



acts

of the general council

year CI

july-december 2019

N. 431

**official organ
of animation
and communication
for the
salesian congregation**

**Direzione Generale
Opere don Bosco
Roma**

acts

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
Sede Centrale Salesiana
Via Marsala, 42
00185 Roma

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Tel. 06.78.27.819 - Fax 06.78.48.333 - E-mail: tipolito@pcn.net
Finito di stampare: Aprile 2019

“Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:10)

GOOD CHRISTIANS AND UPRIGHT CITIZENS

Strenna 2020

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INTRODUCTION

When I was thinking about the Strenna for this year, with some other Salesian confreres, I clearly saw how important and fascinating this subject was. A very simple title but something broad and complex to be developed. After the work of the last few weeks I saw this even more clearly. It appears to me to be a fascinating, useful and complex subject.

I really believe that in our Salesian Family, in each one of our groups, in the different countries in which we find ourselves, and with the most varied works, we need to examine those aspects which are concerned with the formation of the Christian and the citizen.

- We need to make ever more explicit the message that our mission is one of Evangelizing and Catechizing. Without this we are not the Salesian Family. We might be ‘providers of social services’, but not apostles of boys and girls, of teenagers and of young people.

- At the same time, it is more than clear that in our mission as educators we cannot 'live in a vacuum' as though it had nothing to do with life, with justice, with equality of opportunity, the defence of the weak, the promotion of a life that is civilized and decent. This aspect nowadays is more urgent than ever, at a time when the society in which we are living does not believe very much in these values. When we are educating, what side are we on? Precisely because of the importance of this question, reflection on this year's Strenna is so relevant and necessary.
- Added to this there is a new obstacle. Can that twofold educational expression of Don Bosco, that twofold aim that guided him in nineteenth century Italy be considered still valid in a "Salesian world" in which the Family of Don Bosco can find a home in countries with different religions or with a non-Christian majority, or in post-Christian societies, or even in countries that are officially secular or anti-religious?

As far as this last aspect is concerned, a Strenna speaking about being Christians in non-Christian societies, some questions have been sent to me from some of these Regions in which this is the case. I present them to you, since they certainly contain some very pastorally sensitive issues. Here are some of them.

In the Provinces with a large non-Christian majority (other religions, agnostics or those indifferent to religion), this Strenna will be well received to the extent that it succeeds in offering some opportunity for reflection and some ideas for educational activity in settings that are 'non-Christian' or 'post-Christian'. How might it be possible to present this educational expression of Don Bosco **in such a way that our non-Christian laity and young people can accept it, understand it, follow it and put it into practice?**

In Don Bosco's times, in the context of a society with a Christian majority, being socially useful was a sign of a genuine religious spirit.

On the other hand, nowadays in the 134 countries in the world in which the charism has spread we feel the need to maintain a balance in an attitude of openness and inclusion in the educational process 'for and with' non-Christian young people and laity, starting from the first **proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ by means of the Preventive System that creates relationships, a family atmosphere in which education takes place and the faith is transmitted by osmosis.**

It is necessary to take into account the **pluri-cultural and the multi-religious settings** of the 40 Salesian Provinces which are living in minority Churches among the great religions of the world, especially in Asia and in Africa.

It is not enough to repeat what Don Bosco did in the nineteenth century. **We have to learn from the experiences of the Salesians who today are living the Preventive System in countries that have a non-Christian majority.** They certainly have a wealth of life experience in which they have learned how to interpret the thinking of Don Bosco in multi-religious and multi-cultural contexts which our Father could never even have imagined.

Good Christians and upright citizens in contexts with a non-Christian or post-Christian majority. We can ask ourselves some specific questions:

- How do you put Don Bosco's expression into practice with non-Christian youngsters and lay co-workers?
- How do you keep a balance between openness to non-Christians and the first proclamation of the Gospel?
- How do you translate the concept of the 'good Christian' for a majority of lay co-workers who are non-Christians?
- How do you put into practice the pillar of 'Religion' in the multi-religious contexts in which we find ourselves?
- How do you educate the young and the lay people in the three pillars of the Spirituality of the Preventive System of Don Bosco: Reason - Religion - Loving Kindness?

- How do you translate into daily life the ‘good Christians’ of Don Bosco in the mission shared with so many non-Christians?
- Does the Rector Major believe that the Preventive System of Don Bosco can be fully lived out and put into practice also with lay co-workers of other religions?
- How do you include non-Christians in the Educative Pastoral Community (EPC)?
- What do these non-Christians who are involved in the Salesian educative mission themselves say?
- What are the most attractive elements/expressions of the practice of the Preventive System of Don Bosco?

I think that during my development of the Strenna you will find some suggestions that respond in one way or another to these questions that have been sent to me, and that are obviously more than legitimate.

I. GOOD CHRISTIANS AND UPRIGHT CITIZENS in Don Bosco¹

Some people will ask whether this educational expression was used and put forward by Don Bosco himself. Well, this is one of the issues dealt with by Fr Braidò with academic rigour. He it was who made people understand that Don Bosco had always followed this particular educational path or process, expressed in these precise words or very similar ones, making slight changes on the basis of the people he was speaking with. However, the subject of the relationship between the education of the young and the good of society as well as that of eternal salvation could be considered a constant. In fact this two-fold expression was used in the course of the years in the following different versions:

¹ The commentary which I am presenting and which will refer to the twofold expression ‘Good Christians and Upright Citizens’ that is so specifically Salesian because it is according to the heart of Don Bosco, has been studied at depth and amply described by Pietro Braidò, *Buoni cristiani ed onesti cittadini*, RSS, vol. 24, 1994 (p. 36-42).

- ✓ *Making them upright citizens and good Christians (1857)*
- ✓ *Making themselves good Christians and upright workers (1857)*
- ✓ *So that they might all become good citizens and good Christians (1862)*
- ✓ *Making them all good Christians and upright citizens (1872)*
- ✓ *Educating youth to the dignity of the Christian and to the sense of duty of the good citizen (1873)*
- ✓ *They become good Christians and upright citizens (1875)*
- ✓ *Doing what little good I can for abandoned youngsters, making use of all my efforts so that they might become good Christians as far as religion is concerned and upright citizens in civil society (1876)*
- ✓ *Preparing good Christians for the Church, upright citizens for civil society (1877).*

In many of his writings, especially in twofold educative and pastoral his letters, Don Bosco has left behind, clearly defined, the expression, using the following formulas (always according to Fr Braido, as the scientific-historical source):

- ✱ *Making them good citizens and good Christians is the purpose we are giving ourselves;*
- ✱ *Making them good Christians and upright citizens;*
- ✱ *They are... useful citizens and good Christians;*
- ✱ *They become good Christians upright citizens;*
- ✱ *When entering this Oratory a young person needs to persuade himself that this is a place of religion, in which the intention is to make good Christians and upright citizens;*
- ✱ *Restoring them to civil society as good Christians and good citizens;*
- ✱ *Educated in Christian and civil virtues (...) making them good Christians and upright citizens;*
- ✱ *It is a question of making them into upright citizens and good Christians;*
- ✱ *Always living as good Christians and as wise citizens;*
- ✱ *The hope that they become good Christians, upright and useful citizens;*
- ✱ *Now they are good Christians and upright citizens;*

- * *I am delighted to know that you (...) are living as good Christians and as upright citizens;*
- * *Wherever you find yourselves show that you are always good Christians and honest men;*
- * *The purpose of our colleges is to form good Christians and upright citizens;*
- * *Then to be returned to civil society as good Christians, upright citizens;*
- * *They leave good Christians and fine citizens;*
- * *Returning them to society good Christians and upright citizens;*
- * *Educating them in such a way as to make them good citizens and real Christians.*
- * *Good Christian and upright citizen;*
- * *Learning how to live as good Christians and as wise citizens;*
- * *Taught to live as good Christians and wise citizens;*
- * *They become good Christians, wise citizens;*
- * *Making them good Christians and useful citizens;*
- * *Continue therefore to be good Christians and wise citizens;*
- * *Giving to civil society useful members, to the Church virtuous Catholics, to Heaven fortunate inhabitants;*
- * *Making them good citizens and good Christians;*
- * *Restoring them... to civil society as good Christians, upright citizens;*
- * *They make the world see how you can... be Christians and at the same time upright and hardworking citizens;*
- * *Teach them, educate them and so make them good Christians and upright citizens;*
- * *How many good sons, how many Christian and upright fathers, how many more better citizens might we not give to families, to the Church to society;*
- * *Making themselves good Christians and upright citizens;*
- * *Returning them to their families, to society, to the Church as good sons, wise citizens, exemplary Christians.*

As we can see, as though it were a piece of music, the melody is always the same but there are different variations. Fr Braido

has presented it in an unequivocal manner in a study that enables us to understand that Don Bosco is not a theorist. He is a man of action. However, he is a man of action who 'reflects' on the significance of his pastoral activities. Therefore, while it is not surprising that the words he uses and the ideas expressed are simple and repetitive, it is obvious that the way he operates is along very specific lines with a very clear 'theoretical' awareness, both on the level of a knowledge of the situations and of the problems, and with regard to the practical solutions to be put into effect. These two aspects come to the fore with particular clarity in one of the expressions most dear to him and frequently repeated: 'good Christian and upright citizen'.

1.1. GOOD CHRISTIANS living with Faith in the Lord and under the guidance of the Spirit...

If we go back to our beginnings when it was Don Bosco at the end of December who was giving the Strenna for the new year with personalised messages for each of the boys and the first Salesians, we can see how 'living the faith' was something that was the most precious and the most natural the first Oratory had to offer to someone living there, both to the boys and to their teachers. It reflected a way of life in which the first Salesians, the Mammams of the Oratory, the lay people who helped and the youngsters were creating a real family in the same house.

Quite impressive is the number of Saints and Blesseds who were living in those poor places during Don Bosco's lifetime. It was a school of mutual holiness, a growing together in the faith. If it is true, for example, that Don Bosco helped Dominic Savio to grow in the love of God, no less great is the influence of Savio and his companions on Don Bosco, on his 'ongoing formation' as a man of God. 'Faith is strengthened when it is given to others.'² From the reciprocal gift of a deeply lived faith comes the school of

² *Redemptoris Missio*, 2.

holiness that continues to nourish the spiritual journey of the Salesian Family throughout the world.

The harmony between faith and life is at the heart of the charism of Don Bosco on whose face and in whose life can be contemplated ‘a splendid blending of nature and grace. He was deeply human, rich in the qualities of his people, open to the realities of this earth; and he was just as deeply the man of God, filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and living as seeing him who is invisible’.³

‘Living the faith’ is nowadays the most precious gift we can share together, whatever might be our state of life, our age, our vocation and also our religion. In the ecclesiology of communion that nourishes and transforms the progress of the Church and which is being so greatly practised and encouraged by Pope Francis, the identity of each group and person is lived out and revealed *in becoming a gift for others*, as likewise in knowing how to welcome the gift of someone who is called to be a disciple of the Lord in whatever state of life and vocation.

For those of us who are consecrated persons in the Salesian Family, is not ‘living the faith’ at the centre and the heart of what we are called to be and to offer, incarnated in the specific nature of each particular vocation and of each person?

If we consecrated persons are not living symbols of the ‘blending of nature and of grace,’ of that fruitful encounter between the call and the love of God and the generous daily response freely given, on what other ‘treasure hidden in the field’ could one ever rely so that life might have meaning, indeed full meaning so as to become salt and light capable of giving taste and enlightening the lives of those who are living with us?

The Synod on Young People demonstrated with disarming clarity that what the younger generations are looking for from

³ *SDB Constitutions and Regulations*, n. 21.

those who have dedicated their lives entirely to the Lord is to find 'shining and consistent witnesses.'⁴

But we need to say the same for the laity, the parents, the young people: if the faith is a gift, so too the life of faith is a gift. It is not the result of great personal skills and an ironlike strength of will. Whatever our contribution that may also form part of the dialogue between grace and freedom, it is never found outside the anticipatory love of God, of the discrete but effective presence of the Spirit, in each one, in the community, in the Salesian Family, in the Church, in the world, in history, in the whole universe. The Spirit is the creative force, and is the energy that brings to fruition, that makes the great tree of the Kingdom grow from the grain of mustard seed.

1.2. GOOD CHRISTIANS living *attentive to the God who speaks*

'There is no greater gift you can offer to another person than your total attention.' This was the conclusion a wise missionary came to after many years of service in the feverish outskirts of a large city.

In many ways we are trying to rediscover the ability to listen, also an indispensable art for personal accompaniment. Learning to listen has been a strong incentive that the Synod on the Young offered to the whole Church.

And there is a kind of listening that has even deeper roots, and on it depends a large part of the quality of our listening to each other. This listening has roots that stretch upwards. It is the ABC of every vocation, which is the coming together of a call and a response which is renewed at every new awakening.

⁴ SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment*. Instrumentum Laboris, 175.

Listening to God is a mystery that cannot be reduced to any simple exercise or particular moment. It happens ‘through the work of the Holy Spirit’ and usually it does not happen suddenly, but by a progressive maturing process that takes place through a series of long patient stages, like those the Scriptures speak about and which can be found in the lives of our saints.

There is a predisposition for listening to God, the more precious as it is more difficult in most of the social contexts in which we are living, marked by a constant superabundance of social media stimuli and by ever more intense rhythms of activities. The precious predisposition is that of ‘having a little silence’.

Silence is the grammar through which the language between God and man is expressed. There is a word that has always been different from all the others, the word with which He speaks to us: Sacred Scripture. This is never imposed, it always depends on our listening, on being in harmony with our heart, and on its familiarity with our being in silence with God. While listening to this Word, affections and thoughts begin to model themselves on what the Gospel reveals each day. Listening to God in the people around us and in the events that happen to us makes us more attentive and we see things at greater depth.

Along this path the consistency develops between what is heard and proclaimed and what is lived. Listening to God who speaks to us needs to be practised every day, as an artist or an athlete does in their area of specialized excellence.

1.3. GOOD CHRISTIANS with the need to *Evangelize and to offer the first proclamation and catechesis* ‘This Society’s origins are found in the simple catechetical instructions...’ (BM IX, 35)

“He took no step, he said no word, he took up no task that was not directed to the saving of the young... Truly the only concern of his heart was for souls.”⁵ This testimony from the one who

more than any other knew Don Bosco and ‘who went halves with him in everything,’ enables us to appreciate almost in a tangible manner the intensity of the pastoral love of our father. He never drew back in the face of the harshest challenges of poverty starting in the Turin prisons, where Cafasso had encouraged him to go ‘to learn how to become a priest’. At the same time he never held back from proposing the highest goals of spiritual growth to everyone, as much to Magone as to Savio, adapting the path to each one. In the language of today: ‘Imitating God’s patience we encounter the young at their present stage of freedom.’⁶

The modern tone of this pastoral approach is surprising, as it knows how to walk beside each young person, even those most tried and tested (we can think of the presence of the Salesian Family in refugee camps or among migrants), and to find precisely there the good soil for the seed of the Gospel, ***without proselytism and without fear***, because faith and life have never ‘been divorced’ wherever there is fidelity to the charism that the Spirit has given to the Church with our family saints.

Pope Francis reminds us that we must never neglect the first proclamation nor postpone it in the hope of more suitable situations or of better times. He tells us:

‘This was something I emphasized in *Evangelii Gaudium*, and I consider it worth repeating here. It would be a serious mistake to think that in youth ministry “the kerygma should give way to a supposedly more ‘solid’ formation. Nothing is more solid, profound, secure, meaningful and wisdom-filled than that initial proclamation. All Christian formation consists of entering more deeply into the kerygma” and incarnating it ever more fully in our lives. Consequently, youth ministry should always include occasions for renewing and deepening our personal experience of the love of God and the living Christ. It can do this in a variety of ways: testimonies, songs,

⁵ SDB CONSTITUTIONS no. 21, quoting Don Rua on 24.8.1894.

⁶ SDB CONSTITUTIONS no. 38.

moments of adoration, times of spiritual reflection on the sacred Scriptures, and even an intelligent use of social networks. Yet this joyful experience of encounter with the Lord should never be replaced by a kind of “indoctrination”.⁷

Do we really believe in the importance of the first proclamation? Let us look at the world of youth in its totality: the extraordinary velocity of the constant changes travelling at digital-age speed that are creating a formidable diversity of cultures, of approaches to life, with a generation-gap far broader than in former times. Perhaps the world of someone born after 2000 is a territory still to be evangelized? The social network generations, already well beyond the young people of this millennium, born in the times of the internet, are waiting for someone who is capable of bringing them, for the first time, the light and the strength of the Gospel, speaking their language and being on their wavelength.

‘Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?’ (Is 6:8). These ancient words of Isaiah could not be more modern if we think of them on the lips of the whole Church community addressed to us the Salesian Family, as to those who, because of their charism, by the gift of the Spirit, are born to be specialists in contacting young people, and ready to be with them as they are and where they are, even with a difference in religious belief. Drawing back in the face of this challenge is like withdrawing from the Salesian Family, from the spirit that Don Bosco has handed on to us.

We must be careful, however, not to confuse the first proclamation with something minimal, limited, so ‘innocuous’ as to leave no trace of itself behind.

Don Bosco often recalled that it all began with ‘simple catechetical instructions’. His life story, inseparable from that of the young people with whom he lived, shows with absolute clarity that ‘simple’ in no way means ‘superficial’.

⁷ FRANCIS, *Christus Vivit*, 214.

When it comes to ‘personal experience of the love of God and of the living Jesus Christ’, often it is the young people themselves who become missionaries and evangelizers of those who accompany them because they are asking for a witness and a sharing of the life of faith that is authentic and profound.

In this lies the genius of Don Bosco: he remains accessible to everyone and with his boys is not afraid to focus directly on holiness; nothing less.

In this process a fascinating and demanding field opens up: making ‘catechism’ not just a series of necessary meetings for children and youngsters before they make their First Communion or are Confirmed; making ‘theology’ not just a series of examinations to be taken in order to be ordained priests. Catechesis is growing in the understanding of life enlightened by faith; theology is entering with mind and heart into the beauty of the mystery of God as it is revealed in Jesus. If, as members of the Salesian Family we can let ourselves become attracted by this ‘kindly light’ so as to fall in love with it and we again nourish our hearts and minds with these treasures, our way of being educators-pastors will also be enlightened. And what is more, I say that with this heart we will know how to be and to remain among the young and the families who practise other religions or who claim to be agnostics or atheists. Our attitude will be that of a real sharing and a simple witness to respect for different faiths.

As in the beginnings of the Oratory of Valdocco, growth in the faith can only happen in company: the more intense the spiritual journey of the one who is accompanying so too will be that of the youngsters and the people who, ‘*more by osmosis than by logical processes*’ will tend to follow in their footsteps. In its turn it will be the progress of his people that will urge the one who acts as pastor to grow more, and to take himself closer to the spring in order to respond to the thirst of the one who, often without words, asks for his help to meet the Lord.

1.4. GOOD CHRISTIANS living a true Salesian spirituality

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit initiated the time of the Church and of the mission. Thanks to the Spirit spirituality and the mission go hand in hand. It is not possible to separate the mission from spirituality nor spirituality from the mission. For this reason when we do not succeed in living the mission and spirituality in an integrated manner most probably knocking at our door will come weariness and confusion and our being satisfied with “entertaining” the others with our activities, *without, however, managing to ‘touch’ the life of each one at any depth.*

Returning to the first love

Nowadays many sociologists talk about a society of weariness. Pope Francis says that we pastoral workers can also live tired out. Why do we become so weary? Someone might say we have an agenda full of occupations... however ‘... The problem is not always an excess of activity, but rather activity undertaken badly, without adequate motivation, without a spirituality which would permeate it and make it pleasurable.’⁸ Evidently we should not seek the cause of our weariness in our agenda but in ourselves, in the lack of motivation and in the disconnection between the way we live the mission and spirituality.

In order to cure this weariness we need to understand the causes. Returning to one’s first love gives new life. We remember how Don Bosco too, in the last years of his life, saw that the Oratory of Valdocco had lost its first love, Therefore from Rome he wrote a letter to the boys and to the Salesians of the Oratory in which he compared the life and the joy of the first years to the present crisis. In the Oratory the joy, the life, the trust had been lost. The conclusion was that it was necessary to return to the first love.

⁸ FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 81.

A. *Spirituality*

It is true that the word spirituality is in fashion, however, it is equally true that this word is very ambiguous. We can see a reawakening of the desire for spirituality in places and contexts that are very diverse, even though many of the spirituality projects that are nowadays fashionable have nothing to do with Jesus and his Gospel.

In spite of this ambiguity, it needs to be recognised that the desire for spirituality can be the gateway to the Christian life for those searching for it. In some young people, we can see a desire for God, albeit still vague and far from knowledge of the God of revelation. In others, we can glimpse an ideal of human fraternity, which is no small thing. Many have a genuine desire to develop their talents in order to offer something to our world. In some, we see a special artistic sensitivity, or a yearning for harmony with nature. In others, perhaps, a great need to communicate. In many of them, we encounter a deep desire to live life differently. In all of this, we can find real starting points, inner resources open to a word of incentive, wisdom and encouragement.⁹

This attitude of openness leads us to ask ourselves what we as the Salesian Family are doing on behalf of these young people and adults who are “searching”. What we can offer is a little light and encouragement. This is an urgent concern especially in those contexts in which religious signs and symbols have lost their force and significance, even though these places are now to be found almost everywhere. Knowing how to communicate with those who are searching means building bridges of relationships. Perhaps this is what the Holy Father is asking for when he says: ‘Anyone called to be a parent, pastor or guide to young people must have the farsightedness to appreciate the little flame that continues to burn, the fragile reed that is shaken but not broken (cf. *Is* 42:3). The ability to discern pathways where others only see walls, to

⁹ FRANCIS, *Christus Vivit*, 84.

recognize potential where others see only peril. That is how God the Father sees things; he knows how to cherish and nurture the seeds of goodness sown in the hearts of the young. Each young person's heart should thus be considered "holy ground", a bearer of seeds of divine life, before which we must "take off our shoes" in order to draw near and enter more deeply into the Mystery.'¹⁰

And we recognize very well in this approach the style and the way in which our beloved Father Don Bosco used to draw near and accompany his boys.

B. *Christian Spirituality*

In the vast field of spirituality, we have our place within Christian spirituality. There is a fundamental Christian spirituality, the fruit of the essential message of the Gospel marked by the values most characteristic of each moment in the history of the Church. We cannot forget that Christianity is incarnated in history and aims to transform real people in their own cultural context. Therefore Christian spirituality ought to respond to the needs of each period of time, and must express itself in the categories of the present moment. And there can be no doubt that these values that flow from the Gospel in all contexts, in all cultures and at all times are very precious bridges of communication, dialogue and meeting with other religions.

The decisive point in the spiritual life is to discover the mystery of God in the world and in our life because 'God is at work in the history of the world, in the events of life, in the people I meet and who speak to me.'¹¹ Here we find the foundation of discernment. Because God is not found in idleness but is active, and the mission of the Church is to make sure that every man and every woman meets the Lord who is already Presence and is acting in their lives and in their hearts. Understanding the mission in this

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 67.

¹¹ FRANCIS, *Angelus* on 28 October 2019.

way, the aim of youth ministry is to help every young person to come into contact with the mystery of God who is acting in history, in their lives and in their heart.

Don Bosco always knew how to interpret the events of life from God's perspective. In order to live according to God's perspective a spiritual core is necessary which gives unity to a person, since a spiritual person is a person who, thanks to the action of the Holy Spirit, is a sound, unified, well-balanced person. In this way a spiritual person is conscious of being a child of God, has knowledge of the faith that makes it possible to perceive the mystery of God, the meaning of the world and of history, and to live the faith in a community of brothers and sisters at the service of the Kingdom of God.

What has been said helps us to appreciate and understand the extraordinary importance that Pope Francis gives in his Magisterium to spirituality. He deals with it in all his major documents:

- The spirituality of the missionary disciple.¹²
- Ecological spirituality.¹³
- Matrimonial and family spirituality.¹⁴
- Holiness as the origin and goal of the spiritual life.¹⁵

Pope Francis says: 'I hope that you will be serious enough about yourselves to make an effort to grow spiritually'.¹⁶ Because undoubtedly spirituality affects life. A life made up of dreams, experiences, relationships, plans and choices. We have to be able to help our young people to take the risk of dreaming and choosing; to live intensely and to experiment; to taste the experience of friendship with Jesus; to grow and mature; to live an experience of fraternity; to become committed; to be courageous missionaries.

¹² Cf. FRANCIS, *EG*, 239-288.

¹³ Cf. FRANCIS, *LS*, 181-213.

¹⁴ Cf. FRANCIS, *AL*, 278-289.

¹⁵ Cf. FRANCIS, *GE* for most of its contents.

¹⁶ FRANCIS, *ChV*, 159.

C. Salesian Spirituality

We are speaking about a Salesian spirituality, as a charismatic expression within the 'great river' of *Christian spirituality*. The noun is Christian spirituality and the adjective is the concrete charismatic style.

Salesian Spirituality cannot be understood without appreciating the spiritual experience of Don Bosco. Our father was a priest who dedicated himself to the education and to the evangelization of the young, the founder of a variety of apostolic movements on behalf of youth and father of a charismatic family with a clear and strong apostolic spirituality.

For this reason Salesian Spirituality has its roots in the spiritual experience Don Bosco lived, that the first Salesians lived, that the first Salesian sisters, the lay co-workers and the boys at the Oratory lived. In this spiritual tradition we can see a particular way of understanding the Christian life, educational, pastoral and social action; the pedagogical and spiritual project that we call the Preventive System. Our Spirituality has some characteristics that are quite proper to it. It is a spirituality of everyday life, an Easter spirituality of joy and optimism; a spirituality of friendship and of a personal relationship with Jesus, a spirituality of communion with the Church, a Marian spirituality; a spirituality of responsible service that proposes, as Don Bosco always did, the goal of being '*good Christians and upright citizens*.' We try to promote the dignity of every individual and their rights; making the effort to live with generosity in the family and promoting solidarity especially with the poorest; undertaking one's own work with uprightness and competence; promoting justice, peace and the common good in politics; respecting creation and fostering access to culture. All of this is part of our spirituality, of our being the Salesian Family and a Gospel message according to the charism of Don Bosco in the different parts of the world.

1.5. GOOD CHRISTIANS in the face of the challenge of environments that are non-Christian, post-believing or post-Christian

On the other hand we are living in a world where we come across not only young believers but also young people who are drifting away from the faith, young people who profess other religious beliefs and those who profess none.

This plurality of situations enables us to remember the missionary mandate received at Pentecost. Where is Jesus sending us? There are no frontiers, there are no boundaries: he is sending us to everyone, since for the Gospel there are no boundaries or frontiers. The Lord is sending us to everyone and the Salesian mission takes us to everyone. 'Do not be afraid to go and bring Christ into every area of life, to the fringes of society, even to those who seem farthest away and most indifferent. The Lord seeks all; he wants everyone to feel the warmth of his mercy and his love. He invites us to be fearless missionaries wherever we are and in whatever company we find ourselves: in our neighbourhoods, in school or sports or social life, in volunteer service or in the workplace. Wherever we are, we always have an opportunity to share the joy of the Gospel.'¹⁷

It is for this reason that the mission is as stimulating as it is demanding. *What do we need to be thinking about in order to be able to draw close, at the pastoral level, also to those young people who distance themselves from the faith and to those who profess other religions or to those who profess none?* In other words in non-Christian or post-Christian contexts.

Some dangers that threaten us

In Christian contexts as well as in those non-Christian or post-Christian ones, we need to avoid both fundamentalism and

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 177.

relativism, and likewise exclusivism and syncretism.

Fundamentalism, believing to have the truth in one's pocket, is closed to dialogue, it stands firm and is intransigent in its convictions, but in a reactionary and intolerant manner. For its part relativism starts from the conviction that there are no certainties, no cognitive truths, no absolute norms. The postmodern cultural climate finds in relativism its own natural habitat and sees as an unacceptable attack any kind of claim of truth. Neither fundamentalism nor relativism are any help in our pastoral projects.

The *Instrumentum Laboris* of the last Synod on Youth has an interesting point. 'It is not a matter of giving up the most precious hallmark of Christianity to conform to the spirit of the world, nor is this what young people are asking for, but we do need to find a way to convey the Christian message in changed cultural circumstances. In line with biblical tradition, the recognition that truth has a relational basis is a good thing: human beings discover truth once they experience it from God, the only one who is truly reliable and trustworthy.'¹⁸ The *Instrumentum Laboris* suggests that the path of relationships is the one to be pursued. It seems to be suggesting that the way in will be found in relationships. We know very well that the Preventive System of Don Bosco has always been a practical example of this principle of relationships.

Two other dangers are exclusivism and syncretism. The first exclusivism has two faces. One concerns the offering of a proposal addressed only to an elite, those young people and adults most prepared. The other regards the young people and adults most ready. The second refers to the rejection of any pastoral proposition, with the excuse of respecting the sensitivities of each individual. In conclusion, it would be a pastoral project only for a few or even a total absence of any pastoral project. None of these

¹⁸ SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment*, o.c., 55.

routes is good. If our pastoral approach is not concerned with those at a distance, we are showing that we have little confidence in the Gospel project, and perhaps also how elitist our ideas of pastoral work are. And if we chose censorship, then our confidence in the evangelization project is very slight. Censorship will be the best way of concerning ourselves pastorally with no one.

The other side of the coin is syncretism. A syncretist pastoral project is characterized by a mixing together of proposals taken piecemeal from various world views. The syncretist proposal is always seeking novelty without the application of any criterion of discernment.

We therefore come to ask ourselves whether any projects are possible? Yes, there are:

- Taking care of the seeds of the Word

The first proposal is that of *seeking out and taking care of the seeds of the Word*. The Second Vatican Council gave encouragement to this teaching which, in fact is based on a centuries old tradition, already formulated in the Second Century by the Father of the Church Saint Justin.

Recalling this doctrine, the Council proposed to recognize the different levels of truth that there are in various religious and cultural traditions. In these seeds the Word is already present if only in embryonic form and they are moving in the direction of the Word. This is a great help in our pastoral work in non-Christian or post-Christian contexts that require us to try to find suitable opportunities for mutual understanding and collaboration. We can find these 'meeting places' in contexts such as human values and human dignity, the search for peace, the acquiring of virtues such as compassion and respect for others, the stranger, the one who is different; care for Creation, ecology ...

