perceptible, and we note:
- difficulties in teamwork among Salesians themselves and between Salesians and laity, with authoritarian attitudes;
  - the difficulty of some Salesians in changing their work or house;
  - disparity of lifestyle between the religious community and the local people, and between one house and another, sometimes with the waste of the goods we have available, through the bad management of the resources at the service of our mission;
  - situations of coldness in relationships, the inability to establish authentic relationships, seeking compensations outside the community, and ambiguities of life which compromise the credibility of the choices we have professed.

### **C. CHALLENGES**

- 30** At the root of the situation just described there appear to be the following causes among others:
- *weakness in recognizing the primacy of God* which leads the community and individual confreres to lose sight of motivations of faith and of the awareness of being consecrated Salesians.
  - *fragmentation of personal and community life* which is seen in the sacrificing of what is important to what is urgent, and the inability to harmonize being and doing, work and prayer, evangelization and education, individual initiative and community planning.
  - *lack of the prophetic force* of our salesian consecration, which obscures its visibility and makes the communities less attractive and appealing in a vocational sense.

To these causes correspond the following challenges:

- *How can we keep on reviving and expressing the primacy of God in the communities, and how can we share this spiritual experience with lay people and with the young?*
- *How can we realize today new personal and community forms of balance between the different aspects of our work so as to live them in the grace of unity and in a complete and harmonious way?*
- *How can we make our community witness to the following of Christ something radical, prophetic and attractive?*

## **D. GUIDELINES**

To the above-mentioned challenges we want to respond in particular by the application of the following guidelines.

### **31 Primacy of God and the sharing of spiritual experience**

*The community, following Mary's example, undertakes to place God as the unifying centre of its being and to develop the community dimension of the spiritual life by:*

- fostering the centrality of the word of God in personal and community life through the *lectio divina*, daily meditation, the Liturgy of the Hours, celebrations of the Word, and community preparation for the Sunday Eucharist;
- celebrating the daily Eucharist with joy, creativity and enthusiasm, and fostering its celebration by all the confreres together at least once a week;
- improving the quality of community prayer to the point where it becomes a school of prayer for the community itself, our young people, the members of the Salesian Family and our lay collaborators;
- promoting revisions of life based on the Constitutions and the essential elements of salesian spirituality;



- encouraging spiritual follow-up by good use of the opportunities dear to our traditions: the Sacrament of Reconciliation, spiritual direction and the fraternal talk;
- creating among the confreres an atmosphere conducive to the exchange of their own experiences of faith;
- encouraging integration between personal and community projects by cultivating their interrelationship and sharing.<sup>19</sup>

## **32 Fostering the grace of unity**

*The community undertakes to ensure the necessary conditions so that every confrere can give a sense of deep unity to his being and working:*

- by the practice of evangelical discernment as an attitude of searching for the will of God through community dialogue and coherent decisional and executive processes;<sup>20</sup>
- by periodically reviewing the balance between work commitments, demands of community life, and times for prayer, study and rest.

## **33 Community witness to the radical following of Christ**

*The community undertakes to ensure that the evangelical counsels make crystal clear the gratuitous and unconditional offering of life, and measureless and unrestricted love, especially for the very poor:*

- by specifying the humanizing values of the evangelical counsels so as to live them with joy and coherence;<sup>21</sup>
- by verifying their community practice by periodic scrutinies; for this purpose the Formations Department will prepare practical guidelines;
- by educating its members to the appropriate use of the means of social communication, including the most recent

<sup>19</sup> cf. Ratio 90, 277

<sup>20</sup> C 66

<sup>21</sup> cf. VC 88-92



such as the internet, DVD etc., and periodically assessing their positive and apostolic use.

### **34 Central place of obedience**

*The community encourages a deep life in the Spirit, the sense of the mission and the effective involvement of every confrere in the community pastoral and educative project by:*

- promoting dialogue among its members through community assemblies, the community-day and meetings of the local council, and by availing itself when necessary of the help of external consultants;
- involving all the confreres more effectively in the animating nucleus of the EPC and in the elaboration and application of the SEPP;
- helping the confreres, in choosing their sphere of professional qualification, to respond to the needs of the Province, in dialogue with the Provincial;
- relaunching the practice of the fraternal colloquy with the Rector, the centre of unity and pastoral orientation for all the confreres.

### **35 The concrete nature of poverty**

*The community undertakes to give witness to a lifestyle inspired by the poverty of Christ and his Gospel by:*

- manifesting prophetic austerity through a simple, sober and modest way of living, taking account of the local neighbourhood,<sup>22</sup> in assiduous and self-sacrificing work with a readiness to carry out even the most humble tasks;<sup>23</sup>
- living a spirit of detachment and of trust in Providence, with transparency in availability and the use of money, and drawing up a budget with frugal criteria;
- making solidarity a regulating principle of its life and activity, with a genuine sharing within the local and provincial communities, and also meeting the needs of other provinces;

<sup>22</sup> cf. C 77

<sup>23</sup> cf. C 78

- being open to the needs of the young, especially the very poor, putting our life, our time and our structures at their service, and collaborating with persons and organizations committed to social advancement and the struggle for justice.

### 36 The splendour of chastity

*The community radiates its witness to chastity and offers it to today's young people as a prophetic sign of the Kingdom of God and a proclamation of the dignity of every individual by:*

- creating a serene, joyful and fraternal environment which encourages the growth of true friendship among the confreres and becomes a sign of the happiness in giving oneself for the Kingdom;<sup>24</sup>
- aiming at a temperate and laborious lifestyle, nourished by asceticism and willing service, as a practical expression of the boundless love for God and for the young;
- proposing to young people programs of education to love and giving proper value to chastity;<sup>25</sup>
- laying down at both congregational and provincial level, norms of behaviour to which all confreres must conform, so as to prevent the scandals connected with sexual abuse, taking advantage also of opportune legal and scientific advice;
- offering to the confreres, and especially to those in difficulties, accompaniment, understanding, space for recovery and those steps that may be necessary, even at provincial level;
- committing ourselves to the protection of juveniles, collaborating also with persons and organizations working for the rights of children and of young people who are victims of sexual exploitation.

<sup>24</sup> cf. C 83

<sup>25</sup> cf. GC23 192-202



### III. ANIMATING PRESENCE AMONG THE YOUNG

*"And now I commend you to God  
and to the word of his grace,  
which is able to build you up  
and to give you the inheritance  
among all those who are sanctified"* (Acts 20, 32).

#### A. THE CALL OF GOD

- 37 *"Whether I am at home or away I am always thinking of you. I have only one wish, to see you happy both in this world and in the next... Being away from you, my dear sons, and not being able to see or hear you, upsets me more than you can imagine... You are always and exclusively in my thoughts".*<sup>26</sup> When we Salesians of the Third Millennium read these sentiments of the fatherly heart of Don Bosco once again, we find in them an authentic appeal from God to envisage and bring about, with hope and in fidelity to the "oratorian criterion"<sup>27</sup>, *our presence among the young, a presence that consists in being effectively close to them in participation and follow-up, in animation and witness, and in vocational suggestion in the style of salesian assistance.*<sup>28</sup>

Following in Don Bosco's footsteps, we want to respond to the call of Jesus to be, in the Church of the present day, a prophetic sign and joyful bearers of the love of the Father for the young.<sup>29</sup> God calls us not only to be a community *for the young* but also *with the young*, especially "those who are poor, abandoned and in danger".<sup>30</sup> The young people to

<sup>26</sup> *Due lettere da Roma, 10 maggio 1884*, in P. BRAIDO (ed.), *Don Bosco educatore. Scritti e testimonianze*, LAS, Roma 1997<sup>3</sup>, p. 377

<sup>27</sup> cf. C 40

<sup>28</sup> cf. AGC 372, p. 25-27

<sup>29</sup> cf. C 2

<sup>30</sup> C 26

whom we open our Salesian heart ask us to listen to their requests; they want us in all simplicity and familiarity to throw our doors open and go out to meet them, to share their life by living with them, perceive their values, understand their pre-occupations, and offer them opportunities to get involved.

For this reason we strive to prompt and respond to young people's search for meaning: we aim to become a school of life that raises questions and gives reasons for hope, that lives and celebrates the presence of the Risen Christ, that communicates its own experience of faith and forms disciples, and that accompanies them as they grow to the point where they "*develop their own human and baptismal vocation by a daily life progressively inspired and unified by the Gospel*".<sup>31</sup>

Animated by the charity of the Good Shepherd,<sup>32</sup> and with Mary as our Mother and Teacher, we seek with confidence a common educative and pastoral project and a methodology that can instill education with Gospel values and pay more attention to the processes of education than to activities, to persons rather than to structures, to fraternity rather than to functions.

Our zeal for God and for the young moves us to become a "*home and school of communion*".<sup>33</sup> We live a vocation that radiates joy and fosters participation and is able to muster numerous apostolic forces with which to share Don Bosco's spirit and mission in the local Church and neighbourhood; the lay collaborators of the EPC, the groups of the Salesian Family, and our more committed young people.

## **B. SITUATION**

- 38** Wherever there is a salesian community, there is a gift of God: an experience of faith, a network of relationships and multiple forms of service to the young.

<sup>31</sup> cf. C 37

<sup>32</sup> cf. C 11

<sup>33</sup> NMI 43



The community gives visibility to the **salesian presence**, animates it and promotes its growth. Even though it is not possible to identify the mission with the work, the salesian presence among the young gives shape to a work and can be expressed in it.

The presence expresses a progressive capacity for welcoming acceptance and communion, a commitment to education and evangelization, and a method for follow-up and vocational discernment.

### **39 A presence that welcomes and builds communion**

*The need is recognized of being present among young people in the style typical of the preventive system, even in those communities where the number of confreres is small and which are marked by aging or illness. Often however organizational and management concerns cause some confreres, in fact, to remain remote from the young. Moreover there are some who through their personal projects or convenience are drawing apart from the youth situation.*

In the communities positive attention is given to the new and old forms of poverty affecting young people, but there are also signs of an attachment to the past, defensive attitudes in facing present and future, insufficient sensitivity to the new forms of poverty, and a lack of proper training to deal with marginalization – though in this field we are present to a greater extent today than in the preceding six years.

The salesian community, more convinced of its charismatic task in the animating nucleus, has given rise to new forms of lay involvement, especially through the formation and animation of the EPC, collaboration with volunteers and the elaboration of the SEPP. There is also an improved sensitivity as regards the Salesian Family, but the need is recognized for a greater sharing in responsibility for a more effective sharing of the mission.

#### **40 A presence that educates and evangelizes**

The effort to evangelize meets with a favourable response today because of the resources possessed by young people, and especially because of their quest for inner depth, their particular openness to new values, and the many different forms of service in the volunteer movement. At times, however, the effect of our work is weakened by the community failing to live a deep spiritual experience with clear reference to evangelical motivations and genuine pastoral charity.

Furthermore, it is observed that relationships today tend to be fleeting and lacking in depth. The number of possibilities of communication does not always correspond to the quality of relationships: this also affects the relationships between the salesian community and the young.

There is also the danger that the mission may be identified with the works, and the latter with structures and services. The young then find it difficult to perceive the community as an alternative form of life, a challenge to what society offers and a concrete prophetic statement of the future.

In many places our presence has a positive social, political and cultural impact, even if sometimes our educational and social work does not attain the hoped for results. There are communities that find it difficult to harmonize community life with an open understanding of mission that could lead to responses to new problems and the planning of new forms of service.

#### **41 A presence that accompanies and broaches the subject of vocation**

In recent years action and reflection have given rise to vocational planning at both local and provincial levels; greater attention has been given to methods of formation; there has been a greater involvement of young people in groups and in the Salesian Youth Movement. We have not always known how to involve the family as the primary setting for vocational growth.

There is a greater attentiveness to all vocations in the Church and in the Salesian Family in particular, and the conviction

that a true youth pastoral work always has a vocational aspect. We realize that our settings abound in vocation potential and resources, but there is still the difficulty of presenting and conveying the meaning of life as a vocation and mission, and the fatigue of personal guidance for the young. We Salesians always have the priority obligation of bearing witness to the vocation of consecrated apostles in its double and complementary lay and priestly form<sup>34</sup>.

The social and cultural situations, the present structure of some of our works, and a certain spiritual weariness on the part of some SDBs and communities account for a weakening of the life of faith and of the processes connected with the formation and the vocation of the young, and also for the fall in numbers referred to by many provincial chapters.

### **C. CHALLENGES**

- 42** The salesian presence is a dynamic reality, a network of relationships, an ensemble of projects and processes, activated by pastoral charity and carried out together with young people, the laity and the Salesian Family. The subject of this presence, therefore, is not exclusively the salesian community. Starting from this consideration, the following challenges seem fundamental.

**43    A presence that welcomes and builds communion**

The salesian community is called to renew the quality of its presence in the midst of the young, to build communion and foster the participation of the laity, and to insert itself actively in its neighbourhood.

- *Which community model facilitates our presence among the young?*
- *What kind of presence should we have in the EPC and in the Salesian Family as a charismatic community? When*

<sup>34</sup> cf. GC24, 253

*should we be present? With what forms of involvement and tasks?*

- *What kind of presence do we have in institutions where decisions are made concerning the problems of young people?*

#### **44 A presence that educates and evangelizes**

The Salesian community is called to be a presence that educates and evangelizes, and becomes a prophetic proclamation among the young living in a secularized, globalized and fragmented world.

In a secularized, multi-cultural and multi-religious world which seeks new spiritual experiences and feels the irrelevance of the faith:

- *How can the community contribute to creating environments that have a powerful influence for the experience of Gospel values, that provide opportunities for interreligious dialogue and the sharing of intercultural experiences, so as to help young people to arrive gradually at a synthesis of faith, culture and life?*
- *How can the community share rich and meaningful experiences with young people, expressing them in the languages used by the young and in the new forms of communication?*

In the movement towards a globalized world which produces alarming situations of poverty and glaring economic and social inequalities, and offers new opportunities for solidarity:

- *How can the community make its structures and resources effective in its service to the poorest of young people, so as to speak to them of God's love and contribute to their development?*
- *How can the community transmit to the young who live in a context of affluence the value of evangelical poverty and simplicity of life, and help them to investigate the causes of poverty and to grow in their commitment to solidarity with those most affected?*



In the complex and fragmented culture of our day which can cause disunity and gives importance to what is singular and diverse:

- *How can the community carry out processes of discernment and pastoral conversion, and pass from a pastoral approach built around activities and needs to an approach centred on processes?*
- *How can the community overcome the fragmentation of its activities and operate according to a unified and structured plan?*

**45 A presence which accompanies and broaches the subject of vocation**

The salesian community is called to become an invitation to young people to consider the subject of vocation and to develop educational and pastoral activities which make possible a personal encounter with them.

- *How can the salesian community become a vocational sign so as to help the young person see life as a gift and a task which consists in the following of Christ?*
- *How is the subject of vocation to be broached with a young person so as to bring him to discover and accept God's designs in his regard?*
- *How can the community realize an educative presence that encourages personal meetings and provides ongoing personal guidance?*

**D. GUIDELINES**

We have selected a number of **practical guidelines** that will help the community to respond to the challenges and build up a salesian presence in line with the call of God.

**46 A presence that welcomes and builds communion**

The salesian community is a fraternal and apostolic community which draws its inspiration from the oratorian criterion of Don

Bosco.<sup>35</sup> Through our animating presence among the young and lay people, we build communion and promote our mission, which all must consider a single mission belonging to all.

*The community rethinks its presence among the young with a view to making it direct, welcoming and gratuitous by:*

- organizing the life and the structures of the community around the presence of young people, re-examining the timetable of daily life and prayer, so as to create a setting that attracts and facilitates direct contact with them;
- recovering the value of salesian assistance so that not only are we *for* the young but *with* the young, giving priority to the tasks that are in line with our responsibility for the charism;
- making the salesian community visible among the young and open to them as a place of welcome for those who wish to stay with us to get to know our life at close quarters;
- setting up appropriate initiatives to respond especially to the needs of the young who are marginalized.

*The salesian community becomes the leaven of communion among the young and lay people by:*

- planning and reviewing the essential lines of educative and pastoral activity in the community project, to ensure unity of action, convergence of criteria, and harmony among people;
- programming and evaluating the SEPP, according to a method that encourages co-responsibility of all those who for various reasons share in the educative mission;
- deepening the commitment to formation together, among Salesians and lay people, through appropriate procedures that foster the sharing of criteria and objectives, and the organic structure of our activities;
- living the salesian spirituality with the young and lay people more deeply and ensuring time and opportunities for personal relationships and sharing of the salesian spirit;
- giving particular attention to environmental pedagogy.

<sup>35</sup> cf. C 40

*The community becomes the animating presence in the locality by:*

- paying more attention to new settings for meeting young people;
- promoting collaboration with the various groups of the Salesian Family as a way to adopt a mentality of shared responsibility in the youth mission;
- collaborating with ecclesial and civil institutions in the fields of education, youth pastoral ministry and social communication;
- developing a greater involvement in multicultural and plurireligious settings, through the knowledge of languages, dialogue, and the experience of international communities;
- contacting and dialoguing with the youth culture in the area where one is working.

#### **47 A presence that educates and evangelizes**

In a variety of contexts the salesian community becomes a prophetic proclamation through its own life and activity and develops a presence that educates and evangelizes; it creates places with a strong spiritual ethos, takes account of the actual situation of poverty and promotes projects and processes for the growth of the young.

*In a secularized context the salesian community fosters the creation of settings with a strong spiritual character by:*

- proposing and living occasions of deep spiritual experience with young people: Eucharist, Reconciliation, “lectio divina”, prayer, meetings, retreats;
- involving the EPC in the planning, running and evaluation of the processes of education and evangelization in view of a consistent way of life and of commitment for the Kingdom;
- fostering in the EPC the formation of young people involved in civil and ecclesial activity, so as to promote a more just and supportive society with a Christian inspiration;

- participating in occasions of meetings of the SYM and recognizing the groups as the special setting for spiritual development and youth missionary activity;
- fostering active participation by the more mature young people so as to make them protagonists in the evangelization of their peers.

*In a globalized world the salesian community is aware of the reality of poverty and injustice and commits itself to education and evangelization with techniques appropriate to the young people who are living in conditions both of poverty and of affluence by:*

- embracing a lifestyle of poverty and of sharing with the poor;
- practising financial transparency and justice in working relations within the EPC;
- studying with the young essential elements of the social teaching of the Church to help them enter society in a responsible manner;
- creating high standards in education in justice and in solidarity for all young people, those living in contexts of poverty and those in more affluent situations through an examination of the causes of injustice and with a view to making practical commitments.

*In a complex and fragmented culture the salesian community sets out to work according to a project and to progress from pastoral activities to a pastoral process by:*

- overcoming a view of pastoral action that reduces it to an area of our activity or to a specific activity of religious formation;
- maturing a concept of pastoral action that includes the comprehensive view of contents, interventions and methods, respecting the rhythms of growth of young people, giving attention to the different areas of growth;
- embracing an approach to working in teams to overcome a compartmentalized outlook in carrying out roles and responsibilities;



- verifying the assimilation of the GC23 regarding the integral education of the young and the planning and implementation of educational processes;
- being open to forms of education and evangelization that make good use of social communication as a new vital setting for young people to come together.

#### **48 A presence that accompanies and becomes a vocational proposal**

The salesian community promotes the vocational choice of the young through the witness of its life; it animates the educative pastoral community so that it becomes the setting for vocational growth in the young; it implements a method of accompaniment and of vocational proposal.

*The salesian community takes to heart its role in the process of vocational development and of follow up of the young by:*

- bearing witness in community to the vocation of the salesian priest and salesian brother, in a visible, joyful and attractive manner;
- sharing with the young some aspects of our life: celebrations, friendship, meals, prayer, our history, plans, missionary interests;
- encouraging experiences of voluntary work as a valid opportunity for guidance and vocational discernment;
- offering an explicit plan of accompaniment and vocational guidance at local level, that harmonizes experiences in a structured way, involving and training the confreres in spiritual guidance and utilizing the presence of young confreres;
- giving special attention to the figure of the salesian brother.

*The salesian community animates the EPC as the special setting for the accompaniment and vocational choice of the young by:*

- making the EPC a real faith community, that promotes communion between the different vocations and develops a religious formation of quality;

- creating a welcoming family atmosphere;
- participating in the SYM, by having care for the leaders, the provision of suitable faith programs, and the suggestion of apostolic experiences and of missionary service;
- organizing a team of leaders within the EPC, open to the Salesian Family, that motivates, stimulates and guides experiences to arouse interest and involvement according to the many different vocations;
- starting from the EPC developing an appropriate pastoral care of the family, especially those parents whose children are in the process of being formed in the faith and in the phase of discerning their vocation.

*The salesian community gives effect to a methodology of guidance and vocation follow-up by:*

- animating a vocational process that harmonizes the various elements: witness to gospel values within the EPC, presence among the young, the explicit proposal of follow-up, the formation process, the experience of God lived in service, and the vocational decision;
- promoting initiatives that ensure the continuity of the process: dialogue with the educators; age-groups for vocational discernment; vocational guidance for young adults; formation of animators in their process of vocational discernment;
- re-evaluating some aspects of traditional salesian pedagogy: group life, personal dialogue, spiritual direction, vocational discernment;
- proposing for the vocational development of the young some typically salesian spiritual experiences: involvement in Church activities; personal prayer, frequent reception of the sacraments of the Eucharist and of Reconciliation, love for Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco.

## **IV. THE SALESIAN COMMUNITY PRIVILEGED SETTING FOR FORMATION AND ANIMATION**

*"You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1, 8).*

*"Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers" (Acts 20, 28).*

### **A. THE CALL OF GOD**

- 49** We are convinced that God calls us to live in fraternal communities, following the model of discipleship lived by the Twelve and animated by Jesus.

Don Bosco is for us our father, model and teacher. Through study, prayer and practical experience he learned to face reality, assess it and find appropriate answers to new trends and situations. With his human and spiritual gifts he gathered around him a fraternal and apostolic community in continual vocational growth.

The salesian communities of today want to continue the spirit of the community of Don Bosco and the first Salesians. For us the community is a real home where in a fraternal atmosphere we support each other in the process of personal and vocational growth at the different stages of life. Community life is formative in itself.

- 50** Challenged by the young and urged on by the dynamics of a world in constant change, we keep up-to-date and deepen our vocational commitment. In this context, dialogue with lay people and commitment to the development of the EPC become for us a way of formation and of fostering our charism.

- 51** Urged on by the vast movement of the re-founding of consecrated life, and open to the signs of the times, our communities recognize the need for a continual change of mentality regarding lifestyles, educative and pastoral criteria and methods, and also of structures, in constant fidelity to the original charism; for this reason they feel called to a determined effort of reflection and dialogue, of experimentation and analysis, of decisions and evaluation to ensure a continuing formation.
- 52** The Rector – father, teacher, brother and friend – is recognized and supported by the confreres as the principal point of reference in everyday life, and animator of their fidelity and vocational growth. He unites, guides and encourages the whole community to live to the full their own vocation to holiness in the spirit of Don Bosco.<sup>36</sup>

## **B. SITUATION**

- 53** The situation manifests the following positive aspects:
- In many communities the confreres show themselves to be open to formation and to change. The desire for vocational growth is fulfilled:
- in mutual brotherly love, in understanding and acceptance of one another; in community prayer, in collaboration in the drawing up and carrying out of the common project, in dialogue;
  - in special occasions such as the provincial and community assemblies, community day, the monthly and quarterly days of recollection, retreats.

Some particular sensitivities that contribute to formation are:

- responsibility for one's own human and spiritual development;

<sup>36</sup> cf. C 55



- the ability to share with the confreres one's own personal life;
- attention to the human and affective dimension of the individual;
- the desire not only to educate young people, but also to learn from them;
- a planning mentality that leads to ever greater involvement;
- commitment to inculturation and insertion in the social and ecclesial context.

In different parts of the Congregation there is a positive assessment of the ministry of the Rector and some conditions that help him to exercise it:

- his role as a *man of unity and fraternity*;
- his ability to lead the community along the lines of renewal and of response to the problems in the world today in accordance with the teaching of the Church and the guidelines of the Congregation;
- care by the Provincials and their councils and the participation of the confreres in the selection of Rectors;
- the preparation of the Rector for his ministry;
- personal guidance offered to the Rector by the Provincial.

**54** Some communities complain about *difficulties and uncertainties* due to:

- the effects of modern culture also marked by aspects of secularism, relativism, hedonism and individualism;
- a weakening in faith reflected in the abandonment of prayer, of the daily celebration of the Eucharist and of the sacrament of reconciliation, in the interpretation of the events of life and history on the basis of non-evangelical criteria, in a falling off in zeal for evangelization;
- human immaturity and psychological weakness; superficiality in relationships, insufficient communication and dialogue;

- little collaboration between confreres and their insufficiency in number and quality, lack of coordination between the different roles in the community and in the mission; inadequate distribution of tasks; lack of balance between work, study and prayer;
- the inability of the confreres to help each other in their development and in their difficulties, and the lack of mutual help through fraternal correction;
- the crisis of the “friendly chat” with the Rector;
- insufficient attention given to young confreres and to those in initial formation;
- lack of continuity between initial and ongoing formation;
- the multiplicity of the tasks of the Rector and the failure to prioritize them that limit his ability to devote time and energy to the service of the confreres; the absences, sometimes frequent, of the Rector from the community;
- the tendency for the Rector to do things himself rather than get others to do them;
- in some cases his inadequate preparation.

## **C. CHALLENGES AND GUIDELINES**

### **1. THE COMMUNITY: THE SETTING FOR FORMATION AND ANIMATION**

#### *CHALLENGES*

- 55** An analysis of the situation indicates many challenges among which the following seem to be the main ones:
- *What attitudes need to be fostered to bring about an effective change of mentality and openness to renewal?*
  - *Under what conditions is it possible to ensure and improve the commitment of all the confreres to ongoing formation?*

- *What are the salesian experiences that should be given a special place and fostered in order to enrich formation in community?*
- *How can sufficient importance be given to everyday living in its formation aspect?*

## **GUIDELINES**

The following are suggested as a response particularly to the present challenges and future perspectives.

### **56 *Improve the commitment of the whole community to formation by:***

- enabling the confreres in initial formation to acquire the necessary convictions and attitudes for ongoing formation;
- involving all the confreres in those processes that foster analysis, dialogue, research, community planning, systematic evaluation of the life and activity of the community;
- encouraging and guiding each confrere in the commitment to his own formation through a personal project of life.

### **57 *Give greater emphasis to some areas of formation:***

- human maturity, especially affective maturity;
- Christian and salesian vocational identity;<sup>37</sup>
- understanding and appreciation of the preventive system as the way to salesian holiness;
- the ability to work in a team, also with lay people, and to draw up projects and identify procedures;
- a sound knowledge of the cultural context and of the youth situation for the inculturation of evangelical values and of the salesian charism.

