

2. GUIDELINES AND DIRECTIVES

2.1 YOUTH MINISTRY AND FAMILY

Fr Angel FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME
Rector Major

It contains a “guidance - directive” of the Rector Major expressed through a letter addressed to the Provincials on the theme of the family, in the work of Salesian Youth Ministry.

Dear Father Provincial,

in his final address concluding the works of the XIV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Pope Francis affirms: “We have seen, also by the richness of our diversity, that the same challenge is ever before us: that of proclaiming the Gospel to the men and women of today, and defending the family from all ideological and individualistic assaults. [...] In effect, for the Church *to conclude* the Synod means *to return* to our true “journeying together” in bringing to every part of the world, to every diocese, to every community and every situation, the light of the Gospel, the embrace of the Church and the support of God’s mercy!”

With the same feeling I’m addressing you because I would like that Pope Francis’ wish may become for our Congregation a further “journeying together” on the roads of the education of young people, especially the poorest and those most in need. A “journeying together” always more prone to consider the family as a protagonist of the Salesian educative and pastoral experience.

The Department for Youth Ministry, starting by the special attention that the Congregation has given to the family in our GC27 together with the Synodal process promoted by Pope Francis, is leading a process of reflection by involving all the Provinces in view of the *International Congress on Youth Ministry and Family* which will take place from the 27th of November to the 1st of December 2017.

At this point, I would like to ask each you, my dear Provincial Fathers, to dedicate a moment of reflection together with your Provincial Council around the theme of the family according to the guidelines and questions proposed in the following pages.

Your contribution will represent a precious assistance to the Department for Youth Ministry in preparing the *International Congress on Youth Ministry and Family*. Your reflection will also light up the way to the process of animation that together with the General Council, we are carrying on around the theme of the family, which, as Congregation and as Church, are called to discover always more as a privileged field for the proclamation of the Good News.

With deepest gratitude for your collaboration,

1. REFLECTION

In the Final document of GC27 we, Salesians of Don Bosco, acknowledge that “an emerging apostolic front that we have begun to take better care of is family ministry.” We want this ministry “to be seen in strict connection with youth ministry.” (CG27, 20).

Such pastoral urgency is also present in Pope Francis’ analysis in *Evangelii Gaudium*: “The family is experiencing a profound cultural crisis, as are all communities and social bonds. In the case of the family, the weakening of these bonds is particularly serious because the family is the fundamental cell of society, where we learn to live with others despite our differences and to belong to one another; it is also the place where parents pass on the faith to their children.” (Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 66).

As for the Synod of Bishops, in its Final report it reaffirms that for us “the family is the primary and fundamental “school of humanity” (cf. *GS*, 52). [...] The Church, expert in humanity and true to her mission, announces with deep conviction the “Gospel

of the Family” (Synod of Bishops, *The vocation and mission of the family in the Church and the contemporary world*, Final report, 2).

QUESTION 1:

WHICH CHALLENGES DOES THE FAMILY PRESENT TO YOUTH MINISTRY IN YOUR PROVINCE?

2. REFLECTION

The *Frame of Reference* of Salesian Youth Ministry describes the Educational and Pastoral Community as “a centre that welcomes the greatest possible number of people interested in the human and religious aspects of the area.” Then it states that “one clearly identified pastoral challenge is to achieve a fuller sharing with the family, which is the primary and indispensable educational community.” (*Salesian Youth Ministry, Frame of Reference*, Chap. V, 1.D).

In *Evangelii Gaudium* Pope Francis presents this challenge as “a breakdown in the way Catholics pass down the Christian faith to the young” for “growing numbers of parents do not bring their children for baptism or teach them how to pray”, and that there is also “a certain exodus towards other faith communities”. (Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 70).

The Synod of Bishops has chosen a pastoral approach that recalls us in a special way: “we note the importance of connecting youth ministry with family ministry” (Synod of Bishops, *The vocation and mission of the family in the Church and the contemporary world*, Final report, 90).

As Salesians of Don Bosco, at the GC26 we had already proposed the commitment to integrate the family ministry into the provincial and local pastoral and educative project, by fostering the formation and the involvement of lay people as collaborators (GC 26, 99, 102, 104). (GC 27, 71.5).

QUESTION 2:

IN YOUR PROVINCE’S PROJECTS, SUCH AS THE OPP, THE SEPP AND OTHER PASTORAL DOCUMENTS, WHICH DECISIONS HAS THE PROVINCE TAKEN OR IS GOING TO TAKE IN THE AREA OF YOUTH MINISTRY AND THE FAMILY?

3. REFLECTION

We are glad to notice that in many Provinces there are several pastoral initiatives in favour of the family, both as protagonist and object of our pastoral action. Such initiatives enable us to meet the challenge of “a spiritual ‘desertification’, as the result of attempts by some societies to build without God or to eliminate their Christian roots.” The family is becoming for us “a parched place where faith nonetheless has to be preserved and communicated” (Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 86).

Among other initiatives, the Synod of Bishops affirms that family catechesis is of great assistance as “an effective method in training young people and parents to be aware of their mission as evangelizers of their own family” (Synod of Bishops, *The vocation and mission of the family in the Church and the contemporary world*, Final report, 89).

Within our Salesian pastoral experience, several proposals are already at work in this area:

- “the emergence of counselling centres in support of education to help with family problems, run by both lay people and religious, is an interesting and promising development;
- the same can be said of groups that help parents in educating their children to the faith;
- EPCs are committed to making parents aware of their educational responsibility, in the face of new emerging patterns of education;

- EPCs are paying particular attention to accompanying young couples and actively involving them in the EPC.”

Thus, the importance of making “a careful community discernment, in order to identify and respond to the most urgent problems of the family, making use of all the resources available.”

All of this invites us to foster “a greater involvement of the family in the SEPP” (*Salesian Youth Ministry, Frame of Reference*, Chap. V, 1.D).

