

## **Social Communication Department**

### **Some basic elements for moving ahead together during the six year period 2008 - 2014**

In order to realize the aims and tasks of the Social Communication Department (SCD) during the six years from 2008 – 2014, we need to keep in mind and share certain general elements which come from the Constitutions, GC 26, the letters of the last two Rectors Major (370, 390) in reference to Social Communication and SSCS. These elements are spelled out in brief. The documents just mentioned can be found on our website ([www.sdb.org](http://www.sdb.org)), and by clicking the SDL button and choosing the SSCS collection.

#### **1. The Departments for the Mission: departure point for reflection and coordinated activity**

The mission entrusted to the Congregation: “to be bearers of God's love for the young, especially the poorest of them”<sup>1</sup>, is based on the Church's own mission<sup>2</sup> and for its accomplishment requires a communion of forces and convergence of perspectives. This is why GC 26 asked the Departments for Youth Ministry, SC and the Missions to work in coordination as “**departments for the Mission**”<sup>3</sup>. Logically, this can be extended to other Departments, but for now let's focus attention on the first three mentioned.

Unity and coordination of the Departments at the service of the mission in no way cancels out the identity and viewpoint which is proper but simply underlines the fact that the authentic meaning of each is found only in the perspective of the mission experienced and in communion with the rest. *We are talking about a mindset, a way of organizing, guiding and acting in each department, in communion with the others, in view of accomplishing the one and the same mission.* None of the departments (sectors) is absolutized nor sees itself running in parallel with the others. From the first moment of this process, in reflection on reality, we begin from the same mission from which we have come. The coordination of the three, and particular organization of each one, obeys the common mission and the essential points of interaction with other departments for its accomplishment, in the Congregation, Province or Local work.

The departure point for drawing up projects is a common one and is on behalf of the one and the same mission in the Congregation, Province and Local work. This is why it requires initial and then ongoing agreement between sectors in view of reflection, organization, planning, carrying through and evaluating together where it is possible and needed. Then afterwards each department or sector will reflect, organize itself, direct itself and act according to its own specific identity and approach, autonomously, but not independently, and always at the service of the mission which gave birth to it and from which it draws inspiration.

#### **2. Passion for God and passion for the salvation of the young**

Coming now to the specific field of SC in the Congregation, we affirm that it comes from the **Passion for God and passion for the salvation of the young**<sup>4</sup>, “**da mihi animas, cetera tolle**”. Our aim is that God and the One he sent, Jesus Christ, be known and loved by the young; also that the young know that they are loved by God in Christ, that they are important in the Church and for the Church<sup>5</sup>. This is why Social Communication is not something external to the Salesian mission, but arises from it along with other sectors, all necessary and

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<sup>1</sup> C. 2

<sup>2</sup> Cf C. 6

<sup>3</sup> “General Chapter 26: “considering the complexity of the Salesian mission; sees the need for greater coordination between the Departments for Youth Ministry, Social Communication and the Missions, especially in animating sectors of shared activity; it asks that the Rector Major with his Council to promote interdepartmental animation teams for these sectors and entrust the coordination to one or other Councilor, in each case safeguarding the unique and organic nature of Salesian ministry” (GC 26, 117) Cf above GC, 26 111 [note 3].

<sup>4</sup> “Listening to the Spirit we feel called to return to Don Bosco as our sure guide in following Christ with a burning passion for God and the young, especially the poorest of them” (GC 26, 1; Cf GC 26, 13).

<sup>5</sup> Cf Jn. 17, 3; C. 34

complementary, as we said earlier. Therefore it would not be correct to say that Don Bosco introduced SC into the mission, but rather saw that the mission entrusted to him by God already included and needed it. This is where the Salesian, like Don Bosco, is an evangelizer, educator, communicator by nature<sup>6</sup>.