<sup>37</sup> cf. FSDB 26-37

## **58 Give due importance to everyday life by:**

- animating the community to a spirituality of communion<sup>38</sup> as a prerequisite for all collaboration and sharing;
- involving all the resources of the community in view of the common mission;
- fostering the development of religious identity through community occasions, and in particular the planning and evaluation meetings, community assemblies, community days;
- helping the confreres to find the right time and rhythms to overcome excessive activity and superficiality, and carefully planning times for study, for personal reading, community reflection, sharing, prayer, recreation and rest.

## **59 To achieve all this it is proposed that:**

*At world level*

The General Councillor for Formation and his team:

- continue to present in an appropriate manner and to give due weight to the new *Ratio*;
- coordinate and strengthen the national and international centres of ongoing formation;
- promote the appreciation of the salesian places for opportunities for formation, also for the different cultural and language groups.

<sup>38</sup> This spirituality of communion “indicates above all the heart’s contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us... It also means an ability to think of our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the Mystical Body, and therefore as ‘those who are a part of me’. This makes us able to share their joys and sufferings, to sense their desires and attend to their needs, to offer them deep and genuine friendship. Spirituality of communion implies also the ability to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and prize it as a gift from God. ... not only as a gift for the brother or sister who has received it directly, but also as a “gift for me”. Spirituality of communion means, finally, to know how to ‘make room’ for our brothers and sisters, bearing ‘each other’s burdens’ (*Gal* 6,2) and resisting the selfish temptations which constantly beset us and provoke competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy” (NMI 43).



## 60 *At provincial level*

- The provincial commission for formation draws up an annual program for ongoing formation, giving special attention to the affective area and to the ability to form interpersonal relationships;
- The delegate for formation coordinates the specific programs to respond to the needs of the different groups of confreres, not neglecting the sick and the elderly, to help them to live their condition with serenity and a spirit of faith;
- The Provincial with his council draws up the provincial plan for the qualification of personnel, in harmony with the formation commission and in dialogue with the confreres. The necessary weight should be given to studies of philosophy, pedagogy, theology, salesianity, and to professional and academic studies;
- Each Province should make arrangements for and encourage the possibility of drawing on the sources of our spirituality;
- Where it is judged appropriate, houses for initial formation can be available for and support the ongoing formation of other confreres and members of the Salesian Family, and lay collaborators;
- Confreres in practical training, Brothers who have just finished initial formation and priests in the first years of their pastoral ministry should be sent to communities where there are confreres in sufficient number and of the right quality who are capable of guiding them in their development;
- To the confreres should be offered suitable periods of time for renewal and spiritual experiences that will sustain them at different stages of life;
- From the beginning of formation the confreres should be trained in different forms of cooperative learning.

## 61 *At community level*

- As the basis of formation are still to be found: daily celebration of the Eucharist, the sacrament of Reconciliation,

the Liturgy of the Hours, meditation, devotion to Mary Help of Christians and the saints of the Salesian Family, and other forms of prayer;

- The *lectio divina*, personal and in community, is to be fostered as a means of growth in the life of the community; and a “school of prayer” for the confreres, the lay people and the youngsters, particularly during the special periods of the liturgical year;
- Great value should be attached to the community day, and the various community meetings. These occasions are to be well prepared and planned, so as to be effective means for spiritual growth and for the sharing of personal experiences;
- Community planning flows from the involvement of all the confreres so that it is truly shared and regularly evaluated;
- Because of its formative value, individual communities will put into practice everything that they consider useful in order to safeguard, reorganize and furnish their libraries and documentary archives.

## 62 *At personal level*

- The confrere will give priority to times for prayer, personal reflection and retreat, to the community day and to meetings for planning and evaluation.
- He will give due value to both personal and community spiritual direction.
- With the help of the human sciences he will develop the capacity for self-knowledge and self-esteem.
- His personal plan of life<sup>39</sup> can become part of his friendly chat with the Rector.

<sup>39</sup> Ratio, 277

## 2. THE RECTOR: ANIMATOR OF THE COMMUNITY

### CHALLENGES

63 In the current situation the challenges for an adequate exercise of the ministry of the Rector are varied and among them the following seem the most relevant:

- *How to help the Rector so that in the community he can be not only a man of government and the one ultimately responsible for the activities but above all a father, guide, brother and friend?*
- *How to assess that the necessary conditions exist for the Rector to be able to carry out his mission in an appropriate manner?*
- *How to prepare a confrere adequately to assume the role of Rector?*
- *How to help the confreres to recognize in faith the role of the Rector and to support him in his service?*

### GUIDELINES

- 64
- The Rector, following the model of Don Bosco “is a paternal figure, at the same time both affectionate and authoritative... Deeply marked by the priestly character, he expresses it daily in the ministry of the word, of sanctification and of animation.”<sup>40</sup>
  - The first task of the Rector is to animate the community in love (“*study how to make yourself loved*”), giving attention to the confreres especially the more frail ones and those in initial formation. The exercise of his ministry, in the situation of today, requires that he take into account the relative importance of his different tasks: at the service of salesian unity and identity; teacher and pastoral guide, organizer of educative commitments, manager of the work.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> cf. Fr J. Vecchi, *Spiritualità salesiana*, ed. SDB IVE-IVO, pp. 129-131

<sup>41</sup> cf. GC21, 52

- The Rector “lives in a vision of faith, expressed in the certitude of having received from the Lord whatever can be of help to the community. Consequently he lives in the joyful offering of whatever he can possibly do, and in tranquility in the face of his own limitations of temperament or ability.”<sup>42</sup> He enjoys the trust of the confreres of the house and of the province and is accepted not only for what he does, but especially for what he represents.
- Given the complexity and the sensitivity of his duties, it is of fundamental importance that the Rector receives good initial and ongoing preparation in the content and skills necessary for his ministry.

## 65 Proposals:

### *At provincial level:*

- The Provincial should ensure that there are regular meetings of the Rectors for their formation, exchange of information and an understanding about the activities and the animation of the province.<sup>43</sup>
- At interprovincial or regional level courses of preparation and updating for the Rectors are to be organized.

### *At local level:*

- The community, at the beginning of the year, under the leadership of the Rector, draws up its *annual plan for community action* in which Rector and confreres express their own aims, identify and set out their objectives and criteria for activity, and program their meetings together.<sup>44</sup>
- The Rector, as well as having the support of the Provincial, should be helped and assisted by a well chosen Vice-Rector and the constant cooperation of his council.

<sup>42</sup> cf. Fr J. Vecchi, *Spiritualità salesiana*, ed. SDB IVE-IVO, p. 25

<sup>43</sup> cf. R 145

<sup>44</sup> cf. C 181



- Sensitive to the needs of the confreres and in dialogue with them, the Rector does all he can to foster and promote the best way of having the “friendly chat”, and is himself willing to make the first approach.
- With the help of the Provincial the Rector tries to ensure his own suitable preparation, making use also of the human sciences.



## **V. ORGANIZATIONAL AND STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS FOR LIVING AND WORKING TOGETHER**

*Now many signs and wonders were done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. (...) And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women (Acts 5, 12. 14).*

### **A. THE CALL OF GOD**

- 66** God calls us to live and work together in the various social, cultural and religious situations in which our young people live and to be in them, as a salesian community, prophetic signs of his love and witnesses to the values of the Kingdom of heaven.

We recognize that God is calling us to accept and give effect to our mission in the first place as provincial and local communities.<sup>45</sup>

- 67** Different forms of salesian community life have developed in the Congregation. While they oblige us to rethink and renew the practice and organization of the salesian religious community, they invite us to continually verify the fundamental conditions which make possible a meaningful community life in the fulfilment of our mission.

### **B. SITUATION**

- 68** Salesian communities find themselves in varied and partly new situations as regards living and working together. The new experiences of salesian community life can be described as having the following characteristics:

<sup>45</sup> (cf. C 44 and 49)



- Communities with a reduced number of confreres with the task of the animation of a plurality of works, in mission territories or through the reality of a lack of personnel.
- Communities inserted in complex works, in which the disproportion between work and resources leads to fragmentation of the rhythms of community life.
- Communities fully inserted into the social scene to the extent of sharing the lifestyle of the people; that are working in close collaboration with the local Church; that are collaborating with members of other religions.
- Communities with lay and young people present in the community life.

Many communities have positive experiences which manifest a fraternal life of a typically evangelical flavour, community sharing and sense of responsibility, and participation in the mission.

**69** There are some structural and organizational aspects that have a negative influence on the effectiveness of our living and working together. In some cases the community is still working to a model that calls for a serious rethinking of the relationship between Community and Mission:

- structural elements that affect community rapport, such as the prevalence of functional over fraternal relations; little concern for the common project and the moments set aside for fraternal encounters; lack of organization of work, and its division into sectors;
- timetables, customs and schemes linked rigidly with kinds of pastoral action and traditional responses which are a long way from the reality and youth culture of today;
- works that raise no questions and give rise to no communion and collaboration with those who share the same salesian spirit and mission.

The above-mentioned conditions constitute real and concrete risks for some confreres and lead to physical and spiritual weariness, situations of psychological and relational unease,



independence in initiatives, fragmentation in the fulfilment of the mission, difficulties between generations, and the accumulation of roles and functions.

- 70 The process towards a community of salesian religious with the task of the internal animation of a broader reality – the Educative and Pastoral Community – is irreversible.<sup>46</sup>

The animating nucleus of the EPC is becoming composed ever more of other subjects (young and lay people, members of the Salesian Family, representatives of the local Church and neighbourhood), who share our spirituality and mission committing themselves to animation. Within it the salesian community plays the role of the charismatic point of reference from which all take their inspiration.

## C. CHALLENGES

- 71 In response to God's call and to the situation described above, there are four challenges which demand a new way of organizing our apostolic work and the life itself of the salesian community:

- *How can we overcome the tendency to individualism and sectorialism and the little ability for sharing, which compromise our living and working together?*
- *How can we ensure that the salesian community be made up of the right number of confreres and those of the necessary quality, as an essential condition for fraternal life, evangelical witness and presence among young people?*
- *How can we rethink the relationship between the works and the salesian community, so that it has the role of guaranteeing the charism, of animation and involvement of all who share Don Bosco's mission and spirit?*
- *How can we rationalize all the salesian work in a specific area so as to ensure the conditions needed for a fraternal and community life and the animation of the EPC?*

<sup>46</sup> cf. Report of the Vicar of the RM to the GC25, n. 321

## D. GUIDELINES

### 1. Working in line with a community project

#### 72 Every community shares and draws up its own community project and reviews it annually.

In this way consistency is given to living and working together, overcoming the progressive separation caused by individual work, with the risk of fragmentation. It is a matter of leading the confreres to the conviction of the need for working together according to the same project, which does not necessarily mean that they all have to do the same things.

#### 73 *The community becomes accustomed to working according to a planning mentality:*

- developing among the confreres a common and shared vision of the community project and helping each one to discover and give due value to his own talents and qualities. The community accepts each member with his strong points and limitations, and decides on roles of shared responsibility for each one.<sup>47</sup>
- living the project as a community process that starts from the daily experience of the confreres. The objective is not only the final design of the project, but especially the giving of effect to continued assessments of aims, values and expectations which lead the confreres to a practical living and working together.
- encouraging moments of dialogue (assembly of confreres, local council), of discernment of God's will (times of prayer, listening to God's Word through the *lectio divina*, reference to the magisterium of the Church and the Congregation), in harmony with the Organic Provincial Plan each community agrees on, draws up, and revises each year the progress of its own project.

<sup>47</sup> cf. C 52



- questioning itself in particular on the following aspects: Who do we want to be at the present day as a local community? How can we, as a local community, be present in a religious and salesian manner, animate the EPC and give evangelical witness? What practical consequences follow for the community? What choices must we make right now? What kind of personal and community formation do we need?

**74** *The drawing up of the community project involves all the different parts of the community:*

- involving every confrere independently of his own particular role, and appealing to his sense of shared responsibility. Fraternal dialogue will facilitate the participation of all, and harmonize personal life projects with that of the community.
- identifying through the annual programming process the objectives, goals and interventions that the community itself undertakes to carry out and verify.
- organizing the rhythm of community life in a suitable way, by restructuring the activities and timetables of religious life and of our pastoral and educative service while safeguarding its salesian style.
- ensuring that the Rector, to whom it belongs to animate this process with the help of his council, receives the necessary support from the Provincial and the organisms of provincial animation, making use also of the contributions of the human sciences.
- inviting the Provincial and his council to verify the process of realization of the projects of the individual communities, and check that they are consistent with that of the province.

**75** **2. Ensuring that the salesian community is made up of the right number of confreres and those of the necessary quality**

The qualitative and quantitative consistency of the salesian community is a fundamental condition for making possible in

each community the experience of fraternal life, of evangelical witness, of animating presence among the young, of ongoing formation, and for achieving in a significant manner its animating role in the EPC as described by the GC24 itself.<sup>48</sup>

**76** *This is achieved by:*

- fostering a balance between new salesian missionary frontiers and the consolidation or reshaping of present ones at world and provincial level.
- promoting in the provincial and local community the awareness of a common mission, and ensuring its spiritual, educative and pastoral quality through ongoing formation and the functioning of the community organisms (house council, assembly of confreres, regular fraternal meetings).

**77** *To attain this objective:*

- The Provincial and his council will evaluate the situation of the existing communities as regards the number and quality of confreres:
  - in the light of the criteria of the General Regulations 20 and 150;
  - by verifying the concrete opportunities for development that would allow for the attainment in a reasonable time of an effective community life;
  - by defining, in dialogue with communities that live in unusual situations with regard to number of members, particular ways for the exercise of authority and for the organisms of community life;
- In beginning new works and forming new communities, the Provincial and his council will ensure an adequate number and quality of confreres for the purpose of realizing:
  - a fraternal life of quality, in the style of the family spirit;
  - the communal programming and verification of the mission entrusted to the community;

<sup>48</sup> cf. GC24, 173, 174



- the animation of the works and the respective EPCs.
- In the course of the coming six years the Rector Major and his Council will promote a process of evaluation in the Provinces and Regions which, because of the changed situations, need to set up salesian work in a new way.

### **3. Redefining the relationship between the community and the work**

**78** **The relationship between the community and the work ought to enable the salesian community to live and work together and be a point of charismatic reference in the animating nucleus of the EPC.** This presupposes that the community's project is in line with that of the Organic Provincial Plan, and with that of each EPC.

**79** *The salesian community fulfils its task of animation of the EPC by maturing in the conviction:*

- That all the salesian religious, according to their possibilities, be members of the animating nucleus, but in the awareness that the latter is not to be reduced to the SDB community alone. In line with the interpretation of art. 5 of the General Regulations and in the spirit of the GC24 and of subsequent guidelines,<sup>49</sup> the SDB community must become

<sup>49</sup> "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. (...) 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" (Fr Vecchi in AGC 363, p. 9).

ever more aware that the responsibility for the animation of the EPC is to be shared with the laity, overcoming any resistance and in the perspective of shared charismatic and pastoral responsibility.

- That the whole community, even if represented by a single confrere, feels itself part of the animating nucleus of the work.
- That the living and working together of the community find a broader perspective at the level of rapport and shared responsibility, in the context of the EPC.
- That the relationship of the structures of government of the religious community be harmonized with those of the Work, so as to avoid overlapping.

**80** *The salesian community lives its vocation to be the point of reference for the charismatic identity of the animating nucleus of the EPC by accepting the working model described by the GC24. For this purpose the salesian community grows by:*

- forming the young and lay people in the salesian charism;
- sharing its own mission with the laity;
- living the family spirit;
- fostering real co-responsibility in animation and in government;
- ensuring fidelity to the pastoral implications of all aspects of the community life;
- becoming a promoter of peace and justice, and in the ability to provide a practical response to the needs of the poor.

**81** *The local salesian community fosters its relationship with the EPC by:*

- living a dialogue with the young people of the neighbourhood with faith and confidence;
- facilitating participation of the Salesians, youngsters and laity in a working network, through involvement in local and provincial structures;



- carrying out a discernment of the signs of the times;
- developing professional competence in youth pastoral work, and in the dimensions of evangelization, education, social behaviour and pastoral work for vocations;
- organizing pastoral work in such a way as to coordinate among themselves the EPC and its council with the local community and its council.<sup>50</sup>

#### **4. Drawing up and evaluating the Organic Provincial Plan**

#### **82 In the next three years the provincial community, through its various organisms will study, draw up or evaluate the Organic Provincial Plan.**

The Organic Provincial Plan will set out the fundamental options guiding the development of the province, ensuring continuity and coherence in decisions. It covers the priority fields of action for the years ahead, practical criteria for the different plans and projects, the works to which attention must be given, the general lines for the preparation of personnel and for economic and structural development, responding to today's urgent requirements and future prospects emerging from analysis of the locality.<sup>51</sup>

#### **83 *The Organic Provincial Plan must pursue the following objectives:***

- The strengthening in every confrere and in every community of the sense of the common mission and shared responsibility for it;
- The reshaping and restructuring of the areas of commitment and development in the province;
- The overcoming of situations of community fragmentation, dispersion and numerical inadequacy;

<sup>50</sup> cf. GC24, n. 161

<sup>51</sup> cf. *Salesian Youth Ministry. Fundamental framework of reference*

- the real priority of the more effective and prophetic works and a more authentic expression of the salesian mission in the area.

**84** *In the elaboration and revision of the Organic Provincial Plan, the Provincial and his council, with the help of a working team, will evaluate the effectiveness of the mission of the individual works with reference to the following points:*

- the adequate number of confreres and the necessary qualities in the salesian community;
- the possibility of a fraternal religious life in salesian style, perceptible and significant for the young and for lay collaborators;
- work/presence among the young, especially the very poor and those most in need, through an intense living of the preventive system;
- the ability to provide responses of educative and evangelizing quality to the challenges arising from the world of youth and from the social context;
- the ability to combine with other forces (laity, youngsters, Salesian Family, other provinces and organizations), and give rise to ecclesial vocations with particular attention to the Salesian Family;
- the promotion of light and easily managed works that allow for a dynamic adaptation to a change of circumstances;
- the ability to collaborate and have an effective and prophetic impact on the evangelical transformation of the locality.



## CONCLUSION

- 85** At the conclusion of the work of the Chapter we find ourselves with the riches not so much of a written text as of a lived experience: that of a fraternal community that has known how to welcome and appreciate diversity, to renew and to deepen further the reasons for our living and working, to be open to listening to the world especially that of the young, to assume the joys and the concerns of so many confreres, working together, praying together, breaking bread together. It is the Easter gift of the community that we want to share with everyone, renewing our faith:

**We believe** that our community  
is brought to birth by the gratuitous initiative of the Father  
sinks its roots in the Lord's Passover  
is a gift ever new of the Holy Spirit.

**We believe** that we are called to live in community  
following Christ, obedient chaste and poor  
according to the charism of Don Bosco,  
in the service of the young, especially the poorest  
to walk together towards the full maturity of Christ.

**We believe** that the Salesian community,  
guided and sustained by the motherly presence  
of Mary Help of Christians,  
is built up around the Word, the Bread and Forgiveness,  
and that, through the practice of charity and of fraternal correction  
becomes the place of mercy and reconciliation.

**We believe** that the practice of the preventive system,  
as an inspiration and a way of living and of working together,  
deepens our relationship with God,  
helps our fraternal relationships to mature  
and unites Salesians, the young and lay people in a single experience,  
in an atmosphere of family, trust and dialogue.

**We believe** that the Salesian mission is entrusted to the community,  
in which we all share and are co-responsible,  
with the richness of personal gifts  
in the complementary nature of the lay and priestly vocations,  
in the appreciation of talents, roles and services.

**We believe** that each of our communities,  
living the family spirit,  
and attentive to the needs of the locality,  
in union with the whole Salesian Family,  
becomes for the young people and our brothers  
an example of life rich in humanity and grace,  
a luminous sign of love,  
a school of spirituality,  
a vocational call  
and a prophecy of communion.

- 86** Now, like the disciples of Emmaus, we are returning to the places where we live and work, knowing that we shall meet communities of brothers with whom to share this faith. Strengthened by the gift of the Spirit, together we shall respond to the invitation “Duc in altum!” for an even more courageous mission, certain that the first and fundamental call is that to holiness. “Dear Salesians, be saints! Your essential task is to be holy, as indeed it is for all Christians!”<sup>52</sup> Convinced that the most urgent task is to live and to communicate a spirituality of communion: “to make the Church the home and the school of communion: that is the great challenge facing us in the millennium which is now beginning, if we wish to be faithful to God’s plan and respond to the world’s deepest yearnings.”<sup>53</sup>

Holiness and communion: these are the gifts we want to share with young people.

<sup>52</sup> John Paul II, Address to the members of the General Chapter... in “L’Osservatore Romano” 13.04.2002, p. 5

<sup>53</sup> NMI 43

SECOND PART

**VERIFICATION OF THE STRUCTURES  
OF ANIMATION  
AND OF CENTRAL GOVERNMENT**





## INTRODUCTION

**87** The GC25 has carried out the verification of the structures of government and of their functioning, requested in the letter from the Rector Major convoking the Chapter itself, starting from a careful examination of the contents of articles 122 and 123 of the Constitutions regarding the principles and general criteria of the service of authority in our Congregation. In addition it has accepted what the General Council said on the basis of studies and of the experience of the last six-year period, regarding the value of the general principle of "unity around the Superior, considered always as the centre of unity and animator of communion in the community at all levels" (AGC 372, 52-53) and of some articles of the Constitutions (AGC 372, pp. 56-57) specifically:

- a) the nature of the General Council in that it assists the Rector Major and collaborates with him in the functioning of government and animation of the Congregation (art. 130);
- b) the organization of the Council into Councillors for Departments and Regional Councillors, is considered to be substantially positive for the animation and the government of the Congregation (art. 133);
- c) the residence of the Regional Councillors in the house of the Council, judged necessary for ensuring the unity of the guidance and the activity of animating the Provinces (art. 131);
- d) the subsidiarity and decentralization, that recognize a proper autonomy and a right distribution of powers between the different organs of government (art. 124).

## **1. Relationship and links between the Rector Major with his Council and the Provinces and Regions, and forms of animation and government**

### **Expectations**

- 88** In general the Provinces appreciate the unity of the Congregation as the fruit of communion and of fidelity to the charism. They would like the General Council to help this unity to grow further, giving due consideration to the cultural diversity found in the Congregation, and to accompany the process of inculturation, especially in the problem areas, in this way ensuring fidelity to the charism.
- 89** The structures of animation and government already ensure communion at various levels. The Provinces are looking for further progress, considering that the cultural complexities, (mentality, social organization and political and economic systems, languages and customs, etc.) are in continual development, and that one notes a further growth in some areas of the Congregation in the world, and changes of circumstances (decrease in the number of confreres and the unification of provinces etc.) in others.
- 90** The programming of the six year period by the Rector Major with his Council has aroused interest and appreciation in the Congregation and has helped the individual Provinces to undertake the process of planning. Numerous Provinces are awaiting a further incentive from the central Government, that in a typical family manner, will foster, encourage and accompany the development of a "planning mentality" in the Congregation, in the Regions, and in the individual Provinces, bearing in mind the cultural differences.
- 91** Many Provinces make a substantially positive judgment on the service of animation and of government of the Rector Major and his Council (Team Visits, Extraordinary Visitations, Formation Courses, Regional Meetings, etc.). The presence of the Rector Major in the Provinces is especially appre-



ciated as an expression of communion around the Successor of Don Bosco. The Provinces express a desire for greater contact and closeness with the general Councillors in order to ensure a knowledge of the different local situations and to facilitate an effective provincial and regional coordination. It was appreciated that the Council itself midway through the six-year period carried out an overall assessment in view of a fair distribution of the animating presence of the Rector Major and his Councillors in the Provinces.

- 92** The Circular Letters of the Rector Major were found to contribute well to the unity and to the links within the Congregation, but need to be used to greater effect in the Provinces.

#### Problem areas

- 93** The large number of guidelines, proposals and initiatives offered by the various organs of animation in the Congregation (e.g. Documents of the General Chapters, Letters of the Rector Major, documents of the various Departments, documents of the Team Visits, the final report after Extraordinary Visitations) make it difficult to give effect to procedures for change or for maturing together because of a certain difficulty in assimilating the subject matter, the different mentality of the confreres and the weakness in animation that may exist in some Provinces or Regions.
- 94** The plurality and the cultural, social and religious complexity of the different contexts in which the salesian charism must be embodied require that the interventions be diversified, pluralistic and focused. Achievement of mutual understanding between the General Council and the Provinces and the Regions can present difficulties.
- 95** There is a certain tardiness on the part of central bodies in making necessary decisions; it seems also that no steps or processes of implementation are foreseen in the line of

follow-up and evaluation. Such a situation sometimes makes animation ineffective and government weak.

- 96 In the ever more challenging situations of young people in the world, especially those who are poor and in most need, it seems that sometimes there is lacking an appropriate response with interventions on their behalf on the part of the Congregation at international and governmental level, in order to "give a voice to the voiceless".
- 97 The problem areas mentioned point out **some challenges** that the Government of the Congregation must face:
- to live and promote unity in the growing diversity of cultures and situations that are constantly changing requires an ongoing dialogue between the centre and the Provinces, so that on the one hand situations and local problems are known and taken into account, and on the other there is openness to the horizon of universality of the Congregation;
  - to govern and animate according to the processes of change and maturation in the Provinces, according to their own situation and their real possibilities, requires a planning mentality and a vision attentive to the unity of the salesian mission;
  - to promote a presence and an activity open to the social, political and ecclesial situation both particular and general, implies overcoming a tendency towards activity that is too self-directed.

### **Criteria and lines of action**

- 98 To build communion real interaction is necessary in the management of problems. Hence "to promote fraternal union among the different provinces, and to develop an ever more efficient organization for the fulfilment of the salesian mission in the world" (C 130), it is suggested that the Rector Major with his Council always try to find more and better ways:



- for identifying and studying common emerging problems,
- for promoting and guiding the reflection of the Provinces and Regions,
- for suggesting criteria for solutions and practical guidelines to the respective controlling bodies.

In the light of these considerations the Rector Major and the members of the Council must evaluate the various requests from the Provinces, Provincial and Regional Conferences so as to respond in the most significant and effective way.

- 99** It is proposed that the Rector Major with his Council find suitable ways for evaluating effectively with the Provinces or Regions concerned: the programming of the six-year period, the conclusions of the Team Visits, the indications from the Extraordinary Visitations in particular with regard to the task of inculturation, the extent of the implementation of the deliberations of the most recent General Chapter, the development of a planning mentality, and the follow-up of processes of change.
- 100** To help the Provinces to overcome the danger of a possible closing in on their own situations and requirements, and to open them up to a shared and cooperative vision of the problem areas and needs in their own and other Regions, (e.g. centres of formation and study centres, works of special significance, the development or re-structuring of Provinces, support for Regional projects and the foreign missions), the Rector Major with his Council will encourage an open and cooperative mentality, and in dialogue with the Provinces, also arrive at practical interventions, promoting the mobility and exchange of confreres between Provinces of different cultures.
- 101** The circular letters of the Rector Major are a good means of linkage and unity in the Congregation. To make them better used and appreciated in the various communities it is suggested that they be written in a simple and discursive style and that those with a wealth of content on challenging themes alternate with others more familiar and informal about the life of the Congregation.

