

**Acts of the General Council
of the Salesian Society
of St. John Bosco**

OFFICIAL ORGAN OF ANIMATION AND COMMUNICATION FOR THE SALESIAN CONGREGATION

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***“Witnesses to the radical approach of the
Gospel”
Work and temperance***

**Documents of the general chapter xxvii
OF THE SOCIETY OF SAINT FRANCIS OF SALES**

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I. LISTENING

Like Don Bosco, in dialogue with the Lord ...

1. We recognise that the time in which we are living is a place of encounter with the Lord. We wish, as individuals and communities, to give *primacy to God* in our lives, challenged by Salesian holiness and the thirst young people have for authenticity. We are more aware that only a personal encounter with God, through his Word, the Sacraments and our neighbour, can make us significant and authentic witnesses in the Church and society. The desire for God, which is something we feel within us, is also alive in young people and in the laity: we find them responsive to life values expressed in simplicity, austerity and genuine relationships between people. Young people in particular are seeking significant adults to accompany them and help them to mature in life.
2. We find that we are working in different *cultural contexts* manifesting in various ways the sense of God. The yearning to have God at the centre of our lives can at times be in conflict with a secular culture which could lead us to be afraid of speaking about Him, so as not to offend, or out of respect for the other person, or to protect ourselves from the opinions of others. Sometimes there is no encounter with the Gospel because of the lack of openness, or the indifference of the listeners, and at other times because of our laziness or lack of missionary courage. Sometimes we consider our era only as a problem; our awareness of history and of modern day cultures is partial and superficial. By uncritically responding to social needs and demands, we are silent as regards the experience of God and run the risk of no longer understanding our specific mission as religious in today's world.
3. There are *signs of the primacy of God in our lives*: fidelity to the Lord through the practice of the evangelical counsels, our service of poor youngsters, the sense of belonging to the Church and the Congregation, our increasing knowledge of Don Bosco and his Preventive System, the simple and abundant legacy of our everyday spirituality, marked by family spirit and positive interpersonal relationships, sensitivity to accompaniment and spiritual fatherliness. At the same time we find that who we are and what we do does not always appear to be rooted in faith, hope and charity, and does not clearly show that the initiative begins from God and always returns to Him. At times the Eucharist is not seen nor experienced as the source and support of communion, and prayer in common which builds and strengthens fraternal life is too easily set aside. It is our young people and their families in particular who question us on our spiritual roots and vocational motivation, reawakening in us our identity as consecrated persons and our educative and pastoral mission.

... journeying together, moved by the Spirit ...

4. We are grateful to God for the *fidelity* of so many confreres and for the *holiness* of some members of the Salesian Family that has been recognised by the Church. Every day we are in contact with adults and young people, confreres old and young,

sick or at the height of their activity who bear witness to the fascination of the search for God, the radical approach of the Gospel lived joyfully and with a keen passion for Don Bosco.

5. Generally our consecration reveals the sense of God in history and in the life of human beings, in circumstances of seeking meaning or of poverty, with the power of a witness that gives hope and enthusiasm, offering a human way of life that achieves fulfilment by going against and offering an alternative to a worldly mentality.¹ The practice of *lectio divina*, with community sharing of God's Word and the *personal plan of life* have become for many confreres a great resource for personal renewal, an effective antidote to the temptation of spiritual superficiality.
6. Given the difficulties and daily challenges related to proclaiming the Gospel, we are very much aware that there is a connection between *pastoral charity and spiritual life* as the sources of our fruitfulness.
7. We note certain *symptoms of ego-centricity* where we do not go out of ourselves to be open to the demands of God or go out to meet others: a lack of updating, of reference to a stable spiritual director and a “do it yourself” spirituality. These forms of self-sufficiency often make us forget that we are cooperating with God and hinder us from making Christ the point of reference in our lives.

... experiencing fraternal life, as at Valdocco ...

8. Since GC25 there has been a growing commitment to *living our community life more authentically* through better animation of prayer times, and an effort to grow in sharing and more qualified and participative apostolic work. Communities have seen an increase in more systematic meeting schedules and the quality of these has seen improvement. In particular, some community choices have helped people come together in communion as brothers who live, reflect and work together: community day, the annual formative project, *lectio divina* and spiritual sharing, reflection on our Salesian experience, times for celebrating and relaxing together. Community structures, settings and their location, the style and rhythms of life express our view of community and allow us to live it.
9. Some negative influences from society are also noted in our communities. We risk losing our Gospel-inspired *ways of thinking* by taking up negative features of today's culture. For example, we mask our indifference towards or lack of care for our confrere with the excuse of showing “respect” or “tolerance”, or we unnecessarily make public information that should be kept among ourselves. Creeping materialism and activism make us perceive community time as time 'stolen' from the private sphere or the mission.
10. Fraternal life in community especially shows signs of the low appreciation of the meaning of our consecrated life which is seen in a weak concern for *the Salesian Brother vocation*, with its specific contribution to the community and the Salesian

¹ Cf. POPE FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 93-97.

mission, and the excessive clericalism so often manifested in our community and pastoral relationships.

11. We note that prayer and the offering up of a life of sacrifice by *elderly and sick Salesians* are a true apostolate with and for the young; they remain an active part of the community and live out the “*da mihi animas*”. Moreover, communities are making every effort to see they are not excluded from the mission. We still find some difficulty in accepting and taking care of confreres who are in situations of fragility, in trouble, senile and sick.²
12. Among our confreres and in our communities there is also the *issue of spiritual fatherliness*, expressed in a comprehensive network of giving and receiving, lived in a harmonious family spirit. We recognise that over these years, especially in initial formation, valuable projects have been developed for growth as human beings in the emotional, relational and spiritual sphere.

... available for planning and sharing ...

