



DIREZIONE GENERALE OPERE DON BOSCO

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The General Councillor for formation

2° MEETING OF THE MISSIONARIES OF PROJECT EUROPE
“Project Europe: process of sending and inserting missionaries”
Turin Valdocco, 31 October - 3 November 2013

Dear Confreres,

I am happy to take part in this “second meeting of the missionaries of Project Europe”; it will be for me a time of listening and sharing. It will offer me some elements for assessing the lived experience of these last six years since the launch of the Project, but also furnish me with ideas for the direction it must take in the future. You, in fact, have directly lived this experience with its joys and hopes, but also with its difficulties and sufferings; furthermore, it is you who now look forward with hope towards a renewed Salesian presence in Europe.

In the first meeting we reflected on the motivations of the Project and on its first two areas: an endogenous revitalization of our charism and a redesigning of the Salesian presences in Europe; we sought together the specific contribution the missionaries in Europe could make to realize these goals. In this second meeting we shall dwell on the third area of the Project: “Europe, a land of new evangelization”, and in particular, on the sending of missionaries and their insertion in Europe; it will not only be a matter of making an assessment, but also of identifying new objectives and new steps that need to be taken.

1. Sending missionaries to Europe

The sending of missionaries to Europe calls for a robust preparation. Before reaching the moment when the missionary crucifix is handed over by the Rector Major in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Turin, there are some processes that need to be carried out: forming a missionary spirit in the Province; stirring up missionary vocations in the Province; making known in the Province the Congregation’s commitment to Project Europe; discerning motivations, qualities, attitudes and suitability for the missionary vocation in Europe; offering oneself to the Rector Major for Project Europe. Time and formation are required to prepare a good missionary vocation.

2.1. Forming a missionary spirit in the Province

We know the interest in the missions that Don Bosco progressively developed in his life and that came to full flowering in the first missionary expedition of 11 November 1875 and successive expeditions. We also know the “Souvenir of St. John Bosco to the first missionaries” that the Rector Major, Fr Pascual Chavez, commented upon in his letter, “Inculturation of the Salesian charism” (AGC 412, Rome 2011). Finally, we are aware of the constant missionary commitment of the Congregation in our own times, as codified in article 6 of the Constitutions.

In January of this year 2013, the Rector Major and the General Council approved some guidelines for “The Missionary Formation of the Salesians of Don Bosco”. Good missionary vocations cannot be had if specific attention is not paid to missionary formation. The reflections and proposals contained in these guidelines seek to keep the missionary spirit alive in the Congregation; in particular, they pursue a *twofold objective*.

In the first place, they aim at fostering a missionary sensitivity in every confrere and an ability to carry out a work of *missionary animation* among young people and the laity. We are aware, in fact, of the evangelizing and vocational potential of missionary groups and missionary volunteering: they introduce the young to sober lifestyles out of a sense of solidarity, enlist them in the cause of the Gospel and lead them to question themselves about the Salesian consecrated vocation. All this serves to strengthen the faith-journey of young people. It is up to all of us, and especially to you also in Europe, to become missionary animators of the young and the laity.

In the second place, the guidelines offer criteria for discernment and spell out a process for discovering, discerning and deepening a true *Salesian missionary vocation*. This vocation is born, grows and develops as a gift of God, drawn by the example of Jesus’ evangelizing commitment and driven by an impulse of the Holy Spirit; at the same time, it finds itself in historical situations that require our cooperation. It calls for generosity, openness to other cultures, apostolic zeal for souls and for the Gospel, a spirit of sacrifice,... and also a missionary climate in the Provinces.

This document therefore seeks to encourage *every Salesian* in the course of his formation to keep alive in himself the missionary zeal of Don Bosco; it enables him to become a missionary animator and helps him to discern if God is calling him to the mission “ad gentes”.

1.2. Stirring up missionary vocations in the Province

Article 6 of our Constitutions points out the tasks we have in the Church: “The Salesian vocation places us at the heart of the Church and puts us entirely at the service of her mission. Faithful to the commitments Don Bosco has passed on to us, we are evangelizers 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. In this way we contribute to building up the Church as the Body of Christ, so that also through us she may appear to the world as the ‘universal sacrament of salvation’.”

This article applies to every Salesian confrere, community and province. Achieving the goals of the Congregation is everyone’s responsibility; it applies to the education and evangelization of young people, especially the poor, to apostolic vocations, to the education of the faith of the working classes, particularly by means of social communication, and precisely to the proclamation of the Gospel to people who do not know it. Therefore, it is not the exclusive task of the Councillor for the Missions to accomplish this fourth task of the Congregation and stir up missionary vocations; this responsibility falls on all of us.

