



DIREZIONE GENERALE OPERE DON BOSCO
Via della Pisana 1111 - 00163 Roma
The Rector Major

Prot. 11/048
Rome, 31 January 2011
Solemnity of Saint John Bosco

**To the Confreres
of the Salesian Society of Saint John Bosco**

Subject: Preparation for the Bicentenary of the birth of Don Bosco

Dear Confreres,

We are approaching the Bicentenary of the birth of Don Bosco, which will be celebrated on 16 August 2015. It is a very special event for us, for all the Salesian Family and for the whole Salesian Movement, which requires an intense and profound process of preparation, so that it may prove fruitful for all of us, for the Church, for the young and for society.

The XXVI General Chapter, taking as its theme the motto of Don Bosco “*Da mihi animas, cetera tolle*” and putting as the foundation of the five key issues “Starting afresh from Don Bosco”, has set us on our way to the Bicentenary. In the letter announcing the GC26 I wrote: «By making our own the motto *Da mihi animas, cetera tolle*, we intend to take up Don Bosco’s spiritual and apostolic programme resulting in his tireless work for the “glory of God and the salvation of souls.” In this way we can find once again the origin of our charism, the purpose of our mission and the future of our Congregation» (AGC 394 p. 6).

The putting into practice of the GC26, which asks us to strengthen our charism and revive in the heart of each one of us the apostolic passion, is therefore the first practical way of preparing for this bicentenary celebration. On the other hand, for the whole Salesian Movement, for the animation of which we are those primarily responsible, it is important to identify a common path.

1. Three years of preparation for the Bicentenary

The preparation which I am proposing to you, takes the form of a process in three stages which begin respectively on 16 August 2011, 16 August 2012 and 16 August 2013, with each one ending on 15 August of the following year. Each stage is meant to focus on one aspect of the charism of Don Bosco. The theme for each of the three stages of preparation will coincide with the theme of the Strenna for that year.

*First year of preparation:
Knowledge of Don Bosco's history
16 August 2011 - 15 August 2012*

The first stage concentrates on a knowledge of Don Bosco's history and of his context, of Don Bosco as a person, of his experience of life and of his choices. In recent years there have been new publications in this regard, the findings of which need to be assimilated systematically. During this first year of preparation we need to set ourselves a systematic plan for the study and assimilation of Don Bosco. The generations of those who knew Don Bosco or had come in contact with his first witnesses have now come to an end. It is necessary therefore to draw on the sources and on the studies about Don Bosco, in order to deepen our knowledge first of all about him as a person. The study of Don Bosco is an essential condition in order to be able to communicate his charism and propose his current relevance. Without knowledge there cannot be love, imitation or intercession; then only love can lead to greater knowledge. It is a question therefore of a knowledge which starts from love and leads to love: an affective knowledge.

*Second year of preparation:
Don Bosco's Pedagogy
16 August 2012 - 15 August 2013*

Some years ago I spoke about the importance of a deeper study of Don Bosco's pedagogy; now this needs to become a programme to be put into practice in this second year of preparation for the celebration of the bicentenary. Then I wrote: « Nowadays a deeper understanding is needed of *Salesian pedagogy*. In other words we need to study and apply that updated preventive system desired by Fr Egidio Viganò... developing its great implicit principles, modernising concepts, guidelines and interpretations so as to express the basic ideas in a modern manner: the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls; living faith, firm hope and pastoral charity; the good Christian and upright citizen; the threefold "cheerfulness, study and prayer"; the three "S" (in Italian): health, knowledge and holiness: piety, morality and culture; evangelisation and civilisation.

The same can be said of the great guidelines regarding attitudes: make yourself loved rather than feared; reason, religion, loving kindness; father, brother, friend; familiarity, especially in recreation; winning over the heart; the consecrated educator for the good of his pupils; freedom to run about, play and chatter.» (AGC 394 pp. 11-12).

