

SECOND PART

VERIFICATION OF THE STRUCTURES

OF ANIMATION AND OF CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

VERIFICATION OF THE STRUCTURES OF ANIMATION AND OF CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

Introduction

[87]

The GC25 has carried out the verification of the structures of government and of their functioning, requested in the letter from the Rector Major convoking the Chapter itself, starting from a careful examination of the contents of articles 122 and 123 of the Constitutions regarding the principles and general criteria of the service of authority in our Congregation. In addition it has accepted what the General Council said on the basis of studies and of the experience of the last six-year period, regarding the value of the general principle of “unity around the Superior, considered always as the centre of unity and animator of communion in the community at all levels” (AGC 372, 52-53) and of some articles of the Constitutions (AGC 372, pp. 56-57) specifically:

- a) the nature of the General Council in that it assists the Rector Major and collaborates with him in the functioning of government and animation of the Congregation (art. 130);
- b) the organization of the Council into Councillors for Departments and Regional Councillors, is considered to be substantially positive for the animation and the government of the Congregation (art. 133);
- c) the residence of the Regional Councillors in the house of the Council, judged necessary for ensuring the unity of the guidance and the activity of animating the Provinces (art. 131);
- d) the subsidiarity and decentralization, that recognize a proper autonomy and a right distribution of powers between the different organs of government (art. 124).

1. Relationship and links between the Rector Major with his Council and the Provinces and Regions, and forms of animation and government

Expectations

[88]

In general the Provinces appreciate the unity of the Congregation as the fruit of communion and of fidelity to the charism. They would like the General Council to help this unity to grow further, giving due consideration to the cultural diversity found in the Congregation, and to accompany the process of inculturation, especially in the problem areas, in this way ensuring fidelity to the charism.

[89]

The structures of animation and government already ensure communion at various levels. The Provinces are looking for further progress, considering that the cultural complexities, (mentality, social organization and political and economic systems, languages and customs, etc.) are in continual development, and that one notes a further growth in some areas of the Congregation in the world, and changes of circumstances (decrease in the number of confreres and the unification of provinces etc.) in others.

[90]

The programming of the six year period by the Rector Major with his Council has aroused interest and appreciation in the Congregation and has helped the individual Provinces to undertake the process of planning. Numerous Provinces are awaiting a further incentive from the central Government, that in a typical family manner, will foster, encourage and accompany the development of a “planning mentality” in the Congregation, in the Regions, and in the individual Provinces, bearing in mind the cultural differences.

[91]

Many Provinces make a substantially positive judgment on the service of animation and of government of the Rector Major and his Council (Team Visits, Extraordinary Visitations, Formation Courses, Regional Meetings, etc.). The presence of the Rector Major in the Provinces is especially appreciated as an expression of communion around the Successor of Don Bosco. The Provinces express a desire for greater contact and closeness with the general Councillors in order to ensure a knowledge of the different local situations and to facilitate an effective provincial and regional coordination. It was appreciated that the Council itself midway through the six-year period carried out an overall assessment in view of a fair distribution of the animating presence of the Rector Major and his Councillors in the Provinces.

[92]

The Circular Letters of the Rector Major were found to contribute well to the unity and to the links within the Congregation, but need to be used to greater effect in the Provinces.

Problem areas

[93]

The large number of guidelines, proposals and initiatives offered by the various organs of animation in the Congregation (e.g. Documents of the General Chapters, Letters of the Rector Major, documents of the various Departments, documents of the Team Visits, the final report after Extraordinary Visitations) make it difficult to give effect to procedures for change or for maturing together because of a certain difficulty in assimilating the subject matter, the different mentality of the confreres and the weakness in animation that may exist in some Provinces or Regions.

[94]

The plurality and the cultural, social and religious complexity of the different contexts in which the salesian charism must be embodied require that the interventions be diversified, pluralistic and

focused. Achievement of mutual understanding between the General Council and the Provinces and the Regions can present difficulties.

[95]

There is a certain tardiness on the part of central bodies in making necessary decisions; it seems also that no steps or processes of implementation are foreseen in the line of follow-up and evaluation. Such a situation sometimes makes animation ineffective and government weak.

[96]

In the ever more challenging situations of young people in the world, especially those who are poor and in most need, it seems that sometimes there is lacking an appropriate response with interventions on their behalf on the part of the Congregation at international and governmental level, in order to “give a voice to the voiceless”.

[97]

The problem areas mentioned point out **some challenges** that the Government of the Congregation must face:

- to live and promote unity in the growing diversity of cultures and situations that are constantly changing requires an ongoing dialogue between the centre and the Provinces, so that on the one hand situations and local problems are known and taken into account, and on the other there is openness to the horizon of universality of the Congregation;
- to govern and animate according to the processes of change and maturation in the Provinces, according to their own situation and their real possibilities, requires a planning mentality and a vision attentive to the unity of the salesian mission;
- to promote a presence and an activity open to the social, political and ecclesial situation both particular and general, implies overcoming a tendency towards activity that is too self-directed.

Criteria and lines of action

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To build communion real interaction is necessary in the management of problems. Hence “to promote fraternal union among the different provinces, and to develop an ever more efficient organization for the fulfilment of the salesian mission in the world” (C 130), it is suggested that the Rector Major with his Council always try to find more and better ways:

- for identifying and studying common emerging problems,
- for promoting and guiding the reflection of the Provinces and Regions,
- for suggesting criteria for solutions and practical guidelines to the respective controlling bodies.

In the light of these considerations the Rector Major and the members of the Council must evaluate the various requests from the Provinces, Provincial and Regional Conferences so as to respond in the most significant and effective way.

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It is proposed that the Rector Major with his Council find suitable ways for evaluating effectively with the Provinces or Regions concerned: the programming of the six-year period, the conclusions of the Team Visits, the indications from the Extraordinary Visitations in particular with regard to the task of inculturation, the extent of the implementation of the deliberations of the most recent General Chapter, the development of a planning mentality, and the follow-up of processes of change.

[100]

To help the Provinces to overcome the danger of a possible closing in on their own situations and requirements, and to open them up to a shared and cooperative vision of the problem areas and needs in their own and other Regions, (e.g. centres of formation and study centres, works of special significance, the development or re-structuring of Provinces, support for Regional projects and the foreign missions), the Rector Major with his Council will encourage an open and cooperative mentality, and in dialogue with the Provinces, also arrive at practical interventions, promoting the mobility and exchange of confreres between Provinces of different cultures.

[101]

The circular letters of the Rector Major are a good means of linkage and unity in the Congregation. To make them better used and appreciated in the various communities it is suggested that they be written in a simple and discursive style and that those with a wealth of content on challenging themes alternate with others more familiar and informal about the life of the Congregation.

[102]

To foster personal contact and effective discussion on the progress of the Province, it is suggested that the Rector Major and the Departmental Councillors offer to those Provincials who desire it, about half way through their term of office, the opportunity of a personal meeting to evaluate the fidelity to the charism and the salesian mission in the Province, and for a sharing in the six-year program.

[103]

The future development of our mission requires the collaboration of a research and development group made up of experts (Salesians and laity) at the service of the Rector Major and his Council, to deal with particular issues. This group would enable the General Council to offer significant and effective suggestions especially on behalf of the young and the poor at international and governmental level.

[104]

The Rector Major with his Council should continue the practice of drawing up a program for the six year period, a practice that everyone considers to have been very positive, and then refer to it regularly in subsequent documents and proposals. The whole Council will work according to projects, programming the different stages, procedures and evaluations, which are considered very

important, and will therefore frequently ask for an assessment of the various proposals and initiatives while they are in progress, and not only at their completion.

[105]

The Regions and the Provinces are asked to plan and re-plan their initiatives, taking into serious consideration the programming carried out by the Rector Major for the six-year period, so as to ensure a unified course of action in the Congregation.

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The Rector Major and his Council are asked to follow up in a special way those Provinces or Regions that find greater difficulty in proceeding according to the programming and the respective provincial plans.

[107]

Through the various departments the General Council attempts to respond to the internal needs of the various Provinces. This task however must in no way diminish our vocation as a Congregation, which requires us also to act in the defence and for the advancement of all the young people in the world, especially those who are poorest and most in need, and this at international level in both Church and State.

2. The Departmental Councillors

Expectations

[108]

While the service of animation of the Departmental Councillors is appreciated in the Provinces for the resources they can make available, for the animation they can offer and for the encouragement they give to the Provinces in developing a greater sense of international communion and interprovincial understanding, there is also a strong and frequently felt desire for a continual dialogue between the Centre and the Provinces.

[109]

In a world in which the complexities of the different cultures, languages, races, religions and societies make communications difficult, the Provinces expect from the Departmental Councillors that the programs of animation they propose will be of help in meeting local problems, and at the same time in broadening horizons; there is in fact sometimes the feeling that the animation program proposed by the various sectors does not meet the real needs of the Provinces.

[110]

While the Departmental Councillors frequently offer competent advice and service for the animation of the Provinces, the latter feel the need for coordination between the initiatives and the need to avoid overlapping, and parallel or conflicting proposals. The GC25 appreciates the growing efforts at coordination between the Departmental Councillors in the last six-year period (e.g. the *Vademeum* of the General Council and its revision, the six-year program and its revision, the interdepartmental initiatives) and it encourages them to continue along the same lines.

Problem areas:

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There is insufficient communication in both directions in the preparation of programs; this can lessen the effectiveness of developing processes and weaken the Provinces in their initiatives.

[112]

The lack of interdisciplinary studies and projects between the various sectors can be a hindrance to the full understanding of the youth condition which is now in a state of rapid change and frequently defies sectorial delimitation. The study of themes relevant to the present day such as the growing division between rich and poor, questions about the rights of the child and of young people, the loss of family unity, the influence of technology on information and communication, the globalization process, etc., could help to fill this evident lacuna.

[113]

Putting together the suggestions made by some provincial chapters, by the assembly of the Generalate and in the report of the Vicar of the Rector Major, the desire for a reorganization of the working structures within the Generalate is recognized.

Criteria and lines of action

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The request of the Provinces to have a significant presence and closeness on the part of the Departmental Councillors, reflects the deep desire for a commitment to an effective dialogue about the best ways to respond to the signs of the times. This implies a change of mentality both at the centre and in the provinces. It is considered important that work be done within provincial conferences or groups of provinces for the planning of network interventions, with the involvement of regional or provincial centres and delegates, rather than they be imposed from above.

[115]

The past six years have seen positive experiences of coordinated study between various sectors (e.g. on the volunteer movement, street-children, etc.). The need for prompt and flexible responses to complex and wide-ranging situations implies coordination between the Departments and the Regionals. It is proposed that this be a constant concern of the Vicar of the Rector Major, for the purpose of coordinating the interrelated initiatives and fostering a transverse study and evaluation. At a practical level, the Councillor most directly concerned could be involved from time to time.

[116]

Let the Departmental Councillors give due importance to what is suggested in art. 107 of the Regulations (concerning technical offices and consultants) and make use of qualified specialists in the planning, programming and evaluation of interventions of animation. Let the professionally prepared personnel at the service of the various sectors be kept up to date through projects of ongoing formation and ensure continuity of programs.

[117]

The Rector Major is asked to give effect to the interventions considered most opportune for the Blessed Michael Rua community of the Generalate, with possible internal arrangements for making the life of confreres called to work in the service of the central government of the Congregation more fraternal and satisfying and with a greater sharing of responsibility.

3. The Regional Councillors and the groups of Provinces

Expectations

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An examination of the precapitular document, the contributions of the Provincial Chapters and of the General Council reveal that in general the figure of the Regional Councillor is appreciated in the Provinces. The programming realized within the General Council is considered of positive value.

[119]

The Regional Councillor is considered important and necessary in his role of linkage between the Provinces and the Rector Major with his Council, as a service to unity and decentralization. His residence in Rome is considered a positive factor, but an appropriate division of his time between Headquarters, the Regions and the Provinces is desired. The extraordinary visitation is appreciated as an opportunity for the Province to assess its project and renew it, and to get fresh light on its programming as an experience of unity and communion with the Rector Major and as a significant occasion for fraternity and dialogue.

[120]

The groups of provinces are looking for closeness, accompaniment and animation. This leads at times to difficult situations as a consequence of cultural, linguistic, political and social complexities, and the geographical extent of some Regions.

Problem areas

[121]

Various factors make the Regional's functions difficult in practice:

- the geographical, cultural, linguistic, political and social complexity of some Regions;
- the Regional's difficulty in striking a balance between the time spent in extraordinary visitations and that needed for accompanying the Provinces;
- the growing complexity of the life and mission of the Provinces which makes the extraordinary visitation itself more difficult because of the growing number of relationships, not only with the confreres and community organisms, but also with the different groups of the Salesian Family and the organisms of animation of the EPC and young people.

[122]

Many of the Provinces concerned put forward the proposal to divide the Australia-Asia group of provinces because of the notable growth of the Region over the past six years and its future

expectations, of the inherent difficulty of accompaniment and coordination, of its cultural religious and social complexity, and of the geographical extension of the Region itself.

[123]

The situation of the Africa-Madagascar Region has also been examined. Because of the complexity of languages, cultures, religions, etc., some of the Provinces involved had suggested the division of this Region.

[124]

Keeping in mind the proposals of some of the Provinces of the Regions of Europe more directly involved, the reality of the present grouping has also been studied. Evident is the vast geographical extent and the linguistic, historical, political and cultural complexity of the Region of Northern Europe; the new European mentality growing in different countries, with deep processes of coming closer together and of political, economic, cultural and social sharing; the development within the Congregation of processes of the reorganization and regrouping of Provinces with foreseeable consequences for the configuration of the regions of Europe in the not-distant future; and that this sensitivity is felt in the Provinces; but nevertheless no practical, convergent and viable proposals have been made by way of change.

Criteria and lines of action

[125]

As far as the action of the Regional Councillors is concerned, it is proposed:

- that in the initial programming of the Council each Regional be assigned a reasonable number of extraordinary visitations to be carried out, relying on the help of other members of the General Council;
- that in the making of the extraordinary visitation, in addition to the present method, different means and methods should be tried out, always ensuring that every confrere has the possibility of a personal meeting with the Visitor and that the latter gains an adequate knowledge of the state of the Province and fulfils the objectives assigned for the visitation by the Rector Major;

- that the Regional have collaborators available if necessary to make possible a balanced work of animation and accompaniment of the provinces and to implement the guidelines of the extraordinary visitation.

[126]

With respect to the organization of the groups of provinces it is suggested:

- that some Regions be suitably reshaped, having in mind the criteria of geographical extension and cultural diversity;
- that the Regions be suitably arranged internally into conferences or intermediate elements which will ensure easy and organic animation.