All of these are very relevant and issues of worldwide social sensitivity nowadays and this certainly suggests to us that we can begin with the simpler things.

– Dialogue

The second pastoral proposal in non-Christian and post-Christian contexts needs to be *dialogue*, and with this we return to our reflection on the subject of relationships.

I am emphasising the importance of dialogue which needs other skills, such as that of knowing how to listen, to speak in a way that can be understood, being able to propose experiences of communion. Dialogue does not consist only in offering opinions. When we enter into dialogue we need to make a great effort to understand the experience that the other person is living and his thoughts. It is therefore important always to foster an atmosphere of respect in the face of undeniable differences, and also to recognize that dialogue requires the humility to admit one's own limitations, and confidence to appreciate one's own good points.

The pastoral dialogue we are speaking about is above all a conversation about human life, with an attitude of openness towards the young, sharing their joys and their sorrows, their desires and hopes, their religious values; we are dealing with an exercise in personal and community encounter that enriches us enormously: 'In this way we learn to accept others and their different ways of living, thinking and speaking. We can then join one another in taking up the duty of serving justice and peace, which should become a basic principle in all our exchanges.'¹⁹

– The value of Witness

Another no less important perspective is that concerned with Witness: the value of witness based on consistency, commitment and credibility. Young people will forgive us for many mistakes, but they want us to be consistent, credible and committed to working for others. They are the witnesses of our times.

¹⁹ FRANCIS, *EG*, 250.

– Proclamation

Pope Francis recalls with insistence the importance of proclaiming the Gospel. “there can be no true evangelization without the explicit proclamation of Jesus as Lord and without the primacy of the proclamation of Jesus Christ in all evangelizing work”²⁰. Proclamation should never be proselytism, and in each context will have a different expression; for example it will not be the same proclamation of the Gospel in non-Christian contexts or in post-Christian contexts.

This proclamation includes essentially the three great truths for the Christian: *That God loves us, that Christ saves us, and that the Spirit gives life and accompanies us in life.*

How should we make this proclamation? Above all with the certainty of knowing that the proclamation is presented and remains open so that through the Grace of the Spirit it may give rise to faith. In addition the proclamation ought to be carried out in a style characterized by nearness and closeness, and ought to be personalized even within a group or community, that is to say, it needs to reach each individual. No resource or pastoral strategy can ever take its place.

‘But in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord, Always be prepared to make a defence to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you. Yet do it with gentleness and reverence, and keep your conscience clear.’ (1Pt 3:15-16a).

1.6. GOOD CHRISTIANS detached from themselves

The mission is a characteristic of the disciples of the Lord. We recall that when Pope Francis describes, in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, the characteristics of the spirituality of the missionary disciple, he places the missionary mandate in the

²⁰ *Ibid*, 110.

very depths of the human being. ‘My mission of being in the heart of the people is not just a part of my life or a badge I can take off, it is not an “extra” or just another moment in life. Instead, it is something I cannot uproot from my being without destroying my very self. I am a mission on this earth; that is the reason why I am here.’²¹ The Holy Father places the mission at the centre of existence.

A. *Your life for others*

The meeting with God draws me out of myself in order to go towards others. It is called by some ‘the anthropology of the gift’, that can be summed up with the expression ‘your life for others’. On this account a person attentive to others is a person capable of an attentive and compassionate gaze rather than one of an indifference that is found deep in the hearts of many people these days, making us incapable of experiencing compassion faced with the cries of others.

A person open to others is also capable of recognising the gift he has received, putting his talents at the service of others. Dedication to others, especially those most in need, becomes a real act of faith and is the foundation of every Christian life.

‘When an encounter with God is called an “ecstasy”, it is because it takes us out of ourselves, lifts us up and overwhelms us with God’s love and beauty. Yet we can also experience ecstasy when we recognize in others their hidden beauty, their dignity and their grandeur as images of God and children of the Father. The Holy Spirit wants to make us come out of ourselves, to embrace others with love and to seek their good.’²²

B. *From ‘I’ to ‘here I am’*

This way of understanding life open to others invites us to change from ‘I’ to ‘Here I am’. The ‘I’ culture explains the world

²¹ *Ibid*, 273.

²² FRANCIS, *ChV*, 164.

in which we are living very well. This culture offers great possibilities (personal growth, autonomy, development of the individual), but it also conceals great weaknesses (people who keep at a distance and are little open to others, narcissism).

Biblical anthropology presents the believer as someone who is capable of saying 'Here I am'. In Scripture we see that these words were said at significant moments in the lives of Abraham, Moses, Samuel, Isaiah, Mary of Nazareth, by Jesus himself who according to the Letter to the Hebrews, coming into the world said: 'God, here I am, I am coming to obey your will' (Heb 10:7).

Giving importance to the value of the 'I', and it could not be otherwise, we can understand Christian life as a journey from 'I' to 'Here I am'. Making this journey enables us to open ourselves to a mystery that transcends. When we say with faith, 'Here I am', an attitude and a disposition is being created in us that opens our life to the Holy Spirit who is guiding and accompanying us in order to find the way of being and of living that most identifies us as human beings. It is the essence of every *vocation*, with the believer's gaze fixed on Jesus Christ, and 'the life that Jesus gives us is a love story, a *life history* that wants to blend with ours and sink roots in the soil of our own lives.'²³

II. UPRIGHT CITIZENS

2.1. Young people are waiting for us in the 'house of life'

One of the best and most relevant interpretations we can give of our Salesian mission is that of continuing to ensure our choice of meeting young people where they are to be found and in the circumstances in which they are living. The young people are waiting for us, and it is their daily life, the present that is the

²³ *Ibid*, 252.

place where we need to meet them. There would be no human development, nor social commitment nor even evangelization and a faith journey were it not recognized that *the starting point is the place where the young and the families and everyone find themselves.*

The ability to go out and meet them learned from Don Bosco, is a sign of our being concerned about their lives, of taking their situation seriously and above all of the real desire to be on their side and to make their concerns our concerns. It is for this reason that we cannot forget our founding charism as the Salesian Family of meeting the young where they are, and with them, precisely there to work with commitment to improve and transform a situation that is always a challenge. Consequently every process of human development ought to be seen as a part, and not an end in itself, of a more profound and broad process of promotion that leads the person to make of their own lives a meeting place with others, for the sharing of gifts, to build a more just and worthy society for everyone, as an anticipation of the Kingdom of Heaven that is already being built on this earth, if within us there are the principles of the Good News of Jesus.

I don't think there is any need to accept that social commitment, 'militancy' in associations that promote the good of young people and of society are incompatible with gospel teaching. In the Our Father we can find the 'politics' of fraternity and of justice, solidarity, reconciliation, respect, equality and the protection of the weakest. It cannot be said that the different ways of doing good are incompatible. It is sufficient that this good concerns the full person and every person, avoiding any discrimination and partiality.

When Jesus was presented with the situations of those who were 'not ours' he at once responded making his own those who were not directly opposed to him. Who is not against us is with us.

2.2. UPRIGHT CITIZENS educating our young people for citizenship and social commitment

Perhaps we are dealing with one of the ‘clichés’ to which we sometimes retreat so as to avoid uncomfortable questions such as when it is said that Don Bosco did not get involved in politics, since his politics were those of the ‘Our Father’. Certainly we have to clarify what politics we are talking about.

It is worth reflecting on this subject and to discover that bringing into the field of politics the ideas of the Our Father simply confirms human and evangelical commitment to what causes people concern or to the conditions in which they are living. And rather than giving the Our Father a different meaning reducing it to an empty spiritualism, uninterested in ‘the things of this world’, it ought rather to give an idea of the God who seeks the good and the happiness of human beings, of all his sons and daughters.

For our young people today, used as they are to practical things, to easy results, to the immediate effect of their actions, and with the difficulties they encounter in trying to undertake programmes or processes or to accept the burden of sowing the seed or the long wait before they see the fruits, it is indispensable to educate them to social commitment as a way that can introduce many of them to the path of the Christian life.

There is no genuine Christian life, one might say, without social commitment, or in other words without justice and charity, without the service of others, and above all of those most in need, the weakest, those ‘without a voice’ the abandoned and those cast aside, just as there is no good Samaritan without a man in need, or Don Bosco without young people who are poor, abandoned or in danger.

And on the other hand, there cannot be genuine political or social action without human development. Social and political action ought to be the expression of the priority that people and human development have within society.

It may be that the dichotomy to which some people give great emphasis, between the path of holiness (the spiritual life) and social commitment (life of the citizen) can become a reality when the goals are the dignity of labour and Christian development through it, faith through works commitment to the poor and to social justice as an experience consistent with the Gospel.

The social dimension is not extrinsic to the experience of faith. It is precisely in social commitment that one ought to make more profound the transcendent dimension of every human activity. Pope Francis in 'Christus Vivit' gives an interesting interpretation of the ability that young people have of committing themselves in society, and attributes this dedication to a full life to friendship with Christ. All of this is a pastoral project for us educators and evangelizers of the young.

'I want to encourage all of you in this effort, because I know that "your young hearts want to build a better world. I have been following news reports of the many young people throughout the world who have taken to the streets to express the desire for a more just and fraternal society. Young people taking to the streets! The young want to be protagonists of change. Please, do not leave it to others to be protagonists of change. You are the ones who hold the future! Through you, the future enters into the world. I ask you also to be protagonists of this transformation. You are the ones who hold the key to the future! Continue to fight apathy and to offer a Christian response to the social and political troubles emerging in different parts of the world. I ask you to build the future, to work for a better world. Dear young people, please, do not be bystanders in life. Get involved! Jesus was not a bystander. He got involved. Don't stand aloof, but immerse yourselves in the reality of life, as Jesus did." Above all, in one way or another, fight for the common good, serve the poor, be protagonists of the revolution of charity and service, capable of resisting the pathologies of consumerism and superficial individualism.'

²⁴

²⁴ FRANCIS, *ChV*, 174.

2.3. UPRIGHT CITIZENS educating our young people to commitment in political service

‘The society that Don Bosco had in mind was a Christian society built on the foundations of morality and religion. Nowadays the view of society has changed: we are living in a secular society built on the principles of equality, of freedom, of participation, but the Salesian educative proposal preserves its capacity to form a citizen aware of his responsibilities, social, professional, political, capable of committing himself to justice the promotion of the common good, with a special sensitivity and concern for the most weak and marginalised groups. There is need therefore to work for a change in the criteria and in the vision of life, for the promotion of a culture of the other person, of a way of life that is moderate, a constant attitude of generous self-giving, of a fight for justice and for the dignity of every human being,’²⁵

It is a matter of fact that safeguarded by the ‘rules of the game’ many contemporary socio-political systems control their citizens or keep them subdued far more than we could or would like to believe. Our educational centres need to prepare the young to react to such situations with a responsible political attitude and one of civic participation. I ask myself:

- How can we help the young to acquire the knowledge, the ability, the skills and essential attitudes needed to be able to exercise their citizens’ rights in an effective, free and consistent manner?
- As the Salesian Family, how can we be citizens, co-responsible in a Salesian way, at this time?

At the present fragile and fragmented time, when the political dimension of life is very often thought of as conniving with corruption and a lack of morality, where there is anaemia regarding attitudes that focus especially on individualism, we ought to be

²⁵ P. CHÁVEZ, *Acts of the International Congress on the Preventive System and Human rights*, p. 82.

setting ourselves the task of educating our young people to a commitment to the service of an 'upright citizenship' in the political-social field.

Among the many political theories (economic, social, educational, health, international...) we can choose as the Salesian Family that of the 'Our Father', that of our 'daily bread', that of the 'bare feet', that of 'always of the poorest (Mk 14:7), in need of a sound political policy of justice and charity. We want to be and to continue to be on the side of the 'politically incorrect' because we choose to be on the side of those who have no voice. Archbishop Romero said: 'The political dimension of the faith has to be discovered and it is rightly discovered through the practical service of the poor... that is incarnated in their world, proclaims good news, gives hope, encourages processes of liberation, defends their cause and takes a part in their fate.'²⁶

Therefore as educators and as Christians, as the Salesian Family of Don Bosco today, we are aiming at a form of political activity that is social: activity that contributes to solidarity, to human fellowship, to a real coming together that accepts and respects the other person in the establishment of the 'Kingdom of God' here and now.

Educating our young people with this vision and this criterion of political participation, directed towards the common good, the reason for life and the aim of political life, implies that we educate with a firm conviction for:

- ✓ the dignity and the rights of human beings, always seeking the greater good of the community and of the individual;
- ✓ the safeguarding and the protection of the transcendental dignity of people made in the image of God;
- ✓ the promotion of development that is complete, sustainable and involving the whole of man and of all human beings;

²⁶ Arch. O. Romero, *Address given on the occasion of the Honorary Doctorate conferred on him by Louvain University on 2 February 1980.*

- ✓ the globalization of charity, and of solidarity especially with the poor, the weak and excluded and against the enormous weight of indifference, exclusion and egotism;
- ✓ the achievement of fraternity as the driving force of economic order and of the development of all the potential that peoples have;
- ✓ the extension of the principle of subsidiarity as free and responsible participation, as the basis of a democratic society in which all have a voice and can participate;
- ✓ the shared availability of the goods of the earth, and the fostering of the idea of coming together and of sharing; including care of our common home, with a natural and human ecology of living together, of harmony, peace and wellbeing in the present and in the future.

This requires from us a work of education that re-awakens and cultivates the sense of humanity within each man and woman; that makes this grow in self-awareness of its vocation, dignity and destiny; a work of education that includes ‘the new political generations’ so that they do not withdraw from participation in public life, full of zeal for the good, charismatically present where decisions about the future are made.

As Pope Francis tells us: ‘The future of humanity is not only in the hands of politicians, the great leaders, big businesses. Yes, their responsibility is tremendous. But, the future is above all in the hands of people who recognise in the other an individual and themselves as part of an “us”’.²⁷ Thus we want to go beyond silence, beyond indifference, so that all us citizens in these times can carry out our mission in the community.

This way of looking at things is not very different in essence from what we identify as the Salesian charism. An example would be what is found in the SDB Constitutions and the Regulations

²⁷ FRANCIS, Video message sent to TED 2017

when it says that: “the social dimension of charity belongs to the education of the individual socially and politically engaged in the cause of justice, in the construction of a society more just and more human, finding in it an inspiration that is fully evangelical,”²⁸ and in the same way in many documents of the various groups that are part of our large family.

Blessed Alberto Marvelli, an oratorian from Rimini, was an example in all of this. He saw and lived an engagement in politics as a service and as a way of expressing his faith in the world, in the ‘polis’, trying to incarnate in his life the ideals of solidarity and of justice that the Church in his day preached and that he knew thanks to his reading of the social encyclicals. For him politics was love, it was the ultimate consequence of social charity and an instrument of truth. This is how Saint John Paul II described him in the homily at his Beatification: ‘In prayer he sought inspiration also for his political activity, convinced of the need to live life fully as children of God in history in order to transform it into salvation history.’ A young man who allowed himself to be educated in the school of socio-political commitment as a synthesis of faith and life for the transformation of the world. Albert under stood very well in his life what the service of others as a citizen means.

For this reason it continues to be indispensable “to move forward in the direction of an updated re-affirmation of the socio-political and educational choice of Don Bosco. This means the forming of a social and political conscience that then leads to the making of one’s life a mission for the common good with a constant reference to the inalienable human and Christian rights and values.”²⁹

This is a challenge in our socio-political education of the younger generations in which we need to grow even more. ‘For a

²⁸ SDB CONSTITUTIONS AND REGULATIONS 32 e 22 rispettivamente.

²⁹ P. CHÁVEZ, *ACG 415. Like Don Bosco the educator*, 15.

young person today, being an upright citizen entails promoting the dignity and rights of the individual in all contexts, living with generosity in the family and preparing for family life on the basis of mutual self-giving, that fosters solidarity, especially with the poorest. It means developing work skills with honesty and professional competence, promoting justice, peace and the common good in politics, respecting creation and promoting culture.³⁰

Education in itself has a political dimension: educational activity is a way of making an impact in the world. This implies paying more attention to the political dimension of education, of citizenship, of a commitment to society, to the families of our young people and to themselves.

This is today and always will be a great challenge to us as educators to make possible a reality that promotes new moral standards. Therefore we cannot be satisfied if our educational centres produce graduates but not citizens committed to change, critical of certain situations, skilled not only because of the ‘formation’ received but capable of the ‘transformation’ of these situations, as agents of change and of improvement, of hope and of renewal in the world of finance, politics, education, work, social commitment, the mass media... and for a new world of active citizenship, protagonists of the common good. As educators in the Salesian Family, consecrated and lay, we need to continue, with conviction, along this path so that having planted the seed, this may grow in time and become a approach to life and a way of life.

2.4. UPRIGHT CITIZENS educating our young people to integrity and legality

There are questions, it seems to me, that we cannot avoid asking ourselves when we are thinking about educating and accom-

³⁰ SALESIAN YOUTH MINISTRY DEPARTMENT, *Salesian Yoth Ministry Frame of Reference*, p. 107, referring to GC23, no. 178.

panying our young people in their formation as upright citizens capable of overcoming the temptations to take the easy way, making money without working or using one's professional expertise.

- How can we help the teenagers and young people that we meet every day to make decisions and to solve the problems in the lives with honesty and integrity?
- How can we offer them experiences that help them to build confidence in themselves and at the same time recognize the rightness of their behaviour?

We shall need to be able to educate in the truth that makes free, in the beauty of transparency, without double lives or self-deception, without falling into forms of slavery that are overwhelming, or immoral reactions that weaken a person's inner self. Jesus himself lived with the integrity and transparency of his preaching, restoring liberty to captives, light to the blind, freedom to the oppressed and proclaiming the Lord's year of favour (cf. Lk 4:18-19); washing the feet of his disciples as an example of service to others, living the "unfathomable riches" of love and truth that cost him his life on the cross in front of everyone. He suffered in his own flesh the institutional injustice that corrupts on account of egotism, self-centredness, the pursuit of one's own interests and the lies that repeated so many times become "truth" to the point of murder.

As educators we must put into practice and encourage uprightness and legality. How? Through prevention. It often happens nowadays that we hear 'siren voices' suggesting as the most natural thing to follow the easy paths that corrupt the inner conscience and damage a person's integrity, the strength and truth of what we are. 'Society as a whole is called to commit itself concretely to combating the cancer of corruption in its various forms... Corruption is one of the most lacerating wounds of the social fabric, as it gravely harms both from an ethical and an economic point of view; with the illusion of quick and easy gains, in reality it impoverishes everyone, removing trust, transparency and reliability from the whole system.' ³¹

- As educators what are we doing in a preventative style to reinforce in the lives of our youngsters the conviction of the need to be upright people?
- What examples, what ideas, what kind of behaviour are we handing on so that young people and their families do not come to accept as normal what is unjust, untruthful, deceitful and one's own advantage at any price?
- What are we creating with education and evangelical values in areas essentially human such as conscience, a critical sense, standing up for the truth, authenticity and justice?

Corruption is 'a process of death' that had become normal in so many societies, and is certainly a real evil and a grave sin (that isn't spoken about), even though nonetheless, the hope brought by the Lord Jesus cannot be mistaken. A hope that we have to really sow in each of our young people. Knowing that schools and youth associations are always a means of civic education, it is vitally important that whoever is involved in education and society *asks themselves what kind of citizen our educational programmes have in mind*. Educators nowadays are under enormous pressure to reduce education to teaching and learning subject matter and to preparation for the examinations.

I should like to think that the majority of educators, at least the educators in the Salesian Family centres around the world, believe that schools, in addition to teaching children to read and write, to do sums and know about science and history are also being a marvellous influence in seeing the world, and therefore are an important and powerful instrument in shaping our society, changing it for the better. It is important to teach young people to ask themselves questions, to look at themselves and to query what is being proposed to them as ideals in life; to express their own points of view and the way they see things; to give due consideration to their own environment and to the particular

³¹ FRANCIS, *Audience to the Officials of the Court of Auditors* Vatican City, 18 March 2019.

circumstances of their lives, their past and their dreams for the future; to think of themselves as active citizens, ready and capable of making sound judgements and well prepared to have an influence on public life.

Educating means all this. 'To educate means helping individuals to rediscover themselves, and to patiently accompany them on their journey of recovering values and self-confidence. It means reconstructing reasons for living through discovery of the beauty of life. Educating also means a renewed capacity for dialogue, but is also a proposal full of interests, firmly anchored in what is the most fundamental of approaches involving young people in experiences that help them grasp the meaning of daily effort, offering them the basic tools for earning a living, making them capable of acting responsibly in every circumstance. Educating requires that we understand the juvenile social problems of our times.'³²

2.5. UPRIGHT CITIZENS sensitive and co-responsible in a world on the move and migration

Allow me by way of illustrating what I want to propose, to refer to my own experience in the various visitations in these years. I have been greatly impressed by the enormous creativity and commitment of my confreres and of the Salesian Family, who have known how to respond to the staggering phenomenon of our days that human migration is. I came across it in Kakuma, a refugee camp in the north of Kenya containing about 190,000 people. My SDB confreres are the only institution authorized to live within the camp itself, taking care of all the needs of the youngsters coming from various parts of Africa, above all from South Sudan and Somalia, by providing technical training, an oratory and youth centre, and educational-pastoral activities. I also saw it in the significant presence in Tijuana, in Mexico.

³² SALESIAN YOUTH MINISTRY DEPARTMENT, *op. cit.*, 93.

In that frontier between the economic north and south of the world, with food provision, and a network of oratories, they are responding to the needs of hundreds of youngsters in search of a future. They are accompanying them, forestalling the danger of violence and drugs and offering educational opportunities' Also in our 'Sacred Heart' community in Rome we have a small but very active youth centre attended by young university students and volunteers, who in the setting of an oratory welcome young migrants and refugees from various parts of the world. In this way we could travel round the whole World of our Salesian Family and find everywhere creative responses to the needs of young migrants, since this awareness is part of our Salesian DNA. I think I can say without fear of being mistaken that **we are sons and daughters of an emigrant, who welcomed emigrants and who sent his sons as missionaries to take care of emigrants.**

The phenomenon

The phenomenon of migration nowadays effects **more than 1000 million people**; it is the greatest movement of people of all time and has become an institutional feature of contemporary society that is becoming more and more complex in social, cultural and religious terms, exacerbated by the existence of illegal migration. The causes are varied: the world wide social and economic inequalities, political and social crises that are transformed into armed conflicts and ethnic and religious persecutions, as well as migrations produced by climate change and the desertification of various parts of the planet and also the enormous ease and possibility of communication and mobility that exist today.

According to United Nations' statistics, **international migrants today number 271.6 million**, about 3.5% of the world population. Of these, 39 million are minors under 18 years of age. Internal migration (that which takes place within a country) was estimated according to 2009 figures, at 790 million people.

One particular and very tragic feature is that of the **70.8 million people forced to migrate**: 41.3 million migrants, especially people who because of wars have had to migrate within their own country. Those leaving their own country are 25.9 million refugees, plus 3.5 million seeking refuge. These are the official statistics of UNO, while it is known the actual numbers could be higher. Half of these forced migrants are minors under 18 years of age, It has been calculated that there are 111,000 unaccompanied minors without any family. More frequently the refugees are living in cities (61%), being more invisible.

Don Bosco

For our Religious Family the phenomenon of migration is nothing new to our charism.

Don Bosco himself emigrated from the serenity and the austerity of the countryside – to the Becchi at Chieri, and afterwards to the city of Turin. From the beginning Don Bosco faced this situation. The first boys he took into his Oratory were seasonal or permanent migrants coming from the countryside to look for work in the Piedmontese capital; young foreigners who spoke neither Italian nor Piedmontese. In a discussion with some parish priests of Turin who thought Don Boco was keeping the boys away from their parishes, the saint said that they were all foreigners:

‘Because almost all of them are visitors, who have been abandoned by their relatives in this city; or they have come here looking for work and failed to get it. Boys from Savoy, Switzerland, the Val d’Aosta, Biella, Novara, Lombardy are the ones who most frequently who come to my activities. [...] They’re far from home, they speak diverse dialects, they have no fixed places to stay. These considerations make it difficult if not impossible for them to belong to any parishes...’³³

³³ BOSCO J., *Memoirs of the Oratory*, ISS, *Salesian Sources. Don Bosco and his work*. LAS, Roma, Kristu Jyoti Publications 2017, 1413.

The Salesian Missionary Enterprise began with care being offered to Italian emigrants in Argentina. Don Bosco exhorted the first missionary expedition in 1875 as follows:

‘Search out these brothers who were driven to a strange land by poverty or misfortune; teach them how great is the mercy of God, who for the good of their souls is sending you to help them.’³⁴

The Salesian Congregation in the times of Don Rua and of Don Albera consolidated the attention being given to Italian emigrants, and also Polish and German. One only has to think of the enormous work undertaken among the emigrants; already in 1904, in America alone, there were 450,000 emigrants being helped by the Salesians.³⁵ With Don Rua a ‘**Salesian Commission for Emigration**’ was set up which operated for several years. The service provided for emigrants was enormous, on behalf both of the European emigrants in America, Africa, the Middle East or Europe itself and of emigrants who escaped from Eastern Europe to Western Europe at the time of the Communist regime.

Therefore the phenomenon of migration, in one way or another had always been present in our Salesian history. The challenge of the migration of young people is today much more widespread and complicated because of its cultural, social, religious dimension, and because of its great demographic impact, as well as the features linked to information technology, globalization, the ease of transport. In the face of this situation a **pastoral approach of communion** (more inclusive and integrating) is more necessary compared to the traditional, ethnic-national of looking after one’s co-nationals. We too find ourselves facing new and tragic phenomena such as that of refugees, unaccompanied

³⁴ CERIA E., *Biographical Memoirs of St John Bosco*, Vol. XI, New Rochelle 1964, 360.

³⁵ MOTTO F., *Bosco (Don) Giovanni e la missione dei Salesiani per i migranti*, in BATTISTELLA G. (a cura di). *Migrazioni. Dizionario Socio-Pastorale*, Cinisello Bal, abuse of power, abuse of conscience, sexual or financial abuse (Milano) 2010, 62.

children and people trafficking. All of this presents great challenges to our Salesian Family faced with this new 'youth continent' of the 21st century.

Vision for the future

To the question: which young people are we turning to in the world today, certainly these millions of youngsters forced to migrate are presenting us with a challenge. This is a situation in which, in addition to being a presence on the frontiers, in emergency situations, the larger part of the Works of the Family of Don Bosco **are welcoming into their premises** hundreds of thousands of children, teenagers, young migrants of the first or second generation, who are being happily integrated into our educative communities. This valuable service, generally conducted very quietly and with discretion provides an important help for the young people who migrate, offering them a shelter and helping them to effectively and naturally integrate into civil Society and sometimes into the Church.

We have to carry out this action of ours in this demanding world of human mobility starting from our charismatic identity:

- ✓ Focusing first of all on the children, the teenagers, the young people, offering them educative-pastoral courses of a certain calibre.
- ✓ Maintaining our educative-evangelizing approach, avoiding being reduced to an NGO. The mission is entrusted to an educative community in communion of life between consecrated and lay persons with the necessary skills for this delicate mission.
- ✓ Supporting an 'educative presence' with which we make ourselves as much as possible an essential part of the physical and existential world of those we are working with and for.
- ✓ Being educators and friends who are with them not simply as humanitarian agents, as providers of services for their benefit, but as educators and pastors.

- ✓ Focusing on 'prevention', trying to offer the young the possibility of developing skills in their own cultural context, so as to be able to take their place there with dignity, without the need to have to emigrate. Every young person has the right not to have to emigrate.
- ✓ With an ever more coordinated, more formalised, more visible and professional presence. It is a great opportunity for the Salesian Family to do something, where each group can make available to the mission its own gifts. The Salesian Missionary Volunteering Service and the Salesian Youth Movement have an immense opening for engagement with this Youth on the move.

This continent on the move raises very serious issues for us in the 21st century, suggesting that its very existence could be a motive for all of us, the opportunity for a very real pastoral, charismatic and vocational renewal.

2.6. UPRIGHT CITIZENS who take care of our common home as young people ask us to

Commitment to the common home (the view of ecology proposed by *Laudato Si'*) is not an extra commitment: it is a viewpoint that entirely calls into question our culture, faith, way of life, mission, education and evangelization. In addition, ecology can be a integral educational proposal (in its human and spiritual values).

When we talk about caring for the common home, or the care of Creation, we are not faced with an optional choice, but rather with a essential question of justice, since the Earth that we have received belongs also to those who will come after us. The environment is a loan that every generation receives and that has to be handed on to successive generations.

Some pastoral proposals

– *Ecological conversion*

The first proposal is very much connected to a change of mentality and of the way of looking at reality. Pope Francis invites us to ‘become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering.’³⁶ For this reason we have to adopt a radically new spirituality, a spirituality in which our commitment to care for the Earth is serious and effective to the extent that it is rooted in an effective ecological conversion.

We are being called to get to the moral and spiritual roots of environmental problems, which are inviting us to look for solutions not only using technology but also changing as human beings. Everyone has to move on from consumption to sacrifice, from avarice to generosity, from waste to the ability to share, from “what I want” to “what God’s world needs.”

– *Accompanying youth involvement in the commitment to our common home*

Very probably something that no one could ever have imagined, and much less the ‘great and powerful ones of this world’ is that the biggest reaction and protest could come from young people and in a movement on an almost worldwide scale. There are young people in the world very well informed in ecological issues, and they are exercising an active citizenship for the safeguarding of our common home.

- Greta Thunberg, the young Swedish 16-year-old activist told the world leaders gathered in New York for the UNO Summit on the climate in 2019: ‘You have robbed my dreams and my childhood with your empty words. We are at the start of a mass extinction and all you can talk about is money and the fantasy of unending economic growth. How dare you! You are

³⁶ FRANCIS, *LS*, 19.

deceiving us. But young people are beginning to recognize your betrayal.³⁷

- These strong words are a challenge for the leaders and they are changing the perspectives of adults and leading a vast movement of young people to save our common home. The ‘*Laudato Si*’ Generation’ is a practical example of this. This is the “Youth Sector” of the Catholic World Movement for the climate, an international network of over 800 Catholic organizations. They are working for climate justice and are pleading for the Church and the world to act. As active members of this international network, ‘Don Bosco Green Alliance’ and the ‘Salesian Youth Movement’ are representing the Salesian Family.
- As educators of the young we accompany not only those already geared up but also those who are reclining on their sofas in front of the window or the screen. At the same time, we also remember that young people are excellent at encouraging their own companions to get down to work.³⁸

– *Towards a human ecology*

Environmental ecology intrinsically urges us to reflect on integral ecology. From the 1970s, from Pope Saint Paul VI to the various Popes who followed him, all have always insisted on this point. ‘Human ecology’ is a term introduced by Pope Saint John Paul II in his encyclical letter *Centesimus Annus*.³⁹ Taking up this idea again, Pope Francis says that ‘the destruction of the human environment is extremely serious, not only because God has entrusted the world to us men and women, but because life is itself a gift which must be defended from various forms of debasement.’⁴⁰

³⁷ See #FridaysForFuture e #Climatestrike.