Our provinces run the kind of risk that Pope Francis is denouncing in the Church: becoming closed. A province centred on itself and its own needs, one that does not go out into the streets and reach the frontiers, becomes sick. There are provinces with an abundance of vocations that think only of themselves; and there are poor provinces that receive missionaries and also send them. The Church and the Congregation are renewed through a missionary commitment and an exchange of vocational gifts. That is why international communities are important; they are a sign that the Congregation is alive because in it there is a readiness for generosity and missionary mobility.

There are provinces that have done little for Project Europe. But this is a commitment of the Congregation, asked of all by the GC26. The GC27 will certainly have to indicate the direction in which the Project is to move ahead in the six-year period, 2014-2020. Let us then ask ourselves:

how can each of us work for the missionary animation of youth and lay people? What can each one do to stir up missionary vocations for Project Europe?

1.3. Making known the Congregation's commitment to Project Europe and its needs

Missionary animation today, as it was for Project Africa, requires each province to motivate, encourage and inform confreres and young people about the Congregation's Project Europe and its needs. This is asked of everyone – of European as well as non-European provinces. And in each province, this is especially the task of the Provincial, Provincial Delegates, and formation personnel. The Regions too must mobilize for this commitment.

This is your task as well, viz. to know Project Europe and make it known. Vocations are born of a witness that is attractive. If you are happy in your missionary vocation in Europe in spite of difficulties, you will speak well of it in your province of origin, especially with the young confreres. This will create a feeling of good will towards Project Europe and can give rise to missionary vocations. Through social communication too, the Congregation at various levels must make better known the testimonies and experiences connected with this Project.

Are there still some reservations concerning Project Europe? Are there prejudices that act as a brake on the response of young confreres towards a missionary vocation in Europe? Are there European provinces that still have difficulty in understanding this Project and welcoming missionaries? I am keen to know what the Rector Major will say on this matter in his report to the GC27. And you: what do you personally think? What are the steps that have been taken and what are those that still need to be taken?

Speaking for myself, I think that the provinces of Europe in general have grown in an awareness of the Project, more at the level of the government of the Provinces than at the level of the confreres. Project Europe has brought them together as they grow in the Salesian charism. Revitalization is a long process; there has been a maturing especially in the identification with Don Bosco and in Salesian identity. As for the second area, more work needs to be done; we are still behind in the process of redesigning our presences and pastoral conversion. Finally, the sending of missionaries is the most visible aspect; where there are missionaries, provinces begin to change. We have laid greater insistence on the first two areas of the Project, whereas we are still at the beginning of a reflection and planning with regard to the new evangelization, immigration in Europe and the sending of missionaries.

1.4. Discerning motivations, qualities, attitudes and suitability for the missionary vocation in Europe

The Salesian who feels called to be a missionary outside his own country, cultural environment and language group (*ad exteros*)¹, among those who have not yet heard the Gospel and where the Church has not yet been fully established (*ad gentes*)², through a commitment for life (*ad vitam*), can offer himself at any time for service in the missions.

Young confreres are preferred because of their ease in learning a new language and culture and their spirit of adaptation; generally speaking, it is desirable that they complete the process of discernment of their missionary vocation during the post-novitiate, but this can also take place during the specific formation of the Salesian priest and the Salesian brother.

The XIX General Chapter also allowed the possibility for Salesians to be missionaries *ad tempus*, for at least five years, “provided they are considered suitable”.³ This can happen for the sake of

¹ Cf. FABC Office of Evangelization, “Consultation on Asia Local Church and Mission Ad Gentes”, edited by Franz Josef Eilers, *For All the Peoples of Asia*, III, n. 5, Claretian Publications, Quezon City 2002, p. 222.

² Cf. *Ad Gentes* 6.

³ Cf. *Redemptoris Missio* 66.

some specific and urgent tasks in the Congregation's missionary enterprises or in order to help a confrere to better discern his Salesian missionary vocation *ad vitam*.

The process of discernment is a gradual and ongoing exercise requiring the assistance of a spiritual guide. In this process, the candidate learns like the Virgin Mary to listen to the voice of the Spirit, to purify and deepen his motives, and to discern his qualities and attitudes that determine his suitability for Salesian missionary life.

The formation community too has an important part to play in this process. It employs in this exercise the "*Criteria for the Discernment of a Salesian Missionary Vocation*".⁴ It is also possible, for example, for a missionary candidate to be given, on a trial basis, an experience of working for a year in a missionary context outside his province; this experience can serve for discerning his Salesian missionary calling. At this point, we would like to ask if there are specific aspects that make up the profile of a missionary in Europe and therefore become the discernment criteria proper to this vocation. In fact, there can be confreres who discover they have a missionary vocation, but it does not follow that everyone of them feels called to work in Europe.