*Third year of preparation:
Don Bosco's Spirituality
16 August 2013 - 15 August 2014*

Finally we must have a knowledge of Don Bosco's spirituality and live it. A knowledge of his life and activity and of his method of education is not enough. At the basis of the fruitful results of his actions and of his relevance there is a profound spiritual experience. «It is not easy to identify precisely Don Bosco's spiritual experience. Perhaps this is an aspect of our founder that has not been studied at sufficient depth. He is a man totally intent on work. We have no descriptions of his interior development, nor has he left us any explicit reflections on his spiritual life; he wrote no spiritual diaries, offered no specific interpretations. He preferred to pass on to us a spirit by describing the events of his life, or through the biographies he wrote of his boys. It is certainly not enough to say that his spirituality is that of one engaged not in contemplation but in active pastoral work, a pastoral work of mediation between theoretical spirituality and its popular expression» (ACG 394 p. 12).

2. The year of celebration of the Bicentenary

Year of celebration:

Don Bosco's mission with the young and for the young

16 August 2014 - 16 August 2015

The celebration of the Bicentenary of the birth of Don Bosco will take place after the XXVII General Chapter: it will begin on 16 August 2014 and end on 16 August 2015. The process and the theme of the bicentenary year, following on consistently from the years of preparation, will refer to: *Don Bosco's mission with the young and for the young*. The communication to others of the message of the Bicentenary will certainly take into account what has been acquired and matured during the three years of preparation.

The Calendar of the Congregation, in addition to the two celebrations of 16 August in 2014 and 2015 at Colle Don Bosco, includes two international events: the International Congress of Salesian Studies on "*The development of the charism of Don Bosco*" at the 'Salesianum' in Rome in the month of November 2014 and the 'Bosco Camp' of the STM with the theme "*Young people for the young*" in Turin in August 2015.

This year needs to be planned in good time in the Provinces so that we can concentrate on the process of spiritual and pastoral renewal which we intend to pursue as the Congregation, the Salesian Family and the Salesian Movement emphasising the importance and the relevance of the messages we intend to communicate. It is absolutely essential to avoid dispersion, fragmentation and repetition, focusing rather on decisiveness and effectiveness. All of this in view of the aims to be achieved.

3. Prayer to Don Bosco

The preparation and the celebration of the Bicentenary are an opportunity to take up again with the young, the lay people, the Salesian Family and the Salesian Movement prayer to Don Bosco. I propose an updated rewording of the prayer "Father and Teacher of youth."

*Saint John Bosco,
Father and Teacher of youth,
docile to the gifts of the Spirit and open to the reality of your times
you were for the young, especially the little ones and the poor,
a sign of the love and the special care of God.*

*Be our guide as we walk the path of friendship with the Lord Jesus,
so that we may discover in Him and in his Gospel
the meaning of our lives
and the source of true happiness.*

*Help us to respond with generosity
to the vocation we have received from God,
so that in daily life we may be
builders of communion,
and may collaborate with enthusiasm,
and in communion with the whole Church,
in creating a civilisation of love.*

Obtain for us the grace of perseverance

*in living a high standard of Christian life,
according to the spirit of the beatitudes;
and grant that, guided by Mary Help of Christians,
we may one day be with you
in the great family of heaven. Amen*

I would suggest that Salesian communities make daily use of this prayer, each day at the end of Evening Prayer or Spiritual Reading just as each day after meditation we invoke Mary Help of Christians with the prayer of entrustment. They should also see to it that this invocation is used in the daily prayers with the young.

May the Spirit of Christ help us to pursue our path of preparation for the Bicentenary and may Mary Help of Christians support us; on the seriousness and the depth of the preparation depend in fact the spiritual, pastoral and vocational fruits which we are looking for from the bicentenary year. May Don Bosco, as always, be our model and our guide.

A Happy Feast of Don Bosco! Yours in the Lord,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Pascual Chávez V." in a cursive script.

Fr Pascual Chávez Villanueva