

AMICABLE COMMUNICATION WITH TODAY'S YOUNG PEOPLE



**SOCIAL COMMUNICATION
SERVING THE
SALESIAN MISSION IN THE CHURCH**



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WITH TODAY'S YOUNG PEOPLE**

**GUIDELINES
FOR FURTHER STUDY
AND ACTION**

**SOCIAL COMMUNICATION
SERVING THE
SALESIAN MISSION IN THE CHURCH**

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PRESENTATION

The text you have in hand is the result of the work of the Salesian Congregation's Social Communication Sector. It aims to offer the most recent guidelines for understanding the question of social communication serving the Salesian mission in the Church.

This handbook is being published 14 years after the text bearing the title *Salesian Social Communication System*, and is the result of collaboration with Communication Delegates, experts in communication and other consultants. It will certainly be enriched by your knowledge and experience.

The Salesian Congregation, in its various areas of intervention, always aims to keep up with the times. This is an attitude that over the years has led us to the continuous search for dialogue between faith and science, the gospel and youth culture, the Preventive System and the digital world.

As educators of young people, we are responding to the challenges and opportunities of digital culture through profound reflection on communication and the use of various information technologies, the internet, social networks and, most recently, Artificial Intelligence.

Starting from the values of the gospel and the Preventive System, together with lay people and educators we wish to discuss this reality by listening to the new generations, accompanying adolescents and young adults in their social worlds, in search of new languages and new ways to educate them to love, to the meaning of life and responsibility, to the construction of their personal project.

The Church, after the Synod on Young People, asked us to deepen our knowledge of the dynamics of the digital environment: "The digital environment presents a challenge to the Church on various levels; it is essential, therefore, to deepen knowledge of its dynamics and its range of possibilities from the anthropological and ethical point of view. This requires not only entering into it and promoting its communicative potential with a

view to the Christian proclamation, but also giving a Gospel flavour to its culture and its dynamics. Some initiatives along these lines are already under way and should be encouraged, deepened and shared.”¹

Recently, the Vatican’s Dicastery for Communication published a text on the topic of digital technology, stating that we are experiencing a gigantic change today, but we still have to face the way in which we, as individuals and as an ecclesial community can approach the digital world as “loving neighbours”, genuinely present and attentive to each other on our common journey along the “digital highways”.²

The Salesian Congregation, in step with the Church, has made a great effort to update the reflection on the Salesian charism, on the Salesian identity of consecrated persons and lay educators, on further exploring and updating the Preventive System in light of the changing times in which our young people live. Through studies, conferences, meetings at every level within the Congregation, a fundamental theme emerged: social communication as an aspect of the youth world, especially in relation to digital culture.³

The Communication Sector, through its various initiatives, has studied, delved into and responded in a Salesian way to the important dialogue between communication, evangelisation and Salesian education.

Communication is part of the great Salesian charismatic heritage, one of the priorities of our founder Don Bosco, and is an expression of our identity and our mission as educators.

The Salesian Congregation animates and manages communication under the responsibility of the Social Communication Sector. To accomplish this task, it developed a text to guide and offer direction for communication throughout the Congregation.

¹ Synod of Bishops, XV General Assembly, Final Document “*Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment*”, Vatican City, 2018, no. 145.

² Dicastery for Communication, *Towards a Full Presence – Pastoral Reflection on Engagement with Social Media*, Vatican City, 2023.

³ Social Communication Sector, Letter “Walking with Young People in Digital Culture”, no. 10, AGC 440, Valdocco, 2023.

The text, bearing the title *Salesian Social Communication System* – published for the first time in 2008 and updated in 2011 – has been an important point of reference. Nevertheless, we have arrived at an historic moment wherein an epochal change is needed in terms of both organisational structure and practical directions.

Why renew the Salesian Social Communication System Document?

If we consider the communication revolution over the last fifteen years through the development of digital technology, social networks and socio-cultural changes in the world of youth, development of the Document is necessary.

Thanks to the Magisterium of Pope Benedict and Pope Francis, the Church has expanded its vision of communication, especially through the annual Messages for World Social Communication Days and the documents from the Synod of Bishops on the Young, but also through directives contained in documents such as *Ethics in the Internet*, *Laudato Si'*, *Fratelli Tutti*, *Global Compact on Education*, *Dignitas Infinita*.

Further development of the Document must also be implemented in consideration of the requests of GC27 and GC28, in the light of the Rector Major's Action Guidelines for the six-year period (proposal number 3): "Living the Salesian sacrament of presence" and considering the new Vatican document *Antiqua et nova* on Artificial Intelligence.

It is also appropriate to broaden the vision of communication in terms of its charismatic, educative and pastoral and ecclesial dimension, in accordance with the Salesian Youth Ministry Frame of Reference.

Beginning with the Rector Major's request addressed in 2020 to the Communication Sector, the latter was entrusted with drafting this Document, involving a study of the digital habitat: "Engage the Social Communication Department, at various levels, in offering resources and stimuli for a constant process of verification, updating, inculturation of the Salesian mission in the digital habitat where young people live, involving our universities in a network with other centres and agencies that more closely follow and study the transformations that the digital world is bringing among the new generations." (AGC, 433).

The work on this Document was carried out with the involvement of a large number of Communication Delegates, those responsible for the Salesian Bulletin, Radio, Publishers and social media. As a result, we developed a communication *instrumentum laboris*, integrating all the proposals and topics presented by these groups.

Starting from the fundamental principle that renewal is possible, in full respect of the guidelines of the Magisterium of the Church and the Salesian Congregation, the new communication text remains faithful to our tradition and the heritage which is part of our identity.

The goal of this new Document is to be a guide and a formation tool in continuity with what has been stated in the earlier edition, at the same time seeking to respond in a Salesian style to the socio-cultural changes of the new generations and the digital world. Through new educative and pastoral demands and cultural challenges along the Church's journey, it is necessary to bring communication closer to the evangelising and educative proposal of Salesian Youth Ministry.

This Document is a tool offered by the Social Communication Sector to shed light on, update and guide the reflection, practice and sharing of communication work in each Educative and Pastoral Community. All this can be achieved through the various Communication Delegates and their teams. Finally, the Document aims to contribute to the formation of Salesians and lay people who work collaboratively in carrying out the Salesian mission in today's world.

Rome, 31 January 2025

Fr. GILDÁSIO MENDES DOS SANTOS
General Councillor for Social Communication

INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW DOCUMENT

Starting from various perspectives, the structure and fundamental contents of this Document have been brought together and explored first of all through a biblical and theological approach; then, through an anthropological, ethical, educational and Salesian pastoral outlook to finally arrive at organisational and operational indications.

Chapter 1 begins with the dream at nine years of age, which provided Don Bosco with a particular perspective on all his activities and achievements. Following the example of the Good Shepherd and his heart as an educator, the genesis of his way of thinking and implementing the methodology of communication is highlighted.

In Chapter 2, communication is defined as a complex human and cultural phenomenon and the new communicative approach that people, and in particular young people, have to the digital universe, and culture is analysed, with its various psychological, sociological and relational implications.

Chapter 3 offers a new perspective on the importance of synodality and discernment in our way of communicating to create fraternal communion, participation and shared responsibility which serves the individual and society.

Chapter 4 develops the theological foundations of communication, starting from the principle that God seeks out the human person, and driven by the desire to communicate, he approaches, reveals himself in love and truth, creates interaction and shows humanity his project of love and salvation.

Chapter 5 has a Christological perspective as its theme. This is based on Jesus Christ, communicator of the Father who, as the Good Shepherd, gives life to a friendly pedagogy of self-communication: he listens, welcomes, loves, cares, educates and saves. Through the Holy Spirit, the Trinity is an example of community that is built on communion and service.

In Chapter 6 the Church is presented as a sign of God in the world, a teacher of humanity and educator of the people of God on their way to redemption.

Chapter 7 illustrates how Mary, the Mother of Jesus, places herself at the service of her Son, accompanying him throughout his life, up to his death and resurrection. In the Upper Room she took an active part in the birth of the Church; as an example of the praying Church, she built the life of the community and its mission.

Chapter 8 recalls the fact that Saint Francis de Sales, chosen by Don Bosco as an example of the communicator, teaches that to communicate is a matter of the heart.

Chapter 9 illustrates how to live in digital culture in a Salesian style, following the example of God's own pedagogy: amicably, with closeness, acceptance, listening, fraternal communion and shared responsibility.

Chapter 10 presents the bases of communication in harmony with the Salesian evangelising and educational vision: communication is made actual through the relationship between evangelisation and education, in dialogue with culture, through networking and through collaboration with the laity and the Salesian Family. It also deals with the methodology of Salesian communication, the importance of the Educative and Pastoral Community, the pastoral plan and the work carried out with an educative and pastoral mentality.

In Chapter 11 the Preventive System is presented as a communicative impulse that is expressed through a specific spirituality, pedagogy and pastoral approach. It also analyses how the Preventive System is in dialogue with the communication dynamics of digital media.

Chapter 12 pays particular attention to the importance of Christian anthropology as a source that illuminates and humanises virtual communication and digital culture. In addition to this, an original educational proposal is presented that takes its inspiration from the images of the four Biblical Gardens, comparing them through their symbolism to the human condition in the digital world.

Chapter 13 describes the identity of the Salesian communicator, starting from the spirituality and pedagogy of Don Bosco.

The final Chapters, from 14 to 17, present guidelines for the organisation, management and governance of the Salesian Congregation with regard to social communication. New needs and challenges that arise in the communication field today are considered, such as the professionalism of communication operators, the modernisation of institutional communication, collaborative methods of networking, the various kinds of structural organisation in the Provinces, issues related to privacy and security.

This final part also presents practical guidelines for communication, considering the reality of each Province, with attention to multiculturalism and the different rhythms, styles and ways of carrying out the Salesian mission in the world.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AGC/ASC - Acts of the General/Superior Council of the Society of Saint John Bosco

C./R. - Salesian Constitutions and Regulations

EPC - Educative and Pastoral Community

OPP - Overall Provincial Plan

SEPP - Salesian Educative and Pastoral Plan

YMFR – Youth Ministry Frame of Reference

1

THE GENESIS OF DON BOSCO'S COMMUNICATION

GUIDELINES FOR FURTHER STUDY AND ACTION

“The media have always played an important part in Salesian activities, and Don Bosco and his sons have been deeply involved in using their various forms for the evangelization and social development of the young, the working classes and the missions” (Fr. Egidio Viganò, “Social Communication” challenges us, in Acts of the General Council 302, 1981).

*The chapter begins with Don Bosco’s dream at the age of nine, recounted in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, a text initially written only for Salesians, with the desire to hand down their own educational system and method. That dream also contains the archetype of Salesian communication, because it gave Don Bosco a particular perspective regarding all his activities and achievements. Here the genesis of his way of thinking and carrying out communication is highlighted, starting from his heart as an educator following the example of the Good Shepherd.*

With the love of the Good Shepherd and the apostolic passion of Don Bosco, we look at young people with renewed sympathy and faithfully communicate the Salesian educational project, appreciating the role of young people, who now live in a highly digitised culture with the lights and shadows linked to it.

❖ **Don Bosco dreams a dream to live and communicate.** The young people's Saint tells us in his *Memoirs of the Oratory*: "It was at that age that I had a dream. All my life this remained deeply impressed on my mind... At that point, still dreaming, I began crying. I begged the lady to speak so that I could understand her, because I did not know what all this could mean. She then placed her hand on my head and said: "In good time you will understand everything."⁴

❖ **The dream at nine years of age is the archetype of the root and originality of communication** by the young people's educator. The mission is entrusted to him in very simple words in the dream at nine years of age: "This is the field of your work", meaning your mission will be among the smallest, among the poorest. The word given to Don Bosco in the dream is, in practical terms, the handing over of a life project serving others.

Both in his mission as an educator and priest and in his life as a writer, Don Bosco was a man who knew how to discern and interpret reality through faith. All of this is evident both in his initiative to found the Salesian Congregation and in his practical and creative approach to taking action. Even more, the dream at nine years of age is a great example and school of communication: "because I did not know what all this could mean."

Throughout his life, Don Bosco tried to find the meaning of the dream, what it was, what the message was, what he should do... His educational pedagogy resulted from his search to live and communicate his dream. Deeply faithful to God and to his vocation and mission, Don Bosco created a true communication ecosystem for collaborating in the education of young people.

❖ **Gift of the Holy Spirit, the Salesian charism inspires,** nourishes and guides the mission to youth in every time and culture. Communication collaborates with the Salesian mission, placing itself at the service of the educational community and young people, involved in evangelisation and education according to the project of integral development of young people.

⁴ John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory*, Salesiana Publishers, New Rochelle, New York, 2010, p. 34.

- ❖ **Don Bosco was a communicator with the heart and gaze of the Good Shepherd.** While Turin was going through a great social, cultural and religious transformation, Don Bosco developed a very original approach to communication through the pedagogy of Christ the Good Shepherd: he approached, conversed with, accompanied and loved poor youngsters, workers and migrants who come from rural areas to work in the new factories in this industrial city.

Don Bosco, who was very attentive to the reality of the poor young people of Turin, sought a place to welcome and educate them, a setting that would allow them to have a place to sleep, eat, play, pray, sing and learn a trade. Convinced of the great importance that can be exercised by an educational and communicative habitat, he fought with great sacrifice and suffering to create an environment in Valdocco where his young people could live, and he could give them confidence and educate them.

- ❖ **Faithful to our founder, to the Salesian charism and to young people, we Salesians, like Don Bosco, look at today's young people from the point of view of the Gospel.** Together with the educative community and the laity, we try to respond in a Salesian way, through educational communication, to the great challenges that young people face today in digital culture, in particular individualism, violence, injustice and indifference towards migrants. But also to other issues that disfigure the role of the human person, such as the destruction of nature, war and ethical relativism.

- ❖ **With the heart of the Good Shepherd and the apostolic passion of Don Bosco,** we faithfully communicate the Salesian educational project, appreciating the active role of young people, their gifts and their initiatives, the opportunities that digital culture can offer on a personal level, whether professional or Christian, so that by walking together with them in different cultures, we can communicate Jesus Christ and the joy of the gospel.

2

COMMUNICATION AS A HUMAN AND CULTURAL PHENOMENON

GUIDELINES FOR FURTHER STUDY AND ACTION

“Since this social life is not something added on to man, through his dealings with others, through reciprocal duties, and through fraternal dialogue he develops all his gifts and is able to rise to his destiny. Among those social ties which man needs for his development some, like the family and political community, relate with greater immediacy to his innermost nature; others originate rather from his free decision.” (Gaudium et Spes, no. 25).

Communication is a complex human phenomenon, an essential and constitutive component of the person and an ever-developing cultural factor.

Here the new communicative approach that people, and in particular young people manifest when faced with the digital culture and world, is analysed with its various psychological, sociological and relational implications.

In the interactions between man and machine, we immerse ourselves in a large and articulated real and global universe, with its own rules and timelines and filled with new challenges.

For this reason, communication experts talk about the infosphere and the psychosphere: we are all physically, psychologically and socially involved in this immense and complex virtual universe.

In digital communication speed, immediacy, and interactivity become the main factors and also shape our emotional dynamics, while still leaving essential room for personal responsibility and educational work.

❖ **Communication is an essential and constitutive component of the human person. Communicating is a gift and a personal and social responsibility.** Etymologically, the word “communication” has *com* as its root (to share; from the Latin *communis*, common). In its origin it translates into communion, human relationships, the ability to interact and create bonds with people.

Of course, the word communication recalls the human need to be *communitas* and to share, to establish processes through which people share ideas, feelings and information.

❖ **The human person, the individual, is the main protagonist of communication,** which develops their skills and abilities such as language, emotional and social relationships, the interpretation of codes and symbols, dialogue with themselves and with others, the ability to create communication processes and procedures, the ability to develop means and techniques to record and disseminate their knowledge and experiences.⁵

Through communication in its various aspects, human beings build their networks of relationships, develop languages to express their vision of life, their beliefs and their values, participate in social, political, cultural and religious initiatives.

❖ **From an anthropological point of view,** human communication has evolved in different cultures through expressions such as language, customs, arts, cuisine and religious ceremonies. Each people elaborates, celebrates and shares the tradition of its values, its vision of the world and its religiosity. Through various rituals, communication fosters the participation of the individual within the community.

❖ **Human communication is complex and is characterised by the relational dimension,** by the sharing of content, messages, emotional expressions and meanings, by intentionality and symbolism.

Each person develops the gifts and skills to communicate through family and education – gifts and skills such as language and cultural codes, dialogue, listening, involvement with people and life situations.

❖ **Communication is multidisciplinary and cuts across all sciences such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics and the various**

⁵ Luciano Paccagnella, *Sociologia della comunicazione*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2004, pagg. 23-25.

technological and organisational sciences. In practice, all societies and cultures need communication, both at an interpersonal, organisational and functional level.

- ❖ **Media such as radio, newspapers, TV, magazines and, more recently, digital communication,** satellites, computer networks and artificial intelligence, form a large and complex network of human relationships with different social, political and economic aspects.

Communication is born, evolves and spreads within societies through precise legal norms and different political organisations that change according to personal, governmental or private group interests. Due to the numerous political and economic affairs, communication can become a site of conflict and tension, often a battleground for ideologies serving groups, commercial interests, battles for control of individuals and societies.⁶

- ❖ **With the development of organisational culture,** consisting of values, symbols, traditions, practices and behaviours, institutional communication lends itself to developing internal and external processes through a network of human relationships. Their application is characterised by a set of tools and procedures for the management of people, organisations and companies. In this way, an organisational culture seeks to offer quality of relationships, the flow of actions, professionalism and the results of institutional communication in its different areas.

A – HUMAN AND TECHNOLOGICAL DYNAMICS IN THE DIGITAL WORLD

- ❖ **The phenomenon known as digitisation began with the growth of digital communication.** This is the process of transforming an image or analog signal into a digital code. Digitisation also includes the conversion into digital code of audio signals and moving images (video), originally created in other formats.

A second concept linked to digitisation is digital transformation, which is a broad process in which technological resources take on a new and important role. This generates a set of technical management processes that, starting from digitisation, expands to the way of doing management

⁶ Commissione Internazionale di Studio sui problemi della comunicazione nel mondo, *Comunicazione e società oggi e domani*, Torino, 1982, pp. 38-39. Note, however, that UNESCO established the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems with its McBride Commission.

within an organisation and includes contact with the customer, the way of carrying out marketing, technological innovation, the market... The purpose is always to expand the market, guarantee quality in the execution of organisational processes and procedures, the development and improvement of management.

❖ **Digital technology brings the individual into a wide and complex universe of human, social and cultural communication. This is a new aspect, with great possibilities and challenges.** In truth, communication experts talk about the infosphere and the psychosphere: we are all physically, psychologically and socially involved within this immense and complex virtual universe.⁷

❖ **The infosphere is a universe made up of the totality of objects and information which interact dynamically. In this environment it is like being completely immersed in a real aquarium.** While before you knew your country, your city and your neighbours, now with a simple mobile phone connected to the Internet you can travel the world. There you are involved on a cognitive and emotional level in a vast universe of images and sounds that allow interactivity, participation and involvement with people and objects, free from time and space.

The infosphere is a complex term. Basically, it is the environment in which the real and virtual worlds are integrated, where time and space intertwine and merge, so that both online and offline interact with each other. In this scenario, the field of automation and artificial intelligences, virtual reality, and augmented reality is also expanding.

The infosphere opens a new frontier of large investments after smartphones, creating the possibility of immersing oneself in a world with different dimensions – temporal, psychological, social – and expanding the experience of the reality of relationships.

❖ **Virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), the infosphere** involve the five senses, our abilities: visual, sound, sensory and interaction with devices (for example virtual tools such as 3D glasses). It is through the senses that we enter a reality that is present-absent to us, which allows us to immerse ourselves in different interactive realities (made of people and devices).

❖ **When an individual enters the Web and starts interacting, both in a video conference and by participating in a game,** there is a human

⁷ David J. Chalmers, *Reality +: Virtual Worlds and the Problems of Philosophy*, W. W. Norton (US) and Allen Lane (UK) 2022.

interaction with the machine that allows them to access the virtual world, more commonly known as “virtual human mediation”. This involves the use of our senses and perceptions, our imagination and our emotions. Through mediation (me and the machine), the individual has access to a real universe that is coded (digitised) and lived at a distance. Digital immersion has a direct impact on life and social and cultural relationships. The term used to understand this ecosystem in which communication takes place is “mediatisation”, which indicates the general effects of the media on social, economic and political organisation.

In this context a new reality is emerging: the Metaverse. This is a term created by the fiction writer Neal Stephenson in 1992, simply to say that there is a virtual world that can be inhabited by avatars in 3D format. We can say that the Metaverse is a universe of various dimensions in a parallel universe.

