

LETTERS TO PROVINCIALS - 2008-2014

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

Il Consigliere generale per la formazione

Rome, 15th March 2013
Prot. 13/0081

To the Reverend Provincial Formation Delegates,
at their respective addresses

For information

To the Reverend Provincials,
at their respective addresses

Subject: Reading the 2012 Statistics

Dear Delegates,

At the beginning of each year, the statistics of the Congregation regarding the previous year together with some observations are studied in the General Council.

All these years I have thought it useful to make the statistics known in the Provinces; they invite us to reflect and to arrive at some practical decisions. I encourage you to study them in your Provincial Formation Commission, and if possible, in your Provincial Council and with your Rectors, keeping in mind the particular situation obtaining in your Province.

Initial formation in the Congregation

Year	Novices (*)	Novices who left	Newly professed (*)	Those in temporary vows who left	Newly professed: perpetual vows	Newly perpetually professed clerics	Newly perpetually professed brothers	Newly ordained priests
2002	607	137		231	249	217	32	262
2003	580	111	470	225	254	221	33	218
2004	594	118	469	211	281	242 +1P	38	203
2005	621	151	476	237	249	219 +2P	28	230
2006	561	137	470	227	260	221 + 2P	37	192
2007	527	110	424	200	219	205	14	175
2008	557	121	417	216	220	200	20	222
2009	526	109	436	225	265	246	19	195
2010	532	125	417	222	177	161 +1P	15	203
2011	414	40	407	185	231	210 + 1P	20	206
2012	480		374	174	262	237	25	189

** To understand the first three columns it should be borne in mind that the novices entering in a given year make their first profession the following year; therefore the number of the novices who*

leave is the difference between the number of those who enter in a given year and those who profess the following year. For example: in 2002, 607 novices entered and in 2003, 470 made their first profession; therefore the difference between those who entered in 2002 and those who were professed in the following year 2003 is 137; this number is found in the column “novices who left” for the year 2002. In 2012, 480 novices entered; only at the end of 2013 shall we know the number of those who professed and therefore the number of those who left.

Ongoing formation in the Congregation

Year	Perpetual-ly professed clerics who left	Perpetual-ly professed brothers who left	Deacons dispensed from celibacy	Priests dispensed from celibacy	Those excommunicated	Those secularised previous experimento	Those secularised simpliciter	Those dismissed
2002	8	12	3	15	18	7	11	24
2003	10	14	4	11	10	3	10	25
2004	14	15	3	20	14	9	12	26
2005	11	15	1	15	10	9	10	26
2006	13	10	3	27	11	11	11	26
2007	15	11	3	18	9	12	18	24
2008	8	6	5	18	5	12	14	24
2009	12	13	2	9	6	14	10	36
2010	9	9	1	11	0	29	8	38
2011	10	12	3	11	3	17	11	30
2012	8	11	1	33	4	23	15	29

Novices according to the Regions

Year	America South Cone	America Interamerica	West Europe	Italy-Middle East	North Europe	Africa-Madagascar	East Asia-Oceania	South Asia
2002	76	110	11	43	71	55	80	135
2003	69	111	6	27	59	84	79	144
2004	86	98	12	25	51	92	84	145
2005	97	92	14	18	71	95	74	160
2006	76	88	3	22	47	92	75	158
2007	76	97	6	22	51	94	73	108
2008	58	105	4	18	48	100	89	135
2009	64	91	8	24	40	89	64	146
2010	40	73	1	18	55	114	93	138
2011	46	46	7	15	29	94	60	117
2012	43	63	3	21	38	107	69	136
TOT	731	974	75	253	560	1016	840	1522

Appraisal and observations

1. *Vocations to Salesian consecrated life*

Let us consider the number of novices in the Congregation *in the last two years*. In 2011 we had 414 novices, the lowest number in the last 11 years; the year 2012, instead, saw a vocational rebound with 480 novices, that is to say, 66 more in respect of the previous year, but still 52 short of the 2010 number of 532 novices. We shall have to see in the coming years whether the drop in the number of novices below 500 in 2011 and 2012 is the new norm or only a passing phenomenon.

