



SOCIETÀ DI SAN FRANCESCO DI SALES

CASA GENERALIZIA SALESIANA

Via della Pisana 1111 - 00163 Roma

*Il Rettor Maggiore*

Prot. 16/0226  
Roma, June 16 2016

### MESSAGE BY THE RECTOR MAJOR

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!”

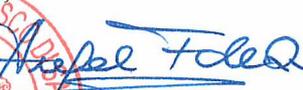
With the same feeling I’m addressing you because I would like that Pope Francis’ wish may become for our Congregation a further “journeying together” on the roads of the education of young people, especially the poorest and those most in need. A “journeying together” always more prone to consider the 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 27<sup>th</sup> of November to the 1<sup>st</sup> 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,

  
Fr. *Angel Fernandez A., SDB*  
Rector Major



## **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 that 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).

### **1.1. QUESTION**

**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 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 present 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).

### 2.1 QUESTION

**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).

#### 3.1 QUESTION

**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?**