In the complexity of communication presented to us by the infosphere and the Metaverse, we gradually see the influence of cybernetics, biogenetics, biopolitics and artificial intelligence, which thus form a true kaleidoscope of the communicative environment, with their diversity and changes.

Mediatisation involves the microcodes and the language of communication, the symbols, the various interests that are elaborated and communicated sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly (in a subliminal way), making communication a complex, branched and amplified phenomenon which touches on the social identity of each individual.⁸

In this universe of the infosphere the individual has a psychophysical and social experience: the psychosphere.

- ❖ **The psychosphere is the emotional and cognitive state that an individual experiences when the mind is altered;** non-material elements of information influence human thoughts and feelings without the person being aware of reality.

In this way, the individual enters what is called the collective brain (cyberspace), which is a form of processing signs (symbols, languages, sounds) and stimuli.

⁸ Censis, *XVI Rapporto sulla comunicazione, I media e la costruzione dell'identità*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 2020.

- ❖ **In the digital world, you learn to live with a new logic that is based very much on stimuli, on neurological reactions, and on the brain's response mechanisms to these stimuli.** In this regard, it can be said that all the images, sounds, words and interactivity that we experience in a social network have effects on our brain, directly impacting our perceptions, our imagination, our behaviours and consequently our choices, both consciously and unconsciously.

Digital logic, which is based on technique and automatism, follows the stimuli that neuroscience has developed, giving very little importance to the question of consciousness.

An example of how this logic works is the speed offered by digital technology, the great ability to generate and share information and to facilitate immediacy and interactivity. This logic therefore changes the way of learning, generating a certain superficiality in thinking, and difficulty in reflecting in a systematic, integrated, and coherent manner.

- ❖ **Digital Communication allows speed, immediacy and interactivity. It is important to note that, in itself, the digital universe is based on digital logic and Artificial Intelligence is based on algorithms.**

In digital communication, our sensations and perceptions obviously enter a new dynamic and begin to respond to this brain acceleration with greater activation of the nervous system as a result of the involvement of the five senses. Images, sounds, words and the interactivity we experience in a social network have effects on our cognitive and affective dynamics.

The acceleration of the brain, the intensity of emotions, the exposure of our emotional life within social networks, place us in a universe where this new mental mechanism requires many stimuli, many reactions and speeds.

The digital world and digital logic are realities that are part of human life and its development. We are part of the digital world and we are aware of the benefits this offers to humanity and human progress. We need to understand how human interaction with this digital world works. This is precisely why an education in ethics that helps us to live in a healthy and creative way is essential.

- ❖ **As can be seen, the digital world becomes very complex when we integrate it into human, interpersonal, community and institutional communication.** In addition, there are many ways of understanding the digital phenomenon and the socio-cultural and economic context of humanity.

The way we interpret the digital world presents us with practical situations that have and will have consequences for the present and the future. In this encounter between the human individual, technology and the immersive environment, aspects of the individual's life and society emerge in the public sphere, making the infosphere a reality where the great human, ethical, economic, ecological, political, cultural and religious issues are reflected.

- ❖ **It is in the relationship between individuals, interaction processes, and immersion in the infosphere that the phenomenon of digital communication** becomes more complex, involving political, economic, and social processes in which people's freedom and interests come into play.

The legal aspects that regulate human behaviours, the rights and duties of the individual, are intertwined in this way in the great and complex phenomenon of human communication in the digital world.⁹ As the Church's document "*Towards Full Presence*" states: "Social media is only one branch of the much broader and more complex phenomenon of digitization, which is the process of transferring many tasks and dimensions of human life to digital platforms. Digital technologies can increase our efficiency, boost our economy, and help us solve previously insurmountable problems. The digital revolution has extended our access to information and our ability to connect with each other beyond the limits of physical space."¹⁰

- ❖ **The way in which everyone lives in the digital realm is also a matter of personal responsibility.** It is important to note, however, that the dialogue between digital dynamics and the human person is broader, and that cognitive and emotional aspects involved in the digital experience must also be considered, because those who enter the digital universe are free individuals who can choose their interests by deciding consciously. This means that the person who lives in the digital world and interacts in the infosphere is able to process information, give meaning to the various community processes, express their freedom and create meaningful human relationships.

⁹ Paolo Dal Ben, *Nuovi media e identità digitale*, Pazzini, Rimini, 2022.

¹⁰ Dicastery for Communication, "*Towards a Full Presence – Pastoral reflection on involvement with social media*", Vatican City, 2023, no. 7.

3

COMMUNICATING WITH DISCERNMENT AND SYNODALITY

GUIDELINES FOR FURTHER STUDY AND ACTION

“Exercising discernment is at the heart of synodal processes and events. (...) It is a matter of the Church, by means of the theological interpretation of the signs of the times under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, travelling the path that is to be followed in service of God’s plan brought to eschatological fulfilment in Christ, which also has to be fulfilled in every kairós throughout history. Communal discernment allows us to discover God’s call in a particular historical situation” (Synodality in the life and mission of the Church, no. 113).

This chapter focuses on the topics of synodality and discernment in communication, the quest for communication and fraternal communion, and participation and shared responsibility in serving both the individual and society.

The starting point for our communication with the world of young people is our communication with God and his love for us. True communication puts interpersonal and community relationships at the centre, values a sense of the other, the ability to live moments of generosity, sharing and celebration.

In the Salesian context, the communicator operates with a planning mentality and a sense of community as part of evangelical discernment. Synodality opens up a communications perspective as service and collaboration in the evangelising mission of the Church and the Congregation, all of which is expressed in different ways through cultural diversity.

- ❖ **Communication is at the service of the fulfilment of the human person**, their happiness, their mission to live fraternity, and of the dignified and responsible building up of institutions and society in all cultures and social contexts. Communication creates bridges between people, fosters the expression of the values and desires of individuals and the community, opens channels for the manifestation of cultural riches, values and actions carried out by people and communities. Wishing to exemplify, through its fundamentally humanistic and relational foundation, communication constructs dialogue, is open to listening, collaborates in discernment, is open to the new and to synodality.
- ❖ **A gospel-inspired interpretation of the youth situation, carried out with community discernment and a strong sense of ecclesial synodality**, is a fundamental starting point to respond to the educational and pastoral needs of today's youth.
The reality that young people are involved in digital culture requires a careful and wise educational approach that allows us to carry out the Salesian mission beginning with an awareness that communication serves our Salesian pastoral ministry, which is both evangelising and educational.
- ❖ **A gospel-based discernment ensures that the Salesian communicator sees the communicative action as a process**, as dialogue, listening, and as the accomplishment of the Salesian mission through a broad perspective, planning mentality and a sense of community.
- ❖ **Synodality opens up a perspective of communication as service and collaboration in the Church's and Congregation's evangelising mission**, strengthening ecclesial sense, shared responsibility in the mission carried out in a fraternal spirit, the ability to experience cultural diversity, to think in an original way, and to collaborate with the entire mission. "Synodality indicates the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* of the Church, the People of God, which reveals and gives substance to her being as communion when all her members journey together, gather in assembly and take an active part in her evangelising mission."¹¹
- ❖ **Discernment and synodality for us stem from our communication with God and his love for us**. Communicating is a simple and fundamental reality: it is the relationship between man and God, between people or

¹¹ International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the life and mission of the Church*, Vatican City, 2018, no. 6.

groups of people. True communication places interpersonal and community relationships at the centre, values the sense of the other, the ability to live moments of generosity, sharing and celebration. In the renewal of recent years, communication has been recognised as one of the human factors acquiring increased importance for the life of a religious community. The deeply felt need to enhance fraternal life in community is accompanied by a corresponding need for communication which is both fuller and more intense. In order to become brothers and sisters, it is necessary to know one another. To do this, it is rather important to communicate more extensively and more deeply."¹² Similarly, since communication finds its source in God who loves, who amicably brings the human person closer, this necessarily leads to an experience of community and fraternity.

- ❖ **Communication is a source of fraternity and synodality in the community.** Without it there can be no unity of hearts and projects, since in this way the community would be reduced to a group of people who live only physically in common and who are instead spiritually distant. Fraternity, as the Lord taught the disciples, finds its natural habitat in the community, understood not as a narrow circle, but as a *schola amoris* that teaches how to live among brothers and sisters. "Today, when the networks and means of human communication have made unprecedented advances, we sense the challenge of finding and sharing a 'mystique' of living together, of mingling and encounter, of embracing and supporting one another, of stepping into this flood tide which, while chaotic, can become a genuine experience of fraternity, a caravan of solidarity, a sacred pilgrimage."¹³ Interpersonal relationships in community primarily consist of fraternal communion, taking care of one another, with the awareness that fraternity is achieved through communication and building together in sharing God's plan.

¹² Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Fraternal Life in Community*, "Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor", Vatican City, 1994, no. 29.

¹³ Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Vatican City, 2013, no. 87.

4

THE FRIENDLY COMMUNICATION THAT ARISES FROM GOD'S LOVE FOR US

GUIDELINES FOR FURTHER STUDY AND ACTION

"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph 1:7-10).

After establishing the human foundations of communication, particularly in the youth world, we go in search of its theological underpinnings, starting from the principle that God seeks the human person driven by the desire to communicate, approaches, reveals himself in love and truth, creates interaction, and shows humanity his plan of love and redemption. In this communicative process, the Word of God becomes a source of salvation because for God, revealing himself personally coincides with saving humankind.

Moreover, the Word of God, which reveals itself in a human way, which "becomes flesh" (Jn 1:14), is manifested in all created things, in the beauty of creation and in all human works that partake in this gift.

Love and human affection in their entirety, as well as the vocational dimension of each person, the call to give oneself, are also illuminated by the Word of the God who loves us.

Don Bosco's educational and spiritual vision is entirely based on this perspective and is known as pastoral charity.

- ❖ **God communicates with us lovingly: this is the founding principle of communication.** God reveals himself by speaking as a friend. This understanding implies a change of mindset in conceiving how God reveals and thus communicates with us. In this friendly revelation of God, communication is enlightened and guided by a broad, humanistic, spiritual and pastoral vision, with ethical sentiments that are awakened, precisely, with love.
- ❖ **The initiative to communicate with his sons and daughters always originates first and foremost from God.** Humankind would not be able to communicate with God if there were no revelation on his part. It is he who approaches humanity amicably to achieve its salvation. The pedagogy of God's initiative to come close to his children to reveal himself as God the Creator manifests his presence in creatures. The human being is the work of the Creator and is therefore loved and sought after.
- ❖ **It is through his initiative to seek the human person that God's communication originates.** God establishes a true pedagogy of communication: he approaches as a friend, speaks, reveals himself and tries to find a way to listen, hear the person's reaction, establish a dialogue. It is from this loving initiative that relationship, dialogue and interaction are born.
 In God's communicative pedagogy, he speaks first, the person listens, reflects, reacts so that an interaction is created.¹⁴ The divine word is expressed in human words in this process. It unfolds as a dialogue and gives rise to faith: it establishes interpersonal relationships and gradually comes to fruition in a intertwining of flesh and language, through facts and words, events and interpretations intimately linked to each other, which occur together and complement each other. Therefore, the trait that best defines the biblical God is his willingness to dialogue, his ability to always manifest himself through the word (Heb 1:1-2).
- ❖ **God desires to communicate with humanity in truth.** The encounter between the human person and the mystery requires a journey. God loves in truth and this truth must emerge in the person's relationship with God. This is why communication is not self-serving. It collaborates so that the person can truly encounter God.

¹⁴ Juan José Bartolomé Lafuente, *Dios y su pueblo necesitan mediadores*, Editorial CCS, Madrid, 2023.

The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council says in the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*: “In His goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal himself and [not only something of himself but himself] to make known to us the hidden purpose of his will (*Eph* 1:9), by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature” (cf. *Eph* 2:18; *2 Pt* 1:4).¹⁵

❖ **In God’s communication with the human person, his word creates reality.** The power of the Word in the beginning creates things. The biblical God does not express himself only by declaring his existence to us. He spoke in favour of the real by giving it existence.

In the Bible, the relationship between God the Creator and created reality is understood as a divine pronouncement: the world is his repeated word (cf. *Gen* 1:3-25); man was born from a divine conversation. Thought of in the intimacy of God and willed by him, he came from nothing, knowing himself in the image of the God who speaks; people are the fulfilment of a word given, a promise kept (cf. *Gen* 12:2). God’s speaking is synonymous with his doing: what God names, he declares to exist; in naming it, he calls it into being, saving it from silence and nothingness. Everything that has life is the word of the living God (cf. *Rom* 4:17).

❖ **Humankind is the result of a divine conversation.** Believers know that they have been called to life by God. Born of a divine dialogue, humankind is destined to dialogue with God: in the midst of all creation we are, therefore, the very image of God.

Believers, simply by living, know that they are called by God and that they are responsible before him: they are alive because God willed it and in order to live as God wills; they know that they are alive because they have been invoked by God; they know that they will live if they remain faithful to their origin and maintain communication with their God.

❖ **The believer, born of the Word, is at his service.** Humankind must take responsibility for the very fact that they exist. As the only living being that reflects the dialogical nature of God (cf. *Gen* 1:26), the believer will have to answer for what God has created, be responsible for procreation or for a brother or a sister (cf. *Gen* 1:27 -30; *Pss* 8: 6-9; *Sir* 17: 1-10).

¹⁵ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, Vatican City, 1965, no. 2.

- ❖ **The salvation of the human being is a dialogical journey.** “The novelty of biblical revelation consists in the fact that God becomes known through the dialogue which he desires to have with us. (...) God was never without his *Logos*.”¹⁶

For God, personally revealing himself coincides with saving humankind. His Word is expressed throughout the entire history of salvation; it is salvation accomplished: it is the one who lives in dialogue, open to the Other and responsible towards others who is saved.

- ❖ **“God spoke his eternal Word humanly; his Word “became flesh”** (*Jn* 1:14). This is the good news.”¹⁷ Without the Spirit there would have been neither the incarnation of the Word nor the Word of God recorded in Holy Scripture. “We cannot come to an understanding of Scripture without the assistance of the Holy Spirit who inspired it.”¹⁸ “For this reason it is necessary to refer to revelation to seek and to know the Trinitarian foundations of communication. The God of the Christian faith has revealed himself as a Trinitarian God in whom unity and plurality coincide, one God and three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”¹⁹

- ❖ **Beauty is a constant aspect in the texts of Holy Scripture.** It manifests itself in all created things, reaching its apex in divine wisdom, supreme beauty and supreme wisdom.

In the Hebrew and Greek Bibles we find a lexicon of “beauty”. The Hebrew terms *Japheh* and *Tov* can be translated as “splendid”, “decorous or respectable”, “successful”, “pleasant”, “fitting”. In Greek the terms are *kalòs* and *agathòs*: “beautiful” and “good”, especially in the sense of “healthy”, “strong”, “excellent”, “well-composed”, “suitable”.

The biblical text offers us a vision of the beauty that manifests itself in the splendour of creation. Some Psalms, in particular, are literary works of profound and rich communicative expression, artistic hymns that can be sung as a form of prayer, meditation and liturgy.

Beauty is also a community and social experience: taking care of others and nature, carrying out social, religious and civic activities, engaging in

¹⁶ Benedict XVI, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, Vatican City, 2010, no. 6.

¹⁷ Ibidem, no. 1.

¹⁸ Ibidem, no. 16.

¹⁹ Felicísimo Martínez Díez, *Teología de la Comunicación*, BAC, Madrid, 1994, pp. 1254-1270.

actions that serve society through work, dedicating oneself to human development and progress.

❖ **The Word of God illuminates human love and affection.**

Communication is essentially the expression of the human being in his or her entirety. Human individuals communicate based on their emotional experience, their sensitivity, their empathy with others and for others.

In the *Song of Songs* we find a text rich in expressions of love and affection that one individual experiences, nurtures, and communicates for the other individual. In the symbolism of this Book on the love between two people, we find a prototype of how we can live our love for God: because God loves us, we love him. And each person builds this love story with God. This text also enlightens us on how to live the experience of love in God towards the other. The greatness of God's love illuminates and shows the vocational dimension of each person, called to gift of self, dedication and commitment to build love.

5

JESUS CHRIST COMMUNICATES AMICABLY IN THE FATHER'S NAME

GUIDELINES FOR FURTHER STUDY AND ACTION

“While He was on earth Christ revealed Himself as the Perfect Communicator. Through His ‘incarnation’, He utterly identified Himself with those who were to receive His communication and He gave His message not only in words but in the whole manner of His life. He spoke from within, that is to say, from out of the press of His people. He preached the Divine message without fear or compromise. He adjusted to His people’s way of talking and to their patterns of thought” (Communio et Progressio, n. 11).

The Christological perspective that is based on Jesus Christ communicating the Father, as the Good Shepherd, gives life to a friendly pedagogy of self-communication: he listens, welcomes, loves, cares, educates and saves.

God, through the incarnation of his Son Jesus Christ, establishes a decisive and powerful communication. It is the Word of God that fulfils the Saviour’s promise and accomplishes the salvation of humanity, because Jesus Christ is the infinite expression of a God who eternally loves the human person. Faithful to the Father’s word, Jesus lives and communicates his plan for all his children. This truth is passed on to the disciples and inspires and guides the Church and all believers.

- ❖ **The Father reveals himself through Jesus in a friendly way.** Jesus, as the Son of God, communicates starting from his divine sonship. His communication takes place entirely in the name of God. It can be said that Jesus communicates out of necessity, that is, to make known the Father's plan of salvation for all humanity. "Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!'" (Mk 9:7).
- ❖ **The Word of God is his Son, Jesus Christ.** Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, is truly the Word of God who has become consubstantial with us. Those who meet him within themselves hear God, and in listening to God, they encounter his Son (cf. Mk 1:11, 9:7). And to facilitate this encounter, God "abbreviated" his Word: "the eternal Word became small – small enough to fit into a manger. He became a child, so that the Word could be grasped by us."²⁰ His unique story is the definitive word that God has addressed to humanity.
- ❖ **In Jesus Christ the Word becomes flesh and communicates with us.** The Gospel of John opens with the great affirmation of God's communication: "In the beginning was the Word" (Jn 1:1). In Jesus Christ, the Word of God became flesh. "And the Word became flesh and lived among us" (Jn 1:14). Pope John Paul II said that "Through the Spirit, he prepared his coming as Saviour, secretly directing hearts to nurture expectation in hope."²¹
- ❖ **Theologically, the Word of God has the power to act, to create bonds, to transform and build new realities.** God, through the incarnation of his Son Jesus Christ, establishes a decisive and powerful communication. It is the Word of God that fulfils the Saviour's promise and accomplishes the salvation of humankind. In Revelation, the Word is intensely fertile in love because Jesus Christ is the infinite expression of a God who eternally loves the human being.
Therefore, it is a word that generates life and builds a deep covenant between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.
- ❖ **Without the Spirit there would be no incarnation of the Word, nor would there be understanding.** The Word became flesh, having been conceived by Mary "through the Holy Spirit" (cf. Mt 1:18, 20; Lk 1:35). It

²⁰ Benedict XVI, Homily at the Mass on the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord, 24 December 2006.

²¹ John Paul II, General Audience, 3 December 1997.

is the same Spirit who spoke through the prophets who will remind the disciples of what Jesus had said to them (Jn 16:7), who came down upon the apostles and sent them into the world to preach the Gospel, and under whose inspiration the sacred authors wrote the message of salvation.

“Without the efficacious working of the ‘Spirit of Truth’ (Jn 14:16), the words of the Lord cannot be understood. Just as the Word of God comes to us in the body of Christ, in his Eucharistic body and in the body of the Scriptures, through the working of the Holy Spirit, so too it can only be truly received and understood through that same Spirit.”²²

❖ **Jesus learns from the Father that communicating is loving and caring.**

Mark the Evangelist states that “In those days Jesus came from Nazareth... and was baptised by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased’” (Mk 1:9-11). Through his word, God confirms Jesus as his true Son and at the same time expresses his unconditional love.

❖ **Jesus, in his deep relationship with the Father, learns from him to communicate:**

“As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete” (Jn 15:9-11).

Throughout his life Jesus lives in deep communicative intimacy with the Father, which he passes on to human beings. “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you” (Jn 15:9). Jesus is the word made flesh, in him the word becomes flesh, feeling, emotion, language, love and service to the mission.

As communicator of the Father, Jesus’ word and what he teaches is consistent with the truth and faithful to the mission he receives from the Father. He therefore communicates from his experience and testifies to his intimate communion with the Father.

❖ **Jesus’ communicative pedagogy is that of the Good Shepherd who approaches, loves and gives his life for his sheep.** Jesus is the model

²² Benedict XVI, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, Vatican City, 2010, no. 15.

of the communicator: he listens, converses, asks questions, interacts empathetically and walks together with them, placing individuals and their inner reality at the centre.

