



acts

of the general council

year LXXXVIII january-march 2007

N. 396

official organ
of animation
and communication
for the
salesian congregation

Direzione Generale
Opere don Bosco
Roma

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

OFFICIAL ORGAN OF ANIMATION AND COMMUNICATION FOR THE SALESIAN CONGREGATION

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Editrice S.D.B.
Edizione extra commerciale
Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco
Via della Pisana, 1111
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Finito di stampare: gennaio 2007

**“YOU LOVE EVERYTHING THAT EXISTS,
AND NOTHING THAT YOU HAVE MADE DISGUSTS YOU...
LORD LOVER OF LIFE”**

(Wisdom 11,24.12,1)

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1 January 2007

Solemnity of the Divine Motherhood of Mary

My Dear Confreres,

Today we begin a new year which opens before us full of hope. It coincides with the day on which we celebrate the Solemnity of the Divine Motherhood of Mary and the World Day of Peace. The newness of the new year reminds us that time is a grace, an opportunity for human and spiritual growth, an occasion for a greater commitment to live our life as a gift, to help the youngsters to discover the beauty and the meaning of life, to defend it and to make it grow to its fullness. With the Psalmist I love say-

ing to the Lord: "Make us know the shortness of our life that we gain wisdom of heart" (*Psalms* 90,12). Peace cannot be reduced to the absence of wars or conflicts, not even to non-aggression treaties, even though sometimes in certain parts of the world so afflicted with the scourge of violence, that sort of peace would already be something great. Peace is the total reconciliation of man with himself, with others, with nature, with God, and this is possible on condition that there is truth, justice, development, forgiveness between people, social groups and nations. With the Psalmist I like to confess: "Mercy and faithfulness have met; justice and peace have embraced" (*Psalms* 85,11). Well now, so that all this marvellous plan of salvation of God may be accomplished, the Church offers us Mary in her divine motherhood. She will accompany us throughout 2007, and will bring us through the liturgy to a meeting with Jesus, inviting us to welcome Him: "*Do whatever he tells you*" (*Jn* 2,5). In fact, Jesus came so that we might have life and have it to the full (cf. *Jn* 10,10), since He himself is the resurrection and the life (cf. *Jn* 11,25). He who revealed the full meaning of human existence and possesses the keys to open the doors from death to life. I wish each and every one of you the fullness of life in Christ, while I offer you the spiritual and pastoral programme for this year, which has in fact as its theme: "life".

But before presenting my commentary on the Strenna, I would like to share with you some of the events I have been involved in during the last three months, after my last circular letter. This period between September and December 2006 has been a particularly busy one which saw me involved in visits to the Vice Provinces of Angola, French-speaking West Africa and Madagascar: all three of them celebrating the 25th anniversary of the arrival of the first Salesians. I also visited the Province of Peru, which hadn't had a visit from the Rector Major for 15 years, and those of Bolivia and Chile. I won't delay in telling you about all my experiences and impressions during these visits, in the first place because you will find an account in this issue of the AGC, but also

because, nowadays through ANS the news about what is happening in the Congregation is immediately communicated. I then took part in the *Harambée* and the celebration of the 137th missionary departure ceremony held again this year in the Church of Don Bosco at the Colle. I chaired the intermediate meeting of the Council, gave the opening address at the inauguration of the academic year at the UPS, gave a talk at the Congress on "Vocational Training and Disadvantaged Youth" in Arese on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the foundation entrusted to us by the then Cardinal John Baptist Montini, Archbishop of Milan, when he invited the Salesians "to come to terms with another type of youth". I also preached a Retreat to the Provincials, Provincial Councillors and Rectors from the Provinces of Poland and the East Circumscription. I was present on the closing day of the World Congress of Salesian Cooperators. I was particularly involved in the unfolding of the Seminar "Europe Mission Territory", and I took part in the General Assembly of the Union of Superiors General and in the celebrations for the 150th anniversary of the death of Mamma Margaret.

How can I sum up having lived through such a wealth of Salesian experience? Simply by praising God for the many beautiful things that the Lord has allowed me to touch with my own hands. Yes, the Lord is truly generous and good to us. And the first and best response is to praise and thank him, so as to merit new and greater graces.

Here I shall pause briefly on the last four events mentioned above, since I think that they have a greater significance in relation to the whole Congregation.

First of all:

The World Congress of Salesian Cooperators

It took place at the Salesianum between 9 and 12 November. It was a beautiful experience of Salesianity, lived in a family spirit

as everyone there remarked. It was the final stage of a journey of almost six years which started with the proposal to divide the material in the Regulations for Apostolic Life into two parts: the first referring to the vocational and apostolic identity (the Statutes) and the second (the Regulations) dealing with the aspects of implementation, organisation and flexibility.

All the Association, under the leadership of the World Council carried out a study, with the collaboration of and constant discussion with the grassroots, aimed at the renewal of the *Regulations of Apostolic Life*. This has resulted in the drawing up of a document divided into two parts but with the single title: *Project of Apostolic Life*.

In this process a start was made in the local Centres and the Provincial Councils, asking for opinions and suggestions. The World Council had prepared a first official draft by February 2003, remaining as faithful as possible to the excellent theological and charismatic text of the RAL (1986) and attempting to insert elements leading to a greater structural autonomy, to an apostolic sensitivity that was lay and secular more suited to the needs of the Salesian mission in today's world. The great value of this process was precisely the contribution that the Salesian Cooperators themselves made, more than ever conscious of their specific Salesian apostolic vocation.

Asking in the renewed text of the Project of Apostolic Life to change the name from "Salesian Cooperators" to "Salesians Cooperators" the Cooperators wanted to express in a clear manner their awareness of being, according to the mind of Don Bosco, real "extern Salesians" living in the world.

The passing to and fro of the drafts from the Salesian Cooperators around the whole world to the Rector Major, to the Central Committee, as well as the involvement of the Mother General of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, meant that the final fruit produced was a text which was presented to be voted on "ad experimentum" for the next six years and received almost a unanimous vote from those attending the Congress with right to vote.

My desire to transform the "Association" into an immense Salesian apostolic movement with all the branches of the Salesian Family, so as to be more visible, more credible and more effective in the mission on behalf of today's youth, according to the apostolic heart of Don Bosco, was also accepted with great enthusiasm.

The Congress concluded, first of all in St Peter's Basilica with the renewal of the promise in front of the tomb of the Apostle and then in the Square listening to the message of the Pope, along the lines of what had been the motto of the Congress: "We are renewing the Regulations and the Regulations are renewing us". The whole thing indicating that it was not so much a point of arrival as a point of a renewed departure.

A significant event was:

The Seminar "Europe Mission territory"

This Seminar organised by the Departments for Youth Ministry and the Missions was held between 16 and 20 November with the participation of the three Regional Councillors for Europe, the Provincial Delegates for Youth Ministry and other representatives of all the Provinces in the three European Regions. The Seminar followed along the same lines as the Meeting of the Provincials of Europe at the beginning of December 2004 and as other European meetings organised especially by the Youth Ministry Department. From the very beginning until the end I tried to follow much of what was going on at first hand and inviting the confreres to take up with courage the great project "to give Europe back its soul", committing ourselves with *parrasia*, trust, joy, generosity and professionalism to education to the faith and of the faith of the young. I wanted to propose as the model for the new evangelisation of Europe St Paul who in Rome in chains in a tiny cell of no more than three metres square, bore witness to Christ and proclaimed his Gospel with complete fearlessness and without any hindrance... (cf. *Acts* 28,16-31).

All those in the Seminar showed a great sense of responsibility both in analysing the extremely varied situations in the different areas from west to east and from north to south of the continent and in sharing initiatives already in progress in the various Provinces. It was important to share all this and to make it part of the common heritage, knowing that we were not starting from scratch but rather with a considerable amount of valuable experience behind us. We are able to weigh up the various opportunities offered us by history, while we study how to face up to the challenges which the Europe of today is presenting to us, giving importance and taking into account all the elements which can help move forward the work of evangelisation. We are aware that today more than ever our task is **to give priority to the first proclamation of the Gospel and to present the person of Christ**. This requires a new kind of evangeliser, with the same apostolic passion for “*Da mihi animas...*” that Don Bosco had. The final document accompanied by a letter from me to the Provincials and to all the confreres in Europe, gathers together very well what was done during the Seminar and what was taken up as a commitment. I was satisfied with everything, and I would like all the other Regions to arrange a similar experience, since the priority of evangelisation is not limited to Europe.

After this there was:

The Assembly of the Union of Superiors General

Between 22 and 24 November, once again at the Salesianum, there was the Assembly of the USG with the theme “*Together for the Kingdom*”. On the first day, in addition to the Male Superiors of the Orders and Congregations there was also the active participation of a large group of Female Superiors General. The spirit of this day was that of the International Congress on Consecrated Life held in Rome in November 2004. The theme, but also the joint presence of the USG and the UISG, was an invitation to translate into practice the spirituality of communion

in order to study the experiences of collaboration between the Union of (Male) Superiors General and the International Union of (Female) Superiors General, between Congregations with similar charisms or missions, all leading to an ever greater and significant collaboration. It was not a matter of drawing up strategies for survival in the face of the phenomenon of ageing and of the shortage of vocations, as is happening in a part of the western world, but of growing in a sense of Church, and of allowing ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit to a greater sense of the significance of the Religious Life in today's world, united by the same mission of Christ. It is not a question that is merely functional but theological, in the sense that the Spirit who creates the diversity and the wealth of the charisms calls to unity for the building up of the Body of Christ. We as Salesians have come a long way in collaborating with lay people, to whom roles of responsibility have been entrusted for many years especially in the area of the schools. We are growing in communion at the service of the mission as the Salesian Family. Some Provinces, in the missions, in education, in reception centres have formal relationships with groups of the Salesian Family and with other religious institutions. What is being developed within Consecrated Life today is "collaboration among equals" with other religious Institutes, with dioceses and with lay organisations. In these cases formal agreements are made which are not between individuals but between institutions and are directed at shared activity at the level of planning, decision-making, and joint assessments. All of this is already taking place in practice for example in what is happening in response to the challenge of HIV/AIDS in Africa, to work against the traffic in human beings, to have an authoritative and significant representation at the UNO. Naturally to undertake this kind of commitment, enthusiasm is not enough if one wants to ensure continuity and success. These activities require formal agreements which need to clearly define the project, the objectives, the decision-making process, financial arrangements, the personnel, and the strategies to deal with any differences of opinion. We know at first hand the resis-

tance and the difficulties to be overcome in order to collaborate within the same Congregation, the same Region or Province. So it is not difficult to imagine how much greater the challenges can be at inter-Congregational level. In my opinion, the most important point is to grow in a culture of communion and in the awareness that the mission in which we are engaged is the mission of Christ.

On the last day of the Assembly I was elected the President of the USG. I took this election as an expression of trust in the Salesian Congregation, rather than in myself. For my part I shall try to do my best with the Vice President and the Executive Committee I have beside me. The first aim is to accompany and guide the path that Consecrated Life is following today, so that it may respond to the expectations of God and the needs of people in the Church. I am convinced that Consecrated Life represents a veritable cure for our society, on condition, however, that it be a visible and credible sign of the presence and of the love of God (“mystica”), that it adopt a critical stance in the face of all that threatens the human person, understood as being in accordance with God’s design (“prophecy”) and that it stand beside human beings especially the poorest, the most needy, excluded or sidelined (“diaconia”). It seems that today more than ever what is being asked of us is to listen to the Spirit and allow ourselves to be guided by Him.

Finally I want to refer to:

The Celebrations in honour of Mamma Margaret

An event which aroused great enthusiasm, giving rise to a great number of beautiful initiatives was the 150th anniversary of the death of Mamma Margaret. In a letter written to the Provincials I invited them to let me know how they intended to celebrate this special occasion in their Provinces. I thank all those who replied sending me the programmes with which they honoured Don Bosco’s Mamma. I have a fine dossier which

records the activities and the celebrations which took place throughout the year 2006. So we arrived at 25 November, full of joy for the marvellous gift which the Lord gave us through the Congregation for the Causes of Saints: with the Decree dated 23 October it recognised the heroicity of the life and of the virtues of Mamma Margaret and also her reputation for holiness, and declared her Venerable. I am particularly grateful to the Holy Father who responded favourably to our request that we might arrive at 25 November, while respecting the normal stages of the process, with this recognition. I cannot hide from you that I experienced the reading and the official handing over of the Decree with great emotion. Now while we pray that the Lord may hasten the day of the beatification and canonisation of Mamma Margaret, what really matters is that we continue to promote in our Salesian Family the vocation to holiness. Whatever may be one's own plan of life we have to see in ordinary daily life a path to holiness, aware that this does not consist in doing extraordinary things but in doing the ordinary things in an extraordinary way. At the same time I invite you to promote the "Mamma Margaret Association" in all the Provinces, so that the parents of those consecrated pledge themselves to accompany the vocation of their children and to support them with their prayers so that they may be faithful, especially in moments of trial. Given that the Association already exists in many parts, perhaps it would be time to think about an official aggregation to the Salesian Family.

STRENNA 2007

Just a little observation before moving on to the commentary on the Strenna. With regard to the impact that the Strenna is having in the whole Salesian world, in the sense that it is becoming ever more a real spiritual and pastoral programme. This requires special attention to avoid going ahead on the basis of

short-term programmes which might compromise the SEPP in the various houses and Provinces. Rather, on the one hand it should be remembered that the Strenna is meant for the whole Salesian Family and not only for the Salesians, and on the other an attempt should be made – at least in our own case – to link the Strenna to the major choices of the SEPP, precisely to draw from it ideas to help with the implementation of the overall pastoral plan.

1. Introduction

Last year's Strenna was greeted with great enthusiasm in the Salesian Family and led to a large number of initiatives. With this year's Strenna I would like to see these initiatives continue and at the same time open up fresh horizons.

In the course of 2006, which we devoted to a commitment to the family, we experienced the great event in the Church of the Vth International Meeting of the Family, in which was re-affirmed the value of love and of human life, for which the family is the privileged setting. The words of the Pope addressed to an audience of hundreds of thousands, including many members of the Salesian Family, are a source of hope and challenge us to continue our journey in defence of life and for the renewal of the family the cradle of life and of love.

At the same time, however, there have been other dramatic events in which once again we have witnessed human life treated with contempt: the wars in Iraq and in the Middle East, terrorist violence, the inexorable increase in emigration, in the abuse and exploitation of children and of women, laws which permit experimentation on embryonic cells, etc.

All of this helps us to see that nowadays the great gift of life is under threat, as John Paul II of venerated memory said speaking to the young people at the VIII World Youth Day: «As time pass-

es the threats against life do not diminish. On the contrary they take on huge dimensions. It is not only a question of threats that come from outside, from the forces of nature or from those "Cains" who kill the "Abels"; no, it is a question of threats that are planned in a scientific and systematic way. The XXth century will be remembered as an era of massive attacks against life, an endless series of wars and constant destruction of innocent human lives. The false prophets and the false teachers have had the greatest possible success».¹

Faced with this situation, we cannot remain indifferent, especially as members of the Salesian Family, animated by the spirit of the humanism of St. Francis of Sales, which Don Bosco lived and passed on as a precious educational heritage. It is a humanism which leads us to appreciate all that is positive in the life of each individual, of things and in history, and to defend and nurture it; to believe in the power of good and to spend ourselves in promoting it rather than in lamenting over evil, to love life and all the human values it contains.²

We need to feel ourselves challenged by God the lover of life. If human life comes from God's very Spirit, if it is the divine breath, if we have been created in His image and likeness, then necessarily the love of God gently caresses our life. God loves all living things. He cannot hate what he has so lovingly created.

Contrary to what those may think who are living with the gloomy conviction that God constitutes a threat to human beings and is a oppressive presence which needs to be eliminated in order to be able to live and enjoy life more fully, we want to proclaim our faith in God as mankind's best friend and the most reliable defender of life. This is what He has shown Himself to be throughout the history of Israel, and the author of the Book of Wisdom puts it like this.

¹ JOHN PAUL II, Address during the Prayer Vigil for the VIII World Youth Day at Denver, of the 14-08-1993, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 17/18-08-1993.

² Cfr. Mission Statement of the Salesian Family, nn. 9. 10. 16.

“Yes, you love everything that exists, and nothing that you have made disgusts you, since if you had hated something you would not have made it. And how could a thing subsist, had you not willed it? Or how be preserved, if not called forth by you? No, you spare all, since all is yours, Lord, lover of life! For your imperishable spirit is in everything! And thus gradually, you correct those who offend; you admonish and remind them of how they have sinned, so that they may abstain from evil and trust in you, Lord” (Wis. 11,24-12,2).

God gives life through love, sustains it in love and destines it to love. It is the love of God that urges us to love life, to foster it through responsible service, to defend it with hope, to proclaim its value and its meaning, especially to the young people who are the most weak and defenceless, those drifting between emptiness and apprehension.

For this reason I am proposing to the whole Salesian Family that they allow themselves to be guided by this God who is the lover of life and by His love for life, and to decisively commit themselves to its defence and promotion.

At a time when life is particularly under threat, as the Salesian Family we commit ourselves to:

- accept life with gratitude and with joy as an inviolable gift,***
- foster life with passion as a responsible service,***
- defend with hope the dignity and the quality of every life, above all the most weak, poor and defenceless.***

This Strenna is intended to be “a precise and vigorous reaffirmation of the value of human life and its inviolability, and at the same time a pressing appeal addressed to each and every person, in the name of God: respect, protect, love and serve life, every human life! Only in this direction will you find justice, development, true freedom, peace and happiness!”³

³ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (EV), 5.

2. Ambiguity of the current culture of life

Pope Benedict XVI told the priests in the Diocese of Rome: «To me this also seems in some way the nucleus of our pastoral care: to help people make the true choice for life, to renew their relationship with God, as the relationship which gives us life and shows us the way to life».⁴

Our first efforts therefore must be directed to trying to reflect on some of the serious contradictions in the culture of our times, to find the questions posed by the way modern man is living, to appreciate what is positive in modern life in order to strengthen it and condemn the “culture of death” which threatens the very existence of mankind and of his world.

The value of human life proclaimed and defended but also attacked and threatened

Undoubtedly modern man has acquired a greater awareness of the dignity of each human being and of his inviolable rights. Today there is a strong reaction against the death penalty, torture, ill treatment or any other kind of punishment which degrades the individual. Modern legislation and social arrangements reflect in many ways the demand that the individual should be respected and human life defended.

But it would be a mistake to ignore the abuses of power that continue to be practised contrary to what society proclaims and to what is codified in the laws. Human life is destroyed before birth by means of abortion: and the same happens in more or less terminal situations in the name of a misunderstood “mercy” towards a sick person or of what is called “a dignified death” or euthanasia.

The fact of many little boys and girls ill-treated or sexually abused is a scandal that cries to heaven, as is that of women

⁴ To the Clergy of the Diocese of Rome. Lent 2006, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, (Eng. Edition) 15-03-2006, p. 5.

forced into prostitution, exploited and enslaved by organised groups at the service of the sex trade.

Particularly distressing is the spectacle of so many people, especially young people, caught up in the turmoil of drug use, of alcohol consumption, or who devote themselves to a style of life that is reckless, disordered and irresponsible.

In a society and in a world that is ever more developed in which the possibilities of a life of dignity are expanding there is, none the less, an increase in the number of those who are excluded, forced to live on the edge of survival, with nations and whole continents exploited and forgotten, as though it were a matter of second class human beings.

Quality of life: an ambiguous goal

For a long time peoples' concerns had been concentrated on ensuring the basic and indispensable conditions needed for survival. It was the only thing they could aspire to when they did not have the resources to expect anything more. For some years now quality of life has become the new goal for society and for individuals.

This concern about the quality of life can lead to a variety of different consequences according to the intention behind it: if it is inspired by a humanitarian desire to produce the most favourable conditions for the expansion and development of a decent life for all human beings, or else if it becomes an absolute end in itself, founded on utilitarian or hedonistic ideas on the basis of which one measures, evaluates and comes even to exclude from life those who do not reach a predetermined level. In this way a distinction is made for example between sick people who are to be treated with all the means available, and sick people with a limited quality of life (with certain disabilities, elderly people without families, the chronically sick etc.) who can be neglected, and to whom, in the final analysis, the most effective treatment can be denied. There are lives which are considered less important or

less useful, lives which are too long, and which come to the point of being perceived as a threat to the well-being of others and so are terminated.

So that a few might enjoy a high quality of life with a hedonistic and consumerist mentality there is the undermining and the destruction of the planetary ecosystem (pollution in its various forms, climate change, crisis in water resources, reduction of biodiversity etc), favouring a model of non-sustainable development which also seriously compromises the future of the whole of humanity.

Increase in destructive aggression.

Together with the many signs of an increase in respect for human life, concern for every living creature and respect for the environment, there are also unfortunately the many examples of violence which is ever more serious and destructive. We may think about the wars and the arms trade which supports them which continue to lead to thousands of innocent victims; also the cruel fighting between different peoples and races which oblige whole populations to leave their own homes and seek refuge outside their own countries; and again the increase in xenophobic violence against immigrants, who are considered a danger and a threat, and are exploited and their most fundamental rights denied.

There are other forms of violence too arising from an anti-life attitude, following from an experience of the dashing of a person's deepest aspirations; then hostility, rejection, hatred of life and of others grow; things are destroyed, people are ill-treated, wholesale damage is done... This kind of violence is very often to be found in gangs of youths or in groups who foment violence on the streets, etc.