[127]

In response to the requests submitted, the group of Provinces previously assigned to the Regional Councillor for Australia-Asia has been divided into two groups:

- the South Asia group: India-Bangalore, India-Bombay (Mumbai), India-Calcutta (Kolkata), India-Dimapur, India-Guwahati, India-Hyderabad, India-Madras (Chennai), India-New Delhi, India-Tiruchy;
- the East Asia-Oceania group: Australia, China, Indonesia-Timor, Japan, Korea, North Philippines, South Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam.

[128]

Since the Africa-Madagascar Region is still in a period of consolidation and the number of confreres of the Region is not great, it is considered that the problems at present existing can be resolved through a suitable distribution and coordination of the Provinces in Conferences.

[129]

For the moment it is not considered opportune to proceed to a change in the grouping of the European Provinces. Nevertheless it is proposed to entrust to the General Council, with the particular involvement of the three Regionals concerned, the launching of a study of the situation, with suitable specialists, of processes and experiences of coordination. The study ought to lead, should it be considered appropriate, to a new distribution and organization of the European Provinces, more in line with the European sensitivity and mentality now emerging in the field of culture and in the new political, religious and social reality. In the meantime it is suggested that a coordinating office be set up under the three Regional Councillors of Europe to work in agreement with the Councillors of the sectors concerned.

[130]

As a consequence, the following is the overall framework of the configuration of groups of provinces for the next six years: the Africa-Madagascar group (unchanged); the Latin America Southern Cone group (unchanged); the Interamerican group (unchanged); the South Asia group (new); the East Asia-Oceania group (new); the North Europe group (unchanged); the West Europe group (unchanged); the Italy and Middle East group (unchanged).

DELIBERATIONS AND GUIDELINES
CONCERNING THE CONSTITUTIONS AND REGULATIONS
AND THE GOVERNMENT OF THE SOCIETY

The modifications to the text of the Constitutions, decided on by the GC25, were approved by the Apostolic See by a Rescript of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated life and the Societies of Apostolic Life N. T.9-1/2002 dated 3 April 2002.

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On the basis of the evaluation carried out on the structures of central government, with reference also to their adequate functioning for the animation and guidance of the Society at its various levels, and having in mind the reflections and proposals made by the provincial chapters and the confreres – as also stated in the Chapter document on the evaluation – the 25th General Chapter approved the following **deliberations concerning modifications to the text of the Constitutions and General Regulations** and to other **practical guidelines** concerning the governing of the Society.

1. LIMIT TO THE DURATION OF THE TERM IN OFFICE OF THE RECTOR MAJOR (C 128)

[131]

The 25th General Chapter, after considering the proposals made by the Chapter itself,

and keeping in mind the general indication of the Code of Canon Law[\[1\]](#) concerning the temporary nature of offices in Institutes of Consecrated Life, as also the norm already adopted in our own law for superiors at provincial and local level;[\[2\]](#)

and considering furthermore on the one hand the heavy commitment called for by responsibility at such a high level, and on the other the increased pace of history and the complexity of the present time, which suggest that two periods of six years seem sufficient for a person to give of his best,

approves the following modification (*in italics*) to art. 128 of the Constitutions:

“The Rector Major is elected by the General Chapter for a term of six years and may be re-elected *only for a second successive six-year period*. He may not resign his office without the consent of the Apostolic See”.

2. LIMIT TO THE DURATION OF THE TERM IN OFFICE OF MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL (C 142)

[132]

The 25th General Chapter, after considering the proposals made by the Chapter itself,

and keeping in mind the general indication of the Code of Canon Law[\[3\]](#) concerning the temporary nature of offices in Institutes of Consecrated Life, as also the norm already adopted in our own law for superiors at provincial and local level;[\[4\]](#)

and considering furthermore on the one hand the heavy commitment called for by office at the level of the General Council, and on the other the increased pace of history and the complexity of the present time, which suggest that two periods of six years seem sufficient for a person to give of his best,

approves the following modification to art. 142 of the Constitutions:

“The Vicar General, the Departmental Councillors and the Regional Councillors remain in office for six years and may be re-elected only for a second successive six-year period in the office of Vicar General, Departmental Councillor or Regional Councillor respectively, except for the case referred to in art. 143 of the Constitutions.[\[5\]](#)”

Should a member of the General Council die or be permanently unable to attend to his duties, the Rector Major with the consent of his Council shall entrust his office to whomsoever he judges most suitable in the Lord, but only until the expiry of the six-year period”.

3. ASSIGNMENT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF THE SALESIAN FAMILY TO THE VICAR OF THE RECTOR MAJOR, AND THE CONSTITUTION OF THE COUNCILLOR FOR SOCIAL COMMUNICATION (C 133, 134, 137)

[133]

The 25th General Chapter, having considered the proposals put forward by the Chapter,

for the purpose of making more evident the service of unity that belongs to the Rector Major in the Salesian Family (C 126), keeping in mind that the Vicar of the Rector Major can count on a well-organized network at various levels of the groups entrusted to the direct care of the Salesians, and that there exist for the other members of the Salesian Family the Common Identity Card and the Common Mission Statement of the Salesian Family, and that the vast commitment of the promotion of the salesian movement and salesian charism can be carried out in collaboration with the other Departmental and Regional Councillors;

and considering furthermore the growing importance of the sector of communication in the context of the activity of the Salesian Congregation in the spirit of art. 6 of the Constitutions and of art. 43 of the same which declares this to be “a significant field of activity which constitutes one of the apostolic priorities of the salesian mission”,

approves the following modifications to arts. 133, 134 and 137 of the Constitutions:

Art. 133:

“The councilors in charge of special departments are: the councillor for formation, the councillor for the youth apostolate, *the councillor for social communication*, the councillor for the missions and the economer general”.

Art. 134

“The vicar general is the first collaborator of the Rector Major in the government of the Society and has ordinary vicarious power.

He takes the Rector Major's place whenever he is absent or impeded. To him is entrusted particularly the care of religious life and discipline.

He has the task of animating the Congregation in the sector of the Salesian Family. In accordance with art. 5 of the Constitutions he promotes communion between the various groups, respecting their specific character and autonomy. In addition he guides and assists the Provinces so that they may develop in their own territories, according to their respective statutes, the Association of Salesian Cooperators and the movement of the Past-pupils”.

Art. 137

“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 at world level the structures and centres for which the Congregation has responsibility in this field”.

4. MODIFICATION OF ART. 24 OF THE GENERAL REGULATIONS (Mission Offices at Congregational level)

[134]

The 25th General Chapter,

having considered the proposal put forward by the General Council,

and having in mind the need to better identify the responsibility of the economer general in the management and distribution of the resources of the international mission offices, together with that of the Councillor for the Missions,

and to foster a more accurate and precise identification of the resources and a more rational coordination of their distribution, in the light also of the considerable development of the Mission Offices and international NGOs,

approves the following modification (*in italics*) to art. 24, paragraph 2, of the Regulations concerning the constitution of mission offices at Congregational level:

“Their organization and method of functioning will depend on the provincial or provincials in whose territory the offices operate, in the light of a statute made previously with the Rector Major, and in agreement with the councillor general for the missions *and with the economer general*”.

5. DIVISION OF THE AUSTRALIA-ASIA GROUP OF PROVINCES

[135]

The GC25, after considering the proposals put forward by the Chapter itself,

in the light of the considerable growth of the Australia-Asia Region in the six-year period 1996-2002 and the prospects for the future, of the difficulties in follow-up and coordination, of its cultural, religious and social complexity, and of its geographical extension,

and keeping in mind that there already exists a Conference uniting the provinces of India, that the Indian situation is itself intercultural, interreligious and multilingual, and that the number of provinces and confederates is adequate,

approves the following division of the Australia-Asia group of Provinces:

SOUTH ASIA GROUP: including the Provinces of: India-Bangalore, India-Bombay (Mumbai), India-Calcutta (Kolkata), India-Dimapur, India-Guwahati, India-Hyderabad, India-Madras (Chennai), India-New Delhi, India-Tiruchy.

EAST ASIA – OCEANIA GROUP: including the Provinces of: Australia, China, Japan, Korea, North Philippines, South Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, and the Vice-province of Indonesia-Timor.

6. REQUEST REGARDING THE METHOD TO BE FOLLOWED IN CELEBRATING THE GENERAL CHAPTERS

[136]

The 25th General Chapter:

- considering the requests from many chapter members for an arrangement that would be less monothematic, more open to the assessment of the prevailing general situation and to the opportunity for a more specific and focused response;
- given that its members represent the whole Congregation and that there is a need to promote a better awareness and consideration of situations and perspectives at the level of Regions and of similar cultural areas;
- considering the high and rising number of chapter members, which requires a way of operating that encourages interpersonal relationships, a better knowledge of the candidates for the elections and the sharing of particular significant experiences;
- aware of the consequent need for an updating of the regulations for the General Chapter;

approves the following statement:

The GC25 requests that during the next six year period the Rector Major with his Council carry out an assessment of the celebration of the recent General Chapters with a view to evaluating and proposing a manner of operation that is more streamlined, and aimed at carrying out an examination of the situation of the Congregation and drawing up fundamental guidelines for the policy to be implemented during the following six year period, in addition to fulfilling the constitutional requirements.

[1] cf. Can. 624

[2] cf. C 163. 177; R 171

[3] cf. Can. 624

[4] cf. C 163. 177; R. 171

[5] Practical interpretation of the General Chapter: “A Regional Councillor cannot be elected for a third successive period of office as a Regional Councillor, even in the case of being destined for a Region different from one or more of the preceding, but he can be elected as a Departmental Councillor or Vicar General. Similarly a Departmental Councillor cannot be elected for a third successive period of office as a Departmental Councillor, even in the case of being destined for a Department different from one or more of the preceding, but he can be elected as a Regional Councillor or Vicar General. Finally, the Vicar General cannot be elected for a third successive period of office, but can be elected as a Departmental Councillor or Regional Councillor”.

MESSAGES

1. THE GC25 TO THE SALESIAN CONFRERES

LET US WELCOME THE GRACE,

THAT HAS BEEN GIVEN TO US WITH THE BEATIFICATION

OF THE SALESIAN BROTHER ARTEMIDE ZATTI

[137]

We, the members of the GC25 offer thanks to the Father who has willed to illumine this General Chapter with the gift of the beatification of three members of the Salesian Family: Sister Maria Romero Meneses, Brother Artemide Zatti, and Father Luigi Variara.

With particular insistence, Fr J. E. Vecchi drew our attention to Artemide Zatti, so that we might make him the sign of a new commitment on the part of the whole Congregation, to recognizing the relevance today of the vocation of the Salesian Brother and to promoting its development in the spirit of Don Bosco. In him – as in the Salesian Brothers already beatified as martyrs – is found in an outstanding manner the “high level” of the ordinary salesian vocation which takes us to the roots of our consecration itself.

Many signs of hope invite us to propose a new commitment with great conviction. The young people who are entering our novitiates to become Salesian Brothers show that they appreciate this vocation. Everywhere throughout the salesian world there are examples of Salesian Brothers who are living their vocation joyfully and attractively, demonstrating its fullness in the complex world of communications, in work training, in social action, in education in the faith, in missionary daring, in formation for the salesian life.

John Paul II – on the occasion of Brother Artemide Zatti’s beatification – underlined “his unceasing and joyful activity”, “his genial manner and his special skill, together with his total availability” (*Audience of Monday 15th April*).

In fact, there is to be found in the Brother confreres, in an outstanding manner, the witness of a salesian vocation, which brings together, through educative and supportive charity, the gifts of consecration and of the lay state. It reminds religious communities of the values of creation and of secular realities; families and lay people of the values of total dedication to God for the sake of the Kingdom (GC24, 154). In this way the Salesian Brother becomes the protagonist of that new civilization of love and of life that men of our day are yearning for.

Their special links with the world of work makes them protagonists of an educational venture in which civil society and the church community, secular values and Christian proclamation meet, so that everywhere, through work, man takes on the image willed by God.

Our reflection on the “salesian community today” has strengthened in us the conviction that from a salesian point of view, it is more positively effective when it is made up of Salesian Brothers and Salesian Priests. There could be no effort towards community renewal that did not also become a renewed determination to ensure that every community be able to live the fullness of its own identity with the presence of those who, with different but complementary gifts, reveal the features of Don Bosco.

Salesian Priests and Salesian Brothers look to Don Bosco together, so as to re-present him to the world. Together they live his spirit, and continue his mission of service to the young and to God’s people. Together and in constant dialogue with each other, each one becomes a more genuine Salesian, since he is more firmly rooted in his own vocational identity. Together they are raised to the honours of the altars.

With the presence of the Salesian Brother the salesian community is complete and becomes fully effective. We have all experienced how well the Brother confrere knows how to be “a community man,” as ready for great responsibilities as for the small services of every day, full of a sense of “the house”, capable of forging straightforward and brotherly relationships. “Religious Brothers are an effective reminder to religious priests themselves of the fundamental dimension of brotherhood in Christ.” (VC 60)

The GC25 invites us to love our communities, following the example of Artemide Zatti, who, – once again according to the words of John Paul II – demonstrated a “service that was impassioned, skilful and full of love,” he was as “punctual in carrying out his community duties” as he was “completely dedicated to the service of those in need” (*Homily at the Beatification Mass*). Of him, a genuine community builder, it was said that not only was he a “medical assistant” but he knew how to become “medicine” through the contact with the gospel that he offered to those who approached him.

The things we have mentioned encourage us and urge us to put into practice in each province a new, extraordinary and specific campaign for the vocation of the Salesian Brother, especially in youth ministry and within the Salesian Family.

It is greatly to be desired that more visibility be given to it in the world of education and human development, in meetings and youth gatherings, in initiatives that aim to make the salesian vocation better known, in teams and councils where, at different levels, the life and mission of the Sons of Don Bosco are planned and animated.

The liturgical celebration of Blessed Artemide Zatti, which we shall begin to keep on 15 March, and the annual world day of Consecrated Life are invitations that should become, – for every educative community – occasions for testimony and prayer, so that this vocation may continue to flourish for the benefit of young people and for the fullness of the spirit of Don Bosco.

While we write this message for you, with hearts full of enthusiasm after the experience of the grace granted in these days, we ask for the support of your prayers, so that the renewed commitment of the Congregation to the vocation of the Salesian Brother may bear fruit.

The members of the GC25

Rome, 15 April 2002.

2. MESSAGE OF THE GC25 TO THE SALESIAN FAMILY

[138]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

At the end of our 25th General Chapter we want to send to each group and to every member of the Salesian Family a special greeting and expression of our gratitude.