Jesus' call to his disciples is also fulfilled through the power of the word: "As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake – for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you fish for people'" (Mk 1:16-17). Jesus teaches his disciples to communicate like him and like the Father. In this regard, *Dei Verbum* recalls that Jesus orders his disciples to preach the Gospel. This communicative mission has its root in God's desire to communicate and in his way of communicating amicably. "In His gracious goodness, God has seen to it that what He had revealed for the salvation of all nations would abide perpetually in its full integrity and be handed on to all generations. Therefore Christ the Lord in whom the full revelation of the supreme God is brought to completion, commissioned the Apostles to preach to all men that Gospel which is the source of all saving truth and moral teaching, and to impart to them heavenly gifts."²³

Faithful to the Father's word, Jesus lives and communicates his plan for all his children. This truth is passed on to the disciples and inspires and guides the Church and all believers. "This commission was faithfully fulfilled by the Apostles who, by their oral preaching, by example, and by observances handed on what they had received from the lips of Christ, from living with Him, and from what He did, or what they had learned through the prompting of the Holy Spirit. The commission was fulfilled, too, by those Apostles and apostolic men who under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit committed the message of salvation to writing."²⁴

²³ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, Vatican City, 1965, no. 7.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

6

GOD CONTINUES TO COMMUNICATE WITH HUMANITY THROUGH THE CHURCH

GUIDELINES FOR FURTHER STUDY AND ACTION

“God continues to communicate with humanity through the Church, the bearer and custodian of his revelation, to whose living teaching office alone he has entrusted the task of authentically interpreting his word. Moreover, the Church herself is a *communio*, a communion of persons and eucharistic communities arising from and mirroring the communion of the Trinity; Communication therefore is of the essence of the Church” (The Church and the Internet, no. 3).

Following our theological and Christological analysis, a more detailed ecclesiological study presents the Church as a sign of God in the world, a teacher of humanity, and an educator of the people of God on their journey towards redemption.

The Church, in fact, is born from listening to the Word and exists to evangelise, that is, to preach and teach the Gospel throughout the world, which means recounting the Easter experience.

The Church, messenger of the Gospel and teacher of humanity, places human beings and their community at the centre of her mission. She is enlightened by the Holy Spirit in her work, who guided the apostles and Mary on the journey of proclaiming the Gospel.

She also uses the media to evangelise and accompanies humanity in its vocation and mission in the history of human communication.

- ❖ **The Church is born from listening to God.** She listens to the Word in order to proclaim it: only someone who first hears the Word can then become its announcer. Indeed, Christians should not teach their own wisdom, but the wisdom of God, which often appears as a scandal in the eyes of the world (cf. *1 Cor* 1:23).
- ❖ **The Church exists to evangelise, that is, to preach and teach.** According to Luke's testimony, the Christian community was born to preach the Paschal experience throughout the world (*Acts* 1:6-8; cf. *Mt* 28:16 -20) and presented herself to the world by preaching the resurrection (*Acts* 2:14 -36): the new people of God are dedicated to the communication of the Gospel. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the preaching of the common faith was also at the origin of the process of generating Scripture. The ecclesial tradition has given life to the written word: the very existence of Scripture is the documentary proof of the pre-existence of preaching. God spoke then and still speaks today through the experience of his witnesses, who celebrate their faith in worship and who have the task of making it public.
- ❖ **The Church, created by the Word, lives to listen to it.** The biblical God, the God who speaks as a friend, saves by bringing people together: he makes his listeners his people. God has no other way to save than to gather together those who listen to him. The value of community life, as a way of living God's salvation, depends on the believer's ability to listen and not so much on God's will to communicate.
- ❖ **The Church, messenger of the Gospel and teacher of humanity, places human beings and their community at the centre of her mission.** For this reason she is an authoritative communicator of God's plan. The Church communicates because being a sign of the mystery of God in life and human history is its mission and vocation in the world. This, in turn, allows us to affirm what *Lumen Gentium* teaches: "The Son, therefore, came, sent by the Father. It was in Him, before the foundation of the world, that the Father chose us and predestined us to become adopted sons, for in Him it pleased the Father to re-establish all things. (cf. *Eph* 1:4-5,10). To carry out the will of the Father, Christ inaugurated the Kingdom of heaven on earth and revealed to us the mystery of that kingdom. By His obedience He brought about redemption. The Church,

or, in other words, the kingdom of Christ now present in mystery, grows visibly through the power of God in the world."²⁵

- ❖ **The Church communicates, enlightened by the Holy Spirit**, who guided the apostles and Mary on the journey of proclaiming the Gospel. The same Spirit guides the Church in all times and places to be the community born from Pentecost where the Trinitarian communication is the example for every kind of communication. Having completed the work that the Father had entrusted to the Son on earth (*Jn 17:4*), on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was sent to continually sanctify the Church, so that believers could thus, through Christ, have access to the Father in one Spirit (*Eph 2:18*). This is the Spirit who gives life, the source of gushing water leading to eternal life (*Jn 4:14; 7:38 -39*); through him the Father restores life to human beings, dead because sin, until one day He will raise their mortal bodies in Christ (*Rom 8:10 -11*).
- ❖ **The gospel is communicated by those who have accepted it**. The content of the Christian gospel is therefore the experience that the apostle himself has of Christ: "What I deal out to you is not mine own. What you eat, I eat; what you live upon, I live upon. We have in heaven a common store-house; for from thence comes the Word of God."²⁶ Evangelise those who are evangelised. This law of apostolic preaching is prominently demonstrated by the apostle Paul.
- ❖ **"As the Church understands it, the history of human communication** is something like a long journey, bringing humanity 'from the pride-driven project of Babel and the collapse into confusion and mutual incomprehension to which it gave rise (cf. *Gen 11:1-9*), to Pentecost and the gift of tongues: a restoration of communication, centred on Jesus, through the action of the Holy Spirit.' In the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, 'communication among men found its highest ideal and supreme example in God who had become man and brother.'²⁷

²⁵ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, Vatican City, 1964, no. 3.

²⁶ Augustine, Sermon XLV, no. 1.

²⁷ Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *The Church and the Internet*, Vatican City, 2002, no. 2.

7

MARY, EXAMPLE OF THE COMMUNICATOR

GUIDELINES FOR FURTHER STUDY AND ACTION

*“Predestined from eternity by the decree of divine providence which determined the incarnation of the Word to be the Mother of God, the Blessed Virgin was on this earth the virgin Mother of the Redeemer, and above all others and in a singular way the generous associate and humble handmaid of the Lord. She conceived, brought forth and nourished Christ. She presented Him to the Father in the temple, and was united with Him by compassion as He died on the Cross. In this singular way she cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the work of the Saviour in giving back supernatural life to souls. Wherefore she is our mother in the order of grace.”
(Lumen Gentium, no. 61).*

The Virgin Mary, the Mother of Jesus and the Church, is a model of communication. She places herself at the service of her Son, accompanying him throughout his life, until his death and resurrection.

In Cana, in Galilee, Mary is the communicator of human relationships.

At the foot of the cross she is the communicator of faith in God’s plan for each of us.

In the Upper Room, after the resurrection, we see her silently present among the disciples of Jesus.

- ❖ **The Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus and of the Church, is a model of communication.** Mary is the communicator of God's grace, since her unconditional and loving "yes" to the One who chose her as his chosen one.

Mary announces to Elizabeth that she has been chosen to be the mother of Jesus, the Saviour (*Lk 1:39-56*). The interpersonal relationship between them is an encounter between two women deeply involved in God's love. An exchange between sisters, a communication of attention and care that one has for the other.

- ❖ **In Cana, in Galilee, Mary is the communicator of human relationships,** empathy, sensitivity and openness. She interprets the situation with faith, going out of herself and projecting herself towards others: "When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.'" (*Jn 2:3*). She values the group, knowing how to live in community, partaking in its rites and joining in the joy of the guests. Her communication with Jesus and with the guests at the feast is characterised by a loving, active, firm and creative authority: "His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you'" (*Jn 2:5*).

Mary takes the initiative, takes the first step, talks things over, questions, listens and acts to find a solution to the lack of wine. Mary, an exemplary communicator, shows a specific sensitivity for others and an immediate active attitude rooted in the rational order of things.

- ❖ **At the foot of the cross (*Jn 19:25 -27*), she is the communicator of faith in God's plan for each of us.** Faithful to the love that gives of itself beyond all human logic, she teaches us to communicate God's redemption in history and to share the hope that will never end, because it draws its source of light from the risen Christ.

In the Upper Room Mary is silently present among the disciples of Jesus. In the Acts of the Apostles (1:14), Luke mentions the humble presence of Mary during the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. She is a woman of communion, of integration into the community; she inserts herself among the disciples as a woman and as the Mother of Jesus. Mary interacts, listens, prays, accompanies, shares in the community that is being born. Despite being the Mother of Jesus, she does not place herself above the disciples. She communicates through her friendly and humble presence, with her profound sense of community.

8

ST FRANCIS DE SALES: ALL FOR LOVE

GUIDELINES FOR FURTHER STUDY AND ACTION

“After all, one of his most famous statements, ‘heart speaks to heart’, inspired generations of faithful (...). It shows that for him communication should never be reduced to something artificial, to a marketing strategy, as we might say nowadays, but is rather a reflection of the soul, the visible surface of a nucleus of love that is invisible to the eye.” (Message of the Holy Father Pope Francis for the 57th World Day of Social Communications).

The figure of Saint Francis de Sales, chosen by Don Bosco as an example of a communicator, teaches that communicating is a matter of the heart. In his statement “All is love, and in love, for love, and of love, in the holy Church”, we understand his revolution in the way of communicating, and how communication becomes fruitful when it allows the communion and exchange of one’s experiences in a journey of accompaniment and collaboration with God’s plan.

With this perspective rooted in the experience of the gift and gratuitousness of God’s love, Francis de Sales opened an original path of spirituality, communicative skill and pastoral action.

❖ **“All is love, and in love, for love, and of love, in the holy Church.”**²⁸ It is with this expression that St Francis de Sales, unique in his time, initiated a true revolution in the way of communicating. The word *communication* is the key to the theology and spirituality of the saint, who has made an inner pilgrimage in the wise and loving search for God.²⁹

❖ **Communication, as a key to interpreting the life and doctrine of Saint Francis de Sales**, refers to a richness and multiplicity of aspects that find their foundation in the theology of the Trinitarian mystery, in which the human being by grace and vocation is called to participate. Francis de Sales embodies a model of communication that is inspired by the Gospel both in content and in its dynamics.

For him, communicating means giving of himself to the other, making him a part of his own life and establishing genuine relationships of friendship. Communication is effective, in fact, only when we are able to create bonds, opportunities for encounter, proximity.

Communication is fruitful when it allows communion, the exchange of one's own experiences. Francis starts from a fundamental principle: God communicates out of love. This love is God's gift to his creatures, who freely respond with filial spirit, loving dedication and joyful commitment, which translates into a path of holiness in collaborating with God's plan in the world.

❖ **From this perspective rooted in the experience of the gift and gratuitousness of God's love, Francis de Sales opened an original path of spirituality, communicative skill and pastoral action.**

Saint Francis was a communicator who lived his life and created his works with creativity and intensity. This demonstrates his important and decisive way of communicating, which continues to be relevant today: living a spiritual life open to the inner energies of the heart and soul in union with God in service to others.³⁰

²⁸ Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*, Preface, Christian Classics Etherial Library (available online) p. 39.

²⁹ The history of humankind is marked by their incessant activity of research. A wise man from Israel said: “I, the Teacher, when king over Israel in Jerusalem, applied my mind to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven; It is an unhappy business that God has given to human beings to be busy with” (Ecc. 1:12-13). “The desire to know is undoubtedly one of the characteristics of the human being, already recognised by ancient philosophers and appreciated by them, because it makes existence itself creative, useful and better” (Pontifical Biblical Commission, “*What is man?*” (Ps 8:5). *An Itinerary of Biblical Anthropology*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano, 2019).

³⁰ Vincenzo Marinelli, *Francesco di Sales comunicatore. Ricostruzione della teologia della comunicazione salesiana e suo contributo per la prassi pastorale contemporanea*, PUL, Roma, 2019, pp. 26-28.

9

LIVING AMICABLY IN DIGITAL CULTURE TODAY

GUIDELINES FOR FURTHER STUDY AND ACTION

“As the world becomes increasingly digital and virtual, we all have a responsibility to explore, with our educators, the guidelines for establishing a healthy relationship between people and technology, with a particular focus on care for creation, dignity and rights, the ethics of economics and politics. The objective is to safeguard our Common Home through fraternity, as Pope Francis proposed in the Encyclical Laudato Si’ and in his Global Compact on Education” (Letter, Walking with the young in digital culture, no. 13).

Living in digital culture with a Salesian style is the primary commitment and the heart of every one of our communication activities. It is achieved first of all by following the model of God’s own pedagogy: amicably, with closeness, welcome, listening, fraternal communion and shared responsibility.

The example of Don Bosco, comfortable with exchange, asks of Salesians to be able to move in step with the times, attentive to social and cultural changes, closely following the development of young people, open to the social sciences, to the documents of the Church and the Congregation, to technology in continuous progress.

It is mostly teenagers who experience digital reality with its great challenges and opportunities, growing up as key players in it with a typically new mentality and behaviour. They are the first to be affected by the complex economic, political and social scenario that threatens the present and the future, living a spirituality and relationship with God without necessarily being bound to rituals or belonging to a specific religion. Therefore it is up to us to go looking for them in the different environments where they live.

❖ **Young people are at the heart of the Salesian communicative mission. Don Bosco developed the Preventive System, strongly emphasising this value.** “Don Bosco directed his work decisively towards youth. He decided consciously to make himself available to welcome boys and young people at risk. This choice became the criterion for his work of evangelisation for their complete liberation. His priority for “the young, especially the poorest among them” – these are Don Bosco’s words – “is also our decisive choice.”³¹

❖ **Don Bosco, deeply aware of the dynamic reality of youth, asked the Salesians to be able to keep pace with the times.** The Salesian Congregation, attentive to the social and cultural changes of different societies, closely follows the development of young people through an organisational outlook on youth ministry, with the ability to interpret youthful situations, change paradigms and embark on a path of pastoral conversion and synodality.

Communication is part of this dynamic of listening to the signs of the times, investigating the languages of young people, communication codes, the formation of groups and the modern use of communication.

❖ **The social sciences, the documents of the Church and the Salesian Congregation attest** that we are living in a vast and complex reality in the world of communication, in today’s information era, the Internet, social networks and artificial intelligence.³²

The Church recognises that these realities, however, do not affect all people in all parts of the world. In many poor places, access to the Internet and social networks is very precarious or even non-existent. The digital divide can still be found in many countries around the world.

The general and global context of the development of digital communication must be considered. It should also be borne in mind that communication is not limited to technology alone, but manifests itself through human rituals, culture, art, and everyday expressions that people use to communicate with others in the community. The use of traditional means of communication (radio, TV, newspapers, multimedia), which operate digitally or which are making the transition to digital, must also

³¹ Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry. Frame of Reference*, Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, Rome, 2014, p. 72.

³² Synod of Bishops, XV General Assembly, Final Document “*Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment*”, Vatican City, 2021.

be valued. Some regions in the world lack a proper infrastructure for information technologies and quality connections, even though mobile phones and the internet are present.

Finally, communication, sites and social networks in some countries are controlled by oppressive and intolerant governments. In other words, justice and freedom in the world also pass through access to communication technology.

- ❖ **Technology goes hand in hand with the progress of humanity, plays a fundamental role in the development of science, knowledge,** great discoveries, and makes an immense contribution to education, health, democracy, justice and peace. Hence the digital world is destined to grow, to become more sophisticated and faster, especially through Artificial Intelligence. But it is the responsibility of every citizen and every Christian to ethically educate themselves to be actively involved in the use of technology for the well-being and safety of their children, the family, the community and society in general.

For all these reasons, considering the communicative context in which our young people live, we stress the importance of understanding the dynamics of digital culture to educate and evangelise effectively and profoundly.

- ❖ **Adolescents and young adults experience the digital reality with its great challenges and opportunities,** grow up with a typically new mentality and behaviours, use digital language and logic, do more things at the same time, respond emotionally and socially to the speed and immediacy of the internet and are affected by the complex economic, political and social scenario that threatens the present and the future.

However, we are all immersed in this reality on a physical, emotional and social level. We live in this digital habitat day and night. We talk to people on the phone, record and send videos, shop, manage our bank accounts, documents, travel, organise work projects, business agendas, education and entertainment.

Basically, we live in a veritable digital reality. And we absolutely cannot separate the real world from the virtual one.

- ❖ **Young people in digital culture form a network of images, sounds and interactivity. They are natives of a reality where “real” and “virtual” are one and where the imagination speaks a multidimensional language.** For them, the Internet and social networks are places of study, research, personal and professional promotion, friendships and entertainment.

The new generations, within this ecosystem, are building digital culture with all its possibilities and challenges, at a personal and community level.³³ They have to face up to threats such as individualism and relativism; they manifest malaises that take on the characteristics of self-referentiality, indifference, lack of respect for nature, and various forms of dependence on algorithms that manage the functioning of the Internet; they suffer from the problem of privacy, security and violence. In addition, there are also great challenges in this scene. The digital world reflects the complex economic, political, and social scenario where poverty, violence, war, indifference towards others, individualism, injustices, lack of work, and climate crisis pose a threat to the present and the future.

In this context of great social and cultural changes due to information technologies, the gospel continues to be the source of values for the development of human, fraternal and healthy communication. This is why it is important to place communion and fraternity at the centre of any form of communication, maintaining an ethic that ensures respect for the human person and the entire community. This is essential to ensure that communication is always a means and never an end.

❖ **Young people play a leading role in digital culture.** They are born digital, bringing sensitivity and perception of human relationships as interaction; they have the cultural codes to enter the world of image and sound instantly and quickly; they know the grammar of words and symbols to create their messages and share them; they have a language of great emotional, visual and symbolic expressiveness, and they communicate through a veritable encyclopedia of words that allow them to converse with reality and give meaning to their sensations and perceptions. They are also able to master the basic technological instruments, integrating photography, videos, sounds and words, publishing their messages in the broad and complex contexts of social networks.

They use the virtual universe to navigate the channels in which they find educational content, information about art, health, politics, fashion, food and affections; they use information technologies to study, work, do

³³ Synod of Bishops, Final Document of the Pre-Synodal Meeting in preparation for the XV Ordinary General Assembly, *“Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment”*, Vatican City, 2018, no. 4.

research, create their relational and work policies; they navigate and create a universe to share their dreams, their fears, their hopes and their vision of the future.

Young people in our educational and pastoral settings are real communicators, both through human relationships and friendships, and by creatively using technology and networks to study, research, share emotional bonds or their vision of the world.

Many young people use digital technologies to create their own professional enterprise, forming networks for promotion, marketing, organising groups to share ideas and projects on music, cinema, dance, sport; creating networks of solidarity and encouraging social activities at the service of the most needy; promoting ecology and peace; engaging in social, political and cultural causes.

Many young people use digital means to spread the Word of God, liturgy, devotion to saints, knowledge of Church documents, and dissemination of community and group news.

❖ **The way young people communicate in the digital realm is not characterised by a linear approach or a hierarchy of concepts,** but rather by a fragmented language in which symbols and rituals hold significance.

The multiple and emotional intelligence of young people reveals a communication style, the desire to always be connected, the sense of belonging to a group, the need to create codes to express feelings, emotions and ways of perceiving the world. The languages of art, music, videos, films, etc. speak of interactivity, immersion and immediacy and they always develop, therefore, in an environment, in an ecosystem of relationships.

Corporeality, manifested through the five senses, is a privileged channel for young people to communicate and create their own messages. In this regard the body becomes the place of the message, so the use of tattoos, attention to fashion, aesthetics and external visual manifestations is very common. Corporeality thus becomes the expression of the communicative politics of every young person.

Young people live a spirituality, a relationship with God, without necessarily being bound to rituals or belonging to a specific religion. Precisely for this reason, communication must foster a process in which young people can verbalise their experiences of the supernatural and thus become more aware of their journey of faith.

Young people also show a great sensitivity towards cooking, fashion and entertainment. They have a remarkable imagination and show strong expression of their desires, which materialise through symbols and become important to them. We must therefore look for them in the different environments where they live, in the way they eat the food they prefer, in the music they listen to, etc.

The language of young people follows a digital logic because the digital world is made up of an encyclopedia of symbols that they use to communicate with (for example, Apps).