As for the number of novices *over the long term*, we find that Congregation-wise the vocation situation remains disquieting; in fact, in the period between 2002 and 2006 there was an average number of 586 novices a year, whereas in the period between 2007 and 2012 the annual average fell to 506, which meant 80 less novices a year, or a drop of 13.65% in respect of the previous five-year period. Region-wise, from 2002 till 2012, there was, especially in the two Regions of America and the three Regions of Europe, a continual fall resulting in a low number of novices; in the East Asia – Oceania Region, there was a slight decline in the number of vocations, whereas the South Asia Region maintained its high number of novices, despite a slight downward trend; the Africa-Madagascar Region instead showed a clear propensity towards growth.

The fall in the number of novices over the long period, and especially in the years 2011–2012, challenges us. We need to ask ourselves in our Salesian communities and our educative and pastoral communities, and also in our youth groups and associations, whether there is a commitment to vocation animation and in what it consists, whether it involves lay people and families, and whether there is an invitation to the young to embrace an apostolic commitment and Salesian consecrated life. For this reason the Provinces have to ask themselves whether, in addition to vocation animation at the provincial level, there is a model of vocation animation at the local level; at the same time, they must identify concrete commitments they need to assume in this matter.

The Salesian charism has a remarkable capacity of attracting young people in all kinds of contexts because of the spirituality it proposes, the fraternal relationships and family spirit, the mission carried out among poor youth and the fascination radiating from the figure of Don Bosco. However, we have to ask ourselves whether our Salesian consecrated life too is attractive to the young. The choice of a vocation is closely bound up with the witness of a community, not only with an explicit invitation. Vocational fruitfulness depends upon the radical and joyful witness we bear to the gospel; the reflections of the GC27 will help us to embrace choices that make for an authentic witness, and consequently for a desirable outcome in the form of a rebound of vocations to Salesian consecrated life.

2. Initial formation

The novices who left the novitiate from 2002 to 2011 were 1159 out of a total of 5491 who entered; this means that out of an annual average of 549 novices, an average of 115 left every year, that is, 21% of the novices who entered. Between 2002 and 2006 an average of 130 novices, or 22%, left each year out of an annual average of 586 who entered the novitiate; between 2007 and 2011 the average number of novices who left the novitiate each year was 101 out of an average of 511 novices who entered, or 19%. Finally, there is a particular situation worth noting: in 2011, 414 novices entered the novitiate and only 40 left, i.e., 9,6%. Consequently, in the years from 2002 to 2011, the losses during the novitiate tended proportionately to decrease; should this decrease continue, it would be an indication of a positive, new trend.

With regard to *the temporarily professed who left*, the annual average from 2002 to 2012 was 214: from 2002 to 2006 it was 226, and from 2007 to 2012, 203. In the latter period (2007-

2012), although there was a decrease in the number of the temporarily professed who left, the situation actually worsened because of the smaller number of temporarily professed confreres in this period caused by a smaller number of novices. This can be seen by comparing the number of the newly professed: from 2003 to 2006 there was a total of 1885 newly professed, and a total of 900 temporarily professed who left, i.e., 47,75%; from 2007 to 2012 the total was 2475 newly professed and a departure of 1222 temporarily professed, i.e., 49,37%. This is why, proportionately speaking, the number of the temporarily professed leaving the Congregation each year tends to increase. There was a particular situation, however, in the years 2011 and 2012: in this period there was a slight fall in the number of the temporarily professed who left: from an annual average of around 220 departures in the years 2003 – 2010, the number of those leaving fell in 2011 to 185 and in 2012 to 174, making a yearly average of 180 departures in 2011-2012. This drop in the number of temporarily professed who left is also confirmed by comparing the annual number of the temporarily professed who left with the annual number of the newly professed: in the years 2003 – 2010, 1763 temporarily professed members left the Congregation and 3579 entered, so that the annual loss of confreres averaged 49,2%; in 2011-2012 instead, 359 left and 781 entered, limiting the average of annual losses to 45,9%; the coming years will confirm whether what happened in 2011 and 2012 marks a turning point.