QUESTION 3:

WHICH PROPOSALS IN YOUR PROVINCE CAN BE QUALIFIED AS GOOD PRACTICES, WHICH ARE INNOVATIVE AND ABLE TO SUCCESSFULLY MEET THE NEW CHALLENGES CONCERNING YM AND THE FAMILY?

2.2 MISSIONARY APPEAL OF THE RECTOR MAJOR TO THE SALESIANS OF DON BOSCO

Fr Angel FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME
Rector Major

It contains a letter of the Rector Major, addressed to all the Confreres of the Congregation, which the Rector Major defines as “a missionary appeal ‘ad gentes’ to all the provinces all over the world and to all those confreres who feel called by the Lord to live the Salesian vocation in this particular form: to be available to be Salesian missionaries ‘to all peoples, to externs, for life’”.

Dear Confrères,

I am writing this letter today, December 8th, 2016, on the 175th year since the commencement of the Salesian Oratory, when, as Don Bosco himself tells us, he recited that *Hail Mary* with Bartolomeo Garelli. I do it with a precise intention. This is a favourable day to launch a missionary appeal “*ad gentes*” to all the Provinces of the world and to all those confrères who feel called by the Lord to live their Salesian vocation in this particular form: being available to be Salesian missionaries “*ad gentes, ad exteros, ad vitam*” (“to the peoples”, “abroad”, “for life”). My appeal is a voice that must resound in all the Provinces and Salesian presences in the world in order to favour generous responses.

The fundamental reason for this appeal is threefold:

- The **Evangelizing mission** in the world requires from us, Salesians of Don Bosco, that we go beyond, that we open up even more to give a response to so many requests that continually come to us from the Church, for a mission of evangelization in diverse places and among many peoples.

- There are some presences of the Congregation we can no longer sustain because in some nations of the five continents **there are no Salesians** who can offer their service, whereas in other places the apostolic strengths are more numerous. I think in particular of the youth that are waiting for us in the context of Project Europe, in the Middle East, in countries with a Muslim majority, in the islands of Oceania, in South Sudan, in Mongolia, in Siberia, Cambodia and Malaysia, as well as among the young migrants of the American continent... and in many other places!
- The third motivation is intimately linked to the missionary passion of Don Bosco. After the great missionary challenge of Argentina, in 1875, to arrive, in due time, in Patagonia, it was – as some of his successors stated – as if he lived only for that project. Fr Albera writes: “Missions were always the heart of his heart and it was as if he lived only for them... He spoke about them with such an enthusiasm, that we were amazed and strongly edified by his inflamed love for souls”¹.

Don Bosco himself, in the note he sent in 1880 to Pope Leo XIII, explicitly says: “Foreign Missions were always a subject cherished by the Salesian Congregation”².

On the occasion of the journeys I made in these years and that allowed me to visit 44 Provinces, I often said that we have to reflect on this fact: if Don Bosco had decided to limit the field of the pastoral educative activity of the Salesians only to the needy youth of Italy – which would have been a legitimate priority, considering that Italy was very much in need of his Salesians – and if he had not had the great passion and the great missionary vision that spurred him at every moment, today the Salesian Congregation would be a small congregation, limited to one nation. It was the missionary spur of our Father that made the Congregation universal in the Church and in the world.

¹ Paolo ALBERA, *Circular Letters*, 134.

² MB XIV, 624.

Dear Confrères, for the above reasons, I now address to you this strong appeal and invite you all to generosity. First of all I ask the generosity of those confrères who hear this explicit call from the Lord. Then I ask the generosity of the Provinces, Rectors and, in particular, of Provincials, that they do not stifle in any way the missionary unrest of young confrères and of no other confrère, confining their view and their interest only to their own Province. We cannot forget our origins and our charismatic identity.

You know well how we proceed in these cases. As soon as the Rector Major receives a call, a letter or an email from a confrère who expresses this wish, the Dicastery for the Missions begins a serene, serious and profound discernment with the Confrère and with his Provincial. Everything is then brought to the knowledge of the Rector Major. Discernment often highlights the suitability of the candidate; but sometimes it is not so. In any case, we only look for the good of the persons and of the mission.

This is my appeal, my dear Confrères.

I invite you to pray for this intention in the entire Congregation. Many are the persons who have not yet been reached by the announcement of the Gospel. Many young people need a friend, a brother, a father whom they will be able to find in the Salesians they will meet.

May Mary Help of Christians bless this generosity of yours and may Don Bosco continue to accompany us in our commitment to being true missionary disciples of Jesus.

Yours affectionately

Fr Ángel FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME, sdb
Rector Major

2.3 RENEWED COMMITMENT TO RELIGIOUS DISCIPLINE

Fr Francesco CEREDA
Vicar of the Rector Major

Constitutions assert that the Vicar of the Rector Major “is particularly entrusted” with “the care of religious life and discipline”¹. Starting from this constitutional statement, I was wondering what is to be understood today as religious discipline and what commitment is to be promoted in this regard in the Congregation. This is required, among other things, by the project of the Rector Major and of the General Council for the 2014-2020 period; in fact it requests to “make Provincials and Provinces responsible for the care of religious discipline by fostering a culture of *vocational fidelity* and of prevention of lapses in religious discipline”.

Religious life and discipline are not separated from one another; rather, they are realities that recall and integrate one another. Religious life is the hidden treasure and the pearl of priceless value; in its turn, religious discipline is the investment to make so as to obtain them, selling whatever one has². Religious life does not subsist without religious discipline; neither does the latter have any meaning without the first. In fact, the witness of consecrated life requires a constant commitment to discipline, and vice versa discipline aims at showing the charm of consecrated life.

The awareness of the identity of Salesian consecrated life has grown during these past years. It is “a living memorial of Jesus’ way of living and acting”³ in the footsteps of Don Bosco. In our General Chapter 27, this identity is seen in its testimonial relevance and is deepened in its threefold mystical, prophetic and diaconal dimension. Salesian consecrated life is more and more

¹ Const. 134.

² Cf. Mt 13: 44-45.