- ❖ **This language gives access to a universe of information and content that they always approach in an integrated, instantaneous and interactive way** (watching a movie, listening to music, buying food online, etc.). Young people access a universe of information (scientific, educational, research... for example through Google). Moreover, they use digital means to share information with friends, teachers, thus creating a network for sharing information and knowledge, receiving updates on what is happening in society at a political, social, economic, religious and entertainment level.

10

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATIONAL AND EVANGELISING ACTIVITY

GUIDELINES FOR FURTHER STUDY AND ACTION

“Ours is a sharing in the mission of the Church, which brings about the saving design of God, the coming of His Kingdom, by bringing people the message of the gospel which is closely tied in with the development of the temporal order. We educate and evangelise according to a plan for total human well being directed to Christ, the perfect Man. Faithful to the intentions of our Founder, our purpose is to form ‘upright citizens and good Christians.’” (Constitutions, 31)

Here we have a key and substantial chapter in which the foundations of communication are presented in harmony with the Salesian evangelising and educational perspective.

Since the human being lives immersed in the search for the meaning of life and its place in a world that is now mediated and networked, communication plays a fundamental role starting from evangelisation and education. It involves several consistently interconnected aspects, and while based on the values of the gospel, it engages in dialogue with culture and cultures, with an educational attitude, offering principles for integral communication. It is open to networking and collaboration with the laity and the Salesian Family.

The chapter also analyses the methodology of Salesian communication, the importance of the Educative and Pastoral Community, pastoral plans and the work carried out with an educative and pastoral mentality in accordance with the guidelines of the Youth Ministry Frame of Reference.

- ❖ **Human beings live in search of the meaning of life and their place in a media and networked world.** The vocation of the human person is his or her fulfilment and happiness. To this end, all are called to responsibly respond to their vocation to life, love and service to others to contribute to the development of people.

The construction of the person requires a commitment based on human and Christian values such as truth, fraternity, collaboration and responsibility with regard to life, others and the environment. Unfortunately, the reality in which many people live does not favour the progress of human dignity, the personal and institutional growth of society. Sometimes, the digital environment and the traditional media and the ideologies that are hidden in them create disinformation, fake news, manipulation and exploitation of people. Within the world of communication, poverty, individualism, ethical relativism, indifference towards others and the environment are on the increase, creating a kind of descent into the underworld: violence, political corruption, greed of economic groups, and so on.

- ❖ **In this context of the weakening of institutions such as the family, and of social and cultural disintegration,** young people are the first to face existential, economic and ethical crises, often losing the meaning of life and becoming simple consumers of the commercial ideologies that dominate the media and social networks in particular.

Existential and ethical fragmentation and secularisation destroy values such as family, interpersonal relationships, cultural traditions, and religious practice, increasing the distance between faith and culture, thereby strengthening the so-called godless world, or post-Christianity.

- ❖ **Human beings, however, carry in their hearts the desire to be happy, to give meaning to their lives** and to find reasons to live, love, work and have a future.

Fully involved in the world of communication, young people are looking for languages, symbols, ways of expressing themselves, their joys and hopes, their fears and uncertainties. Along their journey through the huge world of social networks and the internet, they seek friendship, fraternal encounter, accompaniment in discovery and life of faith, the vocation to love and to dedicate themselves to an existential project that gives joy and meaning to life.

- ❖ **Evangelisation is the source and origin of Salesian communication.** Through faith, people open themselves to a new reality and embark on

a journey of discovery of meanings that give them reasons to live and love. Historically, the journey of faith requires an openness to God, to a Person, to the Mystery.

Jesus Christ and his message are at the centre of the proposal and communication for young people of all times: the charm of his person, the depth of his message, the authenticity of his life, his fidelity to the Father's plan. His love for the poor and for sinners knows no boundaries. His death and resurrection are always the foundation and novelty that nourish evangelisation and illuminate Salesian communication. Through the experience of Christ, young people find their human depth, develop their gifts at the service of others, mature in fraternal communion, in encounter, in listening and in the sense of service in the family and in the community. In their experience of pain, suffering and anguish, a young person who believes in Christ finds a horizon of hope and redemption for humanity.

- ❖ **Don Bosco achieved a deeply Christocentric evangelisation:** in the encounter with Christ, the young person builds their path of human and spiritual commitment.

The gospel inspires and guides the practical experience of spirituality that is expressed in a joyful, committed, creative life in the service of others. With his threefold reason-religion-lovingkindness, Don Bosco carried out an experience of educational evangelisation in Valdocco based on the Salesian charism which is a criterion for communicating to all peoples and all cultures. Starting from this Christian anthropology that sees the young person as a gift from God, architect of their own spiritual and formative journey, Don Bosco created an original system of evangelisation and education, establishing a dialogue with culture, involving the laity and the different components of society in his project, promoting the gospel message through his writings, the Salesian Bulletin and arts and trades. This summary describes Don Bosco's style as a communicator.

- ❖ **At the heart of the Salesian charism is the option for young people, especially the poorest.** This is the charismatic gift given to Don Bosco through the Holy Spirit. This is the main option of our mission both as educators and as communicators.

Pope Francis, in his message to the General Chapter in 2020, spoke to us about "the Valdocco option and the charism of presence" which he described as a "Salesian sacrament of presence". This means, first of all, being there for young people, living for them and educating them with a pedagogy of listening, dialogue, and evolving processes.

The Pope writes that “Even before things that need to be done, the Salesian is a living reminder of a presence in which availability, listening, joy and dedication are the essential features which give rise to processes. The first call is to be a joyful and gratuitous presence among young people. Our being disciples of the Lord, our authentic and profound way of being apostles of young people passes first of all through our ‘being among the people’, and in a special way, among children and young people. In the term sacrament, the being of the Church is spoken of, and of the gifts of Grace entrusted to her, for the perpetuation in history of the Paschal Mystery, so that the Lord’s universal offering can be full and effective.”³⁴

A – COMMUNICATION IS IMPLEMENTED STARTING FROM THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN EVANGELISATION AND EDUCATION

- ❖ **Evangelisation involves several consistently interconnected aspects,** necessary for communication to carry out its mission in a complete and collaborative way. Evangelisation is essentially the explicit proclamation of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Evangelisation consists of three fundamental aspects: the experience of Christ, witness and proclamation. The believer lives the new life in grace, is nourished by the Word, the Eucharist, personal and community prayer; testifies to the vocation and mission of serving others in fraternal charity and service; announces the Person of Christ, the Kingdom; participates in the evangelising and missionary mission of the Church.

By living, witnessing and proclaiming the Gospel of joy, the communicator conveys the message of Christ and the Church in the world, denouncing all injustices and everything that goes against the life and dignity of the individual and their environment, and proclaims the primacy of Christian life and faith: “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (cf. *Jn 10:10*).

- ❖ **Salesian communication is inspired by the values of the gospel and is based on the person of Jesus Christ;** its pedagogy is based on the way

³⁴ Francis, Message to the Participants of the General Chapter of the Salesians, 4 March 2020. Fr. Pascual Chávez Villanueva, in an article for the magazine *Rassegna CNOS*, takes up Pope Francis’ message on the “Valdocco option” and the “charism of presence” and connects it with the Rector Major’s third proposal on the “Salesian sacrament” of presence. He emphasises the Christological and ecclesial dimension of the term Sacrament.

in which Jesus communicates with people, it is organised using the community and collaborative model as an example and it builds its communication methodology through language, symbols, human and cultural relationships. Moreover, uses information technologies, the internet, social media and new communication technologies and methodologies always in dialogue with the gospel and Don Bosco's Educational System.

In this task, the person of Jesus Christ and his message are the guiding and enlightening principles of education. The YMFR states in this regard: "The Gospel is its guide in the search for identity and meaning. It enlightens the formation of conscience and presents itself as a sublime model for the authenticity of love. It offers the clearest guideline for engagement in the social dimension of the person."³⁵

The gospel inspires and guides the criteria of judgement, guides the fundamental choices of life, enlightens the private and public ethical conscience, regulates interpersonal relationships and provides guidelines for living and carrying out projects. The dignity of the person is elevated in the interaction with faith.

❖ **In this way, communication, in dialogue with education and evangelisation**, becomes profoundly rich from the anthropological point of view, offering principles for a complete vision of the human person, tracing a path towards the experience of the divine based on the values of the gospel and the person of Jesus Christ.

❖ **In its dialogue with education and evangelisation**, social communication bases its educational proposal on the existential and current reality of young people of all societies and cultures.

In this dialogue, communication finds the basis for its psycho-dynamics: who communicates, how, why, what means of communication and mediation they use, what message they try to convey. This means that, starting from the principles and methodology of education, with all its hermeneutical tools, communication has the mission of drawing on the values of the gospel and translating them into the socio-psychological realities of young people, respecting the psycho-dynamics of human growth and the gradualness of formation processes.

³⁵ Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry. Frame of Reference*, Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, Rome, 2014, p. 70.

- ❖ **Education is therefore a way to develop all the gifts and abilities of young people**, allowing them to be subjects of their own formation and to mature in cognitive and affective psycho-dynamics. Education becomes a true union, a path of dialogue, of friendly discussion that fosters the integral growth of young people.

From the Salesian point of view, cultural and pedagogical mediation must be at the service of the person: "If education puts young people at the centre, looking after the different aspects, then structures and institutions are a response to the needs of the young people to whom we are sent (cf. Constitutions, 26). We recognise the valuable contribution of all educational activity in educating to the faith. Their task is to sustain and mediate the process of salvation."³⁶

With a consistent Christian anthropological foundation, "education to human and Christian maturity evokes the pedagogical perspective more immediately. It is a help in promoting the gospel with a realism that is educative and pedagogical"³⁷.

- ❖ **In the dialogue between evangelisation and education, the processes and activities carried out go hand in hand with young people.** This means that in the educational process "we bring an educational focus to the task by endeavouring to make the gospel message meaningful in real life terms, by getting it to measure up to, interact with the real problems a young person has and, more generally, with the whole question of meaning. Since education is a process and is called to constantly adapt to changes in the individual and in culture, it has to let people feel that it is a gradual thing and helps in how courses and approaches are planned. It also has to play a positive and critical role with regard to certain approaches to evangelisation which can be naive and too abstract. And it ought to encourage a pedagogical awareness which is essential to good pastoral planning."³⁸ In this way, "Evangelisation interacts with education. It allows the Gospel of Jesus Christ to be heard, which is a necessary condition if the truth is to be accepted."³⁹
- ❖ **The pastoral theological foundation of the dialogue between evangelisation and Salesian education** is a fundamental aspect of the identity and methodology of Salesian social communication.

³⁶ Ibidem, p. 68.

³⁷ Ibidem, p. 69.

³⁸ Ibidem, p. 70.

³⁹ Ibidem.

Salesian youth ministry forms the basis of this dialogue and guides the relationship between educational and evangelising activity. This foundation is based on the fact that “the centrality of the person in Christian anthropology has educational implications.” “Education is taken in its widest and most comprehensive sense as the growth of the person and a collection of interventions that help to make the person aware of his or her identity, to embrace everything good that the Creator has put in it, and to be open to meaning and to mystery.” Therefore, the “centrality of education as a privileged means of service to people” is clearly stated.⁴⁰

B – COMMUNICATION IN DIALOGUE WITH CULTURE

- ❖ **Communication at the service of evangelisation is part of a movement of continuous inculturation of the Christian message in the various realities of community life.** This means that communication enters into dialogue with biblical and educational principles such as the pedagogy of listening, dialogue, acceptance, discernment and synodality.
- ❖ **In the Council document *Gaudium et Spes*, the Church clearly expresses how,** through time and history, she has used the philosophical and anthropological categories of great thinkers to build a dialogue between the Gospel and human and cultural realities, demonstrating its vitality and openness to dialogue between faith and reason, religion and culture, religion and society. The document states that the Church “from the beginning of her history ... has learned to express the message of Christ with the help of the ideas and terminology of various philosophers, and has tried to clarify it with their wisdom, too. Her purpose has been to adapt the Gospel to the grasp of all as well as to the needs of the learned, insofar as such was appropriate.”⁴¹
- ❖ **The Church, considering the cultural diversities in which it is called to evangelise,** knows how to value the culture and history of people from every place, establishing an evangelising methodology based on the concept of inculturation of the gospel: “For thus the ability to express

⁴⁰ Ibidem, p. 68.

⁴¹ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Contemporary World, *Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, Vatican City, no. 44.

Christ's message in its own way is developed in each nation, and at the same time there is fostered a living exchange between the Church and the diverse cultures of people."⁴²

C – AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO DIALOGUE WITH THE DIGITAL WORLD

- ❖ **Over the last thirty years, many studies have been published on the psychological, philosophical, social and educational aspects of matters digital and virtual.** We are witnessing a constant debate that calls into question whether we are truly experiencing the primacy of technologies, whether the virtual world is becoming a new religion, whether we can continue to live immersed in the digital habitat without an ethic that offers us security, freedom, responsibility and justice.⁴³

It is important to note that one of the great challenges highlighted by digital and virtual scholars is how to establish a solid dialogue at the epistemological level with the various sciences. There are attempts at dialogue, for example, between philosophy and virtuality, psychology and artificial intelligence, theology and neuroscience. It is precisely at this point that we find great impasses and great challenges. For example, Artificial Intelligence dialogues very well with neuroscience because it promotes the relationship of the human brain with digital and virtual logic. This relationship encourages the logic of automation, but it encounters a very serious obstacle regarding a person's free will, conscience, freedom.

It is important to discover how to establish a dialogue between anthropology, philosophy, humanistic psychology, cognitive psychology, freedom, consciousness, free will, especially in the case of psychoanalysis (the role of the unconscious), with neuroscience and artificial intelligence. It will be a great challenge for the future.⁴⁴

- ❖ **In the context of digital transformation and the use of Artificial Intelligence, technology is never neutral.** The virtual emerges within

⁴² Ibidem.

⁴³ Bordoni Carlo (ed), *Il primato delle tecnologie. Guida per una nuova iperumanità*, Mimesis, Milan, 2020.

⁴⁴ Han Byung-Chul, *Non-Things: Upheaval in the Lifeworld*, Polity, 2022.

the complex universe of the development of capital, politics, the different ideologies of groups, the domination of companies that through their research have control of the structure, organisation and content of the internet and social networks.

In conclusion, everything is connected: the technological system, the economic system, health, education, security, the conflict of interest between the State and companies.⁴⁵ In this context, the question of ethics is fundamental. Technology is born and developed within capital and finance. The immense gap between economically advanced nations and those in extreme poverty necessarily leads to issues concerning human rights, the great conflict between the individual and the system.

- ❖ **More recently, Artificial Intelligence has opened new horizons by connecting individuals with technology.** Some authors reflect on the urgent need for an ethics for Artificial Intelligence.⁴⁶ Furthermore, on a global scale, there are fundamental discussions involving the human and natural ecosystem and its relationship with the human person and technology. This means that the digital issue cannot be thought about outside of human development and its relationship with ecology.

But the fundamental question – instead of simply determining that humanism has been overcome and that we are entering a new era of post-humanism, where technology will help us solve the great problems of humanity – is to humanise and find an ethic for the relationship between the human person and technology, care for creation, dignity and human rights, and to renew the economy and politics, safeguard our Common Home, fraternity and cooperation, technology and integral ecology, as Pope Francis proposed starting with *Laudato Si'* and the *Global Educational Compact*.

- ❖ **Given the continuous development of communication, a fundamental task emerges for researchers and scholars of the various sciences:** finding a common focus for dialogue and establishing an ethics for technology, information and digital technology in particular, so that this becomes part of a perspective on comprehensive development, and not just one based on capital and profit. In this regard, Father Paolo Benanti

⁴⁵ Zuboff Shoshana, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*, New York: PublicAffairs, 2019.

⁴⁶ Spaviero Paolo, *L'etica alla prova delle neuroscienze. Sfide e opportunità per la teologia morale*, Cittadella Editrice, Assisi, 2020.

clearly states: "In the relationship between human beings and machines, the true knower and bearer of value is the human part. Human dignity and human rights tell us that it is the human being who must be protected in the relationship between the human being and the machine." Hence, reconsidering our humanity necessitates a more comprehensive interdisciplinary examination, in order to discover a way to incorporate technology and digital tools into the education of upcoming generations.

- ❖ **Currently, there are some researchers studying the relationship between anthropology and the digital world.** They propose an interpretation of the digital realm starting from anthropological and cultural phenomena such as language and its codes, as fundamental elements for virtual communication.

Other studies explore symbols as a metaphor for digital language, social rituals of daily life (dialogue, encounters, meetings) as a way to establish interactivity.

In the great mosaic of the online world, we find a real network of socio-cultural elements that are characteristic of people. When we talk about fashion, food, music, games, we are talking about anthropological aspects, that is, how to understand the person within their culture. One of the research sectors that is growing rapidly in this area is digital ethnography and netnography.

- ❖ **The basis of interdisciplinary dialogue today depends on an epistemology that involves philosophy, anthropology, ethics, psychology and scholars of the digital world and artificial intelligence.** The future of digital communication, the Internet and artificial intelligence will depend very much on the presence of an ethic that guarantees that the human being integrates with technology in a responsible way on a personal, social and global level.

D – COMMUNICATION AS A SALESIAN FAMILY AND NETWORKING WITH LAY PEOPLE

- ❖ **We communicate as one great Salesian Family.** Don Bosco, our father, had an innate communication ability and placed communication at the service of education and evangelisation. Following this path, today we proceed as a Salesian Family in a vast movement of people guided by the same pastoral and apostolic dynamism.

In our houses, schools, social works, universities and parishes, we have extensive and considerably varied media material, which expresses our creativity and our culture in all the Regions of the Congregation.

The Salesian Family applies social communication in the context of the contemporary world, where it permeates all aspects of human, social and cultural life; reaffirming fidelity to the prophetic richness of Don Bosco as a faithful response to God's plan starting from the three areas in which he intervened: human advancement, education, evangelisation.

The members of the Salesian Family, in relation to their vocation and mission in different contexts, form a communication network at the service of the charism. The charismatic unity of the Salesian Family, in its variegated composition of gifts and services, bears witness to the fact that communication is the fruit of an experience of communion, fraternity and human, pastoral and professional preparation to be implemented in the various areas of social communication and in different cultures.

❖ **Salesian communication takes place through a network of people who communicate** on the basis of Salesian spirituality and pedagogy, with their own methodology. The network is built on shared values, an overall vision, collaboration and a common commitment to the mission. Considering that online communication is an expression of collaborative work, it is essential that Salesians and lay people can work together in the educative and pastoral community to communicate as a team, collaboratively.

❖ **The Salesian mission shared through communication between Salesians and lay people seems to be a vital need today.** This entails first and foremost establishing a more profound scientific foundation linking the charismatic, educational and pastoral dimensions, drawing on the knowledge and educational expertise of the laity in various areas of their competence. Put differently, in order to encourage a sharing of responsibility in the educational mission within communication, lay people are required to delve into the anthropological, psychological, and educational aspects of our pedagogy, enabling them to incorporate its values effectively.

In the digital world, the construction and complex nature of the educational phenomena of the present age requires collaborative work with laypeople and young people. It is crucial that the vocation and mission of the laity, both in the Church and in the educative and pastoral community, are analysed in this experience.

The mandate shared with the laity must be motivated by their vocation and mission in the world of culture and society. Especially today, in the

information and digital communication era, there are many lay people who have a very high technical and professional knowledge of communication. It is our mission to encourage and involve lay people to collaborate in the implementation of high quality and professional communication.

E – SALESIAN COMMUNICATION METHODOLOGY

- ❖ **Salesian communication methodology** is nourished by evangelisation and education as its source and is built on Salesian educational values. It is essentially how the communicator relates to people, their culture and their world.

When we aim to communicate from the call of the Church and the Congregation, which is to evangelise and educate young people, the methodology must necessarily follow the way the Church, through its teachings and experiences, guides us. This means that, in order to collaborate with the Salesian mission, communication, in all its expressions and modes of creating, sharing, and disseminating information, must have its foundations in the Salesian educational model, which has a broad anthropological vision of the human person, values the personalisation of content, personal growth, active involvement, the psycho-dynamics of integral growth, where the gospel and Christian values are the foundations. Human mediation is necessary for education and is achieved through language, the use of media, and communication which establishes its methodology based on Salesian education.

- ❖ **Salesian pastoral activity is an expression of the charism and methodology of Don Bosco's Preventive System.** Since it is located within Salesian pastoral activity, communication is essentially educational. For this reason, communication is at the service of the Salesian mission, as stated in the Youth Ministry Frame of Reference: "We recognise the valuable contribution of all educational activity in educating to the faith. Their task is to sustain and mediate the process of salvation."⁴⁷ On the basis of this theological, Christological and Salesian outlook on communication, we communicate through an educational pedagogy built on various processes, to collaborate with people, to give life to an

⁴⁷ Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry. Frame of Reference*, Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, Rome, 2014, p. 68.

environment, to systematise formation curricula, to organise and create structures for education.