We are grateful for the messages and contributions you have sent us, for the prayers you have said for us, for following with interest the unfolding of the Chapter, and for your joy and good wishes sent to the new Rector Major who is for all of us the successor of Don Bosco.

The event of the beatification we recently celebrated together represents a significant moment of recognition on the part of the Church. The newly beatified, a Sister, a Brother and a Priest, who had in common the same vocation and were moved by the same apostolic zeal, are a powerful recall to holiness of life for the whole Salesian Family.

During our reflections in the Chapter we have kept in mind your contributions and what you expect from the salesian community: we hope that in the final document of the Chapter you will be able to find some responses to your wishes. The most pressing requests that you have made to us in your messages concern our being capable spiritual guides, and our availability to welcome you as brothers and sisters, so as to offer to young people a valid education and a witness to the Gospel in today's society. This will certainly help us to share the spiritual treasures of Don Bosco's charism.

In the chapter document we have expressed in various ways our intention to work in close concert and to grow together. The complex nature of the world in which we are living requires us to share, always more deeply and with co-responsibility, the spirituality that Don Bosco has entrusted to us and the mission to the ordinary people and to the young to which we are called.

Aware of our particular responsibility within the Salesian Family in which Don Bosco is the Father and guide, we want to work together for an increase of vocations in the various Groups, bearing witness to the authenticity of the spirit and the communion of hearts.

The theme of vocations is a concern for all the Groups of the Salesian Family. We, on our part, wanted to pay particular attention to the vocation of the Salesian Brother, an original feature and one that is essential to our charism.

Following our mission, many of us are involved in the education and evangelization of the young and of ordinary people. In schools, oratories, social works, centres for youngsters with problems, parishes, and other places, we are working together and forming ourselves in order to better carry out our service to them. We are putting our efforts and our hopes in shared formation. Through the practice of the preventive system we are enabled to become, in society and in the Church, a significant presence in the field of education. In recent years we have put great trust in lay people as genuine collaborators and protagonists, and are now witnessing the expansion of a lay salesian movement throughout the world.

Our Chapter, reflecting on the salesian community today, has confirmed our absolute commitment to grow in brotherhood and living witness. We intend “living and working together” as brothers according to the same charism, to be both the aim and the result of living in communities, where fraternal love becomes strong and visible. This mutual strengthening will be of benefit to the whole Salesian Family, who will know how to help each other to become enriched so as to give life to a genuine communion of brothers and sisters according to Don Bosco’s heart.

Evangelical witness also firmly unites us. Its ultimate aim is to bring the Gospel of Christ to the young and to ordinary people. We do not feel that we are alone in this enterprise. Sharing the charism and the complex nature of evangelization obliges us today to plan and to work together. It is in this that the great wealth of the Salesian Family is to be found, so that as we live our different experiences we can perceive present-day reality from different standpoints and with specific charismatic emphases to be placed in common for the benefit of all. Don Bosco’s preventive system is the common heritage behind our plans for education and evangelization. In this way we can reach those for whom we work with complementary activities and the same educative objectives united in the same spirit.

In this way we build up a living Family that acts together in harmony to reach a common aim. Allowing ourselves to be guided by what we have expressed in the “*Common Identity Card*” and the “*Common Mission Statement*” we all become involved in the one mission of Don Bosco with our individual forms of expression, but linked together in one vast salesian movement.

In this way our giving of ourselves will also be the fruit of what we receive from each other, conscious that “there is more joy in giving than in receiving” (Acts 20, 35).

Together we joyfully share the protection of the Help of Christians, the Mother of our Groups and communities. Devotion to her is spreading ever more widely throughout the world, thanks to the members of the Family. We invoke her with confidence that she may bless each one of us, each Group and all our collaborators and their families. Into her hands we entrust the future of the spiritual Family that we have so much at heart.

As members of the Chapter, we invoke for everyone the Lord’s blessing through the intercession of Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco, the new *Beati* and all the salesian saints.

The Rector Major and the members of the GC25

Rome, 18 April 2002

3. MESSAGE TO YOUNG PEOPLE

[139]

Gathered together in Rome,
coming from all the continents,
we the Salesians of Don Bosco,
write to you Young People,
because it is for you that we live.

Convinced of the Lord's word:

“Love one another as I have loved you,”

we have examined how we can improve our life in community.

We believe that the renewal of our “living and working together”

is a great gift for you as it is for all of us;

and we hope that you may be able to interpret it as a sign of hope

in your efforts to overcome divisions

to search for justice without giving way to hatred

to offer help and forgiveness to everyone.

Following Don Bosco Father and Teacher of Youth

we want to be for you and with you

in situations of poverty,

in the tragedies of war

in the conflicts which divide

and wherever life is threatened

and development stifled.

We are with you in the search for Love

that gives full meaning to life and leads to happiness.

Together

we want to be

“heralds of the dawn”

messengers of peace,

builders of a new human family

drawing strength for the Lord's Passover.

And if at times we have disappointed your expectations

today we want to renew our pledge:

the doors of our hearts and of our houses
are always open for you.

The Salesians of the 25th General Chapter,

Rome, 20 April 2002

4. AN APPEAL TO SAVE THE YOUNG PEOPLE OF THE WORLD

BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE

LET US SAVE THE YOUNGSTERS, THE FUTURE OF THE WORLD.

*“Youngsters need to be taken seriously,
otherwise they will be against us or nowhere to be found.*

*We cannot take advantage of their good will;
if they ask for bread let us give them bread,
but if they ask for instruction, for training,
we must not pretend not to hear”.*

(Fr Vecchi, 8th Successor of Don Bosco)

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We the Salesians of Don Bosco are living and working in 128 countries, in direct contact with thousands and thousands of young people, boys and girls. As representatives of all the Salesians, we are gathered in a worldwide assembly and we cannot remain silent but feel bound to emphatically declare our commitment to fight with might and main on their behalf as something that cannot be delayed.

We address our words to those with responsibilities regarding the young:

- to those who are responsible politically and economically in every country, and at international level;
- to humanitarian Institutions, to NGOs, to Associations of Volunteers;
- to the Churches and to Religious Institutes;
- to families;
- to those who control and who work in the mass media;
- to educational agencies.

In every part of the world we are aware not only of the humiliating situations of poverty in which millions of youngsters are living, without a family, home or future, but even more of the exploitation of minors, made slaves by a world of adults too often unfeeling and irresponsible, which constructs barriers that exclude them. There are many millions of poor children. Poverty can be overcome, but even the poor have the right to have their dignity respected. Instead we see a world which bears down on them and humiliates them obstructing every opening to a better future. We are convinced that at the root of such poverty are to be found not natural causes but downright injustice, the result of a view that sees everything only in economic terms.

The list of the wounds that afflict the world of youth is long and well known: child labour, children who live night and day on the streets, child prostitution, pedophilia, violence and the exploitation of young people, truancy, the spread of AIDS, illiteracy, unemployment, drugs and alcohol abuse, forced emigration, child soldiers, corruption, child gangs: all of which phenomena are on the increase and cut off any possibility of a future for many countries, many of which are burdened by foreign debt.

Destroying the children and young people means blocking the future for a nation and for the whole world.

We Salesians have inherited from Don Bosco the commitment to give our lives for the development and the education of the young. It is essential to invest great resources to this end.

On more than one occasion Don Bosco (1815-1888) in asking for money from wealthy people to educate his poor boys used strong words: either we open our wallets willingly today to help these young people or one day they will come “to take your money with a knife at your throat and a gun in their hands”.

We are also strengthened by the words of Fr Juan E. Vecchi, the 8th successor of Don Bosco, who recently launched a “j’accuse” against political and economic institutions that were either heedless or directly guilty with regard to young people.

We are on the side of the young because – like Don Bosco – we have confidence in them, in their willingness to learn, to study, to escape from poverty, to take their future into their own hands, but we see that they are often unable to do so because too many adults are guilty of ignoring them; when it comes to investing in them not only do these adults just not want to know but instead they even exploit them.

We are on the side of the young because we believe in the worth of the individual, in the possibility of a different kind of world, and above all in the great value of working for education.

We are very happily surprised that the “money men” themselves (The International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank) have stated that the only solution is to be found in Education.

We are convinced that it is essential that such organizations devote a great deal of their resources, money and concern to the EDUCATION OF THE YOUNG: to their protection, their safety, to preventive measures, to their direct involvement. Educating young people is the only way to prepare a better future for the whole world.

That everyone work together in the commitment to education on a global footing is the task for all men and women who have responsibly at heart the future of their own children and that of all the young people of the world.

We want to respond to economic globalization with a globalization of an educational character that will give heart and hope to all young people in the world.

The Rector Major

and 231 representatives of the Salesians in the world

Rome, 20 April 2002.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Message of His Holiness JOHN PAUL II

for the beginning of the GC25

Dear Sons of Don Bosco!

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1. With great affection I address myself to you gathered together from the five continents to celebrate the 25th General Chapter of your Congregation. It is the first of the third millennium and gives you the opportunity to reflect on the challenges of educating and evangelizing young people, challenges to which the Salesians wish to respond following in the footsteps of their Founder Saint John Bosco. It is my hope that the Chapter may be for you a time of communion and fruitful work, during which you can share the zeal which unites you in your mission among boys and also your love for the Church and the desire to open yourselves to new apostolic frontiers.

My thoughts at this moment go spontaneously to the late Rector Major, Fr Juan Vecchi, recently deceased after a long illness, offered to God for the whole Congregation and especially for this Chapter Assembly. While I thank the Lord for the service he rendered to your religious Family and to the Church, and for the witness of evangelical fidelity that always distinguished him, I offer a special prayer for the repose of his soul. It is for you now to continue the work that he so successfully undertook following the example of his predecessors.

Diligent educators and skilled spiritual guides as you are, you will know how to meet with young people who long to “see Jesus”. You will know how to lead them with gentle firmness along the demanding paths of Christian fidelity. “*Duc in altum!*” May this also be the watchword of your Congregation, which in this Chapter Assembly is encouraging all its members to a courageous relaunching of their own evangelizing activity.

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2. You have chosen as the topic of the Chapter “The Salesian community today”. You know very well that you have to refashion methods and ways of working so that your “Salesian” identity may clearly emerge in the changed circumstances of society, which require, among other things, the opening up to lay collaborators with whom to share the spirit and the charism left as a legacy by Don Bosco. The experience of recent years has highlighted the great opportunities there are in such collaboration which will enable the members and groups within your Salesian Family to grow in communion and to develop a common apostolic and missionary dynamism. In order to open yourselves to cooperation with lay people it is important for you that you clearly determine the special identity of your communities; that they may be, as Don Bosco wished, communities gathered around the Eucharist and animated by a profound love for Mary Most Holy, ready to work together, sharing a single educative and pastoral project. Communities capable of animating and co-involving others, especially by their example.

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3. In this way Don Bosco continues to be present among you. He lives on through your fidelity to the spiritual heritage that he left you. He gave to his works a special style of holiness. And it is especially holiness that the world needs today! Most fittingly, therefore, the General Chapter will propose once again with courage as the principal response to the challenges of the contemporary world “tending towards holiness”. In short, it is a matter not so much of taking up new activities and initiatives as of living and bearing witness to the Gospel without any compromises, so as to encourage towards holiness those young people that you meet. Salesians for the third millennium! May you be enthusiastic teachers and guides, saints and formers of saints, as was Don Bosco.

Strive to be educators of youth in holiness, making use of that typical pedagogical approach of the joyful and serene holiness that is your hallmark. Be welcoming and fatherly, ready at every opportunity, in every situation to ask young people through your way of living: “Do you want to become a saint?” And do not hesitate to propose to them the “highest level” of the Christian life, accompanying them on the road of a deep attachment to Christ, who in the sermon on the mount declared: “You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Mt 5, 48)

Yours is a history filled with saints, many of them young people. On the “Hill of the beatitudes of the young” as these days you call Colle Don Bosco where the saint was born, in the course of my visit on the 3rd of September 1988, I had the joy of beatifying Laura Vicuna, the young salesian girl from Chile that you know well. Other Salesians are on the way towards that goal: these are the two confreres, Artemide Zatti and Luigi Variara, and the Daughter of Mary Help of Christians, Sister Maria Romero. In Artemide Zatti one sees the value and the topicality of the role of the Salesian Brother; and in Don Variara, priest and Founder, one sees a further expression of your missionary charism.

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4. To this by no means small band of Saints and Blesseds you too are called to unite yourselves, committed to following in the footsteps of Christ, source of holiness for every believer. Do so in such a way that your whole Congregation may shine out for holiness and brotherly communion.

At the beginning of this millennium, the great challenge facing the Church, as I recalled in the apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte* is “to make the Church the home and the school of communion” (n. 43). For the apostolate to bear good fruit it is essential that the communities live in a spirit of real mutual brotherhood. To carry forward a single educative and pastoral project it is necessary that all the communities be joined together by a strong family spirit. May each

community really be a school of faith and of prayer open to young people where it is possible to share their hopes and difficulties, and to respond to the challenges that as adolescents and young people they have to face.

But where is the secret of that union of hearts and of apostolic action to be found if not in fidelity to the charism? Therefore always keep your eyes fixed on Don Bosco. He lived his life entirely in God and recommended the unity of the communities around the Eucharist. Only from the tabernacle can that spirit of communion which becomes the source of hope and of commitment pour forth for every believer.

May affection for your Father continue to inspire and sustain you. His teaching invites you to mutual confidence, to daily forgiveness, to fraternal correction, to the joy of sharing. This is the path that he followed, and the one on which you too can draw the lay faithful, especially young people, to share the gospel and vocational project that unites you.

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5. As you can see, the reference to young people also keeps coming back in this Message. This link between Salesians and young people is no surprise. One could say that young people and the Salesians walk along together. Your life, in fact my dear sons, is lived out among the boys as Don Bosco wanted it to be. You are happy among them and they enjoy your friendly presence. Yours are “houses” in which they feel at ease. Isn’t this the distinguishing feature of your apostolate in every part of the world? Continue to open your places especially to poor boys, so that they feel “at home” there, enjoying the fruits of your hard work, your love and the witness of your poverty. Accompany them as they enter the world of work, of culture, of social communication, promoting a climate of Christian optimism within the context of a clear and strong appreciation of moral values. Help them to be in their turn apostles of their friends and those of their own age.

This demanding pastoral activity puts you in touch with the many factors at work in the field of the education of the new generations. Be ready to offer your support generously at various levels cooperating with those who are fashioning educational policies in the countries where you are to be found. Defend and promote human and gospel values: from respect for the individual to love for one’s neighbour, especially for the poor and the marginalized. Work so that the multicultural and multireligious society of today may move towards an integration that is ever more harmonious and peaceful.