³ JOHN PAUL II, *Consecrated Life*, Vatican City, 1996, n. 22.

understood and lived in the totality of its aspects as “*confessio Trinitatis*” (confession of the Trinity), “*signum fraternitatis*” (sign of fraternity) and “*servitium caritatis*” (service of charity)⁴; and the Salesian is more aware to commit himself to be mystic in the Spirit, prophet of fraternity and servant of the young.

Nevertheless, the sense and practice of religious discipline must still grow. At present, Provinces are committed to living vocational fidelity and to preventing lapses in religious discipline; they pay more attention in accompanying the confrères who are experiencing difficulties in living their Salesian vocation; they try to solve irregular situations. Because of this there is a greater responsibility today with regard to an authentically lived consecrated life, and therefore the need is felt for a renewed commitment to religious discipline⁵.

1. Discipleship and Discipline

The word “discipline”, from the Latin verb “*discere*”, means learning, drill, instruction, training. “Discipline” is necessary in all sectors and walks of life: at school and at work, in the family and in the office, in sports and in social relationships. In order to learn music, a craft or a foreign language, the “disciple” must obey certain rules, follow the advice and corrections of their instructor, do an exercise that implies repetition, fatigue, sacrifice, patience and perseverance. At the beginning, discipline is mainly an exterior practice, but it is gradually interiorized until it becomes self-discipline and a life-style.

Also in the life of faith there is a journey of learning and a discipline that accompanies it. In the Gospel, the disciple of Jesus is

⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁵ It is important to resume what Rector Major Fr Egidio Viganò had already proposed in a letter of his; Cf. E. VIGANÒ, *New Commitment in Religious Discipline*, in “Acts of the General Council” n. 293, Rome 1979. See also these other letters of his: *Saint John Bosco*, in “Acts of the General Council” n. 310, Rome 1983; *Be on the Watch, With Your Robes Hitched up and Your Lamps Alight*, in “Acts of the General Council” n. 348, Rome 1994.

presented as the one who sits at the feet of the Teacher and listens to his teaching, so as to walk later after him faithfully following in his footsteps. However, at the school of Jesus one does not learn only a world vision or a religious wisdom. In fact, He is a particular Teacher because the contents of his teaching coincide with His person. He himself is the Word to welcome, a Word that is the way, the truth and the life. The “discipline” we learn from Jesus is therefore an initiation to the mystery of God, to Whom he gives us access, allowing the disciple to live not only *like* Him, but *in* Him.

Jesus, who to those who listen to him speaks with authority and acts with power, lives in his conscience in an attitude of profound obedience to the Father and of full docility to the Holy Spirit. While he tells us “Learn from me”, he lets himself be led in the way of a demanding handing over of himself even unto the cross. Because of this, the letter to the Hebrews daringly asserts that, “though He was a Son, *yet* He learned obedience by the things which He suffered”⁶. Jesus invites those who follow him to enter into this filial obedience; those who do not assume the demands of this call cannot be his disciples⁷. Therefore there cannot be any discipleship without discipline.

In the light of these considerations, we can understand that the most authentic nature of Christian discipline, of which religious discipline is a particular expression, is to be found in the Trinitarian dynamism of obedience and glorification that Jesus lived in his Passover of death and resurrection. By calling us to follow him and proposing the paradoxical discipline of life that it implies, Jesus initiates us into living as children who gratefully and humbly accept the sovereignty of God and who do not walk any longer under the burden of the flesh, but rather in the vivifying strength of the Spirit. The profound core of religious discipline is therefore becoming *docibilis a Spiritu Sancto* (*capable of*

⁶ Heb 5:8.

⁷ Lk 14: 26-27, 33.

being taught by the Holy Spirit), as was understood so well by venerable Fr Giuseppe Quadrio, who made of this motto his programme of life.

Religious discipline is, therefore, an essential part of our “discipleship” in the following of Jesus. Nevertheless, this “discipleship” does not aim solely at our sanctification. The Church reminds us that “to some [...] *for the sake of all*, God gives the gift of a closer following of Christ in his poverty, chastity, and obedience”⁸. And it re-affirms this in the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, stating: “Thus, while those who follow the evangelical counsels seek holiness for themselves, they propose, so to speak, a spiritual ‘therapy’ for humanity, because they reject the idolatry of anything created and in a certain way they make visible the living God. The consecrated life, especially in difficult times, is a blessing for human life and for the life of the Church”⁹. In fact, it is religious discipline inherent in consecrated life that demolishes the idols of pleasure, of possession and power, and gives witness to the world that God is the sole Absolute that suffices of his own.

2. Formative Commitment to Religious Discipline

It is difficult to accept the consequences that derive both at personal and community level from this evangelical vision of discipleship and discipline. The following of Christ, in fact, is always realised within well defined historical contexts, in which other styles of life are widespread, models in competition with the Gospel, different priorities by which to “discipline” one’s own existence. For example, in consumer society, the culture of liking prevails, and so does the culture of what gratifies in the moment and offers immediate satisfaction; those who grow in this context, find it difficult to understand the sense of sacrifice, renunciation,

⁸ CIVCSVA, *Essential Elements in the Church’s Teaching on Religious Life as Applied to the Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate*, Rome 1983, 7.

⁹ JOHN PAUL II, *Consecrated Life*, 87.

perseverance. On the contrary, in other cultures the burden of social conventions and the paternalistic use of authority may lead to a formal observance and to a formative style unable to foster personal responsibility.

The assimilation of religious discipline consolidates with the passing of time and requires a constant care for formation. In fact the loss of the sense of one's own identity as a consecrated person, the shallowness of spiritual life and the weakening of apostolic passion often lead to an irregular life and to an exterior observance. Religious discipline is the sign of the vitality of a Congregation. Without religious discipline great things are at stake: prayer becomes sporadic, the practice of the evangelical councils minimalist, community life weak, and apostolate among the young loses momentum. In particular, the lack of fraternal life fosters individualism: the confrère takes distance from the community, lives in his own world, gradually shifts towards mediocrity and bourgeoisification, avoids asceticism and is in search of an easy life.