- 102** To foster personal contact and effective discussion on the progress of the Province, it is suggested that the Rector Major and the Departmental Councillors offer to those Provincials who desire it, about half way through their term of office, the opportunity of a personal meeting to evaluate the fidelity to the charism and the salesian mission in the Province, and for a sharing in the six-year program.
- 103** The future development of our mission requires the collaboration of a research and development group made up of experts (Salesians and laity) at the service of the Rector Major and his Council, to deal with particular issues. This group would enable the General Council to offer significant and effective suggestions especially on behalf of the young and the poor at international and governmental level.
- 104** The Rector Major with his Council should continue the practice of drawing up a program for the six year period, a practice that everyone considers to have been very positive, and then refer to it regularly in subsequent documents and proposals. The whole Council will work according to projects, programming the different stages, procedures and evaluations, which are considered very important, and will therefore frequently ask for an assessment of the various proposals and initiatives while they are in progress, and not only at their completion.
- 105** The Regions and the Provinces are asked to plan and re-plan their initiatives, taking into serious consideration the programming carried out by the Rector Major for the six-year period, so as to ensure a unified course of action in the Congregation.
- 106** The Rector Major and his Council are asked to follow up in a special way those Provinces or Regions that find greater difficulty in proceeding according to the programming and the respective provincial plans.
- 107** Through the various departments the General Council attempts to respond to the internal needs of the various



Provinces. This task however must in no way diminish our vocation as a Congregation, which requires us also to act in the defence and for the advancement of all the young people in the world, especially those who are poorest and most in need, and this at international level in both Church and State.

## **2. The Departmental Councillors**

### **Expectations**

- 108** While the service of animation of the Departmental Councillors is appreciated in the Provinces for the resources they can make available, for the animation they can offer and for the encouragement they give to the Provinces in developing a greater sense of international communion and interprovincial understanding, there is also a strong and frequently felt desire for a continual dialogue between the Centre and the Provinces.
- 109** In a world in which the complexities of the different cultures, languages, races, religions and societies make communications difficult, the Provinces expect from the Departmental Councillors that the programs of animation they propose will be of help in meeting local problems, and at the same time in broadening horizons; there is in fact sometimes the feeling that the animation program proposed by the various sectors does not meet the real needs of the Provinces.
- 110** While the Departmental Councillors frequently offer competent advice and service for the animation of the Provinces, the latter feel the need for coordination between the initiatives and the need to avoid overlapping, and parallel or conflicting proposals. The GC25 appreciates the growing efforts at coordination between the Departmental Councillors in the last six-year period (e.g. the *Vademeum* of the General Council and its revision, the six-year program and its revision, the interdepartmental initiatives) and it encourages them to continue along the same lines.

## Problem areas

- 111 There is insufficient communication in both directions in the preparation of programs; this can lessen the effectiveness of developing processes and weaken the Provinces in their initiatives.
- 112 The lack of interdisciplinary studies and projects between the various sectors can be a hindrance to the full understanding of the youth condition which is now in a state of rapid change and frequently defies sectorial delimitation. The study of themes relevant to the present day such as the growing division between rich and poor, questions about the rights of the child and of young people, the loss of family unity, the influence of technology on information and communication, the globalization process, etc., could help to fill this evident lacuna.
- 113 Putting together the suggestions made by some provincial chapters, by the assembly of the Generalate and in the report of the Vicar of the Rector Major, the desire for a reorganization of the working structures within the Generalate is recognized.

## Criteria and lines of action

- 114 The request of the Provinces to have a significant presence and closeness on the part of the Departmental Councillors, reflects the deep desire for a commitment to an effective dialogue about the best ways to respond to the signs of the times. This implies a change of mentality both at the centre and in the provinces. It is considered important that work be done within provincial conferences or groups of provinces for the planning of network interventions, with the involvement of regional or provincial centres and delegates, rather than they be imposed from above.
- 115 The past six years have seen positive experiences of coordinated study between various sectors (e.g. on the volunteer



movement, street-children, etc.). The need for prompt and flexible responses to complex and wide-ranging situations implies coordination between the Departments and the Regionals. It is proposed that this be a constant concern of the Vicar of the Rector Major, for the purpose of coordinating the interrelated initiatives and fostering a transverse study and evaluation. At a practical level, the Councillor most directly concerned could be involved from time to time.

- 116** Let the Departmental Councillors give due importance to what is suggested in art. 107 of the Regulations (concerning technical offices and consultants) and make use of qualified specialists in the planning, programming and evaluation of interventions of animation. Let the professionally prepared personnel at the service of the various sectors be kept up to date through projects of ongoing formation and ensure continuity of programs.
- 117** The Rector Major is asked to give effect to the interventions considered most opportune for the Blessed Michael Rua community of the Generalate, with possible internal arrangements for making the life of confreres called to work in the service of the central government of the Congregation more fraternal and satisfying and with a greater sharing of responsibility.

### **3. The Regional Councillors and the groups of Provinces**

#### **Expectations**

- 118** An examination of the precapitular document, the contributions of the Provincial Chapters and of the General Council reveal that in general the figure of the Regional Councillor is appreciated in the Provinces. The programming realized within the General Council is considered of positive value.
- 119** The Regional Councillor is considered important and necessary in his role of linkage between the Provinces and the

Rector Major with his Council, as a service to unity and decentralization. His residence in Rome is considered a positive factor, but an appropriate division of his time between Headquarters, the Regions and the Provinces is desired. The extraordinary visitation is appreciated as an opportunity for the Province to assess its project and renew it, and to get fresh light on its programming as an experience of unity and communion with the Rector Major and as a significant occasion for fraternity and dialogue.

- 120** The groups of provinces are looking for closeness, accompaniment and animation. This leads at times to difficult situations as a consequence of cultural, linguistic, political and social complexities, and the geographical extent of some Regions.

#### Problem areas

- 121** Various factors make the Regional's functions difficult in practice:
- the geographical, cultural, linguistic, political and social complexity of some Regions;
  - the Regional's difficulty in striking a balance between the time spent in extraordinary visitations and that needed for accompanying the Provinces;
  - the growing complexity of the life and mission of the Provinces which makes the extraordinary visitation itself more difficult because of the growing number of relationships, not only with the confreres and community organisms, but also with the different groups of the Salesian Family and the organisms of animation of the EPC and young people.
- 122** Many of the Provinces concerned put forward the proposal to divide the Australia-Asia group of provinces because of the notable growth of the Region over the past six years and its future expectations, of the inherent difficulty of accompani-



ment and coordination, of its cultural religious and social complexity, and of the geographical extension of the Region itself.

- 123** The situation of the Africa-Madagascar Region has also been examined. Because of the complexity of languages, cultures, religions, etc., some of the Provinces involved had suggested the division of this Region.
- 124** Keeping in mind the proposals of some of the Provinces of the Regions of Europe more directly involved, the reality of the present grouping has also been studied. Evident is the vast geographical extent and the linguistic, historical, political and cultural complexity of the Region of Northern Europe; the new European mentality growing in different countries, with deep processes of coming closer together and of political, economic, cultural and social sharing; the development within the Congregation of processes of the reorganization and regrouping of Provinces with foreseeable consequences for the configuration of the regions of Europe in the not-distant future; and that this sensitivity is felt in the Provinces; but nevertheless no practical, convergent and viable proposals have been made by way of change.

### **Criteria and lines of action**

- 125** As far as the action of the Regional Councillors is concerned, it is proposed:
- that in the initial programming of the Council each Regional be assigned a reasonable number of extraordinary visitations to be carried out, relying on the help of other members of the General Council;
  - that in the making of the extraordinary visitation, in addition to the present method, different means and methods should be tried out, always ensuring that every confrere has the possibility of a personal meeting with the Visitor and



that the latter gains an adequate knowledge of the state of the Province and fulfils the objectives assigned for the visitation by the Rector Major;

- that the Regional have collaborators available if necessary to make possible a balanced work of animation and accompaniment of the provinces and to implement the guidelines of the extraordinary visitation.

**126** With respect to the organization of the groups of provinces it is suggested:

- that some Regions be suitably reshaped, having in mind the criteria of geographical extension and cultural diversity;
- that the Regions be suitably arranged internally into conferences or intermediate elements which will ensure easy and organic animation.

**127** In response to the requests submitted, the group of Provinces previously assigned to the Regional Councillor for Australia-Asia has been divided into two groups:

- **the South Asia group:** India-Bangalore, India-Bombay (Mumbai), India-Calcutta (Kolkata), India-Dimapur, India-Guwahati, India-Hyderabad, India-Madras (Chennai), India-New Delhi, India-Tiruchy;
- **the East Asia-Oceania group:** Australia, China, Indonesia-Timor, Japan, Korea, North Philippines, South Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam.

**128** Since the Africa-Madagascar Region is still in a period of consolidation and the number of confreres of the Region is not great, it is considered that the problems at present existing can be resolved through a suitable distribution and coordination of the Provinces in Conferences.

**129** For the moment it is not considered opportune to proceed to a change in the grouping of the European Provinces. Nevertheless it is proposed to entrust to the General Council, with the particular involvement of the three Regionals concerned, the

launching of a study of the situation, with suitable specialists, of processes and experiences of coordination. The study ought to lead, should it be considered appropriate, to a new distribution and organization of the European Provinces, more in line with the European sensitivity and mentality now emerging in the field of culture and in the new political, religious and social reality. In the meantime it is suggested that a coordinating office be set up under the three Regional Councillors of Europe to work in agreement with the Councillors of the sectors concerned.

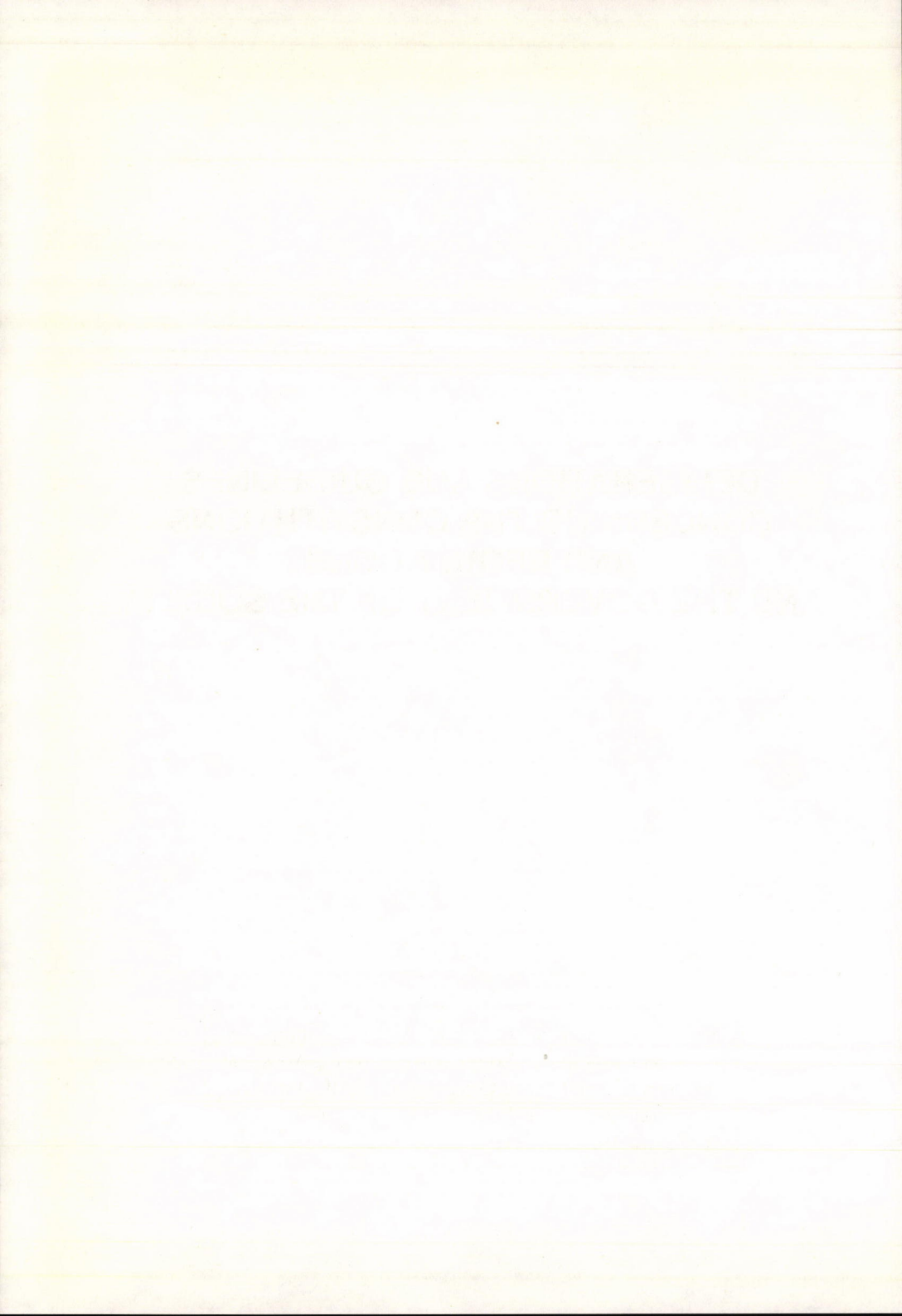
- 130** As a consequence, the following is the overall framework of the configuration of groups of provinces for the next six years: the Africa-Madagascar group (unchanged); the Latin America Southern Cone group (unchanged); the Interamerican group (unchanged); the South Asia group (new); the East Asia-Oceania group (new); the North Europe group (unchanged); the West Europe group (unchanged); the Italy and Middle East group (unchanged).





# **DELIBERATIONS AND GUIDELINES CONCERNING THE CONSTITUTIONS AND REGULATIONS AND THE GOVERNMENT OF THE SOCIETY**

The modifications to the text of the Constitutions, decided on by the GC25, were approved by the Apostolic See by a Rescript of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated life and the Societies of Apostolic Life N. T.9-1/2002 dated 3 April 2002.



On the basis of the evaluation carried out on the structures of central government, with reference also to their adequate functioning for the animation and guidance of the Society at its various levels, and having in mind the reflections and proposals made by the provincial chapters and the confreres – as also stated in the Chapter document on the evaluation – the 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter approved the following **deliberations concerning modifications to the text of the Constitutions and General Regulations** and to other **practical guidelines** concerning the governing of the Society.

### **1. LIMIT TO THE DURATION OF THE TERM IN OFFICE OF THE RECTOR MAJOR (C 128)**

- 131** The 25th General Chapter, after considering the proposals made by the Chapter itself,

and keeping in mind the general indication of the Code of Canon Law<sup>1</sup> concerning the temporary nature of offices in Institutes of Consecrated Life, as also the norm already adopted in our own law for superiors at provincial and local level;<sup>2</sup>

and considering furthermore on the one hand the heavy commitment called for by responsibility at such a high level, and on the other the increased pace of history and the complexity of the present time, which suggest that two periods of six years seem sufficient for a person to give of his best,

approves the following modification (*in italics*) to art. 128 of the Constitutions:

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

<sup>1</sup> cf. Can. 624

<sup>2</sup> cf. C 163. 177; R 171



## 2. LIMIT TO THE DURATION OF THE TERM IN OFFICE OF MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL (C 142)

132 The 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, after considering the proposals made by the Chapter itself,

and keeping in mind the general indication of the Code of Canon Law<sup>3</sup> concerning the temporary nature of offices in Institutes of Consecrated Life, as also the norm already adopted in our own law for superiors at provincial and local level;<sup>4</sup>

and considering furthermore on the one hand the heavy commitment called for by office at the level of the General Council, and on the other the increased pace of history and the complexity of the present time, which suggest that two periods of six years seem sufficient for a person to give of his best, approves the following modification to art. 142 of the Constitutions:

***“The Vicar General, the Departmental Councillors and the Regional Councillors remain in office for six years and may be re-elected only for a second successive six-year period in the office of Vicar General, Departmental Councillor or Regional Councillor respectively, except for the case referred to in art. 143 of the Constitutions.”***<sup>5</sup>

**Should a member of the General Council die or be permanently unable to attend to his duties, the Rector Major**

<sup>3</sup> cf. Can. 624

<sup>4</sup> cf. C 163. 177; R. 171

<sup>5</sup> Practical interpretation of the General Chapter: “A Regional Councillor cannot be elected for a third successive period of office as a Regional Councillor, even in the case of being destined for a Region different from one or more of the preceding, but he can be elected as a Departmental Councillor or Vicar General. Similarly a Departmental Councillor cannot be elected for a third successive period of office as a Departmental Councillor, even in the case of being destined for a Department different from one or more of the preceding, but he can be elected as a Regional Councillor or Vicar General. Finally, the Vicar General cannot be elected for a third successive period of office, but can be elected as a Departmental Councillor or Regional Councillor”.

with the consent of his Council shall entrust his office to whomsoever he judges most suitable in the Lord, but only until the expiry of the six-year period”.

### **3. ASSIGNMENT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF THE SALESIAN FAMILY TO THE VICAR OF THE RECTOR MAJOR, AND THE CONSTITUTION OF THE COUNCILLOR FOR SOCIAL COMMUNICATION (C 133, 134, 137)**

**133** The 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, having considered the proposals put forward by the Chapter,

for the purpose of making more evident the service of unity that belongs to the Rector Major in the Salesian Family (C 126), keeping in mind that the Vicar of the Rector Major can count on a well-organized network at various levels of the groups entrusted to the direct care of the Salesians, and that there exist for the other members of the Salesian Family the Common Identity Card and the Common Mission Statement of the Salesian Family, and that the vast commitment of the promotion of the salesian movement and salesian charism can be carried out in collaboration with the other Departmental and Regional Councillors;

and considering furthermore the growing importance of the sector of communication in the context of the activity of the Salesian Congregation in the spirit of art. 6 of the Constitutions and of art. 43 of the same which declares this to be “a significant field of activity which constitutes one of the apostolic priorities of the salesian mission”,

approves the following modifications to arts. 133, 134 and 137 of the Constitutions:

Art. 133:

**“The councilors in charge of special departments are: the councillor for formation, the councillor for the youth apostolate, *the councillor for social communication*, the councillor for the missions and the economer general”.**

Art. 134

**“The vicar general is the first collaborator of the Rector Major in the government of the Society and has ordinary vicarious power.**

**He takes the Rector Major’s place whenever he is absent or impeded. To him is entrusted particularly the care of religious life and discipline.**

*He has the task of animating the Congregation in the sector of the Salesian Family. In accordance with art. 5 of the Constitutions he promotes communion between the various groups, respecting their specific character and autonomy. In addition he guides and assists the Provinces so that they may develop in their own territories, according to their respective statutes, the Association of Salesian Cooperators and the movement of the Past-pupils”.*

Art. 137

*“The councillor for social communication has the duty of animating the Congregation in this sector. He promotes salesian activity in the social communication sector, and in particular coordinates at world level the structures and centres for which the Congregation has responsibility in this field”.*

#### **4. MODIFICATION OF ART. 24 OF THE GENERAL REGULATIONS (Mission Offices at Congregational level)**

- 134** The 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, having considered the proposal put forward by the General Council,
- and having in mind the need to better identify the responsibility of the economist general in the management and distribution of the resources of the international mission offices, together with that of the Councillor for the Missions,
- and to foster a more accurate and precise identification of the resources and a more rational coordination of their distribution, in the light also of the considerable development of the Mission Offices and international NGOs,



approves the following modification (*in italics*) to art. 24, paragraph 2, of the Regulations concerning the constitution of mission offices at Congregational level:

**“Their organization and method of functioning will depend on the provincial or provincials in whose territory the offices operate, in the light of a statute made previously with the Rector Major, and in agreement with the councillor general for the missions *and with the economer general*”.**

## **5. DIVISION OF THE AUSTRALIA-ASIA GROUP OF PROVINCES**

**135** The GC25, after considering the proposals put forward by the Chapter itself,

in the light of the considerable growth of the Australia-Asia Region in the six-year period 1996-2002 and the prospects for the future, of the difficulties in follow-up and coordination, of its cultural, religious and social complexity, and of its geographical extension,

and keeping in mind that there already exists a Conference uniting the provinces of India, that the Indian situation is itself intercultural, interreligious and multilingual, and that the number of provinces and confreres is adequate,

approves the following division of the Australia-Asia group of Provinces:

**SOUTH ASIA GROUP:** including the Provinces of: India-Bangalore, India-Bombay (Mumbai), India-Calcutta (Kolkata), India-Dimapur, India-Guwahati, India-Hyderabad, India-Madras (Chennai), India-New Delhi, India-Tiruchy.

**EAST ASIA – OCEANIA GROUP:** including the Provinces of: Australia, China, Japan, Korea, North Philippines, South Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, and the Vice-province of Indonesia-Timor.

## **6. REQUEST REGARDING THE METHOD TO BE FOLLOWED IN CELEBRATING THE GENERAL CHAPTERS**

### **136 The 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter:**

- considering the requests from many chapter members for an arrangement that would be less monothematic, more open to the assessment of the prevailing general situation and to the opportunity for a more specific and focused response;
- given that its members represent the whole Congregation and that there is a need to promote a better awareness and consideration of situations and perspectives at the level of Regions and of similar cultural areas;
- considering the high and rising number of chapter members, which requires a way of operating that encourages interpersonal relationships, a better knowledge of the candidates for the elections and the sharing of particular significant experiences;
- aware of the consequent need for an updating of the regulations for the General Chapter;

approves the following statement:

**The GC25 requests that during the next six year period the Rector Major with his Council carry out an assessment of the celebration of the recent General Chapters with a view to evaluating and proposing a manner of operation that is more streamlined, and aimed at carrying out an examination of the situation of the Congregation and drawing up fundamental guidelines for the policy to be implemented during the following six year period, in addition to fulfilling the constitutional requirements.**

## MESSAGES





## 1. THE GC25 TO THE SALESIAN CONFRERES

*LET US WELCOME THE GRACE,  
THAT HAS BEEN GIVEN TO US WITH THE BEATIFICATION  
OF THE SALESIAN BROTHER ARTEMIDE ZATTI*

- 137 We, the members of the GC25 offer thanks to the Father who has willed to illumine this General Chapter with the gift of the beatification of three members of the Salesian Family: Sister Maria Romero Meneses, Brother Artemide Zatti, and Father Luigi Variara.

With particular insistence, Fr J. E. Vecchi drew our attention to Artemide Zatti, so that we might make him the sign of a new commitment on the part of the whole Congregation, to recognizing the relevance today of the vocation of the Salesian Brother and to promoting its development in the spirit of Don Bosco. In him – as in the Salesian Brothers already beatified as martyrs – is found in an outstanding manner the “high level” of the ordinary salesian vocation which takes us to the roots of our consecration itself.

Many signs of hope invite us to propose a new commitment with great conviction. The young people who are entering our novitiates to become Salesian Brothers show that they appreciate this vocation. Everywhere throughout the salesian world there are examples of Salesian Brothers who are living their vocation joyfully and attractively, demonstrating its fullness in the complex world of communications, in work training, in social action, in education in the faith, in missionary daring, in formation for the salesian life.

John Paul II – on the occasion of Brother Artemide Zatti’s beatification – underlined “his unceasing and joyful activity”, “his genial manner and his special skill, together with his total availability” (*Audience of Monday 15<sup>th</sup> April*).

In fact, there is to be found in the Brother confreres, in an outstanding manner, the witness of a salesian vocation, which brings together, through educative and supportive charity, the

gifts of consecration and of the lay state. It reminds religious communities of the values of creation and of secular realities; families and lay people of the values of total dedication to God for the sake of the Kingdom (GC24, 154). In this way the Salesian Brother becomes the protagonist of that new civilization of love and of life that men of our day are yearning for.

Their special links with the world of work makes them protagonists of an educational venture in which civil society and the church community, secular values and Christian proclamation meet, so that everywhere, through work, man takes on the image willed by God.

Our reflection on the "salesian community today" has strengthened in us the conviction that from a salesian point of view, it is more positively effective when it is made up of Salesian Brothers and Salesian Priests. There could be no effort towards community renewal that did not also become a renewed determination to ensure that every community be able to live the fullness of its own identity with the presence of those who, with different but complementary gifts, reveal the features of Don Bosco.

Salesian Priests and Salesian Brothers look to Don Bosco together, so as to re-present him to the world. Together they live his spirit, and continue his mission of service to the young and to God's people. Together and in constant dialogue with each other, each one becomes a more genuine Salesian, since he is more firmly rooted in his own vocational identity. Together they are raised to the honours of the altars.

With the presence of the Salesian Brother the salesian community is complete and becomes fully effective. We have all experienced how well the Brother confrere knows how to be "a community man," as ready for great responsibilities as for the small services of every day, full of a sense of "the house", capable of forging straightforward and brotherly relationships. "Religious Brothers are an effective reminder to religious priests themselves of the fundamental dimension of brotherhood in Christ." (VC 60)



The GC25 invites us to love our communities, following the example of Artemide Zatti, who, – once again according to the words of John Paul II – demonstrated a “service that was impassioned, skilful and full of love,” he was as “punctual in carrying out his community duties” as he was “completely dedicated to the service of those in need” (*Homily at the Beatification Mass*). Of him, a genuine community builder, it was said that not only was he a “medical assistant” but he knew how to become “medicine” through the contact with the gospel that he offered to those who approached him.

The things we have mentioned encourage us and urge us to put into practice in each province a new, extraordinary and specific campaign for the vocation of the Salesian Brother, especially in youth ministry and within the Salesian Family.

It is greatly to be desired that more visibility be given to it in the world of education and human development, in meetings and youth gatherings, in initiatives that aim to make the salesian vocation better known, in teams and councils where, at different levels, the life and mission of the Sons of Don Bosco are planned and animated.

The liturgical celebration of Blessed Artemide Zatti, which we shall begin to keep on 15 March, and the annual world day of Consecrated Life are invitations that should become, – for every educative community – occasions for testimony and prayer, so that this vocation may continue to flourish for the benefit of young people and for the fullness of the spirit of Don Bosco.

While we write this message for you, with hearts full of enthusiasm after the experience of the grace granted in these days, we ask for the support of your prayers, so that the renewed commitment of the Congregation to the vocation of the Salesian Brother may bear fruit.

The members of the GC25

Rome, 15 April 2002.

## **2. MESSAGE OF THE GC25 TO THE SALESIAN FAMILY**

**138** Dear Brothers and Sisters,

At the end of our 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter we want to send to each group and to every member of the Salesian Family a special greeting and expression of our gratitude.

We are grateful for the messages and contributions you have sent us, for the prayers you have said for us, for following with interest the unfolding of the Chapter, and for your joy and good wishes sent to the new Rector Major who is for all of us the successor of Don Bosco.

