



Salesians of Don Bosco

General Chapter 27

Pre-Chapter Commission

***WITNESSES TO THE RADICAL APPROACH OF
THE GOSPEL
“Work and Temperance”***

Working Document

INTRODUCTION

The Rector Major's letter of convocation for GC27 in April 2012 pointed out that the Chapter theme is to be: "Witnesses to the radical approach of the Gospel" (AGC 413). As a subtitle the theme has the motto that Don Bosco had offered the Congregation: "Work and temperance". The theme and its subtitle take us back to the Gospel source of our consecrated Salesian life and the life style that Don Bosco proposed for us.

During his public ministry Jesus gathered a group of disciples around him. Mark's Gospel puts it this way: Jesus "*went up into the hills and summoned those he wanted. So they came to him and he appointed twelve; they were to be his companions and to be sent out to preach, with power to cast out devils*" (Mk. 3: 13-15). Even before the Church came into being the *sequela Christi* as a way of life, the most ancient of Gospel traditions, was offering believers discipleship as a way of following Jesus. Disciples are those whom Jesus calls to himself and who immediately come to him; they are made into a community with the twofold purpose of being with him and being sent out to preach.

Mark's Gospel text is an interesting biblical reference for our Chapter theme. If we wish to be authentic disciples of Jesus we must also be his apostles in earnest. Jesus calls us to 'be with him' ('companions' in some translations) and sends us out to preach his Gospel to everyone. The verbs "be with" and "send" express the dynamics of the community of disciples that Jesus is constantly choosing; they point to inseparable elements which are part of the "*grace of unity*". This is the gift and the most demanding task for us today in both personal and community life. It is a case, then, of living out, as the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata* puts it, the identity of our consecrated vocation which is the *mysterium Trinitatis, signum fraternitatis, servitium caritatis*. We need to return, at the core of our existence, to the primacy of grace, God's initiative and seeking his will, our fascination with Jesus, life in the Spirit; all of this calls on us to have a real conversion and to exercise discernment.

GC27 asks us to bear witness to the "grace of unity" through a *radical Gospel approach*. We are all confronted with the question of what this radical approach of the Gospel really is. We have seen how Pope Francis, in the early months of his pontificate, has made the radical approach of the Gospel and mercy the pillars of his pastoral activity, through a style of life which is poor and brings him close to people. Pope Benedict XVI, speaking to young religious, says it this way: "The radical approach of the Gospel is to be "rooted and built up in Christ, and firm in the faith" (*Col 2:7*), In the consecrated life, this means going to the very root of the love of Jesus Christ with an undivided heart, putting nothing ahead of this love (cf. Saint Benedict, *Rule*, IV, 21) , ... the personal encounter with Christ which has nourished your consecration and to all the transforming power of that encounter. This is all the more important today ... In a world of relativism and mediocrity, we need that radicalism to which your consecration, as a way of belonging to the God who is loved above all things, bears witness."¹

¹ BENEDICT XVI, *Address to young religious*, St Lawrence monastery at Escorial, 19 August 2011.

Don Bosco asked that we live this testimony of a radical way of life through the motto of the Congregation which is summed up in the twofold: “*work and temperance*”. This motto concretely translates Don Bosco's prayer and programme of life, the *da mihi animas, cetera tolle*. Sanctified work is our kind of mysticism and it makes the *da mihi animas* visible: the Salesian, eager for souls, gives himself totally to the young through tireless work. Temperance is our form of asceticism and makes the *cetera tolle* visible: the Salesian, ready to let everything else go, lives in a measured, moderate and self-controlled way so he can focus on the “greater glory of God and the salvation of souls”. In this case, as is typical for all Don Bosco's catch phrases with two or three terms, it means experiencing work and temperance as the “grace of unity”: the mystical and ascetic life cannot be separated and vice versa.

The *working document* which we are now offering confreres reflects the manifold situations and sensitivities of the Congregation but ones which, on the other hand, were also expressed in the Provincial Chapters through a broad convergence on fundamental issues. It is also reflected in the different writing styles of the three groups in the pre-Chapter Commission; in fact each group wrote up a core text after having shared the content which the Commission had in hand.