On the other hand Salesians neither see nor understand SC as something purely theoretical and technical. We do not consider ourselves technical specialists in information and news, but we do seek to be professional in this area because our very vocation as apostles and missionaries of the young requires it: it is here we have to encounter and show the love of God. We try to learn, know and use the media and technology as a transversal dimension and a new language, as a space for encounter in the Salesian work, as a technology that introduces us to a new culture and as an educational and evangelizing resource.

Over recent decades in the past century young people began to create their own environment, their own particular habitat, continent and universe. It began with a certain diffidence towards education and evangelization of a traditional and unidirectional kind. The fact is that having left behind the stone and chisel age, paper and ink, walls and classroom ages, just sitting listening, young people claimed new languages, new ways and approaches for being part of education and evangelization. They are now actors and authors in this space, with their language and contents, they recreate and invent who they are and require navigation, convergence and dialogue in cyberspace, and if that is where they are, then it is also up to us to be there to proclaim and give witness to God, given that this is why we have been called and sent. If we are outside these spaces and languages we will not be seen, heard, nor understood by the young, nor by the new society<sup>7</sup>.

If we say that SC is demanded by the Salesian mission, then we will cease to see it as a hobby for specialists, entertainment for those who have not got much to do in community, or as an adjunct to some other work or as something secondary in the Province Plan. It will be seen rather as a grace and opportunity that today's culture offers so that new generations can come to know and love God there where they live, and we will first highlight all the good things about it before becoming emotionally defensive about "yesterday" or offering moral analysis on its risks and negative elements. For Salesians the new communicative reality neither scares us nor do we run from it. We don't begin looking at it suspiciously as the cause of so much evil in society, and even less do we refuse to have anything to do with it, because this would be to forget the immense crowd of young people living there "naturally"; that's where they were born, live, work, amuse themselves, relate, enjoy, and suffer... and, also, die.

We have learned from our father Don Bosco to see daily life and SC with optimistic realism, however not with naivety. We state that it is an excellent place and opportunity for being with the young in view of their education and evangelization.<sup>8</sup> Salesian Ministry in general and Youth Ministry in particular, the growth and appreciation of our charismatic identity and our apostolic passion<sup>9</sup>, do not let us ignore the digital and multimedia universe which we are all a part of, poor or rich, even if often we are not aware or pretend not to accept or value it by way of excuse for our absence from this reality. We simply happen to be right within it God comes to meet us there too, makes himself seen and heard, and so it is up to us to inculturate the Gospel there<sup>10</sup>. A Salesian

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<sup>6</sup> Cf C. 43.

<sup>7</sup> "We also feel challenged by the new technologies of social communication and by the educational challenges they pose. Today's communication opportunities have become an habitual way for young people to meet, exchange ideas, and get involved quickly and with great mobility, but also in an impersonal and virtual way. The culture of *personal media* can compromise one's ability to mature in personal relationships and exposes young people especially to the danger of very negative encounters and dependencies; this is the 'playground' where we need to be present in order to listen, enlighten, guide" (GC 26, 99).

<sup>8</sup> Hence the inherent bond for the Departments in the Congregation, especially Formation, Youth Ministry, Social Communication and Missions: "Let the Rector Major with his Council... reflect, through the Departments for Social Communication, Formation and Youth Ministry, on the new challenges of the culture of *personal media* for formation of Salesians, the preparation of the laity, and to help the young..." (GC 26, 111); also: "GC 26, considering the complexity of the Salesian mission; sees the need for greater coordination between the Departments for Youth Ministry, Social Communication and the Missions, in particular in the animation of sectors of shared activity; **and asks the Rector Major with his Council to promote interdepartmental teams for these sectors and entrust their coordination to one or other Councillor, in each case safeguarding the unique and organic nature of the Salesian mission**". (GC 26, 117).

<sup>9</sup> "Rediscovering the significance of the *Da mihi animas, cetera tolle*, as a program of spiritual and pastoral life"(GC 26, 19).