An anti-life culture

The thing that causes most concern is the spreading of a certain way of thinking, of judging and of behaving which has the appearance of being normal, and sometimes is even present-

ed as some kind of a defence of freedom, which, rather than defending and fostering life, is leading in the opposite direction undermining it, emptying it of its meaning and in the end towards its extinction. This is what John Paul II used to call a "culture of death": "We are confronted", he wrote, "by an even larger reality, which can be described as a veritable structure of sin. This reality is characterized by the emergence of a culture which denies solidarity and in many cases takes the form of a veritable "culture of death"... In this way a kind of "*conspiracy against life*" is unleashed. This conspiracy involves not only individuals in their personal, family or group relationships, but goes far beyond, to the point of damaging and distorting, at the international level, relations between peoples and States".⁵

In the face of this situation we are profoundly challenged as educators who want to help young people to discover the absolute value of every life, especially every human life. Here then are some of these **challenges**:

– *The ultimate foundation of the absolute worth of every human life.*

Why does each human life deserve to be defended and always respected in every situation and circumstance? Are some lives more valuable than others? Where can the criteria for a quality of life that is worthy of human beings be found?

– *The challenge of the promotion of every life especially that of the weakest and defenceless.*

Is it really being human when the great sensitivity that contemporary man has for a life that is fuller and better is very often changed into a greater threat towards the weak and defenceless?

– *The challenge of evangelisation in this context and this culture.* How can we face up to this culture which is against life and proclaim in it the "Gospel of life" as something healing and life-giving for all?

⁵ EV 12.

How do we foster in our communities, among the young and in the Salesian Family a style of life that is in accordance with Don Bosco's proposal, which leads every one to love, appreciate, defend and promote life as a gift and as service?

3. The involvement of the Salesian Family in the defence of life

This view of the situation would not reflect reality if it did not place on record the many efforts, commitments and achievements in all parts of the world by the various groups of the Salesian Family. As an example I want to present to you some of the more common and significant initiatives of our Family, while at the same time inviting you to be aware of, to appreciate and to develop the resources, initiatives and opportunities already present in every country or region. Here is a list, certainly incomplete, of initiatives that demonstrate the commitment of the Salesian Family to life:

- The expressions of solidarity launched in response to the great disasters which have occurred in recent years (the "tsunami", earthquakes, floods, fires, attacks, wars...), which demonstrate the readiness and the compassion of so many people, especially ordinary ones in responding with generosity to the needs of others and in protecting the lives of the poorest ones, giving them hope and a future.
- The daily welcome given to so many youngsters at risk, to street children and unemployed young people etc. by thousands of educators who with great generosity and a Salesian approach devote their lives to helping them to get over their difficulties of marginalisation and danger, and to become capable of facing their future better prepared.
- The various aid programmes for refugees and immigrants that the Salesian Family undertake in different countries, dedi-

cating themselves to welcoming and educating them and helping them to fit into the new culture in a positive manner.

- The initiatives in progress in Africa, such as the programmes “*Stop AIDS!*” and “*Love matters*”, to respond to the tragedy of AIDS which is gripping this suffering continent, condemning to death millions of people and at the same time leaving millions of orphans. The Salesian Family is implementing preventive strategies aimed at informing the young people in a professional manner about the subject and forming their consciences, in the knowledge that this pandemic will not be conquered with condoms but with effective education.
- The thousands of educators who in various Salesian works and centres are involved in the education of the young, preparing them to take their place in the world of work.
- The huge humanitarian, educative and evangelising work that is carried out in the missions and which very often constitutes one of the few ways of defending life and promoting integral human development for thousands of people and entire populations.
- The very large commitment in the missions to a considerable effort aimed not only at preserving the existence of native peoples but above all their development, their recognition publicly and socially with their own rights to their language, their culture, their world view, their social organisation and political representation.
- The work of so many families who with difficulty but with dedication and generosity are involved in a daily effort in education and in the defence of life.
- Voluntary service in its various forms: social, missionary, vocational.

And so many other initiatives and activities which, day after day, are building up a network which provides support for a great number of people under threat and in danger, and with determination and generosity promotes the commitment to construct a way of life that is more human, supportive and evangelical and in

this way creating the “culture of life”.

I believe that with this large number of groups of people of the highest quality, we can and we must face up to the great challenges which the defence of life presents. The Strenna is an encouragement to examine one’s own vocation to life, an invitation to join forces and to continue our efforts so as to be able to respond in a creative and dynamic way to the enormous challenges.

4. The God who loves life

From the first pages of the book of Genesis to the last page of the book of the Apocalypse, Sacred Scripture shows the belief and the profound conviction of the People of God that life comes from God and needs to be lived in the presence of the one who safeguards and protects it. It is a blessing from God whose love and generosity shine out in this gift. It is the greatest of the gifts that God can grant.

For this reason, the first thing to do is to enjoy living. The first command that we receive from God is to live; it is a command that is not written on tables of stone but rather carved in the very depth of our being. Our first act of obedience to God is to love life, to welcome it with a grateful heart, to care for it solicitously developing all the possibilities that it has.

The Bible continually emphasises the direct relationship between life and God. Man’s life comes from God; it is, as John Paul II points out, “a gift by which God shares something of himself with his creature”.⁶ God is the only Lord of life; man cannot dispose of it. Life and death are in the hands of God: “In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind” (*Job* 12,10). Every life comes from God and God

⁶ EV 34.

protects it. He did not create man to let him die but to be immortal. (cf. *Wisdom* 2,23).

Precisely for this reason the God of life is the "God of the poor", those who scarcely manage to survive; he is the "God of justice", who defends those who are threatened by the abuses and by the unjust actions of the strong and the powerful (cf. Code of the Covenant, in *Ex* 21,1-23,9). Only God who is faithful to life can reveal himself throughout history as the defender of the life of the poor, of the weak, of the widow, of the stranger, of the defenceless. Knowing this God means exercising the justice which gives life, and fighting against the injustice which kills. Believing in him means promoting solidarity with those who suffer and die abandoned. Hearing his voice is to open one's ears and one's heart to his constant demand: "What have you done to your brother?" (cf. *Gen* 4,9-10).

The God who in the Old Testament had already revealed himself as "the friend of life" became man in *Jesus Christ*. In Him the disciples had been able to see with their own eyes and touch with their hands the One who is the "Word of Life" (cf. *1 Jn* 1,1). His words and his gestures are directed from the start to bringing life and healing to mankind. In fact this was the memory of Jesus that the first community preserved: "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him" (*Acts* 10,38).

For Jesus life is a precious gift, "more than food" (*Mt* 6,25). Saving a life is more important than the sabbath (cf. *Mk* 3,4), because "He is not God of the dead, but of the living" (*Mk* 12,27). The defence of human life is a central idea in the plan of the Kingdom. The two aspects – the proclamation of the Kingdom and care for man's life – together make up the content of his messianic activity, as can always be seen from the accounts in the gospels: "Jesus went about all Galilee... preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every infirmity

among the people" (*Mt* 4,23; 9,35; *Lk* 6,18). Indeed, it was the healing ministry that best characterised the Messiah. It was in this that the works of the one sent by God were most immediately evident: "The blind receive their sight and the lame walk; lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; and the dead are raised up and the poor have good news preached to them" (*Mt* 11,5).

In John's gospel too life is the central value. Jesus is the bearer and the guarantor of a life that is "eternal" and definitive, that is to say, a life that God communicates to his children and which will have its final consummation beyond this world. So the evangelist presents Christ to us as "the bread of life" (*Jn* 6,35.48), "the light of life" (*Jn* 8,12); "the way, the truth, and the life" (*Jn* 14,6); "the resurrection and the life" (*Jn* 11,25), to the extent that every one "who believes in him though he die, yet shall he live" (*Jn* 11,25).

This eternal life can be experienced right now by the believer: "he who believes has eternal life" (*Jn* 6,47); the one who listens to his word "has eternal life... and has passed from death to life" (*Jn* 5,24); "he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (*Jn* 6,54). But the fundamental experience that ensures the opening up of our present life and its direction towards eternal salvation is always love: "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love remains in death" (*1Jn* 3,14).

Jesus not only values life and defends it but also *gives his own life* as the supreme service of love so that mankind may not finish up in death and in ultimate destruction. "I lay down my life... No one takes it from me. I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again" (*Jn* 10,17-18). If Jesus gives himself even unto death it is certainly not because he despises life, but because he loves life so much and wants all to have it, even the most unhappy and wretched, and he wants it to be final, full and eternal.

This "crucified life" for love is a "scandal and foolishness" according to the models of life nowadays holding sway in society.

But from the point of view of Christian faith, it constitutes the ultimate criterion for every life which is meant to be fully human and not disfigured or transformed by selfishness, by the lack of solidarity, by injustice. Indeed, for believers this “crucified life” is the supreme revelation of the love of God for man and his respect for and defence of human life: it is the “Gospel of life”.

This gospel culminates in the *resurrection*. The God who raises Jesus is a God who puts life where men put death. This is what the apostles preached: “You killed him... but God raised him up” (*Acts* 2,23-24). The one who believes in this God who raises up, “God of the living”, begins to love life in a radically new way and with a total love. Easter faith urges the believer to take the side of life wherever this is seen to be damaged, violated or destroyed. His fight against death is not only the result of some ethical imperative, but from faith in this God who raises up, who wants man to participate for ever in his own divine life. The Christian truth about life here reaches its summit: «The dignity of this life is linked not only to its beginning, to the fact that it comes from God, but also to its final end, to its destiny of fellowship with God in knowledge and love of him. In the light of this truth Saint Irenaeus qualifies and completes his praise of man: “the glory of God” is indeed, “man, living man”, but “the life of man consists in the vision of God».⁷

5. Letting ourselves be guided by God’s love for life

God’s love for life encourages us in our commitment: to bear witness to, to proclaim and to love the value of human life. John Paul II has written: “We need to bring the Gospel of life to the heart of every man and woman and to make it penetrate every part of society”.⁸ This sort of proclamation involves proposing clearly and decisively the inviolable nature of life.

⁷ EV 38.

⁸ EV 80.

The life of a human being is fragile, precarious and fleeting, but it is something sacred and inviolable. God breathed his own spirit into man, he created him “in his own image and likeness” (*Gen 1,27*). No one can dispose of life at his own whim, neither his own nor that of anyone else. This life received from God is the foundation of the constituent and indestructible dignity of every man, the first value on which all other values and rights are based and develop.

The commandment of God is clear and unequivocal: “You shall not kill” (*Ex 20,13*). Even though formulated in a negative way, it expresses the fundamental sense of the value of life and continues to urge us to re-affirm it today.

In the face of the various attacks on life, nowadays the duty of promoting an *education* more sensitive to the value of life, to respect for it, and in its defence is of decisive importance; an education capable of offering an overall view of life and of health and of giving people an ethical sense. The new generations need parents and teachers who really are “teachers of life”. They need someone to teach them to be grateful to be alive, to live with a healthy and moderate life style and to accept responsibility for their own life, to build it up integrating in it failures, difficulties sacrifices, sufferings, to celebrate life and the God who gives it to us, and to live it with love and dedication.

To carry out this task it is necessary to remember the vocation and the mission of the *family*. Its educational responsibility arises from its very nature and from its specific mission, the fact, that is to say, of its being a community of life and of love and of being destined “to guard, reveal and communicate love”.⁹ The family proclaims the gospel of life especially by educating the children to a deep respect for life and to being grateful for God’s gift.

It is a question of the careful work of the formation of a *moral conscience*. In its words and in its witness, in its relationships and

⁹ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio*, 17.

its everyday decisions, the family can teach, educate and help live the great values of freedom, respect for others, acceptance, dialogue, a sense of justice, of solidarity, of the dedication of oneself. In this way, with confidence and courage, parents will educate their children to the essential values of human life.

6. Don Bosco loves and promotes life for the young especially the poorest

For us, members of the Salesian Family, love for and a commitment to life find in Don Bosco a model and a teacher.

From being a boy Don Bosco was full of life; he learned from his mother, Mamma Margaret, to discover the beauty of nature and of life; he knew how to enjoy the splendour of the countryside, the hills and flower-filled meadows around the Becchi and gaze in wonder at the stars. He made a pet of a little bird and cared for it lovingly. In all these things his mother taught him to discover the work of God the creator who cares for his children, his wisdom and infinite power and above all his love. In this way John was opened up to a positive and providential view of life, he knew how to enjoy the simple things of country life and without discouragement to face the difficulties that came his way in his own home. In this spirit he tried to communicate a sense of joy to his companions, entertaining them on feast days with a great variety of games; but it was always with an educational motive: to make them better and help them carry out the duties of a good Christian. While still a young student at Chieri, with his friends he founded the "Cheerful Society", the first rule of which was precisely that of always being cheerful and trying never to offend God.

As a priest going round the streets of Turin and visiting the prisons, Don Bosco understood that young people are looking for happiness, that they want to enjoy life, to feel accepted and appreciated; and if sometimes they live out their aspirations following the wrong path which can even lead them to prison, it is

not because they are bad but because they have not found people who believe in them and help them to develop all their energies and gifts in the right way. For this reason Don Bosco dedicates his life to them, and with them creates a positive environment that favours a life in which they can experience the joy of living, with ample opportunities for playing and enjoying themselves, for training themselves and for finding work, for feeling loved, accepted and appreciated in a family atmosphere. For Don Bosco games, music, the stage, outings and walks are important means of education and the way to conquer hearts, and so to help these youngsters to develop their best qualities, to feel that they are capable of doing good and making themselves useful to others and to society. In this way Don Bosco leads them to know and to live in friendship with Jesus Christ.

We can say that with his boys in Valdocco Don Bosco lives a real *pedagogy of life*, of joy and of celebration; indeed, he invites them to commit themselves to foster among their companions this atmosphere. He writes in his biography of Francis Besucco: «If you want to be good practise three things only and all will be well. (...) They are Cheerfulness, Study, Piety. This is the grand programme. Following it you will be able to live happily and do a lot of good for your soul». Joy is an essential characteristic of the family atmosphere and the sign of loving kindness, the natural consequence of an approach based on reason, and on religion which is interior and spontaneous and which ultimately arises from peace with God, from a life of grace.¹⁰ For this reason, in Don Bosco's mind joy is not only a means to make the serious matter of education acceptable but a way of life which takes into account the way boys are and their desire for life. Don Bosco understood this and wanted to make it fully real. He appreciated that deep down a youngster needs to experience the joy of living, freedom, games and friendship. But above all, as a priest, Don Bosco firmly believes that Christianity is not a religion of prohibitions, but, on the contrary, is the religion of

¹⁰ Cfr. P. BRAIDO, *Prevenire non reprimere*. LAS, Rome 1999, pp. 324-325.

life, of happiness, of love; for this reason through an educational system of celebration and joy he helped young people to open themselves to Jesus Christ, leading them to a personal relationship of friendship with Him. Faced with an impression of Christian life which these youngsters picked up from the society of their times as something sad, full of renunciation and prohibitions, a life little adapted to the young, Don Bosco put to them *a form of Christian life that was happy and joyful*.

Don Bosco sanctified work and joy. He was the saint of Christian good-humour, of an active and joyful Christian life... In this consisted his very innovative approach. "With the brilliant intuitive insight of his love full of human understanding, and persuaded of the natural and reasonable needs of youth and a wholesome life, together with work, Don Bosco sanctified joy, the joy of living, of working and of praying".¹¹

Don Bosco himself lived and knew how to communicate to all his sons, collaborators and friends a *positive and integral view of life*; he believed in the goodness and in the dignity of every human being, especially of every young person, and in a special way of the poorest and those in danger; he wrote: «The educator must persuade himself that almost all these dear young people have a natural intelligence to recognise the good that is being done for them, and a sensitive heart easily moved to gratitude». ¹² Therefore he believed that every youngster could be rescued; he believed in the effectiveness of the work of education when it is undertaken with generous devotion and follows a method of reason and loving-kindness.

Young people who are abandoned or deviant need to be helped to find the most elementary meaning to life; this means encouraging in them the desire to live, and through work and the sweat of their brow to earn the means of providing a decent life for

¹¹ F. Orestano, quoted by P. BRAIDO, *op. cit.* p. 236.

¹² A. DA SILVA FERREIRA, *Il dialogo tra don Bosco e il maestro Francesco Bodrato - 1864*, RSS 3 (1984) 385.

themselves and their family. For those who were deprived of affection Don Bosco set out to create a setting and a network of family-style relationships and of friendship, capable of restoring an affective life in which their emotional needs and their full expression can be realised.

In addition Don Bosco was convinced that the Christian faith and friendship with Jesus Christ provide the strongest and most effective source of energy to sustain the efforts in education and to lead a style of life that is joyful and happy here on earth and guarantee happiness for ever in eternal life. For this reason he set – and he explained his intention very clearly – as the highest goal of education *holiness*; not as an aim for some of the privileged ones, but as the ideal proposed to everyone, as he said in the “Good night” which prompted Dominic Savio to take up the task of holiness: «It is the will of God that we should be saints; it is very easy to become one and great rewards are promised to saints in heaven».¹³

As a priest and educator he always wanted to appreciate and encourage whatever there is that is positive in life, and in the heart of every individual, to foster a Christian life capable of savouring and valuing whatever can be found in every day life and in the hearts of even the most wretched people that is human, positive and noble, at the same time making a great effort to open up education and culture to Jesus Christ, in the conviction that only in Him is it possible to be fully saved.¹⁴

Following Don Bosco therefore, as the Salesian Family we are called to testify and to proclaim that human life is sacred and inviolable, and therefore not only should it not be eliminated but it needs to be positively protected and defended. The value of life is an essential part of the gospel of Jesus. In a culture and in a civilisation which threatens life at its roots, the Salesian Family of Don Bosco must be particularly sensitive in providing an educational service which takes care of and welcomes *all life and the*

¹³ J. BOSCO, *The life of Dominic Savio...* p. 50, OE XI p. 200.

¹⁴ Cfr. P. BRAIDO, *op. cit.* p. 233.

life of everyone; ¹⁵ especially prepared to accompany and protect, in addition to life at its birth, the life of so many young people under threat, as they struggle with poverty, marginalisation, suffering, the lack of ideals and with the lack of meaning. It is especially for the life of these young people that we are called to be “signs and bearers of the love of God”. ¹⁶

7. Commitment of the Salesian Family on behalf of life

The Church has received the *gospel of life* and is commissioned to proclaim it and make it become a reality. This vocation and mission requires the generous contribution of all its members including the Salesian Family. Together we need to recognise “our duty to preach the Gospel of life, to celebrate it in the Liturgy and in our whole existence, and to serve it with the various programmes and structures which support and promote life”. ¹⁷

Faced with such solemn statements on behalf of life which are to be found side by side with deep-seated anti-life attitudes, our educative-pastoral service needs to bear witness to and proclaim its value as we pledge ourselves to defend it and promote a genuine culture of life.

7.1 *Defend the value of every human life*

Human life has always been surrounded with danger, threatened by violence and death. Today not only have the threats to life not been reduced, they are assuming alarming proportions, even being planned in a systematic and scientific way. Sometimes the point is reached where violent death is considered a sign of progress and of civilisation.

¹⁵ Cfr. EV 87.

¹⁶ SDB Constitutions, 2.

¹⁷ EV 79.

The old threats remain, those resulting from hatred, violence from conflicting interests (murders, wars, killings), made worse by indifference and lack of solidarity. Side by side with this there is the violence carried out against millions of human beings who struggle to survive and who die of hunger, the scandalous arms trade which continues in spite of so many declarations, the upsetting of the ecological balance, the spread of drugs, traffic accidents, terrorist attacks which all cause a veritable carnage. From its earliest moments to its terminal stages human life is under siege in an incredible manner from human beings themselves.

In the face of the dark clouds over it nowadays, it is more than ever necessary and urgent to defend the inviolable and sacred value of every human life. For this reason we must promote among ourselves and among the young a positive attitude to life. This presupposes:

– *Considering life as a gift.*

Often life is considered a product of man's own abilities and power rather than as a gift of God. This mentality limited to productivity easily leads to a specious discrimination against those lives which are not planned, are inconvenient, or 'unproductive': unborn babies, old people, the physically or mentally handicapped, defective lives. Considering life as a gift leads to living it with an attitude of gratitude, of praise and of profound joy, and to committing oneself to taking care of it and loving it, trying to develop all its positive potential.

– *Promoting an integral view of life.*

For all human beings life is much more than simple material well-being or economic progress; life is a path to personal fulfilment, a fulfilment which involves not only material, economic or social activity, but also progress in the spiritual life. The defence of life means that we are ready to take on responsibility for looking after, loving and developing all the potential in life and in nature

in order to lead them to their fullness and give them a genuine human quality. Living with an integral vision of life also requires that we overcome exaggerated hyperactivity, which prevents us from giving due attention to other important aspects of life such as personal contacts and friendship, silence and contemplation, joy and beauty, generous selfless service.

7.2 Protecting the life of the poor

Every human life is precious and worthy of respect. It follows that not only a healthy, useful, happy life is worth while, but also the undervalued, the one lived in pain and sickness, that of the unborn child, and that of the elderly invalid. It is not only the life of the powerful that is precious: so too is the life of the poor and the abandoned.

