



Guadalajara for another six years. Once I had completed this service I finished my Doctorate in Biblical Theology at the Pontifical University of Salamanca. Just at that point I was elected as a member of the General Council, as Regional for Interamerica which takes in a good 18 countries from Canada to Bolivia. Then in the General Chapter (2002) I was elected Rector Major. However, my mission has always been the young. They are my vocation, my *raison d'être*.

I am so happy with and proud of my Salesian vocation that not only am I not ashamed to be a Salesian, but I want to invite young people whom I consider suitable for this vocation to become Salesians, because I want the best for them, and I want them to be as happy as I am.

I can tell you that amongst my students and the boys at the oratory where I worked, and amongst the volunteers who were helping us, there are a number to whom I made the proposal and who responded positively.

And do you know where this decision came from? From personal experience. Amongst the boys in the basketball team at school where I was teaching during my time as a Practical Trainee was one who went to the De La Salle Brothers school, and while I was doing my theological studies he wrote to tell me he was joining them; I asked myself at that point why I had not invited him to be a Salesian! I said to myself: "From now on I am going to be clear and make the offer". It was a lesson I learned well and it had good results.

Someone might ask: "how difficult was it for you to suggest a vocation to religious life in today's context? How do you invite young people to follow Jesus if this also means going against the dominant culture. Are there places in the Salesian world where this kind of vocation promotion actually works?"

In the West, especially in affluent countries, there are a number of factors which work against consecrated life: fewer people demographically speaking (fewer children for society means the same for the Church); secularism which makes it more difficult for religious proposal and response; affluence that makes life easier; so it is counter-cultural to organise your life around sacrifice and renunciation, or definitive commitment, as well as the fact that the State is now self-sufficient and can carry out all the kinds of work that seemed to be for religious to do (schools, hospitals...).

Elsewhere in the world, though, there are things that run in favour of consecrated life: the youth ratio is higher, the cultural background has remained religious fundamentally, there is poverty of a kind that makes us think about how to help people, especially the really poor and needy, and the State does not have the resources to do it.

For example at the moment most Salesian vocations are coming from India, Vietnam, East Timor, and some countries in Latin America. In Poland too and in the Ukraine there are vocations.

One case worth noting is Vietnam, the