<sup>10</sup> "In truth the digital world, by offering media that allow a capacity for almost unlimited expression, opens up important perspectives and actualises the Pauline exhortation: "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!" (1 Cor 9,16). Thus with the spread of these media, responsibility for

heart which is passionate for God and the salvation of the young will always feel urged to live where they live, use the language they use, seek them out where they are.

In the Gospel, and in the history of the Congregation, the Good Shepherd, the Salesian, goes out to find his youngsters because they are important to him, and so the Salesian principle is “to take the first step”, take the initiative, and not wait until they come to where we might have set ourselves up. Only a heart which is passionate for God and the salvation of the young will urge us to learn new languages and find new “playgrounds” to communicate the Gospel; only a heart like Don Bosco's, will get us to emigrate to new places, discover new places for being with the young, will help us lose our fear of the unknown and leave behind comfortable traditions to be able to experience the “*da mihi animas, cetera tolle*” in new frontiers and with new kinds of young people who have a right to the God of Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

### 3. SC, a wide playground to meet young people in

In our father Don Bosco passion for God and the salvation of the young was such that he came to understand and use one of the best amplifying means in his culture, for spreading ideas and Christian education in his time: the printed word (now also virtual). He couldn't be physically everywhere with the young but he wanted to broaden as much as possible the “playground”, and multiplied his presence, extended the classroom for education or the pulpit for evangelization. He placed himself intelligently and with conviction in the publishing and typographical field, which was what he had in his time. This way he was able to multiply himself many times over through the books that the young and ordinary people were reading. This way he got the Gospel and culture, his ideas, feelings and beliefs to arrive amongst the young, teachers, parents where they were; and he overcame the barriers and limitations of walls and timetables, broadened out and multiplied Valdocco. Through SC he wanted to form their moral awareness, shape their way of thinking, stimulate their faith, increase their self-esteem and also get them to feel he was near them because they were particularly important to him. This is the way to interpret both the “letter on spreading good books”<sup>11</sup> and the “dream of 10 May 1884”.

For the Salesian it is essential to spread good works so that those who see them give glory to God, and it is essential to be “in the new playgrounds”, in those inhabited and thronging with young teenagers<sup>12</sup>,

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proclamation has not only grown, but it needs to be done more acutely and requires a more intense and effective involvement. In this respect, the priest finds himself at the beginning of a “new history”, because to the extent that these new technologies give rise to ever more intense relationships, and as they boundaries of the digital world grow wider, the more he will be called to become pastorally involved in this field, multiplying his efforts to place these media at the service of the Word”. Benedict XVI, World Communication Day (16 de mayo de 2010), “The priest and ministry in the digital world: new media at the services of the Word”.

<sup>11</sup> “The spread of good books is one of the principle aims of our Congregation. ... this is why, amongst the books which should be spread, I propose we give preference to those with a reputation for being good, moral and religious, especially the ones coming from our own publishers... But I won't dwell on this point; just that I would do it for a particular group, the young, those for whom I have always wanted to do good, not just in word, but also through print. Through the Catholic Readings, wanting to instruct others, his aim was to enter homes, make the values of the Spirit known in our colleges and attract youth to virtue, especially with his lives of Savio, Besucco and others. With the “Companion of Youth”, I tried to bring them to the Church, infuse the spirit of piety in them and get them to like attending the Sacraments frequently. Through the collection of revised versions of the Latin and Italian classics and the History of Italy and other historical and literary works, I tried to sit beside them in the classroom and save them from many errors and *passions that would have been harmful to them now and in eternity. I longed to be their friend in recreation; and I had the idea of preparing a series of nice books which I hope will be soon realised*. Finally, with the Salesian Bulletin, amongst so many other projects, I also wanted: to keep alive in the young, once they were back home, a love for the spirit of St Francis of Sales and his norms and also make them able to save other young people. I do not say that I was able to achieve my idea to perfection; but I ask you to adjust it, so that it can be completed in all its aspects. So I ask you insistently then, do not abandon this most important facet of our mission”. (free translation of the 'original' in Spanish! translator jbf)

<sup>12</sup> “Let each community...