As sons and daughters of Don Bosco we feel particularly called to protect and take care of the lives of the many young people who have to grow up in poverty, on the margins of society and affluence. We have to be able to invent and create new kinds of a missionary presence in the world of marginalisation and exclusion. Here are some practical suggestions:

– Caring for youngsters at risk.

Every Salesian centre should be committed to responding to the growing challenges presented by the young people living in situations of marginalisation and at risk: street children without a family or far from home, young people without any training and out of work; immigrants, especially youngsters who arrive on their own without their families; youngsters exposed to delinquency or those sexually exploited, and the many other degrading situations, in which human life is exposed to danger and is affronted.

It is our task to welcome these youngsters, to help them to recover a love for life and genuine values, to educate them and

train them in such a way that they can take their proper place in society, to accompany them in finding a place in the world of work, develop their openness to God as a central element in becoming fully human; to introduce them to Jesus Christ and guide them towards a personal relationship with Him in a Christian style of life that is simple, joyful, positive and adapted to them.

– *Accompaniment and help for families in difficulty.*

Special care should be given to families living under severe stress or already split up, families experiencing serious difficulties in educating their children, and others in situations of hardship. In response to last year's Strenna many initiatives were launched for the support and help of parents in their task of education, for the support and guidance for couples in difficulty, in the creation of family groups and communities etc. I invite you to continue along those lines. In the commentary on the Strenna for 2006 I suggested a series of attitudes and activities, which I invite you to consolidate. The family is the first place for the defence and the promotion of life, and as such should continue to be the privileged object of our pastoral care.

7.3 *Educate to the value of life*

In order to defend and to care for life it is necessary to educate to the value of life: "To be truly a people at the service of life we must propose these truths constantly and courageously from the very first proclamation of the Gospel, and thereafter in catechesis, in the various forms of preaching, in personal dialogue and in all educational activity".¹⁸

This is a task that involves us all: parents, educators, teachers, catechists, theologians. As has already been pointed out, the new generations need to find in their parents, educators and catechists

¹⁸ EV 82.

real “*teachers of life*”. They look to us not only for knowledge, information or doctrine, but as people who can show them a positive way of life and encourage and accompany them in the development of their best qualities and possibilities. With our lives and through our words we must be capable of highlighting the absolute value of life, committing ourselves to giving it the highest possible quality, and always promoting an attitude of unconditional respect for individuals, taking a positive and hopeful view regarding them and their future, fighting against everything that prevents them living with dignity and solidarity. Our attitudes and our actions in simple ordinary every day circumstances ought to be for the young people a veritable school of life.

As educators we also need to know how to re-awaken in the young the joy of living, an appreciation for the most profound human values, the taste for selfless service of others and on behalf of nature which surrounds us; we need to arouse in them the sense of life as vocation and as service and educate them to be responsible and active citizens in the building of a society that is more human, more free and united.

Another important aspect of the commitment to educate to the value of life is to “help the young *to accept and experience sexuality and love and the whole of life according to their true meaning and in their close interconnection... Only a true love is able to protect life*”.¹⁹ For this reason there is the need to develop a real education to love, according to the typical experience of Don Bosco and the criteria of his educational system. In the pastoral proposal which accompanied the Strenna last year some steps to be followed in this direction were indicated; it is important to really take them into account throughout the whole educational process.

Only with difficulty will one arrive at a true appreciation of human life if it is not appreciated within the *family*, if there is a atmosphere of violence there, if the interruption of a life that is

¹⁹ EV 97.

inconvenient or unwanted is considered a sign of progress, if competitiveness, success or power are seen as the aims in life. Ways of thinking and attitudes that are positive or negative are passed on in the everyday living of family life. The family educates well or badly through words and example, through choices and decisions, through relationships, through what it does and the concrete signals it gives.

In connection with this task of educating to the value of life I mention some *places and educational activities* which seem to me to provide particular possibilities, on condition that they have a genuine family atmosphere. I refer to two in particular: the Oratory-Youth Centre and Voluntary Service.

■ **The Oratory-Youth Centre**, as a typically Salesian place, has a lively and welcoming atmosphere and is freely available to all young people, a place where they can take the lead and learn to acquire a taste for life and become fully involved in it, where there is an open and generous relationship between educators and young people, and where they are all involved and give each other support in the educational process and in human and Christian growth and development.

The Salesian Oratory and Youth Centre ought to become for the young a real “*workshop for life and for Christian living*”; the place where they can live their own lives, express and develop their own values, their leadership qualities, their interpersonal relationships; a place also where they can find positive and significant educational programmes and people who will welcome and accompany them.

So that the Salesian Oratory can effectively carry out this role for life it needs to fulfil some important conditions:

- It should be an open place in which attention is given to human relationships, where they are happy to be together and can speak and express themselves freely;
- It should encourage a variety of worthwhile activities for the youngsters corresponding to their expectations and needs;

- It should provide opportunities for them to take the lead;
- It should foster the active presence of adults, young adults and leaders whom the youngsters look up to and who encourage them;
- It should offer a high quality educational and cultural programme;
- It should have a programme of evangelisation and education to the faith rooted in the life of the young people,

In this way the Oratory will become the place where young people can bring together and organise for themselves what they hear and experience, and the values they encounter elsewhere (in the family, at school, in the parish, in the company of their friends, etc.) and construct a meaningful style of life for their future.

■ ***Voluntary service*** is an important experience for young people, especially when they are considering their future; it can be much more than a one-off transitional experience, and become a genuine school of life understood as selfless and effective service in situations of poverty and need. Voluntary service, when it is undertaken after a systematic process of preparation which helps to bring a sense of maturity to motives and when it includes personal and group guidance, fosters a personal life option and helps it grow. In carrying out voluntary service young adults learn to be responsible citizens and committed Christians.

7.4 Proclaiming Jesus Christ as the meaning and source of life

Proclaiming the gospel of life ought to lead the young to an encounter and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, in whom they will discover the model, the way and the strength to live a full human life. Perhaps evangelisation has never been so urgent as it is today; the proclamation of Jesus, in the face of a world

which exalts deceptive and seductive models, which do not give nor can give a meaning to life. Very often the young suffer from an enormous inner emptiness which they try to fill with pleasure, entertainment, sex and drugs, or even by pursuing the crooked paths of violence and crime. But neither pleasure, nor consumption nor clutching at the various ways of filling the present moment satisfy their aspirations and their needs. There are also many young people who are living in social and economic situations of exclusion or serious personal fragility in a world that is ever more hard. It is precisely in these situations that the gospel of the God who is the friend of life needs to ring out as “good news”, that Jesus Christ and his plan for happiness need to be made present.

Evangelisation is the best presentation of a human life that is full and happy. For this reason we need to commit ourselves to carrying it out in a straightforward manner and with dedication in all the places young people are to be found. Given the variety of these, evangelisation requires different forms of presentation according to the situation of the young people with whom we deal. I shall mention three important ones:

- In those situations where the young people are living in an indifferent and superficial way an empty or materialistic style of life, we will offer them a gradual process, which helps them to discover and to appreciate the more positive and profound values and to experience the joy of an interior life and of silence, to re-awaken in them the desire to find some meaning, to open themselves to God, developing the *religious dimension of life*.
- As regards young people whose practice of religion is a matter of habit, merely superficial or only to satisfy their own interests or needs, we will help them to discover the person of Jesus, to become enthusiastic about Him and foster the development in them of a decisive *personal option* to follow him, committing themselves to a serious process of education to the faith.

- On the other hand, for those who already take part in groups or movements for Christian formation we offer a systematic programme that helps them to make their faith *something really personal*, to celebrate it and to put it into practice in life until it becomes a mature *vocational option* of Christian life.

Promoting these programmes of education to the faith is the most precious and most significant contribution we can make in our commitment to life.

7.5 *Giving thanks for life and celebrating it*

Fruits of the proclamation of the gospel of life are joy, wonder, praise, gratitude to God lover of life for his gift. The proclamation gives rise to a profound attitude of the celebration of the gospel of life. Every life as the gift of God not only has its dimension of commitment and a task to fulfil, but also of worship. Already in itself it is a expression of praise because every human life is a marvel of love. Accepting it is already praise and thanksgiving.

Celebrating life leads and urges us to cultivate a *contemplative way of looking at things*: at nature, the world, creation, life, towards which we often have utilitarian or consumer attitudes; at persons, with whom often we maintain superficial or functional relationships; at society and history which many times we only consider from the point of view of our own interests... We need to overcome our selfish attitudes to arrive at a contemplative one, which means looking deeply in order to see and admire the beauty and the grandeur of the world of persons and of history. We need to learn to welcome, respect and love things, people, life in all its forms. It is necessary to know how to appreciate silence, to learn how to listen with patience, wonder and surprise before the unexpected and the unimaginable. It is necessary to know how to make room for the other person, to be able to establish a new relationship of intimacy and trust with him.

From this contemplative attitude flow *praise and prayer*. Celebrating life is to praise, love and pray to the God of life, who knit us together in our mother's womb. It means blessing him and thanking him: "I thank you for the wonder of my being; for the wonders of all your creation" (*Ps* 139,14). Man's life is one of the greatest wonders of creation.

7.6 *Caring for creation with love*

God *biófilo* (*philópsychos* is the term used in *Wisdom* 11,26) not only loves human life, he loves all life, because all creation is the work of his love. As well as the value and the dignity of human life, Sacred Scripture from its opening pages also expresses in explicit terms a recognition of the goodness of nature: "God saw everything that he had made and behold it was very good" (*Gen* 1,31). Animals, plants, the skies, the sun, the seas... everything is good, everything has a value in itself.

But this recognition is genuine only when man recognises the dignity of the earth, shows respect for nature, welcomes and accepts the richness inherent in creatures. And it is only this genuine recognition which leads to the affirmation of their worth and their rights, and consequently to the rejection of their plundering and abuse, and to a respectful development of the environment and to an harmonious living with nature.

Industrialised society had encouraged production and efficiency, but often it has dehumanised man, changing him into a mere producer/consumer. The culture of life leads to a genuine ecological attitude: love for human beings, for animals and for plants, love for the whole of creation, a commitment to defend and to foster all signs of life against the mechanics of destruction and death. In the face of the threat of uncontrolled exploitation, of the destruction of nature, of *unsustainable* development, it is well to remember the word of the Great Chief Seattle: *what wounds the Earth, wounds the sons and daughters of the Earth*.

Ecology is a genuine expression of human solidarity which obviously implies the conservation and the use of the resources of the Earth – as the Holy See affirms in a document produced in preparation for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. Development of this sort needs to be based on “sound ethical values, without which no progress will be sustainable”. For this reason “the notion of sustainable development can only be understood from the perspective of a human and integrated development”. In this sense it asks that the term “human ecology” be adopted which “implies ensuring and safeguarding the moral conditions necessary in the activities of human beings with the environment”. Care of the family, the promotion and protection of work, the fight against poverty, development of education and health services, solidarity among nations at the services of an integral human development... are some of the elements which the Holy See presents for an ecology worthy of man.²⁰

Care and love for creation, a commitment to and concern for ecology, need to be promoted in the context of everyday life, educating ourselves and educating the young to respect nature and to care for it, using the goods things it offers (water, plants, animals, other things...) with moderation and always bearing in mind the good of everyone, encouraging a positive commitment to the protection and sustainable development of the earth and of natural resources... Nowadays, forming and developing an ecological mentality and an attitude is an important aspect of an all-round education.

How can we fail at this point to call to mind Saint Francis of Assisi and his Canticle of Creation?

*“Most High, all powerful, good Lord,
Yours are the praises, the glory, the honour, and all blessing.
To You alone, Most High, do they belong,
and no man is worthy to mention Your name.*

²⁰ Cfr. Document of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace on the occasion of the World Summit on Sustainable development in Johannesburg (26 August-4 September 2002).

*Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures,
especially through my lord Brother Sun,
who brings the day; and you give light through him.*

*And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendour!
Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.*

*Praise be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon
and the stars, in heaven you formed them
clear and precious and beautiful.*

*Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene,
and every kind of weather through which
You give sustenance to Your creatures.*

*Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,
which is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.*

*Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom you light the night and he is beautiful
and playful and robust and strong.*

*Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains us and governs us and who produces
varied fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.*

*Praised be You, my Lord,
through those who give pardon for Your love,
and bear infirmity and tribulation.*

*Blessed are those who endure in peace
for by You, Most High, they shall be crowned.*

*Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,
from whom no living man can escape.*

Woe to those who die in mortal sin.

*Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will,
for the second death shall do them no harm.*

*Praise and bless my Lord, and give Him thanks
and serve Him with great humility”.*

8. Conclusion: two texts to share

By way of summarising what has been said, first of all I offer you a text drawn up by people of different religious traditions who met together for the IVth Parliament of World Religions in Barcelona in 2004:

OFFERING TO THE WORLD

*We citizens of the world,
people on the move, people who are searching,
heirs to the ancient traditions handed on,
want to proclaim:*

- *that human life is in itself something wonderful;
that nature is our mother and our hearth,
and should be loved and preserved;*
- *that peace ought to be built with determination,
with justice, with forgiveness and generosity;*
- *that the diversity of cultures
is a great asset and not an obstacle;*
- *that the world appears as a treasure
if we live it in profundity,
and that the religions want to be paths
towards that profundity;*
- *that in their search, religions find strength and meaning
by being open to the incomprehensible Mystery;*
- *that making community helps us in this experience;*
- *that religions can be a starting point
for interior peace, for harmony with oneself and with the world,
which can be translated into an astonished, joyful, grateful gaze;*
- *that we who belong to different religious traditions
want to talk to one another;*
- *that we want to play our part with everyone
in the struggle to make a better world,
to resolve the serious problems of mankind:
hunger and poverty,*

*war and violence,
 the destruction of the natural environment,
 the lack of a openness to a profound experience of life,
 the lack of respect for freedom and for difference;
 - and that we want to share with everyone
 the fruit of our searching
 for the highest aspirations of human beings,
 with the most radical respect for what each person is
 and with the proposal that all may be able to live together
 a life worth living.*

The second text I offer you by way of conclusion is, as in previous years, a fable which shows the importance of a positive attitude to life. It is that which marks the difference between the culture of death in which we are living without even being aware of it, and the culture of life which fills our own life and that of others with joy, with colour and with generosity.

Visiting Belarus, I was very pleasantly impressed by a group of young people I met in Minsk and by the performance they gave of a story. I liked it very much and it seemed to me so enlightening that I said to myself: this is what I want to share with the whole Salesian Family, this is what I would like to do with each one of its members: give them my yellow umbrella, the one I also received from Don Bosco.

THE YELLOW UMBRELLA

*Once upon a time there was a country which was grey and sad,
 where when it rained all the people went around the streets with
 black umbrellas. Just, only black.*

*Everyone had a sad crunched up face... But it couldn't be otherwise
 under a black umbrella!*

*One day when it was raining more heavily than usual, a rather
 strange man suddenly appeared braving the flood... under a yellow
 umbrella.*

And as if that were not enough, he was smiling. Indeed, smiling! Some of the passers-by looked at him scandalised from under the black umbrellas they carried. And they muttered:

«Look at that, how disgraceful!

He's really ridiculous with that yellow umbrella.

Rain is a serious business and an umbrella can only be black!».

Others were furious and said to one another, enraged: «What on earth has come over him over there, going out in the rain with a yellow umbrella? Show off!» Others turned to the authorities: «He's certainly someone very full of himself who wants to get noticed at all costs! Does he perhaps think it's funny?».

In fact there was nothing funny in that country, where it always rained and the umbrellas were all black.

Only Natasha couldn't really understand the criticism. A thought kept going round in her head:

«When it is raining, an umbrella is an umbrella. Yellow or black, what matters is that it keeps off the rain, over and out!».

What was more, she noticed that the gentleman seemed to be perfectly at ease and quite happy under the yellow umbrella. So she had a great desire to know more.

One day coming out of school, Natasha realised that she had left her black umbrella at home.

She shrugged and began walking with her head uncovered so that the rain soaked her hair.

It so happened that just then... Oh! It's the man with the yellow umbrella!...

«Do you want to shelter?».

Natasha hesitated. If she accepted they would make fun of her. But then she had another thought:

«When it's raining an umbrella is an umbrella. Whether it's yellow or black what does it matter? It's always better to have an umbrella than to get soaking wet in the rain!».

She accepted and sheltered under the yellow umbrella beside the kind gentleman.

Then she understood why the gentleman was happy: under the yellow umbrella there was no longer any bad weather! There was a big warm sun and a blue sky where the birds were flying about twittering.

Natasha was astonished, and the man burst out laughing: «I know! You're surprised! Just listen to me and I'll explain everything.

Once upon a time I too was sad in this country where it is always raining.

I too had a black umbrella. One day coming out of the office I forgot it and left it in the umbrella stand, But I didn't go back to get it, I started walking home just as I was.

As I went along I met a man who offered to shelter me under his yellow umbrella. I hesitated. Like you! I was afraid to be different, to make myself ridiculous. But then I accepted because I was even more afraid of catching a cold.

And I noticed – like you – that under the yellow umbrella the bad weather has disappeared. That man taught me that the people under a black umbrella were sad and didn't want to talk. The patter of the rain and the black of the umbrella made them sulky. When suddenly I no longer saw him. I noticed that I was holding his yellow umbrella. Had he forgotten it? I looked around but I couldn't find him.

So I've kept it and the good weather has never left me».

Natasha exclaimed:

«What a story! Are you not embarrassed keeping someone else's umbrella?».

«No, because I know very well that this umbrella belongs to everyone. There's no doubt that that man too had received it from someone else».

When they arrived outside Natasha's house they said goodbye.

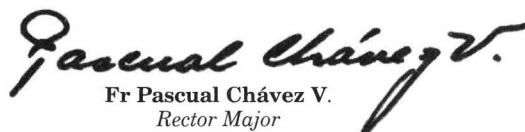
No sooner had the man disappeared than the girl realised that she was holding the yellow umbrella. But who knows where the man had gone!

So Natasha kept the yellow umbrella but she knew that sooner or later, it would have another owner, it would have passed into other hands to bring happiness to other people.

My dear confreres I will conclude renewing my best wishes for a Happy New Year for 2007, with the invitation to a renewed commitment to being worthy believers in a God who loves life, while with Him, we work to build a culture of life. This is the witness which was left to us in an heroic way by the Spanish martyrs who will be beatified this year, on a day still to be decided.

I entrust you to Mary the Mother of God and our mother, so that she may guide you, bless you and make your lives and your vocations fruitful.

Affectionately in Don Bosco,


Fr Pascual Chávez V.
Rector Major

2. GUIDELINES AND POLICES

2.1 THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PARISH ENTRUSTED TO THE SALESIANS

Fr. Antonio DOMENECH
Councillor for Youth Ministry

The Salesian involvement in parish ministry is quite extensive and is increasing, especially in response to the many requests and needs of the local Churches. The parishes entrusted to the Congregation number about 1,100, with almost 12 million faithful and more than 3,000 Salesians working in them. Therefore it is a very important field for Salesian pastoral ministry.

In these years there have been a number of meetings for reflection and formation for the SDB dedicated to the parish ministry in different Provinces and Regions of the Congregation. Having looked over the documentation relating to these meetings and the main points that emerge, I should now like to consider some fundamental aspects of the identity/characteristics of the parish entrusted to the Salesians, and to suggest some guidelines to help the Provinces in the animation of this important sector.

1. The parish in the development of Salesian pastoral work

The Congregation has been involved in the question of the parish from the beginning. The personal reflections of Don Bosco on the responsibility that the role of parish priest involves and the difficulties of carrying out through the parish a fully educational pastoral service on behalf of poor youth, led to a criterion established in article 10 of the Constitutions of 1923: «As a rule, the care of parishes shall not be undertaken». But already in Don

¹ La Boca (1877) and Almagro (1877) in Argentina, for the care of Italian emigrants; Patagones (1880) in the missions of Patagonia.; Genoa-Sampierdarena (1872); Vallecrosia and La Spezia (1876-77) in Italy; Battersea – London (1887), all places where there was considerable sectarian proselytising.

Bosco's lifetime seven were accepted;¹ which shows the liberal and dynamic way in which this criterion was applied.

In the Regulations for the Parishes taken from the deliberations of the third and fourth General Chapters (1883-1886), presented by Don Bosco himself in 1887, the subjects that caused some concern regarding the parishes were the priority of the attention paid to the young, especially the poorest and the religious communitarian identity of the parish priest and his collaborators.² These topics continued to be central issues in subsequent years.

At the time of the GC XIX there were 525 Salesian parishes, and six years later in the GCXX there were 625. In these Chapters it was recognised that the parishes could provide an opportunity and favourable conditions for working with the young; on this account the GC20 removed the idea of parish work being exceptional (cf. SGC, 401); but it insisted that care must be taken in accepting them, so that they do not lead the Congregation away from its main activities which are those of a direct apostolate for the young and of an educational character (cf. SGC, 402).

The GC21 (the number of Salesian parishes were already 1091) speaks about the parish when considering the evangelisation of the young: the parish allows us take our place among the young; in the parish we can evangelise them according to the style of the SEPP (cf. GC21, 135). But the Chapter reaffirmed the priority of the commitment to the apostolate that is directly towards youth (cf. GC21, 136) and spells out the characteristics of a Salesian parish (cf. GC21, 137-141).