The working document offers a summary of contributions from the Provincial Chapters on the GC27 theme and at the same time keeps in mind the Rector Major's letter of convocation of GC27. This document offers the three core topics: “mystics in the Spirit”, “prophets of fraternity” and “servants of the young”, spelt out by following the discernment approach that was proposed for the Provincial Chapters:

- *Listening*: presents the situation of the Congregation in its fundamental aspects today, meaning what challenges us most of all and what seems most promising or risky for bearing witness to the radical approach of the Gospel; it highlights what the Congregation perceives and experiences as being the most important and prior reality: the desires and expectations to be satisfied, questions and provocations requiring a response, commitments that need reinforcing, challenges needing to be faced up to, concerns and risks that have to be borne in mind.
- *Interpreting*: presents the roots, causes and motivations for what has been revealed at the listening stage; in particular it highlights how we understand situations, signs of the times, sensitivities perceived by the Congregation, the things that question it, seem promising or show themselves to be risky.
- *The way ahead*: presents the goal to be achieved and the steps needed to move forward in testimony to the radical approach of the Gospel, giving various individuals tasks to carry out; in particular it highlights the way we need to move forward by way of processes to be put in place or consolidated, mindsets that need changing, structures likewise, interventions to be taken.

The results of the Pre-Chapter Commission's work are now being sent out *to all confreres* and especially to those taking part in GC27. This is a working document, then, that can be useful for preparing for the Chapter through prayer, community sharing and reflection. It is one further step “towards GC27”, helped along by the spiritual atmosphere produced by the third year of preparation for the Bicentenary of Don Bosco's birth.

Let us entrust ourselves to the Holy Spirit, the Lord the giver of life, and to Mary as Help of Christians and support of our Congregation: may the Spirit and Mary accompany us in this journey of preparation, and through their intercession may we be converted and bear abundant fruit, the desired fruit of visibility, credibility and fruitfulness.

In Don Bosco

GC27 Pre-Chapter Commission

MYSTICS IN THE SPIRIT

“He went up into the hills and summoned those he wanted. So they came to him and he appointed twelve; they were to be his companions and to be sent out to preach, with power to cast out devils” (Mk 3:13-15)

LISTENING

[1] God calls us and consecrates us (C. 3)

God our Creator and Saviour, the Father who sent Jesus and the Spirit, took the initiative of calling and consecrating the Salesians of Don Bosco to follow the Lord Jesus, in fraternal communities, sending us to the young through a service of education and ministry. It is up to us to respond to the expectations and challenges that God's initiative puts before us.

In the Provincial Chapters we find the profound desire confreres and communities have of giving God primacy in their lives. We want to know His will, scrutinise His word and the signs of the times in the life of the Church, the Congregation and the world. We sincerely wish to do, not our own will, but the will of God who calls and consecrates us (cf. Jn 6:38; Mt 26:39). We understand that giving absolute primacy to God is the most important need of our time if we wish to live our life of apostolic consecration in an authentic manner. Not only do we have this keen desire but there is also a clear request from the young that we Salesians be happy and radical witnesses of God and show that we are seeking him in our lives.

Therefore we want to take up concrete expressions of God's primacy in our lives: consistent motivation, a deep life of personal and community prayer, listening to the Scriptures daily, faithful participation in the Eucharist and frequent celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, total availability to God's plan and a constant attitude of discerning his will, community experience rooted in Trinitarian communion and expressed through witness. To that we add the tireless work that expresses our dedication to our mission, and the temperance that strengthens custody of the heart and self-control and helps us to calmly, joyfully accept the daily demands and renunciations of apostolic life (C. 18).

On the other hand we need to recognise that our deep desire to give God pride of place and the request young people make for spirituality are not adequately satisfied either by us or our communities; and even less so are they made visible and credible. Despite this, called by God to be Salesians of Don Bosco, we want to imitate Don Bosco with all our strength, he who was *“profoundly a man of God, filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, living ‘as one who saw the invisible’ (Heb 11:27)”* (C. 21).

[2] God calls us to follow Christ (C. 50)

“God calls us to live in community, and entrusts us with brothers to love. Brotherly love, our apostolic mission and the practice of the evangelical counsels are the bonds which form us into one and constantly reinforce our communion”- (C. 50). We see from the Provincial Chapters that this call is perceived as a great challenge and an urgent one inasmuch as we feel we are too influenced by the pervading individualism that regards self-fulfilment to be the supreme value, consumerism that believes it can find happiness in an abundance of material goods, media culture which encourages a selfish attention to individual needs, heightened and emotionally-charged relationships and social bonds, preference for what is ephemeral and fleeting, immediate and mere appearance.