³⁸ Pope FRANCIS, *Address to young people on the occasion of his apostolic journey in Chile*, 17 January 2018.

³⁹ JOSHTRON ISAAC KUREETHADAM, *I dieci comandamenti verdi*. Torino: Elledici, 2016, 142.

⁴⁰ FRANCIS, *LS*, 5.

– *The educational and cultural approach*

- Saint John Paul II, in the face of the ecological crisis, spoke about the urgent need for a great educational and cultural effort.⁴¹
- Our educational proposals to care for our common home are based on the three phases of Informing, Educating, Creating a Culture.⁴²
- In the face of the phenomenon of consumerism, it is necessary to remind the young of our three main ideas (3R: reduce, re-use and recycle).
- We know very well that ecological issues are the result of unjust structures. To deal with them we need virtuous structures of grace, of reconciliation, of healing and of environmental ecology human, social and integral.⁴³ These are the structures that we as educators need to propose to the young.
- To start processes that lead to an ecological citizenship there are some fundamental reflections very close to our Salesian approach. For example our confrere Joshtrom Isaac Kureethadam is working in the Church Department dealing with this issue. In his book *I Dieci Comandamenti Verdi* we find many ideas to continue to develop in our young people a great sensitivity towards Creation, to dream and to turn into reality what our leaders do not want to take seriously on account of economic motives and various other interests.

2.7. In the defence of human rights and especially of the rights of minors

I feel an urgent need to make a strong appeal to our Family so that now and in the future we may be distinguished by our defence of every minor. The essence of the message I want to pass on is precisely this:

⁴¹ *Centesimus Annus*, 36.

⁴² ALDO CODA NEGOZIO - GUGLIELMO ALDO ELLENA, *Gestire il pianeta terra*, Torino: Società editrice internazionale, 1995, P. XI.

⁴³ TEBALDO VINCIGUERRA, 'Ecologia', *Note di pastorale giovanile*, p. 74.

- The purpose for which we have been raised up by the Holy Spirit in Don Bosco as the Salesian Family is that of giving our whole lives to minors, to youngsters, to the boys and girls of the world, giving priority above all to the most defenceless, to the most needy, to the weakest, to the poorest.
- For this reason we have to be experts in the field of the defence of all human rights, especially those of minors, *and asking forgiveness even with tears should anyone not have acted in this way.* We cannot be complicit in any form of abuse, intending by this the abuse of ‘power, of conscience, sexual, financial abuse’ – as it was described on the occasion of the Synod on *The Young, the Faith and Vocational Discernment*.⁴⁴

As Don Bosco’s Family we are part of all the efforts that the whole Church is making on behalf of human rights. As we all know, the language of rights has come into the life of the Church with the development of its social doctrine. In force of the Gospel entrusted to her, the Church proclaims human rights, recognizes and greatly appreciates the dynamism with which in our days these rights are everywhere being promoted.

While civil society operates in a variety of ways in the defence of human rights, we, the Family of Don Bosco, as likewise the Church, are being called today to recover the objective dimension of human rights based on the recognition of the “*inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family [which] is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.*”⁴⁵ Without such a vision, there would be a short circuiting of the rights and the encouragement of ‘that globalization of indifference born of selfishness, the result of a conception of man incapable of embracing the truth and living an authentic social dimension.’⁴⁶ The temptation nowadays is to greatly emphasise the word ‘rights’, neglecting the more important: ‘human’. If rights lose their con-

⁴⁴ SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *op. cit.* Final Document 30.

⁴⁵ *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 10 December 1943, introduction.

⁴⁶ FRANCIS, *Address at the Council of Europe*, Strasburg, 25 November 2014.

nection with humanity, they become simply the expressions of interest groups.

- For Don Bosco the marginalized boy was not a passive beneficiary, a simple recipient to whom assistance was given or services offered. Don Bosco was hoping and working for a new view of the marginalized boy: an educational relationship between taught and teacher, which anticipates the view of the boy as a subject of rights which the New York Convention confirmed for the first time thirty years ago, on 20 November 1989, as an instrument of international law, today legally binding in 193 States.
- The rights of minors and the Preventive System have some basic principles in common. Both have the same aim, that is the integral development and the total wellbeing of children. Both Childrens' Rights and the Preventive System have some work to do in order to achieve their objectives on behalf of children. This includes the overall care of individuals, the formation of the personnel responsible, the creation of a safe environment, the provision of guidelines for sound discipline and the formulation of protocols for the protection of minors.

In defence of the rights of minors

1. Between 21 and 24 February 2019 the 'summit' of the Catholic Bishops' Conferences of the World was held on 'The protection of minors in the Church'. Taking part were 190 Church Leaders and the Presidents of 140 Bishops' Conferences. At the meeting Pope Francis said that *docile to the Holy Spirit we must hear the cry of the little ones seeking justice*. We know very well that every scandal can render the light of the Gospel invisible⁴⁷ and the abuse of power and of conscience do great harm and are extremely dangerous.

⁴⁷ BENEDICT XVI, *Pastoral Letter of the Holy Father to the Catholics of Ireland*, (March 2010).

2. We cannot speak about the rights of minors without referring to the '*Convention on the Rights of Childhood and Adolescence*' of the United Nations that defines a child as every human being under the age of eighteen and provides a standard for care and protection, the identification and management of cases, their reporting and deferment. It identifies four aspects of children's rights: the participation of children in the decisions that regard them; the protection of children from discrimination and all forms of neglect and exploitation; the prevention of harm and the assistance of children in their basic needs.
3. In our Educative and Pastoral Plan, listening to minors is important and vital, as is often affirmed by the Synod.⁴⁸ This opens the way to full participation. And participation contributes to personal development, leads to better decisions and results, serves to protect minors, contributes to the preparation and to the development of civil society, to tolerance and respect for others and strengthens a sense of responsibility.
4. *A more profound knowledge and reflection on the rights of minors*: it is a question of the many documents and declarations constantly being published on human rights and above all on the rights of minors. Some are at the level of the Church and international, others are at the level of a region or of a specific subject.⁴⁹ Ignorance of these documents will certainly prevent us from being effective educators. Therefore we need to study them in depth and communicate them in our centres.
5. *Networking with other agencies*: in the mission of the protection and the promotion of the rights of minors, we need to network with many other agencies that are working with an 'approach based on law'. There are indeed very many of them,

⁴⁸ SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *The Young...*, *op. cit.*, 6.

⁴⁹ MOTU PROPRIO, *On the protection of minors and Vulnerable Persons*, issued on 29, March, 2019 - Council of the Baltic Sea States Secretariat, *Guidelines: promoting the human rights and the best interests of the child in transnational child protection cases*, Sweden: 2015. - Rachel Hodgkin and Peter Newell, *Implementation Handbook for the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, UNICEF, 2007.

governmental and non-governmental. In some Provinces of the world, some Salesians form part of the 'Juvenile Justice Board', through which they are able to defend and protect minors' rights. There are other Salesians who are lawyers and who defend the rights of minors in the civil courts and obtain justice for them. This is an excellent forum in which to spread gospel values in secular sectors.

6. The 'System of child protection', is described by UNICEF as 'the combination of the laws, policies, regulations and services necessary in all social sectors to maintain prevention and the response to the risks connected to protection'. Many of the places where we are present are entirely dedicated to social services and to centres for young people at risk. This ought to continue to be our 'small but great' contribution as the Salesian Family.
7. It is essential that in every Work of our Family in the world there should be a 'Code of Ethics' that very clearly defines what is expected from everyone, from the consecrated persons men and women, from lay educators, and that also clearly determines what constitutes a grave violation of the Code of Ethics itself.
8. Finally, but it is a question of a fundamental aspect as far as consecrated persons are concerned, what needs to be re-enforced is our personal and community relationship with Christ. His companionship ought to inspire us to work harder to protect the children and the minors that He loves so much, and that He has pointed out as models of discipleship.
 - *The preventive system and human rights:* Two proposalsTogether we are doing many good and fine things to promote human rights. To be more effective in this ministry, however, we need to change our strategy in the way we think and act. We need to become a Family of Don Bosco that supports the social dimension of charity⁵⁰ and promotes human rights through the creative use of the Preventive System. This is the necessary change of model.

⁵⁰ GC XXIII, nos. 204, 209, 212.

1. *Moving on from seeing the Preventive System merely as an alternative to the Repressive System, to seeing it as an excellent means of promoting human rights*; Until now, many times we have been accustomed to considering the Preventive System simply as a system of education different from the Repressive System. We have not given sufficient attention to its potential in the area of human rights. We need to study and explain its intrinsic potential in the promotion of human rights and make use of it in this area.
2. *Moving on from making laws that refer to the citizens, to rights to which the citizens lay claim*: We have always said that one of the aims of education is the formation of upright citizens and we have understood that to mean forming citizens who respect the law. This will not be sufficient in the future in an ever more complex world. We have to educate the young to lay claim to their rights; in fact if rights are not claimed it is very probable that they will be ignored.⁵¹

THE FINAL WORD... LISTENING TO DON BOSCO HIMSELF SPEAK ABOUT POLITICS

I finish this very long account in which I have made many references to the many aspects that in my judgement are very important and extremely relevant, by allowing Don Bosco to speak to us himself. Among the very many possible quotations, I have chosen the address that he gave to the Past Pupils, who on 15 July 1883 had returned to the Oratory to celebrate Don Bosco's feast day. Incredibly a large part of Don Bosco's talk re-

⁵¹ JOSE KUTTIANIMATTATHIL, 'Don Bosco's Educative Method and the tenets of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights'; in: Charles Maria, Pallithanam Thomas, Dörrich Hans-Jürgen, Reifeld Helmut; *In Defence of the Young*; New Delhi 2010.

ferred to politics. I think it is very enlightening and very much in tune with what I have been saying thus far. This is what he says:

'Other than Heaven's help, what helps us and what will help us to do good is the very nature of our work. What we aim to do is looked upon well by everyone including those who do not share our idea of religion. If there is someone who creates obstacles for us we need to say that they either don't know us or they do not know what is being done. Civil instruction, moral education of youth who are either abandoned, or at risk, removing them from idleness, wrongdoing, disgrace, and maybe even prison – this is what our work aims at. So what wise man what civil authority could possibly stop us?


Recently as you know, I went to Paris, and I spoke in various churches to plead the cause of our works, and let us put it in frank terms, to find money to give bread and soup to our boys who never lose their appetite. Now amongst the audience there were some who came only to get to know Don Bosco's political thinking. Some even thought that I had gone to Paris to stir up a revolution, others thought I was there to find people for a political party, and so on. There were some benevolent people who feared that someone would play some silly prank on me; but from the moment I began speaking all these weird ideas ceased along with their fears and Don Bosco was left free to go from one end of France to the other. No, truly, we do not engage in politics with our work, We respect constituted authority, we observe the laws that have to be observed, we pay our taxes and keep on going, asking only that they let us do good for poor youth and save souls. If you want, we also play politics but in an entirely innocent way, indeed to the advantage of any government. Politics can be defined as the art and science of governing the State well. Now the work of the Oratory in Italy, France, Spain, America, in every country where it has been established, working especially to offer relief of those most needy young people, tends to lessen the number of vagabonds and unruly types. It tends to decrease the number of young wrongdoers and thieves. It ends to empty out

*the prisons. In a word it tends to form upright citizens who, far from causing grief to public authorities help them to keep order, calm and peace in society. This is our politics. This is the only thing we have been concerned about till now and which will be our concern in the future.*⁵²

With the maternal intercession of our Mother the Immaculate Help of Christians let us ask God the Father to grant us his Spirit so that we may continue to carry out the real politics of the Our Father for the young people of today, in a society that is calling out to us in the face of so much inequality not to remain silent or passive, and in a world always in need of God that we might ever more become Witnesses-Disciples-Missionaries of the God who while scrupulously respecting human freedom is every day ready for the Encounter with his sons and daughters.

So let us pray:

Lord Jesus,
You know how much it costs us to put your Gospel into practice;
help us to contemplate you in Don Bosco,
to see your love in his gestures,
to discern your path in his actions,
to learn your mercy in his affection.
Give us the light to make our own the style
with which Don Bosco was your disciple,
shape our heart like yours of the Good Shepherd,
and give us the strength to transform your words
into life and works.⁵³



Fr Ángel FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME, sdb
Rector Major

⁵² Salesian Historical Institute, *Salesian Sources. Don Bosco and his work*. LAS, Rome, Kristu Jyoti Publications 2017, 120.

⁵³ XABIER MATOSES, *Spirito Salesiano*, in J. José Bartolomé (ed), *Luce sui miei passi*. Elledici, 2016.

2. GUIDELINES AND DIRECTIVES

2.1 LIVING THE PRIESTHOOD AS SALESIANS

Fr Ivo COELHO

General Councillor for Formation

After having dedicated a letter to the topic of the Salesian Brother – “Renewed Attention to the Salesian Brother” (AGC 424) – it is only right to give attention also to the Salesian Priest.

We have not forgotten that the very first area of attention in the formation section of the plan of the Rector Major and his council for 2014-2020 was “to promote in the Congregation a better understanding of the Salesian consecrated vocation in its two forms” by “examining more deeply topics such as: the consecrated life, the Salesian priest, and the Salesian Brother.” (AGC 419 52) This was a way of responding to the fact that GC27 invited us to explore our charismatic identity more deeply and to become aware of our vocation to faithfully live out Don Bosco’s apostolic project, by focusing attention on four thematic areas: “*living our Salesian consecrated vocation* in the grace of unity and joy since this vocation is God’s gift and a personal project of life; having a strong *spiritual experience*, taking on the way of being and acting of the obedient, poor and chaste Jesus and becoming seekers of God; building *fraternity* in our communities of life and action; dedicating ourselves generously to the *mission*, walking with the young to give hope to the world.” (GC27 p. 89) GC26 itself had called Salesians “to give priority and visibility to the unity of our apostolic consecration, even though it takes two different forms,” and to “understand more deeply the original Salesian contribution to the ordained ministry and to make greater efforts to further promote the vocation of the Salesian brother.” (GC26 55)

We present these reflections and orientations on the Salesian Priest on the eve of GC28, in the hope that they might be a contribution to the process of reflection on the great question of

the Chapter: “What kind of Salesians for the young people of today?”

1. Some general considerations

Our Salesian consecrated vocation is a gift

We begin by recognizing that our vocation is a gift of God. Fr Juan Vecchi, 8th successor of Don Bosco, reminded us that ‘gift’ is a fundamental category for understanding the true nature of consecrated life. This is a word that occurs very frequently in *Vita Consecrata* “with reference to the totality of the consecrated life, to each of its historic manifestations or charisms, and to many of its components or particular aspects: the vows, the community, and the service of charity.” (AGC 357 8-9) The many saints who have lived their religious consecration as priests, or who were priest-founders of religious families, are themselves wonderful gifts to the Church: Basil, Benedict, Dominic, Ignatius, Francis Xavier, John of the Cross, Joseph Vaz, Francis de Sales, Vincent de Paul, Don Bosco, Joseph Cottolengo, to name a few. In our own day we have been blessed with Pope Francis who brings the gift of his religious priesthood to the Church.

Our Salesian consecrated vocation is a gift from God to us, to young people, to the Church, to the world. We give thanks for it and rejoice in its beauty.

Our religious consecration is our core identity in the Church

Our religious consecration is our basic identity in the Church. Canon Law presents the People of God as consisting of the Christian Faithful, the Hierarchy, and the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. As religious, all of us, Salesian Priests and Salesian Brothers, are consecrated persons among the People of God. Belonging to the Institutes of Consecrated Life is

the source of our vocation and mission. It is where the Church places us and where it wants us to flourish.

Strangely, there has not been sufficient attention in the Church to the theme of the religious priesthood. Fr Egidio Viganò, 7th successor of Don Bosco, twice comments on this fact, the first time in his 1991 letter, “The Priest of the year 2000: A theme we have very much at heart” (AGC 335) after the Synod on Formation to the Priesthood, and then again in 1995, in “The Synod on Consecrated Life” (AGC 351). “It is unfortunate,” he says, “that no mention was made in the Synod of the delicate and complex problems associated with the *religious-priest*. Maybe the time is not yet ripe, and there is need for prior doctrinal research at a deeper level.”¹ The situation does not seem to have changed today. The new *Ratio* of the Church, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation* (2016) does not contain any special consideration of the religious priest – despite the fact that in 2016 there were 134,495 religious priests, making up 32.3% or almost one-third of the total number of priests in the Catholic Church.

For us, however, it is urgent to reflect on the identity of the Salesian who is a priest. A healthy and robust identity brings joy and unity to life and gives a sound direction to apostolic work. In this letter we will try to highlight the roots of the Salesian priesthood in our one consecrated vocation, drawing on a renewed understanding of the religious life as well as of the priesthood. Fraternal life, the evangelical counsels and the mission are not elements that exist alongside the ministry of Salesian Priests. They are rather the fundamental matrix and the vital root of our vocation. In the words of our *Ratio*: “The Salesian priest [or deacon] combines in himself the gifts of Salesian consecration and those of the pastoral ministry, but in such a way that *his particular manner of being a priest and exercising his ministry stems from his Salesian consecration.*” (FSDB 39)

¹ AGC 351 20.

Priests and Brothers all share in the priesthood of Christ

Theological reflection in the post-conciliar period is marked by an intense awareness of the link between the ministerial priesthood and the common priesthood of the faithful. As C 2 reminds us, we are a community of the baptized. All of us, Priests and Brothers, share in the priesthood of Christ.

The priesthood of Christ is unique and absolutely original. In the other religions, and even in Judaism, the priest belongs to the sphere of the sacred. In the New Testament, instead, far from being a distinct religious expression of the sacred, the priesthood of Jesus stems directly from his life and the saving events of his Passover, and so touches the whole of human reality. Jesus' sacrifice is a sacrifice of obedience: it consists in offering himself completely and entirely to the Father, up to the final surrender on the cross. His life and death transform our resistance and the evil we carry within, opening the way to repentance and pardon, to the new life of Zacchaeus, Peter and Mary of Magdala, to the life of the resurrection. "For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified." (Heb 10:14)

Thus, for us, there is only one priest and one sacrifice – despite the fact that, from the Jewish point of view, Jesus was a layman, and that his sacrifice took place not in the Temple but on Calvary and in a context that was not 'sacred.' "Such a way of being high priest is diametrically opposed to the old concept: instead of ritual separation, we find an existential solidarity; instead of being raised up above others, we find an extreme abasement; instead of a prohibition of every contact with death, we find the call to accept suffering and death."²

All those baptized into Christ are, in fact, called to unite themselves with him in offering their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. (Rom 12:1) This is the 'common

² ALBERT VANHOYE, "La novità del sacerdozio di Cristo," *La Civiltà Cattolica* no. 3541, no. 1 (1998) 16-27.

priesthood' of the faithful, and all of us, Priests and Brothers, share in this priesthood. This common priesthood based on our baptism is "the highest expression of human dignity... the historical way which makes it possible to feel involved in redemption and salvation." (AGC 335 19) *There is no dignity higher than that conferred on us by baptism.* For those of us who are accustomed to speak of the priest as an *alter Christus*, these words of St John Paul II might be a salutary surprise:

It was usual to say, as early as the era of the Fathers, "*Christianus alter Christus*" ("The Christian is another Christ"), meaning by this to emphasize *the dignity of the baptized* and his vocation, through Christ, to holiness... Saint Augustine... often repeated: "*Vobis sum episcopus, vobiscum christianus*" ("For you I am a bishop, with you I am a Christian"). On further reflection, *christianus* has far greater significance than *episcopus*, even if the subject is the Bishop of Rome.³

The ministerial priest is ordained to serve

The ministerial priesthood is totally at the service of the common priesthood of the faithful. Its only aim is to help the disciples of Christ share in his priesthood, overcome evil by love and forgiveness, and offer themselves totally to the Father. (AGC 335 18-23) The priest is called to have the heart of the Good Shepherd, and to have "an awareness and internal feeling that bind him inseparably" to those to whom he is sent. Pastoral charity leads to a constant immersion in the life of the people of God in the ongoing self-donation of service.⁴

"This pastoral charity," Vatican Council II reminds us, "flows mainly from the Eucharistic sacrifice, which is thus the centre and root of the whole priestly life." (PO 14) If in the Eucharist all

³ JOHN PAUL II, "'The Pope': A Scandal and a Mystery," *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, (Rome 1994). See <http://serony.com/ken/books-papers/crossing-the-threshold-of-hope/> (31.10.2019).

⁴ S. DIANICH, *Teología del ministerio ordenado. Una interpretación eclesiológica* (Madrid: Ed. Paulinas, 1988) 324.

baptized persons are called to unite themselves with the offering that Jesus made of himself to the Father, with all the more reason those called to the ministerial priesthood are called to apply to themselves “the action that takes place on the altar of sacrifice” (PO 14), taking and offering themselves to the Father, breaking and giving themselves to their brothers and sisters, turning their lives into a Eucharist.

Pastoral charity is not a new element that comes in after ordination, identified with peculiar ‘pastoral activities’ reserved to the priest, but is, instead, at the very root of the vocation of Salesians who are priests. Pastoral charity is at the centre of our spirit, the driving force and motivation behind all we are and do:

Under the inspiration of God, Don Bosco lived and handed on to us an original style of life and action: the Salesian spirit.

It is summed up and centred in pastoral charity, characterized by that youthful dynamism which was revealed so strongly in our Founder and at the beginnings of our Society. It is an apostolic impetus that makes us seek souls and serve God alone. (C 10)

The Salesian Priest is a man who is driven by charity and ordained to serve. We can understand, therefore, why clericalism can have no place in his life. Fr Egidio Viganò anticipates in a surprising way Pope Francis’ warnings against clericalism:

If in fact there be a real harmful crust to be removed in an ordained ministry, it is that of a ‘clericalist’ mode of action... which make the priest act like a boss among the People of God; such an attitude has nothing in common with Christ the Good Shepherd, who is the ‘Servant of Yahweh.’ A priest behaving in this way would show very clearly that he had not understood the priesthood of the New Covenant. (AGC 335 21)

We would do well to accept Pope Francis’ beautiful invitation to meditate on “the incomparable grandeur of the gift” of the priesthood and our own littleness:

The incomparable grandeur of the gift granted us for the ministry sets us among the least of men. The priest is the poorest of men – yes, the poorest of men – unless Jesus enriches him by his poverty, the most useless of servants unless Jesus calls him his friend, the most ignorant

of men unless Jesus patiently teaches him as he did Peter, the frailest of Christians unless the Good Shepherd strengthens him in the midst of the flock.

Drawing a contrast between the annunciation to Zechariah in the Holy of Holies of the Jerusalem Temple and the annunciation to Mary in an unknown village of conflict-ridden Galilee, the Pope makes a fatherly appeal to priests:

None of us was called to an important post, none of us. At times, without wanting it, and with no moral fault, we get used to identifying our daily activity as priests, religious, consecrated persons, laypersons, catechists, with certain rituals, with meetings and conversations, where our presence in those meetings, at the table or in the hall is “hierarchical”. Then we are more like Zechariah than like Mary.

The Pope invites priests to return to Nazareth, “to step away from important and solemn places, and return to the places from which we were called, where it was clear that the initiative and the power was from God.” The secret is to “return to Nazareth” in order to renew ourselves as pastors who are at the same time disciples and missionaries. The need is to pray constantly with the prayer of our Mother: “I am a priest because the Lord has regarded my littleness (cf. Lk 1:48).”⁵

2. The Salesian who is a Priest

We have been speaking about the baptismal priesthood as our highest dignity (even in the case of the bishop of Rome!), and how the ministerial priesthood is at the service of that baptismal priesthood. The Salesian who is a priest assumes completely the ministerial priesthood and lives it from within his Salesian consecration.

⁵ Pope FRANCIS, Meeting with the bishops, priests, men and women religious, consecrated persons, seminarians, catechists and animators, Apostolic journey to Mozambique, Madagascar and Mauritius, 5 September 2019: see http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/september/documents/papa-francesco-20190905_consacraati-mozambico.html (02.11.2019).

We find the same basic truth about our identity expressed in art. 3 of our Constitutions that is like a password for the entire constitutional text: “Our mission sets the tenor of our whole life; it specifies the task we have in the Church and our place among other religious families.” It is not what we do in the great variety of our works that defines the missionary dimension of our life, but rather our very existence as consecrated Salesians. Indeed, “we are a mission.” As Pope Francis says, “[this] is something I cannot uproot from my being without destroying my very self. I am a mission on this earth; that is the reason why I am here in this world. We have to regard ourselves as sealed, even branded, by this mission of bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing.” (EG 273) If this is true for every Christian, it is definitely so for those called to make their baptismal consecration the *raison d’être* of their life through their religious and priestly consecration.

If the mission I inherited with Don Bosco’s charism does not “set the tenor” of my whole life, I am neither a Salesian nor a priest, because the only priesthood that the Church recognizes in me when I am chosen to be ordained is the one spelled out in our Constitutions. Even the rite of ordination gives expression to this: it is the Congregation represented by the Provincial that guarantees the ‘credentials’ of the one to be ordained, and it is to the Provincial and Bishop together – to the Church and the Congregation at once – that obedience is promised. It is in fact always and only in the authority of the Church and the Congregation that the *potestas* of a Salesian Priest find its source and justification.⁶

⁶ In Canon Law, the term used to express what is conferred in ordination (diaconal, priestly, episcopal) is *potestas*, which connects the authority in the Church to its source, which is ultimately the salvific mission of Christ. The English translation of *potestas* as *power* does not convey this important nuance. The *potestas* conferred in ordination is not a private power that I can exercise when and how I want, and that I can freely invest as if it were a personal patrimony, now in a religious congregation and now in some diocese, when I consider that more convenient. It is rather what the Church entrusts to me according to its mind, which in our case is represented in the Constitutions that the Church itself has approved.

As we will see, the mission is never generic. It is exercised in a specific area and in an original manner, with roots coming from above, as we profess in the first article of the Constitutions:

With a feeling of humble gratitude we believe that the Society of St Francis de Sales came into being not as a merely human venture but by the initiative of God. Through the motherly intervention of Mary, the Holy Spirit raised up St John Bosco to contribute to the salvation of youth, 'that part of human society which is so exposed and yet so rich in promise'. The Spirit formed within him the heart of a father and teacher, capable of total self-giving: 'I have promised God that I would give of myself to my last breath for my poor boys'.

Let us therefore put down a few points about the identity-mission of the Salesian Priest, without pretending to be either systematic or exhaustive.⁷

2.1. *The community*

As the new *Ratio* of the Church insists, the community is essential to the life of a priest, both in the stages of his preparation (discipleship, configuration, vocational synthesis) and in the ministry lived in an attitude of lifelong formation.⁸ Fraternal life in community is essential to human and spiritual maturity, to growth in love. We grow as human beings only through bonds of love. Our brothers and sisters grow in their capacity to love and be loved in the bosom of the family; we, Salesian Priests and Salesian Brothers, do this in the bosom of the religious community and along with lay people in the educative and pastoral community.

⁷ Many of these points may be found in AGC 335. After noting that the Synod on Priestly Formation had not dealt with the theme of the religious priesthood, Fr Viganò went on to say that in the Congregation, instead, we had already elaborated some reflections, especially when we reflected on the pastoral quality of our mission – in a reference probably to GC23 on Education to the Faith (See AGC 335 23-32).

⁸ CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation* (2016) 51.

As a religious, the ministry of the Salesian Priest is always mediated by the community. The title of C 44 is explicit – “The mission is given to the community”:

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. They are aware that pastoral objectives are achieved through unity and joint brotherly responsibility.

For the Salesian Priest, this means that *apostolic individualism* has no place: his apostolic choices must be mediated by the community, they cannot be merely his individual choices according to his likes, dislikes or personal judgement.

We must keep in mind, further, that the Salesian religious community is characterized by an *essential complementarity* between Priest Salesians and Brother Salesians:

The significant and complementary presence of clerical and lay Salesians in the community constitutes an essential element of its makeup and of its apostolic completeness. (C 45)

“The Salesian who is a priest should feel a spontaneous bond of communion with the Brother in virtue of their common Salesian vocation, and the lay Salesian should feel the same towards his priest-confreere. Our vocation is essentially a community vocation; hence there must be an effective communion that goes deeper than mere friendship between persons.”⁹

The priestly dimension is not exclusive to the priest confreres and the lay dimension does not pertain solely to the Brothers. The Salesian community is not an artificial aggregation of two kinds of members who make an effort to live together. Both dimensions are present in the heart of each confrere, highlighted in different ways but intimately connected all the same, so that the Priest cultivates also the lay dimension of the common mission, while the Brother cultivates also the priestly dimension of that

⁹ AGC 335 26.

mission. "Without the lay dimension we should lose the positive aspect of a healthy secularity characteristic of our choice of educational methods, and without the priestly dimension we should run the risk of losing the pastoral quality of the whole plan. By upsetting the complementary balance we could fall on the one hand into a kind of pragmatic social activism, and on the other into a too generic kind of pastoral commitment that would no longer be the genuine mission of Don Bosco."¹⁰

Fr Viganò points out, of course, that the intensity of pastoral charity and the degree of holiness depend neither on the ordained ministry nor on the various services that we provide in our shared apostolic responsibility, but only on the interior vitality of the common priesthood, or, in other words, on the life of faith, hope and charity. He goes on to say something that still sounds surprising:

The life of grace (i.e. of pastoral charity), says St Thomas Aquinas, has a value which is of itself greater than all created things. We shall be judged on the basis of love: in the heavenly Jerusalem there will be no further need for the Bible, for bishops and priests, for the magisterium, for the sacraments, for coordination, or for the great many mutual services which are indispensable in our history. And so already, in the ecclesial community, the order of institutional, hierarchical and operational realities take second place (if we may put it that way; remember where the chapter on the People of God is placed in *Lumen Gentium*!) to the Mystery they serve and reveal to those who live the faith. Holiness is rooted in the degree of perception and communion with the life of the Trinity. We see the intensity of holiness reflected in Mary, and ministerial authenticity in Peter. Both were very holy people: but they show us very clearly that the degree of holiness is not to be identified with hierarchical and ministerial degree.¹¹

The ministerial priesthood is not so much a special privilege as a service that is destined to cease, and that already now takes second place. Its glory consists in putting itself at the service of

¹⁰ AGC 335 27. See also AGC 424 66-68: "Renewed Attention to the Salesian Brother."