Our next consideration pertains to *the perpetually professed*. While the annual average of perpetually professed for the ten years from 2002 to 2011 was 241, the year 2012 registered 262 perpetual professions. From 2002 to 2006 the annual average was 258, and from 2007 to 2011 it stood at 229. Even though there were only 177 perpetually professed in 2010, there was a rebound in 2011 with 231 perpetually professed, and still more in 2012 with 262 perpetually professed. Here too, a confirmation or rejection of the trend in the number of perpetually professed will appear only in the coming years.

As we realize, there remains, in general, a serious problem of vocational inconsistency during initial formation; on the other hand, positive indications have appeared in 2011 and 2012. It is quite possible that with an improvement of the aspirantate, the prenovitiate and the process of discernment, and with greater attention paid to accompanying those in formation, especially during practical training, we have been able to reduce the number of departures, both during the novitiate and during the period of temporary profession. It is, however, too early to speak of a new trend; we shall perceive it better in the coming years, especially if we continue to personalize the formation processes.

3. *Ongoing formation*

There was an average of 33 perpetual professions of *Salesian brothers* each year from 2002 to 2006, and an average of 18 a year from 2007 to 2012, marking a drop in numbers. In addition, the perpetually professed Salesian brothers who left the Congregation between 2002 and 2006 were, on average, 13 a year, whereas between 2007 and 2012 the annual average was 10. When the number of brothers who made their perpetual profession is taken into account, the number of perpetually professed brothers who left is disquieting in so far as the proportion of departures increased in the second period (2007-2012), passing from 39% to 55%.

The *Salesian priests* ordained between 2002 and 2006 were, on average, 221 a year, and between 2007 and 2012, the annual average was 198. Furthermore, the number of priests leaving the Congregation worsened in 2012: adding together the departures through dispensations from celibacy, secularizations and dismissals, the annual average was 70 in the last 11 years from 2002 to

2012, and 77 in the last 6 years; in 2012 the number of priests leaving touched 100, with 33 of them asking for dispensation from celibacy, 38 having entered or entering the ranks of the diocesan clergy, and 29 being dismissed.

These data raise many questions. How do we explain such a high number of departures of Salesian perpetually professed brothers? How is it that such a high number of Salesian priests abandons Salesian consecrated life for the secular life of the diocesan clergy? This is not a phenomenon limited to this year only; in the 11 years from 2002 to 2012 the average number of secularizations has been 25 a year. And how are we to explain the dispensations from celibacy which over the same 11 years have stood at 17 a year and the dismissals at 28?

It is possible that in the case of some departures, a good vocational discernment was not done during the period of initial formation. It is also possible that in some cases there arose a sudden crisis that could not be overcome. However, it is very probable that in the majority of cases, the vocational crisis lasted a certain period of time, and perhaps its signs were already visible in the behaviour of these confreres within the community and outside. We have to ask, then, whether perhaps it was not possible with a little more fraternal attention to anticipate or to help some of the confreres who were in difficulty.

I know it is not easy to give a clear answer to these and other questions because there are so many factors that enter into play in the matter of vocations. Probably some of the situations were held over from the past and were being regularized by the Provinces only now. It is important that the Provincial Formation Commissions and the Provincial Councils reflect on these departures, since they concern confreres who lived several years in the Congregation.

4. Conclusion

God speaks to us also through the life of the Congregation: situations such as (1) a drop in the number of vocations, (2) vocational fragility in initial formation, and above all (3) vocational infidelity in ongoing formation are problems that still persist and need to be faced with patience, continuity and determination. Paying heed to the appeals arising out of the situation, knowing how to make a “radical” reading of the situation, and identifying the course of action to be followed are the steps of a methodology to be applied also to the vocation and formation situation in the Provinces.

While this methodology is applied, attention must be paid to inculturation, that is, one has to take into account the culture of the context in which one lives and the culture of one’s Province; if this “incultured attention” is missing, listening to the appeals emerging from the situation, the “radical” reading of the situation, and the course of action chosen will turn out to be incomplete and ineffective.

I trust in your collaboration and greet you cordially and with gratitude.
In Don Bosco,

Fr. Francis Cereda