- organize its daily rhythms of life in such a way as to enable each confrere to take part in community occasions as well as **to be truly present amongst the young**” (GC 26, 21). It seems that the new poverties, new digital culture, new technologies and the overpopulation of the Net by the young, urgently demand a new reading of the Preventive System and “Salesian assistance”, and “being amongst the young”. It seems that traditional views of assistance, playground and presence have been superseded for some time.

“Let the community...

- plan educative projects to help young people to a critical and responsible use of various kinds of media (mass, folk., personal, convergent, etc.) and encourage their active involvement in the social communication field and in youthful and popular forms of expression;

- and use the technologies of social communication to give greater visibility to their presence in order to spread the charism” (GC 26, 109).

because that's where the Gospel has to be incarnated<sup>13</sup>. Salesians cannot remain on the margins of the “first playground” and not then be in the “new playgrounds”<sup>14</sup> taking refuge in triumphs and visions from the past; we cannot just contemplate from outside and far away the giddy evolution of these new spaces, and less can we simply be critical of them without incarnating the Gospel in them<sup>15</sup>.

The first playground, as a concept and relational, educational, evangelizing and communicative attitude, which knows how to win confidence and open hearts and from their lead them to God, in the new culture and new relationships urges the Salesian to remain with the Preventive System and as an “assistant”, in the “new playgrounds”. We can be sure that Don Bosco would not only be sad if there were no Salesians in these playgrounds, but the young too, living in them, because we are not there playing, talking, making friends with them, and they would come to think and feel that they were no longer important to the Church nor the Congregation. Don Bosco would be said because it would not be like early times, when his Salesians spent time, spent their life amongst the young, times of being close, of trust, familiarity. If we are not amongst them we cannot carry out our mission: “being signs and bearers of God's love for the young and especially the poorest and most needy of them”. For this we first need to be convinced that God really loves them, but who will do it if we Salesians are not with them, if we are not ready for them?<sup>16</sup>

#### 4. SC not just the means, dimension or language, but a presence and work for the mission

If the Preventive System requires a Salesian and community presence “in physical playgrounds” and “virtual playgrounds”, because both are real and do not exclude each other, it means we need to reflect, and put into practice **a Salesian and community 'preventive' presence in the broad playgrounds of communication**, where many media now converge, where the walls are no longer brick and mortar, and the cables no longer wire or fibre, but waves and energy launched by satellites in outer space. The bounds of playgrounds, classrooms, churches have spread so widely that they go beyond any of our traditional kinds of works, but this does not mean that they became worthless, but simply that we can't go on thinking or living as educators and evangelizers as if nothing has happened, that is as we were once.

Just a few years ago it was unthinkable to carry a phone in hand down the street, in the car, on the beach or the plane, it was unthinkable that anyone by phone, but adolescents and young people more so, would not only have instant access to communication but also various types of services and options that have come to change the paradigms of information, the way we live together, education and fun. Given that this has become so normal we should not lose our sense of wonder just the same. Now everything fits into a cell phone:

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“Let the community...

- educate, in collaboration with the educative and pastoral community, to a culture of solidarity, helping young people to bring a critical spirit to their interpretation of the economic and social phenomena of our time, involving them in initiatives and projects of development, and encouraging their taking part in similarly ordered activities of solidarity;

- educate to a respect for ethnic and religious difference and encourage a spirit of brotherly concern” (GC 26, 91). Cf. See also GC 26,99 above [note 2].

<sup>13</sup> “Returning to Don Bosco means “being in the playground”, being with the young, especially the poorest of them, to discover the presence of God in them and invite them to open themselves to the mystery of his love. Don Bosco returns among the youth of today through the witness and action of a community which lives his spirit, and which is animated by the same apostolic passion” (GC 26, 2); “see to a more effective integration, in each setting, of education and evangelisation, following the logic of the Preventive System” (GC 26, 41). Cf GC 26, 99 [note 2].