- ❖ **Salesian communication brings with it great human richness and an all-round approach in the dimension of psycho-dynamics**, because communication involves cognitive and affective aspects both in the process of relationship and of learning. It involves the questions of language, learning methodology, the psycho-dynamics of human relationships, the way in which young people express their creative imagination through ever new cultural and artistic symbols. Therefore, pedagogical and cultural mediations are fundamental for successful social communication.
- ❖ **Inspired by the Preventive System's threefold catchcry – reason, religion and loving-kindness – Salesian communication is profoundly youthful**: the young person is the priority of the educational mission; the environment is a key element of the way of communicating; the presence of educators as friends of young people builds a relationship of trust and friendship; the active role played by young people manifests itself as responsibility and creative commitment; the arts – such as music, theatre, dance, literature, painting, music production, videos, photography – and sports promote a practical, simple and interactive methodology, where communication is integrated into the educational process.
The experiences young people have, such as study, celebrations, festivities, sports, the arts and service activities on behalf of others and the community, become significant moments that represent messages of youth apostolate shared on the Internet and on *social networks*.
- ❖ **Integrated into the body of Salesian pastoral activity**, communication works in an interdisciplinary way, placing itself at the service of the mission. This understanding is realised through a planning mentality, teamwork and in the development and implementation of the Province's communication plan. In this way, it is structured and organised within the Province's Educative and Pastoral Plan. "The various activities and interventions in youth ministry are carried out with a single purpose: the all-round development of the young and promotion of their world, overcoming a fragmented youth ministry project. This is achieved by converging around the over-all purpose, the criteria for action and the preferential choices made in pastoral work to create unity and interrelation among them."⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Ibidem, p. 184.

❖ **Communication is developed within the Youth Ministry Frame of Reference (YMFR)**, as a dimension running through the entirety of educative and pastoral activity, on the same level as other Salesian works. We can therefore speak of “educating by communicating” and “communicating by educating”. A combination that characterises the Salesian style of community.

❖ **The communication plan drawn up in accordance with the guidelines of the Youth Ministry Frame of Reference expresses an integrated vision of pastoral work**, a planning mentality methodology, a sure way to achieve the mission through teamwork, thus collaborating with the pedagogy and methodology of communication and with Salesian pastoral activity in general. In this regard, for a communication plan to be effective, it must be developed and agreed on with the Provincial and his council, because an organisation cannot behave in one way while speaking in another. Communication expresses the culture of the Province and therefore cannot be a “loose cannon” unconnected with the Province’s OPP and SEPP. It is an activity that belongs to the mission and, through the management of processes and products, aims to create and strengthen Salesian communication environments. It is up to each Province, based on its culture, circumstances and tradition, to plan and draw up its SEPP and communication documents. Within the unique mission, Salesian communication always aims to coordinate work in harmony with other sectors of the Salesian mission, and to implement communication with a planning mentality.

Communication in our Provinces must aim at conveying the “personality” of our institution and the values that underlie it: it is an indispensable step for reaching out to everyone. Preferring transparent communication, always clearly manifesting one’s identity, opinions, initiatives, is a wise choice, indeed, more so, it is an act of great courage.

Identity is (re)built through communicative processes. What we call identity is woven through dialogue with others about how we understand the reality, what we do and why we do it. And this does not mean surrounding oneself with prejudices, stereotypes and comfortable idealisations, but considering reality intelligently.

❖ **To achieve the Salesian mission today**, it is essential that reflection, programming and educative and pastoral activities are approached from a transversal, open and synodal perspective. Since our way of communicating is synergetic, it is essential that the different sectors (the

Communication sector, together with Youth Ministry, Formation, Mission and Economy/Administration) share the Salesian mission, establishing a creative and professional path of reflection, inviting lay experts in communication and ministry, in order to maintain a dialogue with the phenomena of digital culture.⁴⁹

- ❖ **In drawing up the communication plan, starting from the YMFR, it is essential that social communication offer a theological, anthropological, psychological, biblical, Salesian and pastoral basis to shed light on, guide and implement the manner, style and organisation of the communication plan in the various Provinces and Salesian presences worldwide.**

⁴⁹ Social Communication Sector, Letter "Walking with Young People in Digital Culture", no. 10, AGC, Valdocco, 2023.

11

THE PREVENTIVE SYSTEM AS A PASTORAL AND COMMUNICATIVE DRIVING FORCE

GUIDELINES FOR FURTHER STUDY AND ACTION

“The practice of the Preventive System demands a fundamental disposition on our part: an empathy with the young and a willingness to be with them.” (Constitutions, 39).

The Preventive System came about through the direct experience of Don Bosco and the first Salesians: a style and a communicative driving force expressed through an educational environment, friendly presence, the active role played by young people and a project of Christian life that combines spirituality with pedagogy and pastoral care.

This method, which focuses on prevention in the face of youthful weaknesses, is based on some principles underlying the spiritual experience of the communicator.

In this analysis, we explore how the Preventive System interacts with the communication dynamics of digital technology, including aspects directly linked to it, such as interactivity, immediacy, and immersion, as well as the new challenges associated with advances in Artificial Intelligence.

And finally we stress the importance of art and all artistic languages and the expressive methods young people employ.

❖ **The Preventive System came about through the direct experience of Don Bosco and the first Salesians with young people in Valdocco**, in a profoundly human synthesis based on the values of the gospel and the teachings of the Church. It was there that Don Bosco, both as an educator and as a communicator, began a communication style capable of expressing the values of the Preventive System: an educational environment, friendly presence, the active role played by young people and a project of Christian life.

❖ **Salesian communication develops from the cardinal principle of the charismatic mission at the service of young people** and draws inspiration from Don Bosco's educational originality, which consisted of his pastoral charity, materialising in love and predilection for the poorest young people.

Don Bosco had a very clear objective, which was to make every young person feel loved by God, respond to the call to live in his grace and mercy, do good, fulfil their duties and live in joy. To this end he created a real Salesian ecosystem focused on pastoral charity (which is spirituality, pastoral activity and pedagogy). Spirituality is manifested in the proposal of Christian life (it is about seeking the salvation of young people, living the *da mihi animas*), in pedagogy (which translates into a practical teaching method) and in pastoral care (which is implemented in the educational project for the holistic development of the individual).

❖ **Salesian communication is inspired by the Preventive System**, the embodiment of the Salesian spirit of engaging and working together in the educational initiative aimed at integral development within the proposal of evangelisation for young people in different social and cultural contexts.

❖ **Don Bosco's pastoral charity in living his mission for poor young people originates from the heart and the example of Christ the Good Shepherd**, and is a current reference for all communicators, both in terms of attitude and communicative practice.

His educational charity was manifested in his deep sensitivity and in his capacity for human support. Don Bosco understood that education is a matter of the heart, and for this reason he created an educational style that is born from love, that creates interpersonal and community relationships, that promotes the opening of young people to themselves and to others. A cornerstone that allows someone to understand their gifts and abilities in order to guide young people towards serving others,

experiencing art, professional learning, liturgy... as ways to express their inner life, and to collaborate so that the environment is characterised by trust, friendship, and true fraternal sharing as a result of a life lived in God's grace.

This style ensures the Salesian communicator of their identity and originality. This authentic and creative way of living spirituality and educational style define the Salesian charismatic identity and our way of communicating. "The Salesian spirit, inspired by the style of the Good Shepherd, is the hallmark of our spirituality and our educational and pastoral action. This spirit is embodied in the first place, in Don Bosco. He and the mission derived from him are our historic and charismatic point of reference."⁵⁰

- ❖ **Don Bosco as a communicator-educator is fully aware of the reality of the human person, the needs of the youthful heart, and their sensitivity in human and Christian formation.** Don Bosco's pastoral charity is pedagogical: it respects the dynamics of human growth, the way each young person is, their history, talents, and possibilities, and the importance of establishing educational norms that promote everyone's well-being.
- ❖ **Don Bosco's communicative and ecosystemic outlook, which always seeks to connect the spiritual, educational, and pastoral dimensions,** opens up to a typical family reality where the presence of the father (educator), the children (students), the mother (Blessed Virgin Mary), and the educators (laypersons) forms a very original Salesian mosaic. The Preventive System involves the educator and the community in the simultaneous implementation of the processes and actions that allow the integrated pedagogical and spiritual practice of the System itself.
- ❖ **The theological, spiritual and pedagogical coherence of the Salesian Preventive System ecosystem** is constantly fed by life experience, shared educational processes, concrete actions, planning and organisation. Hence the need for an educative and pastoral plan for communication, founded on this primacy of the Preventive System that "inspires an educational project for the all-round development of young people in different contexts as part of the work of evangelisation. At the same time it highlights the human richness and the essentially religious heart of the system, based on

⁵⁰ Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry Frame of Reference*, Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, Rome, 2014, p. 86.

reason, religion and loving-kindness. The Preventive System becomes a method for action, characterised by reason, reasonableness of requests and rules, flexibility and persuasiveness. Religion is understood as the development of the sense of God present in every person and an effort to bring to the young the beauty of the good news. Loving kindness, which is at the heart of educational love, evokes a response from the young and helps them to grow.”⁵¹

- ❖ **Recognising the true nature of young people, their virtues and vulnerabilities, cultural values,** as well as the potential influences that could manipulate them and steer them away from their formative journey, Don Bosco emphasised the fundamental importance of prevention in their education.

Prevention is directly linked to reason, to the importance of recognising feelings, intentions and their desires and of knowing how to interpret this human and social reality through dialogue, acceptance, patience. It involves building trust, reconstructing individuals, and maintaining a positive and optimistic perspective with regard to every young person. This preventive outlook of the Salesian educator is proactive, based on offering a proposal: the educator offers young people the opportunity to grow, to commit themselves, and provides tools and means for their human, artistic and vocational formation. Salesian education believes in the inner potential of young people.

A – THE PREVENTIVE SYSTEM AS SALESIAN SPIRITUALITY AND A SOURCE FOR COMMUNICATION

- ❖ **The Preventive System is an original proposal of Salesian spirituality,** which in turn is a true “reinterpretation of the gospel, capable of unifying the gestures and behaviours that characterise Christian life.” It is the source and inspiration for communication: “The trinomial ‘reason, religion and loving kindness’, indeed, is not only an educative plan of integral formation or a practical method that education must use, but it also reveals the fundamental traits of a Salesian Youth Spirituality to be discovered, lived, revived, and renewed continuously.”

⁵¹ Ibidem, pp. 90-91.

- ❖ **Salesian spirituality is based on certain principles that are the basis for the spiritual experience of the communicator.** The primacy of God's gratuitousness stands out: it is in the mystery of God's love that we find the source, the centre and the goal of the Christian life. The encounter with Christ, the Gospel of God, the friend and Redeemer of humanity, follows. Finally, it is realised in life in the Spirit, to whom the young person, aware of this gift, responds with inner freedom and commitment to live as a good Christian.
- ❖ **In Salesian spirituality, communication has a fundamental reference to God who guides its action, starting from the Christian vocation of every young person.** In the experience of Baptism, Confirmation and feeling that they belong to the particular and universal Church, young people experience the gift of self and belonging to the family of the baptised who live as salt of the earth and light of the world in all nations. The Holy Spirit gave rise to Salesian Work through Mary's maternal intervention. As Mother of the Son of God and Helper of Christians, Mary guides and educates to a full life in the redemption wrought by her Son. Life is a gift and a service, which is why Salesian spirituality is at the service of others, especially the most needy; as it also is at the service of the commitment to justice and peace, integral ecology, dedication in work, understanding multiculturalism and the Christian way of living in a digital culture.⁵²
- ❖ **The Preventive System was born from and matured in a concrete gospel experience embodied in the reality of poor young people.**⁵³ The point is that, from this perspective, the Preventive System offers a deep foundation of spirituality and pedagogy, allowing the educator to develop a dialogue with the different sciences of communication. Moreover, through its deep Christian anthropological basis, the Preventive System is a true grammar of cognitive and affective psychodynamics for entering the world of young people: their language, feelings, human relationships.
- ❖ **There are various aspects of the Preventive System that offer a Salesian educational anthropology for communication:** the unconditional acceptance of the other as a gift from God; the effective presence of the educator among young people; the sharing of their daily

⁵² Ibidem, pp. 100-107.

⁵³ Ibidem, p. 87.

life and interests; Don Bosco's certainty that "in every young person there is a point accessible to good"; the constant use of reason, which means reasonableness of requests and rules and personalisation of the educational relationship; the reference to religion, sharing with young people the proclamation of Jesus and his message of salvation through actions, words and concrete proposals; the trait of love, which is expressed in attention to the real needs of people and in the care of a welcoming environment; the involvement of the young person as the first person responsible for and active in their own formation.

- ❖ **Considering the various contexts of religious and cultural diversity, the Salesian communicator, guided by the Preventive System,** engages in ecumenical dialogue with young people of other religions and beliefs and also with those who do not explicitly profess a faith. Based on the values of the Preventive System, such as kindness, acceptance, joy, the environment, the arts, solidarity and professionalism, the Salesian communicator knows how to respond to different intercultural realities with an open, dynamic and welcoming outlook.

B – COMMUNICATING IN THE DIGITAL ECOSYSTEM STARTING FROM THE PREVENTIVE SYSTEM

- ❖ **Communication, starting from the spiritual, educational and pastoral proposal of the Preventive System,** seeks to achieve continuous dialogue between the latter and the digital world. It is important to emphasise that in the interaction which develops starting from the values of Don Bosco's Preventive System, a fundamental dialogue with digital dynamics is established to set the criteria for guiding and educating young people.

Salesian communication does not place physical presence and the experience of presence in the virtual environment in opposition to each other. Educating in a multidimensional environment therefore means entering into this new logic that requires, on the part of the Salesian educator, an ability to create relationships of trust and friendship, a sense of belonging and educational accompaniment.

While immersion is the a way of entering the communicative environment through the five senses, digital communication will promote an expansion of communication both in terms of time and space, allowing the

individual to communicate with hundreds of other people, for example through social networks.

- ❖ **There are three aspects that are directly connected in the dynamics of digital communication:** interactivity, immediacy and immersion. They are not in opposition to “in-person” communication. On the contrary, they are elements that enrich communication, extending it in the digital universe, in the interpenetration between the real and the virtual. Precisely for this reason, we are talking about an anthropology of communication in the digital universe.
- ❖ **Interactive communication is characterised by a horizontal relationship** where everyone is a subject and protagonist. It requires openness, dialogue, empathy, listening and a great ability to understand the diversity of communication. Immediacy introduces us to a dimension where communication is characterised by the “here and now”, all at once. Immersion is a form of communication in which individuals feel as though they are inside a world of images, sounds, and interactive spaces.
- ❖ **Communicating while staying in touch with young people and keeping up with the times requires continuous pedagogical updating,** in order to educate and evangelise with an understandable and engaging language and method. Vigilant support is also necessary, capable of accompanying young people both in method and content, so that they can understand and live the message of the gospel.
- ❖ **The Salesian’s educational approach takes on a dynamic accompaniment attitude** which translates into “walking alongside” young people, who live most of their lives with their eyes focused on the screen of their mobile phones. As Don Bosco would say, what is absolutely necessary is that they know they are loved!

The challenge is therefore to leave young people as the protagonists in the digital world, enabling them to be part of this universe in a critical and responsible manner. Young people themselves will become freer to learn, reflect, think, making better choices for life and developing their spirituality. Using digital technology becomes a creative, healthy way to effectively enter the world of work. Living in the digital world conditions the way of expressing ideas, bringing to life one’s own communicative style, sharing information, expressing oneself, seeing the world and the realities in which one lives.

The Salesian perspective regarding communication is always integrated with the art of educating. “The proper purpose of education and of any

true cultural activity is to liberate young people, making them conscious of their own rights and duties, aware of the vicissitudes of their time, and capable of self-determination and collaboration for a more human society. In this way, education produces culture, opens it up and enriches it. This process becomes a reality not only by bringing new ideas, impulses and energy to society, but especially by forming courageous people, capable of critical reflection and a wholesome way of life.”⁵⁴

- ❖ **Educating to a human and fraternal relationship is a central task for the communicator and for the educator.** It is a matter, for example, of developing through dialogue how to communicate on the Internet and in social media with a human and fraternal outlook and attitude towards others, so that one can always communicate without dominating, relate without controlling people, express oneself without the temptation of worldly power, interact digitally without manipulating or allowing oneself to be manipulated.
- ❖ **Educating young people to communicate digitally requires understanding the logic,** understanding the values and the importance of conscience in choices and decisions. It is through awareness that freedom, respect for others, a sense of the sacredness of the body, and the value of sexuality are nurtured.
- ❖ **Currently, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is gaining more and more importance.** We are facing a momentous change that requires our discernment, to educate for its intelligent and conscious use. Speaking at the G7 in Puglia in June 2024, Pope Francis said that “artificial intelligence is an extremely powerful tool, employed in many kinds of human activity: from medicine to the world of work; from culture to the field of communications; from education to politics. It is now safe to assume that its use will increasingly influence the way we live, our social relationships and even the way we conceive of our identity as human beings.” The Pope recognises its importance and usefulness in the different sectors of the development of human life and society, but reiterates the need to “ensure and safeguard a space for proper human control over the choices made by artificial intelligence programs: human dignity itself depends on it.” These programs must be “instruments for building up the good and a better tomorrow, they must always be aimed at the good of every human being. They must have an ethical ‘inspiration’.”⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Ibidem, p. 75.

⁵⁵ Francis, Speech to the G7 in Borgo Egnazia, 14 June 2024.

- ❖ **Our approach to AI is to establish an educational dialogue.** It is essential to build a humanistic vision of the development of the individual and the community in its use. Just as it is necessary to implement meetings and seminars in the Salesian communities and works to learn about the different psychological, social, moral and cultural aspects involved in AI.

It is also necessary to know the laws and follow the developments of AI regulation and their impact on the economy, politics, culture, education, both at a personal and community level. It is likewise necessary to be aware of binding rules about transparency and security, especially with regard to biometric recognition, *privacy* and security, ensuring that the use of AI guarantees the protection and defence of all citizens.

In his message for the 57th World Day of Peace in 2024, on the theme “*Artificial Intelligence and Peace*”, Pope Francis clearly warned about the importance of AI and the risks it can entail for humanity: On the one hand, “exciting opportunities” such as the improvement of work, the living conditions of peoples, medical tools and personal interactions; on the other, “serious risks”, such as the unregulated use of so-called “autonomous” weapons, the consequent danger of terrorist attacks, thus promoting “the folly of war” or interventions aimed at destabilising legitimate government institutions, ending up, for example, in “interference in elections”.⁵⁶

Therefore it is important to know how algorithms work and how they are applied in different areas of human and social life (education, health, safety, economy, politics). It is good to know how AI is used in the production of content, with all the implications regarding copyright, fake news, information manipulation, state ideologies and ideologies of commercial companies. It will become increasingly necessary to accompany the development and legal provisions with teams of experts, with technical information on conscious use in the different sectors of society.

- ❖ **Art is an important basis for the dialogue between the Preventive System and digital methodology.** The promotion and appreciation of all forms and expressions of communication such as art, music, theatre, cinema, photography and literature are essential to building our society in a healthy way.

⁵⁶ Francis, Message for the 47th World Day of Peace, *Artificial Intelligence and Peace*, Vatican City, 2024.

In Don Bosco's Preventive System, artistic expressions have traditionally been utilised as tools to establish an environment specifically designed for young people and aimed at engaging them. This is even more the case in the digital world, communicating by taking into account interactivity, immediacy and immersion.

All kinds of art are useful for creating a communicative culture. Basically, the language and technical structure of the arts foster interaction with virtual information technologies. Furthermore, considering that art is a language that touches the cognitive and affective dimensions, which concerns feelings, emotions and imagination, young people express their way of thinking, feeling and acting through it.

Therefore we can say that art is a grammar of youthful feelings and perceptions. In this regard it is essential that communication promotes education and evangelisation that relates interactivity, immediacy and immersion, so that young people can actively participate, playing an active role in all forms of communication. In particular, this area also includes personal care and physical appearance, healthy and ethical cooking, organic farming and integral ecology.

- ❖ **Lay people, with their human, scientific, technical and cultural formation, collaborate significantly in the education of young people in the digital world.** Due to the cultural complexity in which the digital realm develops and in order to maintain an educational dialogue in this environment, a profound educational attitude is required that takes into account the anthropological, methodological and technical aspects concerning both the individual and the digital realm.

12

CHRISTIAN ANTHROPOLOGY, A SOURCE FOR AN ETHICS OF COMMUNICATION

GUIDELINES FOR FURTHER STUDY AND ACTION

“The ethical quality of communication is the result of conscientious — not superficial — attention, always respectful of people, both those who are the subject of information and the recipients of the message” (Address of the Holy Father Pope Francis in his 2014 audience given to Directors and personnel from RAI – Radiotelevisione Italiana, 18 January 2014).