13. The *Community Plan* and the *Educative and Pastoral Plan* (SEPP) have been drawn up more frequently than in the past in almost all Salesian communities and works, even though there is still a limited understanding and little awareness of the essential function of the *Educative and Pastoral Community* (EPC). We recognise the importance of working with shared responsibility, notwithstanding the struggle to feel that we are an active part of the EPC and to recognise it as having responsibility for the mission. Sometimes our Educative and Pastoral Plan is limited to organising *our* activities, without shared and ongoing reflection on the objectives, on priorities, on processes and on the evaluation of the objectives achieved. Some confreres nevertheless through a tendency to favour areas of personal activity continue to find difficulty in sharing the mission.
14. Over these years the field of intervention for *Rectors/Directors* has broadened. They are fully engaged in managerial tasks as well as being spiritual guides of the confreres and leaders of the EPC. Therefore the Rectors/Directors are not always in the position to fulfil the obligations of their service and often they do not receive adequate cooperation from the confreres, and sometimes they are deprived of a systematic formative accompaniment at provincial level.
15. We see greater *involvement and activity by the laity*, helped by sharing and joint responsibility with and within the educative and pastoral community. A number of difficulties with regard to Salesian-lay relationships have been overcome in the combined effort to converge around a single project. Where this kind of teamwork exists, in a climate of trust and family spirit, respecting roles, that place becomes fruitful and purposeful, also in vocational terms. Systematic formation of the laity continues to be weak in certain contexts.
16. Some of us allow ourselves to become caught up in managerial tasks or take refuge in our comfort zones, delegating *assistance* and presence amongst the

² *Evangelii Gaudium*, 209-210.

young to confreres in practical training, or to our collaborators. Many lay people who are paid for their leadership roles and assistance offer a truly professional and Salesian service, in comparison with others who have shortcomings especially due to our lack of involvement in formation procedures.

17. In recent years we have seen the development of a healthy *pivotal role of young people*, especially within the Salesian Youth Movement. This factor leads us to feel joy and satisfaction as we experience the regenerating truth of the Salesian charism: evangelising and educating the young with the young. We are ever more conscious that the volunteer movement helps young people to mature in a complete way which includes the vocational and missionary dimension.³ Within the Salesian youth volunteer movement there is sometimes a lack of adequate spiritual and pedagogical accompaniment for it to become an authentic experience of a meeting with Christ in the poor.
18. We have gained greater awareness of the importance of accompanying the young in coming to know and to meet Jesus. The young have a right to Christ and his Gospel and we owe it to them. Strengthened by this belief, in certain contexts we have explored more deeply the *inseparable bond between education and evangelisation*, obtaining appreciable results.
19. Our awareness of being a *Salesian Family* has grown, thanks also to positive cooperation in provincial and local communities, to "Salesian Spirituality Days", the Rector Major's yearly Strenna and the *Charter of charismatic identity*. Some experiences of working "together" on behalf of the young have helped us to grow as a united body sharing responsibility within the Salesian Family, and thus growing in our awareness that we are a single charismatic movement. Moreover, shared responsibility in the mission between Salesians, other Salesian Family members, lay people and the young has helped us improve the quality of our ministry, broaden horizons and expand the heart of our apostolic mission.
20. An emerging apostolic front that we have begun to take better care of is *family ministry*, and not only in parish or adult formation contexts. It needs to be reconsidered in close connection with youth ministry.
21. *Initial formation* at times continues to be disconnected from pastoral processes. After the specific period of formation of candidates for the priesthood and brothers, difficulties and problems arise for these confreres in fitting back into ministry in a significant and effective way or returning to the dynamics of community life. Not all communities accepting confreres at the end of their initial formation have an explicit plan envisaging appropriate ways of helping them fit into ordinary educative and pastoral activity.

... going out to the peripheries ...

22. The Congregation is becoming more decisively oriented to *youngsters who are poor* and at risk as we listen to their cry for help. There is a growing sensitivity

³ Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 106.

among confreres to a culture of human rights, especially those of minors, which is seen in certain prophetic choices on the new frontiers and at the margins in the broader sense.

23. Moreover, the Congregation is committed to insisting strongly that employing any approach which does not respect young people, and having recourse to *violence* of any kind are clearly contrary to Salesian pedagogy. All Provinces have taken or are about to finish taking the necessary steps in order to formulate both their *code of ethics* as statutes of our preventive pedagogical culture, and the *protocol for legal procedures* to tackle possible cases of abuse, in accordance with Canon Law and the legislation of the countries in which we operate.
24. We are becoming aware that there is at times *a certain distance between us and the young*; it is a mental and cultural one rather than a physical one. In some situations we look on the new generations as if they were a “problem” and not an “opportunity”, an appeal from the Lord, an eloquent reflection of the “signs of the times” and a challenge that confronts us.
25. The new technologies of information and communication and the *digital environment* in which we are living are a cultural, social and pastoral space encouraging an experience of life; they are an integral part of daily life and have an impact on our way of feeling, thinking, living and relating. They allow us to maintain ties and cultivate healthy relationships among confreres and young people, reduce geographical distances that would otherwise hinder immediate and frequent communication. As Salesians we feel we are not present as educators and evangelisers in a significant way in this environment.

... becoming prophetic signs in the service of the young!

26. We have put consistent efforts into *giving new meaning to and restructuring presences* so that their charismatic identity is relevant and to guarantee creative fidelity to Don Bosco's educational system in response to the needs of the young in our time. In certain contexts, however, the preference for the poorest young people is not sufficiently clear. The concern to financially support traditional structures limits our openness to new forms of poverty and new social emergencies.
27. The people and the young often admire us for *the amount of work* we do on their behalf. Nevertheless, some of us, overwhelmed by so many activities, experience a sense of tiredness, tension, fragmentation, inefficiency and *burnout*. Sometimes we are far too concerned with and worn down by all the efforts at preserving and helping works to survive. When we are concerned with the young, at times we focus only on their social well-being while neglecting their accompaniment in the spiritual life and in their vocation.
28. The *visibility and credibility* of our consecrated life has gradually lessened. Not always can the witness to the primacy of God be recognised in us, through the practice of the vows, our modest lifestyle, commitment to work, dedication to the mission, personal and community prayer faithfully practised.