The event of the beatification we recently celebrated together represents a significant moment of recognition on the part of the Church. The newly beatified, a Sister, a Brother and a Priest, who had in common the same vocation and were moved by the same apostolic zeal, are a powerful recall to holiness of life for the whole Salesian Family.

During our reflections in the Chapter we have kept in mind your contributions and what you expect from the salesian community: we hope that in the final document of the Chapter you will be able to find some responses to your wishes. The most pressing requests that you have made to us in your messages concern our being capable spiritual guides, and our availability to welcome you as brothers and sisters, so as to offer to young people a valid education and a witness to the Gospel in today's society. This will certainly help us to share the spiritual treasures of Don Bosco's charism.

In the chapter document we have expressed in various ways our intention to work in close concert and to grow together. The complex nature of the world in which we are living requires us to share, always more deeply and with co-responsibility, the spirituality that Don Bosco has entrusted to us and the mission to the ordinary people and to the young to which we are called.

Aware of our particular responsibility within the Salesian Family in which Don Bosco is the Father and guide, we want to work together for an increase of vocations in the various Groups, bearing witness to the authenticity of the spirit and the communion of hearts.

The theme of vocations is a concern for all the Groups of the Salesian Family. We, on our part, wanted to pay particular attention to the vocation of the Salesian Brother, an original feature and one that is essential to our charism.

Following our mission, many of us are involved in the education and evangelization of the young and of ordinary people. In schools, oratories, social works, centres for youngsters with problems, parishes, and other places, we are working together and forming ourselves in order to better carry out our service to them. We are putting our efforts and our hopes in shared formation. Through the practice of the preventive system we are enabled to become, in society and in the Church, a significant presence in the field of education. In recent years we have put great trust in lay people as genuine collaborators and protagonists, and are now witnessing the expansion of a lay salesian movement throughout the world.

Our Chapter, reflecting on the salesian community today, has confirmed our absolute commitment to grow in brotherhood and living witness. We intend "living and working together" as brothers according to the same charism, to be both the aim and the result of living in communities, where fraternal love becomes strong and visible. This mutual strengthening will be of benefit to the whole Salesian Family, who will know how to help each other to become enriched so as to give life to a genuine communion of brothers and sisters according to Don Bosco's heart.

Evangelical witness also firmly unites us. Its ultimate aim is to bring the Gospel of Christ to the young and to ordinary people. We do not feel that we are alone in this enterprise. Sharing the charism and the complex nature of evangelization obliges us today to plan and to work together. It is in this that



the great wealth of the Salesian Family is to be found, so that as we live our different experiences we can perceive present-day reality from different standpoints and with specific charismatic emphases to be placed in common for the benefit of all. Don Bosco's preventive system is the common heritage behind our plans for education and evangelization. In this way we can reach those for whom we work with complementary activities and the same educative objectives united in the same spirit.

In this way we build up a living Family that acts together in harmony to reach a common aim. Allowing ourselves to be guided by what we have expressed in the "*Common Identity Card*" and the "*Common Mission Statement*" we all become involved in the one mission of Don Bosco with our individual forms of expression, but linked together in one vast salesian movement.

In this way our giving of ourselves will also be the fruit of what we receive from each other, conscious that "there is more joy in giving than in receiving" (Acts 20, 35).

Together we joyfully share the protection of the Help of Christians, the Mother of our Groups and communities. Devotion to her is spreading ever more widely throughout the world, thanks to the members of the Family. We invoke her with confidence that she may bless each one of us, each Group and all our collaborators and their families. Into her hands we entrust the future of the spiritual Family that we have so much at heart.

As members of the Chapter, we invoke for everyone the Lord's blessing through the intercession of Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco, the new *Beati* and all the salesian saints.

The Rector Major and the members of the GC25

Rome, 18 April 2002.

### 3. MESSAGE TO YOUNG PEOPLE

139 Gathered together in Rome,  
coming from all the continents,  
we the Salesians of Don Bosco,  
write to you Young People,  
because it is for you that we live.

Convinced of the Lord's word:  
"Love one another as I have loved you,"  
we have examined how we can improve our life in community.  
We believe that the renewal of our "living and working together"  
is a great gift for you as it is for all of us;  
and we hope that you may be able to interpret it as a sign of hope  
in your efforts to overcome divisions  
to search for justice without giving way to hatred  
to offer help and forgiveness to everyone.

Following Don Bosco Father and Teacher of Youth  
we want to be for you and with you  
in situations of poverty, in the tragedies of war  
in the conflicts which divide  
and wherever life is threatened and development stifled.

We are with you in the search for Love  
that gives full meaning to life and leads to happiness.

Together we want to be "heralds of the dawn"  
messengers of peace, builders of a new human family  
drawing strength for the Lord's Passover.

And if at times we have disappointed your expectations  
today we want to renew our pledge:  
the doors of our hearts and of our houses  
are always open for you.

The Salesians of the 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter

Rome, 20 April 2002.

#### 4. AN APPEAL TO SAVE THE YOUNG PEOPLE OF THE WORLD

BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE LET US SAVE  
THE YOUNGSTERS, THE FUTURE OF THE WORLD

*"Youngsters need to be taken seriously, otherwise they will be against us or nowhere to be found. We cannot take advantage of their good will; if they ask for bread let us give them bread, but if they ask for instruction, for training, we must not pretend not to hear".*

(Fr Vecchi, 8<sup>th</sup> Successor of Don Bosco)

- 140 We the Salesians of Don Bosco are living and working in 128 countries, in direct contact with thousands and thousands of young people, boys and girls. As representatives of all the Salesians, we are gathered in a worldwide assembly and we cannot remain silent but feel bound to emphatically declare our commitment to fight with might and main on their behalf as something that cannot be delayed.

We address our words to those with responsibilities regarding the young:

- to those who are responsible politically and economically in every country, and at international level;
- to humanitarian Institutions, to NGOs, to Associations of Volunteers;
- to the Churches and to Religious Institutes;
- to families;
- to those who control and who work in the mass media;
- to educational agencies.

In every part of the world we are aware not only of the humiliating situations of poverty in which millions of youngsters are living, without a family, home or future, but even more of the exploitation of minors, made slaves by a world of adults too often unfeeling and irresponsible, which constructs barriers that exclude them. There are many millions of poor chil-



dren. Poverty can be overcome, but even the poor have the right to have their dignity respected. Instead we see a world which bears down on them and humiliates them obstructing every opening to a better future. We are convinced that at the root of such poverty are to be found not natural causes but downright injustice, the result of a view that sees everything only in economic terms.

The list of the wounds that afflict the world of youth is long and well known: child labour, children who live night and day on the streets, child prostitution, pedophilia, violence and the exploitation of young people, truancy, the spread of AIDS, illiteracy, unemployment, drugs and alcohol abuse, forced emigration, child soldiers, corruption, child gangs: all of which phenomena are on the increase and cut off any possibility of a future for many countries, many of which are burdened by foreign debt. Destroying the children and young people means blocking the future for a nation and for the whole world.

We Salesians have inherited from Don Bosco the commitment to give our lives for the development and the education of the young. It is essential to invest great resources to this end.

On more than one occasion Don Bosco (1815-1888) in asking for money from wealthy people to educate his poor boys used strong words: either we open our wallets willingly today to help these young people or one day they will come "to take your money with a knife at your throat and a gun in their hands".

We are also strengthened by the words of Fr Juan E. Vecchi, the 8<sup>th</sup> successor of Don Bosco, who recently launched a "j'accuse" against political and economic institutions that were either heedless or directly guilty with regard to young people.

We are on the side of the young because – like Don Bosco – we have confidence in them, in their willingness to learn, to study, to escape from poverty, to take their future into their own hands, but we see that they are often unable to do so be-

cause too many adults are guilty of ignoring them; when it comes to investing in them not only do these adults just not want to know but instead they even exploit them.

We are on the side of the young because we believe in the worth of the individual, in the possibility of a different kind of world, and above all in the great value of working for education.

We are very happily surprised that the “money men” themselves (The International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank) have stated that the only solution is to be found in Education.

We are convinced that it is essential that such organizations devote a great deal of their resources, money and concern to the EDUCATION OF THE YOUNG: to their protection, their safety, to preventive measures, to their direct involvement. Educating young people is the only way to prepare a better future for the whole world.

That everyone work together in the commitment to education on a global footing is the task for all men and women who have responsibly at heart the future of their own children and that of all the young people of the world.

We want to respond to economic globalization with a globalization of an educational character that will give heart and hope to all young people in the world.

*The Rector Major  
and 231 representatives of the Salesians in the world*

Rome, 20 April 2002.

## APPENDICES





## Message of His Holiness JOHN PAUL II for the beginning of the GC25

Dear Sons of Don Bosco!

- 141** 1. With great affection I address myself to you gathered together from the five continents to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter of your Congregation. It is the first of the third millennium and gives you the opportunity to reflect on the challenges of educating and evangelizing young people, challenges to which the Salesians wish to respond following in the footsteps of their Founder Saint John Bosco. It is my hope that the Chapter may be for you a time of communion and fruitful work, during which you can share the zeal which unites you in your mission among boys and also your love for the Church and the desire to open yourselves to new apostolic frontiers.

My thoughts at this moment go spontaneously to the late Rector Major, Fr Juan Vecchi, recently deceased after a long illness, offered to God for the whole Congregation and especially for this Chapter Assembly. While I thank the Lord for the service he rendered to your religious Family and to the Church, and for the witness of evangelical fidelity that always distinguished him, I offer a special prayer for the repose of his soul. It is for you now to continue the work that he so successfully undertook following the example of his predecessors.

Diligent educators and skilled spiritual guides as you are, you will know how to meet with young people who long to “see Jesus”. You will know how to lead them with gentle firmness along the demanding paths of Christian fidelity. “*Duc in altum!*” May this also be the watchword of your Congregation, which in this Chapter Assembly is encouraging all its members to a courageous relaunching of their own evangelizing activity.

- 142** 2. You have chosen as the topic of the Chapter “The Salesian community today”. You know very well that you have to refashion methods and ways of working so that your “Salesian” identity may clearly emerge in the changed circumstances of society, which require, among other things, the opening up to lay collaborators with whom to share the spirit and the charism left as a legacy by Don

Bosco. The experience of recent years has highlighted the great opportunities there are in such collaboration which will enable the members and groups within your Salesian Family to grow in communion and to develop a common apostolic and missionary dynamism. In order to open yourselves to cooperation with lay people it is important for you that you clearly determine the special identity of your communities; that they may be, as Don Bosco wished, communities gathered around the Eucharist and animated by a profound love for Mary Most Holy, ready to work together, sharing a single educative and pastoral project. Communities capable of animating and co-involving others, especially by their example.

- 143** **3.** In this way Don Bosco continues to be present among you. He lives on through your fidelity to the spiritual heritage that he left you. He gave to his works a special style of holiness. And it is especially holiness that the world needs today! Most fittingly, therefore, the General Chapter will propose once again with courage as the principal response to the challenges of the contemporary world “tending towards holiness”. In short, it is a matter not so much of taking up new activities and initiatives as of living and bearing witness to the Gospel without any compromises, so as to encourage towards holiness those young people that you meet. Salesians for the third millennium! May you be enthusiastic teachers and guides, saints and formers of saints, as was Don Bosco.

Strive to be educators of youth in holiness, making use of that typical pedagogical approach of the joyful and serene holiness that is your hallmark. Be welcoming and fatherly, ready at every opportunity, in every situation to ask young people through your way of living: “Do you want to become a saint?” And do not hesitate to propose to them the “highest level” of the Christian life, accompanying them on the road of a deep attachment to Christ, who in the sermon on the mount declared: “You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect”. (*Mt* 5, 48)

Yours is a history filled with saints, many of them young people. On the “Hill of the beatitudes of the young” as these days you call Colle Don Bosco where the saint was born, in the course of my visit on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September 1988, I had the joy of beatifying Laura Vicuna, the young salesian girl from Chile that you know well. Other Salesians are on the way towards that goal: these are the two confreres, Artemide Zatti and Luigi Variara, and the Daughter of Mary Help of

Christians, Sister Maria Romero. In Artemide Zatti one sees the value and the topicality of the role of the Salesian Brother; and in Don Variara, priest and Founder, one sees a further expression of your missionary charism.

- 144** 4. To this by no means small band of Saints and Blesseds you too are called to unite yourselves, committed to following in the footsteps of Christ, source of holiness for every believer. Do so in such a way that your whole Congregation may shine out for holiness and brotherly communion.

At the beginning of this millennium, the great challenge facing the Church, as I recalled in the apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte* is "to make the Church the home and the school of communion" (n. 43). For the apostolate to bear good fruit it is essential that the communities live in a spirit of real mutual brotherhood. To carry forward a single educative and pastoral project it is necessary that all the communities be joined together by a strong family spirit. May each community really be a school of faith and of prayer open to young people where it is possible to share their hopes and difficulties, and to respond to the challenges that as adolescents and young people they have to face.

But where is the secret of that union of hearts and of apostolic action to be found if not in fidelity to the charism? Therefore always keep your eyes fixed on Don Bosco. He lived his life entirely in God and recommended the unity of the communities around the Eucharist. Only from the tabernacle can that spirit of communion which becomes the source of hope and of commitment pour forth for every believer.

May affection for your Father continue to inspire and sustain you. His teaching invites you to mutual confidence, to daily forgiveness, to fraternal correction, to the joy of sharing. This is the path that he followed, and the one on which you too can draw the lay faithful, especially young people, to share the gospel and vocational project that unites you.

- 145** 5. As you can see, the reference to young people also keeps coming back in this Message. This link between Salesians and young people is no surprise. One could say that young people and the Salesians walk along together. Your life, in fact my dear sons, is lived out among the boys as Don Bosco wanted it to be. You are happy among them and they enjoy your friendly presence. Yours are "houses" in which they feel at ease. Isn't this the distinguishing feature of your



apostolate in every part of the world? Continue to open your places especially to poor boys, so that they feel “at home” there, enjoying the fruits of your hard work, your love and the witness of your poverty. Accompany them as they enter the world of work, of culture, of social communication, promoting a climate of Christian optimism within the context of a clear and strong appreciation of moral values. Help them to be in their turn apostles of their friends and those of their own age. This demanding pastoral activity puts you in touch with the many factors at work in the field of the education of the new generations. Be ready to offer your support generously at various levels cooperating with those who are fashioning educational policies in the countries where you are to be found. Defend and promote human and gospel values: from respect for the individual to love for one’s neighbour, especially for the poor and the marginalized. Work so that the multicultural and multireligious society of today may move towards an integration that is ever more harmonious and peaceful.

- 146** **6.** My dear Sons of Don Bosco, to you is entrusted the task of being educators and evangelizers of the young people of the third millennium called to be sentinels of the future as I told them at Tor Vergata, on the occasion of the World Day of Youth in the year 2000. Walk together with them, stand beside them with your experience and your personal and community witness. May the Holy Virgin, whom you invoke with the beautiful title of Mary Help of Christians accompany you.

Following Don Bosco, always put your trust in her, and spread devotion to her among all you meet. With her help so much can be done; rather as Don Bosco loved to repeat, in your Congregation it is she who has done everything.

The Pope tells you of his pleasure in your apostolic and educational commitment, and he prays for you, so that you may continue to walk in total fidelity to the Church and in close collaboration among yourselves. May Don Bosco and the host of the Salesian Saints and Blesseds accompany you.

I endorse these wishes with a special Apostolic Blessing, which I send to you, Members of the General Chapter, to the Confreres spread around the world and to the whole Salesian Family.

From the Vatican, 22 February 2002, Feast of the Chair of St Peter.

*Joannes Paulus II*

**Address of Card. Eduardo Martínez Somalo  
Prefect of the Congregation for the Institutes  
of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life**

**147** 1. I am particularly glad to be here with you to express once again the sincere participation of the Congregation for the Consecrated Life, and of myself personally, in the experience of faith and of availability to the will of God, through which your Congregation is at present living. It is an experience rich in grace.

If the event of the General Chapter is a gift of the Holy Spirit which opens us and commits us to Truth and Charity, the witness of the life and death of your Rector Major, Fr Juan Vecchi, is a wonderful expression of Don Bosco's charism: of being ready, in serene awareness, to dedicate all one's life to the young, especially the poorest of them, living the reality of "already but still not yet" in filial abandonment to the will of the Father. This spiritual depth, expressed in simplicity of life and trust in God seems characteristic of the formative process which the Rector Major has developed in recent years in your Congregation. Also the well remembered Fr Egidio Viganò, in all his fruitful life and in his last illness, had followed the same path in his style of life: pastoral love for the young.

I have frequently united in my prayers and in the celebration of the Eucharist these two great animators of the Salesian Family to whom today we entrust the 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter which is now beginning.

I am glad to be able to greet all of you here present, and in particular the Vicar General, Fr Luc Van Looy, who with the members of the General Council has borne in recent months the responsibility of guiding the Congregation with filial affection and close attention to the desires – expressed or intuitively understood – of the Rector Major; I greet the Mother General of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, the Coordinator General of the Cooperators, the President of the Past-pupils, and all the representatives of the various religious and lay groups of the Salesian Family who are here and never fail to make their own contribution, so that the Salesian Family may continue to respond with the readiness and prophecy of Don Bosco to the expectations of the Church, with the help and protection of Mary Help of Christians.

- 148** 2. You are beginning the first Salesian General Chapter of the third Millennium, which the Holy Father called: "A new millennium opening before the Church like a vast ocean upon which we shall venture, relying on the help of Christ.... The Christ whom we have contemplated and loved bids us to set out once more on our journey" (NMI 58).

In recent times we have lived through exceptional moments of grace and mercy during the Jubilee of the year 2000. No one can have remained indifferent to the witness of pastoral charity and demanding spirituality that John Paul II lived with young people. It is a page of history which is of special concern to you: while it reveals to us the deepest expectations of the young, it shows us very clearly that when a young person feels that he is loved, despite all the shortcomings proper to his age and the conditioning of society, his thoughts rise automatically to things above.

How would Don Bosco have reacted had he been able to be present like one of us in those days, and in what way would he have rethought the pastoral commitment characteristic of the fraternal community and its extension in welcoming young people in whom is reflected the young Christ, but very often in a disfigured manner? Your late lamented Rector Major, in the Acts of the General Council which you have kindly sent me, emphasizes in the following words what Salesians throughout the world have at heart: "The objective of the GC25 is not so much what the community and confreres must still do for the young, but what – at the present day – they must be for them as they live with them" (AGC 372). And he goes on to explain: "It is a question of carrying out an evaluation of our community life with the spirit and method of evangelical discernment, so as to discover ways of salesian fellowship able to respond to the demands of the following of Christ and of the mission" (ibid.).

- 149** 3. If the reflection on fraternal life, as a function of the following of Christ and of the mission, is a central point of interest in your Chapter and you want to make a discernment in the spirit of the Gospel, a fundamental condition is that each one of you must develop ever more deeply a living, sincere and existential contact with Christ, the Word of God and the Eucharist. The Capitular Assembly can then truly reach an evangelical discernment on the identity and practical elements of salesian fraternity. In this sense the General Chapter becomes a great occasion of formation in an attitude of listening to each



other with respect and confidence and helps us to mature the humility which is the royal road to truth. In the first place it fosters personal discernment of the coherence with which each one lives his own consecration to God in the salesian manner; it provides light on our reflection on youth pastoral work, which demands a well developed ability for discerning what it is better to leave aside or to revise, and what it is better to confirm or strengthen; it enables us to participate in a balanced and authentic way in a harmonious inculturation, and in the spirit of Don Bosco reconfirms us in the commitment to inculcate in young people the will to become upright citizens and good Christians. At the same time it makes us attentive, as Christ is always attentive, to the authentic demands of the young, to the changes in society and to future perspectives.

Let us never forget that Don Bosco worked among the young at the time of the first industrial revolution when unaccompanied youngsters were heading towards the cities and were being exploited by ruthless employers without any work-contracts that could protect them in some way. It was a fatal and easy road to a life of disorientation, and Don Bosco knew full well from direct experience the devastating consequences for those who ended up in juvenile prisons.

- 150** 4. The Church is glad to note the powerful influence your Institute has on young people, and consequently on the future of society and of the Church. Certainly the mission Don Bosco lived, and which he has passed on to you, calls for great educative sensitivity and a lot of courage to face the young and share their problems and expectations, their moments of rebellion and their easily aroused enthusiasm which often ends in nothing. They live in an environment of contradictions, one that is superficial but yet successful in presenting the idea of easy conquests and a competitive setting which is based on money and marginalizes the weak. But at the same time there is evidence of a new and clean youthful force aiming determinedly at what is good. They are the "sentinels of the morning" who are scrutinizing the dawn of a new society. The Holy Father has seen in them the hope that Paul VI had already nourished in his heart: they are the messengers of the civilization of love. We cannot but believe deeply in such a reality and accompany it with prayer and sacrifice that it may gradually grow among us. That is how Don Bosco lived!

It is a wonderful tradition that you are continuing in all parts of the world, and the Church rejoices in the good you are doing and is



grateful to you for it. How could we fail to recall your fruitful apostolate in the world of culture through your Universities, through your proper promoting of the mass-media, through your dedication to the missions, your work in parishes and in professional training centres to prepare young people for dignified and honest employment?

- 151** 5. We cannot undervalue nowadays a worry common to all Institutes: the scarcity of vocations. This has led to the fact that many members are asked to prolong their dedication even when their energies begin to fail, despite their sharing of the youthful heart of Don Bosco. Then is borne in on them to their regret the generation gap which makes rapport with the young more difficult. There is a great difference of mentality, of language, of tastes, of choices which affect daily life in the way problems are approached, in sources of pleasure, in prayer and judgement, in living together. Sometimes there is the risk that our communication may become burdensome despite our commitment. At such times only faith in the Word enables us to believe and live a kind and patient charity which hopes for everything and willingly overlooks everything, that does not seek its own gratification but believes in today's young people because God loves them. It is a moment for living in the highest degree the offering of oneself in charity for the glory of God and the salvation of the young. The charity extolled by St Paul in his Letter to the Christians of Corinth is the great and irreplaceable strength in the educative experience. It was not just by chance that Don Bosco told the first confreres: "It is not enough that youngsters be loved; they must know and feel that they are loved". He had well understood that even the most rebellious youngster could be won over by the patient love that hopes for everything despite every difficulty.

Education is possible wherever love can reach, but its soul is destroyed if you replace love by mere rules and regulations. This is why when he was asked for a definition of his system of education, Don Bosco replied succinctly: "My educational system? It is just Charity!" (MB V 381) It is the only road that opens the way for proclaiming Christ.

- 152** 6. John Paul II tells us how we can evaluate the authenticity of our faith: "Those who have come into genuine contact with Christ cannot keep him for themselves, they must proclaim him... This should be done however with the respect due to the different paths of different people and with sensitivity to the diversity of cultures" (NMI, 40).

To proclaim Christ by one's own life certainly requires that it be sustained by "a love nourished by the word and by the Eucharist, purified in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and sustained by prayer for unity, the special gift of the Spirit to those who obediently listen to the Gospel" (VC 42). This will be the kind of favourable environment in which young people will find themselves not only welcome, but feel that their presence is indeed desired so that we can share together problems and hopes in open and sincere dialogue.

Dear Salesians, the Chapter is like a workshop where many projects are closely examined, studied and brought into harmony, so as to propose to the whole Congregation a new way of life in fidelity to the charism. At the heart of this fraternal communion there is always the Holy Spirit who points out the way, coordinates and inspires how we can best achieve the holiness of Don Bosco and of our young people. But we are all called to make our contribution because to each of us is entrusted the common good of all.

The same thing happens in your communities. Every youngster you receive is an irreplaceable project of God's love entrusted to you at that point in history. You are called upon to give life and make space for the breath of the Spirit that is in him. Whose is the guiding hand? It is that of CHRIST, from whom we must always begin. He accompanies us through his Word and the gift of the Eucharist. As we look at him we glimpse Don Bosco, who was the first to open this new road, adapting it to the signs of the times as regards methods but taking its inspiration from Charity, the unchangeable reality valid for all times.

### **153 The Church has confidence in you!**

The Church is expecting a great deal from you, the Sons of Don Bosco!

I would like to finish by recalling the words addressed to young Salesians by Jean Duvellet, one of the first collaborators of Abbé Pierre: "You have a treasure: the pedagogy of Don Bosco. You can risk losing everything else, but don't lose that pedagogy! Twenty years of experience in the re-education of young people compel me to tell you: you are responsible for that treasure before the Church and the world".

Rome, 25 February 2002.

**Address of the Vicar General  
Fr Luc Van Looy  
at the opening of the GC25**

Your Eminence Cardinal Martinez-Somalo  
Dear Cardinals Antonio Maria Javierre  
and Oscar Rodríguez Maradiaga  
Dear Archbishops and Bishops  
Sisters and Brothers representatives of the Salesian Family,  
Dear Confreres Capitulars

- 154** At the beginning of the 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter of the Society of Saint Francis of Sales, I am happy to greet you all, cordially and gratefully. I see in your presence a sign of your affection for our Congregation and your participation in one of the most important events in its life, a General Chapter.

I thank Mother Antonia Colombo, Superior General of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and all the leaders of the various branches of the Salesian Family who are here: the Central Coordinator of the Cooperators, the World President of the Past Pupils, the one responsible for the Don Bosco Volunteers, the Superiors of the religious Congregations and those responsible for the Groups and Associations within the Salesian Family. Through your supporting presence we are conscious of the links which unite us in the one Family of Don Bosco.

And to you dear confreres capitulars who have come from the different Provinces around the world I express a heartfelt and fraternal welcome. I know that you have come to work, to experience a powerful worldwide presence, and to prepare the future of the Congregation.

Above all I want to remember very gratefully and affectionately Father Juan Vecchi, whom the Lord called to himself a month ago. Still fresh in our minds is the memory of his loving fatherliness, of his wisdom, his incisiveness in governing the Congregation, and his personal testimony of faith and serene acceptance of God's will during his long illness. The Congregation and the Salesian Family were together at his side during this time of sickness, united in prayer with



Brother Artemide Zatti. Father Vecchi began and guided the preparations for this General Chapter: we are sure that from heaven he will help us to bring it to a successful conclusion.

In recent years, the canonization of Mgr Versiglia and Fr Caravario, the beatification of the young Polish oratorians and of the Spanish martyrs encouraged our whole family to a "high standard of ordinary Salesian living" (cf. NMI 31), and the approaching beatification of Fr Luigi Variara, Sr Maria Romero and Brother Artemide Zatti place the saints once again at the centre of the whole Salesian Family.

## **1. The journey following the Council**

- 155** *The theme of this General Chapter fits into a process followed and developed in the period after the Council. After a general reflection on our salesian identity (GC20) and having looked more deeply into some of its features such as the evangelization of the young, the preventive system, the animation of the community and the characteristics of the members (GC21), we came to the promulgation of the Constitutions, renewed in the GC22 of 1984.*

Subsequently we focused our attention on the process to be followed with young people in order to educate them to the faith and in the faith (GC23). We highlighted for this the need for a community that was always being renewed, that involved itself more actively in the world of young people to greater pastoral effect, and, which at the same time, became the animating nucleus of the educative and pastoral community and of the different branches of the Salesian Family.