¹¹ AGC 335 28. See also *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 773.

the people of God so that all – priests included – might reach the “dizzying heights” of holiness.

2.2. *The charism*

As a Salesian, the priest confrere’s ministry is always mediated by his charism. That is the reason behind Fr Viganò’s suggestion that we use the terms *Priest-Salesian* and *Brother-Salesian*, where ‘Salesian’ is understood as a noun.¹² The Salesian charism colours everything.

As a way of following Christ, the religious priesthood is very different from the diocesan priesthood. For the diocesan priest there is a clear *ministry* into which he pours out his life. The religious priest, instead, finds his rule of life in a *founder* and his original way of following Christ. Thus the Priest Salesian’s existence is completely marked by the charism originated by Don Bosco.¹³ Don Bosco did not think primarily in terms of the kind of ministry he would have in the Church, like most young seminarians who look forward to being parish priests. He did not feel that he was called to carry out a ministry that already existed; he felt, rather, that he was called to concretize in works and institutions the new pedagogy of grace that was his way of being present among young people.¹⁴

¹² See AGC 335 24-25. We have, however, made the option to retain the common English usage ‘Salesian Priest’ and ‘Salesian Brother,’ while also sometimes resorting to ‘Priest Salesian’ and ‘Brother Salesian,’ as also to the circumlocution ‘the Salesian who is a priest.’

¹³ See A. BOZZOLO, “Salesiano prete e salesiano coadiutore: spunti per un’interpretazione teologica,” in *Sapientiam dedit illi. Studi su don Bosco e sul carisma salesiano*, ed. A. BOZZOLO (Roma: LAS, 2015) 340 = A. BOZZOLO, *The Dual Form of the Salesian Vocation: A theological interpretation*, tr. Michael Smyth (Bengaluru: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2019) 34.

¹⁴ See BOZZOLO, *The Dual Form* 36-37. See also *ibid* 41-42:

In this sense, Balthasar sees in Peter the physiognomy typical of the diocesan clergy, while in John he finds the symbol of the religious clergy. In these two disciples, in fact, the relation between office and love follows a movement that goes

The priesthood assumed within the horizon of a particular charism gives the ministry of the religious priest a particular place in the Church that is not the same as that of the diocesan clergy. Thus, the diocesan priest is rooted in a particular territory, whereas the religious priest is characterized by a universal openness. The former is entrusted with the ordinary pastoral care of a parish and in a diocese, whereas the latter participates in a special mission that runs across ecclesiastical regions.¹⁵ The diocesan priest is called to a general ministry to the whole of life, from conception to death. The religious priest, instead, has a vocation that is essentially a particular service to life codified in his charism. Saints Benedict, Anthony of Padua, Camillus de Lellis, and in more recent times, Maximilian Kolbe, Alberto Hurtado and others have been such great gifts to the Church and the world because of their faithfulness to the particular charism to which they were called, and to which the gift of their priesthood was perfectly attuned.

That is why a Priest Salesian's apostolic choices are always mediated by our educative-pastoral charism for young people, most especially for those at risk. Sometimes I hear young Salesian deacons or priests complaining that they have had no chance to

in opposite directions. Indeed, "the two were on opposite courses. Peter received an office and love was then bestowed upon him for the sake of the office – that he might accomplish it more perfectly. John was, from the beginning, the epitome of love... He received the office by reason of his personal dedication." [Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life* (1983) 287]

It is significant, in this perspective, that while Peter was certainly married, John remained a virgin: "As the virgin apostle he represented the 'religious priest' as opposed to Peter, the married 'secular priest.'" [Ibid.] The presence of John at the foot of the cross with Mary sheds further light on the special Marian bond of consecrated life and of the priests who belong to it. In them, in fact, the objective and ministerial priesthood seems to be associated in a special way with the subjective and existential priesthood of the oblation of oneself in the way required by the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. In religious priests, therefore, the grace of ordination finds its place within the Marian space of obedience to God proper to their Order, within a characteristic form of realization of the Johannine love that Mary constantly teaches the great founders and their spiritual sons.

¹⁵ See BOZZOLO, *The Dual Form* 47-48.

celebrate a baptism or preside at a marriage, and I ask myself: How many times did Don Bosco celebrate a baptism or preside at a marriage? And was he less of a priest for that? We have to remember that Don Bosco impressed a very concrete peculiarity on the figure of the Salesian Priest. Together with the Brother Salesian, the Priest Salesian is invited to a mission immersed in the world of the young and of the working classes, which calls for commitments of an educative and pastoral kind and is addressed to people who are often far from the Church or belonging to other religions.

The apostolic consecration of the Salesian Priest pours into the three *munera* of the ministerial priesthood.

Through the **ministry of the Word** (*munus docendi*) the Salesian who is a priest brings the word of Christ into a wide variety of situations and in different forms of preaching, help and counsel, illuminating the experience of the young, giving direction to their lives, and accompanying them in the transformation and transfiguration of their existence. (FSDB 39)

The charismatic identity emerges also in the fact that the ministry of the Word adapts itself to a wide variety of situations and contexts. The Salesian Priest is willing to use the most diverse approaches and knows how to meet the young at their present stage of freedom. (C 38) Adapting ourselves to the young and to their experience rather than expecting them to conform to our own level is the first and basic form of Salesian inculturation.

The figure of the Catechist that used to exist in many of our houses gives us an idea of the variety of forms in which the *munus docendi* can be carried out within a Salesian setting. The Catechist was usually a young and dynamic Salesian priest who cared for all that concerned evangelization, catechesis and Christian life within a Salesian house. He was responsible for planning the major liturgical celebrations and practices of piety, animating groups focussed on apostolic interests (such as the missionary group), and taking care of vocational animation and personal ac-

companiment of the young. This figure from our recent past gives us an idea of how the Salesian charism can merge harmoniously with the *munus docendi* of the priestly ministry within the mission entrusted to the community.

It is significant also that the ministry of the Word comes first, not that of sanctification. It would be a pity, therefore, if our young Salesians were to emerge from specific formation with a rather excessive and exclusive concern for the *munus celebrandi* rather than with a passion for the first proclamation that finds such strong insistence in *Christus Vivit*.¹⁶

The **ministry of sanctification** (*munus sanctificandi*) also can have many expressions for us, but the most significant of these consists in the service of initiation to life in Christ in liturgical prayer and the celebration of the sacraments, especially those of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. (FSDB 39) The Salesian Priest is a specialist in initiating the Garellis and the Magones of today to the sacramental life. He learns to meet the young at their level of freedom and in their experience of life (cf. C 38), striving to use symbols and language that make sense to them.

The Synod on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment makes a strong appeal to the Church to renew herself in the ability to reach out to the new generations, natives of the digital world and living within social networks, with all the risks but also the immense potential that this involves. The Church has the right to expect the sons of Don Bosco to be on the forefront in finding new ways of initiation to the mystery of Christ within this new digital territory. “It is no longer merely a question of ‘using’ instruments of communication, but of living in a highly digitalized culture that has had a profound impact on ideas of time and space, on our self-understanding, our understanding of others and the world, and our ability to communicate, learn, be informed and enter into relationship with others.” (CV 86) The

¹⁶ CV 214, citing EG 165.

munus sanctificandi involves accompanying young people in their encounter with Christ with a creativity that emerges from deep within our own life of faith, hope and charity.

We must insist that the service is that of initiation, and not merely one of administering the sacraments. Preparing young Salesians for a passionate competence in this area is surely one of the great challenges facing initial formation, because it calls for far more than merely the insertion of a few extra courses on catechesis or sacramental theology into an already packed curriculum.

The sacrament of Reconciliation occupies a special place in the life of a Salesian Priest, as it did in the life of Don Bosco. For Don Bosco, this sacrament was perhaps the greatest means of initiation to the life of the Spirit, in which he invested so much time and energy, reaching out to his youngsters one by one, finding that “sensitive spot, that responsive chord in the boy’s heart”¹⁷ from which new life could begin to unfold. Such a spiritual art was not improvised. We can think of the teenager John Bosco who learnt to cherish the sacrament during the years at the Moglia farm and then at the school of the good Calosso. We can look back at the young priest preparing himself under the wise guidance of Cafasso for the “confession examination” at the Convitto. We could well ask ourselves about the place of this sacrament, first in our own personal lives and then in our ministry. What kind of Salesian priests are we if we hardly frequent this sacrament and make ourselves available for this ministry?

¹⁷ The *Biographical Memoirs*, after quoting several examples of how this sacrament was lived in the Oratory, summarize Don Bosco’s ‘reasoning’ as follows: “Just as there is no barren or sterile land which cannot be made fertile through patient effort, so it is with a man’s heart. No matter how barren and restive at first, it will sooner or later bring forth good fruit. It will begin by loving what is naturally good and ultimately advance to what is supernaturally good, provided that a zealous spiritual director will cooperate with God’s grace by prayer and effort. Even the most callous boys have a soft spot. The first duty of the educator is to locate that sensitive spot, that responsive chord in the boy’s heart, and take advantage of it” (MB 5:236).

The **ministry of animating the Christian community** (*munus pascendi*) is totally geared to the service of unity in the different communities – the religious community, the educative and pastoral community, the Salesian Family, the Salesian Movement, and society in general. (FSDB 39) Animation, with its root in the Latin *anima* (soul), consists in giving life and unity. It cannot, therefore, be a vertical affair. The ‘soul’ is that which is present everywhere and works from ‘within.’ The Church invites those entrusted with the *munus pascendi* to adopt a new way of exercising authority, one which gives emphasis to the dynamic of fraternity (NW 41).

It is interesting, in this regard, to see how authority is understood in the renewed orientations for the Salesian Rector and community approved by the Rector Major and his Council in June 2019:

The Preventive System fosters a style of leadership where trust and confidence are fundamental in the relationship between educator and young people, and equally between confreres within the Salesian community. The role of guidance and animation of those entrusted with a ‘service of authority’ is by no means diminished. On the contrary: when such a role and service is lived according to the Salesian spirit it acquires a greater authoritativeness, much more effective than what can be achieved only by recourse to ‘cold rules’ (*Letter from Rome* 1884).

It is interesting to find the same appeal to ‘authoritativeness’ in the final document of the Synod on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment: “To undertake a true journey of growth, young people need authoritative adults. In its etymological meaning, *autoritas* indicates the capacity to promote growth; it does not express the idea of a directive power, but of a real generative force” [*Final Document*, Synod on Youth, 71].

To enable a Salesian to mature in this kind of *autoritas*, first of all as educator with the youth and then also in his service of leadership, much attention and care has to be given to his human and spiritual growth.¹⁸

¹⁸ *The Salesian Rector: A ministry for the life and governance of the local community* (2019) 40.

What is needed, therefore, is a very precise formation and qualification: a great capacity for human relationships, vaccination against all forms of clericalism, a good theology of the laity, experiences of formation together with our lay mission partners. Fraternal life in community has to become a clear and indispensable element in vocational discernment and admission to perpetual profession.

Let us insist on this point: no priest, much less the Salesian Priest, can hold himself excused or find some way of diluting the ministry of communion. Jesus died that he might gather into one the scattered children of God. (Jn 11:52) Are there limits we can put to those who are children of God? Does not “Who is my neighbour” translate into “Who is my brother and my sister”? Can we who are passionate followers of the Lord allow ourselves to put limits to communion, excluding perhaps first Samaritans, and then also Jews, and eventually people of other religions, first the sinners and then also refugees and migrants and all those who intrude into our comfort zones? We are called to be prophets of fraternity, and there are no limits to fraternal communion: it expands in concentric circles to embrace the whole of God’s creation. It would be good to remember that Church communion is a theological reality before being a pastoral concern for us. “And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the Church, which is his Body, the fullness of him who fills all in all (*to plērōma tou ta panta en pasin plēromenou*).” (Eph 1:22-23 NIV).

It is in the context of this love for the Body of Christ, in its totality as well as in its concreteness as the community into which we are inserted, that the service of authority finds its meaning and justification. The ministry of Pope Francis is a constant reminder of the evangelical way of serving the servants of God entrusted to our care, and our new Rector’s Manual can provide useful meditation and encouragement to those called to the service of authority, which in several areas of the Congregation today can often involve great personal self-sacrifice.

2.3. The sign

As a consecrated person the Salesian Priest is an eschatological sign, a living memorial of the way of life of Jesus. In his celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom, he is a sign of the life of the resurrection that Jesus offers everyone.¹⁹ Don Bosco's insistence on the Last Things is perhaps a prophecy of this aspect of our identity – that we are in the Church, in a special way for the young, signs of the resurrection. The Salesian Priest is at all times and everywhere an educator-pastor, concerned about the total well being of those to whom he is sent, with a totality defined by the mission and person of the Lord.

So, like all consecrated persons, the life of a Salesian Priest will be marked by a *passion* for the Lord, translated into a joy that is often contagious (Salesian cheerfulness! see C 17) but always visible, “as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ” (Order of the Mass, Communion Rite).

When he celebrates the sacraments, the priest confrere knows he acts *in persona Christi* and that his actions have an efficacy (*ex opere operato*) that is quite independent of his personal worthiness. But he also knows that, like all Christians, he is called to

¹⁹ AGC 342 21-22: Consecrated life is an important part of the sacramental nature of the Church. “In particular it openly proclaims the eschatological character of the People of God. Consecrated persons, with their total self-donation through the practice of the evangelical counsels, become a visible sign of the force of the resurrection; they strive to become experts in discerning the action of the risen Christ in history and bear witness to the commitments and joy of hope in preparing for the Saviour's return with the expectation of ‘new heavens and a new earth’.”

AGC 347 21: “Against the background of the sacramental character of the whole Church... the discussion moved to the symbolic and transforming function of consecrated life in its widely different charismatic forms, as though it were an ‘eschatological parable’ for the faith of all the People of God... Its significance, in this symbolic and prophetic role, does not raise it above the life of the other members of the Church as though it were of greater dignity, but distinguishes it and makes it ancillary to it because destined for a particular service. It proclaims some of the aspects of the multiform mystery of Christ, making the rich contents of salvation perceptible to people of the present day.”

join his offering to that of Christ, and that, as a consecrated person, he is called to live in such a way that his offering of his body becomes a *prophecy* and a *sign*.²⁰

Like all consecrated persons, the Salesian who is a priest also takes his place at the *Marian heart of the Church*. Mary is the Woman that is the Church. The vocation of every member of the Church is to be, like Mary, a total Yes to God. We are the Spouse that anxiously awaits the arrival of the Bridegroom and with the Spirit says: Come, Lord Jesus! (Rev 22:17) The vocation of Mary is the vocation of us all. Consecrated life takes its place at this Marian heart of the Church, because its role and task is to be a prophecy of this Yes and of the final communion of all human beings with God in the life of the resurrection.

Mary is at the same time also a concrete person with whom we have a very special relationship. This is what happened in the life of Don Bosco, for whom the Church not only had a Marian face but also the face of his mother, that wise woman who not only intuited the demands of the priestly vocation on the person of the priest but also knew how to recommend her son to Mary.²¹

The *affective maturity* of the Salesian Priest, lived within a clear sexual identity, is a limpid expression of his celibacy that takes on a particular importance in the context of the concern for the safety and well-being of minors, and here lies the profound validity and continuing relevance of Don Bosco's insistence on the

²⁰ "I am counting on you 'to wake up the world', since the distinctive sign of consecrated life is prophecy. As I told the Superiors General: 'Radical evangelical living is not only for religious: it is demanded of everyone. But religious follow the Lord in a special way, in a prophetic way.'" (*Apostolic Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to All Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life*, 28 November 2014, 2). See also Bozzolo, *The Dual Form* 28: "Unlike the ordained ministry that has an institutional consistency that transcends the person of the minister, so that it remains valid even if the minister is unworthy, consecrated life consists entirely in the quality of the loving response of those who live it. There is no chastity if you are not chaste, there is no poverty if you are not poor, there is no obedience if you do not obey."

²¹ See Bozzolo, *The Dual Form* 42-44.

virtue of purity. As a Salesian, the priest confrere is called to a particular imitation of the purity of Jesus. Jesus is the Pure of Heart in whose presence women, children and men felt safe. He is so completely Son of the Father that he was able to show himself to every man and every woman exclusively as brother. "Only as brother did he offer himself to the attention, the friendship, the tender affection of his sisters and brothers. His freedom on this point is total, limpid, divine. His celibacy, far from being renunciation and restriction, is the consequence of being completely Son and completely Brother."²² The Salesian knows, however, that he is called not only to be a safe place for young people but also a resplendent sign that speaks to young people and allows him to educate them to love and purity. (C 81)

As a priest, the Salesian is called to the exercise also of spiritual fatherhood and to walk the fine line of being paternal but not paternalistic. The risk of a suffocating paternalism that borders on clericalism and abuse of authority can be reinforced by the way father figures could be experienced and understood in certain cultural contexts. In these situations we will have to make greater efforts to imitate the fatherliness of Don Bosco. However demanding this may be, we cannot lower the standards and compromise with this goal. The fatherliness of Don Bosco is the hallmark of his spirit and charism. "When we think of our Father we remember most especially his concern for the spiritual good, the kindness that inspired his relationships and the wise guidance given to individuals and groups: three points that characterized his fatherliness. These found expression in his actions and attitudes."²³

Amorevolezza lies at the very heart of the Preventive System. It is Don Bosco's unique way of relating to young people, and the usual translation as loving kindness fails to convey its full meaning. This kind of pure love or loving purity that is at the core of our charism can be understood and absorbed only by osmosis. It

²² F. ROSSI DE GASPERIS, *Sentieri di vita* (Milano: Paoline, 2007) 2.2:242.

²³ J.E. VECCHI, AGC 365 46.

matures and ripens along the years in the kind of transparent self-giving that we can contemplate not only in the life of Don Bosco but also in so many of his sons such as Srugi, Variara, Zatti, Cimatti and Sandor, to name only a few.

There is another field in which today our being 'eschatological sign' and 'living memorial of the way of life of Jesus' becomes a precious gift for young people, the Church and the world at large. Ecological consciousness is growing along with the unparalleled and unprecedented ecological risk we are running today. Being signs of the resurrection through the gift of our consecration, we are also signs of the value of creation and of the call to the eco-spiritual conversion demanded by *Laudato Si'*. The resurrection casts a new light upon life, lighting up our profound interconnectedness with the whole of creation.

If we reduce man exclusively to his horizontal dimension, to that which can be perceived empirically, life itself loses its profound meaning. Man needs eternity for every other hope is too brief, too limited for him. Man can be explained only if there is a Love which overcomes every isolation, even that of death, in a totality which also transcends time and space. Man can be explained, he finds his deepest meaning, only if there is God. ... We are invited, once more, to renew with courage and with strength our faith in eternal life, indeed to live with this great hope and to bear witness to it in the world: behind the present there is not nothing. And faith in eternal life gives to Christians the courage to love our earth ever more intensely and to work in order to build a future for it, to give it a true and sure hope.²⁴

The more we grow in the consciousness of the everlasting destiny embedded in every human face, the more every other aspect of life is rediscovered in its immense value, as part of the one divine design where the created universe and the created freedom of each person mirror each other as mysteries beyond reckoning. As consecrated persons we are surely called also to bear witness to the marvellous interconnectedness of God's creation on its way to the *eschaton*, to the reconciliation of all things in Christ.

²⁴ BENEDICT XVI, General Audience 2 November 2011.

3. Vocational Animation and Formation

In the light of what we have been discussing, here are some suggestions that might help us deepen the Salesian consecrated identity in the priestly form today.

A *first* point is to deepen our awareness of **the beauty of consecrated life**. Vocational animation and initial formation are processes that work fundamentally by contagion: a consecrated person who lives his vocation with joy and passion is attractive and prophetic. In this context, it would be good to remember the booklets issued by the CICLSAL during the Year of Consecrated Life, all of which were centred on the Lord: joy in following the Lord (*Rejoice!*), the reading of the signs of the Lord's presence and the waiting for his coming that is at the core of the consecrated vocation (*Keep Watch!*), the beauty and splendour of the Lord (*Contemplate*), being witnesses of the Risen Lord among the nations (*Proclaim*).²⁵

A *second* point is to **deepen our understanding of the priesthood itself**. The problem does not come from being too much priests, but from being too little priests: we tend to concentrate on 'doing priesthood' rather than on 'being priests.' The problem in the Congregation is that we have many priests but not enough priesthood.²⁶ We tend to be fascinated by priestly work – and perhaps by the kick we get out of it, the immediate returns, the appreciation of the faithful – rather than by the living out of the priesthood of Christ in its true profundity. There is so much to be gained by a renewed attempt to understand the beauty of the priesthood of Christ.

²⁵ CICLSAL, *Rejoice! To consecrated men and women from the teachings of Pope Francis* (February 2014); *Keep Watch! A letter to consecrated men and women journeying in the footsteps of God* (September 2014); *Contemplate: To all consecrated persons pursuing the Beauty trail* (November 2014); *Proclaim: To consecrated men and women witnesses of the Gospel among peoples* (August 2016).

²⁶ AGC 335 8.

In the *third* place, the Salesian Priest has to be formed to be attentive to the **constantly changing socio-cultural context** in which young people live. This implies at the same time a constant return to the charismatic inspiration that nurtures our Salesian identity and mission. We were born out of the experience of Don Bosco with the marginalized youth of Valdocco to whom he gave his life until his last breath. Our Constitutions embody this vocation and mission, and the Church asks only that we be faithful to such a heritage and mandate. In the variety of contexts and changes that condition the culture and life of people today, the charismatic experience of Don Bosco remains our lodestone. It is the permanent criterion not only for our works but also for our personal engagement in the mission among the youth as Priest Salesians and Brother Salesians.

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 evangelized, a school that prepared them for life, and a playground where friends could meet and enjoy themselves.

As we carry out our mission today, the Valdocco experience is still the lasting criterion for discernment and renewal in all our activities and works. (C 40)

A *fourth* point is that the Salesian charism must permeate all our efforts of **vocational animation**. While accompanying all young people in the discovery of their vocation, we must also courageously propose what is typical of our charism, involving them in our mission, community life, and the experience of the values of our spirit.²⁷ Within this presentation of the charism, we must learn to propose the Salesian consecrated vocation – first of all by joyful witness, and then also in more explicit ways. There will always be those who come to us with the intention of becoming priests. These must be helped to see if they feel called to embrace the Salesian charism with all their hearts. Such a ‘conversion’ to the charism is a *sine qua non* for further steps on the

²⁷ *Criteria and Norms for Salesian Vocation Discernment*, 3rd ed. (Rome 2000)

journey. Here is also the great task for all our provinces: to move clearly from recruitment to a true vocational culture.²⁸

As far as the vocation of the Salesian Priest is concerned, certain criteria of discernment must be carefully followed: Salesian consecration (Chapter 2 of the Constitutions), the capacity to be a builder (and not a destroyer) of community, zeal for the salvation of young people, and so on.

A *fifth* point regards strengthening the processes of accompaniment in the **prenovitiate, novitiate and postnovitiate**. These three phases form a unit among themselves and are vital for growth in the Salesian consecrated identity in its two forms. If it is true that about 80% of our candidates speak about a true discovery of personal spiritual accompaniment only in the prenovitiate, these phases become even more critical.²⁹ Personal spiritual accompaniment in the context of community accompaniment is an indispensable instrument in the personalization of the values of our vocation. Every province needs to invest courageously in the preparation of formators, as individuals and as teams, so that they become guides who are able to win the confidence (*Strive to make yourself loved!*) and touch the hearts of Salesians in initial formation. We cannot afford to have situations where badly handled authority gives rise to dynamics of fear and suspicion that ruin the process of accompaniment and of formation in general.³⁰ In addition, formators and especially those offering the service of personal spiritual accompaniment must be able to help deepen most especially the charismatic and community dimensions in the context of the overall goal of configuration to Christ.

²⁸ GC27 75.1.

²⁹ M. BAY, *Young Salesians and Accompaniment: Results of an international survey* (Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2019) 494. See *Young Salesians and Accompaniment: Orientations and Guidelines* (2019) 46. We keep in mind that 54.42% do speak of being accompanied by a 'soul friend' in the years before the prenovitiate.

³⁰ See BAY 545-546 (8. Unhelpful elements/features or difficulties in the experience of personalised spiritual accompaniment) and *Young Salesians and Accompaniment: Orientations and Guidelines* (2019) 53-59.

A *sixth* point concerns strengthening the processes of accompaniment and discernment during **practical training** and in **preparation for perpetual profession**. Our Constitutions describe practical training as a phase of intense lived experience of Salesian educative and pastoral action.³¹ Given its proximity to the perpetual profession, this phase becomes even more critical in terms of a final discernment of the Salesian consecrated vocation, both on the part of the individual and of the community. Would it not be worth investing in better and more efficacious forms of accompaniment in this vital phase, so that it truly becomes a “learning by experience the meaning of the Salesian vocation” (C 98)? The Rector Major has been insisting that provincials send practical trainees only to communities that have demonstrated the ability to accompany them. It might be useful also to promote a renewed reflection on the criteria for admission to the perpetual profession.

The transition from practical training to the next stage of initial formation – a move that normally takes place close to the preparation for perpetual profession – can offer good opportunities of discernment to both confrere and community. A process of overall evaluation of the confrere’s Salesian experience since the novitiate, and especially during practical training, is a good basis for exploring motivations as well as orientations towards the future. The choice to begin specific formation in order to become a Salesian Priest needs solid roots and sound ‘positive signs’³² emerging from Salesian life experience. The *Ratio* invites us, in fact, to carry out an overall evaluation of the practical training experience:

When one finishes his practical training, it is appropriate that there be an overall assessment – on the part of the Provincial and the community, and on his part as well – of his entire experience and of the progress he has made in his vocation. (FSDB 439)

³¹ C 115. The Italian text speaks of a “confronto vitale e intenso con l’azione salesiana in un’esperienza educativo pastorale.”

³² Cf. *Criteria and Norms* 39; 42-43.

At the conclusion of practical training, there should be an overall assessment of the whole experience carried out by the Provincial, the community and the confrere himself. (FSDB 444)

Nothing prevents us from expanding this evaluation to the complete arc of Salesian experience since the novitiate, and to make a projection towards the future. Some provinces combine this kind of overall evaluation with the 'declaration of intent' required for beginning specific formation towards priesthood:

The specific formation of the cleric confrere requires from each candidate a clear intention to embrace the priestly life. Therefore, at the time of his acceptance for this phase of formation, a declaration of intent is required of him in this sense. The way in which this declaration is made may vary: for example, it may be through a request to the Provincial to undertake the study of theology, or a request to begin the preparation for perpetual profession with a view to becoming a Salesian priest (FSDB 482).

Good practices like these would help give much more value to the crucial passage from practical training to specific formation and perpetual profession. Evidently, they call for the best dispositions and also involvement both of the confrere concerned and of those who accompany him at that moment of his life.

A *seventh* point concerns **specific formation in preparation for the Salesian priesthood**. This phase, also because of its length, has a formidable impact on the Salesian consecrated identity in its priestly form. The FSDB could not be clearer in its formulation of the objectives of this phase:

"Our living Rule is Jesus Christ... whom we find present in Don Bosco who devoted his life to the young." [C 196] This statement of our Constitutions *sums up our Salesian vocation: we are to conform ourselves to Jesus Christ and spend our lives for the young, as did Don Bosco*. All our formation, both initial and ongoing, consists in acquiring and actualizing this identity in individual persons and in the community. To this end are directed the efforts of every candidate and every confrere, the activity of the animators, and the entire formation enterprise.

For this reason, our Salesian identity is the basis of unity and of belonging to the worldwide Congregation. It is *the heart of all our formation*,

the fountainhead of our formation process and its constant point of reference. It is also the determining criterion of vocation discernment. (FSDB 25)

The Salesian priest [or deacon] combines in himself the gifts of Salesian consecration and those of the pastoral ministry, but in such a way that *his particular manner of being a priest and exercising his ministry stems from his Salesian consecration*. As a sacramental sign of Christ the Good Shepherd, from whom he draws his pastoral love, he works within the framework of his community in his bid to “save” the young (FSDB 39).

It is time to rethink the whole process of specific formation so as to give our Salesian consecrated identity the centrality that belongs to it. It is by no means enough to guarantee that the plan of studies corresponds to the academic requirements in view of ordination to the priesthood. We need to identify and promote the methods that would favour the ongoing attainment of that charismatic synthesis that is the core of the vocation of the Salesian who is a priest. As Cardinal J.J. Hamer had insisted during the 1990 Synod on Priestly Formation, major superiors have the responsibility to ensure a perfect harmony between formation to the priesthood and formation to the religious life according to the particular identity and charism of his institute.³³ During the study of theology, we would need to make a concerted effort to read the theological treatises in the light of our charism.

There are in particular two kinds of relationship that have a tremendous impact on future ministry, and that therefore must be the object of special attention. The first is the lived experience of the *religious community*: a clear sense of belonging and the ability to give of oneself in generous service are extremely important positive signs. Problems in community life after ordination often have their roots in poor community experience during initial formation. The second is the ability to live the *Salesian spir-*

³³ Cited in AGC 335 14. Jean Jérôme Hamer, OP, STD (1916-1996) was a Belgian Cardinal who was Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (1985-1992).

it and mission as shared with the laity. This kind of conviction and ability will not emerge automatically after ordination; it must be the object of particular attention during the processes of initial formation.

In general, we need to ensure that specific formation is not reduced to its necessary intellectual dimension, much less to merely “passing examinations.” Aspirants to the Salesian priesthood must be helped to enter more deeply into their specific identity of confreres called to live the priesthood *within the Salesian vocation and mission*. This would require, as we said, a thorough revision of formation processes and instruments (community and personal formation plans, community, group and personal accompaniment), an expansion of the agents of formation to include lay men and women and married couples, and a far better preparation of formation guides in general. All this would have to be done in a participatory way that ensures that the young confreres are actively involved as the first ones responsible for their formation.