- 29.** *Intercultural living* within our communities is an opportunity, a witness to unity for the world; it also reveals certain limits to our charity and uncovers prejudices which resist evangelical fraternity. International communities and collaboration in worldwide projects contribute to creating a greater sense of fraternity and solidarity.
- 30.** We recognise that the responsibility for *caring for the environment* is an emerging sensitivity in our communities as well. However, we are still not sufficiently convinced of this priority in our choice of a modest and essential lifestyle and in the education of the young.

II. INTERPRETATION

Like Don Bosco, in dialogue with the Lord, journeying together, moved by the Spirit...

31. Immersed in history, marked by limitation and fragility, we are supported by the certainty that *God accompanies the human race* with his interventions of salvation which culminate in the Pasch of the Lord Jesus: "His resurrection is not something of the past; it contains a vital power which has permeated this world. Where all seems to be dead, signs of the resurrection suddenly spring up".⁴ Following Jesus' example in his transfiguration and covering his disciples in the light of Tabor⁵ and listening to the warnings in Don Bosco's "dream of the Ten Diamonds", we appreciate the grace of the Salesian vocation, the fruitfulness of the evangelical counsels, communion in community and among the young. We look upon the Virgin Mary who in her *Magnificat* sings to a God who faithfully leads his People along the paths of history, working wonders and miracles in favour of the humble and the poor. With her we rediscover the joy of the faith which infuses optimism and hope.
32. As for Don Bosco, for us too the *primacy of God* is the cornerstone of our *raison d'être* in the Church and in the world. This primacy gives meaning to our consecrated life, helps us avoid the risk of letting ourselves become too caught up in our activities and forgetting that we are essentially "seekers of God" and witnesses of his love among the young and the poor. We are called, then, to redirect our heart, our mind and all our energy to the "beginning" and the "origins": the joy of that moment when Christ looked upon us, to recall the meanings and needs that underpin our vocation.⁶
33. Our *mysticism* is expressed as both our personal and community lives become more profoundly human.⁷ It is based on the mystery of the Incarnation: Jesus made his own the needs and aspirations of the people and did the will of his Father in building the Kingdom. Don Bosco lived and passed on an original style of *union with God* to be lived always (cf. C 12, 21, 95) and everywhere according to the oratory criterion (cf. C 40). The Salesian, then, bears witness to God when he spends himself for the young and remains with them in sacrificial dedication "to his last breath", lives the "cetera tolle", and knows how to tell them of his own experience of the Lord.
34. The experience of our encounter with God demands a personal response that is developed over a journey of faith and in deep *relationship with the Word*, because "being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the

⁴ *Evangelii Gaudium*, 276.

⁵ Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 14-16.

⁶ CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, *Rallegratevi*, 4.

⁷ Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 87, 92, 266.

encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction."⁸

35. Today, other than noting cultural changes, we are convinced that we are experiencing *an historic turning point*,⁹ perhaps without precedent. This has significantly modified the reasons which induce people to choose and live consecrated life. Pope Francis invites us to hear the cry of the poor, to go out to meet those most urgent needs, to live the culture of encounter and dialogue,¹⁰ avoiding self-referentiality and embodying a missionary spirituality.
36. The difficulties we experience in responding to God's call to live the '*sequela Christi*' in a radical way, are due to our *weak faith* in the fruitfulness of the evangelical counsels in bringing about communion in community and in our mission to the young. Taking up the gift of vocation and being responsible for the processes of our ongoing formation help us to mould the culture with the Gospel and to be people of compassion, especially for the poor.
37. Called as we are to testify to the reality of the Kingdom and to dialogue with thinking that sometimes tends to relativise and marginalise religious discourse, we become irrelevant when we back away from our *prophetic role* in proposing a culture inspired by the Gospel.
38. The risk of easily being considered mere "social workers" instead of educators and pastors capable of witnessing to the primacy of God, of proclaiming the Gospel and of spiritual accompaniment, demands that we *take care of our vocation*. The most significant challenge consists in finding creative ways to state the importance of spiritual values and a personal encounter with the God of life, love, tenderness and compassion. This requires that we encourage the experience of faith and the encounter with Jesus Christ: young people demand a down-to-earth and coherent lifestyle of us.

... experiencing fraternal life, as at Valdocco, available for planning and cooperation...

39. We believe that the community "is put forward as an eloquent witness to the Trinity"¹¹ and our *living together* is the result of the initiative of God the Father who calls us to be disciples of Christ for a mission of salvation (cf. C 50). In order not to lose this particular gift, offered to us and the whole Church, the visibility of the fraternal dimension of our life must be more conscious, direct, effective and joyful (cf. Ps 133:1).
40. We recognise that *community life* is one of the ways of having *an experience of God*. Living "mystical fraternity"¹² is an essential element of our apostolic consecration and a great help in being faithful to it. There is another clear link with

⁸ BENEDICT XVI, *Deus caritas est*, 1.

⁹ Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 52; cf. 61-70.

¹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 220.

¹¹ *Vita Consecrata*, 21; cf. 16.

¹² Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 87, 92.

our mission and with the world of the young thirsting for authentic communication and transparent relationships. At a time when families and society are coming apart, we offer an alternative lifestyle based on respect and cooperation with the other person; at a time marked by inequality and injustice, we offer a witness of peace and reconciliation (cf. C 49). Community is also revealed in the common mission. Unanimity in our apostolic activity brings about the prophecy of the community and such testimony gives rise to new vocations.