The GC24 took up again this theme of the involvement of lay people in our spirit and in our mission and defined the new role of the salesian religious community within the EPC and in the drawing up of the SEPP.

And so in both the GC23 and the GC24 the salesian community emerged as the focal point. In fact, to a large extent, the quality of the Congregation's witness, apostolic impact and fruitfulness depend on the community itself functioning well. It is the community of salesian religious that has the task of being "salt of the earth and light of the world" in its various works and activities.

Following this line of thought, the GC25 now wants to assess the progress made in the light of the last General Chapter, to go more deeply into the proposals that were not sufficiently well understood,



and to give impetus to the work of renewal already under way in the communities. It wants to relaunch the community as the key element in the evangelization of the young in the new millennium.

This theme, therefore, does not divert our gaze from those we are working for, nor from the lay people who are collaborating with us. As Fr Vecchi wrote in his letter convoking the Chapter:

*“The objective of the GC25 is not so much what the community and confreres must still do for the young, but what – at the present day – they must be for them as they live with them. Before all else we must keep in mind what we are and how we live, so as to act more effectively from an evangelical point of view for the benefit of those to whom our mission is directed” (Towards the 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter AGC 372, p. 13).*

*The salesian community* therefore is the focal point of GC25. To this is added the task of putting into effect the working guideline of GC24 (n. 191) regarding the structures of government, and that of the election of the new Rector Major and the members of the General Council who will guide the Congregation in the next six year period.

## **2. The theme of the GC25: facing the challenges of today**

- 156** *The theme of the Chapter “the Salesian community today” has these four main points:*

fraternal life,  
evangelical witness,  
animating presence among the young,  
animation of the community.

The various Provincial Chapters reflected on these points, starting from the experience of the local communities and identifying some particular problems which the Precapitular Commission have clearly indicated, such as for example:

- the need to strengthen the life of the community in the Spirit. That is, to create the necessary conditions so that the confreres can experience deeply the love of Christ, which leads them to a fraternal life that is profound, to a total dedication to their mission for youth, to a attractive witness to the values of the gospel;

- the need to develop the ability of the religious community to provide inspiration within the educative and pastoral community so as to foster communion, enthusiasm and a strong sense of belonging;
- the difficulty of coping with the real demands of the mission, given the reduction in the forces available and the consequent imbalance between the amount of work and the personnel available;
- the ageing process and the shortage of vocations which make the life in community more difficult and lead to the possible hindering of future progress of the mission.

On this and on other aspects of community life the General Chapter is called to indicate the best ways to relaunch the community at the beginning of this millennium, remembering Don Bosco's words:

*"We have chosen to live together in unum. This means in unum locum, in unum spiritum, in unum agendi finem"* (in the same place with the same spirit, with the same objectives) (BM IX 573).

The motive behind the choice of this theme, however, is not simply an awareness of weaknesses or shortcomings in our religious community life today, but rather of some challenges in a much broader context.

## 157 *Today's culture*

*In the first place, today's culture challenges us.* Living and proclaiming the faith has become difficult in the secularized world, where people slowly and quietly have drifted away from the faith as from something that has little relevance in everyday living.

The educative and religious character of the family having diminished considerably, and the Church being seen as an institution cut off from modern society, the young people who are growing up in secularized environments find it difficult to understand religious language, and they become accustomed to arriving at their own criteria of behaviour, and forming their own judgements about life, without any reference to religious values, and often without listening to the advice of the adults close to them. In our days, the credibility of the Church is put under scrutiny by the mass media, which highlight - rightly or wrongly - the weaknesses or moral failings of religious and priests.

Again, *the school situation* challenges us especially in those countries where a process of reform is taking place. Don Bosco's system puts the person and his fully rounded education at the centre, while today

we see that the greatest concern in the field of education is concentrated almost exclusively on imparting knowledge without giving much attention to the formation and the guidance of the individual. In addition, the teaching of religion tends to be given ever less importance, leading inevitably to a weakening in the total formation of the young person and of his capacity to develop a personal culture.

The task today is to find a way of overcoming these barriers, physical, psychological and cultural, in order to reach also those young people who are furthest away, and to help them to come to faith in Christ. It won't, in the first place, be our words or arguments that will open up this road, but the witness of a community that lives its own faith in Jesus Christ, finds its unity in it and makes it visible in joy and openness.

This spiritual depth leads the faith community to overcome a narrowed vision and individualism, and to live in fraternal friendship and collaboration to the extent of being attractive and evangelizing, as the document *Vita Consecrata* states in n. 46:

*"The life of communion in fact, "becomes a sign for all the world and a compelling force that leads people to faith in Christ... In this way communion leads to mission, and itself becomes mission" (Vita Consecrata 46).*

The same love for Christ also leads to a generous welcoming and a giving of oneself to others. To young people in the first place, through an active and friendly presence among them, and then to lay collaborators and to members of the different branches of the Salesian Family, through a communion built on the experience of shared planning, responsible involvement and formation together

*"so that it can become a living experience of Church and a revelation of God's plan for us" (C. 47).*

By being a sign, the community becomes also a school of faith which finds the courage and creativity to show its own Christian face and knows how to give flavour and direction to the lives of those for whom it works.

## **158** *Geographical expansion and involvement*

The phenomenon of globalization, with the corresponding phenomenon of localization, underlines the necessity of a balance between the unity of the charism and the plurality of its expressions.



It is necessary that greater weight be given to the value of brotherhood than to differences of race, language etc., in such a way that our communities, open to different cultures, become a true gift to the Church and to society. Our presence in all the continents, in 128 countries, helps us to have a world view of our charism, and to observe the developing life of the Church and of vocations throughout the world. While it is becoming old in some traditional places, it is growing and coming to birth in other countries and continents.

The Holy Father says in his Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* at n. 51:

*“Placed as they are within the world’s different societies – societies frequently marked by conflicting passions and interests, seeking unity but uncertain about the ways to attain it – communities of consecrated life, where persons of different ages, languages and cultures meet as brothers and sisters, are signs that dialogue is always possible and that communion can bring differences into harmony. Consecrated men and women are sent forth to proclaim, by the witness of their lives, the value of Christian fraternity and the transfiguring power of the Good News, which makes it possible to see all people as sons and daughters of God, and inspires a self-giving love towards everyone, especially the least of our brothers and sisters. In an age characterized by the globalization of problems and the return of the idols of nationalism, international institutes especially are called to uphold and to bear witness to the sense of communion between peoples, races and cultures. In a climate of fraternity, an openness to the global dimension of problems will not detract from the richness of particular gifts, nor will the affirmation of a particular gift conflict with other gifts or with unity itself. International institutes can achieve this effectively, inasmuch as they have to face in a creative way the challenge of inculturation, while at the same time preserving their identity.”*

## 159 *The search for quality*

Involvement in the world of culture requires a serious commitment to the qualification of people and of works. The effective significance of our activity depends mainly on our ability to combine a professional approach and the spirit of our charism.

Speaking of the role of the salesian community as the animating nu-



cleus, Fr Vecchi indicated the path to follow. We have to make the effort to become:

- persons who live 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 ability to involve ourselves in the local area;
- educators who are competent, who know how to combine education and evangelization, and to prepare people to transform society in a Christian manner;
- animators willing to share the formative process with lay collaborators in every day life and on important community occasions, such as the drawing up of the SEPP, the verification of the EPC and discernment in particular circumstances;
- leaders who have made their own the value of participation and of sharing responsibility, and are able to animate by creating and revitalizing suitable opportunities;
- Salesians who, working with others in partnership, show a particular sensitivity towards the education of those who are poorest, and become promoters of a culture of solidarity and peace. (*Experts, witnesses and craftsmen of communion. The Salesian community – animating nucleus*, in AGC 363, p. 40).

To achieve this quality both in the communities and in the confreres, during the last six year period, the Congregation has made a notable effort to rethink and bring up to date its *formation practice*, appropriately adapting its role of formation to the challenges and the requirements of the present time. The Ratio, promulgated in December 2000, is a compendium of norms and guidelines for the Congregation in the area of formation. It considers the whole of formation from the standpoint of ongoing formation, attributing to everyday life and work an effective formative role.

For this reason it is necessary that in every community there is:

- an atmosphere that fosters the growth of the confreres as individuals and as community (the family spirit that creates a mentality of searching and discerning together, drawing on everyone's experience, a climate of faith and prayer that strengthens the inner motivations, disposing each one to live them in the radical way of the Gospel and with apostolic generosity...);
- good use made of all the occasions and means that can promote ongoing formation;

- a yearly program of ongoing formation;
- communication with the provincial community and with the Congregation and the acceptance of the encouragement and the guidance that come from them... (cf. Ratio n. 543).

### 3. Some pointers for the future

- 160 The task given to us by Christ – to be salt of the earth and light of the world – leads us to look at the current situation in which we want to continually rethink our specific charism, ascertaining whether the salt still retains its taste and whether we have put the light in the right place.

The Jubilee Year invited us to raise the level of our lives and with the watchword *Duc in altum* the Holy Father encouraged us to head for the open sea and out into the deep – as Fr Vecchi repeated in his Strenna for this year.

For this first General Chapter of the new millennium, “Duc in altum” means relaunching the Congregation in one of those most fundamental aspects which bear witness to its religious and charismatic vigour. The community in fact is the key to the renewal and to the growth of the Congregation in its mission to youth, in its vocation ministry and in its evangelical and charismatic impact on the world.

In this fraternal gathering which is the General Chapter, we want, in the first place, to “live” our communion, as a sign of the unity of the Congregation. We want to undertake a shared reflection on the community to re-discover and to re-express the heart of the evangelical inspiration of Don Bosco’s charism, sensitive to the needs of time and place. (cf. C 146) It is a question of giving fresh life and a foundation to our gospel and charismatic witness as communities in order to become prophets for the new millennium. We want to identify and to share the ways ahead for the whole Congregation for the next six years.

- 161 In this regard I want to indicate immediately some lines or perspectives for our communities, aiming at a significant witness for the future that is capable of re-founding or redesigning our presence in the world of today.

Above all, as *witnesses to poverty*, our communities are involved in society participating in many forms of poverty, material and spiritual,

committing themselves to justice, and to human dignity. It is in fact the vocational choice of their members that gives them this sort of sensitivity which is a mark of the Church. The Pope reminded us that:

*"The option for the poor is inherent in the very structure of love lived in Christ. All of Christ's disciples are therefore held to this option...For each institute, according to its charism, this involves adopting a simple and austere way of life, both as individuals and as a community,"* (VC 82).

The communities will ensure that they reconsider their way of living and of working, giving preference to a presence among the less fortunate youngsters and developing in their members and in those for whom they work a culture of solidarity that is an expression of the gospel of charity.

- 162** In the second place, as *witnesses to faith* the communities need to respond to the thirst for spirituality shown by young people.

I quote the words of Fr Vecchi:

*"Young people... need witnesses, persons and environments that can show by example the possibility of living a life according to the Gospel in our society. This evangelical witness which is at one and the same time a communion between brothers, a radical following of Christ, and an active presence which stimulates and brings life to the young, constitutes the first educative service we offer them, the first word of the proclamation of the Gospel. From a vocational point of view they feel attracted to join communities with a purpose rather than merely engage in a particular kind of work."* (Towards the 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, in AGC 372 p. 16).

In the exhortation the Pope invites religious to:

*"inspire in all the faithful a true longing for holiness, a deep desire for conversion and personal renewal in a context of ever more intense prayer and of solidarity with one's neighbour, especially the most needy."* (VC 39).

The evangelical witness of our communities to fraternal life and charity towards those in need will be a strong invitation and an encouragement to others to share the salesian charism. In this way they will fulfil what our Constitutions say:



*"...the discovery and guidance of vocations...[is] the crown of all our educational and pastoral activity (C. 37).*

**163** Thirdly: as *witnesses to communion* our communities ought to try to extend, to strengthen and to create communion by becoming as the Pope says, "true experts of communion" (VC 46).

They will become effectively significant in a local area through their involvement, according to their own charism, both in the pastoral work of the local Church and in working on behalf of poor young people and in collaboration with other bodies and agencies. They will try to promote evangelical values, by their words and even more by their example, and by being present in those places where educational criteria are determined and policies regarding young people are decided. Not only this: the vocation as educators and consecrated persons and the priestly ministry will lead communities to set in motion organized action for the guidance and the formation of collaborators and of the educative communities. To enable them to live their own lives with maturity and joy, to understand and to live salesian spirituality and to carry out their educative and pastoral mission competently and in a professional manner, the communities will work at their cultural and professional development but also and especially at the growth of their human, Christian and Salesian vocation.

They will establish relationships of collaboration and co-responsibility in the shared mission, and will become actively involved in the Church and in society, especially in areas of education, of the evangelization of culture, and in social communication.

Fourthly as *witnesses to a deep spiritual life* the communities need to commit themselves particularly to revitalizing their own salesian spirituality, recognizing that the community owes its existence and mission to the Holy Spirit, and therefore it cannot possibly reinvent itself or carry out its role fruitfully without a deep spiritual experience. They will seek therefore to start afresh from Christ (NMI 29) recognizing that "*a religious community is, above all else, a mystery which must be contemplated and welcomed with a heart full of gratitude in the clear context of faith.*" (Fraternal life in community, n. 12)

At the beginning of the new millennium we were insistently reminded of the importance of being authentic Christians and competent and credible witnesses. Today – it has been said – without passion and mysticism no one can be a Christian, much less a religious and a Sale-

sian. May the General Chapter know how to rekindle this flame in every salesian community.

## **Conclusion**

- 164** We entrust ourselves to the help of Mary, “model of prayer and pastoral love, the teacher of wisdom and guide of our Family” (C. 92) and to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, with a docility like that of Don Bosco, in order to be enlightened in every step that we take and on every decision that we make in this Chapter. We also know that every renewal carried out under the inspiration of the Spirit and in harmony with the charism of Don Bosco will be accompanied by their creative power. It is in this way that we can take up our work with complete confidence that we are doing the Lord’s will.

This is what we wish for ourselves, certain of the Lord’s presence among us.

Rome, 25 February 2002.

**Address of homage to the Holy Father  
by the Rector Major Fr Pascual Chavez  
at the Pontifical Audience**

Most Holy Father,

- 165** We are full of joy and gratitude for this fatherly meeting that you have graciously granted us in your house close to St Peter's chair. We feel that this is also our house, because of his lively sense of the Church and love for the Vicar of Christ at the service of the Church that Don Bosco has handed down to us.

We are 231 participants at the 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter of the Salesian Society, members by right and those invited, coming from 94 Salesian Provinces spread across the five continents and where today the Salesians are living the charism and the mission of Don Bosco, committed, in very different contexts, especially to the education of young people and the new evangelization, often in situations on the frontiers. In the name of the chapter members and of the whole Salesian Family, I want above all to express the most lively sentiments of gratitude for this special meeting and for the very many signs of affection, of trust and esteem shown to our Family. The brotherly closeness and encouraging words of Your Holiness, on the most important occasions – happy and sorrowful – of our Congregation, as on the recent bereavement that we suffered with the death of Fr Juan Vecchi, have shed light on our way and have led us with renewed fidelity to the Spirit into the new Millennium.

- 166** We are about to conclude, Most Holy Father, the work of the 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, in which we have been engaged, in family communion and with a sense of responsibility, during these last weeks. For us, in developing the chapter theme, focused on *The Salesian community today*, the message of Your Holiness given to us at the beginning of the Chapter has been a stimulus and an encouragement. You told us "it is important for you that you clearly determine the special identity of your communities; that they may be, as Don Bosco wished, communities gathered around the Eucharist and animated by a profound love for Mary Most Holy, ready to work together, sharing



a single educative and pastoral project. Communities capable of animating and co-involving others, especially by their example.”

We have reflected on this in our Chapter, as we look towards the future. Aware of the new contexts in which today consecrated life finds itself, in a globalized and pluralistic world, marked by signs of dramatic situations of poverty and oppression, in search of new motives and models for life, we want to be capable of offering to young people a new model of humanity, through communities which are “of one heart and one soul”, significant and visible, that with their life and words bear witness to the Risen Lord. As You Yourself, Holiness, pointed out in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, we want our communities to be “houses and schools of communion.”

- 167** And particularly in reference to the same Apostolic Letter, with which Your Holiness has launched the Church into the Third Millennium, I want to say that our work in the Chapter has been guided by the invitation that You Yourself have repeated in the name of the Lord Jesus: *Duc in altum!* The invitation was already taken up by our beloved deceased Rector Major, Fr Juan Edmundo Vecchi who left us almost as a last testament in his final “Strenna”: *Duc in altum*: Put out into the high seas and cast your nets wide and deep, encouraging us to renew our mission as educators and evangelizers in the “open seas” of today’s world, responding to the challenge of the young and together to set our activity in the depth of the spiritual life.

You Yourself Holiness, in your message at the beginning of the Chapter said to us: “Diligent educators and skilled spiritual guides as you are, you will know how to meet with young people who long to “see Jesus”. You will know how to lead them with gentle firmness along the demanding paths of Christian fidelity. “*Duc in altum!*”

In the young people of today, we want to recognize – as you yourself Your Holiness told us – the way of the Church. With them, “called to be the heralds of the morning” we want to discover, ever new, the true Light, that which enlightens everyone. And in their company, we want to spread it with evangelical courage.

- 168** In the Chapter we have kept this horizon before us: fraternal life and evangelical witness lived in the community can lead to an ever more vital animating presence among the young, helping them to grow towards that holiness that, as our Constitutions say – is the most beautiful gift that we can make to young people.

For this I want to thank You Most Holy Father, for the gift of three new Blesseds that you will make to our Family: the priest Luigi Variara, the Brother Artemide Zatti and Sister Maria Romero Meneses: three splendid models of the holiness that we want to live in our communities and to offer to the young people of today.

So that we may reach these demanding goals we ask the Apostolic Blessing of Your Holiness, that it may bring the gifts of the Spirit on the members of the Chapter here present, on the members of the new General Council and the whole Salesian Family.

On our part, together with the fervent prayers according to your intentions, we pledge our commitment to be in the Church as you wished us to be, "diligent educators and skilled spiritual guides" of the young.

**Address of his Holiness JOHN PAUL II  
in the Audience to the Capitulars of 12 April 2002**

My Dear Brothers,

- 169** 1. I am happy to welcome you on the occasion of the 25th General Chapter of your Congregation. Through you I want the thoughts in my heart to reach all the Salesians working in various parts of the world.

With affection I greet the new Rector Major, Fr Pascual Chavez Villanueva, and the General Council that will work beside him for the next few years. I pray that they may guide your religious Family with enthusiasm and docility to the action of the Holy Spirit, keeping alive the charism of your holy Founder that is always relevant.

And then I cannot but recall the previous Rector Major, Fr Juan Vecchi, recently deceased, at the end of an illness accepted with resignation and abandonment to the Lord's will. May his testimony be a stimulus for every Salesian to make his own life a total offering to God and to his brothers.

- 170** 2. At this time of Easter, after the days of the passion and the crucifixion of the Son of God, the Church invites believers to contemplate the shining face of the risen divine Master. In fact, as I recalled in the Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, "Our witness would be hopelessly inadequate if we ourselves had not first contemplated his face." (n. 16) Only in Christ can we find the response to the most intimate expectations of our heart. This means that every effort must be directed towards Jesus "who is to be known, loved and imitated, so that in him we may live the life of the Trinity, and with him transform history" (ibid 29).

Dear Salesians, if you are constant in fidelity to this commitment, if you make every effort to impress on your work the mark of evangelical love, you will be able to fulfil your whole mission with joy and effectiveness. Be saints! As you well know, holiness is your principal task, as indeed it is for all Christians.



The Salesian Family is eagerly preparing to live with joy the imminent beatification of her three children: the priest Fr Luigi Variara, the Brother Artemide Zatti and the religious Sister Maria Romero Meneses. Holiness is the best guarantee of an efficacious evangelization, because in it is to be found the most important testimony to offer to young people the ones for whom you carry out your various activities.

- 171** 3. May the Most Holy Virgin whom you venerate under the title of Mary Help of Christians, guide your steps and protect you everywhere. May St John Bosco, together with the numerous Saints and Blesseds who make up the heavenly host of your protectors accompany you in the not easy task of putting into action the projects that the work of the Chapter has produced for the benefit of the whole Institute.

With this wish I bless you my dear Brothers, assuring you of my prayers for each one of you and for all those you meet in your daily apostolic and missionary ministry.

## **The "Good-night" of Fr Pascual Chávez in the evening of his election as Rector Major**

I hope the fact that we are in the Easter season did not influence my election, given that my name occurs often during this liturgical time (paschal candle, paschal time); it could have been seen as a subliminal message!

### **1. Thanks**

- 172** Well then, I'll start by expressing my warmest thanks, firstly to the Lord God whose desire it has been to give to the congregation and to the Salesian Family a new pastor in Don Bosco's footsteps. Thank you to Fr. Luc Van Looy who for almost two years, since Fr. Vecchi's illness began, has guided the congregation with true dedication and love. Thank you to Fr. Anthony McSweeney, who has accompanied the process of discernment so wisely and with such love for the Salesians. I must say that the fact that the number of preferences in the first straw vote was not made public in the Assembly allowed me to sleep well to the point where right now I am much more at ease than I was yesterday.

### **2. A surprise**

- 173** Of course, this election is a surprise for me and I accept it as an expression of the will of God, as I said when I was asked if I would accept. It states the loving will of God that urges me further in the service of the confreres and the young, with Him as the one and only Lord of my life. Nevertheless, that acceptance expresses my inadequacy to undertake the grand task and honour of being the successor of Don Bosco.

### **3. The profile**

- 174** Reading through the list many times of the qualities required of the Rector Major's role which were given to help the Assembly in its dis-



cernment, I must confess that I didn't see myself in them and I didn't feel that I was the right person, and so I was sure another would have been elected. I say that sincerely. Now I understand that through this profile you have set out not only your expectations of the Rector Major, but also his personal life program. Thank you very much. That too is a gift from God.

#### **4. Program for the next six years**

- 175** The description of the problems which you presented in your questions to the Rector Major's vicar after his 'state of the congregation' report 1996-2002 completes the overview of the situation (as described by Fr. Luc Van Looy in that report). Together with the priorities indicated and at the conclusion of GC25, it will become part of the planning of the Rector Major and his Council for the next six years.

#### **5. A fast ride!**

- 176** Perhaps you will ask me how it is I have arrived at this particular responsibility. In my opinion it's been an especially short, fast ride! In 1995, at the end of my mandate as Provincial of Mexico-Guadalajara, I was called by Fr Viganò who sent me to finish off my formative journey with a doctorate in biblical theology. I remember very well his words: "The Congregation needs this doctorate". When I asked him what my future would be, he said "I don't know yet. You could be a professor at the UPS, or help out in the Formation Department, or you could, you could also be Provincial!" I had a year and a half to finish it. You probably remember how I came to be called onto the General Council six years ago. I was preaching a retreat to a group of confreres from the Madrid province when I received a phone call from Fr. Vecchi telling me that the Chapter Assembly had elected me as regional for the Inter-America region - and asking me for an answer. It was the 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1995. That means that this new nomination has come my way six years later, plus a day! When he asked me to become provincial, Fr. Viganò invited me to allow myself to be guided by the Holy Spirit and to put aside personal projects and take on those that God would give me as a life plan.

Fr. Vecchi, for his part, in his introduction to the workings of the new General Council, invited us all to live the task as a grace, as an opportunity to make progress on the path to holiness by letting the light of



Don Bosco, his charisma, his mission as we find it in the Rule enlighten our situation and that of others. Even if I feel that I have grown as a Salesian over those years, I must confess that there's still a way to go, but I depend on the Lord and His grace and also on yourselves and each member of your province.

## **6. In continuity with previous Rector Majors**

- 177** I know that I am called to continue the splendid work of animation and government carried out by Frs. Viganò and Vecchi; the achievement of the former being his renewal of the salesian identity according to indications of Vatican II and his situating the congregation in harmony with the needs of young people today. This has been a contribution that we cannot avoid responding to adequately and making a part of who we are. It was Fr. Vecchi's contribution to create a pastoral model appropriate to society as it is today, with its new understandings of education, evangelization and pastoral work for young people. Above all he strove to make our work meaningful for young people. The robust theological formation of Fr. Viganò and his closeness to the charisma of Don Bosco flow together into an original contemporary interpretation of our founder and father. The pedagogical competence and anthropological vision of Fr. Vecchi have enriched the congregation giving it more certainty in what to do today to be more truly meaningful as communities and as individuals.

## **7. My wish**

- 178** I would like to have the theological preparation of Don Viganò; the pedagogical and cultural sensitivity of Don Vecchi, but above all the loving fatherliness of Don Rinaldi and the fidelity of Don Rua, of whom Paul VI affirmed that his beatification was owed to the fact that he had made of Don Bosco a school, and of his sanctity a model and of his Rule a spirit. Knowing my limits and weaknesses, I invite you and through you all the confreres of the congregation young and old, priests and brothers, sick and in the fullness of health, together to reproduce the image of Don Bosco.

## **8. A new phase**

- 179** I am the first non-Italian Rector Major (Fr. Vecchi was Argentinian but of Italian parentage). This is the most evident sign of the multi-

cultural nature of the Congregation now spread around the world. I take this occasion to thank all of Salesian Italy which to this point has known how to exercise its responsibility to faithfully hand on the charism of Don Bosco. Thank you my dear Italian Salesians here present, or working in the various communities of the Peninsula or as missionaries around the world. Now this historical responsibility is passed on to all of us since all of us are called to incarnate Don Bosco. We need to deepen our knowledge of Don Bosco especially because we have a need of a charismatic identity in order not to be lost in this ocean which we have been called to plunge ourselves into....as indicated in my predecessor's recent Strenna. We have a need to know Don Bosco so that he becomes our *mens* (our way of thinking), our point of view, our action towards the needs of young people. I invite you to love him. He is the most beautiful gift that God has given us: Don Bosco, a sure road to human completeness and above all the following of Christ. This is my exhortation for you: know him, love him, imitate him, because we are all heirs of his spirit and it is for us to spread it around.

## 9. My attitude today

- 180** What attitude do I have as I take up this responsibility? That of Moses and Don Bosco. In effect, when I was ordained priest on 8th December 1973, I took as a motto something that had struck me while I was studying the Letter to the Hebrews: "He held to his purpose like a man who could see the Invisible". It is the text with which the author of the letter recovers the spiritual experience of Moses, the Easter man. In order to make the long and perilous journey together with the people of God whom he, as leader, was guiding out of Egypt, he had need of courage, of 'parresia'. But this had been shown to be inadequate above all when he knew he was being sought for killing a man, and took refuge in the desert; it was there that his choice to renounce all his own projects matured. So when he was called anew by God, Moses knew he had to renounce his projects and himself and trust himself to God, to believe in Him and walk as if he were seeing the invisible. I can assure you that I felt great emotion when I read this same expression years later in the renewed text of the Constitutions as referring to Don Bosco in article 21 - where the saint is presented as father and teacher. He was a man who lived to bring about a single dream: the salvation of the young especially those most in need and in danger. He was a priest educator 'consecrated' totally to the mis-

sion which God had entrusted to him. He brought all his qualities of nature and grace to bear on this mission. His being one so unified, the perfect incarnation of apostolic interiority, is at the root of his marvelous courage, his fantastic creativity, his tireless capacity for work, his rich sensitivity, his generous love.