In the *eighth* place, there is the period of the **quinquennium**. The importance of this phase could not get greater endorsement than the one coming directly from the life of Don Bosco. It is in the first five years of his priesthood, which coincide with the time between his ordination and the establishment of the Oratory at Valdocco, that the Salesian mission was born. Our founder’s personal experience is an equally strong testimony to the importance of being accompanied during the crucial period of full insertion into the pastoral life: without Cafasso at his side we cannot even imagine the Saint John Bosco we know and follow. It is, of course, the responsibility of the Provincial to assign confreres to communities where they can be mentored and accompanied, as it is up to the confreres concerned to accept the need for such mentoring and accompaniment. No less important at this time is the support coming from the peer group. There are very valuable experiences of quinquennium meetings and mutual support at provincial and interprovincial levels that are worth learning from

and imitating. And then there is study, which Cafasso used to define as the eighth sacrament for a priest. It would be a tragedy if Salesian priests were to stop reading, reflecting and studying soon after ordination. If we are to be educators and pastors rather than functionaries or mercenaries, we have to certainly take care of the reflective and contemplative side of our vocation. The best example here is Don Bosco himself – the Don Bosco who had a room reserved for him at the Convitto to which he would retire every day in his early years as a priest, in order to read and write.³⁴

Ninth, given the large number of **parishes** in the Congregation and the huge formative impact of this particular form of pastoral service on our Salesian life and on our perception of priestly ministry, it would be important in the forthcoming six-year period to foster processes of listening, study and reflection on this topic, to be carried out jointly by the Youth Ministry, Mission and Formation departments, involving also confreres and communities engaged in Salesian parish ministry.

In the tenth place, the Salesian Priest, along with the Salesian Brother, will work out ways of actively promoting the ecclesiology of communion that expands in concentric circles to embrace the whole of humanity. This means moving beyond the boundaries of our own religious and educative-pastoral communities to network with other religious, the diocesan community, the human community in which we are situated, and with all those interested in caring for our common home and in uplifting the lives of the young, especially the most marginalized. The priesthood of Christ embraces the whole human family and, indeed, every form of life in God's magnificent creation.

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³⁴ See G. BUCCELLATO, *Notes for a 'Spiritual History' of Father John Bosco* (Bengaluru: Kristu Jyoti, 2014) 77. See also the vast body of publications by Don Bosco, now easily available at <http://www.donboscosanto.eu/>.

As we learn to take better care of the identity of our priest confreres, we will see an improvement also in the pastoral quality, spirituality and shared responsibility of the subject of the mission that is the community. Ongoing growth in these aspects is a challenge for the Salesian religious life in its two forms, so that all of us, Brothers and Priests, might grow in faith and humanity and render more fruitful service to young people and to those to whom we are sent, with all the energies and resources at our disposal.

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY REFLECTION

1. *What concrete steps can I take to deepen my awareness of the beauty of consecrated life?*
2. *Whether I am a Priest or a Brother, what can I do to deepen my understanding of the Salesian priesthood?*
3. *What can I as a confrere / we as a community do to improve our knowledge of the context in which our young people live, especially those among them who are living in more precarious conditions? What could we do to deepen our knowledge of our charism and its inculturation in our time and context?*
4. *What can we do to ensure that vocational animation is characterized by the Salesian charism and by a meaningful presentation of the Salesian consecrated identity lived out in two forms? How can we move from recruiting vocations to accompanying young people in the discernment of their vocation, and from a role confined to the 'vocation promoter' to a responsibility shared by all confreres and each community?*
5. *How can the province prepare formation guides and spiritual guides for the prenovitiate, novitiate and postnovitiate, and support the ongoing formation of the present formators?*
6. *How could we prepare Rectors and other confreres to accompany practical trainees entrusted to the communities? Further, how could we initiate the practice of the 'overall assessment' of the initial formation experience?*
7. *How could we ensure that specific formation includes not only the intellectual dimension but also the human-fraternal, the pastoral, the charismatic, and that of consecration lived out as Priest (or Brother)?*
8. *How could we ensure adequate accompaniment of confreres in the quinquennium? And how to ensure that confreres keep alive a habit of reflection and study, giving due attention also to the documents of the Church and Congregation?*
9. *What concrete steps could we take to live the complementarity of the one Salesian vocation in two forms (see C 45)?*

2.2 DECLARATION OF THE WORLD CONSULTATION ON MARGINALIZATION AND YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK

Fr Fabio ATTARD

General Councillor for Youth Ministry

In these days in which we have lived the *World Consultation on Marginalisation and Young People at Risk* with great joy we have been able to see the great commitment of the Salesian Congregation in favour of poor, abandoned children and young people. For this reason, we want to begin this **Declaration of ours** by reiterating **the invitation that the Rector Major made to us in his message and that so many like us already feel that we have embraced it by living it in our works and presences**. In his message, the Rector Major reiterates that we are called to return to the peripheries and to accompany young people at risk. Like Don Bosco, we are prophetic signs for these children and young people who live in a context of vulnerability, distress and suffering. The Congregation is increasingly determined to work with these young people, to be present in their lives with a prophetic attitude (Cfr. GC27).

Representatives of the seven regions of the Congregation gathered for the meeting of the **World Consultation on Marginalisation and Young People at Risk** in Rome, from 27 to 31 March 2019, convened by the *Sector for Works and Social Services for Youth at Risk of the Department for Youth Ministry*. The work of the *Consultation* has had its starting point in the **Plan of Animation and Government** of the Rector Major and his Council **for the period 2014-2020**.

The various points of this **Declaration are the result of a series of sessions and reflections on the experiences on the ground** before the Consultation, which we have shared and deepened over the last few days. Personal study, group and assembly discussions have borne much fruit.

We want to **hand over this *Declaration to the Rector Major and his Council, and also to the Pre-Chapter Commission***. We strongly believe that this educational-pastoral experience of ours for the most disadvantaged children and young people, which in these days has found a privileged space for listening and welcoming, can serve as an instrument of study for the next GC28.

ORIENTATIONS

We feel the urgency of a renewed call to live the **Preventive System** as a fundamental orientation that pushes us further to **discern the social and cultural reality of children and young people who are the first to feel the effects of the ‘throw away’ culture**.

We believe that the Preventive System has the strength to help us to **deepen our educational-pastoral response** to the causes that generate an increasingly unjust and unequal society.

We believe that the Preventive System is **a key to the germination of a process of integral growth** in the lives of disadvantaged and discarded children and young people where everyone finds his/her life project, his/her vocation: “Don Bosco’s God-given vocation for the mission of salvation of the young, especially the poorest, involves many people and groups in a common spirituality and a shared educational and pastoral method which is the Preventive System.” (*Salesian Youth Ministry. Frame of Reference*, p. 83).

The current world situation, with the increase in migration, the arrival of refugees, various types of abuse, etc., challenges the Salesians of Don Bosco to **greater dedication and targeted intervention based on the Salesian charism**.

PERIPHERIES

The Spirit reminds us that the **Congregation was born in the peripheries and is calling us to return there again**, to hear the cry of the wounded young people and to respond with “generosity and competence. Pope Francis’ appeal to us during GC27 is alive: “Reaching marginalized youth requires courage, maturity and much prayer. **And the best must be sent to this work! The best!**” (*Address of Pope Francis to the participants in GC27*, 31 March 2014).

We recognize that some of our presences, for various reasons, have moved away from direct contact with the poorest. In many situations, a good part of our energy is spent on managerial and administrative tasks.

Like Don Bosco, we must go back to meeting the wounded young people. We are called to look at these young people with the eyes of God, being with them, closer to them. We “propose that **“young people at risk” and “social injustice” be treated as “attitude” and “transversal choice”, not only as “sector” and that this choice enlighten and guide all our interventions.**

WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

We also believe that our young people are not only beneficiaries of our mission but also **active protagonists and collaborators** of our mission. We feel strongly that while we are **serving** them on their way, they themselves **call upon our consecrated life** so that we may become authentic **mystics**. To our religious communities, they question our way of life as **prophets**. Their experience of poverty and misery is a call to **convert our lifestyles in the light of the service and witness we are sent to offer.**

ADVOCACY

In the light of the Preventive System we believe that “prevention is an educational approach that surmounts problems by preventing their **negative effects**. It is also a **systematic social form of intervention** that is not reduced to short-lived assistance. It remedies exclusion by working on its causes.” For this reason we commit ourselves to an action “not only about direct education of the individual but also **creating a new social mentality at a cultural and political level for the common good and on behalf of human rights**.” (*Salesian Youth Ministry. Frame of Reference*, p. 249).

We work in a network ensuring **the participation of young people, families, educators and other entities for the generation of an increasingly clear social and political sensitivity** that goes against the dynamics of the ‘throw away’ culture. Networking is an essential condition for the promotion of a culture that recognises the rights of children and young people.

For this purpose, the option for needy and marginalised children and young people, and for the poorest of them, should be strengthened and supported by **a stronger and more effective network of contacts**. There is an urgent need to foster **broad-er collaboration with civil society to put pressure on governments and institutions** to promote and support policies that bear witness to the preferential option for the poor. In synergy with other organisations, we are committed to tackling the structural causes of poverty, injustice and marginalisation.

As Salesians of Don Bosco we allow ourselves to be guided by the **social doctrine and teaching of the Church** for our social action. **Article 26 of our Constitutions** also helps us in this direction: “With Don Bosco we reaffirm our preference for the young who are ‘poor, abandoned and in danger’, those who have greater need of love and evangelisation, and we work especially in areas of greatest poverty.” (C. 26).

In line with this action, we suggest that a worldwide service be established, such as a ***Secretariat***, to support the needs of youth mobility (refugees and migrants), through reflection and coordination with technical expertise and charismatic identity. At the same time, this *Secretariat* shall have the opportunity to be present in international civil and ecclesiastical bodies.

We encourage this ***advocacy by exploring new systems and methods, strengthening existing structures and experiences*** at local, national and international level. The strengthening of *advocacy networking* is supported with the help of ***technology and social media***. These tools should be used extensively to implement and accompany this process.

In this field, we highlight the importance of connecting the various levels of *advocacy*, at the international and national, regional and continental levels, to ensure the ripple effect. In this field we note with satisfaction the positive effort of the ***advocacy*** work that ***Don Bosco International (DBI) and the Salesian Presence in United Nations (DBUN)*** are making with great opportunity for development.

PASTORAL PLANNING

May the cry of the poorest of the poor children and young people be a call to our Congregation to **find the courage to leave our comfort zones**.

The 2019 World Consultation proposes to the General Council that through the various structures of government **the “option for the poor and marginalised”** be ensured **in the various documents of government and animation of the Province – OPP, SEPP, Directories**.

In such processes where these documents of animation and governance are formulated, the **path of discernment at all levels** should be fostered. We see the importance of these **dis-**

ernment processes being active and participatory at the level of local EPCs.

It is necessary that through the Provincial SEPP the participation of all the **structures of pastoral animation of the Province, the various Commissions**, be ensured. This is the only way to ensure the **synergy of the various dimensions of the SEPP**, of all pastoral activities and the involvement of all in a holistic way.

In order that in each Province its institutional commitment and resources may be faithful to the work with the poorest, it is necessary that the **Salesian Youth Ministry Department continue with its animation** to make known and apply the common elements that should guide and measure such actions, thus ensuring the charismatic sustainability of social works. Chapter VII, 2.5, of the *Frame of Reference* (Cfr. *Salesian Youth Ministry. Frame of Reference*, pp. 241-255) is an updated resource for this process.

PASTORAL STRUCTURES

The option for the last and least is not exclusive attention of social works and presences. Although it is true that the latter (refugees, migrants, street children, abused people, unemployed, ex-soldiers, those discriminated against because of ethnicity or caste, among others) require specific responses that we, as an organization, must take care to provide. We therefore call for **a firm commitment to this challenge in every work and in every province.**

Responding to the call of the marginalised and abandoned, many Provinces have already set up **structures at provincial and local level** to coordinate services in this area. We encourage the Provinces that have not yet developed this response to **make present in their Directory, SEPP and in the pastoral organization planning of the Province a specific structure** to make operational the option for the poor.

This structure, similar to other structures in various pastoral sectors, **will coordinate, through a person in charge of the sector, the responses at the local and provincial levels**, supporting the actions to be carried out in an organic way, encouraging the sharing of good practices with other Provinces. (Cfr. *Salesian Youth Ministry. Frame of Reference*, p. 254-255).

HUMAN AND ECONOMIC RESOURCES

Working for the most needy and poor is not only a desire but requires **human and economic resources**. For this reason, as members of this Consultation, we ask, first, that in the reorganization of the Province, we try to **ensure, as far as possible, the presence of the Salesians in these presences**.

We also call for **these presences not to suffer from a lack of economic support. Ensuring the necessary resources** to make these structures sustainable is not a gesture of charity, but **a charismatic response of the first order**.

Finally, we encourage the Provinces to provide in the OPP and in the SEPP for the **ongoing formation of Salesians and Laity** in this pastoral commitment. The call of the *Final Document of the Youth Synod* invites us to make this journey a reality in our structures (*Part III, Chapter IV*).

We also suggest that in the OPP of the Province opportunity is given to **prepare in a professional manner more people, Salesians and lay**, who have the necessary tools to recognize, interpret and make choices in this area.

FORMATION

A word on the formation processes was expressed by the various groups during the work of the Consultation.

Starting from **Part III of the *Final Document of the Synod of Young People***, which deals with *accompaniment in formation to ordained ministry and consecrated life*, the Consultation makes the following statement its own: “When young people are admitted to houses of formation or seminaries, it is important to establish whether they are sufficiently rooted in a community, and whether they show stability in relations of friendship with peers, in commitment to study or work, and **in contact with poverty and suffering**” (no. 100). And later it is said: “Engagement with daily reality takes on special importance in this phase. **Various spiritual traditions point out the value of fraternal life and service to the poor as a test for decisions that have been taken and as a setting in which the person fully reveals himself.**” (no. 113).

If we listen to these two indications in the light of our tradition, we see that Don Bosco’s call was a response coming from his walking through the streets of Turin and visiting the prisons. **Don Bosco’s vocation was strongly marked by the cries of the wounded young people.**

We ask that every Salesian be **helped and accompanied to cultivate the art of working with children and young people at risk, that he does not have to refuse those who have been discarded.** From our various experiences we can see the urgency of taking care of this aspect of our vocational identity.

We note that there is a need to **review the processes of formation that clearly reflects the charismatic concern for poor, excluded and abandoned young people.** We suggest that **the Salesian formation reflects the indications and suggestions of the *Ratio*** which includes in the formation process direct contacts with children and young people in the peripheries and “on the streets” (see *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis et Studiorum* [2016], 3.4. *Formation for Youth Ministry*).

That there be a **specific program of appropriate content (curriculum), delivered through gradual and guided ex-**

periences, which help the young Salesian in initial formation to mature the attitudes of the Good Shepherd in the face of the social reality that defines the new frontiers of the youth world.

We also see the fundamental importance of the **formators** themselves **being prepared, having this charismatic sensibility and having such an experience** that they can in turn communicate and bear witness to in a simple and credible way.

Let us also see how pedagogical it is that already in the processes of initial formation **a simple and sober lifestyle is** adopted.

In line with what has been said, we suggest that the same attention and commitment should characterise the **ongoing formation of the Salesians**, who increasingly figure in a **joint formation between Salesians and laity** who with us take on the call of the Salesian mission.

LAY COLLABORATORS

In the light of the journey that the Provinces are living in preparation for GC28, here too the members of the *Consultation* feel the need **to recognize the commitment witnessed by many lay collaborators in our works and presences**. Their participation in the Salesian mission is recognised, above all, by the young people themselves who experience the goodness of a face that communicates compassion and goodness as the Good Shepherd. Children and young people who are discarded from society, but **welcomed, protected, promoted and integrated** within our presences.

The laity who share the Salesian mission with us today are the realisation of **Don Bosco's dream of a vast movement of people, consecrated and lay, who in various ways are committed to the salvation of young people** (Cf. C. 5).

By virtue of their **specific characteristics**, lay people can act in the secular world in a different and complementary way to that of the consecrated religious. We hope that the next GC28 will give a **careful appreciation of the strengths of the two vocations**, making use of a shared mission in favour of the excluded and marginalised.

We hope that the fruit of GC28 will increase the impact of the collaboration of the laity, more **based on the vision of evangelical love, more rooted in the Salesian charism, more synodal** for the benefit of the Salesian mission for the poor and excluded young people.

YOUTH AND VOLUNTEERING

One field where the presence of young lay people is increasing is that of **Volunteering** (Cf. *Volunteering in the Salesian Mission. Identity & Orientations of Salesian Missionary Volunteering*, Rome 2019).

They are young people, still searching but also with a heart full of great desire to make themselves available to the poor. They are young people who have a heart marked by the desire for **gratuity, freedom, solidarity and generosity of deacon**, as the *Final Document of the Synod of Youth* calls it:

The young can help renew the style of parish communities and build a fraternal community that is close to the poor. The poor, the young who are cast aside, those who are suffering most, can become the principle of community renewal. They should be recognized as subjects of evangelization and they help us free ourselves from spiritual worldliness. Often the young are sensitive to the dimension of diakonia. Many are actively committed in voluntary work and they find in service the way to encounter the Lord. Dedication to the lowliest thus becomes a practice of faith, in which one discovers the love “in loss” that

is at the heart of the Gospel and the foundation of the whole Christian life. The poor, the lowly, the sick, the elderly, are the suffering body of Christ: hence to place oneself at their service is a way of meeting the Lord and a privileged space for discernment of one's vocation. A particular openness is required, in different contexts, towards migrants and refugees. With them it is necessary to work for acceptance, protection, promotion and integration. Social inclusion of the poor makes the Church the house of charity. (no. 137).

CONCLUSION

During our meeting we have placed **at the centre our children and young people excluded and discarded** those we meet every day in our works, presences and services. Their joy and happiness in being accompanied from a painful experience towards a dignified future says that as a Salesian Congregation and as a Salesian Family we are attentive and open to the voice of the Spirit.

We also feel, however, the urgency of **strengthening this listening and deepening this empathy** in many of our Salesian confreres.

The suffering of poor young people, and of the poorest of them, is increasing. This tragedy must be matched by our ever more attentive and generous response with the heart of the Good Shepherd. **The globalisation of indifference** must find in the Salesians of Don Bosco **a globalisation of joy and optimism, of hope and of the future.**

We want to conclude this *Declaration* with the words of Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*:

Keeping our missionary fervour alive calls for firm trust in the Holy Spirit, for it is he who “helps us in our weakness” (Rom 8:26). But this generous trust has to be nourished, and so we

need to invoke the Spirit constantly. He can heal whatever causes us to flag in the missionary endeavour. It is true that this trust in the unseen can cause us to feel disoriented: it is like being plunged into the deep and not knowing what we will find. I myself have frequently experienced this. Yet there is no greater freedom than that of allowing oneself to be guided by the Holy Spirit, renouncing the attempt to plan and control everything to the last detail, and instead letting him enlighten, guide and direct us, leading us wherever he wills. The Holy Spirit knows well what is needed in every time and place. This is what it means to be mysteriously fruitful! (no. 280).

Rome, 5 April 2019.

4. ACTIVITIES OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

4.1 Chronicle of the Rector Major

Below are some of the main activities of the Rector Major in the Semester from July to December 2019.

– **July 2019**

The Rector Major, Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, began this month in the Holy Land along with the General Council, returning on the 7th. The summer plenary session of the General Council was held from Monday the 8th to Friday the 26th.

In addition to presiding over the meetings of the Council, the Rector Major was involved in various appointments and business meetings. In particular: he attended the Curatorium of the Salesian Pontifical University (Tuesday the 9th); he met with several new provincials who have just been appointed (ISI, COB, INB); he spoke at the inauguration of the World Assembly of the Don Bosco Volunteers (VDB) in Frascati (Thursday the 18th), and at its conclusion on the 28th he was able to greet the new President General and her Council; he went to Castelgandolfo to meet a group of FMA provincials (Friday the 19th); he went to Tivoli to greet the Salesian Oblates of the Sacred

Heart gathered at their General Chapter (Saturday the 20th), and on the 30th he received in audience the Ambassador of the plurinational State of Bolivia, Mr Julio César Caballero, for a courtesy greeting.

– **August 2019**

On the 3rd the Rector Major, accompanied by his secretary, left by car from Rome for Piedmont, to greet the young participants at the meeting of European prenovitiates at Colle Don Bosco (Sunday the 4th). He then went to Mornese to preside at the Eucharist in which the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians were remembering the anniversaries of profession of many of the Sisters, as well as accepting a perpetual profession. Returning to Rome on Tuesday the 6th, the Rector Major left two days later for the Far East. During his visit to Macau, Taiwan and Hong Kong he was able to meet some of China Service confreres, different groups of the Salesian Family, confreres from various presences, lay collaborators and above all, young people.

Once returned from the Far East, he went to his home town of Luan-

co, in Spain, to meet up with family members and to rest for a while.

– *September 2019*

On the morning of the 4th, the Rector Major met confreres belonging to the 150th missionary expedition group, while in the evening he was present for the installation of the new Rector of the Salesian community in the Vatican.

On the 5th, accompanied by his secretary, he left for Chennai, India, to begin his visit to the INM (Madras-Chennai) and IND (Dimapur) provinces. He returned to Rome on the 15th. In the two provinces he met, as usual, the provincial council, the Salesian confreres, groups of the Salesian Family, young people and lay collaborators. In the Chennai Province he visited: the Missionary Aspirantate; the General House of the Sisters of Maria Auxiliatrix (SMA), where he met a good number of the Sisters; the theologate in Kavarapettai; the FMA provincial house; the Salesian Family and the young people in Vellore; the aspirants, the prenovices and novices in Tirupattur; the young people from the college, taking part in their celebrations. In this great Province the Rector Major was able to greet a good number of confreres and enjoyed the spontaneity and closeness of the many young uni-

versity students who attend our college.

Once in Dimapur, a long line of cars and mopeds accompanied the Rector Major from the airport to the provincial house. After some rest, Fr Ángel met a good number of past pupils and confreres. The next day he met the young people who had gathered at the Don Bosco School, where he was also able to greet some bishops and other religious and priests who wanted to meet him. During the days of his visit there were also meetings with the FMA, the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians (MSMHC), the Catechist Sisters of Mary Immaculate Help of Christians (SMI), the Sisters of the Visitation of Don Bosco (VSDB) and other members of the Salesian Family. Also on this occasion he met a large group of young university students from the Salesian College, and visited a couple of FMA and MSMHC houses. In conclusion, here too he found a province full of life and youth initiatives.

Back in Italy, on the 17th the Rector Major was the main celebrant at Mass in Don Bosco's rooms at Sacro Cuore, Rome, concelebrated together with the Pre-Chapter Commission with whom he shared some of their work moments. In the following days he received sev-

eral people in private audience, including Bishop Soundaraj of Vellore, India (17th), and Mr Michal Hort, world president of the Past Pupils of Don Bosco (Saturday 21st). He also met the provincial delegates of the English-speaking group of the Salesian Family (Friday 20th), and shared the whole morning of the 21st with the Volunteers with Don Bosco (CDB), who were celebrating the 25th anniversary of their Institute.

On Sunday the 22nd, Fr Ángel left for Valdocco for the meeting with the provincials who had completed their third year of service. He was with them until Monday 30th, accompanied by his Vicar. In the meantime, on Saturday the 28th he met the youth from Harambee (volunteers and SDB missionaries) and on Sunday the 29th he was main celebrant at the Eucharist for the 150th Missionary Expedition send-off. He remained in Turin for two more days for various meetings: with the ICP Provincial and Provincial Council, the group dealing with the Salesian places and for other appointments.

– October 2019

Back in Rome, on Thursday the 3rd the Rector Major once again took part in the UPS Curatorium. On Friday the 4th he was main cel-

eb rant at the Eucharist at the FMA Auxilium Faculty, of which he is Grand Chancellor and at which the new Dean, Sister Piera Ruffinatto, made her Profession of Faith. On Saturday the 5th, the Rector Major took part in the public Consistory at which Pope Francis created a new group of cardinals, among them our confrere Cristóbal López, Archbishop of Rabat. Late in the evening he left for Valdocco, to participate the following day in the 150th anniversary of the foundation of the Association of Mary Help of Christians (ADMA), founded thanks to Don Bosco. The meeting was attended by very many members of the ADMA Primary and other groups, coming mainly from Italy but also from some other European countries. It was a very familiar and emotional day, one which also saw the presence of many young ADMA members.

From the 7-11 October, the Rector Major chaired the Plenum of the Intermediate General Council. On the same days he had several audiences and on Wednesday the 9th he was main celebrant at Mass in the parish of Santa Maria della Speranza (near UPS), on the occasion of the visit of the Pilgrim image of Our Lady of Fatima.

On the afternoon of Saturday the 12th, together with other confreres

from Headquarters, he took part in the “Open Doors” initiative run by the young people and parish groups at Sacro Cuore in Rome to make known the different activities that take place in our house every week.

On Thursday the 17th he presided over the opening of the academic year at the UPS.

On the 18th, 19th and 20th, the Rector Major was in Warsaw for the celebration of the centenary of the Province. At different times he met: the Apostolic Nuncio to Poland, Archbishop Salvatore Pappalardo; the President of the Polish Republic, Mr Andrzej Duda, with his wife and some of his immediate collaborators, who received the Rector Major together with a group of Salesians, young people and lay people in the presidential palace; the Cardinal Archbishop of Warsaw and other bishops, and many confreres and members of the Salesian Family and young people from the SYM of this province. He also had the opportunity to give an interview for public television.

As soon as he returned from Poland, he left with his secretary for Nepal (Province of Calcutta, INC) to begin his visit to INC and INS (Shillong), which would be the last provinces of this great country he had yet to visit. He arrived in Kathmandu on the 22nd.

The following morning, the Rector Major met Salesians and FMA from the west of the country at Don Bosco Lubhu. In the afternoon he left by plane for the east and, with the group accompanying him, arrived at Biratnagar, where in the morning, along with SDB confreres, he met the young students and some members of the Salesian Family. He then travelled by car to the mission in Sirsia, where he met the SDB confreres from the area, the FMA and some other members of the Salesian Family. He also presided over a beautiful Eucharistic celebration with all the locals, especially farmers and young people from this very poor area. After lunch with the SDB and FMA, he left by car for the Indian border area (Kakrabhatta) to arrive at the Don Bosco School in Siliguri, where he was met by confreres and a good group of past pupils who offered a special dinner. On the 25th, the Rector Major met the confreres from the northern part of the country, including those from the post-novitiate in Sonara, and later the members of the Salesian Family. He was also able to visit the Salesian College campus and meet the young students there. In the afternoon he left for Guwahati; here the confreres of the INS Province were waiting for him to drive him to Shillong,

where already in the evening he was welcomed by hundreds of young people and members of the Salesian Family from the area, with tributes and the band led by missionary confrere Bro. Colombi. The following day the Rector Major returned to Guwahati airport and from there he left for another part of the province; he took a flight to Agartala and then went to Pathaliaghat and Nandannagar, where he met the confreres from that part of the province and celebrated Mass with the Salesian Family and the youth. On the 28th he visited the FMA Auxilium house where he also met the students, and returned by plane to Guwahati to continue by car to Shillong, passing through Nongpoh. In Shillong he met with the Provincial Council and the next day visited the theologate (Sacred Heart Theological College), where he celebrated Eucharist, met the confreres from that area who had come especially to meet the Rector Major, and visited the wonderful museum called "Don Bosco Centre for Indigenous Cultures". Here he had the opportunity to bless and open a new room and the new website of the museum (<https://dbcic.org>) and to take a guided tour of the other rooms which show the variety and beauty of the different cultures, especially Northeast In-

dia. Later he also met the Salesian Family at St Anthony's College. On the 30th he visited the novitiate in Sunnyside and the FMA at Auxilium Convent, returned to the provincial house and left once more for Guwahati to begin the long return to Europe (Guwahati - Kolkata - Doha - Madrid).

Arriving with his secretary in Madrid on the 31st, he immediately took a plane to Asturias to attend a significant family event – his parents' 60th wedding anniversary – and to be with his mother, whose health was poor.

– **November 2019**

Returning to Madrid on the 3rd, he met with his secretary at the airport and together they left for Campo Grande (Brazil) to participate in the meeting of the Latin America South Cone Region provincials. On the evening of the 5th, together with the Regional Councillor and the Provincial of ARS, he travelled to Buenos Aires to take part in the International Congress of Mary Help of Christians (ADMA) which was held place from 7-10 October in the Almagro district, focused on the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians: it was here that little Jorge Mario Bergoglio, today Pope Francis, was baptised. Before starting the Congress, on the morning

of the 7th the Rector Major was able to preside at the opening of the new Salesian Historical Archives in Buenos Aires, which together with the archives in Bahia Blanca, also in Argentina, complement our Central Salesian Archives in an extraordinary way, since these two institutions look after the archival treasures of the early days of the Congregation and its missionary expansion, and follow the events of the first Salesians in America.

The International Congress of Mary Help of Christians, promoted and organised in a special way by ADMA and, in this case, by the SDB and FMA Provinces of Argentina, saw the presence of about 1,300 participants from more than 30 countries. It was an intense moment of Marian devotion and identity as a Salesian Family. Besides the conferences held at “San Francisco de Sales” in Almagro, the Rector Major blessed the “Mater Misericordiae” Church, already known in Don Bosco’s time as the church of the Italians, the first church where the first missionaries arrived in 1875. He took part in the march through the streets of the centre of Buenos Aires, from the square of the Congress of the Nation to the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians (about 3 km). The Congress ended on Sunday the 10th with the inter-

vention of the Rector Major, followed by the Eucharist, which celebrated in the Basilica.

The following week the Rector Major was again with his family in Spain, due to the health situation of his mother Isabel; he returned to Rome on the 17th.

On Tuesday the 19th, accompanied once again by his secretary, he left for the last remaining Province to visit: Great Britain (GBR). On arriving in Manchester, the Provincial drove the Rector Major to Liverpool, where he met the confreres, young people and members of the Salesian Family from the house in Bootle before arriving in Bolton, where on the 20th he met the Salesian confreres from the northern communities: Bollington, Bootle and Bolton. He also received the FMA who had come to greet him, and then visited the Salesian school, before leaving for the retreat centre in Bollington where he met the Salesians and volunteers who run this work and the members of the provincial youth ministry team. The next day he left for Chertsey, where in the first instance he met the members of the EPC and paid a visit to the Royal Holloway University, where one of our confreres is among the chaplains. He then met the Cooperators, left for Farnborough and then for

Battersea, where he met the confreres. As with the other visits, the Rector Major met with the Provincial Council.