1.5. Offering oneself to the Rector Major for Project Europe

When, as the result of a discernment, a candidate arrives at the conclusion that he is called to serve in the mission field, he sends a letter to the Rector Major in which he explicitly states this desire of his and places himself at the disposal of the Congregation. This does not deprive him of the possibility of expressing his preferences or inclinations towards a specific mission territory; this holds true, in a particular way, of Project Europe.

The Rector Major, through the Councillor for the Missions, enters into a dialogue with the confrere's Provincial, requesting from him and his Council a written opinion about the missionary vocation of the candidate, always with reference to the *Criteria for the Discernment of a Salesian Missionary Vocation*. When the discernment arrives at a positive conclusion and the Provincial consents to release the confrere for the missions, the Rector Major assigns the candidate to a particular destination.

Concluding observation on this first point

At the conclusion of this first point, you could tell me that the sending phase has already been completed in your case and that therefore it is better to pass on without delay to the phase of insertion in the new province. I think it was important to dwell for a little while on the sending phase. In fact, it is helpful for us to take your experience into account in order to improve the process; besides, it is also useful for you to become aware of how your sending took place: if you took some steps in haste, you need to remedy them. Lastly, in the sending process, you have an active part to play as witnesses: you can stir up missionary vocations for Europe and accompany the sending and insertion of new missionaries.

2. Inserting missionaries in Europe

Once an application has been accepted by the Rector Major and a European province decided as the missionary's destination, there are still other steps to be taken in order to provide for his proper insertion in the new province. There is a need to: take care of his immediate preparation; welcome him into the new province; impart to him a knowledge of the culture, the language and the province itself; involve him in the life and the educative and pastoral responsibilities of the province; and assess his ongoing experience together with the experience he has had thus far.

⁴ THE RECTOR MAJOR AND THE GEN. COUNCIL, *The Missionary Formation of the SDB*, Rome, 24 Jan. 2013.

2.1. Taking care of the missionary's immediate preparation

In the period before his departure, the home province offers the future missionary, as far as is possible, a chance to learn the language and culture of the place to which he is destined, and to take part in meetings or courses organized by the Conference of Religious or the Episcopal Conference for candidates to the missions; it affords him the possibility of picking up fundamental concepts of cultural anthropology and the dynamics of intercultural dialogue; it sends the missionary to take part in the orientation course for new missionaries organized by the Missions Sector prior to the bestowal of the missionary cross; it prays and requests prayers for the confrere who is being sent as a missionary.

For his part, the missionary confrere focuses on his interior dispositions, on his spiritual life and prayer, and on his linguistic, cultural and pastoral formation. He also seeks the involvement of his family members and the community to which he belongs by presenting to them his new destination. In this way, he begins to take responsibility for his own preparation and to involve in his missionary commitment those who send him: he does not feel alone, but as someone who is sent by a community and a province.

2.2. Welcoming the missionary into the new province

Today the reception of missionaries in Europe is easier because there are already missionaries who can help in the insertion process and because the European provinces have already launched some good initiatives to welcome the new missionaries. The communities are better prepared to understand and smooth the path of intercultural interactions; even the educational and pastoral experiences in multicultural contexts with migrants or ethnic minorities have helped to draw attention to diversity. The provinces often have a confrere who is close at hand and responsible for accompanying and paying attention to the first needs and difficulties of the new missionary.

In addition to the province and the communities, the warm environment they create and the attention they pay to the first impressions and difficulties of the new missionary, there is a role to be played by those missionaries who already belong to the province: they act as a link between the new missionary's place of origin and his place of arrival. Having themselves gone through the various stages of insertion and especially the first moments, they are in a position to offer encouragement and show practical ways of meeting different situations. Because of their help, the new missionary does not experience the loneliness and distance from one's home country that can create difficulties.

In his turn, the new missionary seeks to be open and welcoming; he sheds his fears and hesitations about his first contacts; he immediately sets about forging relationships; he welcomes opportunities to share and to communicate. No doubt, he also has to know how to wait and have patience, because the welcoming process also depends on his own attitude and initiative. He knows that discouragement can be a problem, but he finds support in the confreres by his side and in his spiritual life. If a new missionary comes along with another confrere, then everything becomes easier.

2.3. Imparting to the missionary a knowledge of the culture, the language and the province itself

To facilitate the missionary's insertion in a new cultural, social and ecclesial environment, the province offers him right from the beginning an orientation programme that imparts to him a knowledge, not only of the history, culture and values of the country, but also of the history, mission and works of the province; it guarantees him sufficient time to learn the language; it assures him the accompaniment of a spiritual guide who gives him advice as he listens to his expectations, deepens his motives, removes any prejudices that might arise, and helps him to draw up his Salesian missionary plan of life.

The province also eases his insertion by not appointing him at once to positions of responsibility; it gives him the opportunity of taking part in the orientation for new missionaries organized by the Conference of Religious or the Bishops' Conference; it holds regular meetings of the new missionaries together with their formation guides, the Rectors and the one responsible for them at provincial level.