41. Our limitations of mutual misunderstanding, our being closed in on ourselves and our daily fragility, depend on a lack of acceptance of the love and grace poured into our hearts by the Spirit of Christ (cf. *Rm 5:5*). We recognise that the communion with the Body and Blood of Christ (cf. *1 Cor 10:16*), with which we nourish ourselves each day, makes us “one heart and one soul” (*Acts 2:42*; C 50). *The Eucharist* is the source and summit of our fraternity, consecration and mission.¹³ Urged on by the charity of Christ and being part of the gift of self of Jesus the Good Shepherd, we participate in Don Bosco’s spiritual experience and spend ourselves as he did for the salvation of the young.
42. *Personal relationships* in community can become formal, fragmented and less significant due to a number of factors: individualism and personal reticence, less than engaging formation, excessive concern for one’s own work or being under-occupied, relationships limited to the functional, retreat into our private sphere and a not always balanced use of *personal media*. These factors become a facile excuse for not facing up to the demands of community life. *Conflict situations* should not be seen as negative things but as an opportunity to mature: they need to be enlightened by the Gospel, tackled and then resolved with greater courage, human skill and mercy.¹⁴
43. A certain tendency to perfectionism and, on the contrary, resistance to change lies behind the lack of community renewal. The capacity to be realists and at the same time know how to dream, is diminished. We find ourselves challenged by Pope Francis: “I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security... I dream of a *missionary option* capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation.”¹⁵
44. What we offer as a community is meant to reveal an “outgoing Church”¹⁶, and to realise an open educative environment and an “outward-looking” *Educative and Pastoral Community*. The Salesian community has the task of creating fellowship too with lay people who share responsibility with us, especially with members of the Salesian Family, overcoming every kind of clericalism and directing ourselves towards new frontiers, “leaving the doors always open”.¹⁷

¹³ Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Lumen Gentium*, 11.

¹⁴ Cf. *Mt 5:20-26*; *Evangelii Gaudium*, 226-230.

¹⁵ *Evangelii Gaudium*, 49. 27.

¹⁶ Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 20-24, 46.

¹⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 46-47.

45. Living out the *spirituality of communion* is what the Church asks of us today, integrating community life and service in our work,¹⁸ in a renewed sense of belonging. To build community we need to shift from life in common to communion of life, in such a way that each confrere establishes deep ties and gives himself unreservedly, feeling no need to alienate himself or seek worldly compensations.¹⁹
46. In the Church, which is the People of God on the march and a communion of individuals with different charisms and roles, we share with the laity the service of building the Kingdom of God. The Salesian charism requires us to cultivate the involvement and shared responsibility of all the members of the *animating core of the Educative and Pastoral Community* (cf. C 47), Salesians and lay people, to foster a planning mentality and common action on behalf of the young, of families and of adults among the ordinary people.
47. The *Preventive System* is not only about pastoral animation but also shapes relationships in the community in a Salesian way. It inspires us to be prophets of fraternity for one another in the community, especially in times of suffering and when seeking more meaningful relationships. We are, then, "signs and bearers of God's love" (C 2) not only for young people but also for our confreres.
48. "Home" and "family" are the two terms frequently used by Don Bosco to describe the "spirit of Valdocco" that must be clearly visible in our communities. In this respect we respond to the evangelical and charismatic appeal for mutual understanding and shared responsibility, for fraternal correction and reconciliation.
49. Formation, both initial and ongoing, is called to have an impact, by making use of the human sciences, on our deep relational dynamics, *on our emotional life and on sexuality*, all of which influence a balanced community life. In our formation processes, it would be good to tackle such issues more competently, frequently and in a more shared way, without limiting them exclusively to spiritual direction and to the practice of the sacrament of reconciliation.
50. Formation, when taken up personally, helps us to purify our motivations, accustoming us to live with the right intention; it educates us to *work and temperance* through disciplined and detached apostolic involvement which knows how to set the necessary boundaries within interpersonal relationships; it trains us in a moderate lifestyle which enables us to undertake manual work and ordinary and humble services in community.
51. The Rector/Director is a central figure; more than a manager he is a father who brings his family together in communion and apostolic service. Because of the complexity of our work, the diversity of functions and less than adequate formation, he is not always in a position to look after fraternal life, discernment and shared responsibility in accordance with the community plan of life and its pastoral and educative plan. In some situations, weak support from the confreres has its effect .

¹⁸ Cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 43-45.

¹⁹ Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 93-97.

... going out to the peripheries, becoming prophetic signs in the service of the young!

52. Young people are “our burning bush”²⁰ through which God is speaking to us. This is a mystery to be respected, accepted, its more profound features recognised, and before which we should *remove our sandals* to contemplate God's self-revelation in each and everyone's story. This strong experience of God can allow us to respond to the cry of the young.²¹
53. We are aware that *union with God* is something to be experienced *among the young*: “We believe that *God* is awaiting us in the young to offer us the grace of meeting with him and to dispose us to serve him in them, recognising their dignity and educating them to the fullness of life.”²² The mission is strengthened authentically when we see it as coming from God, and when we draw sustenance for our service from Him.
54. We are aware that the strength and the sharing of *motivations of faith* and daily seeking union with God enrich pastoral reflection, confer creativity on the proclamation of the Gospel, and induce us to give our life to the young. Thus a double movement, one proper to the preventive system, occurs; in the school of God's love where God goes before us by loving us first, (cf. *1 Jn* 4:10.19) including through the young, we become capable of an ‘anticipating love’ (C 15).
55. We want to be a *Congregation of the poor for the poor*. Like Don Bosco we maintain that this is our way of living the Gospel in a radical way and of being more available and prompt in responding to the needs of the young, bringing about in our life a genuine exodus towards the most needy. Migrants, refugees and unemployed youth challenge us as Salesians in all parts of the world: they invite us to find ways of collaborating and provide concrete responses, and to adopt ways of thinking that are more open, supportive and courageous.²³
56. *A pastoral ministry without a specific focus* does not effectively reflect the Salesian charism and is the result of inadequate planning (cf. AGC 334). This is due to insufficient recognition of the deepest longings of the young, a lack of appreciation of the indications coming from Salesian magisterium and weak observance of the Constitutions.
57. Our educative and pastoral activity is in tune with the *local Church* and cooperates with *institutions around us*, for a more incisive and appropriate service of the young and workingclass areas. Youth ministry and the Salesian pedagogical proposal are not our ‘private property’ nor for exclusive use within our Congregation, but a precious gift for the Church and for the transformation of the world.
58. The *Preventive System* is for us Salesians a pedagogical approach, a proposal of youthful evangelisation, a profound spiritual experience. There is need on our part for a greater commitment to its renewed understanding and practice in today's

²⁰ Cf. *Ex* 3:2ff.; cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 169.