Returning to Rome on the evening of the 23rd, on the 26th the Rector Major gave an address at the National Conference of Economers organised by *CISI-Economia*, which took place at the Domus Pacis, near Santa Maria degli Angeli in Assisi. On the 27th he took part in the first day of the Assembly of the Union of Superiors General (USG) in Rome. But he then had to leave with a degree of urgency for Luanco, to be with his mother during her time of declining health.

– **December 2019**

The Rector Major returned from Spain on the evening of the 1st, and on the 2nd the winter session of the General Council Plenum began. During the following weeks he had a number of audiences and meetings. These included: being involved in the meeting of the UPS Academic Senate (the 4th); the discernment meeting for a possible reconfiguration of some of the African Provinces; the audience granted by Pope Francis to participants and organisers of the Christmas Concert in the Vatican (Friday the 13th) and the recording of the

same concert in the Paul VI Hall in the Vatican (Saturday the 14th); and, at different times, Christmas greeting from the various groups of the Salesian Family. Together with his Council and the entire community at Sacro Cuore, the Rector Major took part in the quarterly recollection held at Genzano on the 18th. As is now a tradition, he presented the 2020 Strenna in the FMA General House, which also involved various groups of the Salesian Family.

On the 28th he left for Luanco for the Christmas holidays together with his family.

4.2 Chronicle of the General Councillors

The Vicar of the Rector Major

From 26-31 **July**, the Vicar of the Rector Major, Fr Francesco Cereda, was in Nairobi for the 25th anniversary of the Consecration of the Church of Mary Help of Christians. Here he presided over the celebration of the perpetual professions of SDB and FMA. He also visited the prenovitiate at Bosco Boys and the theological studentate at Utume.

From 14-16 **August** he was the main celebrant at the Eucharist in Castelnuovo for the Solemnity of the Assumption, the feast of the Madonna del Castello, and at Colle for Don Bosco's birthday. He met the European prenovices and novices who have moved from Pinerolo to their new location.

On 4 **September**, together with the Rector Major, Salesian cardinals and bishops, he took part in the formal entry of the new Rector of the Salesian St Francis de Sales community in Vatican City. On the 8th, he presided at the first professions of the novices at Colle Don Bosco. On the 15th he met the missionaries at San Callisto in Rome and gave them their letters of obedience. From 20-21 September at Balasar, in Portugal, he took part in the 75th anniversary of Blessed Alessandrina da Costa's promise as a Salesian Cooperator, and the new promises of Salesian Cooperators in the recently opened Centre, as well as the opening of the International Salesian Spirituality Centre. From 21-30 at Valdocco in Turin, together with the Rector Major, he coordinated and animated the meeting of Provincials who had come there, halfway through their service of animation and government. On the 29th he concelebrated at the Eucharist during which missionaries

of the 150th Expedition received their crucifixes.

On **October 3rd**, he took part in the "Curatorium" of the Salesian Pontifical University at Sacro Cuore. On the 5th he participated in the celebration in memory of the 75th anniversary of the killing of the Salesian Servant of God, Fr Elia Comini and Dehonian Father Martino Capelli. From 13-17 he took part in the 60th anniversary of the birth of the Province of Guwahati; on this occasion he also met with the Provincial Council and met the Salesian Family from the Province; he gave the introductory report to the Symposium on "Evangelization and Catechesis"; met the young people from the Don Bosco Institute, Guwahati; visited the "Snehalaya" community, a rehabilitation centre for at-risk youth, as well as the Universities of Tapesia and Azara, the Parish of Tangla, the Salesian community at the Don Bosco Technical School Maliganon. He celebrated the Eucharist at the General House of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians and at the Provincial House of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. From 18-19 October he visited the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians' Institute of Spirituality, the aspirantate at Nonglakhiat, the Savio Juniorate

apostolic school, the novitiate at Sunnyside, Don Bosco Shrine in Chirapunjee, the parish of Mawjriong, Don Bosco Technical School, the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians' provincial house, the house for young people at risk. He met the FMA Sisters taking part in their Provincial Chapter; the commission for the life and religious discipline of the Province, the FMA and MSMHC novices, Archbishop Jala's family members, the theology students' community at Sacred Heart College. On the 20th he met the confreres in the provincial house in Kolkata. On the 24th, in Turin, he took part in the opening of the exhibition of paintings concerning migrants in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, organised by "Missioni Don Bosco".

From 4-9 **November**, he was in Ethiopia Vice-province. He took part in the Rectors meeting, exploring with them the Rector Major's letter at the conclusion of the Extraordinary Visitation; the same theme was addressed in the meeting with the Provincial Council from the perspective of animation and government. He then visited the communities and works of Addis Ababa Don Bosco Children and Addis Ababa Mekanissa; he met the aspiring Salesian Cooperators

and the prenovices. Then he visited the community at Adamitullo, the community at Zway where he spoke with the aspirants, and the novitiate at Debre Zeit. In Meki he met with the community of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians and in Zway with the community of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. On 17-24 November he made a Visit to the Province of Venezuela to help with the process of discernment for the appointment of the new Provincial; the Vicar of the Rector Major met with the confreres in four places: in Barinas, Casa Don Bosco Valencia, Puerto la Cruz and Boleita Tecnico Caracas; he also met all those in formation in Macaracuay Caracas.

The Councillor for Formation

After several days at home, in India at the beginning of August 2019, from 17th to 19th August the General Councillor for Formation, Fr Ivo Coelho, visited the Papua New Guinea – Solomon Islands Viceprovince (PGS) aspirantate at Bomana (Port Moresby). He then went to Manila and to Parañaque (FIN) to take part in two curatoriums: the first for the group involving the *Don Bosco Formation*

House, Parañaque, Salesian Brothers' Formation House, Parañaque, and Institute of Theological Formation of the Don Bosco School of Theology, Parañaque; and the second for the group involving the Don Bosco Prenovitiate, Canlubang, Don Bosco College, Canlubang (philosophy centre), Sacred Heart Postnovitiate, Canlubang; Don Bosco Formation Centre (prenovitiate), Lawa-an, and Sacred Heart Novitiate, Lawa-an.

From the Philippines he then went to Guwahati, in India, where with the help of Bro. Raymond Callo and Fr Silvio Roggia from the Formation Department, he visited the novitiate at Dotma and the missionary aspirantate at Sirajuli, before taking part in the meeting of the Regional Formation Commission for South Asia, held at the Provincial House in Guwahati from 26-29 August.

Back in Rome, Fr Coelho then left for Los Angeles to visit the aspirantate and prenovitiate of the SUO Province in Bellflower (1-2 September). He continued his journey to Santo Domingo, where he visited the prenovitiate for the ANT Province (3-4 September), and then on to Port-au-Prince (5-7 September) to visit the house of formation in the HAI Province: the aspirantate (Pétion-Ville), prenovi-

tiate (Carrefour-Thorland) and postnovitiate (Fleuriot-Tabarre). From Haiti he went to San José, in Costa Rica, where he took part in the meeting of the Regional Formation Commission for the Inter-america Region (9-13 September), along with Fr Francisco Santos who had come from Rome in the meantime.

From San José, the Councillor went with Fr Santos to Manaus, Brazil, to participate in the meeting of the Regional Formation Commission for America South Cone (16-19 September) and the seminar for the formation of formators from CIS-Brazil (20-22 September), animated by Fr Santos. During these days, Fr Coelho and Fr Santos visited the BMA Province prenovitiate in Manaus - Alvorada. From Manaus, they reached the province of BBH to visit the inter-provincial novitiate (BBH, BCG, BMA) in Barbacena (23-24 September), before returning to Rome on 25th September.

Fr Coelho left on 29th September, with Fr Silvio Roggia and Bro. Raymond Callo for Dakar, to attend the meeting of the Regional Formation Commission for the Africa-Madagascar Region (30 September-4 October). He then returned to Rome for the General Council intermediate session (7-11 October).

From 11-12 October, the Formation Department convened a meeting of confreres from all regions to plan the Salesian School of Accompaniment at Headquarters in Rome. The meeting was attended by 17 Salesians, including Fr Fabio Attard, General Councillor for Youth Ministry.

On 22nd October, due to visa problems, Fr Coelho had to give up going to Quito for the meeting of provincials from the Interamerica Region. With Fr Francisco Santos he attended first the meeting of the Regional Formation Commission for the Mediterranean Region in Lisbon (27-30 October), then the meeting of the Regional Formation Commission for the Central and North Europe Region in Lviv, Ukraine (3-6 November).

On 11th November, Fr Coelho left with Fr Roggia and Bro. Callo for Taipei (Taiwan), where he visited the new specific formation community for the CIN Province (12-13 November). From Taipei he went to Hong Kong to attend the joint meeting of the Regional Formation Commission (East Asia-Oceania) and the Regional Social Communications Commission held at Shau Kei Wan house (15-18 November). He then took part in the formation of formators meeting led by Fr Giuseppe Buccellato on "The Spirit-

tual History of St John Bosco" (19-23 November).

The Councillor left Hong Kong on 22nd November, a day late due to a flight cancellation, and on the same day he reached Mexico City. He visited the inter-provincial novitiate (MEM, MEG, ANT, HAI, CAM) in Coacalco (23 November) and then went to Ayutla for a visit to Bishop Salvador Cleofas Murguía Villalobos, former member of the Formation Department (24-25 November). He then continued his journey to Quito, to participate in the meeting of the *Equipo ampliado* (Curatorium) of the Salesian Centre for Ongoing Formation, America (26-27 November). While in Quito, he also visited the aspirantate and the prenovitiate in Lumbisi (27 November) and took part in the meeting of the Curatorium (ECU, PER, BOL) for the postnovitiate in Quito (28 November). He returned to Rome on 29th November.

During this semester the Department continued to work on *The Salesian Rector: a ministry for the animation and governance of the local community* (the Rector's manual), on *Young Salesians and accompaniment. Guidelines and directives* (approved by the Rector Major and his Council during the summer session 2019) and on aids for prayer

(*In dialogue with the Lord*, the App *Salesians@prayer* and the *Salesian Proper - Missal, Lectionary and Liturgy of the Hours*). A letter of reflection on the vocation of the Salesian priest was prepared for the next issue of the Acts of the General Council, as well as a letter on the educative and pastoral experience of practical training. At the request of the Rector Major, the Department also launched studies on initial formation in the East Asia-Oceania, South Asia, and Africa-Madagascar Regions.

On 1st September, at the request of the Rector Major, Fr Francisco Santos, who continues his involvement as a member of the Department, was also given the positions of Director of the Sacro Cuore (Sacred Heart) Oratory, and assistant parish priest of the Sacro Cuore Basilica.

The Councillor for Youth Ministry

The commitment to animation of the Department for Youth Ministry in the months from the end of July to the end of November 2019 was marked above all by the various regional meetings at the end of the six-year period. Together with these meetings, Councillor Fr Fabio

Attard was involved in various moments of animation both at the regional and world levels.

Among the animating interventions, first to be noted are the regional meetings, which in this last year of the six-year period were shared with the Department for the Missions, with the presence of the delegates for missionary animation of the various provinces: Africa and Madagascar in September, the two Regions of the Americas combined in October, and two meetings of the South Asia and East Asia-Oceania Regions during the first half of November. In these meetings we shared the volume on *Salesian Missionary Volunteering* approved by the General Council in January 2019.

Together with the Councillor for the Missions and the Economist General, at the end of July Fr Attard presided over the annual meeting on the Salesian presence at the United Nations, which was held in New Rochelle, US. This meeting confirmed the navigation map with the two documents on strategy and pastoral choices that guide our presence.

With regard to this presence at the United Nations, the Councillor is following up the appointment of Dr Renato Cursi as the new Executive Secretary of Don Bosco Inter-

national (DBI) in Brussels; Dr Cursi takes the place of Mr Angel Gudiña.

Towards the end of November a seminar on “Spiritual accompaniment and affectivity” was organised at Sacro Cuore, involving 60 participants from various parts of the world. The ultimate aim of this seminar was to continue the reflection on Salesian spiritual accompaniment through publication of the proceedings, which can nourish the various formative processes in the field of spiritual accompaniment of young people.

During October, for the second time the Councillor and some members of the Department offered some days of reflection on Salesian youth ministry to those taking part in the missionary course held at the UPS.

The Councillor and some members of the Department and the FMA sector, took part in the annual meeting of the SYM Europe Assembly, held in Seville from 22nd to 24th November 2019. This meeting was attended by delegations from 18 countries in Europe; together with the sharing, the preparation for the 2021 European *Confronto* has already begun.

Finally, it should be noted that in August the Councillor was involved in preaching two retreats to the

confreres in Sri Lanka, which was held at the provincial house in Colombo.

During the same period, the members of the Department continued their visits to the school and vocational training sector, with meetings in America, Africa and Madagascar and with conferences in Brussels and Finland. With regards to IUS, the General Councillor visited America, Europe and Asia to follow the regional processes of this sector. The Department continued to accompany the marginalisation and social services sector through meetings at the regional level.

The Councillor for the Missions

In this last section of the six-year period, the Councillor for the Missions, Fr Guillermo Basañes, has been engaged in intense programmes and trips which have seen him visit all five continents.

On the same day of the conclusion of General Council’s summer session, the Councillor left for New York to take part in the meeting on representation of the Congregation at the United Nations, on Sunday 28th July in New Rochelle. Immediately afterwards, he began a period

of missionary animation in ANT province. It was the first time he was able to meet the confreres and communities in two of the nations of that province: Cuba and the Dominican Republic. Throughout the period – from 29th July to 5th August – he was personally accompanied by the Provincial.

On his return to Rome, from 8-10 August Fr Guillermo took part in the UPS meeting of people responsible for the Salesian presence in countries with an Arab-Muslim majority, which involved confreres from the MOR Province as well as confreres in Morocco, Tunisia, Sudan, the Arab Emirates and Kuwait. After this very significant event, the Councillor left for the East Asia-Oceania Region, going first of all to Vietnam, where from 13-22 August he was able to be part of the First Profession and Perpetual Profession ceremonies of confreres in VIE, preached the retreat to the Rectors and Provincial Council in K'long and finally made a brief visit to some of the presences belonging to the new North Vietnam Delegation.

On 24th August, Fr Basañes continued his journey, arriving for the first time in Pakistan, where he met confreres and visited both communities, Lahore and Quetta, until the 29th. In Lahore, the visit to the fam-

ily of Salesian neo-martyr, young Akash Bashir, was very significant.

After completing this East Asian tour, Father Guillermo returned to Rome and on Saturday, 31st August, he immediately went to the San Tarcisio community at the Catacombs, where all the confreres of the 150th Missionary Expedition were awaiting him. He remained with them for the rest of their Roman phase of the Preparatory Course for the Missionary Expedition.

On 14th September, the Councillor left for Antananarivo, where the Regional meeting of Provincial Delegates for Missionary Animation together with the Youth Ministry Delegates took place from the 16th to the 19th. As indicated further on, similar meetings also took place in Sao Paulo, Shillong and Dili.

He returned to Italy on Saturday 21th September, and left the same day for Colle Don Bosco, where the young Missionary Expedition group had preceded him. Continuing their Piedmontese journey with them, he concelebrated the Eucharist with the Rector Major in Valdocco on Sunday 29th September for the solemn missionary send-off. The same evening, he returned to Headquarters in Rome.

On 30th September, Fr Guillermo was present at the opening of the

23rd Ongoing Formation Course in Missionary Pastoral Care at the UPS. The next day he left for Romania, where from 2-4 October he was able to meet the confreres and visit their presence in this country as well as in Moldova. On the last day, in Chişinău, he participated in the monthly recollection and assembly of the confreres, along with the Provincial of INE.

From there, Fr Basañes left for Brussels, where, on the first week-end of the month, he took part in the celebrations for the 50th anniversary of the Salesian NGO, Via Don Bosco.

On his return to Rome he took part in the General Council's intermediate session until 11th October. He then left this time for the south, Buenos Aires. There, after spending a few days with his family, he left for São Paulo where he took part from the 18th to the 21st in the inter-regional meeting of Provincial Delegates for Missionary Animation (as indicated above).

Departing Brazil on 22nd October, he went to northern Patagonia to begin missionary animation through a series of three quarterly recollections in the ARS Province. The first took place in Stefenelli, the other two in Buenos Aires (La Plata and San Justo). At the end of these days of animation, Fr Guiller-

mo remained with his family for a few more days, leaving for Rome on the last day of the month.

He spent a day at Headquarters, meeting some missionaries and visiting those who were still in the Catacombs community, to leave once more on 2nd November, this time for Northeast India. From the 4th to the 7th there was a third Regional meeting of Provincial Delegates (like those already mentioned above) in Shillong. On the 8th, Fr Basañes visited the Salesian novitiate in Sunnyside, and the following day began the long journey to Dili, where he arrived after 48 hours on 11th November, the missionary memorial par excellence. There, in the capital of Timor Leste, the Councillor took part in the last of the Regional meetings of Delegates from the 12th to the 15th.

On Saturday the 16th, accompanied by the only lay Provincial Delegate for Missionary Animation, he began another long journey that took him to Apia, the capital of Samoa. From 17-26 November, Fr Basañes made a missionary animation visit that included three nations belonging to the Australia-Pacific (AUL) Province: Samoa, Fiji and Australia. By the end of this visit, Fr Guillermo had so far visited 115 countries.

On 27th November he undertook the return trip to Rome, and the following day he was busy participating in the world meeting of Mission Office directors which took place at Villa Aurelia.

The next day, 29th November, the Councillor and the other three members of the Missions Sector left for Colle Don Bosco to take part in one of their number's induction as Rector at Colle on Saturday 30th (Fr Gianni Rolandi).

Returning to Rome on 1st December, everything was ready to begin the last session of the General Council for the 2014-2020 six-year period.

The Councillor for Social Communication

After the plenary session of the General Council in June and July, the Councillor for Social Communication, Fr Filiberto González Plasencia, was engaged in many meetings and activities.

August: From the 4th to the 7th he met with the Communication Delegates from the four Polish Provinces in Czerwińsk and Wisła - PLE to deal with the themes of the SC Provincial Plan, the formation of Salesian communicators in the digital world and some points of insti-

tutional communication: *Salesian Bulletin*, common logo, visibility, image and institutional sites. On the 15th he left for Mexico to spend a few days of vacation with the family, and to visit works in MEG. On the 27th he visited Salesian communities in Tlaquepaque (theologate) and St Francis de Sales (aspirantate) in Guadalajara. On the 29th he met with the Province's ministry team. On the 30th he visited the Salesian community and schools in Zamora together with the MEG Provincial. At the Prenovitiate in Irapuato he met with the MEG and MEM Provincials to discuss the *Salesian Bulletin*.

September: from the 1st to the 8th, he preached a retreat at the Benedictine Nuns' monastery in Chapala, Mexico. On the 9th he met the Salesian bishops of the Mixes Prelature, Salvador Murguía and Héctor Guerrero. Between the 10th and 21st he was rushed to hospital twice, first to have gallbladder surgery, then for complications that occurred. On the 21st he left hospital, remaining under constant medical supervision in the MEG Provincial House.

October: on the 1st, Fr Filiberto left for Rome. On the 17th and 18th in Brno - CEP he met the SC Delegate and his team, the *Salesian Bulletin* editor and the people in

charge of the Province website and the “Izidoor” App for young people. On the 19th he left for Slovakia and visited the novitiate at Propad; the following day he visited the SDB, FMA and local SC group in Košice. On the 21st he met the Provincial of SLK, the SC Delegate and his team in Bratislava. Also in Bratislava on the 22nd he met the *Salesian Bulletin* editor and team and the director and staff of the the Don Bosco publishing house. On the 23rd he visited the Salesian community in Žilina and met teachers and students from the multimedia, publishing and graphics workshops at the school. On the 24th he left Bratislava for Zagreb - Croatia, meeting the SC Delegate there and gave the goodnight to the young people from the oratory at the provincial house and Mary Help of Christians parish. On the 25th he met the CRO Provincial together with the SC Delegate and team, the *Salesian Bulletin* editor and the director of “Salesiana d. o. o” Publishing House, as well as the person in charge of the “Nova Eva” Youth App. He also visited the staff of the “Nova Eva” production centre. On the 26th he met the Regional Councillor Fr Tadeusz Rozmus and the World President of Salesian Cooperators and members of his Council. He then left for Slovenia. On

the 27th he met with the communities of the Salesian and FMA provincial houses in Ljubljana. On the 28th he met with the Provincial, the SC Delegate and his team, the *Salesian Bulletin* editor and editor of the “Chierichetti” magazine, the director and staff of the Salve Publishing House and gave the goodnight to the SDB community at the provincial house. On the 29th, also in Ljubljana, he visited the prenovitiate and finally returned to Rome.

November: On the 12th, Fr Filiberto left for Shaukeiuan, Hong Kong, and together with the Councillor for Formation and the Regional, he chaired the meeting of Provincial Delegates for SC and Formation in the East Asia-Oceania Region. They spent one full day together studying the theme: “What kind of Salesian communicators for the young people of the digital world?” In the same place, Fr Filiberto presided over the meeting of SC Delegates, sharing best practice from each province and studying the GC28 information plan, the *Salesian Bulletin*, the use of the official logo of the Congregation, involvement in BoscoLink and ANS, the document produced by the Translators meeting, and involvement of Salesians in social media. On the 19th he left for the

INA Vice-province. In Wisma, Jakarta, he met the Provincial and SC Delegate as well as the *Salesian Bulletin* editor, visited the post-novitiate community and provincial house community. Also in Jakarta he visited the St John Bosco parish and FMA community. In Tigaraksa he visited the novitiate and vocational training school. On the 24th he arrived in the Timor Leste Vice-province. In Comoro, Dili, he met the Provincial, the SC Delegate and team and gave the goodnight to the Salesian Family. On the 25th he visited the post-novitiate, the FMA Provincial and the community at Venilale. On the 26th he visited the novitiate at Fatumaca, and in Fuloro he met all the Salesians who were making their retreat. On the 27th he visited the communities at Los Palos, Baucau and Laga. On the 28th he left Dili and departed for Rome.

The Ecomer General

During **June** 2019, the Ecomer General, Bro. Jean Paul Müller, took part in the General Council sessions held at Headquarters in Rome. In the middle of the month he participated in the *Junta de Gobierno* which took place in Madrid. During the same period, some

members of the Ecomer's Office visited the Provinces of Colombia (COB and COM)

At the end of **July** Bro. Müller took part in the meeting held in New Rochelle (USA) to evaluate the results achieved regarding Salesian presence at the United Nations (Salesians at UN) and took the opportunity to meet the new Director of the US Mission Office.

In **August** the Ecomer General went to Hong Kong to visit Salesian work in China Province and to take part in the meeting of the CIN Provincial Council on the occasion of the Rector Major's visit to this province.

On 23rd August, in Cologne, he attended the funeral of Fr Karl Oerder, longtime head of the Mission Office in Bonn, Germany.

In **September**, the Ecomer General and his staff organised a formation meeting in Toronto, Canada, for provincial ecomers from the Interamerica and America South Cone Regions. Reflections on the great social changes in the region demonstrated the need for a "new model of planning and organisation" for the management and maintenance of significant works in America on behalf of abandoned youth.

In the middle of the month, Bro. Müller went to Timor Leste and In-

donesia to visit Salesian work in the area. He saw the beautiful development of Salesian work and during his meetings with the Salesian leaders and lay employees, encouraged those responsible to insist on transparency and sustainability in the management of schools and vocational training centres. At the end of September he took part in the Bonn Mission Office Board of Directors meeting and the six-monthly Don Bosco Mondo NGO Council meeting. On 30th September, together with the Rector Major and the Vicar of the RM, he met with the ICP Provincial Council in Turin to reflect on the management of the Salesian places.

In **October**, after presiding over the UPS CSA meeting and taking part in the work of the General Council (mid-term session), the Economer General went to Kenya, Uganda and South Sudan to visit Salesian works there, especially those in the service of refugees. The efforts made by the Salesians and their collaborators for thousands of poor people calls for ever more professional accompaniment by the structures of the Congregation's government.

On 5th November he took part in a meeting that took place in Zurich to prepare future professional audits for some provinces with experts;

these are audits that take place on the occasion of the change of a provincial or provincial economer. In the middle of the month the Economer General was invited to attend a congress on new methods and ideas for the management of international and intercontinental structures. The congress, which took place in Berlin, dealt both with staff training and the agile and courageous management of a company during economic crises.

From 25th to 27th November, Bro. Müller, together with Fr Basañes, had invited experts from the Salesian Mission Offices and NGOs to Rome for the "Energy forever" conference. The Economer General stressed the need for all Salesian works to strengthen the drawing up of projects that favour increased use of low cost, reliable and sustainable energy. The conference was one of many reactions of the Salesian Congregation in response to the needs presented by the papal encyclical "Laudato Si".

At the end of the various sessions of the conference a text entitled "Energy Forever" was drafted, which will be presented during the General Chapter meetings to be held in February-March 2020. On 28th November, the Economer General attended the six-monthly meeting of Mission Offices held in Rome

on the occasion of the distribution of the Rector Major's funds. From 29th November to 1st December in Kigali, Rwanda, the Economer General met with the Provincial and Provincial Economer of AGL Vice-province. Before returning to Rome he visited the centres in Kimihurura, Gatenga and the postnovitiate in Kabgayi.

In the first weeks of December some members of the Economer's Office visited some provinces of the Central and North Europe Region (CEP, SLK, SLO). Then, from Monday 2nd December, the Economer General took part in the work of the ordinary session of the General Council.

The Councillor for the Africa and Madagascar Region

At the end of the summer plenary session of the General Council, the Regional Councillor for Africa-Madagascar, Fr Américo Chaquisse, left Rome on 26th July for the AFE Province, to take part in the celebration of the jubilee of the Mary Help of Christians Shrine in Upper Hill, Nairobi. On the 29th he took part in the AFE Provincial Council along with the Vicar of the Rector Major. From 30-31 July he took part in the meeting of the Don Bosco

Tech Africa (DBTA) board of directors.

Afterwards, from 2-9 August, he was in the MOZ Vice-province, Mozambique, for the consultation for the appointment of the new superior. He then left for the AET Vice-province, where he presided over the induction of the new superior on 11 August. The following day he joined the AET Provincial Council meeting. On 13th August he arrived in Brazzaville, in the ACC Vice-province, where on 16th August he presided at the Eucharistic celebration and accepted the novices' religious professions. On 17th August he arrived in the AFC Province for the Extraordinary Visitation. On 18th August he was main celebrant at the Mass where he received the religious professions of the novices. On 19th August he began the Extraordinary Visitation by bringing the Provincial Council together. The Visitation lasted until 28th November, the day on which the conclusions of the Visitation were presented to the Provincial Council, Rectors and the confreres. There were two interruptions during the Visitation: the first, from 29-31 September, so that the Regional could take part in the meeting of Salesian delegates and representatives of the Past Pupils, in Nairobi with the world presidency of the Past Pupils

of Don Bosco. The second interruption took place for two reasons: the annual meeting of the Conference of Provinces and Vice-provinces of Africa-Madagascar (CIVAM) in Nairobi, and Fr Américo's visit to Angola, in the ANG Province, for the consultation for the appointment of the new provincial. During the visit, the Regional was able to meet with the advisory group and coordinators of the Salesian Youth Movement and presided over the opening of the academic year at the Theologate and Postnovitiate. After the conclusion of the Extraordinary Visitation, the Regional Councillor returned to Headquarters on 30th November.

The Councillor for the Latin America - South Cone Region

On the same day the summer session of the General Council concluded, the Regional Councillor for Latin America South Cone, Fr Natale Vitali, left for Brazil.

From 29th July to 2nd August he took part in the ongoing formation meeting for Salesian Rectors in Brazil. There were 87 Rectors present, five of the six Provincials, and the Regional. The Quito team led the experience by exploring the fig-

ure of the Rector in Don Bosco's thinking.

On 4th August, Fr Vitali began the Extraordinary Visitation on behalf of the Rector Major in the Manaus Province, Brazil, which ended on 15th August. During this time he spoke with all the confreres in the province (71 SDBs); he visited the 12 canonical houses, got to know the situation of the 8 colleges (3 of which have an agreement with the state and, among them, two in the missions), the Dom Bosco Faculty, the 9 parishes (3 of which are in the missions), 6 social works, 19 festive oratories and the missions in the Amazon with their lights and difficulties.

He met twice with the Provincial Council and once with all the Salesian Rectors. He spoke with 8 diocesan bishops and with the two Provincials of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. In the communities he met the groups of the Salesian Family.

On 8th August he took part in the Curatorium for the Postnovitiate in Campo Grande, an inter-provincial house involving three Provinces: BBH, BCG and BMA. From 19-20 August he then spoke at the Curatorium for the Regional Formation Centre for Salesian Brothers in Guatemala; on 31st August he went to the inter-provincial novitiate at

Curitiba, belonging to the BPA, BRE and BSP Provinces.

On 17th October, he took part in the Curatorium for the Theologate in Lapa, SP, which houses all the theology students from Brazil, and the next day he went to Lorraine, the postnovitiate for the three Provinces of Brazil.

On the 20th he spoke at the meeting of Provincial Delegates of America for Youth Ministry and Missionary Animation.

Afterwards, he held 4 consultations for the appointment of new provincials for ARS, BBH, BCG and BSP Provinces.

From 1-5 November he animated the meeting of the 11 Provincials of the Region, at which the Rector Major was also present for the last two days.

With the Rector Major, he spoke at the 8th Congress of Mary Help of Christians, which took place in the city of Buenos Aires from 7-10 November.

From 26-29 November, in the city of Quito, together with the Regional Councillor for Interamerica, Fr Timothy Ploch, he took part in the Curatorium (*Equipo ampliado*) for the Salesian Ongoing formation Centre of America.

On 30th November he returned to Rome for the winter session of the General Council.

The Councillor for the East Asia and Oceania Region

Immediately after the General Council's summer session, the Regional Councillor for East Asia-Oceania, Fr Václav Klement, began six months of animation visits to the 11 provinces of the Region. After arriving in Kuching, Malaysia (30th July to 1st August, FIN), he carried out an animation visit to the Cambodia Delegation (1-3 August, THA) and Bangkok-Sampran in the Province of Thailand (4-9 August, THA). Most of the time in Thailand was devoted to exploring the new frontier in the Diocese of Chiangmai (Mae Hong Son) in view of a possible educational work for the young Catholics of the mountain tribes.