These salient features of our global culture contradict the values which are represented by the evangelical counsels of consecrated life. For the true good of humankind and our young people it becomes even more essential that we bear visible, credible and fruitful witness to obedience, poverty and chastity in imitation of Christ. We are grateful to God for the many elderly and sick confreres who are examples of aging gracefully, and for the many young and not-so-young confreres who work tirelessly in a brotherly and apostolic spirit. If the elderly are the 'memory' of our communities, young confreres are their promise, and all of us are the community's present moment. We might ask ourselves whether or not our elderly and sick confreres are sufficiently appreciated, and whether or not our young confreres are sufficiently valued, given responsibility and accompanied as they generously take up the mission.

We are aware of the resistance we feel as individuals and communities in generously responding to Jesus' call (Mk 10:21). The spirit of renunciation and sacrifice is a weak point in our times. This hinders our authentic living out of the radical approach of the Gospel, something we publicly promised to do at our Religious Profession. Sometimes a mediocre approach to life results from this, things slow down by dint of habit, hindering us from higher and more generous desires or from making our thoughts, feelings, deeds those of Jesus - in short hindering us from being his authentic disciples.

Temperance is another weak point of culture today. Some Provincial Chapters speak of a certain lack in this regard, whether at personal or community level. Given that temperance is part of the Salesian motto, this can hit us where it hurts. To be honest, what is lacking is a correct and relevant understanding of temperance. The term “temperance” in the Scriptures is employed to mean the kind of discipline the athlete imposes on his body (1 Cor 9:25), and in controlling sexual impulse (1 Cor 7:9). The temperate person is the strong-spirited individual who keeps desires and pleasure-seeking under control. Temperance is self-control, and is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). It is the virtue by which one achieves self-mastery to then be available as the servant of others.

When we make our religious profession we conclude by saying “Father, may your grace... together with the assistance of my brother Salesians keep me faithful...” Finally, the Provincial Chapters note insistently and regretfully that there has been a gradual decline in the Congregation in the practice of the evangelical precept of 'fraternal correction' (Mt 18:15-17; Lk 17:3). They speak of “human respect” on the part of superiors and confreres who hesitate to intervene charitably where they see individual or community abuses regarding poverty and chastity and which are a counter-witness ruining the beauty and value of the sign of our consecrated life for the world, the young and lay people in the Church.

[3] God sends us to the young (C. 2)

The primacy of God allows us to offer a visible, credible and fruitful testimony to the world into which God sends us. The Salesian community is a school of life and witness. There are confreres in the community who work dedicatedly on all frontiers of the world of the young. Old age and sanctified sickness have great witness value too. There have been and are splendid examples of holiness amongst our living and deceased confreres, amongst the young and the old. This is a recognised, ordinary holiness with specific features.

On the other hand we also have to recognise that often people and young people especially, do not see us as “mystics of the Spirit”, men of God called and consecrated by Him, but rather simply as teachers, social workers, administrators and people 'running a business'. Our deepest motivations, ones rooted in Gospel values, are not always perceived. We ourselves can struggle to share our life of faith and involve young people, lay people and families in a journey of faith. We see a widespread loss of enthusiasm and passion for our vocation and the Salesian mission.

Despite all this we Salesians of Don Bosco, deep-down in our hearts, want to live our total dedication to Don Bosco's mission. He said: “*I have promised God that I would give of myself to my last breath for my poor boys.*”(C.. 1).

[4] God offers us the “grace of unity” (C. 21)

We sense God's call to conversion with ever greater intensity, and to accepting the “grace of unity”, an essential condition for living authentically as witnesses to the radical approach of the Gospel. When Jesus called the first disciples he gave them this grace: “He went up into the hills and summoned those he wanted. So they came to him and he appointed twelve; they were to be his companions and to be sent out to preach, with power to cast out devils.” (Mk 3:13-15). For us, called by God as Salesians of Don Bosco, the “grace of unity” consists in the “single movement of love towards God and towards our brothers” (C. 3) that brings faith, hope and charity together in a vital unity, along with activity and prayer, work and temperance, contemplation and action, the *da mihi animas* and the *cetera tolle*, as also the three inseparable elements of our apostolic consecration: the practice of the evangelical counsels, fraternal community and apostolic mission.

The “grace of unity” in our spiritual tradition is based on the habitual state of “union with God”, something so abundantly granted to our holy founder Don Bosco. The Constitutions repeatedly speak about this marvellous state of union, the result of generous collaboration with divine grace in obedience to the evangelical precept of “pray always” (Lk 18:1; 1 Th 5:17; Rom 12:12).