## **10. Entrustment to the Madonna**

- 181** I conclude by inviting you to entrust me and the Congregation to Mary. She was the precious legacy left by Jesus so that she could be our Mother and teach us to be believers and disciples of her son. And from the time of the dream of 9 years, she was the Mother and teacher of Don Bosco. Today she is the 'Stella Maris' (Star of the Sea) who will guide and accompany us in our adventure of putting out into the deep as Fr. Vecchi urged us to do in order to put the Congregation and the Salesian Family in harmony with the pastoral plan of the Church at this beginning of the third millennium.

Thank you. Good Night!



**Address of the Rector Major  
Fr Pascual Chávez Villanueva  
at the closing of the GC25**

Dear Confreres and Members of the Chapter,

- 182** We have come to the end of our experience of the GC25, which we have lived as a gift of the Holy Spirit for ourselves and for our Congregation. The Spirit of Christ has poured out on us the rich variety of his gifts, which have filled us with joy and pointed to the way we must travel in the future. Our first thought therefore is humbly and gratefully addressed to God, who through his Spirit has animated our assembly to live in the unity of communion and to seek to respond to what he is asking of us.

At this concluding moment there are many people I want to thank: in the first place the Vicar of the Rector Major Fr Luc Van Looy, the Moderator of the Chapter Fr Antonio Domenech, Fr Antonio Martinelli, the members of the precapitular commission, the chairmen and secretaries of the Assembly, Bishop Alois Kothgasser, Fr Anthony Mc Sweeney, who with various degrees of responsibility have guided the Assembly's life and work.

I thank also the capitular Assembly itself, which was always readily available and willing at every stage of the Chapter's development, helped by its Commissions and internal arrangements. I thank too the secretaries of the Chapter, the translators, ANS and its team, the confreres of the Generalate and the auxiliary personnel, who by their discreet and assiduous work made the carrying out of this important event possible.

Finally I thank the members of the outgoing General Council, who have carried out their task with true competence and dedication, and in particular those who have now finished their mandate; and I offer my sincere good wishes to the Vicar and General Councillors who have accepted the indication of the capitular assembly to be my collaborators for the coming six-year period.

Prominent in our minds throughout the Chapter has been our concern for the Holy Land. The drama of the war has never been far from our

thoughts; we have followed the rapid sequence of news items; we have united our prayers with the worried appeal of John Paul II. The carnage, the acts of retaliation, the occupations and acts of destruction have opened up a wide gulf between the inhabitants. We have been seriously worried about the fate of our confreres and sisters in Bethlehem and Cremisan, and we are still keenly following the situation as it continues to develop with our prayers and our close support.

We have also been badly affected by the scandal widely echoed by the mass media concerning priests and religious of the Church of the USA accused of the abuse of juveniles. All this calls for particular care on the part of us who are educators. And similarly we have not failed to follow the situations of wars and social conflicts which are afflicting countries in which we are working.

Following the example of the apostolic community, sent out by Jesus first to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom and then make disciples of all nations, "in the joy of the Holy Spirit" our assembly is now ready to go out into all the world, so that each one may continue to follow the pathways of history, to live with young people, to animate communities, to walk with the Church.

## **1. The salesian community at the present day**

- 183** The GC25 has developed the main theme of the "salesian community today" and the secondary theme of the "verification of the functioning of the structures of central government". The greater part of its time has been dedicated to reflection on the theme of the community, which had already been begun by the two preceding General Chapters; they had shown the local community to be the strategic place for the education of young people to the faith and for the involvement of the laity.

The GC23 had tackled the challenge of the education of the young to the faith. This was becoming an ever more complex undertaking, because of an emerging culture which made a rethinking of both method and content necessary. Starting from the challenges posed by the youth situation in its various contexts, the capitulars drew up a process for the education of young people to the faith, by offering them a suggested form of meaningful Christian life and of salesian youth spirituality.

What was needed was a renewal of the quality of our educative and pastoral approach. It was not a matter of creating new works, but of

starting up *a new presence*, a new way of being present in those places where we are already working. Once again the Congregation felt itself called upon to relaunch the attitude of “*da mihi animas*”, by converting the community into a “sign and school of faith and a centre of communion”.

The *GC24* centred its reflections on the challenge of creating a new synergy between SDBs and laity, in other words on the challenge of increasing the number of people who want to live their baptism in the educational field, bringing Salesians and lay people together in a new paradigm of relationships, of bringing the Salesians face to face with their priority task of pastoral and pedagogical animation.

The conviction became ever more deeply rooted that the new evangelization and the new education could not be realized without the organized and competent collaboration of the laity. And the salesian communities would need to be ever better adapted for becoming animators of the educative and pastoral communities and of the Salesian Family.

These two last General Chapters developed a new pastoral model, in which the salesian community has an animating task, as the charismatic point of reference for all who share Don Bosco's spirit and mission. The quality of its consecrated life, the depth of its spiritual experience, the effectiveness of its witness and the impact of its suggestions, are all indispensable factors for giving evangelical life and strength to the animation of the EPC and of the Salesian Family.

- 184** With the *GC25* the salesian community takes centre stage and is seen in all its dynamic characteristics. It is not so much the community dimension that has been considered, but the local community as the subject, or in other words as regards its ability for planning and involving numerous other forces, for evangelical prophecy, for communion and for effective evangelization. In this way the *GC25* delves more deeply into what the Congregation has already done and gives new importance to the realization of the full “personal involvement” of the community. The model that emerges from the *GC25* is one linked with our apostolic consecration as expressed in art. 3 of the Constitutions. The community lives the grace of unity, which brings about a vital synthesis between fraternal life, the radical following of Christ, spiritual experience and dedication to the mission to the young.



The capitular text concerning the community appears as a collection of five *working guidelines* or schemes of work, and is directed to the salesian community as the principal subject. By taking it on, the latter is invited to give willing acceptance to the call of God that comes through historical and ecclesial events, the indications of the Word of God and of our Rule of life, the appeals of young people and the needs of the laity and of the Salesian Family. The community then examines more deeply its own situation and discovers its own availability and resistances, its resources and lack of them, its possibilities and limitations. It learns moreover to recognize fundamental challenges and face them with hope and courage; it can put to itself appropriate questions that demand a reply. Finally, the community considers the practical guidelines that have been given, and decides on the conditions needed for putting them into effect.

- 185** The fundamental content concerns fraternal life, evangelical witness and the animating presence among the young. The *fraternal life* of the community aims at fostering processes of the human and vocational growth of the confreres, at overcoming the inertia of formal or functional relationships, at strengthening the sense of belonging and the fraternal atmosphere, at facilitating communication, and at helping in the building of a shared vision. Useful for this purpose can be a personal plan of life, the practice of community discernment, the good use of the occasions for community meetings, and the project of the salesian community.

*Evangelical witness* requires us to make visibly perceptible the primacy of God in the community's life, to live the grace of unity in spiritual experience and its community expressions, to make our community witness to the following of Christ radically prophetic and attractive, and to share the motivations and commitments of our vocations. The central place given to the Word of God, fostered by the practice of the "lectio divina", the quality of community prayer, the daily Eucharist, communication and the sharing of life help to deepen our spiritual experience and the manifestation of the primacy of God. The witness of the community is rendered more transparent by concentration on joyful obedience in the mission, the practical application of an austere poverty of solidarity, and the splendour of a serene and watchful chastity.

Wherever there is a salesian community, there is an experience of faith, a network of relationships is built up and many forms of service

for the young are made available. The community makes visibly perceptible the *salesian presence among the young*, to which it gives animation and growth. A first requirement is to get back among the young and be not only a community *for* young people but also *with* young people. To this end the salesian community builds up a presence of communion and participation, it gets the laity and the Salesian Family involved and becomes inserted in the local neighbourhood. It becomes a presence that educates and evangelizes, creating environments with a strong spiritual ethos, working with full awareness in situations of poverty, and realizing projects and processes of growth for the young. Finally, it promotes the vocational choice every young person must make, it animates the educative and pastoral community so that the latter may be a place of vocational growth through a method of personal follow-up and vocational suggestion.

To be a community that makes fraternity come alive, that provides a strong gospel witness and is an animating presence among the young, the community itself needs to be animated, updated, motivated, encouraged, directed and guided. *Animation of the community* takes place mainly through ongoing formation. It can provide moments for spiritual renewal, for discussion, for educative and pastoral updating; but the evaluation and quality of daily life are the first resource for formation in the community. The Rector has a fundamental role to play in the animation process, but with the involvement and shared responsibility of all the confreres; his attention is concentrated on the charism, on the mission and on fraternity. Together with the confreres he animates the community.

Finally the GC25 suggests some *conditions* which make it possible to be a salesian community at the present day; it is a matter of helping the community to work in line with a common project, of ensuring that the community be made up of the right number of confreres with the necessary qualities, of deepening the rapport between the community and the work, and of giving effect to the organic provincial project. Some of these conditions apply to the local level, but for the most part they require the responsibility and decisions of the provincial community.

To every community the Chapter consigns these five processes for study, deeper analysis and practical application, with a view to its becoming an effective charismatic community.

## 2. Verification of the functioning of the central structures of government

186 The second element in the theme for the Chapter's reflection concerned the verification of the functioning of the structures of central government. This was a point specifically requested by the GC24; it was begun by the General Council and the results were passed on to this GC25. The General Council began the work of review through contributions from external consultants, and the study by a group of Provincials led by the Vicar of the Rector Major. Questions were then addressed to the Provincial Chapters concerning the Departmental Councillors, the Regional Councillors and the Extraordinary Visitations. The GC25, finally, has considered all this work and developed its own reflections for the purpose of making the functioning of the structures of central government more smooth running and effective.

The verification has led the GC25 to make certain modifications to the Constitutions; they concern the temporary nature of the period in office of the Rector Major and members of the General Council, the entrusting of the animation of the Salesian Family to the Vicar of the Rector Major and the consequent assignment to one of the Councillors of the social communications sector by itself. This has enabled an internal change to be made in the General Council which has been under study for some time and offers a new possibility for the animation of the Salesian Family, and the giving of greater importance to social communication in the service of education and evangelization.

The group of Provinces formerly known as Australia-Asia has been divided into two distinct groups named *South Asia* and *East Asia-Oceania* respectively. This decision will permit a better animation of the two new Regions on the part of the respective Councillors; more suitable forms of coordination will need to be found within the Regions themselves.

The need is felt to study a different manner of realization of the working of the General Chapter, to enable it to better respond to the needs of planning and clarity of expression. We are all aware that the General Chapters dedicated to a re-reading of the charism have now ended, and we are back to 'ordinary' General Chapters. Analogous reflections can be applied to the functioning of the provincial chapters.

The point is emphasized that the Rector Major with the General Council should work in a more organic and coordinated way, starting



from the six-year programming, but also in the subsequent implementation. In particular it is hoped that sectorialism may be overcome and especially that the so-called sectors of the "salesian mission", i.e. youth pastoral work, social communication and missions, can work together in a more coordinated way. The urgent need is recognized for working by way of projects and of fostering an animation that can initiate processes. Also noted is the importance of exploiting the resources existing in the Regions, Conferences and Provinces, and linking them together in a network. In this connection too the Generalate can make its specific contribution to improving the manner of working with the whole Congregation.

With the growth of the Provinces, the contribution made by the realization of decentralization and subsidiarity has been appreciable; but there is still need for a solidarity extending beyond the province or the region, and the need for much greater interprovincial coordination. At a time of globalization moderation is needed to balance global effects and local initiatives; it will be well to reflect on what Provinces can do through their own resources and what they can more usefully do together. There are in fact certain urgent needs and priorities that extend beyond the capacity of the Regions. Mission frontiers require a combination of subsidiarity and solidarity.

The process of discernment for the election of the Rector Major and the General Councillors was an occasion for living and experiencing a procedure, a method and a spiritual experience which still need further study but are already giving appreciable results. Discernment carried out in common in important matters (C 66) is a way open to us to use in moments of government and pastoral life at different levels. The exercise of such a practice will help us to reach a unity of outlook.

The need for the verification of the structures of central government remains open to the effective realization of better methods of functioning and requires an analogous commitment at different levels in the Congregation. A better method of working will lead to working together, and to a work which is not only good but more effective.

### **3. The era through which we are living**

- 187** We are living through exciting and dramatic times; they both provide new opportunities and impose certain restrictions; they open up possibilities previously unthought of and arduous new and challenging perspectives. The practical guidelines of the GC25 are placed in broader

frames of reference we do well to keep in mind. The communities in fact operate within situations of society and culture, of the Church and of religious life. The implementation of the GC25 requires us to know our own particular contexts, but also to be able to situate them in the great changes now taking place.

### ***3.1 The social and cultural context of secularization, globalization and fragmentation***

Deep and rapid transformations are taking place in society and culture which challenge the commitment to education and evangelization, the testimony of religious life, and the model of man and woman that we put forward.

There exists an accentuated ethnic, cultural and religious pluralism, fostered also by mass emigration. Tolerance and cultural integration often become difficult; various forms of religious syncretism arise; sometimes tensions, conflicts and wars break out for ethnic, nationalistic and religious motives. In the religious field the process of *secularization* is very strong; it is aimed prevalently at the Christian faith but involves other religions as well. Greater prominence is also given to movements that seek spiritual experiences, interior well-being and deep emotions.

*Globalization*, moreover, is a reality that becomes ever more prominent and is manifested especially in economic planning on a worldwide scale, in the growing awareness of solidarity, in the protection of the environment, in the need for a more just sharing and distribution of goods, in social communication and in the development of information technology. But it can also produce social exclusion and injustice to the detriment of weaker populations. Economic well-being, which takes on ever more arrogant aspects in the privileged classes of humanity, leads to consumerism and hedonism in them. At the same time the challenges of hunger, poverty, sickness and social exclusion, which affect millions of persons, are becoming ever more acute.

*Complexity* and *fragmentation* finally create instability and diversity between points of reference, values and interests. Together with a healthy pluralism and the seeking of new criteria, challenges are multiplied and relativism and pragmatism become widespread. While on the one hand emphasis is laid on the value of the individual and his rights, the dignity of women is progressively recognized in practice, and there is a more objective view of the body, the affections and sex-

uality, on the other hand new forms of exploitation of the individual and especially of juveniles have arisen, and there has been an accelerated flight from firm commitment. The post-modern era accentuates attention to interpersonal relationships and the cultivation of the affections, but also individualism and subjectivism.

The GC25 encourages the communities to face the challenges presented by the present culture to education and evangelization; to live fraternity with special attention to the vocational maturing of every confrere and the fostering of interpersonal relationships; to provide an evangelical witness that is positive and an alternative to the prevailing climate. In this way every community will seek to deepen its knowledge of the context in which it is living and acting, and will provide effective responses.

### 3.2 *The ecclesial context of "Novo Millennio Ineunte"*

- 188 At the end of the Jubilee Year and the beginning of the new millennium John Paul II urged the Church to "launch out into the deep",<sup>1</sup> to "keep its eyes on the Lord Jesus",<sup>2</sup> to "begin again from Christ",<sup>3</sup> and to be "witnesses of love"<sup>4</sup> by building communion.

The first standpoint from which we must identify pastoral approaches suited to every community is that of "*starting again from Christ*". "I have no hesitation in saying that all pastoral initiatives must be set in relation to *holiness*":<sup>5</sup> the time has come to put forward again to all this high standard of the Christian life which is holiness and to adopt a pedagogy of sanctity. "This training in holiness calls for a Christian life distinguished above all in the art of prayer":<sup>6</sup> our communities are urged to become authentic schools of prayer; education to prayer must become an essential requirement in any pastoral program. "There is no doubt that this primacy of holiness and prayer is inconceivable without a renewed listening to the word of God".<sup>7</sup> Holiness,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *NMI*, 1

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *NMI*, 16-28

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *NMI*, 29-41

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *NMI*, 42-57

<sup>5</sup> *NMI*, 30

<sup>6</sup> *NMI*, 32

<sup>7</sup> *NMI*, 39



prayer and listening to God's word are the fundamental paths for pastoral work after the Jubilee.

The second standpoint from which a decisive commitment must be made when programming is that of *communion*. "To make the Church the home and the school of communion: that is the great challenge facing us in the millennium which is now beginning, if we wish to be faithful to God's plan and respond to the world's deepest yearnings".<sup>8</sup> The prophetic nature of communion presupposes the cultivation of its spirituality, which is expressed in fostering the different types of vocation, promoting the commitment to ecumenism, basing everything on charity, encouraging interreligious dialogue and the mission "ad gentes", and facing up to the challenges of modern culture.

With the GC25 the Congregation intends to respond to the appeal of John Paul II to work in the outposts of the new evangelization and exploit the gifts and results of the Jubilee: "*Duc in altum*". Every community is called upon to begin again from Christ and build communion. This will lead to new fruits of spiritual life and evangelization.

### 3.3 *The religious context of the charismatic re-foundation*

**189** In these years that have followed Vatican II consecrated life has been strongly urged to renew itself, and become eloquent and meaningful; in particular the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* gathers together the elements of re-foundation which have been realized in the past thirty years and constitute the point of reference for "a great history still to be accomplished".<sup>9</sup>

To the delicate process of renewal desired by the Church, our Congregation has dedicated three "extraordinary" General Chapters, which have specified the salesian identity. It is useful to recall the path we have followed. While the GC19, which took place during the Council, "took note of the situation and made preparations", the Special GC20 "put the process into the Council's orbit", the GC21 "revised, rectified, confirmed and made some points more explicit", the GC22 was called to "reexamine, make more precise, complete, perfect and conclude".<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *NMI*, 43

<sup>9</sup> *VC*, 110

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *ASC* 305, p. 9

The Special GC20 carried out the revision and acceptable renewal of the Congregation according to the spirit of the Founder and in line with the indications of the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* and the Decree *Perfectae Caritatis*. The Chapter set out not only to implement the guidelines and directives of Vatican II in a merely formal manner, but took the opportunity to make a better response to God and to the young. For this reason it was preceded by a very careful preparation with the involvement of all the Provinces, and sought to reformulate a global project. The fundamental point at issue was how to make visible and relevant in the Church the particular testimony of salesian religious life. It was also a matter of writing a renewed text of the Constitutions and Regulations. In brief, the identity of the Congregation had to be re-founded.

After seven months of work the Chapter produced 22 documents of doctrinal and practical guidance. A more charismatic reformulation of the text of the Constitutions was then made, and the Regulations were written to provide a universal method for the practice of the Constitutions, leaving it to the Provinces to legislate on specifically local matters through the Provincial Directories.

The GC21 aimed at verifying whether and to what extent the renewal had been achieved. The rapidity and depth of change after Vatican II led the Church and the Congregation to a state of unease, which needed clarity of formulation and wisdom in solutions. The deep renewal brought about in the Congregation by the Special General Chapter needed revision, rectification in places, still deeper study and reconfirmation.

In the GC21 some substantial themes of the Congregation were studied: the preventive system, formation to salesian life, the Salesian Brother and the Pontifical Salesian University. This work of clarification of the identity, reinforced by the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Paul VI, gave greater depth to the specifically salesian mission. In his closing address to the Chapter the Rector Major Fr Egidio Viganò summarized the three objectives which had been clarified during the Chapter's work: the priority task of taking the Gospel to the young, which implied an educative and pastoral project; the religious spirit; and the new statute of the salesian community as the animator of the educative and pastoral community. The GC21 certainly marked a radical pastoral renewal.

The GC22, taking place after an intense period of experimentation and in-depth examination of the salesian identity, set about con-

cluding the project of renewal with the definitive revision of the Rule of Life. The final result of the Chapter's work was, in the words of the Rector Major: "an organic text, improved, profound and permeated by the Gospel, rich in the authentic nature of its origins, universally open and forward-looking, sober and dignified in expression, richly endowed with well-balanced realism and the assimilation of conciliar principles".<sup>11</sup> The definitive text of the Rule of Life, brought with it, among other things, the revision of the *Ratio*; the central idea was that all salesian formation should be linked with the nature of the vocation and the specific mission of educators and pastors of the young.

In this way our Congregation committed itself to the foundational re-reading of its charisma and to its "re-foundation". The "extraordinary" General Chapters have been followed by three "ordinary" Chapters, concerned with topics of a practical nature: the education of young people to the faith, involvement of the laity in the salesian spirit and mission, and the salesian community at the present day. The charismatic re-reading of the identity has been concluded, but its translation into practice is still taking place.

#### 4. The goal of the GC25

- 190 The phases of the preparation and the celebration of the GC25 having been completed, the time has come for its implementation. Now is the time, with all the confreres, to assimilate the Chapter, to make it a program for the government of the province, to put it into practice in the communities. To identify the steps that need to be taken, we shall briefly look at the objectives for the future and the goal to be reached.

Looking at the path the Congregation has followed in these last thirty years, it can be seen that changes have not always been along a straight line. I think that the greatest difficulty was not the renewal of the Constitutions or of the structures of government or of pastoral practice, but the spiritual renewal, which involves a deep interior conversion.

In these years of change a new form of salesian religious life has been taking shape. Already we have the "new wineskins": a new

<sup>11</sup> Docs. GC22, p. 93



evangelization, a new educational method, a new pastoral model, a new formation. Little by little there has also been the development of the "new wine": the new evangelizer, the new educator, the new pastoral subject, the new Salesian.

Sometimes we feel ill at ease with the use of the adjective "new" to qualify situations that we think we are already familiar with, especially with regard to the practical consequences that it leads to: the need to renew ourselves spiritually, to update ourselves professionally, to prepare ourselves pedagogically. The novelty comes from the situations, the contexts, the changes in the circumstances, from the way of looking at the human person.

Today the concern about religious life in general and of the Congregation in particular, cannot be about survival, but rather about creating a significant and effective presence. It is a question about prophecy. "That means," Fr Vecchi wrote, "giving life to a work that raises questions, gives motives for hope, brings people together, prompts collaborations, 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."<sup>12</sup> What is needed is a form of life that is fascinating and attractive, that puts the prophetic aspect in the first place rather than the organizational, that emphasizes persons rather than structures.

Paraphrasing Karl Rahner in his spiritual testament, we can say that the future of religious life depends on its mystical force, its solid experience and clear witness of God, overcoming every form of "bourgeois attitudes," vagueness and mediocrity. Religious life arose and only makes sense as a search for God and his primacy. Its mission is that of being sacramental: being "signs and bearers of the love of God" (C 2), especially on behalf of those most in need, so that they may have the experience that God exists and loves them.

When the Superior Generals decided to reflect on the theme of the re-founding of religious life,<sup>13</sup> they were moved by the knowledge that there was need for "new wine in new wineskins" (cf. Mt. 2, 22); one

<sup>12</sup> VECCHI J.E. *Experts, witnesses, and craftsmen of communion*, AGC 363 p. 22. It is not insignificant that Fr Vecchi quotes this text in his letter con-voking the GC25, AGC 372 pp. 26-27

<sup>13</sup> Cf. AA.VV *For a creative fidelity. Refounding: relocating charisms, re-designing presence*. Il Calamo, Rome, 1999, a collection of the contributions at the 54<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the USG, at Ariccia in November 1998

source of the novelty is the call to return to the origins of the charism. For us this is a matter of expressing the original character of the Congregation, of going to the essentials, of re-writing the letter from Rome of 1884. *Let us return to Don Bosco and let us return to young people!*

The images of "light", of "salt" and of "yeast", used by Jesus in the Gospel to describe the identity and the mission of the disciples, are revealing and demanding. In simple terms, it is necessary to "be" in order to have significance and relevance; but if the salt loses its savour, or if the light is put under a bushel, or if the yeast does not ferment they are of no use. They have lost the reason for their "being".

The strength of the religious life is based in its prophetic nature in the face of culture, its subversive nature with regard to "bourgeois attitudes" its alternative approach to progress that is without limit but also without transcendence. The problem is that of *identity* and of *identification*; that which marks us out and distinguishes us is a strong experience of God, who changes our life profoundly, and a community in which we begin to live in a new way. "Do not be conformed to this world," Paul writes to the Romans, "but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Rom 12, 2).

Along these lines I want to indicate *five objectives for the future*, which have been the subject of reflection and study by Fr Egidio Viganò and Fr Juan Vecchi in their letters, but which are also areas that still need to be renewed in order to lead us decisively into the new millennium with vigour and clarity of approach.

#### **4.1 The spiritual renewal of every Salesian**

- 191** Spiritual renewal implies a return to the foundations of our vocation: God and his Kingdom. God ought to be our primary "occupation". It is he who invites us and entrusts young people to us, to help them to the maturity of reaching the stature of Christ, the perfect man. For us the recovery of spirituality cannot be separated from the mission, if we do not want to run the risk of compromise. God is waiting for us in the young in order to give us the grace of an encounter with himself (cf. C 95; GC23, 95). Therefore it is inconceivable and unjustifiable to maintain that the "mission" is an obstacle to our meeting God and cultivating an intimate relationship with him.



#### **4.2 The consistency of the community**

- 192** The quality of the life of communion and of educational and pastoral action require that the salesian community be made up of the right number of confreres and those of the necessary quality.

All the proposals to make every-day experience formative, and to improve the quality of the method, the contents and the activities come up against what is actually possible for the community. For us fraternal life in community is an aspect of our apostolic consecration and therefore of our religious profession (cf. C 3 and 24), together with the following of Christ, obedient, poor and chaste, and the mission. It is also the context in which we are called to live the spiritual experience, the mission and the evangelical counsels. We cannot therefore continue with the pretext that we want to solve all the problems at the cost of the charism and of community life.

#### **4.3 Presence with fresh significance**

- 193** The significant effectiveness of the presence is a requirement of both the community and the mission; it is a question of quality in both cases. In the past when one spoke of "reorganization" the emphasis was placed on closing houses or handing them over to lay people. Today, on the other hand, while one continues to insist that reorganization is an unavoidable task if we do not want to weaken the community and overburden the confreres, the emphasis has to be placed on the "significant effectiveness" of the salesian presence in the locality. This cannot be reduced to the work or the activity; it is rather a *way of being, of working and of organizing* that is concerned not only with efficiency but rather with giving meaning, opening prospects, gathering people together, promoting new responses. It is a question of relocating the province where the needs of young people are most urgent and where our presence is most fruitful. Our consecrated life will not be everywhere, and not always even be socially relevant, but it will continue to be the essential point of reference, in so far as it is a sign of the Kingdom.