²¹ Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 187-193; 211.

²² GC23, 95.

²³ Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 210.

altered circumstances. We would like to highlight in particular that it is a “spirituality to be lived”; the fruitfulness of our work is the result of an intense spiritual life lived with the young (cf. C 20) and for their salvation.

- 59.** *Salesian assistance* is a fundamental aspect of our spirituality. Being with the young, making ourselves their neighbour, earning their confidence and accompanying them in their allegiance to the faith, allows us to encounter God and listen to him, expending all our efforts “until our last breath”²⁴ and bearing witness by the gift of our life according to the spirit of the cross. By living this way we share in the paschal dynamic, and are certain that the beauty of the resurrection will fill this authentic gift of ourselves with joy and peace.
- 60.** Practising the twofold *work and temperance* replenishes a Salesian’s life, nourishes his apostolic zeal and brings him close to the young, the Lord and his confreres. The apostolic front must be proportionate to the required quality and number of the community and the Educative and Pastoral Community.
- 61.** We insist on the need for *formation* to take into account the training and preparation for serving the young, including through deeper study, cultural dialogue and significant pastoral experiences, ensuring a constant updating in accordance with the guidelines of the Church and of the Congregation.
- 62.** The *digital world*, “the new areopagus of modern times”,²⁵ challenges us as educators of the young: it is a “new playground”, a “new oratory” which demands our presence and encourages us to new forms of evangelisation and education. Our “knowledge and information era”, however, tends towards the commodification of human relationships and a monopolisation of human knowledge, in this way becoming a source of “new and often anonymous kinds of power”²⁶ which we must tackle through our pastoral and educative involvement.

²⁴ Cf. BM XVIII, 216.

²⁵ John Paul II, *Redemptoris missio*, 37.

²⁶ Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 52.

III. WAY FORWARD

1. GOAL

63. To witness to “a radical Gospel approach” by means of **continual spiritual, fraternal and pastoral conversion**:
1. living the PRIMACY OF GOD by contemplating what happens each day and by following Christ;
 2. building up authentic communities through relationships and work in accordance with the FAMILY SPIRIT;
 3. putting ourselves more decisively and significantly at the SERVICE OF the poorest of the YOUNG.

2. PROCESSES AND STEPS

Like Don Bosco, in dialogue with the Lord ...

64. *To be MYSTICS in the Spirit we need to move:*

1. from a fragmented spirituality to a unifying spirituality, the result of contemplating God in Jesus Christ and in the young.
2. from an attitude where we feel we are already formed, to humbly and constantly listening to God's Word, our confreres and the young.

65. *To bring about these processes we commit ourselves to:*

1. Experiencing our daily Eucharist as the source of our apostolic fruitfulness and celebrating the Sacrament of reconciliation as a way of frequently setting out once more on our path to conversion.
2. Cultivating personal prayer in daily contact with the Word of God, making our daily meditation and cultivating the quality of community prayer, sharing it with the young and members of the EPC.
3. Giving a special character to the project of animation and government at all levels for the next six years, by putting God's Word at its heart.

... journeying together, moved by the Spirit ...

66. *To be MYSTICS in the Spirit we need to move:*

1. from a weak testimony of the evangelical counsels to a life filled with passion for following Jesus which is able to *wake up the world*, calling it back to a life of simplicity.

2. from a pessimistic outlook on the world to a *vision of faith* which discovers the God of joy in the events of life and in the history of the human race.

67. To bring about these processes we commit ourselves to:

1. Living the grace of consecration with joy and authenticity by drawing up or redefining our personal plan of life and the community plan.
2. Having a stable spiritual director and referring to this person periodically.
3. Exploring our spirituality through frequent reading of the Constitutions and the study of Salesian Sources.
4. Arranging times for community spiritual sharing starting out from the Word of God, making use of *lectio divina* in particular.
5. Evaluating and promoting the harmony between prayer and work, reflection and apostolate, as a community and as individuals, through appropriate *scrutinies*.
6. Seeing to the translation of the *Fonti salesiane* (Salesian Sources) in different languages.
7. Updating the prayer book known as *In dialogue with the Lord* and other aids to prayer.
8. Setting in place formation initiatives for Salesians and lay people and suitably preparing a Centre for Ongoing Formation at Regional level or making use of those in other Regions.

... experiencing fraternal life, as at Valdocco ...

68. To be PROPHETS of fraternity we need to move:

1. from functional and formal relationships to *warm and supportive ones, relationships of profound communion*;
2. from prejudice and closure to *fraternal correction and reconciliation*.

69. To bring about these processes we commit ourselves to:

1. Making room for the practice of dialogue with others,²⁷ using positive dynamics of interpersonal communication amongst confreres, young people, lay people and Salesian Family members, also making use of the contributions of the human sciences.
2. Having relationships of fraternity and empathy, where we listen to our dependants and collaborators, avoiding authoritarian attitudes and counter witness.
3. Encouraging every confrere to share the task of responsibility for the community with the Rector/Director and his Council.
4. Meeting the needs of sick and elderly confreres and involving them in the life and common mission in accordance with their real possibilities.
5. Giving special support to communities working on the "frontiers".

²⁷ Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 88.