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6. My dear Sons of Don Bosco, to you is entrusted the task of being educators and evangelizers of the young people of the third millennium called to be sentinels of the future as I told them at Tor Vergata, on the occasion of the World Day of Youth in the year 2000. Walk together with them, stand beside them with your experience and your personal and community witness. May the Holy Virgin, whom you invoke with the beautiful title of Mary Help of Christians accompany you.

Following Don Bosco, always put your trust in her, and spread devotion to her among all you meet. With her help so much can be done; rather as Don Bosco loved to repeat, in your Congregation it is she who has done everything.

The Pope tells you of his pleasure in your apostolic and educational commitment, and he prays for you, so that you may continue to walk in total fidelity to the Church and in close collaboration

among yourselves. May Don Bosco and the host of the Salesian Saints and Blesseds accompany you.

I endorse these wishes with a special Apostolic Blessing, which I send to you, Members of the General Chapter, to the Confreres spread around the world and to the whole Salesian Family.

From the Vatican, 22 February 2002, Feast of the Chair of St Peter.

Joannes Paulus II

APPENDIX 2

Address of Card. Eduardo Martínez Somalo

Prefect of the Congregation

for the Institutes of Consecrated Life

and the Societies of Apostolic Life

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1. I am particularly glad to be here with you to express once again the sincere participation of the Congregation for the Consecrated Life, and of myself personally, in the experience of faith and of availability to the will of God, through which your Congregation is at present living. It is an experience rich in grace.

If the event of the General Chapter is a gift of the Holy Spirit which opens us and commits us to Truth and Charity, the witness of the life and death of your Rector Major, Fr Juan Vecchi, is a wonderful expression of Don Bosco's charism: of being ready, in serene awareness, to dedicate all one's life to the young, especially the poorest of them, living the reality of "already but still not yet" in filial abandonment to the will of the Father. This spiritual depth, expressed in simplicity of life and trust in God seems characteristic of the formative process which the Rector Major has developed in recent years in your Congregation. Also the well remembered Fr Egidio Viganò, in all his fruitful life and in his last illness, had followed the same path in his style of life: pastoral love for the young.

I have frequently united in my prayers and in the celebration of the Eucharist these two great animators of the Salesian Family to whom today we entrust the 25th General Chapter which is now beginning.

I am glad to be able to greet all of you here present, and in particular the Vicar General, Fr Luc Van Looy, who with the members of the General Council has borne in recent months the responsibility of guiding the Congregation with filial affection and close attention to the desires – expressed or intuitively understood - of the Rector Major; I greet the Mother General of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, the Coordinator General of the Cooperators, the President of the Past-pupils, and all the representatives of the various religious and lay groups of the Salesian Family who are here and never fail to make their own contribution, so that the Salesian Family may continue to respond with the readiness and prophecy of Don Bosco to the expectations of the Church, with the help and protection of Mary Help of Christians.

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2. You are beginning the first Salesian General Chapter of the third Millennium, which the Holy Father called: “A new millennium opening before the Church like a vast ocean upon which we shall venture, relying on the help of Christ... The Christ whom we have contemplated and loved bids us to set out once more on our journey” (NMI 58).

In recent times we have lived through exceptional moments of grace and mercy during the Jubilee of the year 2000. No one can have remained indifferent to the witness of pastoral charity and demanding spirituality that John Paul II lived with young people. It is a page of history which is of special concern to you: while it reveals to us the deepest expectations of the young, it shows us very clearly that when a young person feels that he is loved, despite all the shortcomings proper to his age and the conditioning of society, his thoughts rise automatically to things above.

How would Don Bosco have reacted had he been able to be present like one of us in those days, and in what way would he have rethought the pastoral commitment characteristic of the fraternal community and its extension in welcoming young people in whom is reflected the young Christ, but very often in a disfigured manner? Your late lamented Rector Major, in the Acts of the General Council which you have kindly sent me, emphasizes in the following words what Salesians throughout the world have at heart: “The objective of the GC25 is not so much what the community and confreres must still do for the young, but what – at the present day – they must be for them as they live with them” (AGC 172). And he goes on to explain: “It is a question of carrying out an evaluation of our community life with the spirit and method of evangelical discernment, so as to discover ways of salesian fellowship able to respond to the demands of the following of Christ and of the mission” (ibid.).

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3. If the reflection on fraternal life, as a function of the following of Christ and of the mission, is a central point of interest in your Chapter and you want to make a discernment in the spirit of the Gospel, a fundamental condition is that each one of you must develop ever more deeply a living, sincere and existential contact with Christ, the Word of God and the Eucharist. The Capitular Assembly can then truly reach an evangelical discernment on the identity and practical elements of salesian fraternity. In this sense the General Chapter becomes a great occasion of formation in an attitude of listening to each other with respect and confidence and helps us to mature the humility which is the royal road to truth. In the first place it fosters personal discernment of the coherence with which each one lives his own consecration to God in the salesian manner; it provides light on our reflection on youth pastoral work, which demands a well developed ability for discerning what it is better to leave aside or to revise, and what it is better to confirm or strengthen; it enables us to participate in a balanced and authentic way in a harmonious inculturation, and in the spirit of Don Bosco reconfirms us in the commitment to inculcate in young people the will to become upright citizens and good Christians. At the same time it makes us attentive, as Christ is always attentive, to the authentic demands of the young, to the changes in society and to future perspectives.

Let us never forget that Don Bosco worked among the young at the time of the first industrial revolution when unaccompanied youngsters were heading towards the cities and were being exploited by ruthless employers without any work-contracts that could protect them in some way. It was a fatal and easy road to a life of disorientation, and Don Bosco knew full well from direct experience the devastating consequences for those who ended up in juvenile prisons.

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4. The Church is glad to note the powerful influence your Institute has on young people, and consequently on the future of society and of the Church. Certainly the mission Don Bosco lived, and which he has passed on to you, calls for great educative sensitivity and a lot of courage to face the young and share their problems and expectations, their moments of rebellion and their easily aroused enthusiasm which often ends in nothing. They live in an environment of contradictions, one that is superficial but yet successful in presenting the idea of easy conquests and a competitive setting which is based on money and marginalizes the weak. But at the same time there is evidence of a new and clean youthful force aiming determinedly at what is good. They are the “sentinels of the morning” who are scrutinizing the dawn of a new society. The Holy Father has seen in them the hope that Paul VI had already nourished in his heart: they are the messengers of the civilization of love. We cannot but believe deeply in such a reality and accompany it with prayer and sacrifice that it may gradually grow among us. That is how Don Bosco lived!

It is a wonderful tradition that you are continuing in all parts of the world, and the Church rejoices in the good you are doing and is grateful to you for it. How could we fail to recall your fruitful apostolate in the world of culture through your Universities, through your proper promoting of the mass-media, through your dedication to the missions, your work in parishes and in professional training centres to prepare young people for dignified and honest employment?

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5. We cannot undervalue nowadays a worry common to all Institutes: the scarcity of vocations. This has led to the fact that many members are asked to prolong their dedication even when their energies begin to fail, despite their sharing of the youthful heart of Don Bosco. Then is borne in on them to their regret the generation gap which makes rapport with the young more difficult. There is a great difference of mentality, of language, of tastes, of choices which affect daily life in the way problems are approached, in sources of pleasure, in prayer and judgement, in living together. Sometimes there is the risk that our communication may become burdensome despite our commitment. At such times only faith in the Word enables us to believe and live a kind and patient charity which hopes for everything and willingly overlooks everything, that does not seek its own gratification but believes in today’s young people because God loves them. It is a moment for living in the highest degree the offering of oneself in charity for the glory of God and the salvation of the young. The charity extolled by St Paul in his Letter to the Christians of Corinth is the great and irreplaceable strength in the educative experience. It was not just by chance that Don Bosco told the first confreres: “It is not enough that youngsters be loved; they must know and feel that they are loved”. He had well understood that even the most rebellious youngster could be won over by the patient love that hopes for everything despite every difficulty.

Education is possible wherever love can reach, but its soul is destroyed if you replace love by mere rules and regulations. This is why when he was asked for a definition of his system of education, Don Bosco replied succinctly: “My educational system? It is just Charity!” (MB V 381) It is the only road that opens the way for proclaiming Christ.

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6. John Paul II tells us how we can evaluate the authenticity of our faith: “Those who have come into genuine contact with Christ cannot keep him for themselves, they must proclaim him... This should be done however with the respect due to the different paths of different people and with sensitivity to the diversity of cultures” (NMI, 40).

To proclaim Christ by one's own life certainly requires that it be sustained by "a love nourished by the word and by the Eucharist, purified in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and sustained by prayer for unity, the special gift of the Spirit to those who obediently listen to the Gospel" (VC 42). This will be the kind of favourable environment in which young people will find themselves not only welcome, but feel that their presence is indeed desired so that we can share together problems and hopes in open and sincere dialogue.

Dear Salesians, the Chapter is like a workshop where many projects are closely examined, studied and brought into harmony, so as to propose to the whole Congregation a new way of life in fidelity to the charism. At the heart of this fraternal communion there is always the Holy Spirit who points out the way, coordinates and inspires how we can best achieve the holiness of Don Bosco and of our young people. But we are all called to make our contribution because to each of us is entrusted the common good of all.

The same thing happens in your communities. Every youngster you receive is an irreplaceable project of God's love entrusted to you at that point in history. You are called upon to give life and make space for the breath of the Spirit that is in him. Whose is the guiding hand? It is that of CHRIST, from whom we must always begin. He accompanies us through his Word and the gift of the Eucharist. As we look at him we glimpse Don Bosco, who was the first to open this new road, adapting it to the signs of the times as regards methods but taking its inspiration from Charity, the unchangeable reality valid for all times.

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The Church has confidence in you!

The Church is expecting a great deal from you, the Sons of Don Bosco!

I would like to finish by recalling the words addressed to young Salesians by Jean Duvellet, one of the first collaborators of Abbé Pierre: "You have a treasure: the pedagogy of Don Bosco. You can risk losing everything else, but don't lose that pedagogy! Twenty years of experience in the re-education of young people compel me to tell you: you are responsible for that treasure before the Church and the world".

Rome, 25 February 2002

APPENDIX 3

Address of the Vicar General

Fr Luc Van Looy

at the opening of the GC25

Your Eminence Cardinal Martinez-Somalo

Dear Cardinals, Antonio Maria Javierre and Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga,

Dear Archbishops and Bishops

Sisters and Brothers representatives of the Salesian Family,

Dear Confreres Capitulars

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At the beginning of the 25th General Chapter of the Society of Saint Francis of Sales, I am happy to greet you all, cordially and gratefully. I see in your presence a sign of your affection for our Congregation and your participation in one of the most important events in its life, a General Chapter.

I thank Mother Antonia Colombo, Superior General of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and all the leaders of the various branches of the Salesian Family who are here: the Central Coordinator of the Cooperators, the World President of the Past Pupils, the one responsible for the Don Bosco Volunteers, the Superiors of the religious Congregations and those responsible for the Groups and Associations within the Salesian Family.

Through your supporting presence we are conscious of the links which unite us in the one Family of Don Bosco.

And to you dear confreres capitulars who have come from the different Provinces around the world I express a heartfelt and fraternal welcome. I know that you have come to work, to experience a powerful worldwide presence, and to prepare the future of the Congregation.

Above all I want to remember very gratefully and affectionately Father Juan Vecchi, whom the Lord called to himself a month ago. Still fresh in our minds is the memory of his loving fatherliness, of his wisdom, his incisiveness in governing the Congregation, and his personal testimony of faith and serene acceptance of God's will during his long illness. The Congregation and the Salesian Family were together at his side during this time of sickness, united in prayer with Brother Artemide Zatti. Father Vecchi began and guided the preparations for this General Chapter: we are sure that from heaven he will help us to bring it to a successful conclusion.

In recent years, the canonization of Mgr Versiglia and Fr Caravario, the beatification of the young Polish oratorians and of the Spanish martyrs encouraged our whole family to a "high standard of ordinary salesian living" (cf. NMI 31), and the approaching beatification of Fr Luigi Variara, Sr Maria Romero and Brother Artemide Zatti place the saints once again at the centre of the whole Salesian Family.

1. The journey following the Council.

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The theme of this General Chapter fits into a process followed and developed in the period after the Council. After a general reflection on our salesian identity (GC20) and having looked more deeply into some of its features such as the evangelization of the young, the preventive system, the

animation of the community and the characteristics of the members (GC21), we came to the promulgation of the Constitutions, renewed in the GC22 of 1984.

Subsequently we focused our attention on the process to be followed with young people in order to educate them to the faith and in the faith (GC23). We highlighted for this the need for a community that was always being renewed, that involved itself more actively in the world of young people to greater pastoral effect, and, which at the same time, became the animating nucleus of the educative and pastoral community and of the different branches of the Salesian Family.

The GC24 took up again this theme of the involvement of lay people in our spirit and in our mission and defined the new role of the salesian religious community within the EPC and in the drawing up of the SEPP.

And so in both the GC23 and the GC24 the Salesian community emerged as the focal point. In fact, to a large extent, the quality of the Congregation's witness, apostolic impact and fruitfulness depend on the community itself functioning well. It is the community of salesian religious that has the task of being "salt of the earth and light of the world" in its various works and activities.

Following this line of thought, the GC25 now wants to assess the progress made in the light of the last General Chapter, to go more deeply into the proposals that were not sufficiently well understood, and to give impetus to the work of renewal already under way in the communities. It wants to relaunch the community as the key element in the evangelization of the young in the new millennium.

This theme, therefore, does not divert our gaze from those we are working for, nor from the lay people who are collaborating with us. As Fr Vecchi wrote in his letter convoking the Chapter:

"The objective of the GC25 is not so much what the community and confreres must still do for the young, but what – at the present day – they must be for them as they live with them. Before all else we must keep in mind what we are and how we live, so as to act more effectively from an evangelical point of view for the benefit of those to whom our mission is directed" (Towards the 25th General Chapter AGC 372, p. 13)

The salesian community therefore is the focal point of GC25. To this is added the task of putting into effect the working guideline of GC24 (n. 191) regarding the structures of government, and that of the election of the new Rector Major and the members of the General Council who will guide the Congregation in the next six year period.

2. The theme of the GC25: facing the challenges of today

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The theme of the Chapter "the Salesian community today" has these four main points:

fraternal life,

evangelical witness,

animating presence among the young,

animation of the community.