In formation work, it is not enough to transmit enthusiasm for the ideals of apostolate or generically to appeal to the sense of responsibility of the individual. Adhesion to the Lord Jesus requires the *concrete assumption of a consistent style of life*, of which it is important to understand the profound motivations and for which it is necessary to be trained with commitment. What St. Paul affirms in the first letter to the Corinthians, when he compares Christian life to a race in the stadium, concerns us too, like athletes who train for the race, so as to win the prize, we too are in need of a formation and a discipline that enable us to the mission: "Everyone who competes *for the prize* is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a perishable crown, but we *for an imperishable crown*"¹⁰.

Among the most spread attitudes in present society that today mostly challenge religious discipline and lead to that logic of

¹⁰ Cf. 1Cor. 9: 24-27.

spiritual worldliness often denounced by pope Francis, we can indicate in particular three aspects, which require particular attention in initial and ongoing formation: the search for self-fulfilment, individualism and spontaneism. Obviously it is not possible here to give an adequate talk on each of them. It is however easy to understand that they respectively concern the way in which to understand personal freedom in the relationships with God, with the others and with oneself.

The narcissistic quest for *self-realization* is opposed to the evangelical logic of handing oneself over and of the free gift of oneself; it does not accept the paschal dynamics according to which life is found only by losing and donating it. It leads to self-referentiality, to verify the validity of the choices on the basis of immediate gratification, of personal results and success, and not on faith and the fecundity of the sacrifice done with love and out of love. It weakens the availability to let oneself be guided by God, the sense of renunciation motivated by love, the commitment to those aspects of the mission that are not gratifying, but require a humble, hidden and unselfish work.

Individualism, in its turn, favours retreating into oneself and a scarce knowledge of the dynamics of the community. Community life is understood in an instrumental way, as a context or background of personal protagonism, and not as the place of the experience of God and the condition for pastoral fruitfulness. This attitude, which regrettably is widespread also among us, constitutes a distortion of the right esteem for autonomy and personal initiative that find their vital space in communion with the brethren and not in an alleged self-sufficiency.

Spontaneism, finally, is a feature of contemporary culture that, in its thirst for genuineness and the refusal of conventions, tends to confound freedom and spontaneity, considering as authentic only the choices that are done without any effort and with immediacy. In this way one forgets that true freedom is the fruit of a long journey of liberation from one's selfishness and of

a patient learning the capability to choose the true good. For example, spontaneism leads to the illusion of being able to do a true journey of prayer without a serious commitment of fidelity to the times of prayer, without constancy in following a method for meditation, without respecting the moments of silence. In the apostolic field, one has the illusion of being an educator without patiently learning the Salesian art of assistance; it confounds creativity and flexibility with a shallow style of action, that does not reflect and does not plan nor verify; it lets one live under a constant improvisation, mindless of educative journeys and processes.

3. Spiritual Sense of the Norms

The discipleship of Jesus and the very structure of human freedom require, as was already said, a discipline that rules the existence, delivering it from the risks of improvisation. It must help to turn the divine gift of vocation into a coherent practical behaviour that is shared in the Congregation to which one belongs and that can be recognised and witnessed to in front of all. Religious discipline has a fundamental *pedagogical function*.

For this form of life to be possible, it is necessary that, besides inspirational documents and texts, the Congregation also have rules that translate into a normative way the demands of the common vocation. Feeling bound to their observance is a component of religious profession that cannot be underestimated, nor be reduced to simply organizational motivations. The law is not the foundation of faith, but it recalls and realizes the way to accept the gift of divine grace.

The observance of rules in consecrated life is a spiritual matter. In fact, only love can grasp the spirit of the law that no letter alone will be able to transmit. Love and law do not exclude one another and are not confounded, but they reciprocally call one another. No one who loves despises the law of God, neither in its

highest expressions, like the ones contained in the Scripture, nor in its manifold historical translations, like the teachings of the Church, the rules of a Founder, the Constitutions of one's own religious Congregation.

Besides its pedagogical value, the law also has a second function that, though subordinate to the first, is not less important. This is the *function of protecting the community from abuses and deviations*. If no norm can ever fully transmit the charm of the grace that is to be found in the event of the call and of the testimony of those who live it, its task is in any case that of indicating with clarity the borders out of which one is no more in the path of the charism and on the way to sanctity. The law must warn against deviations, point out dangers, indicate behaviours that are incompatible with the identity of a spiritual family and betray its spirit. Precisely in this time when the ecclesial community greatly suffered from the grave scandals of some of its members, it is again possible to recognize that a disciplinary norm constitutes, even in its most severe and sanctioning aspects, a gift that cannot be underestimated.

Pope Benedict XVI, in his homily on the Feast of the Sacred Heart at the closing of the year for priests, proposed a courageous reflection on this point. He affirmed: "Today we can see that it has nothing to do with love when conduct unworthy of the priestly life is tolerated"¹¹. Discipline is important also in its dimension of control and sanction: as long as forms of concupiscence exist in us, it is providential that there be commandments that help recognize them and fight them off, even if it were also for some grave transgressions for which there is the threat of sanctions.

The rules of religious life, therefore, from the most severe and solemn to the most simple and wise ones, cannot be underestimated nor ignored. Even though they are not the foundation of consecrated life, yet they are the fruit of a consolidated wisdom.

¹¹ BENEDICT XVI, *Homily on the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart*, Vatican City, 11 June 2010.

Those who truly love the Lord Jesus and the charism of the founder, know how to value them for what they are: a precious aid for liberty. However, those who follow them perfectly but without that interior disposition of the heart that is given by love, actually would only pretend to observe them.