2. The parish, a situation changing profoundly

The parish needs to think of itself and act according to the model of the Church presented by Vatican Council II, a Church which is a communion of vocations and charisms at the service

² Regulations for the Parishes (1887) in "DON BOSCO. OPERE EDITE" XXXVI, pag. 257-265.

of the mission of evangelisation and of the transformation of the world according to Christ. But nowadays, the parish as the visible expression of the Church communion in a given geographical area is in a state of profound change. It has to face up to some great challenges:

- From being a parish as a place of religious services to a parish as a place where people are freely welcomed and where there is a significant Gospel experience. In the parish, human relationships should be cultivated, a net-work of relationships and groups fostered in which people feel they are accepted, recognised and encouraged; among other things priority should be given to looking after the poor, to giving a clear and significant witness to the Gospel, with special occasions for experiencing evangelical life.
- From being a parish concerned especially with the faithful who attend regularly to being a missionary parish community which knows how to accompany and support the faithful who are weak and confused, which helps those who are drifting away, and is capable of holding a dialogue with different kinds of non-believers... A community which puts at the centre the all-round development of the individual and of society, capable of offering different styles of religious practice and approaches to the faith.
- From a clerical parish in which lay people are only collaborators to a parish community with co-responsibility for evangelising activity, with a great variety of services and levels of involvement, all inter-related and linked to a common agreed pastoral plan and operating through collaboration and net-working.
- From a self-sufficient and inward-looking parish to a parish open to sharing with the other parishes in the local Church, playing a part of the local area with relationships of collaboration with institutions at the service of human and religious development.

3. The Salesian parish, an expression in the local Church of “Don Bosco’s oratorian criterion”

When one speaks of a “Salesian parish”, one is referring to the *nature of the pastoral care* that is given in it, the particular relationship, within a particular Church, that the SDB offer to it to enrich it in its mission (cf. C. 48).

In our way of speaking there is an expression with which we try to express the fundamental characteristics of the pastoral approach used by Don Bosco at Valdocco, as a permanent criterion for discernment and the renewal of every Salesian work and foundation: “the oratorian criterion”. We find it described in article 40 of the Constitutions: *«Don Bosco lived a pastoral experience in his first oratory which serves as a model; it was for the youngsters a home that welcomed, a parish that evangelised, a school that prepared them for life, and a playground where friends could meet and enjoy themselves»*.

Reading the description of the Oratory at Valdocco which Don Bosco gives us in the “Memoirs of the Oratory”, we see that it was a pastoral community which offered the boys an all-round opportunity for education and evangelisation, for development and catechesis. The parish entrusted to the Salesians ought to reproduce today this charismatic experience of Valdocco and make it an enriching contribution to the pastoral service of the local Church. For this reason it has certain charismatic features which are the foundation of its own life and mission.

4. The Salesian parish as community

The parish is the face of the Church which people encounter near their own homes, the community of the faithful which shares with everyone its life and commitments, trying to be among them a sign of witness and leaven for the Kingdom (cf. ChL 26).

«When therefore Salesians are called by the Bishop to the pastoral care of a particular zone (...), they take on before the Church the responsibility of sharing with the laity the *creation* of a *community* of brethren, united in love to listen to the Word, celebrate the Lord's supper and proclaim the message of salvation» (SGC, 416).

This is also one of the characteristics of the oratorian criterion which in this way strengthens and characterises the communitarian nature of every Salesian parish.

4.1 *Characteristics of the parish community in a parish entrusted to the Salesians*

The parish community in a parish entrusted to the Salesians is identified as:

- A community which in the life of the parish has as its priority *good-quality human relationships*, encouraging opportunities for people to meet together in an atmosphere of acceptance, dialogue, collaboration and concern. It is therefore important to organise the parish community into *groups and smaller communities* where they will be able to communicate more easily, work with more commitment, be really involved, and create among all the groups a visible relationship and a human and social atmosphere in the parish.
- A community which promotes among all the faithful a *sense of belonging*, through their conscious and clear sharing in the pastoral plan which is drawn up, implemented and then assessed with the active participation of everyone, through the quality of the information and communication procedures both within and outside the parish, a participation by the laity that is constantly more co-responsible for evangelisation, for charitable work and for human and social development through the various groups, committees and assemblies.
- A community that takes special care of the *formation of lay people*, encouraging a constant growth in the maturing of their

Christian vocation and promotes among them the various groups of the Salesian Family, and especially the vocation of the Salesian Cooperator.

- A community which *promotes the Church among the young and the people*, showing them its more positive and dynamic aspects, promoting communion and collaboration among all the Christian groups present on the area; an open community, one ready to be a focal point in the area drawing people in and involving many of them in the service of the education and the promotion of all, but especially the poorest young people.³
- A community that accompanies the *family* with special attention, considering it the domestic church and as the active link between the Christian community and the local area. For this reason it promotes among the young people an education for love, gives special attention to those who are engaged to be married, offers newly married couples the opportunity to join a group of couples or family movements, invites the families to collaborate in the education of the faith of their children, etc.

4.2 *The Salesian religious community in the parish entrusted to the Salesians*

“The apostolic mandate which the Church entrusts to us is taken up and put into effect in the first place by the Provincial and local communities. The members have complementary functions and each one of their tasks is important” (C. 44). For this reason GC21 already stated: «The responsible agent of the Salesian parish that which gives it life is the religious community. (...) The chief characteristic of a Salesian parish is that it be administered by a religious community which wants to live its specific mission in the Church» (GC21, 138). And article 26 of the Gener-

³ YOUTH MINISTRY DEPARTMENT, *Salesian Youth Ministry. A basic frame of reference*. Rome 2001, pp. 114-115 (The EPC of the Parish).

al Regulations affirms: «The religious community is responsible for its animation».

Following the directives of the GC24, we can indicate the following specific roles of the Salesian community in the parish community (cf. GC24, 159):

- *bearing witness* to the primacy of God in life and through total dedication to the educative and evangelising mission: being a sign of faith and a school of spirituality for the whole parish community;
- *guaranteeing the Salesian charismatic identity* in the parish: being a vital focal point for the oratorian criterion which ought to inform all the life and activity of the parish community;
- being the *centre of communion and participation*, by its own community life and by its activity in inviting everyone and drawing them in to the mission and the common pastoral plan;
- being *primarily responsible for the spiritual, Salesian and vocational formation* of all.

This implies that it be:

- a *Salesian community united* around its community plan, which recognises the complementary responsibilities of the various confreres especially the Rector and the Parish priest (cf. Reg. 29);
- a community which *clearly shows in the parish its fraternal life and the witness of the evangelical counsels* with its own programme of prayer, time together and relaxation... to which it devotes specific times, and which it also knows how to share with the lay people in the parish community;
- a community which *participates in the life of the parish*, particularly on those special occasions which involve the young people and people's lives...;
- a community which *takes on board the diocesan guidelines for pastoral service*, and contributes the richness of its own pastoral charism.

5. The Salesian parish, centre for evangelisation and education to the faith⁴

The parish is living in a society in profound and rapid change, which is a challenge to it and demands that it proclaims the Gospel and forms believers in the faith.

The specific contribution of the Salesian parish

The Salesian parish should re-create in our days the model of the Oratory at Valdocco, described by Mgr. Frasoni, archbishop of Turin, as the parish of the abandoned boy without a parish.⁵ This requires that the parish be in synthesis:

- *a missionary community*, which tries to make contact with everyone especially the young and those at a distance, often becoming the first meeting place with the Church that is sympathetic and meaningful;
- *an educative community*, which promotes and educates in a familiar and meaningful context where evangelical values are lived, a great variety of educational options are offered and spontaneous personal contact between the young person and the educator is fostered;
- *a Christian community*, which forms in the faith and leads the faithful to take up their own vocation in the Church and in society.

To achieve this the **Salesian parish** needs to ensure the following elements:

- *An welcoming place where the Gospel can be experienced*, especially by youngsters and the ordinary people; a *place* that is welcoming and open not only to the better ones, but to everyone living in the area; a *community* in which it is possible

⁴ YOUTH MINISTRY DEPARTMENT, *Salesian Youth Ministry. A basic frame of reference*. Rome 2001. pp. 117-119.

⁵ GIOVANNI BOSCO. *Memoirs of the Oratory of St. Francis of Sales from 1815 to 1855*. Don Bosco Publications, New Rochelle 1989. Third decade ch. 48.

to experience Gospel values, especially those that are more characteristic of Salesian spirituality: the joy of daily Christian life, hope that knows how to see the positive side of people and of situations, a style of friendliness which encourages communion, etc.

- *An evangelisation project* (the first proclamation) addressed above all to those at a distance, with great educational sensitivity, capable of taking people where they are and arousing in them a desire to open themselves to the faith and to become involved in a continual and progressive faith journey; and this in harmony with the concerns and experience of the daily life of the people, especially the young, uncovering in them the seeds of the Gospel and the action of the Spirit.
- *A continuous and progressive programme of education to the faith*, according to the various levels, but taking special care of the education to the faith of the young and of the families, without reducing catechesis to just preparation for the sacraments. In this programme of education to the faith the Salesian parish promotes a *synthesis between evangelisation and education*: it is necessary to think of an evangelisation that is able to propose the Gospel with educational realism, attentive to the human and cultural values of the context in which the young people are living, and intent on developing those forces that create the conditions for free response, attentive to the methodological processes; an evangelisation which promotes the growth of an effective faith, characterised by a social dimension of charity for the creation of a culture of solidarity, involved in a dialogue with all the different cultural worlds in which the young are living, in order to help them to develop values, criteria of judgement model of life according to the Gospel.
- *Vocational guidance* for the faithful, especially for the young:
 - guiding and accompanying growth in the Christian life, with special attention to assisting families and parents in becoming educators of their children;

- introducing to everyone the different vocations in the Church, with a special look at the Salesian vocation;
- accompanying with particular care the leaders and those with responsibilities for associations and movement, the young adults and those engaged to be married in the maturing process of their vocation;
- making a specific vocational proposal to those young people who are more disposed towards religious and priestly life or the lay ministry;
- promoting in the parish community and in the different groups and movements constant prayer for vocations;
- proposing to lay people the vocation of the Salesian Cooperator and that in different groups of the Salesian Family.⁶

The Salesian Parish ought to be the most effective place for the birth and the accompaniment of vocations of special consecration in the Church, in a special way vocations to Salesian religious life.

6. The Salesian parish's option for youth⁷

In article 26 of the General Regulations we read: «A parish entrusted to the Congregation should be distinguished by its low-income population and its interest in the young, especially those who are poorer». The pastoral care of the young in a Salesian parish should not be considered one of the sectors, but as what characterises the whole life of the parish so that the young feel “at home”.

6.1 *Some significant options*

- *A parish which is linked to places where young people live their lives (a new form of presence in an area).*

⁶ Cf. YOUTH MINISTRY DEPARTMENT, *Salesian Youth Ministry. A basic frame of reference.* Rome 2001, p. 119.

⁷ Cf. YOUTH MINISTRY DEPARTMENT, *Salesian Youth Ministry. A basic frame of reference.* Rome 2001, pp. 119-121.

Nowadays the places where people have their homes don't always coincide with the places where they "live their lives", that is where they form a group, make friends, acquire criteria for behaving etc. This is especially the case with the young, who create their own living spaces where they are happy to share their time, plans and affection... (the street, their friends, the night-time, the disco, and nowadays also virtual space...). These places become reference points for life, often much more important than the family or the neighbourhood. The Salesian parish needs to find its own place in this new form of local presence, going out to meet the young in their own living spaces and also becoming a significant place of reference for them, an open welcoming community in which the young can live their own lives and feel in charge of them.

– *A parish which helps the young to meet with Christ.*

The view the young have of the parish is more likely that of an organisation or a structure than of "the face of Christ"; and so they keep away. To help the young to meet with Jesus the following are important:

- *a witness of Christian life*, both personal and communitarian: a life which offers models as alternatives to a "worldly" life, superficial and selfish (adult communities: groups, movements, associations...);
- *significant experiences of faith*: such as a school of prayer, special attention to the Word of God through an introduction to *Lectio divina*, the importance of the Sunday Mass, a strong incarnated spirituality, various possibilities for generous and self-less service of the poorest;
- the opportunity for *groups, movements and youth communities*, in which the young are accompanied in the maturing process of their life of faith, according to the project of Christian life offered by Don Bosco (Salesian Spirituality), fostering the communion and the coordination of all these groups in the Salesian Youth Movement.

– *A parish that opts for the educational approach.*

A Salesian parish should be one that encourages the process of the human development and the promotion of people and of the environment, ensuring the Christian formation of conscience, an education to values, care for the poorest and the marginalised; a parish that in all its activities and programmes tries to ensure a planned approach and continuity; a parish that establishes a relationship of close dialogue and collaboration with the various educational and social institutions in the same local area.

In its educational option the Salesian parish ought to give special *attention to the family*, as the primary place for education and for education to the faith. For this reason it will give special attention to:

- the period of engagement to be married, providing the couples, especially those better disposed, a real faith journey, directed towards the vocational option of Christian marriage;
- the setting up of parents' groups and the encouragement of family movements in which parents can share and help each other in their responsibility for education; in a special way it is important to encourage meetings of groups of young couples so that they can continue the process begun while they were engaged;
- the involvement of the parents in the process of the catechesis and sacramental preparation of their children.

6.2 *The Oratory-Youth Centre in a Salesian parish*

The GC21 declared: «Here we re-affirm that the Oratory Youth Ministry is for us Salesians, “a necessary and irreplaceable element” of our presence in the parish» (GC21, 139).

The Oratory is a very welcoming place with a project that is able to offer programmes suited to different levels of human and Christian growth and formation; for this reason the Oratory-Youth Centre is the missionary method of the Christian commu-

nity with regard to young people, a bridge between the street and the church, between the religious world and the civil one. It achieves this through:

- the promotion of a variety of groups, associations and communities according to the interests of the young and linked together;
- the variety and the nature of the educational and education to the faith programmes, according to the needs and the expectations of the young people;
- the missionary outreach, with proposals for meetings and dialogue with the young people in the local area, with their families, and net-working with other educational, ecclesiastical and social bodies.

7. Some important operative aspects

7.1 *The involvement of the Salesian community in the animation of the parish*

«The responsible agent of the Salesian parish, that which gives it life is the religious community» (GC21, 138; cf. also Reg. 26). This community:

- clearly lives out its own Salesian religious identity and the missionary zeal, as a witness and as a specific contribution to the building up of the parish community;
- has a sensitivity and special attention for young people, promoting them also in the parish community;
- promotes, together with the parish priest, the drawing up and the implementation of the Salesian Pastoral Plan of the Parish, also taking on board the guidelines of the diocesan pastoral programme;
- collaborates with the parish priest in the spiritual formation and animation of the faithful with its pastoral mission;
- helps the members of the Salesian Family, especially the Cooperators, to be the first collaborators of the parish priest.

7.2 *A unified, global and shared plan*

The Pastoral Plan of the parish ought to be simple, practical and shared by all; it ought to indicate the priorities and the aims that every one according to their own role and function, commit themselves to implementing during a fixed period of time. Few priorities, very practical and well organised in a series of steps easily assessed, shared by all so that there is unity, coherence and convergence in all the proposals, groups and the activities of the various sectors of the parish. It is therefore important that in the drawing up of the plan as many people as possible are involved under the guidance of the Pastoral Council.

Various groups of Provinces have provided some pointers to help the parish communities draw up their own Pastoral Plan.⁸

7.3 *Welcome and participation*

In a Salesian parish the welcome ought to be the first contact with the Gospel of Jesus and participation in the process so as to feel motivated to form part of it. For this there is need to:

- Take care of those occasions for welcoming people who turn to the parish for whatever reason: in the parish office, for the celebration of certain sacraments or popular feast days, for funerals, etc.
- Establish an information service that is quick and appropriate which reaches as many people as possible so that all feel interested, invited, and involved.
- Organise the parish into groups, communities and teams, which help people to become involved, to take the lead, making sure that everyone knows and shares the values and the basic lines of the pastoral plan of the parish.

⁸ CISI, *Linee ed elementi per un progetto di parrocchia affidata ai salesiani*. Roma 1995
CONFERENZA IBERICA, *Propuesta educativo-pastoral de las parroquias confiadas a los salesianos*. Madrid 1992.

Cf. also what is proposed in YOUTH MINISTRY DEPARTMENT, *Salesian Youth Ministry. A basic frame of reference*. Rome 2001 (pp. 112-121 and for the methodological aspect pp. 171-175)

- Facilitate in the parish a specific place for meeting and involvement on the part of the young according to their different ages and a positive sharing between them and the adults.
- Make good use of the Pastoral Council as an expressive sign of communion and participation in the parish, and give priority to its role of calling together, coordinating and animating the entire parish community.⁹

7.4 *Promoting in the parish a profound spiritual life centred on the Word, on the sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation and on devotion to Our Blessed Lady*

In a secularised society and culture, or in a pluri-religious context, the witness of holiness is the convincing proclamation and the most effective way to lead to conversion, especially for the young. The Salesian parish therefore should promote among the faithful an intense spiritual life inspired in its proposal of the Christian life by what Don Bosco handed down to us, Salesian Spirituality. Particular occasions for this spiritual life are:

- the contact of the faithful with the Word of God through a “school of prayer”, where the faithful, especially the young, learn to listen to the Word of God, to let it enlighten their own lives, and to begin a personal relationship with the Lord;
- the meeting with Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, in particular in the Sunday Mass, celebrated in a festive atmosphere, with an educational aspect which helps the faithful to enter gradually into the mystery, through an active, conscious and genuine participation;
- the sacrament of Reconciliation, through the use of a real education that introduces the faithful, especially the young, to the appreciation and the practice of Christian forgiveness;
- devotion to Our Lady, as the Mother and Teacher of the parish community.

⁹ Cf. YOUTH MINISTRY DEPARTMENT, *Salesian Youth Ministry. A basic frame of reference*. Rome 2001, pp. 115-116 (some criteria).

7.5 The formation of the SDB and of lay people

The ongoing formation of the SDB and of the lay people is a priority of the Congregation confirmed by the GC24: the Salesian parish ought to take up this priority with determination. Only lay people and Salesians who are living with a renewed conviction in their own vocational identity and are developing their own skills will be able to take the lead in the mission and be agents of a cultural and pastoral change. For this it is necessary to:

- Draw up a formation plan, for both the SDB and the lay people with co-responsibility, as part of the EPP of the Parish which ensures a systematic and continuous process of spiritual, pastoral and Salesian formation.¹⁰
- Promote frequent and systematic meetings for parish clergy and SDB involved in parish ministry, at Provincial and also inter-Provincial level, as a means for formation, awareness, sharing and collaboration.

7.6 Provincial Coordination

The GC19 speaking about the parish made this deliberation: “Let there be set up at the central headquarters, at regional level and where necessary at interprovincial level, centres of consultation for the parochial apostolate where initiatives can be studied, co-ordination be planned of the pastoral activity of Salesians and relationships be established with the bishops’ conferences and with diocesan ordinaries individually” (AGC244 p 133). In its turn the SGC asked that these centres of consultation for the parish apostolate be improved and become more effective (cf. SGC, 441).

Following this directive nowadays it is still very urgent to promote in every Province the coordination of the parish area which fosters:

- the development in the Salesian local and Provincial communities of a mentality that is more attentive to the situa-

¹⁰ The GC24 offers precise guidelines on the objectives to be reached in this joint formation (cf. GC24, 140).

tion of the parishes within the overall Salesian presence in an area;

- reflection on and further examination of the Salesian identity of the parish also in relation to the ecclesial and social situation of the area, offering to the parish communities practical guidelines which may help them to live their Salesian identity;
- communication and collaboration between the different parishes in the Province;
- the ongoing formation of the SDB and the lay people responsible for the parish pastoral work (meetings, courses...).

4. ACTIVITIES OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

4.1 Chronicle of the Rector Major

– *September 2006*

The Rector Major began this period in the *Vice-Province of Angola*, which was celebrating the 25th anniversary of the arrival of the first Salesians. Accompanied by the Superior of the Vice-Province, Fr Guillermo Basaños, Fr Chávez visited the huge area of Lixeira, to greet the three communities of the Parish of St Joseph of Nazareth; he inaugurated the Don Bosco Centre (CEDBES) which, in addition to our own post-novices, provides courses for other men and women religious and also lay people who study philosophy or the educational sciences. He took part also in the ceremony at Ondjango, in which the parents of two confreres about to make their perpetual profession formally consigned their sons to the Congregation. Later he went by road to Dondo, where he was received by a large and festive crowd, eager to welcome Don Bosco's Successor. A Mass followed for the Salesians and pre-novices, and the day ended with the "Good night" to a group of catechists from Calulo, Ndalatando and Dondo.

On the following day the Rector Major presided at a Mass for all the parishioners and the personnel of the school at Dondo before leaving by helicopter with a group of Salesians for Calulo. After the traditional welcome Fr Chávez visited Faque, the place where Fr Marco Aurelio Fonseca had been assassinated and where representatives of three Christian communities had come together for a prayer celebration before visiting the cemetery to pray at the tomb of Fr Fonseca and the young Angolan who had died with him. This was followed by lunch with the Salesian Family of Calulo, after which he returned once again by helicopter to Luanda, this time to the Don Bosco School of Lixeira for an encounter with the members of the Salesian Youth Movement. The day came to an end with supper at the headquarters of the Vice-Province with a supper and "Good night" for the superiors of communities.