Christian anthropology is the source that nourishes and humanises virtual communication and digital culture. Starting from the principle that the gospel is the radical and complete inspiration of educational and evangelising activity, the two complement each other in caring for young people, thus converging towards the goal of “generating the new man”. In this way, ministry works on the human aspect and at the same time in the area of faith, constituting an integrated digital ecosystem in which respect for others and interculturalism provide the basis for effective and constructive communication.

In addition, an original educational proposal is presented in this chapter, starting from the biblical images of four Gardens which offer an integral and holistic perspective for describing the experience of living in the digital world.

❖ **Christian anthropology is the source of the ethics of communication.**

The Church's humanising and gospel-based perspective has been repeatedly described by Pope Francis: "Communication has the power to build bridges, to enable encounter and inclusion, and thus to enrich society. How beautiful it is when people select their words and actions with care, in the effort to avoid misunderstandings, to heal wounded memories and to build peace and harmony."⁵⁷

According to John Paul II, "In the continual expansion and progress of the mass media we can discern a sign of the times, which constitutes an immense potential for universal understanding and a strengthening of the grounds for peace and brotherhood among the nations."⁵⁸

Starting from the principle that the gospel is the basic inspiration on which educative and evangelising activity is based, the two actions complement each other in caring for young people, thus converging on the goal of "generating the new man". In this way, "Ministry works on the human aspect and at the same time in the area of faith."⁵⁹

❖ **Ethics for communication must promote the life and dignity of every individual.**

The Church recognises the human person as the centre of the ethics of communication. In this regard, the Church affirms the fundamental ethical principle that governs the use of the *mass media*: "The human person and the human community are the end and measure of the use of the media of social communication." And it reaffirms that "communication should be by persons to persons for the integral development of persons. It is the task of communication to bring people together and enrich their lives."⁶⁰

Through the ethical and professional use of the media, the Church recognises not only the use of communication tools and networks to inform, but also to promote peace, justice and solidarity. In other words, communication must be synodal, at the service of others and the creator of a culture of humanism.

"The moral principles at issue here are those based on a true interpretation

⁵⁷ Francis, Message for the 50th World Communications Day, *Communication and mercy: a fruitful encounter*, Vatican City, 2016.

⁵⁸ John Paul II, Message for the 15th World Communications Day *Social Communications at the service of responsible human freedom*, Vatican City, 1981.

⁵⁹ Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry. Frame of Reference*, Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, Rome, 2014, p. 69.

⁶⁰ Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *Ethics in Social Communications*, Vatican City, 2020, no. 21.

of the dignity of man. And man, it should be recalled, must be accounted a member of the family of the adopted children of God, At the same time, these principles derive from the essential character of social communication and the innate qualities of the medium in question.”⁶¹

A – THE HUMANISATION OF COMMUNICATION

❖ **To build a communication ethic, it is essential to start from the premise of communication as an ecosystem.** Theoretically, the starting point is that every person in the digital world is called to be God’s co-worker in the process of giving continuity to the creation of the world. This means that each individual shares responsibility for nature, culture, human development and communication in a broad sense.

Starting from this broad and systemic viewpoint, it is important to emphasise, first of all, that in communication there is responsibility towards others, towards every individual no matter what culture they belong to and from whichever part of the world they come. This implies that communication plays a fundamental role in the promotion of social justice and in the construction of a sustainable, fraternal and supportive society.

With a view to interconnection, communication must also dialogue with different cultures and religions, in order to promote cultural expression, the richness of each religion, the history and originality of each group and community.

In this vein we can say that the human person, as the continuer of God’s creation in history, is responsible for caring for creation, for the conscientious use of natural resources, as well as for safeguarding the cultural values of the dignity of the person and the sustainable development of all expressions of a society’s social, economic and political progress.

❖ **In digital culture all people and all things are deeply connected to each other.** In this regard, communication, starting out from an ethical perspective, must always be at the service of the integral development of the person and society.

⁶¹ Pontifical Commission for Social Communications, Pastoral Instruction *Communio et Progressio*, Vatican City, 1971, no. 14.

As a result, every communicator becomes a missionary with this holistic approach, for communication at the service of the individual and humanity.⁶²

- ❖ **In the digital realm, communication is like an extension of human senses and perceptions.** This involves us both cognitively and emotionally, because digital technology is capable of engaging our senses, our attention, and our feelings. Moreover, living in the digital world is like being part of a dimension in which time and space are characterised by great speed.

We live in a new reality and manage all information in a short time, quickly and interactively. During this process, there are psychological consequences for the human being, as is well known from scientific evidence: mental and emotional fatigue, loss of attention, lack of concentration, difficulty understanding and dealing with existential issues can occur; the link with a healthy and balanced lifestyle is therefore missing. Therefore, physical, emotional and spiritual health are fundamental in the digital world.

- ❖ **In the digital world, where the wheat and the tares grow together, caution and an understanding of relationship levels are essential.**

Faced with the wide range of communication levels found today in the digital world, we need to discern and be clear about who the recipients of our communication are and what we want to convey.

Informative communication, characterised by the dissemination of messages to a generic and sometimes anonymous audience, is indefinite, reaches many but it is not guaranteed to be received and accepted. Of course, it has its value and its need, but it remains at the level of information, sending messages and transmitting content.

Interpersonal communication, which involves the knowledge and participation of the individual in the communication process, has the power to generate trust, dialogue, involvement and participation.

Group communication, where people know each other, share common values, have a sense of belonging and fraternal communion, has the potential to generate affective, effective and fruitful communication.

These levels of communication, of course, may have their exceptions, but the communicator must keep them in mind to understand who their

⁶² Cf. Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti* on fraternity and social friendship, Vatican City, 2020.

audience is, what they want to convey, on behalf of whom they are communicating, and the steps that define the gradualness of the communication process.

In the dialogue between communication and evangelisation, it is essential to understand the language and communicative codes used by people, especially by children, adolescents, and young adults. Consequently, it is essential to delve deeply into the use of artistic, metaphorical, narrative, and symbolic language in order to understand the contents of the Christian faith. Communication does not only take place in the linearity and rationality of the truths of faith.

- ❖ **Communicating is exercising gift and responsibility with regard to others.** For true active involvement of people in interactive and intercultural communication, it is very important that the communication process fosters the involvement of the individual. Everything must be focused on the individual's freedom, experiences and vision of the world, so that communication becomes an opportunity for dialogue, openness and exchange of views, understood as a common path based on mutual listening.
- ❖ **Communication becomes intercultural in a globalised world.** As a social, cultural and communicative phenomenon, interculturalism allows two or more cultures to dialogue, interact and relate to each other, without one culture dominating the other. Interculturalism requires commitment to dialogue, valuing the other and their efforts, fostering exchange, acceptance, collaboration and openness.
- ❖ **In communication, inculturation means learning from the environment, with all its expressions,** then integrating these elements into one's own life, in a creative way.

Inculturation is the way in which each individual, in any culture or society, learns and dialogues with what is new and unknown. An example of inculturation in the Scriptures is found in St Paul's address in Athens. "Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, 'Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, "To an unknown god." What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.'" (Acts 17:16 -34). With these words of deep sensitivity and empathy, Paul wins over some listeners and gets some to be more open and listen to him.

After this introduction and the positive response from the audience, Paul

launches his message: "The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. [...] For "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said: "For we too are his offspring." (Acts 17:24-28). At that time, Paul is with a group of Greek people of pagan origin. He chooses a topic already known to his listeners and presents it, respecting the cultural imagination and values of the Greek people. Through this initial respectful attitude, St Paul builds a space to talk about God without hurting the sensitivity of his listeners.

B – CARING FOR THE COMMUNICATIVE HUMAN BEING

- ❖ **On an anthropological and theological level, there is a very interesting and rich image in the Bible** which offers a basis and a horizon for describing the experience of living digitally: it is the image of the Garden. The Garden is, in biblical terms, the place of creation, of God's relationship with man, the ecosystem where the person and the environment are integrated, where the mystery of God is manifested in his creatures and in creation.⁶³ It is also the place for the exercise of human freedom. It is thus possible to outline a human and spiritual psycho-dynamic in the digital world, referring to the four Biblical Gardens.
- ❖ **The first Garden is found in the Book of Genesis** (2:21-24; 3:1-24), where God creates man and woman, the environment and things, gives them a name, a human and natural ecosystem that today we call integral ecology.⁶⁴

In the digital world, there is a risk of drifting away from a global perspective that combines nature, environment, person, and culture, and of living instead in a fragmented way, with the danger of losing the taste for life and the responsibility for the things that give meaning to life (think, for example, of the ecological crisis, with its economic, social and other consequences).

⁶³ Cf. Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* on the care of our common home, Vatican City, 2015, nos. 76-83.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, nos. 84-88.

The digital world is gradually becoming a cause of the environmental crisis. Therefore, the Garden of Genesis offers the paradigm of the importance of looking at the digital world in an integral way, sharing responsibility for creation and human life.

- ❖ **Following this psycho-dynamic of the Garden as a reference to the digital universe, the second Garden is the one in Gethsemane** (*Mt 26:36-39*), which places at its centre an anthropological conception of pain, suffering, abandonment, loneliness, where the person experiences being profoundly alone, in the mystery of life's limits, as it was for Jesus, who had an experience of total abandonment there.

From a Christian understanding, the Garden of Gethsemane is connected to the first Garden, and recalls that communication is always a direct interlocution with God. Jesus Christ teaches us that even in pain and suffering there is an important interlocutor, his Father. Jesus speaks, weeps, manifests profoundly human communication in a very strong interpersonal relationship with God who listens to him. Human communication does not eliminate human suffering; artificial intelligence or any kind of technology can never erase the mystery of the individual and their limitations.

The digital world, where we meet so many people, is a large global network. It often happens that we live in this network populated by people who experience illness, pain, fear, anxiety. In this regard, the Garden of Gethsemane, the place where Jesus goes through the most dramatic moment of his life, reminds us that we must experience this environment within ourselves as a place of spirituality, and think that our suffering is united with the suffering of all humanity.

- ❖ **The third Garden is the Garden of the Resurrection** (*Jn 20:11-18*): the appearance of Jesus Christ to Mary Magdalene in the Garden has a very important meaning for human communication. We see in this encounter a woman who seeks her beloved, Christ, with pain and suffering.

On the other hand, Jesus appearing to Mary Magdalene is an expression of love and life overcoming death. Why in a garden? Because it is always an open place and a relationship between things, nature, God's creation; because Jesus is our common home, is true systemic, integral communication, and in him everything is connected.

In the Garden of the Resurrection we find this beautiful dialogue between Jesus and Mary Magdalene, which manifests the human and divine expression of communication in which everyone is involved. In that place

we are able to understand that communication has a dimension that goes beyond the experience of the senses (seeing, feeling, touching), with the characteristics experienced by Mary Magdalene, enriched by a transcendental dimension.

The great danger of the digital world is precisely one of empiricism, of a technicality in which people often lose the transcendent dimension, lose the ability to see and experience a communication capable of going beyond the human, to welcome the mystery of God.

Self-centeredness and self-referentiality are often the great temptations of the virtual world, because the individual risks being too focused on themselves and can sometimes lose both the dimension of otherness, that is, the relationship with others, and the contact with their God.

The communication experience of the Risen Christ is, instead, a perspective of openness, apostolate, like Mary Magdalene who went out to announce to others the Resurrection of Jesus. We must therefore live in the digital world following Jesus' own logic. The Resurrection is both a gift and a responsibility, because we must share God's message of life and hope with others.

❖ **The fourth Garden is the Garden of the Apocalypse (22:1-2).** The biblical text speaks of a square with a spring that gushes up and becomes a river of living water that flows from the throne of God and the Lamb, and people gather around this spring that represents the Lamb of God. This is the Garden of Redemption, which allows us to have a horizon of life, to walk in a new reality in Jesus Christ, not only individually, but as a family and as a community.

In the digital world there is no philosophy that offers human beings a vision of redemption, nor is this the task of technology. It is therefore crucial to dwell in the digital world with the Garden of Redemption as an essential horizon, in order to engage in communication in a creative, joyful, and hopeful manner. Humanity enlightened by redemption: that is the mission of communication!

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THE HEART AND IDENTITY OF THE SALESIAN COMMUNICATOR

GUIDELINES FOR FURTHER STUDY AND ACTION

“Like Don Bosco, we are all called to be educators to the faith at every opportunity. Our highest knowledge therefore is to know Jesus Christ, and our greatest delight is to reveal to all people the unfathomable riches of his mystery.” (Constitutions, 34).

The aspects that identify the Salesian communicator are listed and described here, together with the spirituality and pedagogy of Don Bosco. Salesian communicators carry out their work in community, at the service of the Salesian mission, and in line with the guidelines of the Congregation and the Communication Sector.

Attentive to the collaborative management process, Salesian communicators work together with other Sectors such as Youth Ministry, Formation, Mission, Economy, Vocations and the Salesian Family.

Salesian communicators walk in step with the times, continually educating and updating themselves to promote a critical and creative approach to digital use.

Salesian communicators value all aspects and social communication media as a new gathering space for young people, where they can play an active role.

- ❖ **Salesian communicators carry out their mission in community, at the service of the Congregation,** living and witnessing to their love for Christ within the evangelising mission of the Church.

Drawing their example from Don Bosco, they love young people and accompany them with the heart of the Good Shepherd. With their knowledge of Salesian pedagogy, they share the educational project with educators and communicators, working as a team, collaboratively, with a synodal perspective in carrying out the Salesian mission in an integrated and dynamic manner.

On the basis of their planning mentality, they cooperate so that the communication plan integrates the various dimensions of the educational project and adopts a typically Salesian communication method, seeing young people as the key actors in communication.

- ❖ **In accordance with the guidelines of the Congregation and the Communication Sector, they are involved in the processes** and operational guidelines of Congregational planning and the planning of Provinces in the Region. Their educational, pastoral and technical formation allows them to develop a mentality and communicative activity based on an evangelical, synodal, Salesian, artistic and networked perspective.

- ❖ **Attentive to collaborative management processes, they work together with other Sectors such as Youth Ministry,** Formation, Mission, Economy, Vocations and the Salesian Family, committing themselves to carrying out the Province's Educative and Pastoral Plan (SEPP) and the Province's Overall Plan (OPP).

In turn, in harmony with those responsible for the management and governance of the Province, they assist the Provincial Council, the rectors and those responsible for Salesian works at provincial and regional levels.

In concert with the centre of the Congregation, they are involved in and implement the principles and guidelines of communication. Finally, they accompany the evolution of information technologies and networks, updating themselves on the various aspects of digital communication and artificial intelligence, dialoguing with the various areas of digital culture and gaining a deeper understanding of the anthropological, ethical, cultural, social and religious elements of young people.

- ❖ **Educating young people today requires a common effort to keep up with the times: formation and updating are essential.** Educating them to the critical and creative use of digital technology requires a change of mentality on our part, because they are digital natives and know the technical

dynamics, language and interactivity of that world very well.⁶⁵ In this regard, the methodology of listening, dialogue, affectivity and accompaniment is essential. Communication must therefore be further understood and managed in an educational and professional manner. This implies:

- *Committing themselves to understanding digital technology not only in its functional and technical aspect.* In a high-technology context, reflection is needed on how to continue to always put the human being at the centre, promoting fraternal communion.
- *Exercising the responsibility, together with our educators, of understanding the guidelines for establishing a healthy relationship between people and technology,* with particular attention to caring for creation, dignity and rights, ethics of the economy and politics. The goal is to safeguard our Common Home through fraternity, as proposed by Pope Francis in his Encyclical *Laudato Si'*⁶⁶ and the *Global Educational Compact*.⁶⁷ To tackle the present and the future, it is essential to develop an interdisciplinary dialogue between digital technology and Christian anthropology; an epistemology involving philosophy, anthropology, ethics, psychology, and studies regarding the digital world and Artificial Intelligence.
- *Having a good understanding of the dynamics and use of Artificial Intelligence.* Salesians, lay people and young people are called to understand and communicate through Artificial Intelligence (AI). In the certainty that every human achievement is never definitive, it is important to understand what it is, how it works and its purpose, to know the potential that it brings for teaching and learning. Beyond the importance that these observations may have, our task is to know how to use AI with an ethical vision and an educative and pastoral purpose. AI is about creating machines, software, systems that can perform tasks normally performed by human intelligence. It concerns cognitive, emotional, and neurological processes, that is, how the human person learns, reasons, processes, and elaborates information. It is equally important to know how AI language is created, based on

⁶⁵ Social Communication Department, *Salesian Social Communication System. Guidelines for the Salesian Congregation*, Editrice S.D.B., Rome, 2011, no. 28.

⁶⁶ Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* on the care of our common home, Vatican City, 2015.

⁶⁷ Francis, Message for the launch of the *Global Educational Compact*, Vatican City, 12 September 2019.

algorithms and technical models that allow machines to process and rework data and make autonomous decisions.

Various forms of AI, such as machine learning, artificial vision, natural language processing, planning and optimisation, need to be explored with educators. It is necessary to understand how it is used in many sectors (medicine, finance, industrial automation, e-commerce, etc.), and to know the dynamics and development of Chat GPT and other systems that are being introduced into the market.

Must be aware that there are various aspects of an economic, political and corporate nature that currently generate tensions and conflicts of interest, especially in the competition to gain socio-economic and political hegemony through the use of this technology.

- *Formation in the critical and educational use of new technologies to live in the digital world.* Educators and young people are called to understand the changes taking place, how the media and cultural industries function. Critical sense, strategic spirit, *self-control*, safe and effective use, sense of respect, civic sense, autonomy and problem-solving skills, are all elements that are not necessarily part of the equipment of an adolescent or young person just because they were born and raised among monitors and keyboards, or because they have made use of them.

Similarly, a serious competence is required for the use of communication tools in the "digital continent": a clear understanding of the goals to be achieved is crucial for fostering creativity, developing an independent and critical mindset towards their messages, and recognising their impact, enabling us to effectively communicate with them using their languages and technologies.

The meaning of media communication directly refers to what the media express through words and images, to "why" we use them and to the purposes of broadcasters and receivers involved in the communication process. There is a need, therefore, for a critical multitasking elaboration of the conceptual elements, of the signs that the media themselves use.

- *Involvement in the production of messages and content specifically aimed at young people, using all the means at our disposal.* Doing social communication is increasingly an educational presence, shaping mentalities and creating culture. "The challenge for the future will be educating to new media, but also carrying out educational and pastoral activity by means of new media especially where new generations are concerned. Its sharp effectiveness and ever more massive presence make Social Communication

a true and authentic alternative school for very large sectors of the world's population, especially youth and ordinary people."⁶⁸

- *The relationship between social communication and evangelisation* or, more concretely, between the use of languages and media of social communication for the gospel and our apostolic style of "evangelising by educating" profoundly impacts Salesian activity. It is not only a question of educating to the media, that is, of critically reading their messages, but also of evangelising with the media. A wide field of initiatives opens up in this sector for our teaching, educational and cultural activities, for the Christian animation of youth groups, for catechesis, for prayer.
- *Seeing the value of social communication as a new space for young people to gather.* Communication technologies change the sense of belonging and how people come together, as they create more communities in which users are inserted, with devices increasingly connected to the lives of young people. "The activities offered and requested are those of listening, recognising, responding, being with and acting with, in a situation that points to the possibility of experiences (maybe new or different ones) that offer mutual trust as an antidote to improvisation by the consumer. These new 'vital settings' like *social networks* encourage focus on the stories of young peoples' lives which we find in their own accounts of themselves and in the way they rework their experiences, with the possibility of helping them to orient themselves and make choices."⁶⁹

"Promotion and appreciation of all forms and expressions of communication (cf. GC24, no.129), like music, theatre, cinema, television, photography, comics, multimedia and other artistic expressions with clear educational and evangelising scope. We need to provide leadership in these situations of communication so that they are not just ever broader settings for free expression and creativity, but also encourage a taste for beauty in all expressions. Educating to beauty means involving the entire sphere of sensitivity and emotion, imagination and creativity, ability to express one's sensations and feelings and understand how others express them."⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry. Frame of Reference*, Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, Rome, 2014, pp. 171-172.

⁶⁹ Ibidem, p. 172.

⁷⁰ Ibidem.

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GUIDELINES FOR SALESIAN COMMUNICATION

GUIDELINES FOR FURTHER STUDY AND ACTION

“All of us are called to grow together, in humanity and as humanity. We are challenged to make a qualitative leap in order to become a complex, multiethnic, pluralistic, multireligious and multicultural society We are called to reflect carefully on the theoretical development and the practical use of these new instruments of communication and knowledge” (Message of Pope Francis for the 58th World Day of Social Communications).