The various Provincial Chapters reflected on these points, starting from the experience of the local communities and identifying some particular problems which the Precapitular Commission have clearly indicated, such as for example:

- the need to strengthen the life of the community in the Spirit. That is, to create the necessary conditions so that the confreres can experience deeply the love of Christ, which leads them to a fraternal life that is profound, to a total dedication to their mission for youth, to an attractive witness to the values of the gospel;
- the need to develop the ability of the religious community to provide inspiration within the educative and pastoral community so as to foster communion, enthusiasm and a strong sense of belonging;
- the difficulty of coping with the real demands of the mission, given the reduction in the forces available and the consequent imbalance between the amount of work and the personnel available;
- the ageing process and the shortage of vocations which make the life in community more difficult and lead to the possible hindering of future progress of the mission.

On this and on other aspects of community life the General Chapter is called to indicate the best ways to relaunch the community at the beginning of this millennium, remembering Don Bosco's words:

"We have chosen to live together in unum. This means in unum locum, in unum spiritum, in unum agendi finem" (in the same place with the same spirit, with the same objectives) (BM IX 573).

The motive behind the choice of this theme, however, is not simply an awareness of weaknesses or shortcomings in our religious community life today, but rather of some challenges in a much broader context.

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Today's culture

In the first place, today's culture challenges us. Living and proclaiming the faith has become difficult in the secularized world, where people slowly and quietly have drifted away from the faith as from something that has little relevance in everyday living.

The educative and religious character of the family having diminished considerably, and the Church being seen as an institution cut off from modern society, the young people who are growing up in secularized environments find it difficult to understand religious language, and they become accustomed to arriving at their own criteria of behaviour, and forming their own judgements about life, without any reference to religious values, and often without listening to the advice of the adults close to them. In our days, the credibility of the Church is put under scrutiny by the mass media, which highlight - rightly or wrongly - the weaknesses or moral failings of religious and priests.

Again, *the school situation* challenges us especially in those countries where a process of reform is taking place. Don Bosco's system puts the person and his fully rounded education at the centre,

while today we see that the greatest concern in the field of education is concentrated almost exclusively on imparting knowledge without giving much attention to the formation and the guidance of the individual. In addition, the teaching of religion tends to be given ever less importance, leading inevitably to a weakening in the total formation of the young person and of his capacity to develop a personal culture.

The task today is to find a way of overcoming these barriers, physical, psychological and cultural, in order to reach also those young people who are furthest away, and to help them to come to faith in Christ. It won't, in the first place, be our words or arguments that will open up this road, but the witness of a community that lives its own faith in Jesus Christ, finds its unity in it and makes it visible in joy and openness.

This spiritual depth leads the faith community to overcome a narrowed vision and individualism, and to live in fraternal friendship and collaboration to the extent of being attractive and evangelizing, as the document *Vita Consecrata* states in n 46

“The life of communion in fact, “becomes a sign for all the world and a compelling force that leads people to faith in Christ...In this way communion leads to mission, and itself becomes mission” (Vita Consecrata 46).

The same love for Christ also leads to a generous welcoming and a giving of oneself to others . To young people in the first place, through an active and friendly presence among them, and then to lay collaborators and to members of the different branches of the Salesian Family, through a communion built on the experience of shared planning, responsible involvement and formation together *“so that it can become a living experience of Church and a revelation of God’s plan for us”*

(C. 47)

By being a sign, the community becomes also a school of faith which finds the courage and creativity to show its own Christian face and knows how to give flavour and direction to the lives of those for whom it works.

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Geographical expansion and involvement

The phenomenon of globalization, with the corresponding phenomenon of localization, underlines the necessity of a balance between the unity of the charism and the plurality of its expressions.

It is necessary that greater weight be given to the value of brotherhood than to differences of race, language etc., in such a way that our communities, open to different cultures, become a true gift to the Church and to society. Our presence in all the continents, in 128 countries, helps us to have a world view of our charism, and to observe the developing life of the Church and of vocations throughout the world. While it is becoming old in some traditional places, it is growing and coming to birth in other countries and continents.

The Holy Father says in his Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* at n. 51:

“Placed as they are within the world’s different societies – societies frequently marked by conflicting passions and interests, seeking unity but uncertain about the ways to attain it – communities of consecrated life, where persons of different ages, languages and cultures meet as brothers and sisters, are signs that dialogue is always possible and that communion can bring differences into harmony. Consecrated men and women are sent forth to proclaim, by the witness of their lives, the value of Christian fraternity and the transfiguring power of the Good News, which makes it possible to see all people as sons and daughters of God, and inspires a self-giving love towards everyone, especially the least of our brothers and sisters. In an age characterized by the globalization of problems and the return of the idols of nationalism, international institutes especially are called to uphold and to bear witness to the sense of communion between peoples, races and cultures. In a climate of fraternity, an openness to the global dimension of problems will not detract from the richness of particular gifts, nor will the affirmation of a particular gift conflict with other gifts or with unity itself. International institutes can achieve this effectively, inasmuch as they have to face in a creative way the challenge of inculturation, while at the same time preserving their identity.”

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The search for quality

Involvement in the world of culture requires a serious commitment to the qualification of people and of works. The effective significance of our activity depends mainly on our ability to combine a professional approach and the spirit of our charism.

Speaking of the role of the salesian community as the animating nucleus, Fr Vecchi indicated the path to follow. We have to make the effort to become:

- persons who live our own lives with confidence and joy, with an attitude of understanding and dialogue with the young and their world, with attention to culture, and with the ability to involve ourselves in the local area;
- educators who are competent, who know how to combine education and evangelization, and to prepare people to transform society in a Christian manner;
- animators willing to share the formative process with lay collaborators in every day life and on important community occasions, such as the drawing up of the SEPP, the verification of the EPC and discernment in particular circumstances;
- leaders who have made their own the value of participation and of sharing responsibility, and are able to animate by creating and revitalizing suitable opportunities;
- Salesians who, working with others in partnership, show a particular sensitivity towards the education of those who are poorest, and become promoters of a culture of solidarity and peace.

(Experts, witnesses and craftsmen of communion. The Salesian community – animating nucleus, in AGC 363, p. 40)

To achieve this quality both in the communities and in the confreres, during the last six year period, the Congregation has made a notable effort to rethink and bring up to date its *formation practice*, appropriately adapting its role of formation to the challenges and the requirements of the present

time. The Ratio, promulgated in December 2000, is a compendium of norms and guidelines for the Congregation in the area of formation. It considers the whole of formation from the standpoint of ongoing formation, attributing to everyday life and work an effective formative role.

For this reason it is necessary that in every community there is:

an atmosphere that fosters the growth of the confreres as individuals and as community (the family spirit that creates a mentality of searching and discerning together, drawing on everyone's experience, a climate of faith and prayer that strengthens the inner motivations, disposing each one to live them in the radical way of the Gospel and with apostolic generosity...);

good use made of all the occasions and means that can promote ongoing formation;

a yearly program of ongoing formation;

communication with the provincial community and with the Congregation and the acceptance of the encouragement and the guidance that come from them... (cf. Ratio n. 543)

3. Some pointers for the future

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The task given to us by Christ – to be salt of the earth and light of the world – leads us to look at the current situation in which we want to continually rethink our specific charism, ascertaining whether the salt still retains its taste and whether we have put the light in the right place.

The Jubilee Year invited us to raise the level of our lives and with the watchword *Duc in altum* the Holy Father encouraged us to head for the open sea and out into the deep – as Fr Vecchi repeated in his Strenna for this year.

For this first General Chapter of the new millennium, “Duc in altum” means relaunching the Congregation in one of those most fundamental aspects which bear witness to its religious and charismatic vigour. The community in fact is the key to the renewal and to the growth of the Congregation in its mission to youth, in its vocation ministry and in its evangelical and charismatic impact on the world.

In this fraternal gathering which is the General Chapter, we want, in the first place, to “live” our communion, as a sign of the unity of the Congregation. We want to undertake a shared reflection on the community to re-discover and to re-express the heart of the evangelical inspiration of Don Bosco's charism, sensitive to the needs of time and place. (cf. C 146) It is a question of giving fresh life and a foundation to our gospel and charismatic witness as communities in order to become prophets for the new millennium. We want to identify and to share the ways ahead for the whole Congregation for the next six years.

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In this regard I want to indicate immediately some lines or perspectives for our communities, aiming at a significant witness for the future that is capable of re-founding or redesigning our presence in the world of today.

Above all, as *witnesses to poverty*, our communities are involved in society participating in many forms of poverty, material and spiritual, committing themselves to justice, and to human dignity. It is in fact the vocational choice of their members that gives them this sort of sensitivity which is a mark of the Church. The Pope reminded us that:

“The option for the poor is inherent in the very structure of love lived in Christ. All of Christ’s disciples are therefore held to this option...For each institute, according to its charism, this involves adopting a simple and austere way of life, both as individuals and as a community,” (VC 82)

The communities will ensure that they reconsider their way of living and of working, giving preference to a presence among the less fortunate youngsters and developing in their members and in those for whom they work a culture of solidarity that is an expression of the gospel of charity.

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In the second place, as *witnesses to faith* the communities need to respond to the thirst for spirituality shown by young people.

I quote the words of Fr Vecchi:

“Young people... need witnesses, persons and environments that can show by example the possibility of living a life according to the Gospel in our society. This evangelical witness which is at one and the same time a communion between brothers, a radical following of Christ, and an active presence which stimulates and brings life to the young, constitutes the first educative service we offer them, the first word of the proclamation of the Gospel. From a vocational point of view they feel attracted to join communities with a purpose rather than merely engage in a particular kind of work.” (Towards the 25th General Chapter, in AGC 372 p. 16)

. In the exhortation the Pope invites religious to:

“inspire in all the faithful a true longing for holiness, a deep desire for conversion and personal renewal in a context of ever more intense prayer and of solidarity with one’s neighbour, especially the most needy.” (VC. 39)

The evangelical witness of our communities to fraternal life and charity towards those in need will be a strong invitation and an encouragement to others to share the salesian charism. In this way they will fulfil what our Constitutions say:

“...the discovery and guidance of vocations...[is] the crown of all our educational and pastoral activity.” (C. 37)

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Thirdly: as *witnesses to communion* our communities ought to try to extend, to strengthen and to create communion by becoming as the Pope says, “true experts of communion” (VC 46).

They will become effectively significant in a local area through their involvement, according to their own charism, both in the pastoral work of the local Church and in working on behalf of poor young people and in collaboration with other bodies and agencies. They will try to promote evangelical values, by their words and even more by their example, and by being present in those

places where educational criteria are determined and policies regarding young people are decided. Not only this: the vocation as educators and consecrated persons and the priestly ministry will lead communities to set in motion organized action for the guidance and the formation of collaborators and of the educative communities. To enable them to live their own lives with maturity and joy, to understand and to live salesian spirituality and to carry out their educative and pastoral mission competently and in a professional manner, the communities will work at their cultural and professional development but also and especially at the growth of their human, Christian and salesian vocation.

They will establish relationships of collaboration and co-responsibility in the shared mission, and will become actively involved in the Church and in society, especially in areas of education, of the evangelization of culture, and in social communication.

Fourthly as *witnesses to a deep spiritual life* the communities need to commit themselves particularly to revitalizing their own salesian spirituality, recognizing that the community owes its existence and mission to the Holy Spirit, and therefore it cannot possibly reinvent itself or carry out its role fruitfully without a deep spiritual experience. They will seek therefore to start afresh from Christ (NMI 29) recognizing that “*a religious community is, above all else, a mystery which must be contemplated and welcomed with a heart full of gratitude in the clear context of faith.*” (Fraternal life in community, n. 12)

At the beginning of the new millennium we were insistently reminded of the importance of being authentic Christians and competent and credible witnesses. Today – it has been said – without passion and mysticism no one can be a Christian, much less a religious and a Salesian. May the General Chapter know how to rekindle this flame in every salesian community.

Conclusion

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We entrust ourselves to the help of Mary, “model of prayer and pastoral love, the teacher of wisdom and guide of our Family” (C. 92) and to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, with a docility like that of Don Bosco, in order to be enlightened in every step that we take and on every decision that we make in this Chapter. We also know that every renewal carried out under the inspiration of the Spirit and in harmony with the charism of Don Bosco will be accompanied by their creative power. It is in this way that we can take up our work with complete confidence that we are doing the Lord’s will.

This is what we wish for ourselves, certain of the Lord’s presence among us.

Rome, 25 February 2002

APPENDIX 4.

Address of homage to the Holy Father

by the Rector Major Fr Pascual Chavez

at the Pontifical Audience

Most Holy Father,

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We are full of joy and gratitude for this fatherly meeting that you have graciously granted us in your house close to St Peter's chair. We feel that this is also our house, because of his lively sense of the Church and love for the Vicar of Christ at the service of the Church that Don Bosco has handed down to us.

We are 231 participants at the 25th General Chapter of the Salesian Society, members by right and those invited, coming from 94 Salesian Provinces spread across the five continents and where today the Salesians are living the charism and the mission of Don Bosco, committed, in very different contexts, especially to the education of young people and the new evangelization, often in situations on the frontiers.

In the name of the chapter members and of the whole Salesian Family, I want above all to express the most lively sentiments of gratitude for this special meeting and for the very many signs of affection, of trust and esteem shown to our Family. The brotherly closeness and encouraging words of Your Holiness, on the most important occasions – happy and sorrowful – of our Congregation, as on the recent bereavement that we suffered with the death of Fr Juan Vecchi, have shed light on our way and have led us with renewed fidelity to the Spirit into the new Millennium.

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We are about to conclude, Most Holy Father, the work of the 25th General Chapter, in which we have been engaged, in family communion and with a sense of responsibility, during these last weeks. For us, in developing the chapter theme, focused on *The Salesian community today*, the message of Your Holiness given to us at the beginning of the Chapter has been a stimulus and an encouragement. You told us “it is important for you that you clearly determine the special identity of your communities; that they may be, as Don Bosco wished, communities gathered around the Eucharist and animated by a profound love for Mary Most Holy, ready to work together, sharing a single educative and pastoral project. Communities capable of animating and co-involving others, especially by their example.”

We have reflected on this in our Chapter, as we look towards the future. Aware of the new contexts in which today consecrated life finds itself, in a globalized and pluralistic world, marked by signs of dramatic situations of poverty and oppression, in search of new motives and models for life, we want to be capable of offering to young people a new model of humanity, through communities which are “of one heart and one soul”, significant and visible, that with their life and words bear witness to the Risen Lord. As You Yourself, Holiness, pointed out in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, we want our communities to be “houses and schools of communion.”

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And particularly in reference to the same Apostolic Letter, with which Your Holiness has launched the Church into the Third Millennium, I want to say that our work in the chapter has been guided by the invitation that You Yourself have repeated in the name of the Lord Jesus: *Duc in altum!* The invitation was already taken up by our beloved deceased Rector Major, Fr Juan Edmundo Vecchi

who left us almost as a last testament in his final “Strenna”: *Duc in altum*: Put out into the high seas and cast your nets wide and deep, encouraging us to renew our mission as educators and evangelizers in the “open seas” of today’s world, responding to the challenge of the young and together to set our activity in the depth of the spiritual life.