Diverse are the *contents* of religious discipline and the sources from which it draws¹². The first one of these is in the Magisterium of the Church; as part of our discipline we follow the indications that are given us in various forms: the Code of Canon Law, the guidelines of Vatican II, the teachings and decisions of the Pope, the documents of the Holy See, ... The Constitutions and Regulations are a second point of reference; in them we find ourselves in front of an original ascetical programme made of behaviours and attitudes, sensitivities and aspirations, moral qualities and virtues, that make it possible for a consecrated person to be recognised as belonging to a definite Congregation. General Chapters are another source of religious discipline; they are an exercise of discernment to discover what the Spirit indicates in a precise historical moment. Eventually, the Superiors help the confrère and the communities to know the will of God; the fraternal colloquy is also part of religious discipline, and requires openness and trust from the individual confrère and availability and welcoming from the rector; likewise, obedience to the decisions and dispositions of the superiors, active participation of the confrères in the meetings at community and provincial level are also part of religious discipline.

4. Salesian Charism and Religious Discipline

Each founder left to his spiritual children, together with the charm of his sanctity and the enthusiasm of his mission, also a peculiar vision of religious discipline that is consistent with the

¹² Fr Gaetano SCRIVO, Vicar of the Rector Major, explained in an operational guideline the contents of religious discipline; Cf. G. SCRIVO, *Contents of Religious Discipline*, in "Acts of the General Council" n. 293, Rome 1979.

characteristics of his own charism. Don Bosco too, under the inspiration of the Spirit, elaborated his own concept of religious discipline; this however, before finding it in his teachings, is to be found in the example of his life. He was always concerned, for himself and for the others, with a strong pedagogy of self-control; in this way one can become an ascetic of daily life.

Even though the public image of don Bosco is characterized by his driving joy, there also is in his personal experience a consistent presence of that element of struggle and sacrifice that is a constitutive part of paschal dynamics. This is clearly testified to by those who had a close knowledge of him. Don Bosco expressed this vision, for example, in the dream of the pergola of roses: his life seems beautiful to the eyes of all, but the roses inevitably present hidden thorns, which can be trod on only with the spiritual combat of obedience and mortification. To those who have chosen Salesian life, he tells in this dream: “If you are out for a nice time, you had better go back. If not, follow me”¹³.

The diverse testimonies of the first Salesians converge in showing that don Bosco had a very rigorous discipline of life and that the heroic renunciations to which he submitted himself were born from his zeal for the apostolic mission. Austerity to him was not a dimension added to his pastoral dedication from outside, but it was the internal condition to live it. In this sense, he identified the core of Salesian discipline in the motto “*work and temperance*”, considering both work and temperance in a strongly apostolic logic: work is the service of God and of the young in the forms required by obedience; temperance is renunciation to all that opposes it.

This is the logic of “*da mihi animas, cetera tolle*”, that our Constitutions reflect in article 18: the Salesian “does not look for unusual penances, but accepts the daily demands and renunciations of apostolic life: he is ready to suffer cold and heat, hunger and thirst, weariness and disdain wherever God’s glory and the

¹³ MB III, 34.

salvation of souls require it”¹⁴. Likewise in article 71 they recall the statement of don Bosco who tells us: “Substitute acts of penance with acts of obedience”¹⁵. The Salesian lives the mystics of work and of “*da mihi animas*” and the asceticism of temperance and of “*cetera tolle*”; there cannot be one without the other.

Religious discipline for don Bosco consists in the observance of the rule. Because of this he insists on the concrete adhesion to the Constitutions: “The observance of our Rule is burdensome. [...] And then, my dear sons, do we wish to go to Heaven in a carriage? We became religious not to enjoy ourselves but to suffer and to earn merit for the next life. We consecrated ourselves to God not to command but to obey; not to attach ourselves to creatures but to practise charity towards our neighbour, moved solely by the love of God; not to live a comfortable life but to be poor with Jesus Christ, to suffer with Jesus Christ on earth, to be made worthy of his glory in Heaven”¹⁶.

Already in his first circular letter he stated clearly: “The first object of our Society is the sanctification of its members. Therefore each one on entering will strip himself of every other thought, every other concern. Whoever enters to enjoy a calm untroubled life, have comfort [...], would have a twisted purpose and his would no longer be that *Sequere me* (*follow me*) of the Saviour’s, since he would be following his own temporal interests and not the good of souls. [...] Our basis for this are the words of the Saviour who says: “[...] Whoever wants to be my disciple, [...], let him follow me in prayer, penance, and especially by denying himself, accepting the cross of daily tribulations and following me. [...] But how far does he follow him? Until death, and if necessary, even death on a cross”¹⁷.

As can be seen, religious discipline as outlined by don Bosco is a faithful echo of the Gospel, with the charm and scandal of its

¹⁴ Const. 18.

¹⁵ Const. 71. Cf. MB XIII, 89.

¹⁶ MB XVII, 15-17.

¹⁷ MB VIII, 828-829.

paradoxical demands. Don Bosco proposes it with the sweetness of him who made of the preventive system a true spirituality and intends to facilitate in the confrères the practice of good with loving kindness, rather than confining himself to repressing abuses. This paternal and respectful loving kindness however is not shallow or lax; it rather expresses the conviction that people have to be drawn on the way of good with goodness and with the strength of the example, rather than with coercion and imposition; with the medicine of mercy, rather than with the arms of rigour¹⁸.

Conclusion

As a Congregation today, we find favourable conditions to assume a positive vision of and a renewed commitment to religious discipline. The promotion of the culture of vocational fidelity, the prevention of lapses in religious discipline and the solution of irregular situations certainly favour this assumption; on the other hand this remains a challenge.

However, due to frailty and weaknesses, we may sometimes find ourselves in front of lapses in religious discipline regarding prayer, the evangelical councils, community life, the apostolic commitment or economy. In such cases all of us, and especially those who exert in the community the service of authority, must keep vigil on the behaviour and style of life of the confrères and the communities through accompaniment and fraternal correction. In the case of grave faults against discipline, as for instance the “*delicta graviora*” (*more grave crimes*), these require to be sanctioned and to intervene promptly; in such situations, the responsibility is serious and we must pay greater attention to guarantee the personal and spiritual good of the confrères, to avoid the harm these behaviours may cause to other people, and to avoid discredit on the Congregation and its action.