In order to accompany the Rector Major on his last visit to the Region before GC28, in the Mary Help of Christians Province (CIN), the Regional moved to Macau, Taiwan and Hong Kong (9-17 August, CIN).

In the second half of August, Fr Václav prepared and presided over the two meetings of the Curatorium in Manila (August 18-22) together with the General Councillor for Formation, Fr Ivo Coelho: for the three houses of formation in Cebu, FIS and Canlubang, FIN; the

three inter-provincial formation houses in Parañaque, FIN. Thanks to the presence of Fr Ivo, the statutes for all the inter-provincial formation houses in the two provinces of the Philippines (FIN-FIS) have been updated. The 4th annual meeting of the Regional Coordinators of sectors (Formation, Youth Ministry, Social Communication, Missions, Economy and Salesian Family) was held on 23rd August in the Provincial House in Manila (FIN).

The second Salesian translators workshop was attended by 30 members from the 5 groups of the Salesian Family from 10 provinces in Anisakan (27-29 August, MYM) and marked a decisive step towards the production of two tools, the *Salesian Translator's Manual* and the *Salesian Dictionary*, which have already been published in Seoul and Hong Kong respectively.

The Regional Councillor continued his animation visits to the Myanmar Vice-province, in Anisakan and Thibaw (30th August to 3rd September, MYM), followed by the Vietnam Province (3-14 September, VIE). To get the new North Vietnam Delegation off to a good start, Fr Klement visited almost all 11 communities in North Vietnam and attended the celebration for the birth of the sixth Delegation in

the region (Hanoi, 7th September). He then continued his animation of the formation houses in the south of the country.

Other animation visits followed in September-November: first to Seoul and Gwangju, Korea (14-23 September, KOR), then to Ulanbaatar, Mongolia (24-29 September, VIE), to the Indonesian islands of Flores and Sumba (5-8 October, INA), to Timor Leste (9-19 October, TLS) and finally to Australia: Perth, Melbourne and Sydney (30th October to 10th November, AUL).

In addition, the Regional Councillor presided over the three days of the 'Religious Discipline' Workshop for about thirty Vice-provincials, Provincial Secretaries and formators from all 12 provinces in the Region. The Workshop was led by the Procurator of the Congregation, Fr Pier Fausto Frisoli (RMG), and Fr Philip Lazatin (FIS) at the new Provincial House in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam (30 September to 3 October, VIE).

The only Extraordinary Visitation for this period was conducted by the Regional for the Pakistan Delegation (21-27 October), followed by animation and meeting of the Provincial Council in Cebu (29th October to 3rd November, FIS).

As is the case each year, in mid-November there were 4 meetings of

Provincial Delegates for the respective sectors, also attended by the Regional Councillor. The meeting of the Youth Ministry and Missionary Animation Delegates in Dili, Timor Leste (11-15 November, TLS) was led by Frs Fabio Attard and Guillermo Basañes with their teams; the theme, common to the two sectors, was Salesian Missionary Volunteering. The meeting of the Formation and Social Communications Delegates in Hong Kong (14-18 November, CIN) was led by Frs Ivo Coelho and Filiberto González, who discussed in common the theme "What kind of Salesians for the young people of digital times?" The last event of the six-year period at the regional level was the meeting for the formation of formators (40 formators from 11 provinces), on various topics of Salesian spirituality; it was led by Fr Giuseppe Buccellato and was held in Hong Kong (20-23 November, CIN).

Before returning to Italy, Fr Václav led the consultation for the new Provincial for Tiruchy in three discernment meetings (Trichy, Yercaud, Madurai) involving 150 confreres between 22-26 November (INT). The last stage of the six months was dedicated to animation in Tokyo (27th November to 1st December, GIA), immediately after

the conclusion of Pope Francis's apostolic visit.

Fr Klement returned to Headquarters on 1st December.

The Councillor for the South Asia Region

Returning to the Region from the General Council, the first activity of the Regional was to conduct the SPCSA Council meeting in the Provincial House of Chennai, on 1st August. After visiting his mother for a day in Varadarajanpet, Fr. Kanaga proceeded to Yercaud, to preach a 6-day retreat for all the Rectors and Provincial Council members of the Province of Chennai from 5th August to 10th August. With this began the Extraordinary Visitation of the province. He travelled to Bangalore to attend a meeting of the Ex-Salesians of India, who were forming themselves into an Association. From there he reached Kotagiri for the visitation and covered 16 houses in the dioceses of Ooty and Vellore till 4th September.

From the 5th of September till 9th, he accompanied the Rector Major in his visit to the INM Province and travelled with him to Dimapur Province (IND) where Fr Ángel continued his visit to that province. The Regional, hearing of the sud-

den death of Fr Antony Joseph SDB, provincial of Tiruchy, flew back to attend his funeral.

From 14th September the Regional visited 18 houses in the dioceses of Chennai, Chengalpattu and Dharmapuri till 16th October. On 17th October he attended the Diamond Jubilee Celebrations of the Province of Guwahati, along with Fr. Francesco Cereda, the Vicar of the Rector Major. Returning, he continued to visit the houses of Chennai Province, starting with the community in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, covering 8 other houses.

From 3rd November to 7th, the Regional was in Kolkata Province to do consultations for the nomination of a new provincial. He met the confreres and conducted sessions of discernment in 4 areas, including one in Nepal. Returning again to Chennai the Regional continued the visitation in the remaining 8 houses of the province in the dioceses of Chennai, Chengalpattu and Pondicherry. The visits kept him busy till 26th November. The next few days were spent for a visit to the Shrine Basilica of Our Lady of Good Health in Velankanni and the preparation of the final report. The Visitation was scheduled to conclude on 30th with the meeting of all the Rectors of the Province. Unfor-

tunately, the Salesian bishop emeritus of Dharmapuri, Joseph Antony Irudayaraj SDB, passed away in Chennai. The concluding meetings were postponed to 3rd January 2020, and the Regional attended the funerals of the bishop in Chennai and in Dharmapuri. He returned to Rome on 1st December.

The Councillor for the Central and North Europe Region

Immediately after the closing of the summer session of the General Council, the Regional Councillor for the Central and North Europe Region, Fr Tadeusz Rozmus, visited some communities in the provinces of France, Switzerland and Germany. From 29th July he was in Austria with the aim of providing a pastoral service, as is his custom, in one of the parishes of the country; this period for Fr Tadeusz is also a time of rest, which continues among his family and with his mother in Poland. Also in August he went to Lyon, in the FRB Province, where he took part in the induction of the new Provincial in Ressins. At the end of the month he returned once again to Austria; from there he moved to Prague, to begin the Extraordinary Visitation to the Pro-

vince of the Czech Republic, CEP, which took place from 2nd September to 17th October.

At the end of the visit, the regional left for Warsaw to join the celebrations for the centenary of the PLE Province, and accompany the Rector Major, who was visiting the Province on this occasion. Immediately afterwards, from 21-24 October, he travelled through three Provinces and met the confreres for consultation to discern the future provincial. The meetings were held in Vienna (21.10), Košice (22.10), Bratislava (23.10) and Budapest (24.10).

From Hungary the regional travelled to Croatia Province (CRO) to conduct another Extraordinary Visitation. From 26th October until 30th November he visited the communities of the province, located in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. During the same period, on 22nd and 23rd November, he was in London, where he accompanied the Rector Major on his visit to the GBR Province.

On 30th November, after the conclusion of the Visitation, he departed Zagreb to do to two other Provinces in view of other consultations for new provincials: first in the PLS Province, where he was first in Oświęcim and Krakow in Poland, then Bibrka in Ukraine

from 2-4 December. From Lviv he travelled to Brno, in the Czech Republic Province, where he took part in consultations from 5-6 December, then to Frištak and then to Prague.

On 6th December he returned to Rome to take part in the General Council's winter session.

The Councillor for the Interamerica Region

Upon leaving Rome at the conclusion of the General Council summer session in July, Fr. Timothy Ploch, Regional Councilor for the Interamérica Region, flew to Bogotá, Colombia, for the installation of the new provincial of COB, Fr. John Jairo Gómez on Sunday, July 28th. The next day he arrived in Guatemala to begin the extraordinary visitation in the province of Central America (CAM). He had previously met with the provincial and his council during an earlier trip to Guatemala in June. His principal activity during the months of July to November therefore was to carry out the extraordinary visitation in CAM. He spoke privately with each of the 167 confreres and visited each of the 24 communities in the six nations which make up the province: Costa

Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panamá. The visitor met with each of the major commissions and delegations of the province in late November. The extraordinary visitation concluded on November 2nd with a meeting of the provincial and his council, a gathering of all the directors of the province, and a general assembly of confreres. Later both the extraordinary visitation and the spiritual retreat were concluded with a celebrated Eucharist and a festive banquet held in the theologate of Guatemala City.

During these same months the Regional participated in the curatorium meetings of three interprovincial houses of formation located in Guatemala: CRESCO (specific formation for Coadjutors in the two American regions), the post novitiate (CAM, MEG, MEM), and the specific formation center for priests (CAM, COB, COM). He was also able to return to his home country, the United States, for ten days of vacation with his family. In mid-October he joined the confreres of the Central American province for a week of spiritual retreat in Costa Rica, followed immediately by the annual meeting of provincials of Interamérica in Cumbayá, Ecuador. After the conclusion of the extraordinary visita-

tion in late November, the Regional went to Quito, Ecuador, to participate in two more curatorium meetings, the Equipo Ampliado of the Salesian Center of Ongoing Formation in America CSFPA (in which the General Councilor for Formation, Fr Ivo Coelho, and the Regional of América Cono Sur, Fr Natale Vitali, also participated) and the interprovincial post novitiate in Quito (ECU, BOL, PER).

On November 30th he returned to Rome for the winter and final session of the General Council of this six year period.

The Councilor for the Mediterranean Region

At the end of the General Council's summer session, the Councilor for the Mediterranean Region, Fr Stefano Martoglio, spent a few days with his family from 27th July. At the beginning of August he went to Santiago de Compostela, Spain, where he took part in the first formation course, held during the first ten days of the month, for "young Rectors" (new and renewed Rectors!) of the Region. This is the first time that formation of the Region's Rectors has been carried out together. They were together on several occasions,

while for others they divided into two groups according to the two Provincial Conferences of the Mediterranean Region: CISI and IBERICA. It was a successful experience, gaining consensus from all participants and organisers.

Returning from Santiago de Compostela to Italy, the Regional Councillor shared two days of the formation meeting promoted by the Missions Department on the Salesian presence in Muslim majority contexts. It was a very interesting meeting, in which several of the Mediterranean Region's situations were involved, starting with the MOR Province.

Once he had finished taking part in this meeting, he returned to his family and from there went to the retreat at Camaldoli, taking part in the retreat for the novices from the two Italian novitiates.

On 23rd August he began his Extraordinary Visitation to the Lombard-Emiliana Province (ILE), with a meeting of catechists and young confreres in Forlì. From there all the initial commitments of the Visitation began, from the work of the Provincial Council to the Province Assemblies at the beginning of the school year.

At the end of August, Fr Martoglio went to Catania to accompany the induction of the new Provincial of ISI, Fr Giovanni D'Andrea, which was held on 29th August. Along with this, he participated in other meetings of the ISI Province which took place in the following days.

On his return from Sicily, he continued the Extraordinary Visitation in ILE, in accordance with the calendar and approaches that had been planned, interrupting it only for the first profession of the novices at Genzano, which he received on behalf of the Rector Major on 8th September 2019. The Extraordinary Visitation to the ILE was also briefly interrupted by involvement with the two boards of directors of Elle Di Ci, held in Turin in September-November 2019.

The Extraordinary Visitation to ILE kept the Regional Councillor constantly and fully occupied until the end, on 1 December, with the last Province Assembly in Bologna. At the end of the meeting he returned to Rome to prepare for the beginning of the General Council's winter session and to hold consultations for the ICP and SSM provincials, which took place in December.

5.1 Letter of the Rector Major for the 25th anniversary of the Association

SOCIETÀ DI SAN FRANCESCO DI SALES
SEDE CENTRALE SALESIANA
Via Marsala, 42 - 00185 Roma
The Rector Major

Prot. 19/0423
Rome, September 12th, 2019

**“Who do you say I am?”
(Mt 16:15)**

***Volunteers with Don Bosco
on the path of fidelity***

*My dear brothers and friends,
Volunteers with Don Bosco!*

The celebration of your 25 years of life as a public association of Salesian consecrated lay faithful gives me the opportunity to write this letter to you. In it I send you an affectionate greeting which is meant as an expression of my closeness and that of the whole Salesian Family to you as brothers of the same family.

It is only a simple letter to mark the significance of this moment. This year we celebrate the 25th an-

niversary of your life. This represents a short period of time for an institution and even for a person, but it is an opportunity to remember, thank, dream and plan. In the words of Pope Francis, it is a time *to contemplate the past with gratitude, to live the present with passion and to embrace the future with hope*¹, following Christ, the image to whom life is to be conformed (C. 3).

September 12th, 1994

On September 12th, 1994, the journey of the Volunteers with Don Bosco began officially. We could apply to you the famous expression of the young Oratory member John Cagliero. When faced with Don Bosco's proposal to start a Pious Society for the good of the poorest young people – a proposal which caused him upset and an inner struggle – he gradually came to a decision which he would follow till his death. It was the decision to stay with Don Bosco: *“Monk or no monk, I am staying with Don Bosco”*.

You too have fixed your gaze on Don Bosco and have been moved by the Holy Spirit who has led you to live as consecrated Salesian lay persons in the world. Some of you

¹ Cf. FRANCIS, *Apostolic letter to all consecrated persons on the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life*, LEV, Vatican City, 10-15.

made your first profession that same day, this day 25 years ago. I congratulate you with all my heart together with my Salesian brethren and all our Salesian Family on your courageous and decisive response and on your journey of fidelity. My congratulations also go to those who have joined the Association over the past twenty-five years, responding to the same vocation. May the Lord bless and strengthen your decision!

In the week before September 12th, together with the Salesians who accompanied you, my predecessor, Fr Egidio Viganò, said to you: *"You are realising an important event for the Salesian Family, for the charism of Don Bosco [...] I congratulate you [...] Here we are in a spirit of 'starting'. You are beginning, you are founding. A spirit for the beginning of a life of consecration is certainly an important, extraordinary fact, on which we must reflect, thank God and know what to do in the future"*.

The previous years

I like to think of the steps you took in the years before 1994 in the different countries where your young lives grew up (Venezuela, Paraguay, Malta, Italy) and of the path that followed. In some way I

myself have witnessed some of these stages in my years of service in Argentina and, now, as Rector Major.

The years preceding your foundation were marked by a strong vitality of the Salesian charism around the celebration of the Centenary of Don Bosco's death and by a serious and effective accompaniment by Salesians and lay people engaged in the Youth Ministry initiatives of the Provinces. You were undoubtedly one of the mature fruits of the pastoral action of those years.

Subsequent years

The years that followed were lit up by the clear awareness and discernment carried out by the Rector Major Fr E. Viganò and his collaborators, aware of the fire that burned in your hearts as enthusiastic young people. In his homily on September 12th he said: *"Today the Salesian Family contemplates happily how, from the vigorous, fruitful roots of Don Bosco's charism, a new and long-awaited branch is blossoming. It will certainly flourish and will give the whole Salesian Family a sense of the newness of the first day: the sense of enthusiasm for continuing to carry out what the Holy Spirit prompted to Don Bosco."*

He carried it out with great generosity, creativity and flexibility and we are called to continue it according to the needs of the new times”.

A gift of the Spirit that rejuvenates the charism

A Secular Institute within the great charism of Don Bosco in the Salesian Family is certainly a *gift of the Spirit*. It is a gift that rejuvenates the charism and this is how it was clearly understood at the beginning. From this perspective the first steps were taken:

- the two initial meetings in Rome to share the richness of what the Lord had done in you with the drawing up of a first draft of the regulations that you proposed to live and interiorize in order to better clarify your common identity;
- the implementation of the means of formation and common life that were to constitute the solid foundation of your life;
- your first years of simple life, filled with joy for the decision you had taken, which showed in an amazing way how interested other young people from various parts of the world were;
- the more elaborate drafting of what you already called the “CDB Constitutions *ad experimentum*”;

- recognition as a public association of lay faithful and as a group belonging to the Salesian Family;
- your Assembly, every four years, and the election of those who were to animate the Institute;
- the elaboration of the Formation Project which has been already reworked a second time in your last Assembly;
- your ever more convinced insertion in the Salesian Family and in the local Church;
- the maturation of your personal and community spiritual life as Salesian consecrated lay persons;
- the many local, regional and world initiatives that are strengthening you and leading you to become a Secular Institute.

The reality of the Association today is a song of gratitude for the action of the Spirit who through you has blessed the Salesian tree, a song of gratitude for the generous, simple response of all of you to the Lord's call. This response is limited like all human realities and yet it is effective. *Who do you say I am?* The answer of your Constitutions is clear: the Word incarnate for the redemption of the world (C. 3), the centre of your consecrated life (C. 8), the model of the spirit of Don Bosco (C. 15).

We all know from experience that the quality of groups and move-

ments is the fruit of the quality of people. We must all grow in quality and authenticity. I address to myself the invitation I make to you on this journey on which the Lord is blessing you as a group of consecrated persons. The number of 85 members, including consecrated persons and brothers in formation, present in 27 countries, is an eloquent sign of the development of your particular charism, rooted in the great charism of Don Bosco and in the Church.

Without doubt you have experienced the closeness and presence of Mary Help of Christians, as mother and teacher. You were inspired by Don Bosco, father, teacher and friend. You have followed the indications of the Church and her Magisterium in what refers to the establishment of secular institutes. You let yourselves be animated and guided by the Rector Majors who preceded me: Fr Viganò at the beginning, Fr Juan E. Vecchi and Fr Pascual Chávez and their collaborators in the years that followed. Your spiritual assistants and companions have walked with you and have tried, as far as I know, to be

with you in your great pastoral work. Our sisters, the *Volunteers of Don Bosco* (VDB), also encouraged you on your journey: one of them accompanied the beginning of your group in Sicily; those who lived close to your daily environment helped you as sisters and their Central Council has always been interested in the development of your Association until today. You are all present in their prayer and they continue to follow your journey. And I can say the same for the whole Salesian Family.

In evoking these twenty-five years it is necessary to recall to mind one of your CDB brothers, Nino Baglieri, “the runner in the last row in a wheelchair”², whose cause of canonization has been introduced. As many will remember, he made his first profession in 1996 and his perpetual profession in 2004. Nino lived “*his consecrated secularity uniting the reality of his own suffering with God, becoming leaven in the world with his humble evangelical presence, and with his witness giving certainty, hope and serenity to all those who approached him*”³.

² This is how G. Bellocchi described him in his book: *Nino Baglieri: un corredor de fondo en silla de ruedas*, CCS, Madrid 2016.

³ G. BELLOCCHI, *o.c.*, p. 40.

Here we have an extraordinary example of God's presence in our world. What a great gift for you, for the Salesian Family, for the Church and for the world!

**Some elements
of Don Bosco's charism
with particular emphasis
for you**

As in the case of the Volunteers of Don Bosco, your reality highlights important elements of the charism of Don Bosco. Among them:

- The breadth and scope of Don Bosco's charismatic and spiritual experience: with the gift of consecration (the profession, with public vows, of the evangelical counsels) you have realized his plan to have external Salesians, a plan that is shared with the Salesian Co-operators, even though with a different vocation.
- The strength of the Salesian charism in the open field of secularity, "right there, where the salvation not only of individuals but of institutions is at stake... For this reason, your vocation is fascinating... a truly revolutionary

gesture"⁴ made by the Church in accepting this charism.

- The missionary attitude that leads you to go out, to go beyond and to live and act in the real world as a seed, as yeast. Your mission is to do everything possible to ensure that the Kingdom of God reaches and grows, even in those areas of our secularized world where the Christian community as such cannot reach or where it is very difficult to reach, in the new cultural and religious contexts mentioned in the Charismatic Identity Card of the Salesian Family (art. 18).
- The conviction of a vocation based on the all-encompassing experience of God's love, which develops in you a new quality of being persons, an evangelical capacity for relationship with others, and an energy that transforms reality and the various contexts in which life develops.
- The primacy of God's experience in the Salesian charism. You feel called to live "in the heart of the world with the heart of God"⁵. You know well that the strength of God's love that you have encountered, known and experi-

⁴ Pope FRANCIS, *Audience to the participants in the meeting promoted by the Italian Conference of Secular Institutes*, Rome 10 May 2014.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

enced makes you capable of reducing distances, of coming close to others and their companions, of healing wounds, and of accompanying others towards new horizons.

Some indications for the path

With this precious wealth of life strengthened in these twenty-five years, at a time when you have personally touched the blessing of God and witnessed His Love in the environments of your daily life, it seems to me opportune to share with you some indications for the journey.

- ***The consolidation of the path you have travelled.*** In a few years you have developed a wonderful spiritual heritage. The Constitutions, the Formation Plan, ecclesial approval, the six assemblies you have celebrated, the accompaniment of the assistants and other members of the Salesian Family and the generosity of your response to the Lord: all these have helped you to mature an authentic life in the Spirit based on secularity, consecration and the Salesian charism which give profound meaning to your life, to your mission and to communion among you. We must thank God for all the good that

you have received and lived. It is, as I said at the beginning quoting the Pope, *an opportune time to look to the past with gratitude.*

For this reason, I would like to suggest to you that it must be a priority to *consolidate the journey* while you are opening yourselves up to new horizons which will be indicated to you by the Spirit of God. Your great instrument is the Constitutions. Meditate on them again, pray with them, practice them with authenticity in everyday life. They constitute your identity.

- ***Take care of the deeper elements of your life.*** I am borrowing the expression of art. 26 of your Constitutions. You know the difficulties that life presents to you day by day as consecrated laity. I am pleased to see the wealth of aspects indicated in your Formation Plan. All this is geared to helping you to be ever more suitable for living total, joyful consecration to God in following Christ in the service of the mission. Draw up your personal plan of life, be faithful to the moments dedicated to the care of your interior life and to formation, knowing how to integrate reflection, prayer and action; share with your brothers and sisters all

that you can so that formation can transform both your personal attitudes and those of the Association and of the secular and ecclesial mission that you carry out. The formation process seeks to bring about the maturity of the unity of the person for yourselves, for your brothers and sisters, for the Church and for the world. This is the key to the effectiveness of the witness of your life.

- ***A lively sense of belonging to the Association/Institute, to the Church and to the Salesian Family.*** Our Salesian Family is a true grace of the Spirit of God who enriched it with the call to Salesian consecrated secularity. The Volunteers of Don Bosco and the Volunteers with Don Bosco are a living expression of what I am saying. It is a typical vocation, a fully ecclesial form of Christian life. Remember the message of St Paul VI some years after the conclusion of the Council: "One cannot fail to see the profound and providential coincidence between the charism of Secular Institutes and one of the most important and clear lines of the Council: the presence of the Church in the world [...] Secular

Institutes, by virtue of their charism, appear to be propitious instruments for embodying this spirit and transmitting it to the whole Church"⁶. Wherever they are, they are a sign of God's love and they act in the name of the Church. You are the Church in environments or places where the Church as such cannot be present. And our Salesian spirituality offers many possibilities for this. Taking deep care of your life of communion will be of great help to you and will support you.

- ***Disciples and missionaries with the joy of the Gospel.*** Salesian spirituality is essentially apostolic. The charism of consecrated secularity has been given to the Church so that she may fulfil her mission in the world. Aware that your whole life is a mission, you work together for the building of the Kingdom of God, bringing the spirit of the Beatitudes to all the places in which you live. This is what your Constitutions say in the first articles.

Pope Francis, with his style of pastoral action and his ecclesial magisterium, is offering us, in these

⁶ PAUL VI, *On the 25th anniversary of Provida Mater Ecclesia*, Roma 1972.

years, precious stimuli for an evangelizing action characterized by the joy of the Gospel. His entire magisterium and his very life are marked by this basic evangelical attitude.

And Don Bosco identified joy as the centre of his proposal for holiness, as we know well and as is written in this year's *Strenna*. It was not a superficial joy, but it was rooted in depth, in interiority, in responsibility before life and before God himself. Don Bosco understood very well that commitment and joy go hand in hand and that holiness and joy are inseparable. This is the Christian proposal born of the Resurrection of Christ and which I encourage you to live with full intensity, following the passionate words of Fr Egidio Viganò when, in September 1994, he spontaneously told you: "What do the Salesian Congregation and the Rector Major expect from the birth of this new Institute? A wave of Salesian enthusiasm. That is to say, to see Don Bosco's charism in a young form, without the burdens of time, a charism which interprets Don Bosco's mission with courage and enthusiasm".

An appeal for the whole Salesian Family

With my congratulations to all the CDB brothers and my congrat-


ulations to the Salesian Family as a whole, I invite my Salesian confreres and all the groups of our extended family to continue their commitment to quality accompaniment of the young. We need to be capable of accepting the different vocations that the Spirit inspires in people, just as the brothers and sisters who accompanied many of you at the beginning of this journey did.

As in every vocation, even in the case of consecrated secularity, it is not a question of having an anecdotal or stereotyped idea of vocation, but of grasping the essence of its identity. A greater knowledge of this ecclesial charism, present by grace in the Salesian Family – when signs of a similar vocation style are perceived or when one notices that there are young people with a desire for "something else" in their lives – should lead us to take the first steps of discernment with a simple but effective vocation pedagogy. If such vocations mature, the CDB or VDB leaders themselves will take responsibility for accompanying the process towards its goal.

My dear brothers and friends CDB: you began this journey on the feast of the Holy Name of Mary. As in her case, the God of the Covenant has given you a name: "With Don Bosco". Do not be afraid

to follow him by deepening the life and charism of the Spirit of which he was a faithful bearer. Entrust yourselves to his own Mother and Teacher, Mary. Learn from her to welcome and accompany with the wisdom of the Spirit the new vocations that the Lord will send. Let us learn from our Mother, personally and as Volunteers with Don Bosco, always to say “yes” to the call of the Lord.

With deep affection.



Fr Ángel FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME, sdb
Rector Major

5.2 New Provincials

The following data concerns provincials (in alphabetical order) appointed by the Rector Major with the consent of his Council in December 2019 and January 2020, during the winter plenary session of the General Council.

1. *ANDRASFALVY* Janoš, Provincial of HUNGARY (UNG) Province

On 12th December 2019, the Rector Major, Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, with the consent of his Council, appointed Fr *Janoš ANDRAS-*

FALVY as Provincial of the “Saint Stephen the King” Province of Hungary (UNG) for a six-year term from 2020-2026. He succeeds Fr Bela Abraham.

Fr Janoš Andrasfalvy was born in Budapest, the capital of Hungary, on 8th June 1971; he entered the Salesian novitiate in Szombathely in 1991, professed his first religious vows on 8th August 1992 and perpetual vows on 28th June 1998, and was ordained a priest in his hometown on 3rd July 1999.

He served in various houses throughout the “Saint Stephen the King” Province of Hungary: Vice-rector in Péliföldszentkereszt (2005-2007), Rector in Szombathely (2008-2010) and Budapest-Óbuda (2010-2011), then Vice-rector in Kazincbarcika (2014-2019). He also held a number of provincial positions: Delegate for Youth Ministry (2002-2009), Vice-provincial (2008-2011), Delegate for Formation (2009-2011 and again since September 1st), Delegate for Social Communications (2011 - currently) and Salesian Cooperators (since 2017).

2. *CARLOS* Ricardo, Provincial of BRAZIL-CAMPO GRANDE (BCG) Province

On 10th December 2019, the Rector Major, Fr Ángel Fernández Ar-

time, with the consent of his Council, appointed Fr *Ricardo CARLOS* Provincial of the “Sant’Alfonso Maria de’ Liguori” Province in Brazil-Campo Grande (BCG) for a six-year term from 2020-2026. He succeeds Fr Gildásio Mendes dos Santos.

Fr Ricardo Carlos was born in São Bernardo do Campo, in the State of São Paulo, on 6th February 1974. He entered the Salesian novitiate in Dourados, Indápolis in 1993, professed his first religious vows on 31st January 1994 and perpetual vows on 30th January 2000, and was ordained priest in Piacatu on 8th December 2001.

He served as the Vice-rector at the “Dom Bosco” community in Campo Grande (2003-2007), Economer (2004-2009) and finally Rector (2007-2013). Then, after spending two years at the International Theological Studentate “Ratisbonne” in Jerusalem, Israel, he was Economer of the community at the Dom Bosco Catholic University (UCDB) in Campo Grande, and since 2016 has been Rector of the same community.

Between 2009 and 2013 he also served as a Provincial Councillor, a position he resumed in 2016 and which he continues to hold to this day.

3. *DA SILVA Gilson Marcos*, Provincial of BRAZIL-PORTO ALEGRE (BPA) Province

On 10th December 2019, the Rector Major, Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, with the consent of his Council, appointed Fr *Gilson Marcos DA SILVA* as Provincial of the “St Pius X” Province, Brazil-Porto Alegre (BPA) for a six-year term from 2020-2026. He succeeds Fr Asídio Deretti. Fr Gilson Marcos da Silva was born in Rio do Sul, State of Santa Catarina, on 28th August 1975; he entered the Salesian novitiate in Curitiba in 1994, professed his first religious vows on 22th January 1995 and perpetual vows on 18th November 2000, and was ordained a priest in his hometown on 15th December 2002.

He worked as Vice-rector of the Viamão community (2003-2005), then as Rector of the novitiate in Curitiba (2005-2008) and as Rector and Parish Priest in Joinville (2008-2011). After spending two years at the Salesian Pontifical University (UPS) in Rome, he returned to the Province and served as Vice-rector of the “São José” house in Porto Alegre and then as Rector of the Provincial House (from 2014 to the present).

At the provincial level he was Vocations Delegate (2013-2017) and

Delegate for Youth Ministry (2015-2019). He is currently Vice-provincial (a position he was given in 2014) and Delegate for Formation (since 2015).