You Yourself Holiness, in your message at the beginning of the Chapter said to us: “Diligent educators and skilled spiritual guides as you are, you will know how to meet with young people who long to “see Jesus”. You will know how to lead them with gentle firmness along the demanding paths of Christian fidelity. “*Duc in altum!*”

In the young people of today, we want to recognize – as you yourself Your Holiness told us - the way of the Church. With them, “called to be the heralds of the morning” we want to discover, ever new, the true Light, that which enlightens everyone. And in their company, we want to spread it with evangelical courage.

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In the Chapter we have kept this horizon before us: fraternal life and evangelical witness lived in the community can lead to an ever more vital animating presence among the young, helping them to grow towards that holiness that, as our Constitutions say – is the most beautiful gift that we can make to young people.

For this I want to thank You Most Holy Father, for the gift of three new Blesseds that you will make to our Family: the priest Luigi Variara, the Brother Artemide Zatti and Sister Maria Romero Meneses: three splendid models of the holiness that we want to live in our communities and to offer to the young people of today.

So that we may reach these demanding goals we ask the Apostolic Blessing of Your Holiness, that it may bring the gifts of the Spirit on the members of the chapter here present, on the members of the new General Council and the whole Salesian Family.

On our part, together with the fervent prayers according to your intentions, we pledge our commitment to be in the Church as you wished us to be, “diligent educators and skilled spiritual guides “ of the young.

APPENDIX 5.

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II IN THE AUDIENCE TO THE CAPITULARS OF 12 APRIL 2002

My Dear Brothers,

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1. I am happy to welcome you on the occasion of the 25th General Chapter of your Congregation. Through you I want the thoughts in my heart to reach all the Salesians working in various parts of the world.

With affection I greet the new Rector Major, Fr Pascual Chavez Villanueva, and the General Council that will work beside him for the next few years. I pray that they may guide your religious Family with enthusiasm and docility to the action of the Holy Spirit, keeping alive the charism of your holy Founder that is always relevant.

And then I cannot but recall the previous Rector Major, Fr Juan Vecchi, recently deceased, at the end of an illness accepted with resignation and abandonment to the Lord's will. May his testimony be a stimulus for every Salesian to make his own life a total offering to God and to his brothers.

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2. At this time of Easter, after the days of the passion and the crucifixion of the Son of God, the Church invites believers to contemplate the shining face of the risen divine Master. In fact, as I recalled in the Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, "Our witness would be hopelessly inadequate if we ourselves had not first contemplated his face." (n. 16) Only in Christ can we find the response to the most intimate expectations of our heart. This means that every effort must be directed towards Jesus "who is to be known, loved and imitated, so that in him we may live the life of the Trinity, and with him transform history" (ibid 29).

Dear Salesians, if you are constant in fidelity to this commitment, if you make every effort to impress on your work the mark of evangelical love, you will be able to fulfil your whole mission with joy and effectiveness. Be saints! As you well know, holiness is your principal task, as indeed it is for all Christians.

The Salesian Family is eagerly preparing to live with joy the imminent beatification of her three children: the priest Fr Luigi Variara, the Brother Artemide Zatti and the religious Sister Maria Romero Meneses. Holiness is the best guarantee of an efficacious evangelization, because in it is to be found the most important testimony to offer to young people the ones for whom you carry out your various activities.

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3 May the Most Holy Virgin whom you venerate under the title of Mary Help of Christians, guide your steps and protect you everywhere. May St John Bosco, together with the numerous Saints and Blesseds who make up the heavenly host of your protectors accompany you in the not easy task of putting into action the projects that the work of the Chapter has produced for the benefit of the whole Institute.

With this wish I bless you my dear Brothers, assuring you of my prayers for each one of you and for all those you meet in your daily apostolic and missionary ministry.

APPENDIX 6.

The "Good-night" of Fr Pascual Chávez

in the evening of his election as Rector Major

I hope the fact that we are in the Easter season did not influence my election, given that my name occurs often during this liturgical time (paschal candle, paschal time); it could have been seen as a subliminal message!

1. Thanks

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Well then, I'll start by expressing my warmest thanks, firstly to the Lord God whose desire it has been to give to the congregation and to the Salesian Family a new pastor in Don Bosco's footsteps. Thank you to Fr. Luc Van Looy who for almost two years, since Fr. Vecchi's illness began, has guided the congregation with true dedication and love. Thank you to Fr. Anthony McSweeney, who has accompanied the process of discernment so wisely and with such love for the Salesians. I must say that the fact that the number of preferences in the first straw vote was not made public in the Assembly allowed me to sleep well to the point where right now I am much more at ease than I was yesterday.

2. A surprise

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Of course, this election is a surprise for me and I accept it as an expression of the will of God, as I said when I was asked if I would accept. It states the loving will of God that urges me further in the service of the confreres and the young, with Him as the one and only Lord of my life. Nevertheless, that acceptance expresses my inadequacy to undertake the grand task and honour of being the successor of Don Bosco.

3. The profile

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Reading through the list many times of the qualities required of the Rector Major's role which were given to help the Assembly in its discernment, I must confess that I didn't see myself in them and I didn't feel that I was the right person, and so I was sure another would have been elected. I say that sincerely. Now I understand that through this profile you have set out not only your expectations of the Rector Major, but also his personal life program. Thank you very much. That too is a gift from God.

4. Program for the next six years.

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The description of the problems which you presented in your questions to the Rector Major's vicar after his 'state of the congregation' report 1996-2002 completes the overview of the situation (as described by Fr. Luc Van Looy in that report). Together with the priorities indicated and at the conclusion of GC25, it will become part of the planning of the Rector Major and his Council for the next six years.

5. A fast ride!

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Perhaps you will ask me how it is I have arrived at this particular responsibility. In my opinion it's been an especially short, fast ride! In 1995, at the end of my mandate as Provincial of Mexico-Guadalajara, I was called by Fr Viganò who sent me to finish off my formative journey with a doctorate in biblical theology. I remember very well his words: "The Congregation needs this doctorate". When I asked him what my future would be, he said "I don't know yet. You could be a professor at the UPS, or help out in the Formation Department, or you could,,you could also be Provincial!" I had a year and a half to finish it. You probably remember how I came to be called onto the General Council six years ago. I was preaching a retreat to a group of confreres from the Madrid province when I received a phone call from Fr. Vecchi telling me that the Chapter Assembly had elected me as regional for the Inter-America region - and asking me for an answer. It was the 2nd April 1995. That means that this new nomination has come my way six years later, plus a day! When he asked me to become provincial, Fr. Viganò invited me to allow myself to be guided by the Holy Spirit and to put aside personal projects and take on those that God would give me as a life plan.

Fr. Vecchi, for his part, in his introduction to the workings of the new General Council, invited us all to live the task as a grace, as an opportunity to make progress on the path to holiness by letting the light of Don Bosco, his charism, his mission as we find it in the Rule enlighten our situation and that of others. Even if I feel that I have grown as a Salesian over those years, I must confess that there's still a way to go, but I depend on the Lord and His grace and also on yourselves and each member of your province.

6. In continuity with previous Rector Majors

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I know that I am called to continue the splendid work of animation and government carried out by Frs. Viganò and Vecchi; the achievement of the former being his renewal of the salesian identity according to indications of Vatican II and his situating the congregation in harmony with the needs of young people today. This has been a contribution that we cannot avoid responding to adequately and making a part of who we are. It was Fr. Vecchi's contribution to create a pastoral model appropriate to society as it is today, with its new understandings of education, evangelization and pastoral work for young people. Above all he strove to make our work meaningful for young people. The robust theological formation of Fr. Viganò and his closeness to the charism of Don Bosco flow together into an original contemporary interpretation of our founder and father. The pedagogical competence and anthropological vision of Fr. Vecchi have enriched the congregation giving it more certainty in what to do today to be more truly meaningful as communities and as individuals.

7. My wish

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I would like to have the theological preparation of Don Viganò; the pedagogical and cultural sensitivity of Don Vecchi, but above all the loving fatherliness of Don Rinaldi and the fidelity of Don Rua, of whom Paul VI affirmed that his beatification was owed to the fact that he had made of Don Bosco a school, and of his sanctity a model and of his Rule a spirit. Knowing my limits and weaknesses, I invite you and through you all the confreres of the congregation young and old, priests and brothers, sick and in the fullness of health, together to reproduce the image of Don Bosco.

8. A new phase

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I am the first non-Italian Rector Major (Fr. Vecchi was Argentinian but of Italian parentage). This is the most evident sign of the multicultural nature of the Congregation now spread around the world. I take this occasion to thank all of Salesian Italy which to this point has known how to exercise its responsibility to faithfully hand on the charism of Don Bosco. Thank you my dear Italian Salesians here present, or working in the various communities of the Peninsula or as missionaries around the world. Now this historical responsibility is passed on to all of us since all of us are called to incarnate Don Bosco. We have a need to deepen our knowledge of Don Bosco especially because we have a need of a charismatic identity in order not to be lost in this ocean which we have been called to plunge ourselves into....as indicated in my predecessor's recent Strenna. We need to know Don Bosco so that he becomes our *mens* (our way of thinking), our point of view, our action towards the needs of young people. I invite you to love him. He is the most beautiful gift that God has given us: Don Bosco, a sure road to human completeness and above all the following of Christ. This is my exhortation for you: know him, love him, imitate him, because we are all heirs of his spirit and it is for us to spread it around.

9. My attitude today

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What attitude do I have as I take up this responsibility? That of Moses and Don Bosco. In effect, when I was ordained priest on 8th December 1973, I took as a motto something that had struck me while I was studying the Letter to the Hebrews: "He held to his purpose like a man who could see the Invisible". It is the text with which the author of the letter recovers the spiritual experience of Moses, the Easter man. In order to make the long and perilous journey together with the people of God whom he, as leader, was guiding out of Egypt, he had need of courage, of 'parresia'. But this had been shown to be inadequate above all when he knew he was being sought for killing a man, and took refuge in the desert; it was there that his choice to renounce all his own projects matured. So when he was called anew by God, Moses knew he had to renounce his projects and himself and trust himself to God, to believe in Him and walk as if he were seeing the invisible. I can assure you that I felt great emotion when I read this same expression years later in the renewed text of the Constitutions as referring to Don Bosco in article 21 - where the saint is presented as father and teacher. He was a man who lived to bring about a single dream: the salvation of the young especially those most in need and in danger. He was a priest educator 'consecrated' totally to the mission which God had entrusted to him. He brought all his qualities of nature and grace to bear on this mission. His being one so unified, the perfect incarnation of apostolic interiority, is at the root of his marvelous courage, his fantastic creativity, his tireless capacity for work, his rich sensitivity, his generous love.

10. Entrustment to the Madonna

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I conclude by inviting you to entrust me and the Congregation to Mary. She was the precious legacy left by Jesus so that she could be our Mother and teach us to be believers and disciples of her son. And from the time of the dream of 9 years, she was the Mother and teacher of Don Bosco. Today she is the 'Stella Maris' (Star of the Sea) who will guide and accompany us in our adventure of putting out into the deep as Fr. Vecchi urged us to do in order to put the Congregation and the

Salesian Family in harmony with the pastoral plan of the Church at this beginning of the third millennium.

Thank you.

Good Night!

APPENDIX 7.

Address of the Rector Major

Fr Pascual Chávez Villanueva

at the closing of the GC25

Dear Confreres and Members of the Chapter,

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We have come to the end of our experience of the GC25, which we have lived as a gift of the Holy Spirit for ourselves and for our Congregation. The Spirit of Christ has poured out on us the rich variety of his gifts, which have filled us with joy and pointed to the way we must travel in the future. Our first thought therefore is humbly and gratefully addressed to God, who through his Spirit has animated our assembly to live in the unity of communion and to seek to respond to what he is asking of us.

At this concluding moment there are many people I want to thank: in the first place the Vicar of the Rector Major Fr Luc Van Looy, the Moderator of the Chapter Fr Antonio Domenech, Fr Antonio Martinelli, the members of the precapitular commission, the chairmen and secretaries of the Assembly, Bishop Alois Kothgasser, Fr Anthony Mc Sweeney, who with various degrees of responsibility have guided the Assembly's life and work.

I thank also the capitular Assembly itself, which was always readily available and willing at every stage of the Chapter's development, helped by its Commissions and internal arrangements. I thank too the secretaries of the Chapter, the translators, ANS and its team, the confreres of the Generalate and the auxiliary personnel, who by their discreet and assiduous work made the carrying out of this important event possible.

Finally I thank the members of the outgoing General Council, who have carried out their task with true competence and dedication, and in particular those who have now finished their mandate; and I offer my sincere good wishes to the Vicar and General Councillors who have accepted the indication of the capitular assembly to be my collaborators for the coming six-year period.

Prominent in our minds throughout the Chapter has been our concern for the Holy Land. The drama of the war has never been far from our thoughts; we have followed the rapid sequence of news items; we have united our prayers with the worried appeal of John Paul II. The carnage, the acts of retaliation, the occupations and acts of destruction have opened up a wide gulf between the inhabitants. We have been seriously worried about the fate of our confreres and sisters in Bethlehem and Cremisan, and we are still keenly following the situation as it continues to develop with our prayers and our close support.

We have also been badly affected by the scandal widely echoed by the mass media concerning priests and religious of the Church of the USA accused of the abuse of juveniles. All this calls for particular care on the part of us who are educators. And similarly we have not failed to follow the situations of wars and social conflicts which are afflicting countries in which we are working.

Following the example of the apostolic community, sent out by Jesus first to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom and then make disciples of all nations, “in the joy of the Holy Spirit” our assembly is now ready to go out into all the world, so that each one may continue to follow the pathways of history, to live with young people, to animate communities, to walk with the Church.

1. The salesian community at the present day

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The GC25 has developed the main theme of the “salesian community today” and the secondary theme of the “verification of the functioning of the structures of central government”. The greater part of its time has been dedicated to reflection on the theme of the community, which had already been begun by the two preceding General Chapters; they had shown the local community to be the strategic place for the education of young people to the faith and for the involvement of the laity.

The GC23 had tackled the challenge of the education of the young to the faith. This was becoming an ever more complex undertaking, because of an emerging culture which made a rethinking of both method and content necessary. Starting from the challenges posed by the youth situation in its various contexts, the capitulars drew up a process for the education of young people to the faith, by offering them a suggested form of meaningful Christian life and of salesian youth spirituality.