6. Ensuring consistency in number and quality of communities by wisely and courageously reshaping communities.
7. Seeing to the two complementary forms of the Salesian religious vocation by following the guidelines from GC26²⁸ and continuing reflection both on the consecrated life aspect and the specific nature of the Brothers with regard to fraternal life and the mission.
8. Reinforcing ways of maturing in spiritual and human terms, and providing adequate support processes for confreres in difficulty.
9. Ensuring adequate accompaniment processes for individuals involved in possible cases of abuse.
10. Evaluating and relaunching the proposal for formation of Rectors/Directors²⁹ as part of the next six year plan.
11. Seeing to the updating of the *Handbooks for Rectors/Directors and for Provincials*, on the part of the Rector Major and General Council.

... available for planning and cooperation ...

70. *To be PROPHETS of fraternity we need to move:*

1. from individualistic pastoral initiative to unconditional *availability* for the mission and community and province planning.
2. from considering young people as simple beneficiaries and lay people as collaborators to *promoting* young people in leading roles and lay people as sharing responsibility for the one mission.

71. *To bring about these processes we commit ourselves to:*

1. Growing in communion and shared responsibility by taking up the community plan and SEPP, developing and giving visibility to “a Salesian culture”.³⁰
2. Creating teamwork with other Salesian Family Groups who are working for the young and promoting their rights.³¹
3. Networking by linking effectively with the local Church, other Religious Families, educational, social and government agencies.
4. Setting up more suitable processes in initial formation aimed at involvement in youth ministry, the acquisition of an ability to understand the social problems in the locality and to undertake educational and pastoral planning.
5. Integrating family ministry into the Provincial and local SEPP, providing for the formation and involvement of lay leadership.³²
6. Organising a unified and comprehensive Salesian ministry in provincial and local communities in accordance with the *Youth Ministry Frame of Reference* and with the agreed planning by Sector and Regional Councillors.

²⁸ GC26, 74-78.

²⁹ Cf. GC21, 46-57; GC25, 63-65.

³⁰ Cf. AGC 413, p. 51.

³¹ Cf. *Charter of Identity of the Salesian Family*, 21, 41.

³² Cf. GC26, 99, 102, 104.

7. Ensuring attention is given to family ministry and lay formation at all levels and encouraging coordination of reflection and intervention by the Sectors for the Salesian mission and for Formation.

... going out to the peripheries ...

72. *To be SERVANTS of the young we need to move:*

1. from being distant from the young to an active and enthusiastic *presence* among them with the passion of the Good Shepherd.
2. from a ministry of preservation to an *outgoing ministry* that starts with the deepest needs of the poorest young people from their family and social perspective.

73. *To bring about these processes we commit ourselves to:*

1. Promoting in Provinces a profound assessment of our significance for and presence among poorer youth in our works in accordance with the criteria offered by General Chapters and the Rector Majors, in view of “structural pastoral conversion” and a shift towards new poverties (cf. Reg. 1).
2. Taking up, together with lay people, the *Youth Ministry Frame of Reference*, activating renewal processes, making use of existing voluntary service efforts and considering the new existential and geographical frontiers of young people who are poorer.
3. Promoting and defending human rights and the rights of minors through the innovative approach of the Preventive System, paying particular attention to child labour, the sex trade, drug dependency and all forms of exploitation, youth unemployment and migration and human trafficking.
4. Encouraging in our centres an atmosphere of respect for the dignity of minors, committing ourselves to creating conditions which prevent any form of abuse and violence, where every Province follows the guidelines and directives of the Rector Major and General Council.
5. Educating the young to justice and lawfulness, to the socio-political dimension of evangelisation and charity, walking side by side with them as agents of social transformation in a spirit of service for the common good.
6. Sensitising communities and the young to respect for creation, educating them to ecological responsibility through concrete activities which safeguard the environment and sustainable development.

... becoming prophetic signs in the service of the young!

74. *To be SERVANTS of the young we need to move:*

1. from a life marked by the trend to upward mobility to a missionary and prophetic community which shares with the young and the poor.

2. from a ministry of events and activities to a complete and systematic ministry able to accompany processes of vocational maturing, in tune with new Church and Salesian perspectives.

75. *To bring about these processes we commit ourselves to:*

1. Developing a culture of vocation and care for vocations to Salesian life, cultivating the art of accompaniment and preparing Salesians and lay people to become spiritual guides of the young.
2. Living the twofold “work and temperance”, cultivating a visibly poor lifestyle, eliminating waste and making ourselves available for domestic and community services.
3. Practising real solidarity with those who find themselves in need, with the poor and among Salesian houses.
4. Entering into the digital world where the young in particular are at home in a significant and educational manner, ensuring the appropriate professional and ethical formation of confreres and collaborators, and applying the Salesian Social Communication System (SSCS).
5. Encouraging international communities also through a worldwide redistribution of confreres and the promotion of missionary projects in the Congregation.
6. Putting procedures in place, including auditing, which guarantee transparency and professionalism in the management of goods and works.
7. Carrying out a careful assessment of the Generalate and other building structures in the Congregation, so that they are a clear and credible sign of our radical Gospel approach.

3. WHERE TO DIRECT OUR FUTURE CHOICES FOLLOWING GC27

As can be easily understood in an address such as this, I am not attempting to suggest all the options we could take after this Chapter. Everything we experienced in it, the ample reflections we shared, and the study we made of the state of the Congregation allow us to glimpse some of the ways forward that I consider to be *essential and of prior concern*. Provinces no doubt will determine some other options appropriate to their specific context and always within the framework of the GC27.

I simply list those that seem to me to be more universal and of priority. Later the General Council in its subsequent planning, and Provinces with theirs, will be able to establish an appropriate set of strategies to be followed throughout the Salesian world.

3.1. Knowledge, study and assimilation of GC27

In some of the early interventions in the assembly hall, as also in commission meetings, there was a concern that we arrive at a *final document* not destined to be consigned to a library, making no impact on renewal. With a view to overcoming this fear I consider that the first step has to be a commitment on the part of us all to think of ways and a spiritual approach – rather than simple strategies – that can encourage a knowledge of what GC27 offers the whole Congregation. Subsequently, I invite you to find an appropriate manner of arriving at personal and community assimilation including conversion (if the Spirit grants this to us). Only this assimilation and conversion will generate *new life*.