On Sunday, 3 September, in the playground of the Don Bosco School of Lixeira, the Rector Major presided at the Jubilee Mass at which more than 5,000 persons

took part, including representatives of all the works of the Vice-Province, of men and women religious of other Congregations and Institutes, and of the civil authorities. During the Mass Fr Chávez received the perpetual profession of two Angolan confreres, and gave to a third confrere (Pedro Sachitula) his formal mandate as a missionary in Papua New Guinea. Lunch followed in the School of St Joseph of Cluny, and in the afternoon Fr Chávez went on to the Parish of St Paul. Here he had a meeting with the Angolan Salesian Family and greeted the Bishop of Cabinda, Mgr. Filomeno Vieira, before going on to Cacucaco, the headquarters of the FMA in Angola; there he was welcomed by the Superior, Sr. Zvonka Mikec, and by a group of Sisters from all the works. With them he celebrated evening prayer, had supper and gave the "Good night".

On Monday, 4 September, the Rector Major spent the morning at Viana, where he began with an address to the students attending our Study Centre. This was followed by a meeting with Salesians, Salesian Sisters and volunteers, to whom he offered a reflection to launch a retreat, before celebrating holy Mass and having

lunch. In the afternoon he went on to Lixeira for a meeting with some 400 teachers, educators and those engaged in remedial work. On returning to the Salesian headquarters he received a visit from the Archbishop of Luanda, Mgr. Damião Antonio Franklin. They had supper together with the Rectors and members of the Vice-Provincial Council, and the evening concluded with a "Good night".

On the following day after Mass and breakfast, Fr Chávez left for the airport. He reached Rome at midnight.

After pausing for a day for some necessary office work, the Rector Major left once again at midnight of Wednesday 6 September, to visit the *Vice-Province of French-speaking West Africa* (AFO).

The visit began on Thursday 7 at Lomé, in Togo, where Fr Chávez, after being welcomed at the airport by the Superior of the Vice-Province, Fr Manuel Jiménez, was able to meet the majority of the Salesians of the Vice-Province who had gathered in the "Maison Don Bosco", the post-novitiate house. This was followed by a meeting with the Superior and his Council, and the day ended with evening prayer and a "Good night".

On the following day Fr Chávez left with the Provincial for Kprogan to preside at a Mass during which he received the perpetual profession of three confreres of the Vice-Province and the first profession of 29 new African Salesians, 5 from Tropical Equatorial Africa (ATE), 13 from English-speaking West Africa (AFW) and 11 from French-speaking West Africa (AFO).

After lunch at the Gbodjomé novitiate he made a courtesy visit to the Archbishop of Lomé, Mgr. Philippe Fanoko Kprodzro, at his residence and then went on to preside at a Marian celebration in the parish of Mary Help of Christians followed by a meeting with representatives of the Salesian Family of Togo.

On Saturday 9 September the Rector Major presided at a Mass for all the young confreres in formation, including those who had made their first profession on the previous day; he received Fr José Antonio Vega, Superior of the ATE Vice-Province, and gave a conference to all those in formation and their guides. He then left for Cotonou, Bénin, where he arrived about 1.30 p.m. and was welcomed by the Bénin confreres and the young people of the Professional Training Centre.

In the evening he had a meeting with the Salesian Family and later with the young participants in the Forum of the Salesian Youth Movement of the entire Province, animated by the youth pastoral team of the Salesians and the FMA. With them he had a lengthy conversation with many questions and answers; supper and a cultural entertainment was followed by the "Good night" that brought the day to a close.

On Sunday 10, Fr Chávez presided at the Mass for the parish community of St Anthony of Padua, which was also the closing event of the first SYM Forum. He then left for Porto Novo where he visited the "Michael Magone" Centre and the Don Bosco reception hostel, the first stage of the project for street-children. In the evening in the parish of St Francis Xavier he had a meeting with various groups, movements and associations of the parish before returning to Cotonou.

In the morning of 11 September he left for the Ivory Coast where he was welcomed at the airport by the Rector and confreres of the Abidjan-Koumassi community, by the FMA Provincial, Sr Teresita Villegas, and by members of the Salesian Family. At midday he went to the FMA Provincial house,

and was given a wonderful reception by the Sisters and novices. He had lunch with them, visited the reception centre for girls in difficulties, and in the afternoon gave a conference to the Salesians and FMA on eucharistic spirituality and the consecrated life. He then visited the Magone Foyer for boys who were abandoned or at risk, and later met with the young people and said Mass with them.

The day ended at the Provincial house with supper and a happy informal get-together with the Salesians.

On the following day the Rector Major celebrated Mass for the Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. He visited the cathedral and the Marian Sanctuary of "Our Lady of Peace", and in the evening left by air to return to Rome.

Fr Chávez spent Wednesday 13 September in office work at headquarters. He had a meeting with his Vicar and some other confreres, and in the evening held a Council meeting with those members present in Rome. On Thursday 14 he gave the "Good night" to those taking part in the seminar on Mamma Margaret and on the following day gave the "Good night" also to the community of the Generalate.

From 16 to 20 September the Rector Major visited the *Province of Peru*. On his arrival at Lima he received an honorary decoration from the Mayor of the town of Callao, followed by a welcoming reception from the educative community of the School of St Francis de Sales at Breña. On Sunday 17 he presided at Mass in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians during which he received the promise of several new Cooperators, and then had meetings successively with a group of young people gathered for a prayer vigil, with members of the SYM, and with the Salesian Family. In the evening he went on to Piura, where he was welcomed first at the airport, then in the church of Mary Help of Christians, and finally at Bosconia. On Monday 18 he presided at the Mass to commemorate the centenary of Salesian work in Piura, and had a meeting with young people representing all the works of the Province. After a press conference he had a meeting with the confreres and took part in a cultural event marking the centenary, at the end of which he gave the traditional "Good night". Tuesday 19 saw him back in Lima for a meeting with young confreres in formation at Magdalena del Mar, after which he gave a television in-

interview, had a meeting with missionaries and numerous confreres of the Province, presided at a Mass in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians for all the Salesian Family of Peru, and after supper had a meeting with the Provincial Council. On the following day he celebrated Mass in the Provincial house of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians before leaving for Bolivia.

From 20 to 24 September Fr Chávez visited the *Province of Bolivia*. On the first day he had a meeting at Santa Cruz with the Rectors and Provincial Council, presided at a Mass for them and for the Salesian Family of eastern Bolivia, had a meeting with young people from our works of that area, another meeting with confreres of eastern Bolivia, and visited the work "Hogares Chicos de la Calle". He then left for Cochabamba, where he met the formation communities of the Province at Fatima, followed by a meeting with the confreres of Cochabamba, Independencia, Kami, and Sucre; he presided at a Mass for them and for the Salesian Family in that part of the country. Finally he met with young people gathered from all over Bolivia in the Cochabamba stadium. In the late evening he

went on to La Paz and Calacoto. On Saturday 23, after a meeting with the academic authorities, teachers and students of the Salesian University, he met with young representatives of our works in the Bolivian high plateau in the assembly hall of the Don Bosco College at La Paz, and subsequently with the confreres of the same area. In the evening at Calacoto he had a meeting with the Provincial Council and celebrated Mass in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians for all the Salesian Family.

Between 24 and 27 September the Rector Major visited the *Province of Chile*. The visit began at the airport of Iquique where Fr Chávez's aircraft made a technical stop on its flight to Santiago, and the SDB and FMA local educative communities were able to welcome the Rector Major. On his arrival at the airport of the capital itself he was welcomed by representatives of all branches of the Salesian Family, and later met many more of them in the "La Gratitude Nacional" College, where he received the Apostolic Nuncio, the Archbishop of Santiago, Card. Francisco Javier Errázuriz, the President of the Chilean Episcopal Conference and the Salesian Bishops. On Monday

25, at Catemu, the Rector Major was received by the town's mayor as a guest of honour, by confreres of the Province and by representatives of the educative community of Catemu. Subsequently he joined a large number of confreres who had gathered to celebrate the Provincial Community Day; he celebrated Mass and had lunch with them. In the evening he returned to Santiago for a meeting with the Rectors. The following day, at the "Cardenal Raúl Silva Henríquez" University he gave a conference, followed by a dialogue with the participants and an interview with the mass media of the Chilean Church. Immediately afterwards he presided at the ceremony by which the Chilean Bishops Conference entrusted the "Raúl Silva Henríquez" Catholic University to the Chilean Salesian Province. After lunch, at which members of numerous ecclesiastical and civil authorities were present, Fr Chávez returned to the Provincial house for a meeting with the young members of the SYM gathered in the gymnasium of the "Gratitud Nacional" College. This was followed by a meeting with the Provincial Council, and the day ended in the Provincial house of the FMA where he met Sisters from all the communi-

ties, shared with them evening prayer and supper, and gave the "Good night". On Wednesday 27 he said Mass in the postnovitiate house of Lo Cañas, with confreres from all the formation communities and every stage of the formation process. On his way to the airport for the return flight to Rome he visited the elderly confreres resident in the Philip Rinaldi house and also greeted the educative community of the "Camilo Ortúzar Montt" Salesian Institute.

On Thursday 28 he reached the Generalate once more, and on the following day visited Mgr. Angelo Amato who was in hospital.

Fr Chávez left Rome again on Saturday 30 about midday for Turin, to take part in the preparation of the DVD presenting the Strenna for 2007. He took the opportunity to give the "Good night" in the Basilica to the SDB and FMA communities of Valdocco, and later to those taking part in the National Convention of the Past-pupils.

– October 2006

On Sunday 1 October the Rector Major met at Colle Don Bosco with the new missionaries, gave a conference to those taking part in the

Harambée ceremony, and presided at Mass for the departure of the missionaries.

Returning to headquarters, he presided between October 2 and 10 at meetings of the *intermediate session* of the General Council. As is always the case, these days were interspersed also with visits of Salesian bishops and other confreres, with official commitments such as the Mass inaugurating the academic year of the Auxilium on Wednesday 4, the presidency of the "Curatorium of the UPS" on Saturday 7, an audience with the Secretary of State, Card. Tarcisio Bertone on Monday 9, and the inauguration of the academic year of the UPS, where the Cardinal presided at the Mass and the Rector Major gave the inaugural address.

On Wednesday 11 October he received some members of the Council, various missionaries and Mgr. Maroun Elias Lahham, Bishop of Tunis.

After lunch on Thursday 12 Fr Chávez left for a visit to *Madagascar and Mauritius* which lasted until 21 October. On his arrival in Mauritius on the way to Madagascar, he met with the pupils of the "Saint Montfort" Centre, of the St Gabriel College and with the per-

sonnel of three centres for technical training. In *Madagascar*, between Saturday 14 and Monday 16 he had various meetings: with young members of the SYM, with confreres of the Vice-Province, with the postnovitiate community, and with the FMA – all this at Fianarantsoa. At Mahajanga he visited the whole complex of works of the Don Bosco Centre; with the local Mayor and the Bishop of Mahajanga he inaugurated the "Don Bosco Highway" and a monument to the Saint. Afterwards he had a meeting with the Cooperators. On the following day, Wednesday 18, he presided at the Mass, conversed with them, answered their questions and blessed the foundation stone of the Oratory. Thursday 19 was the day for the official celebration of the 25th anniversary of the beginning of Salesian work in *Madagascar*. At the Mass the Bishop of Ambatondrazaka, Mgr. Antonio Scopellitti, presided with Mgr. Gaetano Di Pierro, Bishop of Moramanga, and Mgr. Raymond Razakarinvony, Bishop of Miari-narivo, concelebrating and the presence of many Superiors of Congregations and Orders, diocesan priests and thousands of youngsters. Among those present were also the Apostolic Nuncio, Mgr. Augustine Kasujja, the Prime

Minister, Jacques Sylla, the President of the National Assembly with other civil and military authorities. After the celebration, the youngsters of the "Our Lady of Clairvaux" Centre and of the FMA presented in song, dance and costumes, the life and story of Salesian work in Madagascar. In the evening the Rector Major visited the premises of Radio Don Bosco, had a meeting with the Rectors of the Vice-Province, and then went on to Ambohidratrimo to visit the novitiate. The following morning he presided at the Mass during which a Malagasi confrere made his perpetual profession and a number of Salesian Cooperators made the Promise. Later he met with the Salesian Family in the Provincial house of the FMA and inaugurated the new dining room in the Clairvaux Centre. Later in the evening he left again for *Mauritius* to meet the Bishop, Mgr. Maurice Piat, who had come to install the new Rector, Fr Vittorio Costanzo; the following morning he met with the personnel of the Oratory, and in the evening of Saturday 21 left on his journey back to Rome.

On Sunday 22 about midday the Rector Major reached the Generalate again and for the next two

days was engaged with office work, receiving some Salesian bishops and various other confreres who had come to see him. In the afternoon of Thursday 25, he went to Milan where he was received by the Provincial, Fr Agostino Sosio, and the Vice-Provincial, who took him to Arese for the celebration of the golden jubilee of the Salesian Centre there. He greeted the confreres of the house for the sick and elderly, had supper with the two communities and was present at the entertainment that had been prepared in the Oratory theatre and concluded with his "Good night". The following day he presided at the community Mass and took part in the Convention on "Professional formation and youthful distress", with a conference on the theme: "*Salesian professional formation in the world: an educative success*". Later in the evening he returned to headquarters in Rome.

From Saturday 28 to Tuesday 31, Fr Chávez was engaged in the usual office work. During this time he received the BMA Provincial Economist, the Provincial of Hungary Fr Jozsef Havasi, various Councillors, the Postulator General Fr Enrico Dal Covolo, and other confreres.

– November 2006

Fr Chávez began the month of November by presiding at the Mass of the Community of the Generalate for the Solemnity of All Saints, and later on the same day he received the FMA Provincial of the Piedmontese and Val d'Aosta Province, and then his Vicar, Fr Adriano Bregolin.

Early in the morning of the following day, he went with the members of the General Council to the chapel of the Salesian cemetery at the Catacombs of St Callistus to pray for our deceased confreres, and in particular for the former Rector Majors who are buried there, Fr Luigi Ricceri, Fr Egidio Viganò and Fr Juan E. Vecchi. They then had breakfast with the San Tarcisio community and visited the St Callistus community before returning to the Generalate. At midday there was a meeting with the Council members present in Rome.

On Friday 3, with his Vicar he received the new Rector of the Community of the Catacombs of St Callistus, Fr Tadeusz Rozmus.

The following morning he received the Rector Magnificus of the UPS, Fr Mario Toso, followed by a number of confreres of the community and some missionaries.

From Monday 6 to Saturday 11 the Rector Major was at Krakow to preach a retreat to the Provincials, Provincial Councilors and Rectors of the four Polish Provinces and the Eastern Circumscription. In between his retreat conferences he was able to speak privately with each of the Provincials and with some of the other retreatants; there were also some other items worthy of note: he was invited to lunch by the Archbishop of Krakow, Card. Stanislaw Dziwisz, and he went to visit the young postnovices and the students of theology, who were making their own retreat at Skomielna Czana.

On Saturday 11 November he was back at headquarters in Rome and was able to take part in the final phase of the World Congress of Salesian Cooperators, with a talk on the theme of the Congress.

On Sunday 12 he presided at the closing Mass of the Congress and then went with the participants to St Peter's Basilica to receive at the tomb of St Peter the renewal of the Promise of the Cooperators; the whole group then remained in St Peter's Square for the Angelus prayer and greeting of the Holy Father.

On the Monday and Tuesday following, he received various indi-

viduals and groups: Salesian Co-operators from the Guadalajara Province of Mexico, some of the General Councillors, the Procurator and Postulator Generals, and a reporter of the Review "30 Days" to whom he gave an interview.

On Wednesday 15, in the premises of the Union of Superiors General (USG), Fr Chávez presided at a meeting of the USG Theological Commission, before going on to the Salesian community in the Vatican where he gave an interview for the newspaper "L'Avvenire". At 12.30 in the community chapel, there was a brief but significant celebration during which the Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, Card. Saraiva Martins, read the *Decree on the heroicity of the life and virtues and also the reputation for holiness of Mamma Margaret*, and formally consigned the Decree to the Rector Major. He then remained with the community for lunch at which were present also the Secretary of State, Card. Tarcisio Bertone, and Fr Raphael Farina whose appointment as a Bishop had been publicly made known at midday.

On Thursday 15 he had a meeting with the Councillors present in Rome, and in the evening took part in the inaugural session of the

Seminar "*Europe - Mission Territory*", organized by the Departments for Youth Ministry and for the Missions, and at which he gave the opening address.

The following day found Fr Chávez fully occupied with USG matters; in the morning in a meeting of the "Group of 16" (the USG, UISG and CIVCSVA Executive Councils), and in the afternoon in a further meeting of the two Executive Councils.

On Saturday and Sunday 18 and 19 the Rector Major continued his participation in the Seminar "*Europe - Mission Territory*", using the intervals to receive some individual participants and also Bishop Carlos Ximenes Belo.

On Monday 20, he presided at the closing Mass of the Seminar and then took part in a meeting of the USG Executive Council. In the afternoon he gave an interview for Vatican Radio and later went on to the "Ersilia Canta" house of the FMA for a meeting with the Sisters of that community. On the following day he received the Superior of the ITM Vice-Province.

From Wednesday 22 to Friday 24 the Rector Major took part in the General Meeting of the USG which took place at the Salesianum, as in the previous five years. On the final day of the meeting Fr Chávez

was himself elected as USG President,

In the evening he took part in the celebration by the Generalate community in honour of Mamma Margaret, at which were also present Mother Antonia Colombo and her Council.

In the afternoon of Saturday 25, he presided at a meeting of a group of specialists in the history, pedagogy and spirituality of the Congregation.

The remaining few days of November the Rector Major spent at the Salesian house of Monteor-tone.

4.2 Chronicle of the General Councillors

The Vicar of the Rector Major

At the end of the summer session of the General Council, the Vicar of the Rector Major, together with the Regional Councillor Fr Helvécio Baruffi, left for Asunción, where he presided at the installation of the Provincial of Paraguay, Fr Walter Jara. On that occasion he had a meeting with the Provin-

cial Council to discuss some of the problems of the Province, and he also had a meeting with the Rectors of the Salesian houses about the same issues. During his visit he had the opportunity to meet the Salesian Family of the Province, the young confreres in the post-novitae and also the Novices in the House of Fernando de la Mora. He also went to Lambaré, to the "Don Bosco Roga" centre, where our confreres dedicate themselves to welcoming and educating street children. In this house there was also an Assembly of the Confreres of the Province and a discussion with the Vicar about various problems of the Province.

After a short stay at the Provincial House in San Paolo, Brazil, he returned to Rome.

On 15 August, since the Rector Major was absent, he concelebrated with the Holy Father who according to a now well established custom went to visit our Salesian parish in Castel Gandolfo.

On 16 August he arrived in Paris and from the 17 he preached a Retreat to the French Confreres at the Bellefontaine Abbey, in Brittany. During this week he was able to pay a brief visit to the Salesian Community and the Agricultural School in Pouillé. After the Retreat he stayed a few days in Paris and

among other things was able to visit the Salesian houses in the city.

He then had a short break and returned to Rome on 8 September.

On 25 September he gave a talk to the General Council of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and on Saturday 30 he went to Turin to attend the National Past Pupils' Congress..

Between 2 and 11 October he took part in the work of the *intermediate session* of the General Council at the Generalate.

On 13 he went to Potenza for the celebrations for the 25th anniversary of the presence of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and the following day, 15 October, he left for Santo Domingo to take part in the meeting of Delegates of the Salesian Family in the Inter-america Region. On 19 he went on to Puerto Rico - Aibonito, where he had a meeting with the Provincials of the same Region, with whom he also considered the topic of the Salesian Family and discussed some issues of government relating to the Provinces of the Region. On 22 he returned to Rome.

On 24 October he left for Dar-Es-Salam, Tanzania. Here with the World Delegates of the Cooperators and the Past Pupils, he chaired a meeting of the Provincials of Africa and Madagascar Re-

gion. Afterwards on 28 he went to the postnovitiate at Moshi, where he met the formation team and the young confreres. Then on 29 he went on to Nairobi. At the Provincial house in the evening he met the Salesian confreres and the FMA from the city and from the neighbouring communities. The following day, 30 October, he went to visit the Salesian communities in Nairobi - DBYES, Nairobi - Boys Town and Nairobi - Bosco Boys. In the afternoon he was also able to visit the Studentate of Theology in Nairobi Utume. After his visit, on 31 October he returned to Rome.

Between 9 and 12 November he took part in the *World Congress of Cooperators*. In the afternoon of 12 he left for the Philippines. At Manila on 14 and 15 he had a meeting with the Rectors of the North Philippines Province; afterwards he also had a meeting with the Provincial Council and the Formation Commission. He went to the Studentate of Theology at Parañaque, where he had a meeting with the Formation Community and with the Teaching Staff of the Study Centre. In the evening he paid a visit to the Community of Muntinlupa, which looks after street children.

On 16 he went to Cebu. Also in this Province of South Philippines

he had a meeting with the Provincial Council. He visited the houses of Pasil, Bacolod - Granada and Cebu - Don Bosco Technology Centre. Here he was able to meet the young aspirants, prenovices and novices as well as the Confreres from the houses in the city.

On 17 he left the Philippines for Hong Kong. A series of flight delays meant that the journey took all day, and so he lost the opportunity of meeting the youngsters of the Chinese Province gathered together at Ocean Park for the closure of the Centenary of the arrival of the Salesians in China.