#### **4.4 The quality of the educative and pastoral proposal**

- 194** The course followed so far, at least in many places, has been the multiplication of the works, compromising in not a few cases the quality



of our activity. Sometimes the organizational aspects have been emphasized rather than the pastoral ones, or the maintenance and the construction of buildings rather than the clarity and the seriousness of the educative and pastoral project. Today we are required to develop more focused forms of evangelization, to concentrate on fostering human maturity and on the education to the faith of young people, on the formation of the laity, the animation of the educative and pastoral community, and together to draw up a project. This undertaking is itself already the bringing about of significant effectiveness.

#### 4.5 *The formation of the Salesian*

- 195** The complexity of the current situation nowadays, the challenges of young people, the requirements of the new evangelization, the task of inculturation require a formation that is capable of preparing the Salesian to live his vocation in a dynamic and sound way, to carry out the mission in a professional and competent manner, and to personally assimilate the charismatic identity. For us, Don Bosco is not only a constant point of reference, but a way of life, and formation is nothing else than the personal assimilation on our part of the gift that God gave us when he called us. The document on formation to the Consecrated Life clearly states: "The renewal of religious institutes depends mainly on the formation of the members."<sup>14</sup> This is the greatest challenge that the Congregation has today, and to which it has wished to respond with the new edition of the *Ratio*.<sup>15</sup>

The Church and the world need people who make it their profession to incarnate their concern for God, who are a reserve source of humanism, who become a power, an eloquent and radical sign of the "sequela Christi". This is what the Vatican Council II wanted and expected from religious life. This has been the aim of the Congregation during these last 30 years. Now the GC25 has determined to give its specific support to the achievement of this aim, a contribution on the practical level, that as we have seen, aims at strengthening the salesian community in all its facets.

<sup>14</sup> *Potissimum Institutioni, I*

<sup>15</sup> *Formation of Salesians of Don Bosco. Principles and Norms. Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis et Studiorum Third Edition*, Rome 2000 (n. 15), 33

## 5. The gift of the beatifications

196 "Dear Salesians, (...) be saints! As you well know, holiness is your principal task." With this exhortation, John Paul II addressed the members of the General Chapter as we were received in audience on the morning of 12 April. Holiness is also what this Chapter hands on, when it concluded with the gift of three new *beati* for the Salesian Family: the priest Luigi Variara, the Brother Artemide Zatti and Sister Maria Romero Meneses.

These *Beati*, who are joined to the numerous array of holiness in our charismatic Family, are united by the joyful giving of themselves and their generous dedication to the very poor. There is nothing that attracts like the witness of total dedication without reserve, without limit, without condition; there is nothing so fascinating as service to the poorest, to the humblest, to those most in need. The lepers of Fr Variara, the sick of Brother Zatti, the abandoned girls of Sister Romero immediately recall the totally free offering of the lives of these three persons, who are proposed to us as models. Care for the poorest and the total gift of oneself link together the three new *beati*, in this way bearing witness to their heroic charity.

Holiness is the demanding way that together we want to follow in our communities; it is "the most precious gift we can offer to the young" (C 25); it is the highest goal that, with courage, we can set for all. Only in an atmosphere of holiness that is lived and experienced will the young people have the possibility of making courageous life choices, of discovering God's plan for their future, of appreciating and welcoming the gift of vocations of special consecration.

In particular the beatification of Brother Artemide Zatti underlines the relevance and the validity of the vocation of the salesian Brother. The salesian charism would not be what it is meant to be without such a figure. His presence in the life of the salesian community is not the addition of a type of person extraneous to it, but is an indispensable part of its very nature. This requires from us a more convinced vocational proposal, and a more visible presence of this figure in the educative and pastoral community.

Running through the whole of Brother Zatti's life was the following of Jesus, with Don Bosco and in Don Bosco's manner, always and everywhere<sup>16</sup> This indicates that Don Bosco fascinated and attracted

<sup>16</sup> Cf. AGC 376, p. 27

him; following Don Bosco's example he lived the total donation of himself; like Don Bosco he chose to be an educator: Zatti was an infirmarian educator. To the extent of becoming a reflection of God with the radicality of the Gospel, he lived in profound union a spiritual experience, professional work, joyful brotherhood. The shining figure of this Blessed salesian Brother teaches us the way to help youngsters discover the beauty of this vocation.

## 6. Launching into the deep at his word

- 197 The episode in the gospel of the miraculous draught of fishes, presented in "*Novo Millennio Ineunte*" and taken up again in Fr Vecchi's last Strenna, is a symbol of the return to our journey at the conclusion of the 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter.

We too sometimes may have experienced the fruitless labour of our work. The Lord Jesus is again inviting us today to "launch into the deep" to renew our determination to cast the net, to try once again, if on several occasions we have experienced lack of success. This is the time for courage! We need to go out into the open sea, facing today's challenges, and we need to go to the deep waters, cultivating an intense spiritual experience and developing the quality of our activity.

What is urging us on to try again is trust in the Lord Jesus: at his word we will once again cast our nets. This is the time for hope! The time we are living in is moving us towards the great responsibilities that await us, towards the joyful adventure of once again lowering the nets for the catch and experiencing the power of the Word of God. We are sure that the Lord Jesus still knows how to amaze us with his fidelity and his surprises.

Where there are great challenges the courage and the hope of the community are needed. The new ways and the difficult tasks of evangelization can be faced by communities that undertake a radical pastoral conversion and live a profound spiritual experience. Courage and hope are the most eloquent expressions of the prophecy of our communities.

It has not escaped us that in the gospel episode the gratuitous gesture of the surprising catch of fish has no other purpose than that of arousing faith and leading to a *sequela*. Faced with the overgenerous gesture of Jesus and after the invitation: "Do not be afraid: from now



on you will be fishers of men", the first disciples drawing their boat to land, left all and followed him (cf. Lk 5, 1-11). In this way they will be involved in the same mission and in the same destiny as Jesus: the definitive call to everyone to welcome the Kingdom. May the surprising gestures and the abundance of courage and of hope of all our communities provoke a vocational response from the young; may the prophetic witness of the communities be such as will still today be capable of attracting youngsters ready to share Don Bosco's life project "*Da mihi animas; coetera tolle*".

## 7. With Mary our help

- 198 As with the apostolic community at the beginning, so in our communities Mary is present. She is at prayer with her Son's disciples; lives with us who became her sons at the foot of the cross. From that moment Mary is in the Church with a praying presence; she prays that the disciples may overcome the closed-in consequences of fear, be attentive and ready for the breath of the Spirit, go out onto the highways of evangelization.

Don Bosco left us as a precious heritage entrustment to Mary; she is our Help and the Mother of the Church, the help of young people and of the poor; the Mother of all. Like the beloved disciple we too welcome her into our homes, into our communities. She will make us attentive to the needs of the present time. "They have no wine", and she will make us sensitive to the requirements of the gospel: "Do what he tells you" (cf. Jn 2, 3-5).

Mary with your maternal intervention  
help us to return to Don Bosco and to the young!  
Mary our help,  
pray for us and for our communities!



## 25<sup>th</sup> GENERAL CHAPTER

### List of participants

#### General Council

|    |     |   |                        |                   |         |
|----|-----|---|------------------------|-------------------|---------|
| 1  | RMG | P | VAN LOOY Luc           | Vicar General     | Belgium |
| 2  | RMG | P | NICOLUSSI Giuseppe     | Coun. Formation.  | Italy   |
| 3  | RMG | P | DOMENECH Antonio       | Coun. Youth Min.. | Spain   |
| 4  | RMG | P | MARTINELLI Antonio     | Coun. SF and CS   | Italy   |
| 5  | RMG | P | ODORICO Luciano        | Coun. Missions    | Italy   |
| 6  | RMG | P | MAZZALI Giovanni       | Economer General  | Italy   |
| 7  | RMG | P | BARUFFI Helvécio       | Regional Coun.    | Brazil  |
| 8  | RMG | P | CHAVEZ V. Pascual      | Regional Coun.    | Mexico  |
| 9  | RMG | P | D'SOUZA Joaquim        | Regional Coun.    | India   |
| 10 | RMG | P | FEDRIGOTTI Giovanni    | Regional Coun.    | Italy   |
| 11 | RMG | P | RODRIGUEZ T. Antonio   | Regional Coun.    | Spain   |
| 12 | RMG | P | RODRIGUEZ M. Filiberto | Regional Coun.    | Spain   |
| 13 | RMG | P | VAN HECKE Albert       | Regional Coun.    | Belgium |
| 14 | RMG | P | MARACCANI Francesco    | Secretary Gen.    | Italy   |

#### Salesian Region: AFRICA – MADAGASCAR

|    |     |   |                         |                 |              |
|----|-----|---|-------------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| 15 | AET | P | ROCA Alfredo            | Sup. Vice-Prov. | Spain        |
| 16 | AET | P | BARAKI Weldegabriel     | Delegate        | Ethiopia     |
| 17 | AFC | P | SWERTVAGHER Camiel      | Provincial      | Belgium      |
| 18 | AFC | P | TSHIBANGU Joachim       | Delegate        | Dem. R.Congo |
| 19 | AFC | P | RUVEZI Gaston           | Delegate        | Dem. R.Congo |
| 20 | AFE | P | CHALISSERY George       | Provincial      | India        |
| 21 | AFE | P | LOWE Glenford           | Delegate        | India        |
| 22 | AFM | P | GORE Robert             | Sup. Vice-Prov. | South Africa |
| 23 | AFM | L | THUSI John Butana       | Delegate        | Swaziland    |
| 24 | AFO | P | OLIVERAS Lluís Maria    | Sup. Vice-Prov. | Spain        |
| 25 | AFO | P | FERNANDEZ Antonio César | Delegate        | Spain        |
| 26 | ANG | P | PICCOLI Luiz Gonzaga    | Sup. Vice-Prov. | Brazil       |



|    |     |   |                       |                 |          |
|----|-----|---|-----------------------|-----------------|----------|
| 27 | ANG | P | FAVARO Gino           | Delegate        | Italy    |
| 28 | ATE | P | OLAVERRI Miguel Angel | Sup. Vice-Prov. | Spain    |
| 29 | ATE | P | ASSIENE Grégoire      | Delegate        | Cameroon |
| 30 | MDG | P | MIELE Giuseppe        | Sup. Vice-Prov. | Italy    |
| 31 | MDG | P | SALVO Bartolomeo      | Delegate        | Italy    |
| 32 | ZMB | P | SOCHA Kazimierz       | Sup. Vice-Prov. | Poland   |
| 33 | ZMB | P | LEWANDOWSKI Grzegorz  | Delegate        | Poland   |

### Salesian Region: LATIN AMERICA – SOUTH CONE

|    |     |   |                           |            |            |
|----|-----|---|---------------------------|------------|------------|
| 34 | ABA | P | REPOVZ José               | Provincial | Argentina  |
| 35 | ABA | P | LAPADULA Enrique          | Delegate   | Argentina  |
| 36 | ABB | P | LOPEZ Joaquín             | Provincial | Spain      |
| 37 | ABB | P | LAXAGUE Esteban           | Delegate   | Argentina  |
| 38 | ACO | P | JARA Walter               | Provincial | Argentina  |
| 39 | ACO | P | BARBIERI Horacio          | Delegate   | Argentina  |
| 40 | ALP | P | FIERENS Antonio           | Provincial | Argentina  |
| 41 | ALP | P | PERERA Ramón Darío        | Delegate   | Argentina  |
| 42 | ARO | P | BOSIO Carlos Alberto      | Provincial | Argentina  |
| 43 | ARO | L | DEVIT Eduardo             | Delegate   | Argentina  |
| 44 | BBH | P | SCARAMUSSA Tarcísio       | Provincial | Brazil     |
| 45 | BBH | P | CARRARA DE MELO Alfredo   | Delegate   | Brazil     |
| 46 | BCG | P | WINKLER Josef             | Provincial | Czech Rep. |
| 47 | BCG | P | VENDRAME Paulo Fernando   | Delegate   | Brazil     |
| 48 | BMA | P | SUCARRATS FONT João       | Provincial | Spain      |
| 49 | BMA | L | LOBATO Antonio            | Delegate   | Brazil     |
| 50 | BPA | P | SANDRINI Marcos           | Provincial | Brazil     |
| 51 | BPA | P | MOSER Assis               | Delegate   | Brazil     |
| 52 | BRE | P | SOBRINHO Raimundo Ricardo | Provincial | Brazil     |
| 53 | BRE | P | VANZETTA Diego            | Delegate   | Italy      |
| 54 | BSP | P | PESSINATTI Nivaldo Luiz   | Provincial | Brazil     |
| 55 | BSP | P | SPINOSA Benedito          | Delegate   | Brazil     |
| 56 | CIL | P | BASTRES Bernardo          | Provincial | Chile      |
| 57 | CIL | P | STRAHSBURGER Hugo         | Delegate   | Chile      |
| 58 | PAR | P | CARDOZO Miguel Angel      | Provincial | Paraguay   |
| 59 | PAR | P | AQUINO Severo             | Delegate   | Paraguay   |
| 60 | URU | P | BISIO Enrique             | Provincial | Uruguay    |
| 61 | URU | P | STURLA Daniel             | Delegate   | Uruguay    |

## Salesian Region: AUSTRALIA-ASIA (AUSTRALASIA)

|    |     |   |                         |                 |             |
|----|-----|---|-------------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| 62 | AUL | P | MURDOCH Ian             | Provincial      | Australia   |
| 63 | AUL | P | PAPWORTH John           | Delegate        | Australia   |
| 64 | CIN | P | HON TAI-FAI Savio       | Provincial      | China       |
| 65 | CIN | P | LAM Simon               | Delegate        | China       |
| 66 | FIN | P | GUSTILO Francis         | Provincial      | Philippines |
| 67 | FIN | L | FERRER Jose Maria       | Delegate        | Philippines |
| 68 | FIS | P | BUZON Patricio          | Provincial      | Philippines |
| 69 | FIS | P | BACLIG Mario            | Delegate        | Philippines |
| 70 | GIA | P | FUJIKAWA Nagaki Stefano | Provincial      | Japan       |
| 71 | GIA | P | PUPPO Orlando Lorenzo   | Delegate        | Argentina   |
| 72 | INB | P | COELHO Ivo              | Provincial      | India       |
| 73 | INB | P | FURTADO Adolf           | Delegate        | India       |
| 74 | INB | P | NORONHA Romulo          | Delegate        | India       |
| 75 | INC | P | ALENCERRY Francis       | Provincial      | India       |
| 76 | INC | P | BERGER John             | Delegate        | India       |
| 77 | INC | P | YE MAUNG Joachim        | Delegate        | Burma       |
| 78 | IND | P | MULAYINKAL Thomas       | Provincial      | India       |
| 79 | IND | P | PULIMOOTTIL Alex        | Delegate        | India       |
| 80 | ING | P | BARJO Philip            | Provincial      | India       |
| 81 | ING | P | VARICKASSERIL Jose      | Delegate        | India       |
| 82 | ING | P | MALIECKAL Francis       | Delegate        | India       |
| 83 | INH | P | MEDABALIMI Balaswamy    | Provincial      | India       |
| 84 | INH | P | ARIMPOOR Jose           | Delegate        | India       |
| 85 | INK | P | MARUVATHRAIL Matthew    | Provincial      | India       |
| 86 | INK | P | FERNANDEZ Joseph        | Delegate        | India       |
| 87 | INK | P | KOLLASHANY George       | Delegate        | India       |
| 88 | INM | P | FERNANDO Bellarmine     | Provincial      | India       |
| 89 | INM | P | KANAGA Maria Arokiam    | Delegate        | India       |
| 90 | INM | P | PUTHOTA Benjamin        | Delegate        | India       |
| 91 | INN | P | KEZHAKKEKARA Joseph     | Provincial      | India       |
| 92 | INN | P | PEEDIKAYIL Michael      | Delegate        | India       |
| 93 | INT | P | THEOPHILUS James        | Provincial      | India       |
| 94 | INT | P | SUSAI Amalraj           | Delegate        | India       |
| 95 | ITM | P | WONG Andrew             | Sup. Vice-Prov. | Philippines |
| 96 | ITM | P | CARBONELL José          | Delegate        | Spain       |
| 97 | KOR | P | KLEMENT Václav          | Provincial      | Czech Rep.  |
| 98 | KOR | P | KIM Benjamin            | Delegate        | Korea       |

|     |     |   |                             |            |          |
|-----|-----|---|-----------------------------|------------|----------|
| 99  | THA | P | KITNICH SOMCHAI Philip      | Provincial | Thailand |
| 100 | THA | P | SARACHIT Niphon Peter       | Delegate   | Thailand |
| 101 | VIE | P | NGUYEN VAN TY Giovanni      | Provincial | Vietnam  |
| 102 | VIE | P | NGUYEN VAN THEM G. Battista | Delegate   | Vietnam  |

### Salesian Region: NORTHERN EUROPE

|     |     |   |                           |                 |            |
|-----|-----|---|---------------------------|-----------------|------------|
| 103 | AUS | P | VÖSL Josef                | Provincial      | Austria    |
| 104 | AUS | P | OBERMÜLLER Petrus         | Delegate        | Austria    |
| 105 | BEN | P | PALMANS Piet              | Provincial      | Belgium    |
| 106 | BEN | P | LOOTS Carlo               | Delegate        | Belgium    |
| 107 | CEP | P | KOMÁREK Jan               | Provincial      | Czech Rep. |
| 108 | CEP | P | KAŠNÝ Jiří                | Delegate        | Czech Rep. |
| 109 | CRO | P | MATUŠIĆ Ambrozije         | Provincial      | Croatia    |
| 110 | CRO | P | KRPIĆ Josip               | Delegate        | Croatia    |
| 111 | EST | P | BOGUSZEWSKI Henryk        | Sup. Circumscr. | Poland     |
| 112 | EST | P | BACZYŃSKI Andrzej         | Delegate        | Ukraine    |
| 113 | GEK | P | VON SPEE Meinolf          | Provincial      | Germany    |
| 114 | GEK | P | VON HATZFELD Ulrich Hatto | Delegate        | Germany    |
| 115 | GEM | P | BIHLMAYER Herbert         | Provincial      | Germany    |
| 116 | GEM | P | GRÜNNER Josef             | Delegate        | Germany    |
| 117 | GEM | P | MENZ Heinz                | Delegate        | Germany    |
| 118 | GBR | P | PRESTON Francis Joseph    | Provincial      | Gr Britain |
| 119 | GBR | P | DICKSON William John      | Delegate        | Scotland   |
| 120 | IRL | P | SMYTH Michael             | Provincial      | Ireland    |
| 121 | IRL | P | MANGION Victor            | Delegate        | Malta      |
| 122 | OLA | P | SPRONCK Herman            | Provincial      | Holland    |
| 123 | OLA | P | FLAPPER Wim               | Delegate        | Holland    |
| 124 | PLE | P | STRUŠ Józef               | Provincial      | Poland     |
| 125 | PLE | P | KOWALIK Krzysztof         | Delegate        | Poland     |
| 126 | PLE | P | NIEWĘGŁOWSKI Jan          | Delegate        | Poland     |
| 127 | PLN | P | WOREK Jerzy               | Provincial      | Poland     |
| 128 | PLN | P | BALCERZAK Antoni          | Delegate        | Poland     |
| 129 | PLN | P | CHMIELEWSKI Marek         | Delegate        | Poland     |
| 130 | PLO | P | KRASOŃ Franciszek         | Provincial      | Poland     |
| 131 | PLO | P | KEMPIAK Ryszard           | Delegate        | Poland     |
| 132 | PLS | P | ROZMUS Tadeusz            | Provincial      | Poland     |
| 133 | PLS | P | KRAWCZYK Wojciech         | Delegate        | Poland     |



|     |     |   |                  |            |          |
|-----|-----|---|------------------|------------|----------|
| 134 | PLS | P | CHYZAN Marek     | Delegate   | Poland   |
| 135 | SLK | P | FEKETE Vladimír  | Provincial | Slovakia |
| 136 | SLK | P | TURANSKÝ Stefan  | Delegate   | Slovakia |
| 137 | SLK | P | GRACH Pavol      | Delegate   | Slovakia |
| 138 | SLO | P | DOBRAVEC Alojzij | Provincial | Slovenia |
| 139 | SLO | P | ŠTUMPF Peter     | Delegate   | Slovenia |
| 140 | UNG | P | HAVASI József    | Provincial | Hungary  |
| 141 | UNG | P | MÉSZÁROS György  | Delegate   | Hungary  |

### **Salesian Region: WESTERN EUROPE**

|     |     |   |                         |                 |          |
|-----|-----|---|-------------------------|-----------------|----------|
| 142 | BES | P | JEANMART José           | Provincial      | Belgium  |
| 143 | BES | P | VAN der SLOOT André     | Delegate        | Belgium  |
| 144 | FRA | P | INISAN Job              | Provincial      | France   |
| 145 | FRA | P | FEDERSPIEL Daniel       | Delegate        | France   |
| 146 | FRA | P | CHARMOILLE Jean-Noël    | Delegate        | France   |
| 147 | POR | P | MENDES Joaquim          | Provincial      | Portugal |
| 148 | POR | P | PEREIRA Artur           | Delegate        | Portugal |
| 149 | SBA | P | VALLS I FERRER Domènec  | Provincial      | Spain    |
| 150 | SBA | P | CODINA Joan             | Delegate        | Spain    |
| 151 | SBI | P | LETE Ignacio            | Provincial      | Spain    |
| 152 | SBI | P | GUTIERREZ Luis Fernando | Delegate        | Spain    |
| 153 | SCO | P | ACOSTA RODRÍGUEZ Felipe | Provincial      | Spain    |
| 154 | SCO | P | MUÑOZ Eusebio           | Delegate        | Spain    |
| 155 | SLE | P | FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME Ángel  | Provincial      | Spain    |
| 156 | SLE | P | GUZÓN NESTAR José Luis  | Delegate        | Spain    |
| 157 | SMA | P | GUERRA IBANEZ Jesús     | Provincial      | Spain    |
| 158 | SMA | P | APARICIO SÁNCHEZ Manuel | Delegate        | Spain    |
| 159 | SMA | P | DÍEZ ANDRÉS Julio       | Delegate        | Spain    |
| 160 | SSE | P | PEREZ GODOY Juan Carlos | Provincial      | Spain    |
| 161 | SSE | P | VIGUERA FRANCO Valentín | Delegate        | Spain    |
| 162 | SVA | P | SANCHO Juan Bosco       | Vice Provincial | Spain    |
| 163 | SVA | P | ORDUNA ABADÍA Cándido   | Delegate        | Spain    |

### **Salesian Region: INTERAMERICA**

|     |     |   |                          |            |                |
|-----|-----|---|--------------------------|------------|----------------|
| 164 | ANT | P | SOTO Angel               | Provincial | Dominican Rep. |
| 165 | ANT | P | ROSARIO PEÑA Luis Emilio | Delegate   | Dominican Rep. |

|     |     |   |                             |                 |            |
|-----|-----|---|-----------------------------|-----------------|------------|
| 166 | BOL | P | HERRERO Miguel Angel        | Provincial      | Spain      |
| 167 | BOL | P | ZABALA TÓRREZ Juan Pablo    | Delegate        | Bolivia    |
| 168 | CAM | P | GUIJO GONZÁLEZ José Manuel  | Provincial      | Spain      |
| 169 | CAM | P | ECHEVERRÍA Rolando          | Delegate        | Costa Rica |
| 170 | CAN | P | LANTAGNE Luc                | Sup. Vice-Prov. | Canada     |
| 171 | CAN | D | HARKINS George              | Delegate        | Canada     |
| 172 | COB | P | RIVERA Nicolàs              | Provincial      | Colombia   |
| 173 | COB | P | REYES ZAMBRANO Mario        | Delegate        | Colombia   |
| 174 | COM | P | ALVAREZ Armando             | Provincial      | Colombia   |
| 175 | COM | P | ANGEL CAMPUZANO A. de Jesús | Delegate        | Colombia   |
| 176 | ECU | P | ORTIZ Esteban               | Provincial      | Ecuador    |
| 177 | ECU | P | FARFÁN Marcelo              | Delegate        | Ecuador    |
| 178 | HAI | P | NAU Jean-Baptiste           | Sup. Vice-Prov. | Haiti      |
| 179 | HAI | P | FLORIVAL Elan               | Delegate        | Haiti      |
| 180 | MEG | P | GUERRERO CORDOVA Héctor     | Provincial      | Mexico     |
| 181 | MEG | P | PLASCENCIA José Luis        | Delegate        | Mexico     |
| 182 | MEM | P | VALERDI SÁNCHEZ L. Rolando  | Provincial      | Mexico     |
| 183 | MEM | P | OCAMPO URIBE Ignacio        | Delegate        | Mexico     |
| 184 | PER | P | DAL BEN LAVA Santo          | Provincial      | Italy      |
| 185 | PER | P | ZEGARRA PINTO José          | Delegate        | Peru       |
| 186 | SUE | P | ANGELUCCI Patrick           | Provincial      | U.S.A.     |
| 187 | SUE | P | DUNNE Thomas                | Delegate        | U.S.A.     |
| 188 | SUO | P | REINA Nicholas              | Provincial      | U.S.A.     |
| 189 | SUO | P | ITZAINA John                | Delegate        | U.S.A.     |
| 190 | VEN | P | MASIERO Bruno               | Provincial      | Italy      |
| 191 | VEN | P | REYES SEQUERA Johnny        | Delegate        | Venezuela  |

### **Salesian Region: ITALY – MIDDLE EAST**

|     |     |   |                         |                  |       |
|-----|-----|---|-------------------------|------------------|-------|
| 192 | IAD | P | SCAGLIONI Arnaldo       | Provincial       | Italy |
| 193 | IAD | P | DILETTI Pietro          | Delegate         | Italy |
| 194 | ICP | P | TESTA Luigi             | Sup. Circumscri. | Italy |
| 195 | ICP | P | MARTOGLIO Stefano       | Delegate         | Italy |
| 196 | ICP | L | MARANGIO Claudio        | Delegate         | Italy |
| 197 | ICP | P | BOSCO Giovanni Battista | Delegate         | Italy |
| 198 | ICP | L | BOMBARDA Guido          | Delegate         | Italy |
| 199 | ILE | P | RIVA Eugenio            | Provincial       | Italy |
| 200 | ILE | P | CACIOLI Claudio         | Delegate         | Italy |

|     |     |   |                         |                 |       |
|-----|-----|---|-------------------------|-----------------|-------|
| 201 | ILE | P | VANOLI Stefano          | Delegate        | Italy |
| 202 | ILT | P | COLAJACOMO Giorgio      | Provincial      | Italy |
| 203 | ILT | P | D'ALESSANDRO Giovanni   | Delegate        | Italy |
| 204 | IME | P | GALLONE Francesco       | Provincial      | Italy |
| 205 | IME | P | COMITE Gennaro          | Delegate        | Italy |
| 206 | IME | P | SAMMARRO Pasquale Italo | Delegate        | Italy |
| 207 | IRO | P | CARNEVALE Mario         | Provincial      | Italy |
| 208 | IRO | P | PUSSINO Gian Luigi      | Delegate        | Italy |
| 209 | IRO | L | MAGAGNA Giuseppe        | Delegate        | Italy |
| 210 | ISA | P | LILLIU Giovanni         | Sup. Vice-Prov. | Italy |
| 211 | ISA | P | GALIA Gaetano           | Delegate        | Italy |
| 212 | ISI | P | LA PIANA Calogero       | Provincial      | Italy |
| 213 | ISI | P | DI NATALE Francesco     | Delegate        | Italy |
| 214 | ISI | P | RUTA Giuseppe           | Delegate        | Italy |
| 215 | IVE | P | FILIPPIN Claudio        | Provincial      | Italy |
| 216 | IVE | L | PETTENON Giampietro     | Delegate        | Italy |
| 217 | IVE | P | TREVISAN Alberto        | Delegate        | Italy |
| 218 | IVO | P | BREGOLIN Adriano        | Provincial      | Italy |
| 219 | IVO | P | BONATO Giannantonio     | Delegate        | Italy |
| 220 | MOR | P | MURRU Mario             | Provincial      | Italy |
| 221 | MOR | P | CAPUTA Gianni           | Delegate        | Italy |

### **Generalate community**

|     |     |   |                 |          |       |
|-----|-----|---|-----------------|----------|-------|
| 222 | RMG | P | MOTTO Francesco | Delegate | Italy |
|-----|-----|---|-----------------|----------|-------|

### **Salesian Pontifical University**

|     |     |   |                  |                 |       |
|-----|-----|---|------------------|-----------------|-------|
| 223 | UPS | P | CEREDA Francesco | Sup. Vice-Prov. | Italy |
| 224 | UPS | P | PELLEREY Michele | Delegate        | Italy |

### **Observers**

|     |     |   |                       |         |           |
|-----|-----|---|-----------------------|---------|-----------|
| 225 | AFC | P | VANDECANDELAERE Frans | Invited | Belgium   |
| 226 | ANG | L | FONTAINE Gastón       | Invited | Argentina |
| 227 | CAM | L | GRANADOS Wilfredo     | Invited | Guatemala |



|     |     |   |                     |         |       |
|-----|-----|---|---------------------|---------|-------|
| 228 | FIN | P | BARBERO Valeriano   | Invited | Italy |
| 229 | ICP | P | CASTELLINO Riccardo | Invited | Italy |
| 230 | INM | L | DAS Joseph          | Invited | India |
| 231 | POR | P | DE PABLO Valentin   | Invited | Spain |

## Translators

|                   |                         |
|-------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>French</i>     | Fr Lambert PETIT        |
|                   | Fr Christian BIGAULT    |
|                   | Fr Joseph OCCHIO        |
| <i>English</i>    | Fr Bernard GROGAN       |
|                   | Fr George WILLIAMS      |
|                   | Fr Rocco RAGONE         |
|                   | Fr Chrya SALDANHA       |
| <i>Portuguese</i> | Fr Ervino MARTINUZ      |
|                   | Fr Hilario PASSERO      |
| <i>Spanish</i>    | Fr Oswaldo GORZEGNO     |
|                   | Fr Gabriel LARRETA      |
|                   | Fr Angelo BOTTA         |
|                   | Fr Ambrosio BOEM        |
|                   | Fr Francesco BALAUDER   |
| <i>German</i>     | Bro. Johannes BORCHARDT |
|                   | Fr Josef PRIVOZNIK      |

# **CHRONICLE OF THE 25<sup>th</sup> GENERAL CHAPTER**

(24 February – 20 April 2002)

## **The Chapter begins**

On 24 February 2002 the 231 members of the GC25 arrived at the Generalate to begin the 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, with the central topic “The salesian community today” and the complementary theme “The verification of the structures of central government.”