¹⁸ JOHN XXIII, *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*, Speech for the Opening of Vatican Council II, 11 October 1962, 2.

Let us therefore together, as a Congregation, assume the commitment to religious discipline with a renewed spirit and with full awareness: we will thus be able to overcome the risks that even today threaten our vocation so as to live our Salesian consecrated life to the full.

2.4 RENEWED ATTENTION TO THE SALESIAN BROTHER

Fr Ivo COELHO

General Councillor for Formation

The publication of *Identity and Mission of the Religious Brother in the Church* by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life at the end of the Year of Consecrated Life is a good occasion to give renewed attention to the vocation of the Salesian Brother. GC27 asks us to “continue to reflect both on the aspect of consecrated life and on the specific nature of the Brothers with regard to fraternal life and the mission.”¹ Interestingly, as we will see below, reflection on the Salesian Brother opens up, in fact.

1. The journey made so far

While almost all our general chapters have taken up the theme of the vocation of the Salesian Brother, let us begin with the significant document of GC21 (1978), “The Salesian Brother: A lay religious vocation at the service of the Salesian mission.” Fr Viganò’s famous letter, “The lay dimension of the Salesian community” (AGC 298, 1980) was an authoritative comment on this document of GC21. In 1984 GC22 gave us the definitive text of the Constitutions, and in 1986 there followed *The Project of Life of the Salesians of Don Bosco*. In 1989 we have another fruit of the decisions of GC22: *The Salesian Brother: History, Identity, Vocation Ministry and Formation*². In 2001, Fr Vecchi wrote “The Beatification of Salesian Brother Artemide Zatti: A Startling Precedent” (AGC 376), and accompanying this was a letter of Frs Nicolussi and Domenech, “A renewed and extraordinary

¹ GC27 69.7, and also 28.

² Dicastero per la Formazione, *The Salesian Brother: History, Identity, Vocational Apostolate and Formation* (Rome: Editrice SDB, 1989).

commitment to the vocation of the Salesian Brother.” In 2003, Fr Cereda published “Care and Promotion of the Vocation of the Salesian Brother: A concrete commitment for the whole Sexennium” (AGC 382). GC26 presented a vision of our same consecrated vocation in its two forms, ministerial and lay, highlighting what is common along with the specificity and the reciprocity of the two forms. Finally, in 2013, the Rector Major with his council approved the revision of certain parts of the Ratio referring to the formation of the Salesian Brother³. From this journey of reflection on the Salesian Brother, certain themes can be seen to emerge: community, mission, consecrated identity.

1.1 Community

GC21 situated the Salesian Brother and the Salesian Priest squarely within the Salesian **community**: “it will not be so much the individuals who will perpetuate his [Don Bosco’s] ideals as his communities, ‘formed of priests and laymen,’ closely united to each other by deep brotherly ties.” For this reason, the chapter went on, “the clear precise dimension of each Salesian can only be studied and evaluated adequately in the context of a brotherly and apostolic community.” (GC21, 171) The chapter speaks, in fact, of the “Essential mutual relationship between the Salesian brother and the Salesian priest.” (GC21, 194-196)

This great intuition of GC21 was corroborated and deepened by subsequent developments in the ecclesiastical magisterium. Thus *Christifideles Laici* places the different states of life within “the Church that is Communion,” and notes that they “are linked among themselves in such a way that they are ordered to one another,” different yet complementary, each with its unmistakable character and yet related to one another and placed at each other’s service (CL 55). In the three documents on the states of life within the church – *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, *Christifi-*

³ Available at www.sdb.org.

deles Laici, and *Vita Consecrata* – we have an emergent “theology of sign.” What is specific to each state really belongs to all, but is embodied in that state so as to serve as a sign and a prophecy to the other states. Thus, for example, service is not the mark of the deacon in an exclusive way. The whole church is called to serve; the deacon is an icon of service, a reminder to all in the church of our common vocation. In like manner, the lay state bears witness to the sacredness of created realities, and the religious state is a sign of the eschatological character of the whole church, reminding us all of our vocation to be so united one day with God that there will be neither marrying nor giving in marriage. (CL 55)

Thus when GC21 tells us the **lay dimension** is the specific characteristic of the Salesian Brother⁴, it is clear that this must be understood in relation to the community and to the Salesian priest. Fr Viganò understood this very well: in his letter soon after the chapter, he pointed out that the Salesian Brother is an embodiment of the lay dimension and “secular slant” that characterizes the congregation as a whole, and that the clarification of the vocation of the Brother is a test for the clarification of the lay element in our Society⁵. The Salesian Brother, we might say, is an icon of the lay dimension of the congregation. In the words of GC24: “To his consecrated brethren he recalls the values of creation and of secular realities,” inviting them to collaborate with the laity and reminding them that the apostolate goes beyond strictly priestly and catechetical activity; “to the laity he recalls the values of total dedication to God for the cause of the Kingdom. To all he offers a particular sensitivity to the world of work, attention to the local environment, and the demands of the professional approach associated with his educative and pas-

⁴ “The lay dimension is the concrete form in which the Brother lives and operates as a Salesian Religious.” (GC21, 178)

⁵ Egidio VIGANÒ, “The Lay Element in the Salesian Community,” AGC 298 (1980), section 5. See also section 4 where Viganò distinguishes three meanings of “laicità” and notes that the Salesian Brother is not “secular” in the sense in which laypeople within the church are, but that his vocation has nonetheless a real connection and a certain congruence of thought and activity with the first two levels of “laicità.”

toral activity.”⁶ To the religions of the world, we might add, he is a prophecy of the beauty and sacredness of created realities.