Early in the morning on 18 November he went to the Hong Kong - Salesian House of Studies, where he stopped and also greeted the elderly and sick confreres of the Province. Afterwards he was taken to "Tang King Po School", where he had a meeting with the Salesian Family. In the afternoon at the Parish of St. Anthony, he took part in the Centenary closing ceremony and the Concelebration, at which Cardinal Joseph Zen presided. After this moment of prayer there was a meeting with the young people of the Salesian Youth Movement. Then in the evening he was guest of honour at a festive meal organised for the whole Salesian Family, with a large

number of Cooperators, Past Pupils, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and Salesians.

The following day having gone by sea to Macao, he met the local Salesian Family and in the afternoon attended the Centenary Closing Ceremony at the "Yuet Wah College". He concelebrated with the Bishop of Macao, in the presence of a large number of young people of the Salesian Youth Movement from the City.

In the evening with all the Salesian Family in Macao he attended a festive meal prepared for the occasion.

Leaving Hong Kong on the evening of 21 November, he arrived in Rome the following day.

From the afternoon of 22 with the Rector Major he attended the Assembly of the Union of Superiors General. After the opening of the plenary session of the General Council, on 7 December he went to Spain, to Madrid, where in the Community of Escorial he took part in the National Congress of Cooperators in Spain.

The Councillor for Formation

On 2 September at Venice-Mestre the General Councillor for

Formation presided at the celebration for the beginning of the term of office of Fr Eugenio Riva as Provincial of the North East Italy Province. He then took part in the Provincial Assembly, with which he opened the *Extraordinary Visitation of the INE Province*, carried out in the name of the Rector Major which was to occupy him for the major part of these months.

On 8 September he received the First Profession of the novices in Genzano and on 17 September at Verona he received the Perpetual Professions of the confreres from the INE Province. As part of the Extraordinary Visitation he went to Romania and Moldavia to meet the communities and confreres there.

On 29 September he took part in the installation of the new Rector of the International formation community in Rome "Gerini - Students UPS". On 7 October he took part in the "Curatorium" of the UPS and on 10 October in the inauguration of the Academic Year. Between 28 November and 2 December he visited the International formation community in Jerusalem, and also chaired there the "Curatorium". On 16 December in Rome he chaired the "Curatorium" of the "Gerini" Community.

Throughout this period, as Moderator of the GC26, he assisted and accompanied the Provinces in the preparation and celebration of the Provincial Chapters.

The Councillor for Youth Ministry

When the plenary session of the General Council finished, on 30 July the Councillor for Youth Ministry took part in León (Spain) in a Course for new Rectors, organised by the Iberian Conference, and presented the topic of the Rector as the animator of an apostolic community. Then on the 3 and 4 August he was with the priests of the quinquennium from the Spanish Provinces, meeting in Salamanca, speaking about priestly spirituality.

Dominic Sequeira, in the name of the Department took part in the "Asian Youth Day", held in Hong Kong between 29 July and 5 August and then on 6 August met with Salesians and the young leaders of the SYM from the Provinces of East-Asia, present at the meeting.

Between 6 and 20 August the Councillor accompanied the Rector Major for some days of rest at Les Combes (Valle d'Aosta) and

with him on 16 August at Colle Don Bosco took part in the celebration of the anniversary of Don Bosco's birth.

Having returned to Rome, between 29 and 31 August he took part in the Assembly of the Roman Province at Arcinazzo presenting the topic "Animating Presence among the young", and on 2-3 September in that of the Liguria-Tuscany Province at Genoa-Sampierdarena, at which he developed the topic "Proposal for a youth and vocational ministry of quality". On 6 September at Turin-Valdocco he had a meeting with the Provincial Commission for the Salesian places, to consider together ways of developing in a more coordinated and co-involving manner the Colle and Valdocco project, in the light of the Rector Major's invitation to prepare for the bi-centenary of the birth of Don Bosco in 2015.

On 22 September the Councillor travelled to Ghana, where he took part in the annual meeting of the Youth Ministry Commission of the CIVAM, which took place in Ashaiman. There he led the reflection on the identity of the Salesian parish and other pastoral themes. In the meantime, between 1 and 3 October, Dominic Sequeira was taking part in the "*Board and*

Council of the DBYA-SA" at Mumbai (India).

On 13 October at a meeting of DBN, together with the Councillor for the Missions, the Councillor presented a document on Salesian Volunteer Service to those in charge of Mission Offices and those responsible for the Salesian NGO. Between 21 and 26 October in Cairo (Egypt) he took part in a meeting of the Rectors and those in charge of Youth Ministry in the MOR Province, to examine with them the progress made in the pastoral animation of the Province.

In the context of the Department, on 10 November Carlos Garulo left to visit the Salesian Colleges in the Provinces of Guwahati, Dimapur and Calcutta, a task which occupied him until 7 December. On his part, José Luis Anguiano between 9 and 12 November was in Lisbon taking part in a meeting of the Team for European Schools and Salesian Vocational Training centres.

Between 16 and 20 November at the Salesianum Fr. Antonio Domenech, with Fr. Francis Alencherry, presided at the Seminar "*Europe mission territory*", organised by the two Departments for Youth Ministry and for the Missions. It was attended by 130 Salesians, as well as some FMA

and lay collaborators from all the Provinces in Europe.

During the weekend 24-26 November Dominic Sequeira took part in the 2nd Assembly of SYM-Europe, held in Groot-Bijgaarden (Belgium).

The Councillor for Social Communication

Between 21 and 25 August, the Councillor for Social Communication paid a visit to Guwahati and Shillong, in the Guwahati Province (ING). Between 26 and 30 August he took part in the meeting of the World Consultative Body for Social Communication at New Delhi (INN), and a day with the members of *BOSCOM* ("Bosco Communication") from the Region and a visit to some of the communities. Later, between 10 and 12 September he visited the Antilles Province (ANT); and then between 12 and 16 Guatemala and El Salvador, in the Central America Province (CAM). Afterwards, he took part in a meeting of Provincials and Delegates for SC from the America South Cone Region at Ypacaray (PAR), between 18 and 20 September. On 14 October, in Madrid he took part in a meeting for Delegates for SC from the Iber-

ian Delegation. On 25 October he took part in a meeting of the Department with the SC Group of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, held at the Pisana. On 19 and 20 November at Loreto he attended the opening of the Provincial Chapter of the Adriatic Province (IAD).

During this period, the Department began an updating process for the organisation of the site of the Direzione Generale, to make it more accessible to everyone. A *Wiki* section has also been created for it to assist with inter-action in the work of the World Consultation Body for SC. There has also been the planning for the development of the new ANS site, which includes an *Image Bank*, which will shortly be inaugurated. The work for the Video for the 2007 Strenna Commentary was also completed.

In addition the Department has been examining and developing the application of FOSS (*Free Open Source Software*) in the context of computerised material in the Congregation, as for example the conversion of texts into a form suitable for the computerised archival storage of important material. Computer courses based on FOSS have been held for young confreres and for other young

people in Fiji. The Department also collaborated in the work of translation at the World Congress of Salesian Cooperators.

The Councillor for the Missions

On 28 July immediately after the conclusion of the summer session of the General Council, the Councillor for the Missions left for Khartoum, Sudan, to preside at the inauguration of the Delegation of Sudan and the installation of the Delegate. For this special occasion the confreres who are working in the south of Sudan were able for the first time to go to Khartoum. The opportunity was also taken on this occasion to hold an Assembly for the confreres who are working in Sudan, to plan the life and development of the Delegation. The inauguration took place on 31 July and the following day Fr Francis received the perpetual profession of two Sudanese confreres.

On 3 August the Councillor returned to Rome and a day later left for retreat at Annecy. On 12 August at the end of the retreat, he left again for Kigali, Rwanda, for the inauguration of the new Vice Province of Africa

the Great Lakes (AGL). He took the occasion to hold a number of meetings for the confreres and the Council of the new Vice Province. The inauguration took place on 15 August with Mass, in the presence of a large number of confreres and faithful who had come for the occasion. During his stay in the Vice Province until 17 August, the Councillor visited the Salesian communities in Rwanda.

Between 18 and 23 August Fr Francis was in the new Vice Province of Mozambique to preside at its inauguration which took place on 19 August with an Assembly of the confreres and the celebration of a solemn Mass. On 21-22 August he visited the vocational training school at Inharrime and took part in the feast of Don Bosco there.

On 24-25 August Fr Francis was back in Rome. On 26 he left for Moscow to visit the Salesian foundations in Russia, staying until 8 September. After visiting the Salesian house in Gatchina, St. Petersburg, he left for Siberia to visit the foundations at Yakutsk and Aldan, about 500 km. apart. This visit to Siberia was the high point of the journey in the East Circumscription, apart from being present at the installation of the new Provincial of the Circum-

scription celebrated at Oktiabrskij on 6 September. Before leaving Fr Francis visited other centres around Moscow.

Having returned to Italy, on 9-10 September Fr Francis was in Milan to preside at the function for the perpetual profession of three Salesian confreres and three Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. He took the opportunity of this journey to meet several groups for missionary animation. At the end of the day he visited the Arese community where he met among the confreres Fr Giuseppe Marchesi, a longstanding collaborator of the Missions Department for over 30 years.

Between 11 and 16 September the Councillor was in Rome. On 17 September the course for the preparation of the new missionaries began. This year it was held in the house of Rome-San Tarcisio. On this account between 17 and 26 September the Councillor divided his time between the Generalate and San Tarcisio, so as to spend time with the missionaries and also to attend to some office work. The course was led by Fr Giuseppe Puthenpurakal. Between 27 and 30 September Fr Francis accompanied the missionaries and some confreres from the Vietnam Province on a pilgrimage to the

Salesian places. He then took part in the missionary crucifix ceremony with the Rector Major, in the Don Bosco Church at Colle. In all the Rector Major gave the crucifix to 54 departing missionaries: 22 SDB, 9 FMA, 1 Salesian Cooperator and 22 lay volunteers.

Between 2 and 10 October Fr Francis, having returned to Rome took part in the *intermediate session* of the General Council.

Afterwards between 12 and 15 October the Councillor chaired the six monthly reunion of the Mission Offices and the Salesian NGO. One day of the reunion was given to a meeting between the Mission Office and NGO Directors and Provincial Economers of Africa and Madagascar.

On 16 October Fr Francis left for a visit to four countries in the ATE Vice Province. Between 16 and 19 he visited the Salesian communities at Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire. On 20 he left for Yaoundé and the following day he visited the new theologate and the community in Mimboman, before leaving for Dar Es Salam, in Tanzania.

Between 22 and 27 October the Councillor was at Oyster Bay, Dar Es Salam, to chair the annual meeting of *CIVAM*. On 28 he returned to Yaoundé, examining the programmes of the neighbouring

communities; he concluded with a meeting of the Salesian Family in Yaoundé.

On 30 October, the whole day was spent travelling from Yaoundé to Ndjamena in Chad. He stayed in Chad until 4 November, visiting the two Salesian centres 600 km. apart and investigating the possibility of starting a third foundation between the two.

On 5 and 6 November he was in Bangui in the Central African Republic, visiting the two Salesian foundations. Mgr. Albert Vanbuel SDB, bishop of Kaga Bandoro was also present (there was not sufficient time to visit his diocese situated 300 km. away linked with very poor roads).

On 7 November he returned to Yaoundé, only to leave at once for Ebolowa, 150 km. away to go to the only community in Cameroon not yet visited.

On 8 November, having returned once again to Yaoundé, the Councillor attended a special meeting of the Provincial Council to share his observations.

On 9 November he went to Nigeria, where he visited all the Salesian centres, beginning with the postnovitiate in Ibadan and going on to Akure, Ondo and Onitsha. In each community he held a meeting with the confreres. The visit ended

on 14 November and Fr Francis was back in Rome that night.

Between 15 and 21 November Fr Francis was at the Seminar "*Europe Mission Territory*". The Seminar, organised by the two Departments of the Missions and of Youth Ministry had a good attendance of 130 people representing all the European Provinces together with some FMA.

On 22 November the Councillor left once again for a visit to the Province of Vietnam. Between 23 November and 1 December he was able to visit more than two thirds of the communities and centres in the Province in both north and south. He also visited the places where it is hoped to establish new Salesian foundations. On 2 December at Saigon, in the theologate, the Provincial Missionary Day was celebrated with the participation of representatives from all the communities and several members of the Salesian Family. Fr Francis led the day and spoke about the work in the Sudan. At the end of Mass, four confreres made their request to be sent as foreign missionaries *ad gentes*.

On the evening of 2 December Fr Francis left for Bangkok, where he spent a day visiting the formation house in Sampran and the Centre for the training of the blind

at Pakkred. On the night of 3 December he returned to Rome for the winter session of the General Council.

The Economist General

When the summer session of the General Council finished, Fr Giovanni Mazzali took up his normal office work again with a break for an excursion to Monte Rosa, where, at the Capannna Gnifetti shelter, on 5 August he celebrated Mass in memory of Fr Aristide Vesco and the mountain victims. Between 13 and 19 August he gave a Retreat for a group of confreres from the Lombard-Emilian Province at the Salesianum spirituality centre in Como. Afterwards, between 27 August and 2 September, he was with a school camp for youngsters from the Don Bosco Oratory in the Holy Martyrs' Parish in Sangano (TO).

After a rest period with his family he returned to Rome where on 18 September he took part in a meeting of the Economic Commission of the USG and on 20 of the Administrative Committee of the Gerini Foundation. Between 23 and 29 in the Salesian house of Thorland, Port au Prince, Haiti,

he directed a course on administration and accounting for the Economers and Rectors of the Vice Province of Haiti. Having returned to Rome, on 2 October he took part in the Administrative Committee of the Polaris Society and also the beginning of the autumn intermediate session of the General Council. On 6 October he took part in a meeting of the Administrative Committee of the *Società Editrice Internazionale*. On Thursday 12 October Fr Mazzali left for Cuba, where he stayed until Saturday 14. Afterwards he spent a few days in Santo Domingo, for a meeting of community economers. On 17 at Puerto Rico he took part in a meeting for the Provincials of the Interamerica Region on the subjects of poverty, administration and solidarity.

Having returned to Rome he left immediately for Korea, where between 21 October and 3 December he carried out the *Extraordinary Visitation* of all the communities in the Province.

The Councillor for the Region Latin America - South Cone

When the summer session of the General Council finished, Fr

Helvecio Baruffi left for Paraguay, to be present at the installation of the Provincial Fr Walter Jara.

Immediately afterwards he began the *Extraordinary Visitation of the "St Dominic Savio" Province of Manaus, Brazil*. The opening ceremony for the Visitation took place on 7 August with a gathering of the Rectors and the confreres from the Manaus area. Afterwards the Regional left for the Rio Negro region to visit each of the Salesian missions. In the course of the Visitation he personally met all the Salesians and the groups of the Salesian Family together with the EPC of each centre with the staff and pupils.

The visit was interrupted between 18 and 21 September to enable him to take part in the joint meeting of *CISBRASIL* and *CISUR*, which took place at Asunción, in Paraguay, and had as the main topic "the situation regarding communication". The first part of the meeting was led by the General Councillor for Social Communication, Fr Tarcisio Scaramussa. The Provincials and the Provincial Delegates for Social Communication took part in the meeting. It was an important event which gave the members of the two Provincial Conferences the opportunity to share their

experiences and to present some joint proposals multiplying their forces.

Having returned to the Manaus Province, Fr Helvécio Baruffi continued his Visitation of the other areas of the Province: those of Pará, Manaus and Porto Alegre. The Extraordinary Visitation concluded on 14 October with a meeting of the Provincial Council.

Between 16 and 18 October the Regional was in the São Paulo Province and then that of Porto Alegre, where he took the opportunity to have some medical tests.

Between 1 and 10 November the Regional paid a visit to the Province of Rosario in Argentina. In addition to visiting the main works of the Province, especially the formation houses, he gave the quarterly days of recollection in several places. The visit ended with a meeting of the Provincial Council.

Between 11 and 13 November the Regional took part in a meeting of *CISUR*, which was held in the Buenos Aires Province. It was a meeting to evaluate the meetings held and to plan those for the coming year. It was also an opportunity to consider the progress of the Provincial Chapters.

The Regional remained in the

Buenos Aires Province until 22 November. In the first days with the Provincial Council he visited the region of Patagonia, holding a meeting of the Council with the Rectors and then with all the confreres of the region gathered in an Assembly. Having returned to Buenos Aires, he visited the formation house of the theologate and personally met all the Rectors in the Capital.

On 23 November the Regional went to Brasilia to take part in a meeting of *CISBRASIL*. The meeting was devoted to an evaluation of the activities undertaken and to planning for the coming year. There was also a meeting of the "Curatorium" of the Theological Institute of Lapa, São Paulo. This meeting was preceded by a meeting with the Provincial Economers to assess the economic progress of the "União pela Vida" and the Salesian Schools' Network. On 25 November the Regional presided at Mass in the Don Bosco Church in Brasilia, when all the Salesian communities in the Region commemorated Mamma Margaret being declared Venerable.

On 26 November Fr Helvécio Baruffi returned to the Generalate for the winter session of the General Council.

The Councillor for the Region Interamerica

At the end of the summer session of the General Council, the Councillor for the Interamerica Region left for New York on 30 July to visit his family. Between 13 and 19 August he took part in the Retreat for the Confreres of the New Rochelle Province at Stony Point (NY). On 16 August he presided at Mass in the church of Mary Help of Christians in Manhattan (NY) at which he received the first professions, and on 18 August he had a meeting with the Provincial of SUE, Fr James Heuser, and his Council.

On 20 August Fr Esteban Ortiz arrived in Guatemala, where the following day he had a meeting with the Provincial of CAM, Fr Luis Corral, and his Council to speak, among other things, about the new proposal regarding CRESCO (Regional Centre for the Salesian Brother) for the specific formation of the Salesian Brother, which will come into operation in the city of Guatemala in January 2008.

On 22 August he arrived in Mexico to lead the consultation process in view of the appointment of a new Provincial for the MEG Province, holding intercommunity

meetings at Tijuana, Monterrey, Leon and Guadalajara; from 27 August he did the same for the MEM Province with meetings in the city of Mexico and Oaxaca. In both Provinces he had meetings with the respective Provincials, Fr Héctor Guerrero (MEG) and Fr Luis Valerdi (MEM) and their Councils.

On 2 September the Regional Councillor travelled to San Francisco (USA) to officially begin on 6 the *Extraordinary Visitation*, in the name of the Rector Major, of the Province of "Saint Andrew" (SUO). After a first meeting with the Provincial, Fr David Purdy, and his Council, on 7 September he began visiting the Communities.

On 14 October he interrupted the Extraordinary Visitation to coordinate the annual meeting of the Provincials of the Inter-america Region at Aibonito (Puerto Rico, 15-22 October). Attending the meeting at various points were Fr Giovanni Mazzali, Economer General and Fr Adriano Bregolin, Vicar of the Rector Major and the one responsible at world level for the animation of the Salesian Family.

The following week, Fr Esteban Ortiz stayed in the Antilles Province to meet with the Council

of the Delegation of Puerto Rico at San Juan, with the Provincial Council at Santo Domingo and with the Council of the Delegation of Cuba at Havana, for an assessment of how the Province had responded to the guidelines of the Rector Major after the Extraordinary Visitation carried out the previous year. In addition at Santa Clara, he presided at Mass in memory of Fr Juan Palomino, a missionary from Ecuador who had died in June.

On 29 October the Regional Councillor returned to the San Francisco Province to continue the Extraordinary Visitation, which he concluded on 18 November, giving a final report at an Assembly in Los Angeles, at which were present the Provincial and his Council, the Rectors of the Communities and some Confreres. In the afternoon of the same day he had a concluding meeting with the Provincial and his Council.

Between 20 and 26 November he paid a visit to Haïti (HAI): holding a meeting with the Provincial and his Council, another with the Rectors of the Communities and visiting the Communities in Cap-Haïtien, Fort Liberté and Port-au-Prince. On 25 November he took part in the celebration in commemoration of

Mamma Margaret in Port-au-Prince. His stay in Haïti enabled Fr Esteban Ortiz to understand better the serious situation in the country where on 26 November another Salesian was kidnapped.

On 26 November he went to Caracas (VEN) for a meeting with the Provincial Fr Jonny Reyes and his Council, in view of making an assessment of the putting into practice of the recommendations of the Rector Major after the Extraordinary Visitation carried out the previous year. During his stay in Venezuela he visited the initial formation houses in the Province and the sick confreres in the house at Altamira (Caracas).

On 29 November the Regional Councillor went to Ecuador (ECU). Here on 30 November he took part in a meeting of parish priests at Cuenca and had a meeting with the Provincial Fr Francisco Sánchez, and his Council; on 1 December he visited the Communities in Guayaquil; on 2 in the city of Quito he had a meeting with the team of the Salesian Regional Centre for Ongoing Formation (CSRFP) and paid a visit to Mgr. Pedro Gabrielli, Vicar Apostolic of Méndez, who is making a recovery after illness.

Finally on 4 December he returned to Rome to take part in

the plenary winter session of the General Council.

The Councillor for the Region East Asia - Oceania

When the plenary summer session of the General Council finished, Fr Václav Klement left for the Province of Thailand (THA), where – between 30 July and 2 August – he paid a short visit to the formation communities and to the new foundation for youngsters from ethnic minorities at Chiang Mai.