I believe it would be a mistake to think that by encouraging knowledge of GC27 at a Retreat or a weekend meeting, the objective had been achieved. ***This is why I am proposing that we dedicate at least these first three years to reading it, reflecting on it, meditating on it, and making it the object of our local and provincial planning, and of the various animation and government plans of the Provinces; evaluating it then at the next Provincial Chapter (the one known as the Intermediate Provincial Chapter) to see what results it is producing.***

3.2. Depth of interior life: witnesses to the God of life

As I have said on previous pages I believe that speaking in general terms, we need to recognise that in the Congregation *depth of interior life is not our strength*. I refuse to think, I told you, that this is part of our Salesian DNA, because Don Bosco was not like that nor did he want us to be. Having recognised this weakness (mentioned quite abundantly by previous Rector Majors, and also by some General Chapters), with the help of the Holy Spirit we need to find the strength to reverse this trend. It requires authentic conversion to the radical approach of the Gospel, which needs to touch hearts and minds. When Pope John Paul II was talking about Consecrated Life, he asked that we put spiritual life '*in the first place*'. He was not inviting us to a strange kind of spiritualism but to a depth in life that at the same time makes us really brothers

and generous in giving ourselves to others, to the mission and especially to the poorest ones, thus making our choice of life truly attractive.

This depth of life, this authenticity, this radical Gospel approach, this way to holiness is the “most precious gift we can offer to the young” (C. 25). In fact we cannot explain Don Bosco’s radical predilection for the young without Jesus Christ. “In the following of Christ we find the life-giving source of his vitality. This is the initial gift from the Most High; the first ‘charism’ of Don Bosco” (Fr E. Viganò, AGC 290, p.16).

This is why I suggest that each Local community 'tell itself' in a concrete way, and as a result of GC27, what it thinks and proposes could be done about putting 'God in the first place', while being a Salesian community called by the Lord, that not only comes together but lives in his name.

3.3. Taking care of ourselves, our confreres, and our communities

“This is why we come together in communities, where our love for each other leads us to share all we have in a family spirit, and so create communion between person and person” (C. 49).

For us Salesians community life, ‘communion of life in common’, is not only a circumstance, a way of organising ourselves, a way of being more effective in our activity. For us the authentic fellowship we experience in communion of persons is essential, constitutive; it is one of the three inseparable elements which the already quoted article 3 of our Constitutions speaks about.

It is on account of the power of our witness to evangelical fraternity that I invite everyone to be really aware that we have to take care of ourselves, to be well and vocationally fit, and that we have to take care of our confreres in the community with an attitude of “welcome, respect, mutual help, understanding, kindness, forgiveness and joy” (cf. the audience with the Pope). In order to live a spirit of true brotherly love which, in the end, accepts and integrates differences and combats loneliness and isolation we have to take care of our communities in the Provinces.

I have already implied this earlier. We often sacrifice community life, spaces and occasions for the sake of work. In the end this makes us pay too high a price and a tremendously painful one.

This is why I ask each Province to undertake a real study and practical effort to look after and consolidate our communities, ensuring a robust human quality and also number of confreres, even at the price of there not being a religious community in some presences, and making progress in giving new meaning to and 'reshaping' Houses and Provinces, as has been asked of us in recent years and in various Team Visits to the Regions. We certainly have to overcome great resistance that comes from attachments, from having spent so many years in a house, from the pressure of the educative community itself, of the suburb or citizens' associations, right up to local and regional government ..., however the foreseeable difficulties should not impair either our clear-sightedness or our capacity to act in prudent freedom.

3.4. It is enough that you are young for me to love you

In GC26 we read that returning to the young means 'being in the playground', and we know that being in the playground goes well beyond physical space. It means wanting to be with and among them, meeting up with them in our daily life, getting to know their world, encouraging them to play their part, accompanying the awakening of their sense of God and encouraging them to live their lives as the Lord Jesus lived his.

When we contemplate Don Bosco in what those who have studied him well tell us about him, and in the fascination he himself awakens, we are struck by the force of his vocational passion for the young. Fr Ricceri wrote something in one of his letters that I think is very valuable when he said: "The pastoral predilection for youngsters and older youth showed up in Don Bosco as a kind of 'passion', or better, as his 'super vocation'; he had to dedicate himself to it by-passing every obstacle and leaving behind all things, even good ones that could in any way hinder its accomplishment" (cf AGC 284, 1976, p.33).

Predilection for the young became the basic and most fundamental option in his life, and it is the mission of the Congregation. We can find much already written and thought through about this aspect of Don Bosco. In our General Chapters much has also been said about this. The most recent of them, GC26, dedicated a number of guidelines to "returning to the young".

As a Chapter Assembly we did not speak about this 'returning to the young', and because of this I am not sure to what extent it was realised over the last six years, however it will continue to be something that will always be relevant. ***This is why I dare to ask each Province and local community that, as a response to the plan of animation and government for each Province, where a confrere has the strength, the educative and evangelising passion, the authentic vocation to be with and for the young and amongst them, whatever his age, everything possible be done to free him of other tasks and management roles, so that he can do what we should know best what to do according to our vocation: be educators and pastors of the young.*** I invite you to take the practical steps and translate into decisions of government what we well know to be the result of our Salesian heritage.

3.5. For us as it was for Don Bosco: our priority is the young who are poorest, the least, the excluded

Fr Vecchi wrote in one of his letters: "Poor youngsters therefore were and still are a gift for the Salesians. Returning to them will enable us to recover the central element of our spirituality and our pedagogical practice: the friendly rapport which creates correspondence and the desire for growth" (AGC 359, p.25). It is clear that no one could interpret Fr Vecchi as defending poverty by this, but we do recognise that poverty and poor young people exist. If we are with them and among them they are the first to do us good, evangelise us and help us to really live the Gospel with the charism of Don Bosco. I dare to say that ***it is poor young people who will save us.***

Our being *Servants of the young* means, as we said in our General Chapter, leaving behind our securities, not only of life but of pastoral activity in order to move towards 'an *uphill*' ministry which begins from the deepest needs of the young and especially

the poorest of them. "In working with young people, you encounter the world of excluded youth. And this is dreadful!" (Pope Francis in his Audience).