What was needed was a renewal of the quality of our educative and pastoral approach. It was not a matter of creating new works, but of starting up *a new presence*, a new way of being present in those places where we are already working. Once again the Congregation felt itself called upon to relaunch the attitude of “*da mihi animas*”, by converting the community into a “sign and school of faith and a centre of communion”.

The GC24 centred its reflections on the challenge of creating a new synergy between SDBs and laity, in other words on the challenge of increasing the number of people who want to live their baptism in the educational field, bringing Salesians and lay people together in a new paradigm of relationships, of bringing the Salesians face to face with their priority task of pastoral and pedagogical animation.

The conviction became ever more deeply rooted that the new evangelization and the new education could not be realized without the organized and competent collaboration of the laity. And the salesian communities would need to be ever better adapted for becoming animators of the educative and pastoral communities and of the Salesian Family.

These two last General Chapters developed a new pastoral model, in which the salesian community has an animating task, as the charismatic point of reference for all who share Don Bosco’s spirit and mission. The quality of its consecrated life, the depth of its spiritual experience, the effectiveness of its witness and the impact of its suggestions, are all indispensable factors for giving evangelical life and strength to the animation of the EPC and of the Salesian Family.

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With the *GC25* the salesian community takes centre stage and is seen in all its dynamic characteristics. It is not so much the community dimension that has been considered, but the local community as the subject, or in other words as regards its ability for planning and involving numerous other forces, for evangelical prophecy, for communion and for effective evangelization.

In this way the *GC25* delves more deeply into what the Congregation has already done and gives new importance to the realization of the full “personal involvement” of the community. The model that emerges from the *GC25* is one linked with our apostolic consecration as expressed in art. 3 of the Constitutions. The community lives the grace of unity, which brings about a vital synthesis between fraternal life, the radical following of Christ, spiritual experience and dedication to the mission to the young.

The capitular text concerning the community appears as a collection of five *working guidelines* or schemes of work, and is directed to the salesian community as the principal subject. By taking it on, the latter is invited to give willing acceptance to the call of God that comes through historical and ecclesial events, the indications of the Word of God and of our Rule of life, the appeals of young people and the needs of the laity and of the Salesian Family. The community then examines more deeply its own situation and discovers its own availability and resistances, its resources and lack of them, its possibilities and limitations. It learns moreover to recognize fundamental challenges and face them with hope and courage; it can put to itself appropriate questions that demand a reply. Finally, the community considers the practical guidelines that have been given, and decides on the conditions needed for putting them into effect.

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The fundamental content concerns fraternal life, evangelical witness and the animating presence among the young. The *fraternal life* of the community aims at fostering processes of the human and vocational growth of the confreres, at overcoming the inertia of formal or functional relationships, at strengthening the sense of belonging and the fraternal atmosphere, at facilitating communication, and at helping in the building of a shared vision. Useful for this purpose can be a personal plan of life, the practice of community discernment, the good use of the occasions for community meetings, and the project of the salesian community.

Evangelical witness requires us to make visibly perceptible the primacy of God in the community’s life, to live the grace of unity in spiritual experience and its community expressions, to make our community witness to the following of Christ radically prophetic and attractive, and to share the motivations and commitments of our vocations. The central place given to the Word of God, fostered by the practice of the “lectio divina”, the quality of community prayer, the daily Eucharist, communication and the sharing of life help to deepen our spiritual experience and the manifestation of the primacy of God. The witness of the community is rendered more transparent by concentration on joyful obedience in the mission, the practical application of an austere poverty of solidarity, and the splendour of a serene and watchful chastity.

Wherever there is a salesian community, there is an experience of faith, a network of relationships is built up and many forms of service for the young are made available. The community makes visibly perceptible the *salesian presence among the young*, to which it gives animation and growth. A first requirement is to get back among the young and be not only a community *for* young people but also *with* young people. To this end the salesian community builds up a presence of communion and participation, it gets the laity and the Salesian Family involved and becomes inserted in the local neighbourhood. It becomes a presence that educates and evangelizes, creating environments with a strong spiritual ethos, working with full awareness in situations of poverty, and realizing projects and processes of growth for the young. Finally, it promotes the vocational choice

every young person must make, it animates the educative and pastoral community so that the latter may be a place of vocational growth through a method of personal follow-up and vocational suggestion.

To be a community that makes fraternity come alive, that provides a strong gospel witness and is an animating presence among the young, the community itself needs to be animated, updated, motivated, encouraged, directed and guided. *Animation of the community* takes place mainly through ongoing formation. It can provide moments for spiritual renewal, for discussion, for educative and pastoral updating; but the evaluation and quality of daily life are the first resource for formation in the community. The Rector has a fundamental role to play in the animation process, but with the involvement and shared responsibility of all the confreres; his attention is concentrated on the charism, on the mission and on fraternity. Together with the confreres he animates the community.

Finally the GC25 suggests some *conditions* which make it possible to be a salesian community at the present day; it is a matter of helping the community to work in line with a common project, of ensuring that the community be made up of the right number of confreres with the necessary qualities, of deepening the rapport between the community and the work, and of giving effect to the organic provincial project. Some of these conditions apply to the local level, but for the most part they require the responsibility and decisions of the provincial community.

To every community the Chapter consigns these five processes for study, deeper analysis and practical application, with a view to its becoming an effective charismatic community.

2. Verification of the functioning of the central structures of government

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The second element in the theme for the Chapter's reflection concerned the verification of the functioning of the structures of central government. This was a point specifically requested by the GC24; it was begun by the General Council and the results were passed on to this GC25. The General Council began the work of review through contributions from external consultants, and the study by a group of Provincials led by the Vicar of the Rector Major. Questions were then addressed to the Provincial Chapters concerning the Departmental Councillors, the Regional Councillors and the Extraordinary Visitations. The GC25, finally, has considered all this work and developed its own reflections for the purpose of making the functioning of the structures of central government more smooth running and effective.

The verification has led the GC25 to make certain modifications to the Constitutions; they concern the temporary nature of the period in office of the Rector Major and members of the General Council, the entrusting of the animation of the Salesian Family to the Vicar of the Rector Major and the consequent assignment to one of the Councillors of the social communications sector by itself. This has enabled an internal change to be made in the General Council which has been under study for some time and offers a new possibility for the animation of the Salesian Family, and the giving of greater importance to social communication in the service of education and evangelization.

The group of Provinces formerly known as Australia-Asia has been divided into two distinct groups named *South Asia* and *East Asia-Oceania* respectively. This decision will permit a better animation of the two new Regions on the part of the respective Councillors; more suitable forms of coordination will need to be found within the Regions themselves.

The need is felt to study a different manner of realization of the working of the General Chapter, to enable it to better respond to the needs of planning and clarity of expression. We are all aware that the General Chapters dedicated to a re-reading of the charism have now ended, and we are back to 'ordinary' General Chapters. Analogous reflections can be applied to the functioning of the provincial chapters.

The point is emphasized that the Rector Major with the General Council should work in a more organic and coordinated way, starting from the six-year programming, but also in the subsequent implementation. In particular it is hoped that sectorialism may be overcome and especially that the so-called sectors of the "salesian mission", i.e. youth pastoral work, social communication and missions, can work together in a more coordinated way. The urgent need is recognized for working by way of projects and of fostering an animation that can initiate processes. Also noted is the importance of exploiting the resources existing in the Regions, Conferences and Provinces, and linking them together in a network. In this connection too the Generalate can make its specific contribution to improving the manner of working with the whole Congregation.

With the growth of the Provinces, the contribution made by the realization of decentralization and subsidiarity has been appreciable; but there is still need for a solidarity extending beyond the province or the region, and the need for much greater interprovincial coordination. At a time of globalization moderation is needed to balance global effects and local initiatives; it will be well to reflect on what Provinces can do through their own resources and what they can more usefully do together. There are in fact certain urgent needs and priorities that extend beyond the capacity of the Regions. Mission frontiers require a combination of subsidiarity and solidarity.

The process of discernment for the election of the Rector Major and the General Councillors was an occasion for living and experiencing a procedure, a method and a spiritual experience which still need further study but are already giving appreciable results. Discernment carried out in common in important matters (C 66) is a way open to us to use in moments of government and pastoral life at different levels. The exercise of such a practice will help us to reach a unity of outlook.

The need for the verification of the structures of central government remains open to the effective realization of better methods of functioning and requires an analogous commitment at different levels in the Congregation. A better method of working will lead to working together, and to a work which is not only good but more effective.

3. The era through which we are living

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We are living through exciting and dramatic times; they both provide new opportunities and impose certain restrictions; they open up possibilities previously unthought of and arduous new and challenging perspectives. The practical guidelines of the GC25 are placed in broader frames of reference we do well to keep in mind. The communities in fact operate within situations of society and culture, of the Church and of religious life. The implementation of the GC25 requires us to know our own particular contexts, but also to be able to situate them in the great changes now taking place.

3.1 The social and cultural context of secularization, globalization and fragmentation

Deep and rapid transformations are taking place in society and culture which challenge the commitment to education and evangelization, the testimony of religious life, and the model of man and woman that we put forward.

There exists an accentuated ethnic, cultural and religious pluralism, fostered also by mass emigration. Tolerance and cultural integration often become difficult; various forms of religious syncretism arise; sometimes tensions, conflicts and wars break out for ethnic, nationalistic and religious motives. In the religious field the process of *secularization* is very strong; it is aimed prevalently at the Christian faith but involves other religions as well. Greater prominence is also given to movements that seek spiritual experiences, interior well-being and deep emotions.

Globalization, moreover, is a reality that becomes ever more prominent and is manifested especially in economic planning on a worldwide scale, in the growing awareness of solidarity, in the protection of the environment, in the need for a more just sharing and distribution of goods, in social communication and in the development of information technology. But it can also produce social exclusion and injustice to the detriment of weaker populations. Economic well-being, which takes on ever more arrogant aspects in the privileged classes of humanity, leads to consumerism and hedonism in them. At the same time the challenges of hunger, poverty, sickness and social exclusion, which affect millions of persons, are becoming ever more acute.

Complexity and fragmentation finally create instability and diversity between points of reference, values and interests. Together with a healthy pluralism and the seeking of new criteria, challenges are multiplied and relativism and pragmatism become widespread. While on the one hand emphasis is laid on the value of the individual and his rights, the dignity of women is progressively recognized in practice, and there is a more objective view of the body, the affections and sexuality, on the other hand new forms of exploitation of the individual and especially of juveniles have arisen, and there has been an accelerated flight from firm commitment. The post-modern era accentuates attention to interpersonal relationships and the cultivation of the affections, but also individualism and subjectivism.

The GC25 encourages the communities to face the challenges presented by the present culture to education and evangelization; to live fraternity with special attention to the vocational maturing of every confrere and the fostering of interpersonal relationships; to provide an evangelical witness that is positive and an alternative to the prevailing climate. In this way every community will seek to deepen its knowledge of the context in which it is living and acting, and will provide effective responses.

3.2 *The ecclesial context of “Novo Millennio Ineunte”*

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At the end of the Jubilee Year and the beginning of the new millennium John Paul II urged the Church to “launch out into the deep”,^[1] to “keep its eyes on the Lord Jesus”,^[2] to “begin again from Christ”,^[3] and to be “witnesses of love”^[4] by building communion.

The first standpoint from which we must identify pastoral approaches suited to every community is that of “*starting again from Christ*”. “I have no hesitation in saying that all pastoral initiatives must be set in relation to *holiness*”:^[5] the time has come to put forward again to all this high standard of the Christian life which is holiness and to adopt a pedagogy of sanctity. “This training in holiness calls for a Christian life distinguished above all in the art of prayer”:^[6] our communities are urged to become authentic schools of prayer; education to prayer must become an essential

requirement in any pastoral program. “There is no doubt that this primacy of holiness and prayer is inconceivable without a renewed listening to the word of God”.^[7] Holiness, prayer and listening to God’s word are the fundamental paths for pastoral work after the Jubilee.

The second standpoint from which a decisive commitment must be made when programming is that of *communion*. “To make the Church the home and the school of communion: that is the great challenge facing us in the millennium which is now beginning, if we wish to be faithful to God's plan and respond to the world's deepest yearnings”.^[8] The prophetic nature of communion presupposes the cultivation of its spirituality, which is expressed in fostering the different types of vocation, promoting the commitment to ecumenism, basing everything on charity, encouraging interreligious dialogue and the mission “ad gentes”, and facing up to the challenges of modern culture.

With the GC25 the Congregation intends to respond to the appeal of John Paul II to work in the outposts of the new evangelization and exploit the gifts and results of the Jubilee: “*Duc in altum*”. Every community is called upon to begin again from Christ and build communion. This will lead to new fruits of spiritual life and evangelization.

3.3 *The religious context of the charismatic re-foundation*

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In these years that have followed Vatican II consecrated life has been strongly urged to renew itself, and become eloquent and meaningful; in particular the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* gathers together the elements of re-foundation which have been realized in the past thirty years and constitute the point of reference for “a great history still to be accomplished”.^[9]

To the delicate process of renewal desired by the Church, our Congregation has dedicated three “extraordinary” General Chapters, which have specified the salesian identity. It is useful to recall the path we have followed. While the GC19, which took place during the Council, “took note of the situation and made preparations”, the Special GC20 “put the process into the Council’s orbit”, the GC21 “revised, rectified, confirmed and made some points more explicit”, the GC22 was called to “reexamine, make more precise, complete, perfect and conclude”.^[10]

The Special GC20 carried out the revision and acceptable renewal of the Congregation according to the spirit of the Founder and in line with the indications of the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* and the Decree *Perfectae Caritatis*. The Chapter set out not only to implement the guidelines and directives of Vatican II in a merely formal manner, but took the opportunity to make a better response to God and to the young. For this reason it was preceded by a very careful preparation with the involvement of all the Provinces, and sought to reformulate a global project. The fundamental point at issue was how to make visible and relevant in the Church the particular testimony of salesian religious life. It was also a matter of writing a renewed text of the Constitutions and Regulations. In brief, the identity of the Congregation had to be re-founded.

After seven months of work the Chapter produced 22 documents of doctrinal and practical guidance. A more charismatic reformulation of the text of the Constitutions was then made, and the Regulations were written to provide a universal method for the practice of the Constitutions, leaving it to the Provinces to legislate on specifically local matters through the Provincial Directories.

The GC21 aimed at verifying whether and to what extent the renewal had been achieved. The rapidity and depth of change after Vatican II led the Church and the Congregation to a state of unease, which needed clarity of formulation and wisdom in solutions. The deep renewal brought about in the Congregation by the Special General Chapter needed revision, rectification in places, still deeper study and reconfirmation.