The Regional Councillor then spent ten days (3-12 August) in the Chinese Province (CIN). When he arrived he was able to take part in the conclusion of the IV Asian Youth Days held in Hong Kong with the theme “*Youth - the hope of Asian families*”, which was followed by half a day organised for the 100 young people from the SYM from the Region at “Tang King Po College”, led by Fr. Dominic Sequiera from the YM Department. After this event Fr Klement continued his missionary visits to the communities in Hong Kong.

He spent the following week (13-19 August) in the Philippines, visiting the formation houses of the two Provinces (FIN and FIS),

meeting the Council of the houses in Parañaque - "Seminario ng Don Bosco", "Don Bosco Center of Studies" (FIN) and Talisay City - Lawaan (FIS). During these days on 16 August he was able to bless the new premises of the Institute for the Salesian formation of lay people and young adults "*Don Bosco CLAY*", run by lay people at Cebu - Lawaan, and he also took part in the ordination of three deacons in Manila - Makati (15 August).

Afterwards he chaired the Regional Seminar on the promotion and care of vocation of the Salesian Brother, held at Phnom Penh, Cambodia (THA) between 20 and 25 August, attended by 70 Salesian from 13 countries in the East Asia - Oceania Region. After the Seminar the Regional Councillor stayed for another six days in Cambodia, two for the annual meeting of the Provincial Delegates for Formation, and four for a brief visit to all centres in the country (26-31 August).

His visit to the Province of Viet Nam (VIE, 1-10 September) began from Hanoi towards the south of the country to see the recent developments in our vocational training centres. The Regional continued visiting the four houses of formation for the mis-

sionary animation of the young confreres, and at the end also met the Provincial Council and all the Rectors.

He then paid a short visit to the Japan Province (GIA, 11-18 September), which concluded with a meeting with the Rectors and the Provincial Council. During these days the Regional was able to meet the 54 aspirants in the three formation houses also taking part in an ordination to the priesthood in Tokyo.

The final stage of the visit to the Region was to the promising mission in Mongolia (Ulanbaatar and Darkhan), between 19 and 23 September. During the return flight to Rome, on 24 September he made a short stop over in Seoul (KOR), for a quick meeting with the Provincial and some confreres before the Extraordinary Visitation.

In all the seven Provinces in the Region he visited, the Councillor presented to the communities or to the Rectors and the meetings of the Provincial Councils the dynamics of the upcoming General Chapter 26, using a powerpoint presentation tailored to the situation in the Region. A short presentation of the first Asian Missionary Congress, held in Thailand, Chiang Mai (16-22 October), with the theme "*Telling the story*

of *Jesus in Asia*" was one of the topics used in the meetings with confreres during the two months spent in the Region.

After returning briefly to Rome, Fr Klement left again for two months to make the *Extraordinary Visitation of the Province of Slovakia and Azerbaijan* (SLK), between 25 September and 3 December. During the two months he was able to see a very young and dynamic Province, which after the period of the totalitarian regime is refounding the Salesian Charism in a novel way. The confreres are very close to the youngsters and the families, with a missionary spirit also among the young Rom (gypsy) and since 2000 in the 'Missio sui iuris' in Azerbaijan.

The Visitation was interrupted once while the Regional took part in the World Congress of Salesian Cooperators at the Salesianum in Rome (9-12 November), which was preceded by a day spent with the Cooperators and Salesian Delegates from the East Asia – Oceania Region at the Congress.

The Councillor for the Region South Asia

The Councillor for the South Asia Region, Fr Joaquim D'Souza,

left for Mumbai on 4 August, at the end of the summer session of the General Council. On 7 August he had a meeting with working group of the Forum for youngsters at risk. Afterwards for three days between 8 and 10 August, he presided at a meeting of the Provincial Conference of the Region, dealing with topics arising from Team Visit of the previous year and the Centenary of the presence of the Salesians in India. There was an attempt to gather the fruits of these two significant events along the lines of the recommendations left by the Rector Major. On 11 August he was engaged with a group of people responsible for the *Development Offices* and those in charge of technical schools in the different Provinces together with *GTZ* and *DMOS-Comide* (two NGO which collaborate with us) in order to create a National NGO for the sustainable development of the informal vocational training schools in India. After these meetings and after a short stay of three days in his family, on 16 August Fr D'Souza arrived in the city of Chennai to begin the *Canonical Extraordinary Visitation of the INM Province*.

Between 16 August and 20 November the Visitor was involved

in an intense series of visits to the 42 houses and foundations in this growing and dynamic Province, with 336 confreres and 14 novices. He was also able to visit the Salesian house belonging to the Province in the island of Andamans, severely tried by the *tsunami* in December 2004. In the course of the Visitation he took part in the episcopal consecration of the new bishop of Vellore, the Salesian Mgr. Soundaraj Periyamayagam. He also paid courtesy calls on two other Salesian Prelates, the Archbishop of Chennai, Mgr. Chinnappa Malayappan, and the Bishop of Dharmapuri, Mgr. Joseph Antony Irudayaraj. In the course of the Visitation he also went to greet the communities of the Sisters of various branches of the Salesian Family near the Salesian communities, who collaborate with us in the mission. On the occasion of these visits, he met the Mother General of the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians (SMA) and her Council, and the Provincial of the FMA in Chennai. He also met those responsible at Provincial level for the Association of Salesian Cooperators and for the Federation of Don Bosco Past Pupils.

After the Extraordinary Visitation ended on 20 November, on

the next day the Regional left for Mumbai, going to the postnovitiate at Nashik, where on 25 November he presided at the solemn commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the death of Venerable Mamma Margaret, in the presence of about two hundred members of the Salesian Family, including SDB, postnovices, novices, FMA and their novices, parents and relatives of the SDB. On 2 December Fr D'Souza returned to Rome for the winter session of the General Council.

The Councillor for the Region North Europe

Even during the summer session between 22 and 24 July 2006, the Regional, Fr Albert Van Hecke, went to Bratislava in Slovakia to attend the annual meeting of *Eurizon*, which brought together 200 young people of the Salesian Youth Movement from the various Provinces in the North Europe Region. It was a meeting marked by a great sense of sharing in the Salesian spirit, beyond cultural and linguistic frontiers, with an excellent organisation appreciated by all.

At the end of the summer session of the General Council, the

Regional left for Cogné for a period of rest.

Afterwards, between 16 and 18 August he was in Kraków in Poland for the installation of the new Provincial, Fr Marek Chrzan.

Between 2 and 9 September he went to the Czech Republic to visit the Province. The visit gave the Regional the opportunity to meet the confreres and to present in various area meetings the theme of the next General Chapter. It was a visit full of contacts and events.

On 10 September the Regional was in Slovenia for the episcopal consecration of our confrere Peter Štumpf, auxiliary bishop of the diocese of Maribor. The short stay in Slovenia concluded with a visit to the community in Veržej, a house for retreats and a guest-house which was very significant in the development of the Congregation in this part of Europe, before and after the second world war.

Between 12 September and 7 October the Regional carried out the *Extraordinary Visitation of the Province of Hungary*. During the Visitation Fr Van Hecke was able to see the energy and the fidelity of the confreres to the charism and the very significant choices made by the Province; he carried out an

assessment of the presence of confreres who have arrived from Vietnam, India and Poland to strengthen the community life and the animation of the houses in this country.

Between 29 September and 2 October at Péligödszentkereszt, in Hungary there was a meeting of the Provincials from the *CIMEC* Zone (Croatia, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, Czech Rep.). The aims of this meeting were: the presentation and the examination of DBI (Don Bosco International), the assessment of the functioning of the Provincial Structural Plan of the Provinces and to share information about significant activities.

Between 9 and 19 October the Regional visited the Province of Wrocław in Poland, to see how things were progressing. It was an opportunity to present to the confreres the theme of the next General Chapter.

Between 20 and 22 October the Regional was in Belgium for some medical checks.

Afterwards between 22 and 24 he was in Warsaw to attend the meeting of the Provincial Conference of Poland the East Circumscription. The main items were: the re-structuring of the formation houses in Poland, the presentation of DBI, preparations for the

pilgrimage of the body of Saint Dominic Savio, expected in Poland in 2007.

Between 24 and 26 October he returned to the Generalate before leaving again on 27 for Kazanlak in Bulgaria, with the Provincial of the Czech Rep., Fr. František Blaha, to make an assessment of the Salesian work and to draw up plans for future developments. During the visit he was able to meet the Exarch of Sofia, Mgr. Cristo Proykov.

Between 1 and 10 November the Regional remained in the Generalate.

On 11 November he left for Vienna to chair the annual meeting of the Atlantic and German Zone of the Region (the Provinces of Austria, North Belgium-Holland, Ireland-Malta, Great Britain, Germany). The central themes of the meeting were the presentation of DBI, the examination of ways of achieving closer collaboration among the Provinces of this Zone and an exchange of information about significant events.

On 15 November the Regional returned to the Generalate to take part in the Seminar "*Europe Mission Territory*". This provided some encouraging input and an exchange of experiences in the field of Evangelisation in this continent.

On 22 November the Regional went to North Belgium and the Delegation of Holland for a visit. He had the opportunity to visit the communities and meet the confreres, and help them prepare for the next General Chapter. There were a number of meetings for study; in particular there were meetings with the Council of the Province and of the Delegation. The Regional was present at a seminar on vocational ministry, attended by the Rectors and Vice Rectors of the Salesian houses in North Belgium and of the Delegation of Holland. A significant presence was that of Cardinal Godfried Danneels, Archbishop of Mechelen-Brussel, who gave a talk entitled "Looking at the vocations problem with the eyes of faith". Finally on 2 December the Regional took part in a formation day for 130 teachers of religion from the Salesian schools in North Belgium.

On 3 December he returned to the Generalate to take part in the winter session of the General Council.

The Councillor for the Region West Europe

When the summer session of the General Council finished, the

Regional for West Europe left on 28 July for León, accompanied by his Secretary and by Fr Antonio Doménech, to take part in the course for New Rectors, which was held between 29 July and 3 August.

He stayed in the León Province until 6 August, attending the celebrations for the installation of the Rectors of the Salesian houses of "Ourense" and "La Coruña".

On 7 August he took part in a meeting of the members of the National Youth Ministry Centre held in Madrid. It was a planning meeting especially in view of the fact that the team is substantially a new one.

Between 8 and 22 August he spent some days on holiday with his family although there were also some interruptions for various events: on 11 August the funeral of a confrere at La Coruña; 15 and 17 August attending the first professions of the novices in Granada; 18 August a meeting of Salesians from the area around Salamanca at Ciudad Rodrigo; and 19 taking part in a funeral at Ourense.

At midnight on 24 August Fr Filiberto left for Campo Grande, Brazil, to begin the Extraordinary Visitation of that Province dedicated to Saint Alphonsus Maria

de' Liguori. The Visitation lasted between 25 August and 25 October 2006. It was carried out without any interruptions, with the programme and the series of commitments known to all.

When the work of the Visitation was completed with the presentation of the respective reports to the Provincial Council and the Assembly of the Rectors and Delegates, Fr Filiberto stayed four days in São Paulo, where in the name of the Congregation he assisted at the Episcopal Consecration of Mgr. Antônio Carlos Altieri, former Rector of the Don Bosco community at Rome-UPS and appointed bishop of Caraguatatuba (Brazil).

After a short visit to Madrid and Valencia – to call on the former Provincial who had had a serious operation – he arrived in Rome on 6 November.

Between 8 and 12 November he was in Paris to take part in the annual meeting of the FMA/SDB Provincials of France and Belgium.

Fr Filiberto then returned to Rome, where between 16 and 20 November he took part in the Seminar "*Europe Mission Territory*", organised by the Departments for the Missions and for Youth Ministry.

Between 21 and 23 November he chaired one of the annual meetings of the Iberian Conference and immediately afterwards went to Bilbao, where the following day 24 November in the name of the Rector Major, he presented to the Provincial Council and to the Assembly of the Rectors the Consultation for the appointment of the new Provincial, due to take place during the winter session of the General Council.

During the last days of November he visited his family, the House of Salesian Missions and other houses in the Madrid Province.

On 30 November, in the name of the Rector Major – who for the occasion sent a beautiful message – he attended a grand concert organised by the Province and by the Salesian houses in Madrid in honour of Mamma Margaret in the 150th anniversary of her death. The Salesian Family Choir (150 singers from various houses in Madrid), accompanied by the “Orquesta joven de Galapagar” (50 players), performed the Requiem Mass of W. A. Mozart. The celebration was a solemn, splendid apotheosis: a fitting tribute to the Mamma of Don Bosco.

On 1 December Fr Filiberto returned to the Pisana for the beginning of the period of the

winter sessions of the General Council.

The Councillor for the Region Italy and the Middle East

When the plenary session of the General Council was over, between 31 July and 5 August Fr Pier Fausto Frisoli made the annual retreat. This was followed by a visit to his parents. Between 17 and 19 August at Gualdo Tadino he took part in the formation course for Brothers in the first five years of their perpetual profession and for the priest confreres in the first five years after ordination. On this occasion he gave a talk on obedience in the Salesian style.

Between 20 and 23 August at Colle Don Bosco he took part in a course of preparation for perpetual profession. On 24 he left for Sardinia, where he chaired the Assembly of the confreres of the Vice Province giving a talk on the new juridical structuring of the Provinces of central Italy and on the theme of the next General Chapter.

On 31 August he chaired the Assembly of the confreres of the Liguria-Tuscany Province and on 1 and 2 September the Assembly of the confreres of the Special

Circumscription of Piedmont and the Val d'Aosta. In both he gave a report on the Extraordinary Visitation and on the theme of the 26th General Chapter.

On 4 September in Naples he took part in the Provincial Council of the Southern Province. On 8 September he presided at Mass at Colle Don Bosco, during which he received the first religious profession of the novices from Pinerolo.

Between 18 and 21 September at Gualdo Tadino he chaired the Assembly of the CISI, which had the theme: Youth Ministry in Italy.

On 22 September he began the *Extraordinary Visitation of the Liguria-Tuscany Province*. Successively he visited the communities of Firenze-Istituto, Firenze-Scandicci, Genova-Sampierdarena, Vallecrosia, Alassio. On 22 October at La Spezia he met the young people of the Salesian Youth Movement at their annual Meeting. On this occasion he gave a talk on the top-

ic of the Rector Major's Strenna. On 23 October he met the members of the Provincial Council. He then visited the houses of Varazze and Genova-Quarto. Between 5 and 7 November he went to Genzano di Roma, where, with Fr Enrico Castoldi, Coordinator of the Formation Sector of the Italy and Middle East Region, he presented the second and third modules of the formation course for new Rectors in the Region. Afterwards he visited Livorno and Prato. Then, between 16 and 20 November at the Generalate he took part in the Seminar "*Europe Mission Territory*". He then visited the communities of Arezzo, Colle Val d'Elsa, Figline Valdarno. On 2 and 3 December at Bocca di Magra he met the ILT Provincial Council. On 4 December, at La Spezia, he concluded the *Extraordinary Visitation* giving a concluding report to the Rectors of the Province.

On the evening of the 4 he returned to Rome.

5. DOCUMENTS AND NEWS ITEMS

5.1 Decree on the heroicity in the practice of the virtues by Mamma Margaret

Below in an English translation of the original Latin Decree on the heroicity in the practice of the virtues ("Decretum super virtutibus") by Mamma Margaret, approved on 23 October 2006 and published on 15 November 2006 when it was read by the Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, José Card. Saraiva Martins, in the presence of the Rector Major, of our Postulator and other Salesians. With this Decree, then consigned to the Rector Major, the reputation for holiness of Mamma Margaret is recognised and she is declared Venerable.

CONGREGATIO DE CAUSIS SANCTORUM

TAURINENSIS

BEATIFICATIONIS ET CANONIZATIONIS SERVAE DEI

MARGARITAE OCCHIENA

VID. BOSCO

MADRISS FAMILIAS (1788-1856)

DECRETUM SUPER VIRTUTIBUS

"The truly capable woman – who can find her? She is far beyond the price of pearls... Her children stand up and proclaim her blessed" (*Proverbs* 31,10.28).

150 years have now passed since Margaret Occhiena died in her humble room in Turin-Valdocco. There was a sense of real loss among the Salesians and the boys, who had loved her as a mother. This woman had given so much of herself to them that there was a chorus of "She was a saint!". Among the first of those to say this was Fr John Bosco her holy son who in his judgement went beyond the ties of blood. There was at once this conviction not only within the immediate circle of the oratory but also beyond it

Margaret Occhiena was born at Capriglio, in the province of Asti, on 1st April 1788. On the same day of her birth she was baptised in the parish church. She remained at home until her marriage to Francis Bosco, who had become a widower at 27 years of age. With him she moved to the Becchi, a small hamlet in Castelnuovo d'Asti.

After the premature death of her husband, Margaret had to cope alone with looking after the family at a time of great shortages. In the house she had Francis's mother who was paralysed and in need of care; Anthony, the son from Francis's first marriage; and her two sons, Joseph and John (the future Don Bosco).

A strong and wise woman, fair and resolute in her decisions, Margaret led a simple and moderate way of life. In the Christian education of her sons she was strict but kind and reasonable. In this way she brought up three boys of very different character: neither ignoring their individuality nor making anyone feel undervalued.

Forced to make some very difficult decisions – such as sending her youngest son away from home to keep the peace in the family and to enable him to study –, with faith and hope she nurtured the inclinations of her sons, helping them to grow in generosity and initiative. With love she accompanied John to the priesthood and then leaving her dear little house in the Becchi, she followed him among the poor and abandoned boys of Turin. Here for ten years (the last of her life) Margaret devoted herself tirelessly to Don Bosco's mission and to the beginnings of his work. She is the first and the principal Salesian cooperator; her active charity became the maternal inspiration of the preventive system; she is the real *co-foundress* of the Salesian Family, contributing to the education of such holy sons as Dominic Savio and Michael Rua.

Illiterate, but full of that wisdom that comes from on high, she was

the helper of many poor street boys nobody's children. She always put God in the first place, wearing herself out for Him in a life of poverty, of prayer and of sacrifice.

She died at 68 years of age on 25 November 1856. She was accompanied to the cemetery by many boys who wept for her as for a mamma.

In conclusion, the grace of God and the exercise of the virtues made of Margaret Occhiena an heroic mother, a wise educator and a good counsellor in the formation of the newly born Salesian charism. Mamma Margaret is a simple woman and yet she is a part of that spiritual aristocracy, which shines out in the extraordinary number of holy mothers who live in God's presence and in God, with a union the fruit of well-nigh continuous silent prayer.

Often what is the most simple is forgotten. The "most simple thing" that Mamma Margaret continued to repeat through the example of her life is this: that holiness is within reach, and is for everyone, and consists in faithful obedience to the particular vocation that the Lord entrusts to each one of us.

Holiness, the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II wrote is the "high standard of ordinary Christian living" (Apostolic Letter *Novo mil-*

lennio ineunte, 31): in everyday life the apparently commonplace like the mountain of washing that Margaret attended to and mended during her busy days.

Mamma Margaret teaches us that one can and one should “aim high” with courage. The little things of every day are to way to holiness.

The *diocesan enquiry into the reputation for holiness* was opened in Turin in 1995. The relevant Acts arrived at the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in 1996. The *Positio super virtutibus* was handed over in the year 2000, and in the same year was approved unanimously by the historical experts. On 26 May 2006 the Special Commission of theological experts considering the heroicity of her virtues gave its unanimous approval. Finally the Cardinals and Bishops gathered in an ordinary session on 17 October of the same year – with Mgr. Salvatore Boccaccio, Bishop of Frosinone - Veroli - Ferentino as the Promoter of the Cause – recognised that the Servant of God practised to an heroic degree the theological, cardinal and associated virtues.

The undersigned Cardinal Prefect then gave a careful report of all these things to the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI.

His Holiness, accepting and ratifying the opinions of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, on this day declared: *It is certain that the Servant of God Margaret Ochhiena widow Bosco, mother of a family, practised to an heroic degree the theological virtues of Faith, of Hope and of Charity towards God and towards her neighbour and also the cardinal virtues of Prudence, of Justice, of Temperance and the other virtues associated with these.*

The Supreme Pontiff directed that this decree be published and preserved among the acts of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

Given in Rome, 23 October 2006.

† IOSEPHUS Card. SARAIVA MARTINS
Prefect

† EDUARDUS NOWAK
Tit. Archbishop of Luni
Secretary

5.2 Address of the Rector Major at the Seminar “Europe Mission Territory”

Below is the text of the address given by the Rector Major as an introduction to the Seminar “Europe Mission Territory”, which took place at the “Salesianum” between

16 and 20 November 2006. Even though specifically concerned with the continent of Europe, the observations and the suggestions of the Rector Major can well be applied to the commitment to evangelisation or re-evangelisation in a variety of contexts.

«I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full» (Jn 10:10)

A word of welcome to those taking part and of good wishes to those organising this Seminar **“Europe, mission territory”**. I am happy to welcome you to the father’s house, wishing each and everyone of you a joyful and fruitful family experience, while we share the passion of Don Bosco for the salvation of youth. Today as yesterday, his famous words remain for every Salesian a programme of life: *“It is enough that you are young for me to love you very much”*. *“I have promised God to my last breath to give myself to my poor boys”*.