This is why I dare to ask that with the "courage, maturity and much prayer" with which we are sent to the most excluded young people, we choose in each of our Provinces to take another look at where we must remain, where we should go and where we can leave ... Needy young people challenge us with their groans and their cries of pain. In their own way they are calling out to us. This is to be translated into times for reflection in each Province during these six years so that, in the light of GC27 and of our option to be *Servants of the young.... going out to the peripheries*, we arrive at decisions at the level of provincial government, always in dialogue with the confreres, so that with courage, maturity and a profound gaze of faith we can make what I am asking happen. Let us not be afraid of being prophetic in this.

3.6. Evangelisers of the young, 'companions on the journey', boldly putting challenges before them

Article 6 of our Constitutions contains in essence all the richness of the mission entrusted to us by our charism: "Faithful to the commitments Don Bosco has passed on to us, we are evangelisers of the young, and the more so if they are poor; we pay special attention to apostolic vocations; we are educators of the faith for the working classes, particularly by means of social communication; we proclaim the Gospel to those who have not yet received it." This is and will continue to be our great challenge because even in our most successful achievements, we can always do more; it will never be enough and all too often we see that we are only halfway there.

Don Bosco is our great model in this 'knowing what to do' with a Salesian heart for the education and evangelisation of the young. His boys were convinced that Don Bosco loved them, wanted what was good for them, both in this life and in eternity. This is why they accepted his proposal to know and be friends with the Lord. As educators we must know how to be with the young and walk side by side with them in their circumstances and concrete situation, in their personal process of growing to maturity. As evangelisers, our aim is to accompany young people so that in freedom they can encounter the Lord Jesus.

So dear confreres, even in these brief few lines I cannot but emphasise this as being **essential**: we are *evangelisers* of the young, and as a Congregation, as concrete Provincial and local communities, we must *live and grow in a genuine pastoral love for the young*. It will be very difficult to do this if we do not make *the proclamation of the Lord Jesus* to the young a matter of priority and urgency and at the same time are not capable of *accompanying them* in the circumstances of their lives. This ought to be our strength: *accompanying each young person in his situation* but it is often a task we leave to others, or one we say we do not know how to do. In this accompaniment *it is of vital importance to begin with the culture of vocation that we have spoken so much about*. We have not yet succeeded in it. Often it frightens us, or we excuse ourselves with the 'self-justification' that we do not believe that we should be 'fishing' for vocations. If we really believe this and 'sell this line' *we are killing something that is very much ours, very much our charism: the ability to accompany each teenager, each young person in their personal quest, their challenges, their questions about life, their choices in life*. Something that is **fascinating** in our Salesian vocation we are putting aside or into someone else's hands... or no one's.

Therefore I ask each Province to appoint the most capable confreres to youth and vocational ministry, with truly evangelising projects, developing systematic processes of education in the faith, giving priority to individuals and to their personal accompaniment, proposing bold challenges for the discernment of their life choices with equally bold proposals for every kind of vocation in the Church, including the Salesian vocation in its various forms, involving the whole community.

Hopefully it will not happen as GC23 said it could – one of the most brilliant insights of our Chapter magisterium on educating young people to the faith – when it says that in this process that I have just referred to, someone could arrive at the point of dropping out, “not only because of the difficulties linked with faith, but because of mistakes or inadvertence on the part of educators more concerned with extraneous things than with a fraternal accompaniment of the dialogue between the youngster and God” (GC23, 137).

3.7. With lay people in the urgency of a shared mission

In our Chapter reflection we have noted the more pivotal role being played by lay people, encouraged by shared responsibility and the shared mission in the educative and pastoral community. Already eighteen years previously, in GC24 – without going back to earlier magisterium – the Rector Major and his Council were asked to make known initiatives and experiences of collaboration between SDBs and lay people (GC24, no. 127), and it was recognised in the same Chapter reflection that “the process of involvement leads to communion in spirit, to shared responsibility, and then to sharing of the Salesian mission. Communion and sharing, involvement and shared responsibility, these are the two faces of the same medal” (GC24, no. 22).

We have made progress in our view of the shared mission. Fr Pascual Chávez said this several times, as a result of his reflection on the matter, that with the outlook and theological vision of ecclesiology today, the Salesian mission cannot be thought of without the laity, for what they bring to it is also vital for our charism.

Let me add this, dear confreres: *The shared mission between SDBs and lay people is no longer optional – I say this in case there is anyone who still believes it - and it is because the Salesian mission in the world today so clearly demands it.* It is true that in the Congregation we have different ‘speeds’ in our Provinces and in relations between them, *however the shared mission between SDBs and laity, reflection on this mission, the process of conversion by our SDB confreres in this regard, is something we cannot go back on.*

This is why I dare to ask each Province that in the first three years after GC27 it makes the programme for shared mission between SDBs and lay people that is in place more concrete still – where this already exists – or that the situation in the Province be studied and the concrete project and planning be developed over the years leading up to the next General Chapter.

3.8. Mission 'ad Gentes', Project for Europe and the Bicentenary

I am not going to develop these topics. I just want to point out that they are not being overlooked. On the contrary, they are three issues that already have their place in the planning for the next six years. The last two, **Project for Europe and the Bicentenary**, are already well developed in their own right, and we need to continue to keep a watch on them, and the **Missionary activity of the Congregation** ('*Missio ad Gentes*') will be given special attention within the overall coordination of all the Sectors for the mission, including youth ministry, especially for the poorest, the education of ordinary people, with particular oversight from social communication, and the proclamation of the Gospel to peoples who have not yet received it - *Missio ad Gentes* (cf. C.6).