<sup>14</sup> Cf. GC 26, 19 [note 4] and 104 [note 2].

<sup>15</sup> “Let the community

- renew its understanding and practice of Salesian assistance (cf C. 39), by involving lay people who share the responsibility;  
- plan some formation meetings as part of the annual community programme, which have a thorough study of the youth situation as a topic;  
- plan initiatives for going out to meet the young where they live their lives” (GC 26, 15).

“Let the Province

- cultivate a constant and more focused attention on how the circumstances of young people are evolving in their own area, in dialogue with civil and ecclesiastical institutions”. (GC 26, 16).

- “Let the Province lay down a realistic strategy which favours a more incisive presence in the media world, as well as youthful and popular artistic expression, and prepare qualified personnel in this area...” (GC 26, 110). Cf. above GC, 26 111 [note 3].

<sup>16</sup> Cf. We want to “propose to the young, courageously and joyfully, that they live their lives as Jesus Christ lived his (GC 26, 36). And “witness with courage and joy to the beauty of a consecrated life, fully committed to God and the mission to the young” (GC 26, 61). Here we find the need to “be committed to loving, studying, imitating, invoking and making known Don Bosco, in order to be able to start from him” (GC 26, 8).

cinema, radio, TV, music, messages, photos, books, calendars, clock, internet, and not only is the receive also a publisher, but he or she belongs to groups and virtual communities. Barriers and geographical distances have been broken down and overcome and customs and ways of relating have changed<sup>17</sup>.

In these new playgrounds or areas the capacity for dialogue is essential because everyone has the right to have his or her opinion respected. People who are well guided and accompanied in them know they can be useful, constructive, productive, particularly young people, because everyone can bring what he or she has, knows and is. From this perspective, we realize that SC can not only be a means, or language in which to express ourselves or a dimension running across everything. Speaking in Salesian terms we see that this is a new field, a new educative and evangelizing presence with the same rights as other works and presences. We find ourselves then **with a future work and presence for accomplishing the mission** where we need to educate beginning with initial formation because that's where they come in and that's where our vocations begin from. It's not about banning technology, cutting wires or networks or contact points; this simply takes us backwards. It's about learning, supporting and giving directions. So a wise way of being there, living with people is imperative, and as a form of ongoing formation, since these are the young people we must establish relationships with. Strategically we must form everyone in the basics, and then prepare some as specialists: educators – evangelizers – communicators. In this field you have to invest and work with intelligence and generosity, time and human and financial resources like we do with the infrastructure and personnel in traditional works<sup>18</sup>.

It is clear that a new culture with new tools, calls for a new way of placing ourselves, working and interacting in society, and many of us have come to this new universe from outside and behind, sometimes as 'tourists', while others have 'migrated'. But our youngsters were born there, belong there, and are "natives". In this regard GC 26 is very clear, and sees the need to change mindset and change structures, from "a timid and a sporadic presence in media to one of responsible use and a more incisive educative and evangelizing animation."<sup>19</sup> (GC 26 104/5). The key then lies in the kind of presence. It is not so important to have been born in this continent or have been a digital native. Nor should it detract from us, discourage us or justify our absence that we are digital migrants, tourists or foreigners within a new and not so well known continent where those for whom we work live what is most important for them and for us, is to know why we are there. We could call the meaning of presence in this continent "digital wisdom". In Salesian terms we could say: "Preventive System and Salesian assistance put into practice".