In the GC21 some substantial themes of the Congregation were studied: the preventive system, formation to salesian life, the Salesian Brother and the Pontifical Salesian University. This work of clarification of the identity, reinforced by the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Paul VI, gave greater depth to the specifically salesian mission. In his closing address to the Chapter the Rector Major Fr Egidio Viganò summarized the three objectives which had been clarified during the Chapter's work: the priority task of taking the Gospel to the young, which implied an educative and pastoral project; the religious spirit; and the new statute of the salesian community as the animator of the educative and pastoral community. The GC21 certainly marked a radical pastoral renewal.

The GC22, taking place after an intense period of experimentation and in-depth examination of the salesian identity, set about concluding the project of renewal with the definitive revision of the Rule of Life. The final result of the Chapter's work was, in the words of the Rector Major: "an organic text, improved, profound and permeated by the Gospel, rich in the authentic nature of its origins, universally open and forward-looking, sober and dignified in expression, richly endowed with well-balanced realism and the assimilation of conciliar principles".^[11] The definitive text of the Rule of Life, brought with it, among other things, the revision of the *Ratio*; the central idea was that all salesian formation should be linked with the nature of the vocation and the specific mission of educators and pastors of the young.

In this way our Congregation committed itself to the foundational re-reading of its charisma and to its "re-foundation". The "extraordinary" General Chapters have been followed by three "ordinary" Chapters, concerned with topics of a practical nature: the education of young people to the faith, involvement of the laity in the salesian spirit and mission, and the salesian community at the present day. The charismatic re-reading of the identity has been concluded, but its translation into practice is still taking place.

4. The goal of the GC25

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The phases of the preparation and the celebration of the GC25 having been completed, the time has come for its implementation. Now is the time, with all the confreres, to assimilate the Chapter, to make it a program for the government of the province, to put it into practice in the communities. To identify the steps that need to be taken, we shall briefly look at the objectives for the future and the goal to be reached.

Looking at the path the Congregation has followed in these last thirty years, it can be seen that changes have not always been along a straight line. I think that the greatest difficulty was not the renewal of the Constitutions or of the structures of government or of pastoral practice, but the spiritual renewal, which involves a deep interior conversion.

In these years of change a new form of salesian religious life has been taking shape. Already we have the "new wineskins": a new evangelization, a new educational method, a new pastoral model,

a new formation. Little by little there has also been the development of the “new wine”: the new evangelizer, the new educator, the new pastoral subject, the new Salesian.

Sometimes we feel ill at ease with the use of the adjective “new” to qualify situations that we think we are already familiar with, especially with regard to the practical consequences that it leads to: the need to renew ourselves spiritually, to update ourselves professionally, to prepare ourselves pedagogically. The novelty comes from the situations, the contexts, the changes in the circumstances, from the way of looking at the human person.

Today the concern about religious life in general and of the Congregation in particular, cannot be about survival, but rather about creating a significant and effective presence. It is a question about prophecy. “That means,” Fr Vecchi wrote, “giving life to a work that raises questions, gives motives for hope, brings people together, prompts collaborations, and gives rise to an ever more fruitful communion for the realization together of a plan of life and action in line with the Gospel.”¹² What is needed is a form of life that is fascinating and attractive, that puts the prophetic aspect in the first place rather than the organizational, that emphasizes persons rather than structures.

Paraphrasing Karl Rahner in his spiritual testament, we can say that the future of religious life depends on its mystical force, its solid experience and clear witness of God, overcoming every form of “bourgeois attitudes,” vagueness and mediocrity. Religious life arose and only makes sense as a search for God and his primacy. Its mission is that of being sacramental: being “signs and bearers of the love of God” (C 2), especially on behalf of those most in need, so that they may have the experience that God exists and loves them.

When the Superior Generals decided to reflect on the theme of the re-founding of religious life,¹³ they were moved by the knowledge that there was need for “new wine in new wineskins” (cf. Mt. 2, 22); one source of the novelty is the call to return to the origins of the charism. For us this is a matter of expressing the original character of the Congregation, of going to the essentials, of re-writing the letter from Rome of 1884. *Let us return to Don Bosco and let us return to young people!*

The images of “light”, of “salt” and of “yeast”, used by Jesus in the Gospel to describe the identity and the mission of the disciples, are revealing and demanding. In simple terms, it is necessary to “be” in order to have significance and relevance; but if the salt loses its savour, or if the light is put under a bushel, or if the yeast does not ferment they are of no use. They have lost the reason for their “being”.

The strength of the religious life is based in its prophetic nature in the face of culture, its subversive nature with regard to “bourgeois attitudes” its alternative approach to progress that is without limit but also without transcendence. The problem is that of *identity* and of *identification*; that which marks us out and distinguishes us is a strong experience of God, who changes our life profoundly, and a community in which we begin to live in a new way. “Do not be conformed to this world,” Paul writes to the Romans, “but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Rom 12, 2).

Along these lines I want to indicate *five objectives for the future*, which have been the subject of reflection and study by Fr Egidio Viganò and Fr Juan Vecchi in their letters, but which are also areas that still need to be renewed in order to lead us decisively into the new millennium with vigour and clarity of approach.

4.1 The spiritual renewal of every Salesian

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Spiritual renewal implies a return to the foundations of our vocation: God and his Kingdom. God ought to be our primary “occupation”. It is he who invites us and entrusts young people to us, to help them to the maturity of reaching the stature of Christ, the perfect man. For us the recovery of spirituality cannot be separated from the mission, if we do not want to run the risk of compromise. God is waiting for us in the young in order to give us the grace of an encounter with himself (cf. C 95; GC23, 95). Therefore it is inconceivable and unjustifiable to maintain that the “mission” is an obstacle to our meeting God and cultivating an intimate relationship with him.

4.2 The consistency of the community.

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The quality of the life of communion and of educational and pastoral action require that the salesian community be made up of the right number of confreres and those of the necessary quality.

All the proposals to make every-day experience formative, and to improve the quality of the method, the contents and the activities come up against what is actually possible for the community. For us fraternal life in community is an aspect of our apostolic consecration and therefore of our religious profession (cf. C 3 and 24), together with the following of Christ, obedient, poor and chaste, and the mission. It is also the context in which we are called to live the spiritual experience, the mission and the evangelical counsels. We cannot therefore continue with the pretext that we want to solve all the problems at the cost of the charism and of community life.

4.3 Presence with fresh significance

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The significant effectiveness of the presence is a requirement of both the community and the mission; it is a question of quality in both cases. In the past when one spoke of “reorganization” the emphasis was placed on closing houses or handing them over to lay people. Today, on the other hand, while one continues to insist that reorganization is an unavoidable task if we do not want to weaken the community and overburden the confreres, the emphasis has to be placed on the “significant effectiveness” of the salesian presence in the locality. This cannot be reduced to the work or the activity; it is rather *a way of being, of working and of organizing* that is concerned not only with efficiency but rather with giving meaning, opening prospects, gathering people together, promoting new responses. It is a question of relocating the province where the needs of young people are most urgent and where our presence is most fruitful. Our consecrated life will not be everywhere, and not always even be socially relevant, but it will continue to be the essential point of reference, in so far as it is a sign of the Kingdom.

4.4 The quality of the educative and pastoral proposal

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The course followed so far, at least in many places, has been the multiplication of the works, compromising in not a few cases the quality of our activity. Sometimes the organizational aspects have been emphasized rather than the pastoral ones, or the maintenance and the construction of

buildings rather than the clarity and the seriousness of the educative and pastoral project. Today we are required to develop more focused forms of evangelization, to concentrate on fostering human maturity and on the education to the faith of young people, on the formation of the laity, the animation of the educative and pastoral community, and together to draw up a project. This undertaking is itself already the bringing about of significant effectiveness.

4.5 The formation of the Salesian

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The complexity of the current situation nowadays, the challenges of young people, the requirements of the new evangelization, the task of inculturation require a formation that is capable of preparing the Salesian to live his vocation in a dynamic and sound way, to carry out the mission in a professional and competent manner, and to personally assimilate the charismatic identity. For us, Don Bosco is not only a constant point of reference, but a way of life, and formation is nothing else than the personal assimilation on our part of the gift that God gave us when he called us. The document on formation to the Consecrated Life clearly states: “The renewal of religious institutes depends mainly on the formation of the members.”¹⁴ This is the greatest challenge that the Congregation has today, and to which it has wished to respond with the new edition of the *Ratio*.¹⁵

The Church and the world need people who make it their profession to incarnate their concern for God, who are a reserve source of humanism, who become a power, an eloquent and radical sign of the “sequela Christi”. This is what the Vatican Council II wanted and expected from religious life. This has been the aim of the Congregation during these last 30 years. Now the GC25 has determined to give its specific support to the achievement of this aim, a contribution on the practical level, that as we have seen, aims at strengthening the salesian community in all its facets.

5. The gift of the beatifications

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“Dear Salesians, (...) be saints! As you well know, holiness is your principal task.” With this exhortation, John Paul II addressed the members of the General Chapter as we were received in audience on the morning of 12 April. Holiness is also what this Chapter hands on, when it concluded with the gift of three new *beati* for the Salesian Family: the priest Luigi Variara, the Brother Artemide Zatti and Sister Maria Romero Meneses.

These *Beati*, who are joined to the numerous array of holiness in our charismatic Family, are united by the joyful giving of themselves and their generous dedication to the very poor. There is nothing that attracts like the witness of total dedication without reserve, without limit, without condition; there is nothing so fascinating as service to the poorest, to the humblest, to those most in need. The lepers of Fr Variara, the sick of Brother Zatti, the abandoned girls of Sister Romero immediately recall the totally free offering of the lives of these three persons, who are proposed to us as models. Care for the poorest and the total gift of oneself link together the three new *beati*, in this way bearing witness to their heroic charity.

Holiness is the demanding way that together we want to follow in our communities; it is “the most precious gift we can offer to the young” (C 25); it is the highest goal that, with courage, we can set for all. Only in an atmosphere of holiness that is lived and experienced will the young people have

the possibility of making courageous life choices, of discovering God's plan for their future, of appreciating and welcoming the gift of vocations of special consecration.

In particular the beatification of Brother Artemide Zatti underlines the relevance and the validity of the vocation of the salesian Brother. The salesian charism would not be what it is meant to be without such a figure. His presence in the life of the salesian community is not the addition of a type of person extraneous to it, but is an indispensable part of its very nature. This requires from us a more convinced vocational proposal, and a more visible presence of this figure in the educative and pastoral community.

Running through the whole of Brother Zatti's life was the following of Jesus, with Don Bosco and in Don Bosco's manner, always and everywhere¹⁶ This indicates that Don Bosco fascinated and attracted him; following Don Bosco's example he lived the total donation of himself; like Don Bosco he chose to be an educator: Zatti was an infirmarian educator. To the extent of becoming a reflection of God with the radicality of the Gospel, he lived in profound union a spiritual experience, professional work, joyful brotherhood. The shining figure of this Blessed salesian Brother teaches us the way to help youngsters discover the beauty of this vocation.

6. Launching into the deep at his word

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The episode in the gospel of the miraculous draught of fishes, presented in "*Novo Millennio Ineunte*" and taken up again in Fr Vecchi's last Strenna, is a symbol of the return to our journey at the conclusion of the 25th General Chapter.

We too sometimes may have experienced the fruitless labour of our work. The Lord Jesus is again inviting us today to "launch into the deep" to renew our determination to cast the net, to try once again, if on several occasions we have experienced lack of success. This is the time for courage! We need to go out into the open sea, facing today's challenges, and we need to go to the deep waters, cultivating an intense spiritual experience and developing the quality of our activity.

What is urging us on to try again is trust in the Lord Jesus: at his word we will once again cast our nets. This is the time for hope! The time we are living in is moving us towards the great responsibilities that await us, towards the joyful adventure of once again lowering the nets for the catch and experiencing the power of the Word of God. We are sure that the Lord Jesus still knows how to amaze us with his fidelity and his surprises.

Where there are great challenges the courage and the hope of the community are needed. The new ways and the difficult tasks of evangelization can be faced by communities that undertake a radical pastoral conversion and live a profound spiritual experience. Courage and hope are the most eloquent expressions of the prophecy of our communities.

It has not escaped us that in the gospel episode the gratuitous gesture of the surprising catch of fish has no other purpose than that of arousing faith and leading to a *sequela*. Faced with the overgenerous gesture of Jesus and after the invitation: "Do not be afraid: from now on you will be fishers of men", the first disciples drawing their boat to land, left all and followed him (cf. Lk 5, 1-11). In this way they will be involved in the same mission and in the same destiny as Jesus: the definitive call to everyone to welcome the Kingdom. May the surprising gestures and the abundance of courage and of hope of all our communities provoke a vocational response from the young; may

the prophetic witness of the communities be such as will still today be capable of attracting youngsters ready to share Don Bosco's life project "*Da mihi animas; coetera tolle*".

7. With Mary our help.

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As with the apostolic community at the beginning, so in our communities Mary is present. She is at prayer with her Son's disciples; lives with us who became her sons at the foot of the cross. From that moment Mary is in the Church with a praying presence; she prays that the disciples may overcome the closed-in consequences of fear, be attentive and ready for the breath of the Spirit, go out onto the highways of evangelization.

Don Bosco left us as a precious heritage entrustment to Mary; she is our Help and the Mother of the Church, the help of young people and of the poor; the Mother of all. Like the beloved disciple we too welcome her into our homes, into our communities. She will make us attentive to the needs of the present time. "They have no wine", and she will make us sensitive to the requirements of the gospel: "Do what he tells you" (cf. Jn 2, 3-5).

Mary with your maternal intervention

help us to return to Don Bosco and to the young!

Mary our help,

pray for us and for our communities!

[1] NMI, 1.

[2] Cf.. NMI, 16-28.

[3] Cf. NMI, 29-41.

[4] Cf. NMI, 42-57.

[5] NMI, 30.

[6] NMI, 32.

[7] NMI, 39.

[8] NMI, 43.

[9] VC, 110.

[10] Cf. ASC 305, p. 9.

[11] Docs. GC22, p.93

[12] VECCHI J.E. *Experts, witnesses, and craftsmen of communion*, AGC 363 p. 22. It is not insignificant that Fr Vecchi quotes this text in his letter convoking the GC25, AGC 372 pp. 26-27

13 Cf. AA.VV *For a creative fidelity. Refounding: relocating charisms, redesigning presence.* II Calamo, Rome, 1999, a collection of the contributions at the 54th Meeting of the USG, at Ariccia in November 1998.

[14](#) *Potissimum Institutioni, I.*

[15](#) *Formation of Salesians of Don Bosco. Principles and Norms. Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis et Studiorum Third Edition,* Rome 2000 (n. 15), 33

[16](#) cf AGC 376, p. 27