You have been invited to take part in a very significant event, which follows along the same lines as the *Meeting of the Provincials of Europe*, held here between 1 and 5 December 2004, in which we wanted to plan the future for the presence of the Congregation in Europe; as the *Meeting of*

Youth Ministry Delegates in the Provinces of Europe, also held here between 7 and 11 February 2005; and the *Meeting on Formation in Europe*, held in Benediktbuern between 20 and 22 May this year, which aroused so much enthusiasm and was one of the events programmed in the Provincials’ Meeting.

The re-evangelisation of Europe, becoming ever-more de-Christianised, is a task for the whole Church, and within it for the Congregation, which cannot be delayed, because we cannot be satisfied with recognition being given to religions in Europe in the draft Constitution for the new Europe, yet the place of the Church in the Constitution and especially in cultural, social and political life still needing to be recognised.

The new evangelisation of Europe, therefore, is the appropriate response to the desire and the attempts of those who want to remove God from the lives of the citizens of Europe, to consider the Church as an obstacle to cultural integration and to peace in society, as antagonistic to scientific and technical development and to economic well-being. The new evangelisation is the reaction of believers to the current plan – in

the best scenario – to reduce religious convictions to the realm of personal choice, as long as they are not given expression in cultural or social life.

The commitment to restore to Europe its Christian soul is also the unmasking of a secularism and lay philosophy which first of all wanted to separate values from their religious, Christian roots, so as to arrive eventually at the denial of these same values in the face of a unstoppable wave, not spontaneous but deliberately intended, of ideological pluralism and ethical relativism. The fact is that this dictatorship of relativism and its subsequent manifestation in political popularism is leading to constitutional changes that will have irreversible consequences.

In this context I give here a reflection, taken from his last book, by a renowned lay journalist and thinker who recently died:

«And the West, my world? In the lay and iconoclastic push towards an idea of individual freedom that is totally materialistic, we have fought against a long-standing tradition, we have ridiculed every credo, eliminated every ritual and in this way removed the mystery, that is the poetry, from our lives.

Now people are born, live and die without any ceremony, without

any ritual to mark the stages of our being in the world. The arrival of a son implies no moment of reflection, just the registration of the birth. Now young couples live together, they no longer get married, and the only rite in which they are involved is moving house. They don't mark the beginning of a new life by even changing their clothes. And since there is no initiation ceremony there is no awareness of a stage of passage; there not being any contact with the sacred there is no commitment. Often the only thing in common that results is sex and the telephone bill. Even death is now without any recognition or the consolations of a rite. There is no wake over the body, and the leave-taking, if there is any, is not conducted by priests or witchdoctors but by experts in public relations.

I have seen the end of rituals in my own lifetime, and now as I look back I regret having made my contribution, quite enthusiastically to this great loss. When I was a boy, new-born babies – even those of communists like me – were still baptised, the dead were given a wake and a proper funeral, weddings were a shared celebration not only in the presence of the divine but also of dozens of relatives and friends who in this way

became implicitly guarantors of the union.

But I was a rebel. I didn't want to get married, and when I did, especially for reasons of health insurance, it was in haste, almost secretly with only the essential witnesses present and in front of a mayor who, since I didn't want a Christian Democrat, I had to go and find a long way from Florence in the town of Vinci, the only good thing about the place being that it is where Leonardo was born. Afterwards I didn't have my children baptised and I wasn't present when my father and my mother died.

And yet, from being small, I liked ritual ceremonies and even today I recall as one of the great joys of my life the very real and special ceremony with which at fourteen years of age to mark my "becoming a man" my parents gave me my first pair of long trousers, and which, poor as they were, they had had to buy in instalments. But the winds of change were blowing in another direction and I simply drifted along with them, giving a hand in the destruction of something that nothing has replaced, leaving an awful emptiness».¹

Above all the re-evangelisation of Europe means the rejection of a prevalent view of Christianity as a stage from the past, which, rather in the manner of scaffolding, served in the building of today's Europe, but which has now become useless and dangerous so that there is an urgent need to dismantle it. Or that other interpretation which would restrict it to being part of the wealth of European treasures, made up, however, of many contributions – Jewish monotheism, Greek philosophy, Roman law, Christian morality, the French enlightenment... – which can be made use of according to the tastes of the user, without, however, any claims to privileges, to superiority, to absolute values, to recognition. This would be the equivalent of reducing Christianity to ethics, and ethics to the shared values of human thought.

Europe is mission territory, just like the whole world, according to the command of the Lord Jesus before his Ascension, in which he gave the disciples the order to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth, the gospel as the content of the mission, and the whole world as its field of work. It is true that

¹ TIZIANO TERZANI, *Un altro giro di giostra. Viaggio nel male e nel bene del nostro tempo*. Longanesi, 2004, 368-369.

no evangelisation in the past has been so fruitful as that of Europe; it is also true that Europe provided the Church with the necessary intellectual framework for its inculturation in the world, and for the expression of its theological reflection on the mystery; it is true that the present-day organisation of the Church largely reflects that of European civil and political society; it is true that from Europe the Gospel and the Church have spread through the five continents; and finally it is true that the holiness of the Church has had its richest and most fruitful expression in Europe. But it is equally true that nowadays Europe is no longer Christian, at least a large part of western Europe, which rejects its identity and does not want to be Christian, which has cut off its roots, which today has lost its soul. Today, this Europe has more need than ever to meet Christ again, his Gospel, the faith that can ensure a genuine future and lasting hope for its inhabitants. From this point of view and in this context I am convinced that Eastern Europe is still living with a strong presence of religion in its culture and in the civil societies of quite a number of countries. Therefore it can become a source

of healing for a Europe that is secularised and uneasy with a religious experience, even more so since in this meeting between western and eastern Europe the Salesians are present and we can enrich and help each other.

In our case, as the Salesian Congregation, we are well aware that those who suffer most from this loss are the young. They are the ones most exposed to the negative consequences of the dominant cultural model. But we are also convinced that those who can best reverse this trend are the young. They are our home ground, our mission territory, our heritage, our *raison d'être* (cf. C. 2). At this time we cannot leave them on their own, we cannot possibly leave them to their fate; more than ever the evangelisation of the young people of Europe is a matter of urgency, "so that they may have life to the full".

Therefore, let us courageously take up our task of giving its soul back to Europe, while with fearlessness, with trust, with joy, with generosity and with competence we get down to our work of educating the young to the faith and in the faith. Let us bring them to Christ. Let us bring Christ to them. We must never forget the programme set out in

article 34 of the Constitutions where we read:

«This Society had its beginning in a simple catechism lesson”. For us too evangelizing and catechizing are the fundamental characteristics of our mission. Like Don Bosco, we are all called to be educators to the faith at every opportunity. Our highest knowledge therefore is to know Jesus Christ and our greatest delight is to reveal to all people the unfathomable riches of his mystery. We walk side by side with the young so as to lead them to the risen Lord, and so discover in him and in his Gospel the deepest meaning of their own existence, and thus grow into new men”.

We are not an NGO occupied and concerned only with the material needs of the young. Our mission cannot be reduced to a form of social assistance. *“We, the Salesians of Don Bosco, form a community of the baptized. Submissive to the bidding of the Spirit, we are resolved to carry out the Founder’s apostolic plan in a specific form of religious life: to be in the Church signs and bearers of the love of God for young people, especially those who are poor”* (C. 2).

The model I want to put before you, because it is very inspiring, is

that of St Paul during his stay in Rome from the moment he arrived until his martyrdom. There is nothing more eloquent than the picture of the Apostle, in chains, in a small room no larger than three metres square, while he was *«proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching the truth about the Lord Jesus Christ, with complete fearlessness and without any hindrance from any one»*. I cannot resist the temptation to read you what St Luke says in the Acts of the Apostles, in the beautiful and stirring conclusion of that book (Acts 28: 16-31), where he recalls that the Apostles were faithful to Jesus and docile to the Holy Spirit and carried their witness to Christ, the proclamation of the Gospel and the life of the Church to the hostile heart of the Roman empire. It is the Holy Spirit who conquers all the obstacles to God’s plan and who opens frontiers and hearts to the Word. From the disciples all that was asked was docility and fearlessness.

But let us come to the text, since it offers us many suggestions and become a programme for action:

«¹⁶On our arrival in Rome, Paul was allowed to stay in lodgings of his own with the soldier who guarded him. ¹⁷After three days he called together the leading Jews.

When they had assembled, he said to them: "Brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. ¹⁸They examined me and would have set me free, since they found me guilty of nothing involving the death penalty. ¹⁹But the Jews lodged an objection, and I was forced to appeal to Caesar, though not because I had any accusation to make against my own nation. ²⁰That is why I have urged you to see me and have a discussion with me, for it is on account of the hope of Israel that I wear this chain". ²¹They answered 'We have received no letters from Judea about you, nor has any of the brothers arrived here with any report or story or anything to your discredit. ²²We think it would be as well to hear your own account of your position; all we know about this sect is that it encounters opposition everywhere". ²³So they arranged a day with him and a large number of them visited him at his lodgings. He put his case to them, testifying to the the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them about Jesus, arguing from the Law of Moses and the prophets from early morning until evening; ²⁴and some were convinced by what he said,

²⁵while the rest were sceptical So they disagreed among themselves and, as they went away, Paul had one last thing to say to them: "How aptly the Holy Spirit spoke when he told your ancestor through the prophet Isaiah: ²⁶Go and say to this people: Listen and listen but never understand! Look and look but never perceive! ²⁷This people's heart is torpid, their ears dulled, they have shut their eyes tight, to avoid using their eyes to see, their ears to hear, using their heart to understand, changing their ways and being healed by me. ²⁸You must realise, then, that this salvation of God has been sent to the gentiles and they will listen to it!" [²⁹]

³⁰Paul spent the whole of the two years in his own rented lodging. He welcomed all who came to visit him, ³¹proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching the truth about the Lord Jesus Christ with complete fearlessness and without any hindrance from anyone».

If St Paul is the model to be imitated in this new evangelisation of Europe, the goal to be reached is that which the book of the Acts of the Apostles presents to us when it describes the ideal of the Christian community in the Acts 2:42-48:

«⁴²They remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the

brotherhood, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers. ⁴³And everyone was filled with awe; the apostles worked many signs and miracles. ⁴⁴And all who shared the faith owned everything in common; ⁴⁵they sold their goods and possessions and distributed the proceeds among themselves according to what each one needed. ⁴⁶Each day with one heart they regularly went to the Temple but met in their houses for the breaking of bread; they shared their food gladly and generously, ⁴⁷they praised God and were looked up to by everyone. ⁴⁸Day by day the Lord added to their community those destined to be saved».

These then are the elements making up the Christian identity, with tremendous public, social and political relevance so as to present itself not only as an alternative culture but as a real force for good within the dominant culture like the leaven or the seed that bears fruit:

- **Explicit evangelisation** in all our educational centres and parishes. It is what the summary in the Acts of the Apostles is telling us when it speaks about the apostles' zeal in teaching, which means education in the faith or catechesis, which

becomes authentically mystagogic, because it opens people to the Mystery of God;

- The transformation from individualism to the **construction of a fraternal communion** which makes all Christians into the new family of God and the seed of a new humanity in which are overcome all the differences which sometimes are the basis for religious, social or sexual superiority ("neither Jew nor gentile, neither masters nor slaves, neither men nor women"), or better, where the differences are integrated;
- The progressive identification with Christ through participation in the **Eucharist**, source and summit of Christian life, from which flows the capacity for ourselves to become bread broken for our brothers and sisters and wine poured out for the redemption of the world, which implies a liturgy that is alive and fruitful;
- The translation of a Trinitarian faith into everyday life which manifests itself in a **community of hearts and of goods**, which leads to the generous sharing of what is ours according to the needs of each one, creating a real communion through participation, a reflection of the God Who is Love, of the God

who is a Community of Persons, of the Triune God, and the model of every social community. The most marvellous thing is that people did not say "Look how these people have succeeded in creating a society without social classes", but "See how they love one another".

- Finally, **drawing others in**, the result not of vocation campaigns but of the joyful witness of one's own faith which wins peoples' esteem and opens the way to conversion of the ever-more numerous people who in this way have access to salvation.

This is **the secret** of the new evangelisation of Europe: a **strong experience of God**, in Jesus, who comes to shake people out of the lethargy in which they are living and to turn their hierarchy of values upside down, and a **community which helps people to mature in the faith** so as to become *a creative minority* with sufficient energy to make it capable of changing the dominant culture.

However, the attitude of the new evangelisers needs to be that of the sower who has so much confidence in the force of the Gospel that when he sows the tiny mustard seed he is already thinking of a great harvest; it needs to be that of

the woman who puts in her baking the yeast, which has the energy to give life to the whole batch of dough, even though at the same time it is not very much considering the amount to be transformed (cf. *Lk* 13:18-21). But it is not enough to have faith in the overwhelming power of the Word of God, if this is not accompanied by a unflinching trust in the young, in their ability to welcome God as their only Lord, and in their commitment to give Him to other young people as they themselves, accompanied by us, become real evangelisers of the young.

Fr. Pascual CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA
Rector Major

5.3 Salesian Bishops

1. *Fr Raffaele FARINA, Prefect of Apostolic Vatican Library, raised to the episcopal office.*

On 15 November 2006 the Press Office of the Holy See gave the news that His Holiness Benedict XVI had raised to the episcopal office Fr **Raffaele FARINA**, S.D.B., Prefect of the Apostolic Vatican Library, assigning him the titular see of Oderzo (Italy).

Born on 24 September 1933 at Buonalbergo, in the diocese of

Ariano Irpino and the province of Benevento (Italy), Raffaele Farina made his first religious profession in the Salesian Society on 25 September 1949 at Portici, where he had completed his year of novitiate. He followed the normal Salesian formation course with philosophical studies and practical training, making his perpetual profession on 25 September 1954. He then studied theology at the Salesian Pontifical Ateneum in Turin, obtaining a licence in Theology in 1958. On 1 July that year he was ordained priest.

He continued his studies at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, obtaining in 1965 a degree in Church History. After three years of specialist studies on a scholarship from the "Humboldt" German Foundation at Freiburg and Bonn, he began teaching as lecturer in Ancient and Modern Church History in the Faculty of Theology at the Salesian Pontifical University in Rome. In 1972 he became Dean of the same Faculty for a three year period and subsequently was Rector of the University for twelve years (1977-1983; 1992-1997). In 1978 he was called by the Rector Major Fr Egidio Viganò to be Moderator of the 21st General Chapter.

For ten years from 1978 until 1988, he was Secretary of the Pontifical Historical Commission and for six years Under-Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Culture.

On 25 May 1997 he was appointed Prefect of the Apostolic Vatican Library.

2. Mgr. Calogero LA PIANA, transferred to the Archiepiscopal see of Messina.

On 18 November 2006 the Press Office of the Holy See gave the news that the Holy Father Benedict XVI had appointed Mgr. **Calogero LA PIANA**, S.D.B. Metropolitan Archbishop of MESSINA-LIPARI-SANTA LUCIA DEL MELA (Sicily, Italy), transferring him from the see of Mazara del Vallo, to which he had been appointed on 15 November 2002.

Born at Riesi on 27 January 1952, Calogero La Piana made his first profession in the Salesian Congregation on 12 September 1974 and perpetual profession on 14 September 1980. He was ordained priest at Riesi on 8 August 1981 and ordained bishop in Rome on 6 January 2003. From August 1999 until his appointment as Bishop he was Provincial of Salesian Province of Sicily (cf. AGC 381, n. 5.4).

5.4 Our dead confreres (4th list 2006)

"Faith in the risen Christ sustains our hope and keeps alive our communion with our brothers who rest in Christ's peace. They have spent their lives in the Congregation, and not a few have suffered even to the point of martyrdom for the love of the Lord... Their remembrance is an incentive to continue faithfully in our mission." (C. 94).

SURNAME AND NAME	PLACE of death	DATE	AGE	PROV
L ABBANEO Perpetuo	Roma	15-11-2006	96	IRO
P BARASICH Emilio	Bahía Blanca (Argentina)	25-10-2006	74	ABB
P BELLI Santiago	General Roca (Argentina)	11-12-2006	82	ABB
P BEÑO Ján	Prestavky (Slovacchia)	21-09-2006	84	SLK
P BERTOLUSSO Lorenzo	Manaus (Brasile)	27-10-2006	82	BMA
P BLICHARZ Wojciech	Bydgoszcz (Polonia)	31-10-2006	64	PLN
P BONGIORNO Angelo	East Boston (USA)	03-10-2006	93	SUE
P BRAGHIROLI Giacomo	Castellammare di Stabia (Italia)	08-11-2006	96	IME
P BUSOLIN Piergiorgio	Castelfranco Veneto (Italia)	29-10-2006	65	INE
P BUTTERS Henry	Oxford (Gran Bretagna)	22-10-2006	87	GBR
P CARVALHO José Luis	Lisboa (Portogallo)	13-11-2006	37	POR
P CAVALIERI Francesco	Roma	30-11-2006	100	IRO
L COLUSSI Attilio	Torino	13-11-2006	94	ICP
P COMPRÉS FERMÍN Plinio	Santo Domingo (R.D.)	07-12-2006	70	ANT
P CORDONI Corrado	Guatemala (Guatemala)	07-10-2006	93	CAM
P ČUŘÍK Jaroslav	Teplice (Rep. Ceca)	28-10-2006	84	CEP
P DA SILVA Diniz José	Cachoeira do Campo (Brasile)	04-12-2006	84	BBH
P DHYRIANATHAN Joseph	Mumbai (India)	02-11-2006	80	INB
P FERRARA Antonio	Salerno (Italia)	30-11-2006	85	IME
P GIARLETTA Giannino	Pordenone (Italia)	05-11-2006	74	INE
P GREGORKIEWICZ Józef	Płock (Polonia)	30-11-2006	81	PLE
P IOAN Giuseppe	Negrar (Verona, Italia)	14-10-2006	89	INE
P JAOUEN Marcel	Guingamp (Francia)	06-12-2006	71	FRA
P KABELA wa Ngoie Ghislain	Lubumbashi (Congo R.D.)	18-11-2006	43	AFC
P KELLEHER Denis	Bronx, NY (USA)	31-10-2006	84	SUE
P LATUSEK Konrad	Marszałki (Polonia)	29-10-2006	77	PLO
P MACHUCA JORQUERA Miguel	Santiago de Chile	05-11-2006	87	CIL
P MAGGIONI Virgilio	Casale Monferrato (Italia)	12-10-2006	94	ICP
L MANNING Denis	Limerick (Irlanda)	12-11-2006	74	IRL
P MARCHESI Lorenzo	Sondrio (Italia)	14-10-2006	77	ILE
P MÁRQUEZ FERNÁNDEZ Antonio	Sevilla (Spagna)	29-11-2006	77	SSE
P MARZOLO Gerardo	Santiago de Chile	10-09-2006	96	CIL
P MASELLO Giuseppino	Roma	30-10-2006	90	IRO
P MASOERO Luigi	Torino	11-10-2006	85	ICP
P MATURANI Arcangelo	Caracas (Venezuela)	18-10-2006	85	VEN
P MÁZAK Martin	Genève (Svizzera)	17-11-2006	92	FRA
P MERCANTE Mateo Rubén	Bahía Blanca (Argentina)	02-10-2006	89	ABB
P MÉSZÁROS Béla	Mosonmagyaróvár (Ungheria)	18-11-2006	88	UNG
P MIKULEWICZ Władysław	Vilnius (Lituania)	06-10-2006	79	ILE

SURNAME AND NAME	PLACE of death	DATE	AGE	PROV
P PELLEGRINO Gerard	Valhalla, New York (USA)	20-09-2006	70	SUE
P PÉREZ ÁLVAREZ Vidál	Santiago de Chile	14-09-2006	94	CIL
E PÉREZ TAPIA Elio	Lima (Perù)	05-12-2006	71	-
<i>Fu per 4 anni Vescovo-Prelato della Prelatura di Juli (Perù)</i>				
P RAGAZZO Ivone	Venezia-Mestre (Italia)	17-11-2006	71	INE
P RAJOKOVIĆ Marko	Zagreb (Croazia)	20-09-2006	91	CRO
P RESTELLI Angelo	Treviglio (Italia)	02-11-2006	82	ILE
L RIVA Luigi	Bologna (Italia)	03-11-2006	83	ILE
P RONTELTAP Gijsbertus	Nijmegen (Olanda)	07-12-2006	93	BEN
L SALAMEH Elias	Nazareth (Israele)	29-11-2006	82	MOR
P SANGALLI Giuseppe	Savona(italia)	11-11-2006	94	ILT
<i>Fu per 6 anni Ispettore e per 3 anni Delegato del Rettor Maggiore per le F.M.A.</i>				
P SCAMBELLURI Rodolfo	Messina (Italia)	29-10-2006	77	ISI
L SHEEHAN George	East Boston (USA)	17-11-2006	72	SUE
P STADLER Pablo	Buenos Aires (Argentina)	20-11-2006	69	ABA
P STRAUB Karl	Forchheim (Germania)	30-08-2006	88	GER
P TIRABOSCHI Enrico	Arese (Italia)	18-10-2006	79	ILE
L TOLOMELLI Vincenzo	Roma	04-11-2006	87	IRO
P TÓTH Jenő	Széombathely (Ungheria)	27-09-2006	88	UNG
L URBANI Vittorio	Beit Gemal (Israele)	18-11-2006	100	MOR
P VAN SCHAGEN Johannes Jozef	Vlaardingen (Olanda)	28-10-2006	84	BEN
P VANDENPUTTE Willy	Lier (Belgio)	28-11-2006	66	BEN