But the Salesian Brother is an icon also of **communion** and fraternity, as suggested by *Identity and Mission of the Religious Brother in the Church*. This document has occasioned surprise because of the way it focuses rather exclusively on the religious brother as a sign of communion and fraternity. Fraternity, however, cannot be a marginal point for us who believe that God is a mystery of communion and of love. For Pope Francis, the central question before the church today is communion. The consecrated life is *confessio trinitatis*, and in his letter introducing the Year of Consecrated Life the pope reminded us that consecrated life is not meant to be shut up within itself: its vocation is to expand communion in ever-widening circles, in an expansion that knows no limits.

So the Salesian Brother has a very special place within the Salesian community, the educative and pastoral community, the ecclesial community, and the human community: always and everywhere he is an icon of fraternity. As GC21 had said: “He [the Brother] lives in constant fidelity to his specific vocation and becomes, together with his confreres, a sign of that new and permanent brotherhood established by Christ” (GC21, 176).

1.2 Mission

A second point that emerges in the reflection of the congregation is the charismatic centrality of **mission**. GC22 (1984), in its elaboration of the definitive text of our Constitutions, chose to centre all the elements of Salesian life and work explicitly around mission. This may be seen not only in the contents of the articles but also in the structure: “Sent to the young in communities following Christ.” So it is in the light of mission that we

⁶ See GC24 154, and Pascual CHÀVEZ, “Il Salesiano Coadiutore,” San Benigno Canavese, 19 March 2005 (unpublished) (<http://www.Coadiutoresalesiano.net/index.php/2002-14-chavez>).

have to ask about the identity of the Salesian Brother and the Salesian priest.

A study of the Index of our Constitutions reveals that we have only two articles on the specific identity of the Brother and the Priest: C 45 and C 116 (and, interestingly, 6 articles on the priest that regard authority). Unfortunately, the Index does not mention an article of great importance, one that indicates to us, clearly and synthetically, the identity of the Salesian, whether Brother or Priest: C 98, *the formation experience*:

Enlightened by the person of Christ and by his Gospel, lived according to Don Bosco's spirit, the Salesian commits himself to a formation process which will last all his life and will keep pace with his maturing in other ways. He learns by experience the meaning of the Salesian vocation at the various moments of his life and accepts the ascetical demands it makes on him.

With the help of Mary, his Mother and Teacher, he gradually becomes a pastor and educator of the young in the lay or priestly state which he has embraced.

Pastor and educator of the young: this is our fundamental identity, the supreme genus, that which is common to every Salesian vocation. Only after this comes distinction: "in the lay or priestly state which he has embraced," and this identity-in-difference becomes concrete, in the initial stages of Salesian life, through a formation that is basically equivalent (C 106), and always through the effort to learn by experience the meaning of the Salesian vocation (C 98), to discern the voice of the Spirit in the events of daily life (C 119). It is within the educative pastoral community that we manifest our common identity as educators and pastors, along with the specificity and reciprocity of the two forms of our vocation. Within this community, it is important today to ensure greater visibility to the Salesian Brother.

Mission is not, of course, simply work. Our mission as pastors and educators consists in revealing God. We are called to be epiphany, as was Jesus: signs and bearers of the love of God for the young, *vultus misericordiae*.

1.3 Consecrated identity

But the Salesian mission belongs to all the members of the Salesian Family. We Salesians share in it **as religious**. As Fr Cereda notes in his letter of 2003, there is need to talk also about the dimension of consecrated life. Especially in the light of the insistence on the sharing of our mission with the laity, the clarification and appropriation of our consecrated identity is of vital importance.

Uncertainties in the understanding of consecrated life have had serious consequences for the living out of our Salesian vocation in its two forms. On the one hand there is the temptation to reduce the vocation of the Salesian priest to its priestly dimension alone, and that too very often to a merely functional understanding of the priesthood, when not to a clericalist hankering for power, money and status. On the other hand there is the inability to understand and value the vocation of the Salesian Brother, with tendencies to either a clericalist compensation or else a secularist reduction⁷.

Vita Consecrata (1996) was a great clarification of the place of consecrated life within the church. But what does it mean to be a “living memorial” of Jesus (VC 22)? What difference do the vows make to the way we share in the Salesian mission? What, we might ask, is the meaning of Jesus’ celibacy? As always, nothing that Jesus does is exhausted on the plane of the functional. Jesus is always revealing to us the Father. He celebrated the value of marriage and yet chose to be celibate. He proclaimed in word and deed the good news that our supreme vocation is communion with God. The celibacy of Jesus is a powerful anticipation and revelation of the “life of the resurrection,” where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage. Conse-

⁷ Abraham M. ANTONY, “On the Sublime Vocation of the Religious Brother,” *Consecrated Life Today*, ed. Paul Vadakumpadan and Jose Varickasseril (Shillong, 2015) 107; and Andrea BOZZOLO, “Salesiano prete e salesiano coadiutore. Spunti per un’interpretazione teologica,” *Sapientiam dedit illi. Studi su don Bosco e sul carisma salesiano* (Rome, 2015) 318.

crated persons are called to be precisely living memorials of Jesus, eschatological signs, in their poverty, chastity and obedience. In an age that has discovered the beauty of body and sexuality, the created world and freedom, and that yet blights all by exaggeration and overkill and an absolutizing of what is fragile and relative, consecrated persons are spiritual therapy, sign, prophecy. And it is our life that is a sign. The ministry of the priest remains valid even if the priest is unworthy, but the consecrated person is a sign only through the limpidity of his life. There is no chastity in a religious who is not chaste⁸.

In a church that is not only Petrine but also Marian, and Marian before being Petrine, consecrated life takes its place at the Marian heart of the church. For the Petrine ministry is destined to pass, but the Marian is the ultimate vocation of the whole church⁹. Consecrated persons are a sign and a reminder to the whole church of its final vocation and destiny. And also here the Brother is a sign to his priest confreres in the community. His vocation is the Salesian life in pure form¹⁰, *in statu nascendi*¹¹, a permanent reminder to his priest confreres of their consecration.