The missionary who is still in the period of initial formation completes the various formation stages, makes his perpetual profession and receives his priestly ordination. With regard to practical training, the prescribed two years are counted from the time of his insertion in the educative and pastoral work of a local community, and does not include the period exclusively devoted to the study of a language and to immigration procedures.

2.4. Involving the missionary in the life and the educative and pastoral responsibilities of the province

By the time he has completed his first steps of insertion, the missionary will have learned a lot about the province: the confreres, the communities, the lifestyle, the educational and pastoral work, and the contextual situation. He will therefore be in a position to contribute to the process of discernment which he will do with the Provincial to see in which field of work of the Province he feels capable of taking on responsibilities.

If the province has already completed the process of redesigning its presences and has sought to make them meaningful and identify new frontiers for its apostolic work, it will be easier for the missionary in Europe to settle smoothly into his job. However, it can happen that the apostolic work proposed may not always correspond to his own expectations of being involved in some new frontiers and among the poor. In that case, he will have to make his contribution to the second area of Project Europe, viz. the redesigning of the presences with a view to making them meaningful and opening new presences to meet the needs of young Europeans.

The missionary in Europe will also have to make his contribution to the first area of Project Europe, viz. the revitalization of the Salesian charism. He will have to assist in discerning the *signs of vitality* that can be glimpsed in consecrated life so as to strengthen them or let them come to fruition; he will also have to help in identifying in which direction the Spirit is blowing, and in finding those shoots of new life that are beginning to appear. Only spiritual people can discover and evoke the signs of the times, which are the signs of the Spirit.

He will have to start from a knowledge and interaction with *European culture*. Culture creates mentality, proposes models of life, generates behaviours, and pervades experience. Through a deeper study of culture one is able to come up with ways of responding to questions about what the Salesian, the community and the mission should be like: if this is the context in which we live, what is the kind of Salesian we are called to be? if the cultural climate possesses these traits, what is the model of community we ought to build to enable us to be mystics, prophets and servants? if the context appears to be diffident or indifferent towards the faith, how does this affect our pastoral activity? To be meaningful in a particular context, a serious cultural preparation is required. Hence the need for Salesian missionaries who are prepared.

The missionary who inserts himself fully in the missionary work of the province pays attention to his *continuing formation*, making use also of the opportunities offered by the province to deepen his personal relationship with Christ, the source of his missionary zeal, and to become increasingly inculturated in the light of the Christian faith and the Salesian charism. He takes part in various meetings in the province, in the country or at the Salesian Pontifical University which offers courses of ongoing formation for missionaries. If he possesses the necessary gifts and if these correspond to the needs of the province, he may be invited to qualify himself in pastoral studies, missiology, anthropology, intercultural dialogue, interreligious dialogue, the new evangelization...

2.5. Assessing the missionary's ongoing experience together with the experience he has had thus far

It is important that every year the missionary assess his missionary experience in Europe, first of all with his spiritual guide, and then with his Rector and Provincial. Also, the annual meeting of missionaries working in the same province helps the missionary to better understand the situation of the province and his own personal situation. It leads him therefore to redefine his own way forward in terms of objectives to be attained and steps to be undertaken. This is the kind of work that forms part of his personal plan of life: it is a discernment process comprising an assessment of the progress achieved and a blueprint for the future.

After five years, the missionary is helped to evaluate his missionary experience, and in particular his integration into the life and apostolate of his province; his insertion into the local culture, particularly among the young people entrusted to him; his ability to remain always open; and his apostolic zeal and commitment to the missionary life.

Concluding observation concerning this second point

This phase of insertion concerns above all the European provinces; it is a phase that needs attention because on its success depends the efficacy and credibility of Project Europe. If the missionaries implanted in Europe feel at home, then it will be easier to realize the three areas of Project Europe, and there will be greater enthusiasm in drawing in more missionaries from non-European provinces. For this, you missionaries too have a great responsibility for its success.

I thank you for your attention. I hope that some of the points I have put forward may be useful for an enriching exchange of views. The sharing we do will also help us to discover newer ways.

Fr. Francis Cereda

Questions for group work

1 . The process of sending missionaries to Europe

- What is your positive and negative assessment of the process of sending missionaries?
- What objectives and what steps do you suggest to improve the sending process?

2 . The process of inserting missionaries in the new province

- What is your positive and negative assessment of the process of inserting missionaries in their new provinces?
- What objectives and what steps do you suggest to improve the process of inserting missionaries in their new provinces?

3. What would be the profile of a missionary in Europe?

This response will be useful for the sending process: the criteria for discernment.
This response will also be useful for the insertion process: the criteria for growth.