## 5. A minimal province structure from SSCS with strategic decisions

Putting the mission into practice, in addition to the fellowship and convergence of departments and delegations, requires each Department too clearly to keep its identity and work in the organization of the Congregation and of each Province. Each Department has its own story and importance in relation to the Salesian mission. And this is why I now spend a moment on what might be a minimal structure in the Province following the Salesian Social Communication System (SSCS)<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, "New technologies, new relationships. Promoting a culture of respect, dialogue, friendship", 43rd World Communications Day, L'Osservatore Romano, 24 May 2009

<sup>18</sup> "The sensitivity and involvement of the Congregation, faced with social communication, has increased. Signs of this, for example, are the setting up of the Faculty of Social Communication at the UPS, the putting into place of various projects of education to critical use of media, the growing presence of our websites on the Internet, the greater familiarity we have with computer networks whether for personal exchange or distance education, the new arrangements of the Department for Social Communication. We are nevertheless aware that there are very many virtual worlds inhabited by the young and that we are not always capable of sharing and animating them because of our lack of formation, time and sensitivity" (GC 26, 102).

GC 26 also asked "Let the Province...strengthen the preparation of confreres and lay people who share responsibility with us in the area of pastoral disciplines: youth ministry, catechetics, liturgy, missiology and social communication" (GC 26, 40).

<sup>19</sup>Cf. CG 26, 104/5 [Note 2].

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco – SC Department, *Salesian Social Communication System, Guidelines for the Salesian Congregation*, Rome, Editrice S.D.B., 2005 (pp. 21-32)

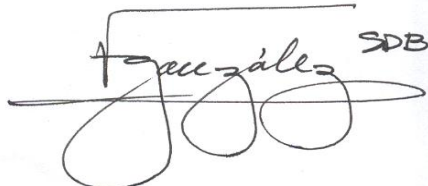
Firstly SC cannot be developed in the province without *being part of the OPP* or without the effective appointment and presence of a *delegate, Salesian or lay*, whose task is to carry out animation and organization of the sector always beginning from the centrality of the mission in animation formation production and enterprises. Without someone to see to this full time, these four pillars that make up the SSCS could be lessened, come apart or lose direction.

The required integration of SC within the OPP makes it clear that it is an integral part of the mission and the province, from the Delegate and his team, which carries it out<sup>21</sup>. Only with the work of animation in team, can Province animation and organization of SC be effective in this new era and new culture of communication. He or she, as the case may be, and the decision of the Provincial and his Council, along with the other delegates for the mission (YM, SC, Miss), Formation and Economy, ensure the plan, implementation and evaluation of projects and the animation of the areas identified by the SSCS are carried out: SC Provincial Project, initial and ongoing formation to SC (a priority over these six years), information and corporate image within and beyond the province (ANS, *sdb.org*, Church and local media websites: Provincial and each Work, SB, newsletters, blogs, 'Salesians 2011' magazine, etc.), and the presence and organization of business and communication products ( Print shops, publishers, libraries, radio, TV, magazines, multimedia production sites, newsletters, websites, etc.), without overlooking what produces popular culture: dance, theatre, choirs, bands, "music" CD, etc..

The general principles will work only if we provide each province with the structure, organization and personnel necessary and appropriate in this field and future work in the Salesian mission. While we do not always have the amount of people in the province needed for the mission or for professional training in each of these fields, you must think strategically how to acquire and prepare people including from amongst SDBs lay people in the Salesian Family and in the Province generally. On occasions we close the door because we do not think as Church and as SF. We want to keep hold of leadership instead of really looking at the salvation of the young.

Given the urgency and necessity of the mission, the solution is far from complaining about our times, backing down or folding our arms; it becomes a more urgent invitation and encouragement to open our minds and hearts to hope, trust in God and in ourselves, beginning to change attitudes and mentalities, make decisions, continuing to change certain strategic structures, and taking small steps into a new reality where the gospel and our charism demand that we be incarnated. Certainly as we are now can not do more, but if we change mentality, certain structures and certain modes of organization, we will be with younger and in a much better way. In all this the Department is reflecting and walking with you and the young, and always at your service.

Rome, Italy  
8 September 2008

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "González SDB". The signature is stylized with large loops and a horizontal line crossing through the middle. The letters "SDB" are written in a smaller, more standard font to the right of the main signature.

Fraternally in Don Bosco:  
Fr Filiberto González Plasencia sdb  
General Councillor for SC

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. above GC 26 111 [note 3].