2. The path ahead

Reflection on the figure of the Salesian Brother thus leads us to a new appreciation of the Salesian consecrated vocation in its two forms. In the present guidelines, however, as we have said, we would like to give renewed attention to the lay form of our

⁸ See BOZZOLO 335.

⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* n. 773.

¹⁰ Philip RINALDI in ASC 4, cited by Viganò, "The Lay Element in the Salesian Community," AGC 298 (1980) section 5.

¹¹ "In statu nascendi" (in the state of being born, or just emerging; nascent state) refers to the state of certain elements at the moment of liberation in a chemical or electrolytic reaction, characterized by a high reactivity. The term is now used analogously in other fields to indicate the great potentiality of certain experiences/situations at their origin, with the capacity to influence future developments. See, for example, Francesco ALBERONI, who uses it of the period in which a group of persons, united by common hopes, come together to create a new force (e.g., a movement), seeing in these beginnings dynamics which are very similar to those that we find when two persons fall in love.

Initial formation as of 31 December 2015¹²

	Post-novitiate			Practical training			Specialization before Specific formation		Specific formation			Total initial formation				All Confreses	
	S	L		S	L		S	L	S	L		S	L	Totale	% L	Totale	% L
Africa - Madagascar	265	19		123	10		31	4	146	4		565	37	602	6.15	1479	12.51
East Asia - Oceania	55	16		55	9		9	12	105	10		224	47	271	15.47	1408	14.48
South Asia	310	13		201	11		206	15	217	4		934	43	977	4.40	2682	5.59
Europe Centre North	52	4		46	7		2	1	81	8		181	20	201	9.95	2416	8.73
Mediterranean	36	6		40	5		24	3	62	7		162	21	183	11.48	3117	17.97
America - South Cone	53	17		42	1		3	4	69	7		167	29	196	14.80	1337	13.24
Interamerica	90	11		57	2		0	0	108	4		255	17	272	6.25	1817	10.89
UPS + RMG¹³	1	0		1	0		0	0	2	0		4	0	4	0	204	9.75
Total	862	86		565	45		275	39	790	40		2492	214	2706	7.90	14460	11.92

¹² Initial formation here includes Salesians after first profession until diaconate (included) or first five years after final profession for Salesian Brothers.

¹³ Includes Eritrea.

vocation. The statistics reveal that the number of Brothers in initial formation is going down: only 7.90% as compared to 11.92% in the congregation as a whole, and even lower in regions with greater growth in vocations (5.06% as of 31 December 2015). This cannot be taken to mean that all is well with the large number of aspirants to the priesthood. The question of the Salesian religious identity is urgent for both forms of our vocation.

In the last few years, the congregation has exerted itself to take care of the vocation of the Salesian Brother, as for example through the revision of the Ratio concerning the initial formation of the Brother, and the setting up of centres for the specific formation of Brothers (CRESCO, Guatemala City; Sunyani, Ghana; Yaoundé, Cameroon; Shillong, India; Parañaque, Philippines; and Turin – though of these, Sunyani and Turin are not functioning any more, while Shillong is temporarily suspended). In the present letter we would like to propose some more strategies and lines of action at various levels of the congregation.

Strategies and lines of action

Study and reflection on the Salesian consecrated identity in its two forms	Guidelines in the AGC	Formation Sector
	Notes on the Salesian consecrated identity and the specific identity of the Salesian Priest and Salesian Brother	Formation Sector
	Clarification of criteria for discernment of the two forms of our vocation.	Formation Sector
	Plans for the animation of the provinces in the area of Salesian consecrated identity in its two forms	Provincial and Formation delegate of each province
Vocation animation	Taking advantage of two iconic figures of the Salesian Brother and the Salesian Priest (Bl. Stefan Sandor and Fr Titus Zeman, to be proclaimed blessed in 2017) to promote the Salesian vocation in its two forms	Provincial Formation Delegate with Provincial Youth Ministry Delegate
Initial formation	Regional courses for those in charge of prenovices in 2017	Regional Formation Coordinators with Formation Sector

Initial formation of Salesian Brothers	Personalized plan of formation in line with the 2013 revision of the Ratio on the Salesian Brother Presence and adequate preparation of Brothers within formation teams	Provincial in dialogue with the Brother concerned Provincial
Specific formation of Salesian Brothers	Strengthening the existing centres (CRESCO, Yaoundé, Parañaque) and studying ways of making other centres available (Europe; South Asia; English speaking Africa-Madagascar) Study of curriculum and methodology for the specific formation of Brothers by means of a worldwide Consultation	Formation Sector with Regional Councillors and provincials concerned Formation Sector
Salesian studies	Online course to facilitate the formation of formators in Salesian studies	Formation Sector

3. Conclusion

In a church that is communion, the vocation of the Brother can be understood only in relation to the Salesian Priest, the community, the mission, and the consecrated life. As Salesian consecrated persons we are signs and bearers of God's love to the young, living memorials of Jesus. In his letter at the beginning of the year of consecrated life, Pope Francis insisted precisely on this:

I am counting on you 'to wake up the world', since the distinctive sign of consecrated life is prophecy. As I told the Superiors General: 'Radical evangelical living is not only for religious: it is demanded of everyone. But religious follow the Lord in a special way, in a prophetic way.' This is the priority that is needed right now: 'to be prophets who witness to how Jesus lived on this earth....'¹⁴

And again:

What in particular do I expect from this Year of grace for

¹⁴ FRANCIS, *Apostolic Letter to all Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life*, 21 November 2014, II.2.

consecrated life? That what I once said might always be true: ‘Wherever there are religious, there is joy.’¹⁵

Through the intercession of Bl. Artemide Zatti, Bl. Stefan Sandor and Ven. Simaan Srugi, let us pray for a Salesian consecrated life that is transparent, visible and above all joyful. Joy is contagious, and happy Salesians are the best publicity for our vocation. Let us not forget the *via pulchritudinis*! (EG 167)

¹⁵ FRANCIS, *Apostolic Letter to all Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life* II.1.