The guidelines for social communication are the canvas on which the individual Provinces and Regions can plan their activities and projects.

Some areas of reflection and essential issues are listed in this chapter, taking into account the digital context, artificial intelligence and the different human, cultural and technical aspects of digital communication and the vision of the Church and the Congregation in the field of evangelisation and education.

The organisation, management and governance of the Salesian Congregation regarding social communication are also outlined.

The Document considers the new needs and challenges that arise in the field of communication today, such as the professionalism of communication operators, the modernisation of institutional communication, collaborative methods of networking, structural organisation of various kinds in the Provinces, issues related to privacy and security.

This final part also presents practical guidelines for communication considering the reality in each Province, with attention to multiculturalism. All these are the new needs, styles and ways of carrying out the Salesian mission in the world today.

- ❖ Considering the cultural diversity of the Regions, the changes that occur in the field of communication, and the dynamic processes in which it takes place in the individual Provinces, it is important to define, update and implement communication both at the central level and at the provincial level. This new and profound horizon must start from a perspective that includes the biblical, theological, ecclesial, Salesian, and pastoral dimensions. Based on this foundation and by adhering to the pastoral and methodological educational approach, every Province and Region develops and coordinates communication together with the Provincial, his Council, and the provincial pastoral team.
- ❖ The purpose of these guidelines is to update, shed light on and expand communication in the Province.
- ❖ Considering the digital context, Artificial Intelligence, and the various human, cultural, and technical aspects of digital communication, we consider it important that the following areas be included in communication projects, through the perspective of the Church and the Congregation in the field of evangelisation and education:

– **The evangelisation area**

In terms of the Salesian Congregation's intentions, evangelisation is a central commitment that runs across all areas. It is a dynamic and multifaceted process which aims to spread the gospel message through modern means of communication, responding to the challenges and opportunities of the contemporary context.

Therefore, its specific tasks are:

- to accompany the production of content to evangelise in collaboration with the other Sectors, the Provincials and Delegates for Communication and their Teams;
- to promote the basics and methodology for evangelisation in digital culture.

– **The animation area**

This synergistic process is based on the Salesian style of working grounded in collaboration with the laity and the use of appropriate targeting tools, both technical and human. The aim of this approach is not only effective internal or external communication, but also the promotion of gospel values and the

Salesian mission through social media, Artificial and Generative Intelligence and, last but not least, traditional media.

Its specific tasks, in collaboration and in close relationship with the Provincials, are to:

- coordinate media-related aspects, with regard to the visits of the Rector Major and the General Council;
- accompany and coordinate the Delegates for Social Communication;
- promote and verify the implementation of the Provincial Social Communication plans;
- take care of the visits of the Councillor or Sector personnel to the Provinces;
- promote and coordinate regional and world meetings for the Delegates for Social Communication;
- animate and coordinate regional or world meetings of Salesian communication bodies and enterprises: publishers, radios, printers, Salesian Bulletin, magazines, websites, content creators, digital missionaries, video producers, various artists, music and theatre, meetings related to communication with and for migrants and refugees (Voices), various workshops (Mobile Journalism).

– The management area

Salesian communication management encompasses the entire set of processes, human relations, work methodologies and operational steps required to implement projects and operations within the organisation itself. It aims at pursuing the objectives outlined by communication management. It involves teamwork in research, development, logistics, finance and assets. Integrated management is, precisely, a priority objective for the Salesian Congregation in the field of social communication. This implies not only the harmonisation of communication activities between the various realities of the organisation, but also the development of a clear and coherent strategy which takes into account the challenges and opportunities presented by the convergence of the media.

Its specific tasks are geared in particular towards:

- coordinating external and internal institutional communication;
- promoting cooperation with communication-related institutions;
- implementing all communication activities on a global scale.

– **The institutional communication area**

Firstly, institutional communication in the Salesian Congregation has as its specific task to follow up activities carried out to generate and pass on information to individuals, groups and communities. The Salesian Congregation manages both external and internal communication. These activities disseminate the organisation's mission, vision, values, objectives, information and projects. The communication channels may vary, as do the audiences themselves.

Internal communication concerns the transmission of messages within the organisation and is addressed to those who are part of it. External communication refers to the transmission of information outside the organisation and is therefore addressed to a wider audience.

Pursuing these goals in more detail, the specific tasks are to:

- develop an appropriate external and internal communication strategy for the Salesian Congregation on a worldwide level;
- coordinate and promote the Congregation's public relations services;
- manage the Salesian iNfo Agency (ANS) in collaboration with the Delegates for Social Communication and correspondents in the Provinces;
- promote the Salesian Bulletin (print and digital);
- coordinate the sdb.org and sdl.sdb.org websites;
- organise the diffusion of Provincial newsletters and the multifaceted Salesian information production;
- coordinate the institutional social media of the Congregation, the Sector and ANS at world level;
- manage emergencies and organise institutional crisis communication;
- accompany the International Artificial Intelligence Commission.

– **The networking area**

The Salesian style includes networking, promoting charismatic identity, valuing people and human relations, sharing vision and mission, adopting a planning mentality and involving the educational community.

It also promotes teamwork and collaboration with other sectors such as Youth Ministry, Mission, Formation, Economy and the Salesian Family.

Use is made of technology, the Internet and social media to share projects and promote professional and synergetic management. All media activities

on an international level involve extensive collaboration with centres around the world.

The specific tasks are to:

- organise the Network of Communication Delegates at Region level
- design the Region's communication project in line with the Sector's proposals for animation and management;
- draw up formation guidelines for the Delegates and Regional Teams through the School of Communication;
- create synergy and collaboration with other Salesian networks;
- implement and accompany the establishment of networking in all the Communication areas of the Congregation around the world;
- ensure that the contents relating to social communication at world level are correctly archived for the benefit of the whole Congregation.

– **The formation area**

It ensures the strengthening of Salesian formation of new priests and brothers with a clear charismatic, ethical, technical and pastoral identity, understanding the dynamics of the digital environment and the vision of convergent, collaborative and networked management.

It must be emphasised that the development of digital skills among Salesians and collaborators is very relevant. In addition to this, the area of competence, both internally and externally within the Congregation, is extended to the laity in collaborative management and in the various processes related to communication projects.

The following are emphasised as specific tasks:

- supporting the integration of the initial and ongoing formation programme for social communication in the different phases, in harmony with the Constitutions, the new Ratio and the Document on Social Communication;
- promoting annual international or provincial meetings on social communication for students and formators, also involving different groups of the Salesian Family and young people;
- promoting the creation and collection of suitable materials for formation in social communication;
- organising workshops on the Mobile Journalism project in the Provinces.

– **The production area**

The production of materials within the scope of activities related to social communication in the Salesian Congregation includes the creation of a wide range of content and communication tools, such as: articles, videos, films, podcasts, photographs, books, music, magazines, graphics, infographics, courses, workshops, social media, websites, applications, communication platforms, live streaming, educational materials and much more.

Considerable importance will be attached to the creation of a network for the promotion and visibility of the various initiatives, events, content and products.

The specific tasks of this area are to:

- coordinate, together with the Economer General, our Publishing Houses or Printing Works as production centres of Christian and Salesian culture;
- accompany Multimedia Production Centres
- animate multimedia theatres: cinema, theatre and culture in general;
- encourage the active involvement of Salesians as evangelisers, educators and communicators in the various communications media: internet, social media, television, radio, press and others;
- encourage the creation of a variety of content dedicated mainly to the internet and social media;
- promote the drafting and translation of professional texts, taking into account the latest developments in artificial intelligence.

– **Professionalisation area**

This includes the use of specialised knowledge and experience in the social communication field to plan, implement and evaluate communication strategies.

It involves selecting appropriate communication channels, raising the quality of content, identifying target groups (audiences), employing trained professionals and ensuring appropriate technologies and tools.

The objective of professionalisation is to increase the impact, reach and effectiveness of communication in the Salesian Congregation at an international level, thus supporting the realisation of Salesian mission and values worldwide.

Its main tasks are to:

- promote the specific, academic and technical preparation of Delegates for Social Communication and of some confreres, so that they can become formators in social communication
- support the specialisation of some brothers in the provinces in social communication;
- implement the ongoing formation of the laity in the field of social communication;
- accompany and support the digital aspects of evangelisation in the different Provinces;
- develop communication strategies that support the mission of the Salesian Congregation.

15

MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

GUIDELINES FOR FURTHER STUDY AND ACTION

- ❖ **What is fundamental in collaborating to carry out the Salesian mission** is that social communication be accomplished through processes, steps and projects as part of institutional communication programming, and programming by the Communication Sector.
With regard to internal communication, the Congregation's Directory of animation and governance and the Sector's communication plan guide the different processes and procedures in agreement with the competence of those directly responsible
At the level of external communication, the Congregation provides various activities, such as public relations and the management of image and institutional advertising. These are complemented by assistance to the Rector Major and his Council in general, and to Provincials and their councils in the Provinces. We are also committed to promoting knowledge of the Congregation within church, governmental and civil entities, in order to support the accomplishment of the Salesian mission.
- ❖ **Criteria and guidelines for the management of Salesian communication.** There is no doubt that the promotion of communication is everyone's responsibility, with the animation and coordination of the Councillor for Social Communication at worldwide level and the Provincials and Delegates at province level. Through systematic activities and by implementing shared policies and plans, all aspects need to be incorporated into the Animation Project of the Rector Major and his Council, as well as the Overall Provincial Plan.

“Social communication extends beyond the restricted confines of a province. It must be thought of in network terms. What cannot be realised by the efforts of a single province can be attained by the joint effort of many” (AGC 370,41) Regarding these services “there should be liaison and cooperation with centres in other provinces and the General Councillor for Social Communication” (Regulations, art. 31).

- ❖ **As a Congregation, we can rely on information tools and products such as the *Agenzia iNfo Salesiana (ANS)***, with a network of correspondents in the Regions and Provinces, Public Relations services, press offices, spokespersons, the Salesian Bulletin, websites and portals, documentation services and archives, province newsletters, and a variety of information products.

In this area, where there are opportunities and convenience, countries, conferences or regions will need to organise teams, structures or services for sharing, consulting and networking for communication, serving the Provinces. These structures and services will be governed by specific conventions or statutes agreed upon between Provinces, involving the Regional Councillor, and after having heard the opinion of the General Councillor for Social Communication.

Communication is promoted when the communication skills of individuals and the institution have improved. This assessment will have to be guided by objective parameters or indicators capable of measuring the rate of achievement of the desired outcomes and its implementation must be outlined in accordance with the listed criteria.

Such processes will be carried out with the participation of the individuals involved, in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the plans and processes initiated, so as to guide the next steps.

The unique nature of the Salesian mission indicates the possibility and need for interdepartmental teams (e.g. Youth Ministry, Social Communication, Missions), above all to facilitate shared actions.

- ❖ **Need for a Communication Sector Action Plan (CSAP).** At a broad level it is essential to formulate and implement a Plan based on the Animation Project of the Rector Major and his Council, with the goal of fostering teamwork among the Provinces and enhancing cooperation between particular formation and production initiatives.

A. At Province level

- Social communication is guided by a Provincial Social Communication Plan (PSCP), integrated into the Overall Province Plan (OPP), which takes into account the specific situation of each Province and seeks to apply the Congregation's Social Communication directives and the general programming made by the Rector Major and his Council for the six-year period.

B. Cross-disciplinary work

- It will be necessary to promote the vitality, dynamics and Salesian style of communication in its expression as a cross-disciplinary dimension of educative and pastoral action, of the mission field, of a work with its own characteristics and of a specific and integrated communication system.

C. Study and research

- The development and implementation of communication are supported by analysis, research, study, reflection and monitored through evaluation, consultancy, formation and development activities.

D. Permanent advisory councils

- Permanent worldwide and Provincial Advisory Councils for social communication have been established, made up of teams of Salesian and lay experts for the different fields or areas, coordinated by the General Councillor and the Provincial Delegates for social communication respectively. It is their task to explore the Salesian pastoral methodology of communication at the service of the Congregation, the Church and society.

- ❖ **Some indications for Salesian communication.** In the management, organisation and operation of communication in our Provinces and in the related works, it is important to establish: media education, considered as tools to be used in general educational processes; critical understanding of the media, seen not only as tools, but as language and culture; the use of media in view of the formation of professionals; artistic expressions, cultural, musical, sports and leisure activities typical of the Salesian style; care for the environment in its various aspects; openness to forms of education and evangelisation which enhance communication

as a new living space for young people to come together; the constant commitment to building a community of people with a common and shared vision of mission, Salesian spirit and project in a family atmosphere of closeness and sharing between Salesians and lay people (see in particular GC24), educators and pupils.

The promotion of unity, within the increasing diversity of cultures and continuously changing situations, must be nurtured through a constant dialogue between the Centre and the Provinces, so that awareness is raised and local situations and problems are taken into consideration, while at the same time broadening the view to the Congregation as a whole. It will also be necessary for the General Administration to be close to the Conferences and groups of Provinces, to design locally networked interventions rather than ones imposed from above, involving regional or provincial centres and Delegates.

❖ **With regard to the question of animation and communication management in external relations**, some important, if indeed not essential, factors must be taken into consideration:

- management of the Congregation's public relations;
- management of the Congregation's image and institutional advertising;
- assistance to the Rector Major and his Council in general matters, to the Provincials and their Councils in the provincial realm, and in engaging with individuals, communities, institutions, media, public activities;
- increasing knowledge and awareness of the Congregation among church, governmental and civil entities, in order to help accomplish the Salesian mission;
- coordination of media use in support of educating young people and disseminating the Good News;
- the opportunity to use potential spaces for entering the world of media, to get to know the communications media, use them and positively influence their content;
- liaison with and involvement in church and civil organisations who operate in and coordinate the social communication sector;
- participation in events and church and social movements in the communication field that are related to education and pastoral work.

- ❖ **The formation of Salesians.** The formation of Salesians takes into consideration the contents of some fundamental documents, including the Regulations, Article 82: “Our Salesian mission orientates and characterises at all levels the intellectual formation of the members in a way that is original and unique. Therefore the programme of studies must preserve a balance between serious and scientific reflection and the religious and apostolic dimensions of our way of life. Those branches of study shall be cultivated with special care which deal with the education of and pastoral work for youth, catechesis and social communication.” Then the guidelines of the new *Ratio* (“The formation of the Salesians of Don Bosco. Principles and norms”); the awareness and preparation of the confreres, so that they can enter the communication field in a professional manner; the Joint Document of the Formation and Social Communication Departments (2006) with Guidelines for the formation of Salesians in social communication, the contents and methodologies for the various formation phases.

- ❖ **Gathering data on youth and their circumstances.** Beyond contact and personal knowledge of young people in their own work or area, we aim for a well-documented understanding of the constantly evolving youth world. A wealth of information about this should be added for a better understanding, for increased involvement, and for an improved qualification of our service.
 - At the same time, we commit to disseminating this information in society, with the aim of creating public opinion and awareness that lead to policies and actions on behalf of youth.
 - To support the animation and smooth functioning of the Congregation as an organisation, it is essential to have an updated database that enables a quick and secure understanding of the personnel, projects, and activities at any given moment.

- ❖ **Procedures for digitisation and digital preservation.** Information also has the task of digital preservation. This implies the development of procedures at different levels which ensure digital material of value, processed in a way that facilitates its preservation. The different digital processes related to the systematisation and preservation of the historical and cultural documents of the Congregation also need to be taken care of: written documents, images (still or moving), audio testimonies, objects.

Proper management of archives, libraries, museums and monuments must be established.

- ❖ **The institutional image.** The institutional image must be maintained through correct and complete information that clearly expresses the social significance of the work of Don Bosco. We work in poor areas and for poor young people. We work with them, educating them to assume their moral, professional and social responsibilities, and favouring their involvement in groups and in the larger community" (Constitutions, 33).
 - We participate as religious in the testimony and commitment of the Church for justice and peace. While not getting involved in ideologies or party politics, we reject everything that encourages deprivation, injustice and violence. We cooperate with all who are trying to build a society more worthy of human dignity. "The advancement to which we dedicate ourselves in the spirit of the gospel makes tangible the love of Christ which sets us free, and is a sign that the Kingdom of God is among us" (Constitutions, 33).

- ❖ **Crisis communication management requires professionalism and strategic action.** It is not limited to reacting to adverse events, but rather focuses on anticipating scenarios, defining clear protocols, and analysing risks. In fact, it is necessary to anticipate scenarios, establish clear protocols and maintain transparent and consistent communication at all times.
 - One of the keys to crisis communication management is the speed and effectiveness of the response. Timely action and transparency of information are essential to effectively manage a crisis. This means being ready to act immediately in the face of critical situations, providing accurate and up-to-date information. A harmoniously flowing communication helps to maintain the trust and credibility of the organisation even in the event of a crisis.
 - Managing crisis communication requires a thorough understanding of organisational values and culture. Therefore, in this context, communication must be empathetic and immediate. This includes aligning the organisation's messages and actions with its core principles and core values.

- ❖ **Qualification and professionalism.** It is essential to professionally enhance and qualify information structures, tools and products. In a special way, the following should be highlighted:

- The *Agenzia iNfo Salesiana* (ANS) with its network of correspondents in the Regions and the Provinces;
- public relations services, press offices, spokespersons;
- the Salesian Bulletins;
- portals and websites;
- documentation services and archives;
- provincial newsletters and the multiple production of Salesian information;
- the platforms and technological communications media that allow greater speed, financial and energy savings, ongoing and personal access to information.

❖ **Editorial Policy.** Don Bosco's educational work bears the imprint of his activity as a writer and publisher. As an author, he wrote devotional, formative, educational and scholastic texts. In support of his publishing activity, he established the Society for the dissemination of good press and founded the Valdocco Oratory's Printing Press.

Salesian Publishers are enterprises involved in the cultural, social and political life of the people, especially young people from popular backgrounds. They are open to the cultures of the countries in which they operate, to understand them and embody the Gospel message in them (cf. Constitutions, 7).

They make the Congregation present in society, in schools, and in culture through their activity, playing an active role in the process of evangelisation and catechesis; their editorial policy is regulated by the relationship between faith and culture as interpreted by the Magisterium; they recognise the authenticity of human values, their autonomy and relevance to faith; they reject any kind of fundamentalism.

They are educational and generating presences, with particular attention to the popular and humanistic dimension, in line with Don Bosco and the Salesian educational and pedagogical tradition.

Salesian Publishers work in the field of education, evangelisation, catechesis, formation and education. They are committed to promoting the proclamation of the gospel, to accompanying the discovery and maturation of the faith, to facilitating the synthesis between faith and culture, to educating in the critical, aesthetic and moral sense, to promoting openness to religion.

❖ **Entrepreneurial communication structures.** Following the example of Don Bosco who gave entrepreneurial stability to his publishing activity, and as required by the General Regulations (R. 31), Salesian Publishers are established on sound legal and economic foundations.

As with any other work of the Province, the Provincial with his Council defines: the legal structure of the Publisher, in accordance with the laws in force in the country; the entity that owns it; the purpose of its activity; its organisational structure, specifying roles, competences, functions.

The Province also exercises its constant duty of control and direction.

The body that owns the Publishing house establishes the following with an official document: core values, guidelines for decision-making; policies, actions, purpose, or in other words the fundamental reason for the existence of the Publishing house; the mission and the objectives to pursue.

The Enterprise develops a significant and careful strategy which allows it to achieve the mission entrusted to it. Through an assessment of its strengths and weaknesses, its financial and human resources, its innovative capacity, it identifies its target and market space, its core business; it draw up its strategic, financial and marketing plan; it defines its organisational chart and job descriptions: who does what, when and how.

❖ **Salesian websites.** We can identify three core factors of a Salesian website: identity, purpose, the nature of the Web itself. The identity of a Salesian website is charismatic and institutional and can be expressed as follows:

- the mission (the salvation of youth); a reference to Don Bosco and his figure; the term "Salesian"; a certain style inspired by the Preventive System; the sense of community and the way in which a community is created.
- There are different levels of belonging to the institutional identity, depending on the nature of the site: it can be an "official" site of the Congregation, of the Region or of a Province, or of a work, a sector, a typically Salesian activity.
- Concrete elements such as the logo and the various links help to express this belonging. An official site should include a link to the Congregation's portal.
- A Salesian website always aims to bear witness to its Christian and evangelising identity. Its purpose is to animate, form, educate, inform

(news, videos...), preserve (documents, images, sounds...), advertise (without excessive self-referentiality).

- Without a doubt, continuous development involves various aspects: design, icons, skills, interactivity, accessibility, the ability to manage increasingly complex sites in a simple way using the tools available today.