They represented the 16,805 Salesians who are working in 128 countries in the world. For over 160 of them it was the first time that they were taking part in a General Chapter. They came from all five continents: 6 from Africa, 55 from America, 40 from Asia, 2 from Australia and 128 from Europe. The average age was 52 with the eldest 74 and the youngest 27.

At 7.30 a.m. on Monday 25 February the Vicar of the Rector Major, Fr Luc Van Looy presided at the solemn concelebrated Mass to invoke the Holy Spirit. The words of the homily set the scene for the task of analysis and reflection facing the Chapter: “It is not us who will be guiding this part of salesian history. Following Don Bosco’s experience throughout his life we want to put the tiller in the hands of God, of the Spirit, and of Mary Help of Christians.”

At 10.30 a.m. in the Aula Magna of the “Salesianum”, renovated and furnished with the latest technology, the opening session of the GC25 took place. Some salesian cardinals and bishops were present together with those responsible for some of the groups of the Salesian Family. Among the former we may mention: Cardinal Antonio M. Javierre Ortas, Cardinal Oscar Rodríguez Maradiaga, Mgr. Vincenzo Savio, Bishop of Belluno, Mgr. Alois Kothgasser, Bishop of Innsbruck, Mgr. Vartan Boghossian, Eparch of S. Gregory of Narek for the Armenian faithful in Argentina, Mgr. Gennaro Prata, Archbishop emeritus of Cochabamba.

After the Moderator, Fr Antonio Domenech, had declared the Chapter open, Fr Luc Van Looy read the Message of the Holy Father. In it the Pope, after recalling the memory of the late Fr Juan Vecchi, invited the

chapter members to follow in his footsteps, asking them and all the Salesian Congregation to be “attentive educators” and “competent spiritual guides.” John Paul II expressed the hope that in addition to *Duc in altum* becoming the thematic motto of the Chapter, it would also become the same for all the apostolic work of the Congregation in the future.

The Message of the Pope was followed by the address of Cardinal Eduardo Martínez Somalo, Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, and by the greetings of some representatives of the Salesian Family: Mother Antonia Colombo, Superior General of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Mr Rosario Maiorano, General Coordinator of the Salesian Cooperators Miss Anita Meertens, the Superior of the Volunteers of Don Bosco – on behalf also of the Volunteers with Don Bosco – and finally Mr Antonio Guilhermino Pires, World President of the Past Pupils. The opening address of the Vicar General followed.

### **The Chapter Assembly takes its first steps**

At 4.00 p.m. the same day, Monday 25 February, the first ordinary working session was held. The Moderator began by presenting the outline timetable for the chapter members and explained the mechanics of the work of the Assembly and of the Commissions, according to the Regulations of the Chapter.

The following day, Tuesday 26 February, the Vicar General presented the Report on the State of the Congregation for the six year period 1996-2002. Fr Luc Van Looy briefly described the aims, the contents, those addressed and the nature of the report, that contained among other things the relevant statistics regarding Salesians, works, collaborators, and those to whom the apostolic mission is addressed.

Starting from a consideration of the facts, he then underlined some particular aspects and the more important problems regarding the situations in which salesian communities are living and working. He indicated also some of the issues that the present General Chapter would need to consider in its work of reflection and analysis: the community as the place for the ordinary ongoing formation of the confreres; the key role of the Rector in the religious community and in the work confided to it; the significance of the work as evidenced in its chosen priorities, and in those for whom it works by preference. He concluded offering the slogan “We shall exist as mystics, or we shall not exist at all!”



The Moderator invited the chapter members to read the Report carefully and to prepare for the discussion which would be held with the Vicar General in the following week.

In the afternoon the two working documents prepared by the Precapitular Commission were presented: the one on "The salesian community today" by Fr Francesco Cereda, Superior of the UPS Vice Province, and the other: "Verification of the structures of central government" by Fr John Dickson of the Great Britain Province.

## The Retreat

At 7.20 p.m. on 26 February the retreat began in preparation for the work of reflection and analysis that awaited the chapter members. It was preached and led by the Salesian, Mgr Alois Kothgasser, Bishop of Innsbruck (Austria), who offered meditations on the theme *Duc in altum*, in reference to the Apostolic Letter of the Pope *Novo Millenium Ineunte* and the Strenna that the late Fr Vecchi left the Salesian Family for 2002.

At the end of this first day the chapter members gathered together for the "Good-night" which was given by Fr Camillo Maccise of the Discalced Carmelites, former President of the Union of Superiors General. In his short reflection Fr Maccise concentrated on the challenges – of which he mentioned seven – which are found facing consecrated life in the Church and in the world of today at the beginning of the third millennium.

On Thursday 28 February, after the first reflection by Mgr Kothgasser, the chapter members made a pilgrimage to the Catacombs of St Callistus where are buried, in addition to Fr Vecchi, his two predecessors as Rector Major, Fr Egidio Viganò and Fr Luigi Ricceri. After a moment of prayer led by Fr Van Looy, in the chapel of the San Tarcisio salesian community, the chapter members went in procession to the tomb of the late Rector Major and spent some moments there in personal prayer for the repose of his soul.

The second day ended with the "Good-night" of Mother Antonia Colombo the Superior of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians who, referring to the approaching 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first FMA missionary expedition to America, expressed her gratitude, saying that as on that occasion, "also today without the Salesians we would not be in many parts of the world" and concluded with the remark: "without you we would not be ourselves". Mother Antonia then mentioned the theme for their own 21<sup>st</sup>

General Chapter to be held in September: *"In a renewed covenant, the commitment to active citizenship"*.

The following day began with a Mass at which Cardinal Oscar Rodríguez Maradiaga presided. Starting from the scriptural readings for the day he encouraged the Salesians to be always promoters of a culture of life in face of the culture of death so evident in contemporary society.

The retreat finished on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> March with the Mass at which Mgr Alois Kothgasser presided. In the evening a group of the chapter members took part in the recitation of the rosary with the Holy Father on the occasion of a meeting organized by the diocese of Rome with young university students from the city.

### **The Chapter gets down to work**

The second week of the Chapter began with the appointment by the Vicar General of Fr Antonio Martinelli as his substitute as President of the Chapter during his own absence following a road accident in which he had been involved the previous Saturday.

The Moderator of the Chapter, Fr Antonio Domenech, then read the message of thanks sent to the Holy Father on behalf of the members of the GC25. In it Fr Van Looy wrote: "We shall be studying the topic of "The salesian community today" following the lines that Your Holiness traced out for us, with the desire to make the mission of Don Bosco in the new millennium a prophetic one," with the promise of the fidelity of the Congregation "to Your Magisterium and the desire to collaborate always with the universal and local Church".

Subsequently the Assembly moved on to the vote on the Regulations of the Chapter which were approved with a large majority.

In the afternoon the full Presidency of the Chapter was constituted with the election of three Chairmen from the list of names presented by the President of the Chapter. The following confreres were elected Fr Savio Hon Tai-Fai, provincial of Hong Kong, Fr William John Dickson, from the Great Britain province and Brother Claudio Marangio, from the Special Circumscription of Piedmont and the Valle d'Aosta.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, 5-6 March, the Chapter members divided into 15 language groups and began the consideration of the Report of the Vicar General on the state of the Congregation and the two working documents on the topics of the salesian community and the verification of the structures of government.



Each group, according to its own interests and experience, chose three priorities starting from those mentioned in the report of the Vicar General; a small group made a summary which the Moderator presented to the Assembly as a help for the reflection to be carried out on the topics of the Chapter.

After a lengthy discussion on the two working documents in the afternoon of Wednesday 6 March, both were approved as the basis for the initial work of the Commissions and of the Assembly. The document on the salesian community was accepted almost unanimously and the one on the verification of the structures of central government by slightly more than two thirds.

From the very beginning the work of the Assembly was characterized by numerous interventions and requests for clarification, demonstrating that every day the GC25 was getting up steam and the topics dealt with were closely followed. Many Chapter members were speaking for the first time, while some of the contributions showed the speakers to be much more at home. Among the most frequent requests was for a final document that would be simple and practical, something for the life of the community directed more at a practical than at a theoretical level.

## **The Chapter Commissions**

In the afternoon of Tuesday 6 March the Vicar General, Fr Luc Van Looy, underwent an operation at the Pius XI hospital in Rome. After assuring the Assembly of its successful outcome the Moderator of the Chapter went on to present a proposal for the setting up of the Chapter Commissions. There were six of them which were to deal with the following subjects: the first, the theme of fraternal life; the second, evangelical witness; the third, animating presence among the young; the fourth, the theme of the Rector and ongoing formation; the fifth, new situations and kinds of salesian community. To the sixth commission was assigned the topic of the verification of the structures of central government and the various proposals for changes to the Constitutions and Regulations. To these working commissions of the Chapter should be added a commission for communications, composed of one representative from each region.

Once the commissions were set up the program envisaged the consideration of the proposal regarding the date of the election of the Rector Major and his Council, and the presentation of the process of discernment.



After discussion the Assembly approved the proposed calendar with the elections to take place during the week 2 to 8 April.

During this time the chapter members would be assisted in the discernment process by Fr Anthony McSweeney, of the Blessed Sacrament Congregation, former Superior General of his Institute and former President of the Union of Superiors General (USG).

In the meantime the six commissions began work and proceeded at once to the election of their presidents, spokesmen and secretaries. The six presidents together with the President of the Chapter, the Moderator and the three Chairmen constitute the Central Commission, which met for the first time at 9.30 p.m. on Thursday 7 March.

### **A first hand experience of community**

The Chapter members not only talked about community – they lived it intensely during the two months of the Chapter. This first hand experience created close relationships of communion, helped in the sharing of experiences and ways of thinking, expressed especially through prayer and eucharistic celebration which are the roots and the source of life in community and make of each one not only a teacher but also a witness.

The daily timetable of the Chapter provided for the celebration of Morning Prayer and Mass in the morning, usually in language groups except on Wednesdays, when all came together and the celebration was led by each region in turn. There were two working sessions during the morning: from 9.00 until 10.30 and from 11.00 until 12.45. The time immediately after lunch was recreation time for the Chapter members, spent in different ways: some walked along the paths of the Generalate, some played basketball, some football, on the pitches specially prepared at the Salesianum, while some played the traditional salesian game of “bocce”. Every so often a chapter member would be found on roller skates or cycling around the grounds. Work resumed in the afternoon at 3.30 p.m. and usually finished at 7.00 with a break for half an hour at 5.00. Then Vespers were said together followed by a “good-night” given in turn by provincials from the different regions; these were particularly appreciated as they encouraged a spirit of family and communion. Afterwards there was supper.

Each working week concluded with a proposed outing organized by a group responsible for animating the life of the community. These were occasions for getting together and sometimes opportunities for meeting dif-

ferent salesian communities (for example in the Naples Province or that of Liguria-Tuscany).

At the beginning of each week the chapter members could watch a short summary of the previous week's work on a video prepared by the *Eurofilm* centre of the Don Bosco Missions Office in Turin.

## **The work of the Commissions**

Returning to an account of the work of the Chapter, the efforts of the commissions took up the third week. The first five, to which the study of the various aspects of the topic on the salesian community was assigned, examined at some depth the reports from the provincial chapters and identified the more important elements of the situation; they then selected the most pressing challenges and sought the most suitable guidelines to respond to them. In this work, time for personal study and in small groups alternated with discussion and the sharing of ideas in the commission.

For its part, the sixth commission concentrated its attention on the examination of the proposals to modify the Constitutions which could have reference to the elections. On Wednesday 13 March it presented in the Assembly some alternative proposals regarding the duration of the time in office of the Rector Major and of the members of the General Council, the procedure for the election of the Economist General, and the subdivision of the Australasian region into two separate areas, with the consequent increase in the number of regional councillors.

Discussion of these proposals began in the Assembly and there were many interventions regarding all the various options. At the end of the debate the commission proposed a series of straw votes on the various proposals to ascertain the mind of the Assembly. This expressed an opinion favourable to the subdivision of the Australasia region, confirmed the form of direct election of the Economist General, supported the proposal to limit the term in office of the Rector Major to two consecutive six-year periods, and finally invited the commission to find a different formulation of the two proposals on the term in office of the members of the General Council and on the possibility of their being eligible for election to another department or region after the completion of two terms of six years in the same office.

In the meantime the other commissions presented the results of their work to the Assembly for discussion. In this way the third week of the Chapter came to an end.



## **Visit to the new library of the UPS**

In the afternoon of Saturday 16 March the members of the GC25 went to see the new premises built to house the Don Bosco Library of the Salesian Pontifical University. A tour of the new buildings in language groups was led by the Vicar General, just released from hospital.

In a brief address Fr Van Looy recalled that the Library was born in the mind of Fr Egidio Viganò during the centenary year of the death of Don Bosco and its construction was begun by Fr Juan Vecchi; it is to be considered the Library not only of the UPS but of the whole Congregation.

Following that of the Vicar General there were speeches by the Rector of the University, Fr Michele Pellerey, who gave a brief outline of the Library's history and highlighted its capacity and functionality; by Fr Francesco Cereda, Superior of the UPS Vice-province, who recalled and thanked all who had taken part in the construction of the new building; by the Economist General, Fr Gianni Mazzali, who illustrated the financial story behind the enterprise; and by Fr Juan Picca, Prefect of the Library, who emphasized the particular innovations and value of the new structure.

Fr Van Looy remained at the UPS infirmary until Monday 18 March for a brief period of convalescence, and then returned to take his place in the General Chapter.

## **Discussions in the Assembly**

On Monday 18 March discussion began on the various nuclei of the theme on the salesian community prepared by the first five commissions. A host of interventions insisted on the need to focus more on the challenges arising from the situations described, and especially to choose guidelines that could help communities to become more significant and prophetic. These suggestions and those made in writing were collected by the commissions concerned for a reexamination and redrafting of their document.

Meanwhile the sixth commission had reformulated their proposals and brought them back to the Assembly. Discussion centered particularly on the separation of the Departments of the Salesian Family and Social Communication, with the possibility of the assignment of responsibility for the animation of the Salesian Family to the Vicar General.

After the discussion on the modifications to the articles of the Constitutions, the sixth commission prepared a first draft which it submitted for



voting with the possibility of further changes (*iuxta modum*), and subsequently for definitive approval just before the Easter Triduum.

In addition to these first deliberations, Holy Week was characterized by the presentation in the Assembly by all the other commissions of the second draft of their own documents. The sixth commission too presented the first draft of the document on the verification of the structures of central government which it had been compelled to delay so as to give priority to the constitutional questions which concerned the coming elections of the Rector Major and members of the Council.

During these same weeks the Chapter community lived also some other fraternal occasions. On 18 March news was received of the assassination of Bishop Isaias Duarte Cancino in Colombia two days earlier. In the name of the Assembly the Vicar General, as President of the GC25, expressed the solidarity of the capitulars to Bishop Alberto Giraldo Jaramillo, President of the Colombian Bishops Conference, in a letter signed by all the members of the GC25.

In the evening of the same day after supper, the assembly hall became a theatre for a performance by the salesian magician, Fr Silvio Mantelli, of a fascinating display of illusions and conjuring tricks which kept the capitulars entranced and amused for the best part of an hour. Some of the capitulars were directly involved in the performance, willingly responding to invitations of the "magician".

After supper on Wednesday 27 March, Fr Vecchi was commemorated by the presentation of a book published by the SEI and put together by the Salesian Fr Vittorio Chiari, entitled "*Globalizzazione, crocevia della carità educativa*". It is a text that synthesizes the thought of Fr Vecchi about the exploitation of juveniles from various aspects. At the end of the evening, after a brief sketch by a clown of the group of Fr Chiari, Fr Vecchi's obituary letter was distributed.

## **The Easter break**

The intensive work of the past weeks had made a pause desirable in the rhythm of the Chapter's work, not least to allow for a deeper participation in the Easter Triduum. But before the break, on the Wednesday evening, Fr Anthony McSweeney presented to the Assembly the process of discernment that would be followed during the elections and replied to some questions submitted in advance by the capitulars.

In the second part of the morning of Holy Thursday the Vicar General, Fr Luc Van Looy, replied in the Assembly to questions on the Report on the state of the Congregation, which had been sent in much earlier by the capitulars but to which he had not been able to reply because of his accident and subsequent surgery.

At the end of the work, the Assembly met in church at 6.00 p.m. for the solemn celebration *In Coena Domini*, at which Fr Joaquim D'Souza, Regional Councillor for Australia-Asia presided.

In the days that followed more than a hundred capitulars left for the Mother House in Turin, where they spent the Easter weekend visiting the salesian places of Valdocco, Colle Don Bosco and Mornese.

### **Election of the Rector Major and General Council**

After the Easter break work was resumed on Tuesday 2 April at 9.00 a.m. with the launching of the discernment process by Fr Anthony McSweeney that would lead to the election of the Rector Major and the members of the General Council.

On Tuesday evening, after a day spent in language groups reflecting on the challenges and strong points of the Congregation and on the qualities required in the new Rector Major, the capitulars gathered in church to invoke the Holy Spirit together and so prepare for the elections. On Wednesday morning, 3 April, at the invitation of Fr McSweeney, each capitular sent in a sheet with a single name proposed as Rector Major. At 11.00 a.m. the list of names proposed was distributed for the personal reflection of each member.

The election itself took place in the afternoon at 4.00 p.m. and resulted in the election by a large majority on the first ballot of **Fr Pascual Chávez Villanueva**.

The solemn celebration of Vespers, with the singing of the *Te Deum* for the new Rector Major and his first "Good-night", followed by supper, concluded the first day of the elections. In the refectory after supper there was a simple but sincere family function during which the various regions expressed their joy in different languages at the election of the new Rector Major.

Thursday 4 April began with a eucharistic concelebration at which Fr Chávez presided, and continued with the process of discernment for the election of the Vicar General.



The election took place at 5.30 p.m., and on the second ballot Fr Luc Van Looy was confirmed in office by a large majority.

On the following days the Councillors for the various Departments were elected, with the following results. On Friday, 5 April: Fr Francesco Cereda for the Formation Department and Fr Antonio Domenech for that of Youth Pastoral Work; and on Saturday, 6 April: Fr Tarcisio Scaramussa for Social Communication, Fr Francis Alencherry for the Missions, and Fr Gianni Mazzali as Economist General.

At this point the capitulars suspended the work and took it up again on the Sunday afternoon with the discernment for the election of the Regional Councillors; the list of the candidates – prepared by each Region – was presented to the Assembly on the Sunday evening.

On Monday 8 April, the Assembly confirmed in office Fr Albert Van Hecke for Northern Europe, Fr Joaquim D'Souza for South Asia, Fr Helvécio Baruffi for Latin America – Southern Cone, and Fr Filiberto Rodríguez Martín for Western Europe. Then were elected the four new Regional Councillors: Fr Adriano Bregolin, provincial of West Venice for Italy and the Middle East; Fr Esteban Ortiz González, provincial of Ecuador, for Interamerica; Fr Václav Klement, provincial of Korea, for East Asia-Oceania and Fr Valentín de Pablo, of the Mozambique Delegation for Africa-Madagascar.

## **An intense week of work and experiences**

With the ending of the week of the elections which gave the Congregation the new Rector Major and General Council, the Chapter returned to its work of reflection, re-drafting and presentation of the various themes.

From Tuesday 9 to the afternoon of Friday 12 April there was discussion of the second drafts of the documents of the first five commissions which had in the meantime rewritten the definitive version of their texts on the basis of the observations received. The sixth commission presented the second draft of its own document, suitably revised after the contributions received from the Assembly.

On Friday morning, 12 April, the capitulars were received in audience by Pope John Paul II. About 11.15 a.m. they entered by the Bronze Door to reach the Clementine Hall of the Vatican. At 11.40 the Holy Father joined them and paused to greet personally the new Rector Major, Fr Pascual Chávez. A warm and lengthy applause was evidence of the joy of the



capitulars at being received in the Pope's house. The meeting lasted 25 minutes in all. The Pope urged the Salesians to be saints: "Dear Salesians", he said, "be holy – holiness is your essential task, as indeed it is for all Christians!".

Strengthened by the Holy Father's words, the capitulars returned in the afternoon to the work of the Chapter which was approaching its end. A small group of three capitulars was formed to work on the texts of the individual commissions, in order to give unity of style to the document on the salesian community today.

## **The gift of the Beatifications**

Almost at the end of the Chapter, on Sunday 14 April the Church offered the Salesian Family the gift of the beatification of three of its members: Fr Luigi Variara, Founder of the Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary; Sister Maria Romero Meneses, Daughter of Mary Help of Christians; and the Salesian Brother Artemide Zatti.

In preparation for this event, the Chapter reflected on the figure of the Salesian Brother, following the indications and prompting of Fr Juan Vecchi in his letter "*Beatification of Bro. Artemide Zatti: a sensational precedent*". In language groups the capitulars sought for suggestions and experiences to stimulate the Congregation and the Salesian Family to a better knowledge of this concrete form of the salesian vocation and to propose it with greater conviction.

In the afternoon of Saturday 13 April the capitulars went to the Don Bosco Church at Cinecittà to join in a prayer vigil with the Salesian Family of Lazio and those who had come to Rome to take part in the celebration the following day.

The Beatification ceremony on the Sunday morning brought together in St Peter's Square large numbers of pilgrims from all parts of the world. Participating with them were the Rector Major, the General Council and the members of the GC25. Also present were numerous civil and religious personalities, including the Presidents of Costa Rica and Nicaragua, representatives of Argentina and Colombia, the Mayors of the Italian cities where the Beati had been born, the Salesian Cardinals Miguel Obando Bravo and Oscar Rodríguez Maradiaga, with many other salesian Bishops. The crowd in St Peter's Square was estimated at more than 15,000 faithful.

During the celebration the relics of the Beati were carried to the altar by those who had received the graces presented for the beatification.

In the afternoon the Rector Major and the capitulars took part in the commemoration of the new Beati in the Paul VI Hall of the Vatican.

## **The final activities of the Chapter**

The Chapter was moving towards its close; during the final week the different commissions presented the texts for the voting "iuxta modum" with the possibility of further modifications, followed by the final vote on the definitive text.

On Monday afternoon, 15 April, at the Don Bosco Theatre of Cinecittà, took place the official commemoration of the centenary of the erection of the Roman Salesian Province. Taking part in the event were the Rector Major and the members of the GC25, with a large number of civil and religious personalities, amongst whom were Cardinal Javierre Ortas, Abps. Tarcisio Bertone and Gennaro Prata, with other salesian bishops present in Rome for the beatification of the three members of the Salesian Family.

In these final days the texts were presented in the Assembly of the Messages addressed to the Salesian Family, to international organisms concerned with youth problems, to young people, and also a message from the Chapter on the figure of the Salesian Brother, the result of the reflection made in the Assembly in the previous week. After the members had been given the opportunity to express their observations and make suggestions, the Messages were approved by the Assembly.

The Chapter ended on Saturday 20 April with the closing session. When the final requirements of the Regulations had been complied with, the Rector Major gave his concluding address in which he summed up what had been done and offered some indications for the application of the Chapter's guidelines.

The final act was the Eucharistic Concelebration, in which each Region committed itself to pass on to the confreres and communities the experience and message of the Chapter; all entrusted themselves and the results of their efforts to Mary Help of Christians.





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