4. *GARCÍA SÁNCHEZ Fernando, Provincial of SPAIN MADRID (SSM) Province*

On 14th January, the Rector Major, Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, with the consent of his Council, appointed Fr *Fernando GARCÍA SÁNCHEZ* Provincial of the “Spain - Saint James the Great” Province for a six-year term from 2020-2026. He succeeds Fr Juan Carlos Pérez Godoy.

Fr Fernando García Sánchez was born in Madrid on 22th September 1974 and received his vocational call while he was a student at the Salesian Institute, Estrecho, and while being involved with the weekend activities of the oratory. He began his novitiate year in 1992 and made his religious profession on 16th August 1993 in Arevalo.

After his years of Theology at Carabanchel, Madrid, he was assigned to Puertollano, where he worked as Pastoral Coordinator for two years. In 2003 he went to Rome, to the Salesian Pontifical University, and obtained a Bachelor's degree in Theology and carried

out studies in Youth Ministry. On 19th June 2004 he was ordained priest at Paseo de Extremadura, Madrid.

His first assignment as a priest was at the Soto del Real house where he spent 6 years as Pastoral Coordinator, Director of the Youth Centre and Sports Coordinator. In the academic year 2010-11 he was appointed Rector of the House in Aranjuez. He was a member of the 27th General Chapter and was appointed as a member of the Provincial Council. At the end of his fifth year in Aranjuez he was asked to accept the appointment as Rector of the House at Atocha and after a year of service he took up the task of Coordination of the Provinces Schools, a position he still holds today.

The Salesian “Spain - St James the Great” Province, which Fr Fernando García will be Provincial of, is based in Madrid and covers Salesian works in Asturias, Cantabria, Castile La Mancha, Castile and Leon, Galicia, La Rioja, Madrid, Navarre and the Basque Country.

The SSM Province has 523 Salesians and is therefore the largest in terms of numbers. The Salesians lead 54 communities, run 36 institutes, 22 vocational training centres, 44 youth centres, 30 parishes and more than 70 social interven-

tion projects in social platforms. The educative and pastoral work is carried out by 6,000 educators and leaders who care for about 64,000 young people in the various Salesian works.

5. *HOBZA Martin, Provincial of CZECH REPUBLIC (CEP) Province*

On 10th January 2019, the Rector Major, Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, with the consent of his Council, appointed Fr Martin HOBZA as Provincial of the “Saint John Bosco” Province, Czech Republic for a six-year term from 2020-2026. He succeeds Fr Petr Vakulic.

Fr Martin Hobza was born in Trebic on 1 March 1970, in the then Czechoslovakia; he entered the Salesian novitiate in Hodonovice in 1991, made his first religious vows on 16 August 1992 and perpetual vows on 14th July 1997. He was ordained priest in Brno on 27th June 1998.

From 2000 to 2007 he worked at the “Žabov esky” Salesian House in Brno, where he served as Councillor, Director of the Oratory and Vice-rector; then for four years (2007-2011) he was the Director of the “St Francis of Sales” Centre in České Budejovice; since 2011 he has been living in Prague, at the

“Kobylysy” work, where he was first the Rector (from 2011 to 2016), and then Parish Priest and Councillor – positions he still holds today.

He is currently a Provincial Councillor in the Czech Province – a position he had formerly held between 2005 and 2011.

6. *KAZNOWSKI Marcin, Provincial of POLAND SOUTH (PLS) Province*

On 18 December, Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, Rector Major, with the consent of the General Council, appointed Fr Marcin KAZNOWSKI as Provincial of the “Saint Hyacinth” Province, Krakow, Poland for a six-year term from 2020-2026.

Fr Marcin Kaznowski was born in Przemyśl (Poland) on 2nd November 1974; he entered the novitiate in Kopiec on 26th August 2000, made his first religious vows on 8th September 2001 and perpetual vows on 16th June 2007, and was ordained priest in Krakow on 24th May 2008. He has been a Provincial Councillor for the Krakow Province (2015-2017) and Vice-provincial, Provincial Delegate for Formation, Salesian Family and Salesian Cooperators.

7. *KETTNER Siegfried, Provincial of AUSTRIA (AUS) Province*

On 12th December 2019 the Rector Major, Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, with the consent of his Council, appointed Fr *Siegfried KETTNER* as Provincial of the Guardian Angels Province, Austria (AUS) for a six-year term from 2020-2026. He succeeds Fr Petrus Obermüller.

Fr Siegfried Kettner was born in Waidhofen an der Ybbs, Austria, on 15th February 1963; he entered the Salesian novitiate in Oberthalheim in 1985, professed his first religious vows on 15th August 1986 and perpetual vows on 15th August 1992, and was ordained priest at Benediktbeurn, Germany, on 25th June 1995.

He was first Councillor (1998-2003 and 2006-2011) and then Rector (2001-2016) of the Provincial House in Vienna, and is currently Rector and Parish Priest of the Stadlau House, also in Vienna. He was Delegate for Vocations Ministry for the “Guardian Angels” Province of Austria (2003-2014), the Salesian Bulletin (2004-2009) and Youth Ministry (2006-2011), Formation (2011-2016) and Provincial Vicar.

8. *LASARTE TOPOLANSKI*
Martín Alfredo, Superior of the
ANGOLA (ANG) Viceprovince

On December 19th, Fr. Ángel Fernández Artime, Rector Major,

with the consent of the General Council, appointed Fr *Martín Alfredo LASARTE TOPOLANSKI*, as Superior of the “Mamá Muxima” Vice-province of Angola for a six-year term from 2020-2026. He succeeds Fr Victor Luis Sequeira Gutierrez.

Fr Martín Lasarte Topolanski was born on 25th October 1962 in Montevideo, Uruguay; he entered the Salesian Novitiate in Montevideo - Manga-Novitiate on 1 February 1981, made his first religious vows on 31 January 1982 and perpetual vows on 31 January 1986, and was ordained priest in Montevideo on 17 August 1991.

Fr Lasarte was resident in the Montevideo – Talleres Don Bosco community (1985-1986); Montevideo – Theologate (1986-1988), then moved to Lapa, Sao Paulo, Brazil, and later to Gerini, Rome until 3rd August 1990, the day of his transfer to Luena, Angola. He was then in Testaccio, Rome (1991-1995), and then again in Dom Bosco Luanda, Angola – Palanca (1995-2001), Luena (2001-2008), Luanda – Sao Paulo (2008-2009), Luanda (2009-2015).

Fr Lasarte was Councillor of the Angola Vice-province (2007-2013), Delegate for Youth Ministry (2009-2015), Commission of Human Rights (2013-2014), Vice-provincial

of the Vice-province (2013-2015). Since 20th August 2015 he has been a member of the Missions Department at Salesian Headquarters in Rome, Italy.

9. *MENDES DOS SANTOS Gildasio, Provincial of BRAZIL-BELO HORIZONTE (BBH) Province*

On 16th December 2019, the Rector Major, Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, with the consent of his Council, appointed Fr Gildásio MENDES DOS SANTOS as Provincial of the Brazil “St. John Bosco” Province, Belo Horizonte (BBH), for a six-year term from 2020-2026. He succeeds Fr Orestes Carlinhos Fistarol.

Born on 18th March 1963 in Conceição do Barra, a city in Brazil belonging to the diocese of São Mateus, he is the son of Gaetano Mendes and Edite Dantas. Fr Gildásio Mendes dos Santos entered the São Carlos novitiate on 11th January 1983 in Campo Grande, and on 11th February he made his perpetual profession. He received his priestly ordination on 12th December, two years later, in Rondonópolis.

For 10 years, from 1993 to 2003, he was the Vice-rector of the Dom Bosco community, Campo Grande, while from 2009 to 2014 he was

Rector of the Corumbá community.

He also served as Provincial Delegate for Social Communications in the Campo Grande Province from 2004 to 2005 and then from 2009 to 2015. From July 2013 to May 2014 he served as Provincial Councillor, before being appointed Provincial of the that Province on 25 May, 2014.

He speaks 4 languages: Portuguese, his mother tongue, English, Spanish and Italian.

Fr Gildásio Mendes dos Santos will take over the leadership of the BBH Province.

10. *MONTENEGRO LATOUCHE Rafael Bernardo, Provincial of VENEZUELA (VEN) Province*

On 10th January 2020, Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, Rector Major, with the consent of the General Council, appointed Fr *Rafael Bernardo MONTENEGRO LATOUCHE* as Provincial of the “San Luca” Province, Venezuela. He succeeds Fr Francisco Méndez.

Fr Montenegro Latouche was born on 30th September 301966 in Valencia, State of Carabobo, the son of Rafael Ubaldo Montenegro and Elina Isabel Latouche. He studied at the “Don Bosco” Salesian Institute in Valencia, where he got to know the Salesian charism

and spirituality. He completed his novitiate year in San Antonio de Los Altos, and made his first religious profession on 7 September 1985 and his perpetual profession on 11th July 1992. He was ordained a priest on 3 June 1995.

In 2000 he was appointed Councillor of the Salesian Postnovitiate of Los Teques, Macarena Sur. In 2001 he began his studies at the Salesian Pontifical University in Rome and was subsequently appointed Rector and Master of Novices (2006). He is currently Rector of the Salesian “San Luca” Theologate in Macaracuay.

At the provincial level he has been Councillor on several occasions (2003-2006 and 2010-16) and Delegate for Formation (2003-2007, 2018 - 2020).

11. PAURIA *Joseph, Provincial of INDIA KOLKATA (INC) Province*

On 10th December 2019, the Rector Major, Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, with the consent of his Council, appointed Fr Joseph PAURIA as Provincial of the “St John Bosco” Province of Kolkata, India. Fr Pauria, who has been Vice-provincial until now, will take up his new post on 31 May next, thus taking over from Fr Nirmol Vincent Gomes.

The Province of Calcutta, India was erected in 1926 as the first Salesian Province in India. Now, for the first time, it will have a Provincial of tribal origin. Fr Pauria comes from the Santhal tribe.

Fr Joseph Pauria was born on 14 January 1965 in Azimganj, West Bengal State. His parents were Thomas and Rita Pauria. His father was the first catechist in the parish of Azimganj.

After completing his secondary education at the Don Bosco school in Azimganj, Fr Pauria joined the Bandel aspirant and completed his upper secondary education. He entered the Novitiate in Siliguri in 1984 and made his first profession in 1985. After studying philosophy at the Salesian Sonada Institute and after his practical training, he then joined the Sacred Heart College in Shillong for theological studies.

He received priestly ordination in 1994 and then received his Master’s degree in Catechetics at Kristu Jyoti College in Bangalore. Subsequently sent to Sonada as formator, he served there for several years. He then completed his PhD in “Salesian Missionary Spirituality” at the Salesian Pontifical University, Rome in 2009, before returning to Sonada as formator and professor.

In the meantime, he was appointed a member of the Provincial Council and, after a brief period as parish priest in Berhampore, was appointed Vice-provincial in January 2016.

In his new role as Provincial, Fr Joseph Pauria brings all his excellent qualities with him. In fact, he has extensive experience as a formator and teacher and knows the Province very well, so it will certainly have much to gain from him over the next six years.

12. *PERERA Ramón Darío, Provincial of the ARGENTINA SOUTH (ARS) Province*

On 5 December 2019, Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, Rector Major, with the consent of the General Council, appointed *Fr Ramón Darío PERERA* as the new Provincial of the Blessed Ceferino Namuncurá Province of Argentina South (ARS), for the period 2020- 2026. He succeeds Fr Honorio Caucamán.

Fr Perera was born in the city of Victorica on 7 December 1964. He is the son of Jesús María Perera and María Rita Pereira. He studied at the San Juan Bosco Institute in Victorica and was involved with group activities at the parish such as Catholic Action Argentina in Mallín.

Fr Perera made his religious profession as a Salesian of Don Bosco at the Sacred Heart Basilica in La Plata on 31 January 1985. He gained degrees in Philosophy and Educational Sciences focusing especially on Youth Ministry (1987), and his Baccalaureate in Theology.

On 16 April 1994 he was ordained a priest in the *Nuestra Señora de la Merced* parish in the town of Victorica. From February 1995 until February 1997 he was in charge of pastoral care and Rector of the agrotechnical school in Del Valle (province of Buenos Aires).

During 1997 he worked as a formator at the post-novitiate and later in Del Valle as Rector in 1998.

In 2000 he was responsible for pastoral care at *Sagrado Corazón* in La Plata and from 2001 to 2005 Rector of the *Domingo Savio* work in Santa Rosa, capital of the province of La Pampa.

In the former province of La Plata he was the coordinator of the Province Schools Team (1996-1999), formator for the students of theology (1999), Provincial Councillor (2002-2005) and Vice-provincial (2006-2009).

In 2010, when the Blessed Ceferino Namuncurá, Argentina South Province came into existence, he was Vice-provincial (2010-2012), Provincial Councillor and

Rector of the Salesian agrotechnical school at Del Valle (2013-2018). Since 2019 he has been Rector and Parish Priest of the La Piedad Salesian community in the city of Bahía Blanca.

13. *SARPRASADAM Agilan, Provincial of INDIA TIRUCHY (INT) Province*

On 18 December 2019, Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, Rector Major, with the consent of the General Council, appointed Fr *Agilan SARPRASADAM* as Provincial of “Our Lady of Health of Velankanni” Province, Tiruchy, India for a six-year term from 2020-2026. He succeeds Fr Anthony Joseph who died prematurely.

Fr Agilan Sarprasadam was born in Venkatagulam, Tamil Nadu (India), on 22th March 1970; he entered the Salesian novitiate in Velakinar, Coimbatore on 24 May 1987, made his first religious vows on 24th May 1988 and perpetual vows on 31st May 1996, and was ordained priest in Tiruchy on 29th December 1999. He was Provincial Councillor for Tiruchy Province (2011-2014 and 2014-2017), Provincial Delegate for Social Communication (2011-2017), Vice-provincial and Provincial Delegate for Youth Ministry.

14. *SARMENTO Adolfo de Jesús, Superior of the Mozambique Vice-province (MOZ) Province*

On 18 December 2019 the Rector Major, Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, with the consent of the General Council, appointed Fr *Adolfo de Jesús SARMENTO* as Superior of the “Mary Help of Christians” Vice-province of Mozambique for a six-year term from 2020-2026. He succeeds Fr Marco Biaggi.

Father Adolfo de Jesús Sarmiento was born in Uai Oli-Venilale (East Timor) on 24th July 1969; he entered the novitiate in Fatumaca on 13th June 1991, made his first religious vows on 13th June 1992 and perpetual vows on 17th May 1998, and was ordained a priest in Maputo (Mozambique) on 25th August 2002. He has been a Councillor for the Vice-province of Mozambique (2006-2008) and is currently Novice Master (Namaacha) and Delegate for Formation in the Vice-province.

15. *TIMKO Peter, Provincial of SLOVAKIA (SLK) Province*

On 12th December 2019, the Rector Major, Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, with the consent of his Council, appointed Fr *Peter TIMKO* as Provincial of the “Mary Help of Christians” Province, Slovakia (SLK) for a six-year term from

2020-2026. He succeeds Fr Jozef Izold.

Fr Peter Timko was born in Presov, Slovakia, on 9th April 1973; he entered the Salesian novitiate at Poprad in 1992, and made his first religious vows on 14th August 1993 and perpetual vows on 14th August 1999. He was ordained priest at Bratislava on 5th May 2001.

Since 2012 until today he has been the Novice Director at the Poprad novitiate, and on a number of occasions also the Rector of the community (2009-2012, 2015-2020). He has been Councillor for the “Mary Help of Christians” Province, Slovakia (2008 to 2015) and Delegate for Formation (2014-2015).

5.3 New Salesian Bishops

DAU ZE Lucas Jeimphaung, Coadjutor Bishop of Lashio (Myanmar)

On 18th October 2019, the Holy Father, Pope Francis, appointed Fr *Lucas Jeimphaung DAU ZE* as Coadjutor Bishop of the Diocese of Lashio, in Myanmar,

Fr Dau Ze was born in the village of Hpa Hping, Shan State, Myanmar, on 18th October 1962. He attended the Salesian novitiate in Anisakan between 1983 and 1984, professed perpetual vows on 6 May

1993 in Anisakan, and was ordained a priest, again in the same city, on 21th April 1996.

He served as Bursar at “Nazareth” in Anisakan (1998-2006), then as Rector and Parish Priest at the same centre (2006-2012), then as the person in charge of the Salesian presence at Pang Way (2012-2017), and finally Rector of the Salesian House of Philosophy at Pyin Oo Lwin.

He has been a Councillor for the MYM Vice-province (2007-2010 and from 2015 until now), as well as Delegate for Youth Ministry (2008-2011) and Delegate for the Missions (from 2017 until now).

His studies include a Bachelor's degree in History from the University of Yangon, Myanmar, in 1989; a specialisation in the Philippines, which earned him a Diploma in Family Counselling from the Jesuit University in 2004; and a Master's Degree in Pastoral Sociology from the Asian Social Institute in 2006.

5.4 Our deceased confreres (2nd list July-December 2019)

“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
P ACHTEN Frans	Achel (Belgium)	18.08.2019	88	BEN
P AMBRIOLA Michele	Salerne (Italy)	15.12.2019	92	IME
L AMBROZIC Janez	Trstenik (Slovenia)	04.10.2019	99	SLO
L ANTE Dankwart	Jünkerath (Germany)	15.11.2019	87	GER
P ARAGÓN CARAZO Carlos	S. José (Costa Rica)	14.12.2019	81	CAM
P ARCOSTANZO Elio	Cuneo (Italy)	27.11.2019	76	ICP
P ASSIENE Grégoire	Kabgayi (Rwanda)	09.10.2019	67	AGL
L BATISTA NUÑEZ Eligio Antonio	Jarabacoa (Dominican Rep.)	15.08.2019	86	ANT
P BAYSINGER Leo	Norwalk, California (USA)	22.11.2019	81	SUO
P BEDINI Mario	Bologna (Italy)	19.12.2019	94	ILE
P BOTTASSO Giovanni	Quito (Ecuador)	24.12.2019	83	ECU
P BOUT Cedric	Citadel (India)	17.08.2019	100	INM
P BRAVO CABRERA Antonio	Quito (Ecuador)	13.12.2019	87	ECU
P BUCCHERI Vicente	Buenos Aires (Argentina)	11.11.2019	96	ARN
P BURNS Peter	Farnborough (Great Britain)	11.12.2019	91	GBR
P BUTTI André Afonso Maria	Campinas (Brazil)	03.10.2019	90	BSP
P CAMPANA Julio	Cusco (Peru)	18.10.2019	66	PER
L CANTELE Stefano	Salerne (Italy)	24.07.2019	90	IME
P CANTT Miguel	Lima (Peru)	01.08.2019	88	PER
P CARBON Lionel	Gent (Belgium)	08.12.2019	76	BEN
L CAROL SOLER Luis	Cochabamba (Bolivia)	25.07.2019	86	BOL
L CARRIJO Antônio Santos	Goiânia (Brazil)	12.11.2019	74	BBH
P CASATI Giancarlo	Turin (Italy)	06.10.2019	85	ICP
P CATEDRAL Mauricio	San Salvador (El Salvador)	11.09.2019	96	CAM
P CERRATO Natale	Turin (Italy)	17.10.2019	97	ICP
P CHIAPPANI Antonio	Turin (Italy)	01.11.2019	86	ICP
P CHIRIBOGA RIVADENEIRA Emiliano	Quito (Ecuador)	25.12.2019	85	ECU
P CIMOSA Mario	Caserte (Italy)	22.11.2019	79	IME
P COLOMBO Mario	Turin (Italy)	14.10.2019	92	ICP
P CONSONNI Mosè Bartolomeo	Caracas (Venezuela)	30.09.2019	93	VEN
P CONTADO Enrico	Castello di Godego (Italy)	14.09.2019	83	INE
P COUDIJZER Koenraad Achiel	Heverlee (Belgium)	13.07.2019	83	BEN
L COYE Patrick	Limerick (Ireland)	30.09.2019	85	IRL
P CRIBB Ronald Lesly	Morteros (Argentina)	02.08.2019	89	ARN
P DALBON Luigi Giuseppe	La Vega (Dominican Rep.)	22.10.2019	99	ANT
P DÁVILA ALVAREZ Justo	Lima (Peru)	13.12.2019	79	PER
P DE LA ROSA CASTRO Jesús	México City (Mexico)	11.12.2019	93	MEM
P DE PONTI Gianalfredo	Ferrare (Italy)	01.11.2019	90	ILE

SURNAME AND NAME	PLACE of death	DATE	AGE	PROV
P DELANEY Donald	Tampa, Florida (USA)	30.07.2019	73	SUE
P DEMANGE Michel	Paris (France)	17.12.2019	67	FRB
L DEMMING Gerhard	Essen (Germany)	26.09.2019	91	GER
L DERACHE Léon	Caen (France)	02.09.2019	94	FRB
P DINH VAN PHUONG Gioachino	Đà Lạt (Vietnam)	08.09.2019	66	VIE
P DOMINICI Angelo	Pedara (Italy)	29.12.2019	86	ISI
P DOOLEY Canice Edward	Lansdowne (Southern Africa)	13.07.2019	85	AFM
P DOUSSET Jean	Issenheim (France)	11.12.2019	100	FRB
P ESTÉVEZ Tomás	León (Spain)	30.07.2019	97	SSM
P FALZONE Giuseppe	Catane (Italy)	16.12.2019	89	ISI
P FIGUEROA ARROYO Gustavo	Coacalco (Mexico)	19.08.2019	82	MEM
P FONG Paul	Hong Kong (China)	16.08.2019	99	CIN
P FORESTI Luciano	Arese (Italy)	11.07.2019	89	ILE
P FRUTOS GAMITO José	Bahía Blanca (Argentina)	18.10.2019	91	ARS
P FULBROOK Albert	Melbourne (Australia)	12.11.2019	82	AUL
P GALOFRÉ i VILAGUT Josep M.	Barcelone (Spain)	06.10.2019	88	SMX
P GEBARINO CROVO Juan	Santiago de Chile (Chile)	02.10.2019	85	CIL
P GEVAERT Joseph	Oud-Heverlee (Belgium)	29.08.2019	88	BEN
P GIORDANI Camillo	Arese (Italy)	17.10.2019	96	ILE
P GIORDANO Antonino	Catania (Italy)	21.10.2019	78	ISI
P GORCZEWSKI Zdzisław	Wrocław (Poland)	23.09.2019	81	PLO
P GRANADOS GUTIERREZ Luis A.	Bogotá (Colombia)	25.09.2019	85	COB
P GRAULS Paul	Tampa, Florida (USA)	30.11.2019	84	SUE
P GUALDONI Roberto	Casale Monferrato (Italy)	11.07.2019	67	ICP
P GUEDE FERNANDEZ Antonio	Logrono (Spain)	23.11.2019	87	SSM
P HENNESSY Eugene	Walkerville (Southern Africa)	12.09.2019	86	AFM
P HERNANDEZ GONZALEZ Miguel	León (Mexico)	29.12.2019	77	MEM
P HERNÁNDEZ SÁNCHEZ Agustín	Málaga (Spain)	05.10.2019	91	SMX
P INISAN Joseph	Paris (France)	21.12.2019	79	FRB
<i>Was Provincial for 6 years.</i>				
E IRUDAYARAJ Joseph Anthony	Perambur (India)	29.11.2019	84	EP
<i>Was Bishop of Dharmapuri for 15 years and Bishop Eméritus for 7 years.</i>				
E JALA Dominc Savio	Colusa County, California (USA)	10.10.2019	68	EP
<i>Was Provincial for 4 years and Archbishop for 19 years.</i>				
P JOSEPH P. Antony	Kallukuzhy-Tiruchy (India)	11.09.2019	55	INT
<i>Was Provincial for 2 years.</i>				
P KIKOLI MUSONDA Firmin	Mansa (Zambia)	31.07.2019	53	AFC
P KIZHAKCHENNADU Joseph	Shillong (India)	25.08.2019	68	INS
P KIZHAKENELLIKUNNEL Thomas	Thope, Kollam (India)	07.07.2019	67	INK
P KOMAREK Jan	Praga (Czech Rep.)	17.07.2019	62	CEP
<i>Was Provincial for 6 years.</i>				
P KOSMÁL Jozef	Trenčín (Slovakia)	13.09.2019	90	SLK
P KRÓLAK Jerzy	Łomianki (Poland)	27.08.2019	67	PLN
P LANDRI Mario	Monza (Italy)	21.10.2019	78	ILE
P LECOMTE Hubert	St. Germain-en-Laye (France)	19.11.2019	83	FRB
P LIEVROUW Karel	Heverlee (Belgium)	18.10.2019	86	BEN

SURNAME AND NAME	PLACE of death	DATE	AGE	PROV
P LOMELLO Luciano	San Pedro, California (USA)	23.07.2019	98	SUO
P LORINI Arturo	Arese (Italy)	04.08.2019	80	ILE
P MACWAN Ignas	Baroda (India)	09.09.2019	62	INB
P MALNGIANG Alphonse	Shillong (India)	25.12.2019	66	INS
P MAQUIERA OBESSO Jesús	Barcelone (Spain)	05.10.2019	93	SMX
P MARTINELLI Ilario	Arese (Italy)	13.10.2019	76	ILE
L MARTÍNEZ FERNÁNDEZ Juan Carlos	Logrono (Spain)	27.11.2019	59	SSM
S MBALAME Paul	Kasungu (Malawi)	20.07.2019	28	ZMB
L MELIS (Drosi) Angelo	Rome (Italy)	11.10.2019	93	ICC
P MENA GUERRERO José Luis	Arévalo (Spain)	28.12.2019	92	SSM
P MENGON Tullio	Salerno (Italy)	02.08.2019	82	IME
L MICHEL Bernard	Caen-St. Benoit (France)	20.11.2019	95	FRB
P MOLINA Redentor	Mandaluyong City (Philippines)	28.10.2019	56	FIN
L MOREIRA DE ALMEIDA Alfredo	Manique (Portugal)	10.07.2019	91	POR
P MORENO OLMEDO Alejandro	Caracas (Venezuela)	25.12.2019	85	VEN
P MORTEAU Pierre	Bréhan (France)	22.12.2019	87	FRB
P MUÑOZ MARTÍNEZ José	Logroño (Spain)	11.07.2019	85	SSM
P NACHTERGAELE DE V. Gerardo	Montevideo (Uruguay)	29.08.2019	85	URU
L NOWICKI Edmund	Czerwińsk nad Wisłą (Poland)	30.09.2019	87	PLE
P OERDER Karl	Koln (Germany)	16.08.2019	90	GER
<i>Was Provincial for 8 years.</i>				
S OJWANG Benedict	Teddy Nairobi (Kenya)	24.11.2019	24	AFE
P PACADA Ramon	Borongan (Philippines)	29.12.2019	56	FIS
P PASARIĆ Stjepan	Zagreb (Croatia)	12.10.2019	73	CRO
P PEÑA Díez José Javier María	Bilbao (Spain)	23.07.2019	61	SSM
L PEÑA GOMEZ Quintiliano	Madrid (Spain)	21.10.2019	79	SSM
P PICHIERRI Giuseppe	Garbagnate Milanese (Italy)	16.09.2019	87	ILE
P PIRES DE DEUS João	Dili (East Timor)	22.09.2019	91	TLS
P QUAGLIOTTO Francesco	Turin (Italy)	05.12.2019	87	ICP
P RACCA Antonio	Córdoba (Argentina)	21.10.2019	96	ARN
P RAMOS MARTIN José Luis	Séville (Spain)	28.10.2019	83	SMX
P ROSSETTO Giuseppe	Turin (Italy)	05.09.2019	86	ICP
P ROSSI (ELIES) Antonio	Turin (Italy)	23.11.2019	80	ICP
P ROZMUS Bolesław	Oswiecim (Poland)	12.12.2019	83	PLS
P RUBATSCHER Vito	Bolzano (Italy)	12.09.2019	85	INE
P RUDONI Antonio	Vallecrosia (Italy)	02.07.2019	84	ICC
P RUIZ PÉREZ Agustín	Burgos (Spain)	19.10.2019	88	SSM
P SACCO (Lombardo) Francesco	Ban Pong (Thailand)	19.10.2019	90	THA
L SADOWSKI Piotr	Rumia (Poland)	11.12.2019	89	PLN
P SANITÀ Guido	Arese (Italy)	02.12.2019	99	ILE
P SCHWARZ Josef	Jünkerath (Germany)	05.12.2019	85	GER
P SOUSA Armindo	Poiars da Régua (Portugal)	06.07.2019	79	POR
P SOWRIAPPAN Martin	Allahabad (India)	22.10.2019	37	INM
P SPITTAELS Boudewijn	Etterbeek (Belgium)	23.11.2019	77	BEN
P SPOSÓB Jan	Mariówka (Poland)	30.09.2019	96	PLE
P TAMONAN Hilario	Makati City (Philippines)	12.07.2019	71	FIN

SURNAME AND NAME	PLACE of death	DATE	AGE	PROV
L TARDÍO MARÍA Francisco Javier	Barcelone (Spain)	16.09.2019	92	SMX
P TERLIKOWSKI Jan	Aleksandrów Kujawski (Poland)	06.11.2019	77	PLN
P TIMAR Mihály	Budapest (Hungary)	14.12.2019	88	UNG
P TONON Andreas	Joinville (Brazil)	01.09.2019	82	BPA
P TORRE GARCÍA Esteban	Léon (Spain)	02.09.2019	92	SSM
P TRABUCCHI Paolo	Bangkok (Thailand)	06.09.2019	79	THA
L TROCHERIS Bernard	St. Brieuc (France)	03.08.2019	87	FRB
P TRZESZCZAK Ireneusz	Gdansk (Poland)	11.12.2019	82	PLN
P URBĄNCZYK Jan	Oświęcim (Poland)	27.08.2019	58	PLS
P UŠÁK Vit	Poprad (Slovakia)	10.12.2019	96	SLK
P VADAKUMPADAN Paul	Shillong (India)	18.11.2019	66	INS
L VENTURA Gaetano	Sulmona (Italy)	09.11.2019	85	ICC
P VILLAURRUTIA NAVA Rafael	México City (Mexico)	19.10.2019	80	MEM
L WAGENER Georg	Jünkerath (Germany)	23.10.2019	81	GER
P WEBER Leo	Benediktbeuern (Germany)	15.12.2019	92	GER
L WESSEL Jan	Oldenzaal (Netherlands)	15.10.2019	80	BEN
P ZAMBIASI Mario	Arese (Italy)	13.12.2019	96	ILE
P ZEI Giorgio	Castel de' Britti (Italy)	14.07.2019	89	ILE