❖ **Salesian radio and television.** These are radio or television facilities that evangelise youth and popular culture in a Salesian style, educating, guiding, informing and involving. Among their multiple purposes, we emphasise the importance of: promoting group activity, involvement of young people and ordinary folk; awakening in them the critical capacity to interpret and evaluate their situation; spreading human and Christian values in society; implementing educational, cultural, and pastoral programs, promoting culture, education, and religion through ethical and quality programming; spreading specialised programs with a Salesian identity based on the Preventive System, creatively, using appropriate resources; promoting the Salesian vocation in its various expressions.

It is therefore necessary to:

- inform, educate, evangelise young people and the popular classes using the language of radio; produce and support youth programs, radio and television enterprises with Salesian educational style, stimulating and involving young people themselves; disseminate correct information which offers elements for a constructive criticism of society; give space in our messages to the themes of social justice and campaigns for the protection and promotion of human rights.

Essential for this to take place: striving to achieve financial sustainability of radio and TV through careful management, local support and network projects; professionally preparing and forming radio and television personnel in the Salesian charism, in order to guarantee the evangelising quality of the message. To this end it is necessary to schedule periodic formation meetings and promote shared networking with the Salesian Congregation and the Church in all local and provincial areas.

❖ **Social networks.** A new form of communication. They are primarily used for exchanging experiences and opinions, communicating with friends, and staying in touch with acquaintances in an increasingly Internet-connected society.

They play a fundamental role in the lives of numerous people, as they make it possible to meet new people and discover new places, become aware of events immediately, engage in dialogue, and create groups with different intentions and functions.

Through Facebook, X, Youtube, Whatsapp, and many other social media platforms, connections are created among people in various parts of the world, something that was impossible to imagine until a few years ago. With a single click someone can immediately find out what is happening thousands of kilometres away.

Moreover, online platforms bring great benefits to users, who become consumers and producers of information because they are available to virtually everyone. In social networks, all users are creators, actors, simultaneously and permanently visible.

- ❖ **The formation of Salesian and lay specialists.** It is necessary to be aware of the priority of the formation of Salesians and lay communication specialists. It is necessary to set in motion, support, and enhance action, animation, formation, information, and production areas for effective communication in service of the Salesian mission.

- ❖ **The implementation of Salesian communication at Congregation and Province level.** The areas of attention and commitment must be considered with this in mind, so that the animation and management of social communication can fulfil their mission in an integrated, convergent and professional manner.

16

ORGANISATION OF SALESIAN COMMUNICATION

GUIDELINES FOR FURTHER STUDY AND ACTION

- ❖ **General Coordination.** The coordination, organisation and promotion of communication are entrusted to the Councillor for Social Communication at general level, and to the Delegate for Social Communication at provincial level.

Organising means identifying and structuring the work to be carried out; defining and assigning the related tasks and powers; establishing adequate relationships among people for teamwork, in order to achieve the expected results.

The Provincial, according to the indications of the 23rd General Chapter, is required to appoint the Delegate for Social Communication who “will assist the individual communities in promoting various communicational realities; will offer his services to the various sectors of activity and will maintain relations with local ecclesiastical and civil organizations” (GC23, no. 259).

- ❖ **Support activities and their policies.** The availability and adequate administration of the personnel, resources and services necessary for the functioning of communication in the Province must be ensured. The support activities must be carried out in agreement between the Economer General and/or Provincial Economer. Personnel management must take into account:
 - the support and development of human resources which allows reliance on qualified, stable and motivated personnel;

- the constant formation of people for the development of their potential and for their appropriate placement within the work structure.

The management of financial resources and assets concerns:

- the availability, adequate use and control of the necessary resources;
- employment in accordance with legal requirements and current legal regulations of civil society and the Congregation;
- professionalism in procedures;
- a budget which corresponds to each of the plans.

The management of services concerns:

- the organisation and working methods, so that organisational structures are constantly updated and adapted to the expected results, within the framework outlined by the Constitutions and Regulations of the Congregation;
- informing sectors and areas of the Congregation of experiences and results;
- the proper functioning of computerised systems which guarantee secure and fast bases for making the management decisions necessary to achieve the results desired by communication;
- the availability of legal support to ensure compliance with the law and to guarantee the defence of the interests of the Congregation in this area.

The management of linguistic resources and translation must take into account:

- safeguarding Salesian terminology both internally and externally;
- seeing to a faithful and understandable translation of the messages of the Rector Major and his Council, of other bodies for animation and formation and information. "Faithful" means faithfulness to the original language and context, however, such as to promote the understanding of readers in their cultural context;
- the promotion of standards useful for texts published by the General Administration.

❖ **Management of documentary heritage.** The Social Communication Sector (SCS) sees to the management of the Congregation's documentary heritage, in collaboration with the Central Salesian Archives, through digitisation of texts, Text Memory (TM), etc.

The Social Communication Delegate offers his skills and advice to the Central Salesian Archives and to others responsible for the management of the Congregation's documentary heritage. The Social Communication Sector, also in collaboration with the Secretary General and/or the Vicar of the Rector Major, sees to coordination of the group of translators and offers services to support their task.

The Social Communication Sector promotes style guidelines for the various situations, for example for the General Administration, or for translators in the various languages.

17

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR SALESIAN COMMUNICATION

GUIDELINES FOR FURTHER STUDY AND ACTION

❖ The General Councillor for Social Communication

Fundamental task

'The Councillor for Social Communication has the duty of animating the Congregation in this Sector. He promotes Salesian activity in the Social Communication Sector, and in particular coordinates the structures and centres at world level for which the Congregation has responsibility in this field' (Constitutions, 137).

As a cornerstone, the Sector for Social Communication bases its values on the gospel, in the person of St John Bosco and in the sources of inspiration of his Preventive System, uniting itself to the Magisterium of the Salesian Congregation.

In order to respond adequately to the growing pressure of the media, it becomes relevant to emphasise the changes taking place. These new socio-cultural demands, dictated by real and evident signs of our times, must promote a type of transmission that is rich in teachings and moral principles, emphasising

- fidelity to the Salesian charism at the service of the young;
- the human person, always at the centre of communication;
- the invitation of the Church and the Congregation to dwell, evangelise and educate within digital culture with Salesian identity;
- the relevance of convergence in shared management and governance, management professionalism and organisational culture;

- the active participation of the laity in the collaborative educational, pastoral and administrative management of communication;
- a networking mentality, the ethical and educational use of artificial intelligence from a teamwork perspective and a multitasking, planning and convergent mindset.

Specific tasks are to:

- animate and manage institutional, informational, educational and pastoral communication in a synodal, systematic and inclusive manner through clear policies, effective processes, planning, implementation and verification of projects.
- spread the values and vision of Salesian communication: to place the priority of the person and their formation at the centre, over the means; to promote a positive vision of the human being, to value fraternal communion between individuals as a vocation, to establish authenticity in personal and community life as a credible foundation for communication.
- accompany and support the Salesian Congregation in the field of Social Communication, taking into account the digital transformation, at the service of the mission, as indicated by the General Regulations (R. 31-34).
- encourage the awareness of being a communicator with Salesian identity and charismatic fidelity. As a rule, this competence must be realised in the religious communities, in mission places, through traditional and digital means of communication (Constitutions, 43).
- animate the Rectors and those in charge of communication centres and structures, in order to work with an educational, professional and networked vision, through the use of social networks and the media.
- coordinate the areas which the Social Communication Sector comprises: evangelisation, animation, management, institutional communication, formation, production, professionalisation, networking.
- promote communication and marketing activities, in order to guarantee visibility and cohesion which, in fact, address all institutional communication and content production in the Salesian Congregation.
- accompany the formation and animation of Communication Delegates, Directors of Communication Centres, Publishing Houses, Salesian Bulletin, Radio and other institutions.

❖ **The Social Communication Department team**

The team that makes up this Department has specific roles of collaboration with the General Councillor. In particular, it must:

- contribute to promoting communication together with the General Councillor;
- constantly collaborate with everything related to the objectives of the Social Communication Sector;
- carry out the tasks assigned by the Councillor at the service of the Sector, such as: the ANS Agency, the press office, the Italian Salesian Bulletin, the Salesian Bulletins worldwide, the Web Portal, documentation and archives, photographic services.

❖ **World Advisory Council for Social Communication**

The different Salesian and lay members of the team, experts in the different areas of animation and formation, information and enterprises, collaborate continuously with the Department through their studies and advice, responding to requests, but also offering spontaneous suggestions proactively.

Their contribution aims in particular to:

- accompany the development of the Congregation's communication;
- carry out evaluations, research, studies;
- offer guidance and aids for constant updating;
- offer continuous advice regarding the Congregation's communication, particularly to the Social Communication Department.

❖ **Regional, National and/or Conference delegate**

In close cooperation with headquarters and in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, the various Regional, National and/or Conference Delegates undertake to:

- promote teamwork and collaboration between the Provinces in the communication field and its various activities, with an open strategic vision of the entire mission and the Congregation;
- carry out the task entrusted to it by the statutes, or by the conventions of the Regional delegation or Conference;
- maintain a close cooperation link with the General Councillor for Social Communication and with the Department;
- promote the development and implementation of a common plan of action and collaboration in the Social Communication Sector in accordance with the general programming of the Region or Conference.

❖ **The Provincial with his Council**

Within the individual Provinces, the Provincial with his Council undertakes to:

- promote communication in the Province;
- see to and verify the quality of communication inside and outside the Province, among confreres, with Salesian Family Groups, with church communities and civil and social institutions, among groups of Provinces and with the General Council;
- appoint the Provincial Delegate for communication;
- see to the organisation, roles and functions of social communication and of the communication team or commission;
- prepare the confreres to enter press, cinema, radio and television circuits;
- establish and strengthen publishing centres for the production and dissemination of books, support materials and periodicals, broadcasting and production centres for audiovisual, radio and television programmes;
- establish the auditors of publications requiring ecclesiastical review.

❖ **The Provincial Delegate for Social Communication**

The Delegate can be Salesian or lay (male or female) and has the task of promoting communication in the Province on behalf of the Provincial:

- the role should be full-time;
- this person must work in collaboration with the different *teams* that make up the structure, in support of the Salesian youth mission, for its implementation in the Province;
- this person coordinates in a special way with Delegates of the other Sectors;
- in agreement with the Provincial Economist, the Delegate plays an appropriate role of representation in managing the communication enterprises of the Province;
- the Delegate collaborates in the development and implementation of the Provincial Social Communication Plan;
- according to the possibilities, the Delegate animates and accompanies those who are involved in Province communication: the Provincial Council, the Salesian communities, the local contact persons for communication, the different areas of communication activity;

- the Delegate assists in the ongoing formation of the confreres in the communication field;
- the Delegate networks with the different people responsible at every level in the Province to coordinate activities, stressing the Salesian criteria listed in the first part of this document: in the development and application of plans at the different provincial and local levels, in promoting processes and in the execution of formation, information and production programmes and activities, collaborating with the Youth Ministry team or Provincial Commission;
- the Delegate is a member of animation bodies for works of social communication production works;
- it is essential that the Delegate has an overview that allows for well-targeted interventions to ensure balance and harmony between local Salesian information and worldwide information in the following areas: ANS (Salesian Info Agency), local information (correspondents), production and dissemination of information within the Province and the Salesian Family.

❖ **Social Communication Team (Provincial Commission or other)**

To support and contribute to the development and functioning of communication within each Province, it is good to form a team that deals with:

- contributing, together with the Delegate and the Province to the task of promoting communication;
- working as a team in the System, and collaborating constantly with everything related to the mission in the Social Communication Sector;
- contributing to the drafting and application of the Province Plan for animation-formation-consulting in the Social Communication Sector;
- contributing to the work of the Delegate with information, study, sharing, planning and experimentation;
- taking up the tasks entrusted by the Provincial or the Delegate for the management of the various activities, or involvement in communication events and bodies;
- enhancing communication in support of the education and evangelisation of young people and ordinary folk.

❖ **Press office, Team and production**

It is important to organise a press office that is concerned with:

- developing an active and positive contact with structures, people and communication media locally;
- managing the Salesian image in terms of quality and quantity, the significance of our presence in mass media and in the press space;
- participating in the meetings of the System at different levels, regional or conference and worldwide, contributing increasingly to the establishment of teamwork within the Congregation;
- coordinating with church, religious, governmental and civil bodies dealing with communication.

❖ **Local Social Communication Coordinator**

Each local scene and work must carefully take care of, organise and coordinate its interventions in the communication sector. Particular attention will be paid to:

- promoting communication in the local work;
- being actively involved within the Youth Ministry team in all activities concerning the education of young people;
- interacting with the representatives of the other Sectors for a well-coordinated activity of the local work;
- collaborating in the development and implementation of the local Social Communication Plan;
- animating those who cooperate in communication in the work: the council of the educative community, the Salesian community, the local communication commission, the different areas of communication activities;
- accompanying the development and implementation of plans in the promotion of processes and in the implementation of formation, information and production programmes and activities
- accompanying the action of people responsible at local level;
- guiding the management of the website, press office activity;
- maintaining active and positive contact with structures, people and communication media locally;
- managing the Salesian image with the utmost attention to quality and quantity, the significance of our presence in the mass media and in the press space;

- providing ANS (Salesian Info Agency), in the provincial and world context, with local information and intelligently placing the information produced in the local area.

❖ **ANS Agency (Salesian iNfo Agency)**

The main purposes of the Agency in charge of information and communication by Salesians are to:

- produce Salesian information to feed Salesian media and place its products in social media at the service of the Salesian mission;
- be available to the different bodies of the Congregation (Rector Major, General Council, Sectors, Provinces, etc.) to help them effectively use information and communication as a means to achieve their animation and governance objectives;
- connect, through information on its distinct realities, the members of the Congregation scattered throughout the world and the different Salesian Family Groups;
- note local situations and challenges and help the Congregation, the Salesian Family and society to read and interpret them according to the Salesian mission;
- contribute to the quality of the information media of the Congregation and Salesian Family. Groups. The Agency aims at carrying out a service geared to enhancing their content and presentation;
- make the Congregation and the Salesian Family in the world known, offering information on relevant facts to the media close to the Church and, in general, to the media of social information;
- highlight the problems of youth and education in the world, processing and distributing information.

The ANS Agency acts on two levels:

Worldwide: in Rome, and in close collaboration with the governing bodies of the Congregation and the Salesian Family, the Agency centre establishes the necessary contacts with international Agencies, world databases, the Vatican and all Salesian communities. All products of a worldwide nature, both internal and external, are made by the centre, which will distribute them directly to clients or send them to the Provincial Delegates so that they can “place” them with the national media.

Provincial: the Provincial Delegate (provincial correspondent) for social communication, in full collaboration with the provincial governing bodies,

establishes contacts with the national agencies and media, with the Episcopal Conference Press Office and with the Salesian communities in the Province.

The Delegate (personally or through another correspondent) conveys to the Agency centre all the information from the Province that is of interest to it and, according to its own criteria and in accordance with its information policy, “places” the information or information products that have been received from the Agency with the Agencies and national media.

In addition, the Delegate, responsible to the Agency, draws up and distributes to the existing media in his area any Salesian information that is of local interest. Informants, Salesians or members of the Salesian Family in the various presences (local correspondents) collaborate with the Delegate.

The Delegate also takes care of the production and shipment of ANS products such as: ANSphoto, the printed monthly, the ANS Site and other products as needed.

❖ **ANS Press office**

The ANS press office must in particular:

- maintain contacts with information agencies, the media and the general public; be a spokesperson for attention to youth and educational problems;
- manage and defend the image of the Congregation and of Salesian activity. The press office is characterised as a service within ANS;
- to organise and update a database on the Salesian reality, on the youth situation and on education;
- to accompany current information on the media in everything related to the Salesian mission, passing on information to the immediate interested parties internally and interacting on these aspects through the same means;
- to establish contacts with agencies and in particular with journalists to inform them about the Salesian mission and mobilise them on behalf of youth education;
- to see to the organisation of roles and functions;
- to manage the communication and marketing plan for the image of the Congregation or the Province;
- to organise relationships of the leaders of the Congregation at different levels with the media and vice versa.

Particular attention should be paid to public relations. For this there is a need:

- to manage the official relationships of the Rector Major and his Council with the Congregation and of the latter with the outside, at a general level, and of the Provincial and his Council at provincial level. The Rector Major maintains responsibility – which in particular cases he may delegate to his Vicar, to the Secretary General, to the Official Spokesperson or to others – for the Council's official relationships with the Congregation and of the latter with the outside, in particular relationships with the Apostolic See, with the Union of Superiors General (USG), with other Institutes and Congregations, with other institutions and bodies both in church and civil fields, especially for statements or positions taken by the Congregation;
- the Provincial with his Council defines the operation of this body at the provincial level, in collaboration with the Press Office.

❖ **The Salesian Bulletin**

The Salesian Bulletin (SB) is a mission-oriented magazine aimed at public opinion rather than at the institution. This entails being able to understand the current circumstances experienced by people and the church, and to provide a Salesian perspective on events, particularly those related to youth and education.

The Salesian Bulletin is prepared according to the directives of the Rector Major and his Council in various editions and languages as the official publication of the entire Salesian Congregation, and not as a specific publication for each region. The numerous national or regional editions aim to embody the values of the unique Salesian vocation in the various cultural areas.

The main objectives of the Salesian Bulletin are to:

- spread the spirit of Don Bosco;
- make Salesian work and its needs known;
- connect and animate the different groups of our Family;
- promote vocations;
- help the Salesian movement to grow, encouraging collaboration in the mission.

❖ **The Web Portal**

The need to manage Internet resources as a space for information, formation, sharing at the service of the Congregation's animation and governance project, as a source of information on the Salesian charism and as a tool for mobilising society on behalf of youth is evident.

With regard to the management and development of the Web Portal, the Social Communication Sector is responsible for the management of the General Administration Portal:

- facilitating the interaction between the centre and the Provinces, and the updating of the various Salesian sites;
- maintaining an adequate structure of people and technological means for interactive operation;
- forming people for interaction;
- playing an animating role with the other Salesian *webmasters* around the world.

❖ **Documentation and the Archives**

"Historical" documentation is collected in the Archives, that is, the material no longer in use or directly available, but available upon request. In this regard, it should be noted that:

- the purpose of these Archives are to collect, preserve and make available documentation on the Salesian charism, experience and work;
- at a general level, the responsibility of the Central Salesian Archives (CSA) is assigned to the Secretary General;
- it functions in accordance with the Regulations of the Central Archives

❖ **The Photographic Archives**

With particular attention to the Photographic Archives, please note that:

- is the space (physical and intangible) where photographs and film, historical and current documentation are kept;
- the person in charge of these Archives makes material available for communication publications and for various documentation;
- the Social Communication Department also manages the Department's archives and its various services (ANS, SB, Portal), as a database and as current documentation for consultation;
- the Social Communication Department can offer its specific skills both to the Secretary General and to the heads of the different sections of the Central Salesian Archives, with regard to conservation policies and strategies, especially those involving technical and digital aspects.

❖ **The Provincial Newsletter**

It is good that the Provincial Newsletters continue to be produced in different ways and suitable for individual situations with the aim of:

- circulating Salesian information among the Salesian communities and educational communities and in the Salesian Family that is useful for communion, the sharing of experiences, the growth of a sense of belonging and renewal;
- producing information to serve the Province's animation plan concerning the different sectors of educative and pastoral organisation.

❖ **Formation Centres**

Communication Formation Centres in the Congregation have different profiles: university (academic) or informal (with formation programmes that vary in form and timing). They must:

- contribute to the Salesian mission by forming teachers, researchers, experts and operators in the Social Communication field, harmoniously integrating theoretical knowledge with operational skills;
- be guided by a specific Salesian educative and pastoral plan and by action plans that respond to the concrete needs of all users, integrated within the Overall Provincial Plan (OPP).

❖ **The Communication Sector promotes formation in communication**

The Communication Sector promotes the mutual collaboration of the Communication Formation Centres with the following guidelines or strategies:

- it works in harmony with the Formation and Youth Ministry Departments;
- it seeks elements of knowledge and collaborative relationships between the Communication Faculties of Salesian University Institutions and the various Formation Centres;
- it offers a formative response to the demand for education in communication and the formation of professionals.

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The Salesian Congregation, in its various areas of intervention, always aims to keep up with the times. This is an attitude that over the years has led us to the continuous search for dialogue between faith and science, the gospel and youth culture, the Preventive System and the digital world.

As educators of young people, we are responding to the challenges and opportunities of digital culture through profound reflection on communication and the use of various information technologies, the internet, social networks and, most recently, Artificial Intelligence.

Starting from the values of the gospel and the Preventive System, together with lay people and educators we wish to discuss this reality by listening to the new generations, accompanying adolescents and young adults in their social worlds, in search of new languages and new ways to educate them to love, to the meaning of life and responsibility, to the construction of their personal project.