The Salesian “cultivates union with God, aware of the need to pray without ceasing in a simple heart-to-heart colloquy with the living Christ and with the Father whom he feels close at hand. Attentive to the presence of the Spirit and doing everything for God's love he becomes like Don Bosco a contemplative in action.”(C. 12); “His need of God, keenly felt in his apostolic commitment, leads [the Salesian] to celebrate the liturgy of life, attaining that ‘tireless industry made holy by prayer and union with God’ that should be the characteristic of the sons of St John Bosco (Reg. 1924, art. 291)” (C. 95). We note the need to re-appropriate the spirit of constant prayer, as simple brief prayers of aspiration

have always been described in our tradition, uniting our daily work with prayer. This is now regarded as urgent in our time and in the Congregation.

The basic obstacle to experiencing the “grace of unity” is found in the fact that we are easily influenced by today's secular and relativist view of life, often leading us to a loss of faith motivation, compensating for this by too much activity; and it leads to spiritual superficiality, lack of staying power or regularity, routine in personal and community prayer, complete omission of the practical exercise of constant prayer, an inability to create communion with God and our brothers, the tendency to a bourgeois lifestyle, work which lacks a pastoral 'soul' to it, lack of discipline and temperance, mistaken and superficial use of the possibilities the media offer us, and finally the loss of fascination for Him whom we once discovered as our true treasure and the precious pearl in our life (Mt 13:44-45).

INTERPRETATION

[5] God calls us and consecrates us (C. 3)

At the root of our problems of bearing eloquent and transparent Gospel testimony is an inadequate appreciation of the grace of vocation, the inestimable gift of God's call to Salesian consecrated life. Our current times require that apostolic consecrated life shows forth its identity, and this means knowing how to make the radical approach of the Gospel part of daily life, or fully taking up the *sequela* (following) of Jesus (Lk 14:25-27), in dialogue with our time (Mt 16:1-4). When we want to show more clearly who we are before showing what we do, we have to recover the central idea, through an act of faith, which sustains our *raison d'être* in the Church and the world: the primacy of God, who calls everyone into communion with Him through Christ and in the Spirit.

There are some signs of hope in our communities however. The constructive presence of elderly and sick confreres is due to their keen faith and their refusal to consider themselves as having “retired from the mission”; on the contrary, “they offer their limitations and sufferings in a spirit of faith for their brothers and for the young, they are united with the redeeming passion of the Lord and continue to share in the Salesian mission” (C. 53). Also, the gift of many vocations to Salesian consecrated life and our young confreres is an encouragement to the community; in fact they aspire to “a more personal and fraternal life style” (C. 103); theirs is the challenge of showing that “the time of initial formation is not so much a period of marking time as already one of work and holiness” (C. 105); “they are closer to the rising generations; they can provide inspiration and enthusiasm; they are ready to try new solutions” (C. 46).

Over the last fifty years during the renewal process for apostolic consecrated life, enhancing certain aspects has meant others have been neglected at the expense of the primacy of God. At times self-fulfilment has been affirmed, weakening community life and the demands of the common mission; at other times a community vision has been fostered, but one which was turned in on itself and formed on the basis of choosing confreres with whom we want to live in friendship, thus weakening the awareness of being called by God to live in community where we receive brothers to love from God; and still at other times there has been a rather exclusive option carried out for the poor, which has

overlooked sacramental life, personal and community prayer, a pastoral sense of apostolic activity and service open to everyone, even though it was preferentially for the poor.

To overcome these counter-positions today we need to motivate ourselves to take up the essential means for keeping union with God alive day by day, individually and as a community. These means are pointed out in detail in our Constitutions and Regulations, and we need them to become people open to the Spirit who offer others the fruit of our experience of God. Don Bosco tells each of us: *“If you have loved me in the past, continue to love me in the future by the exact observance of our Constitutions”* (MB XVII,258 and the Foreword to the Constitutions).

[6] God calls us to follow Christ (C. 50)

The difficulties we experience in responding to God's call to the *sequela Christi* in a radical way are due to our weak faith in the fruitfulness of the evangelical counsels in bringing about communion in community and our mission to the young. The Constitutions put it this way: “Don Bosco frequently points out how the sincere practice of the vows strengthens the bonds of brotherly love and makes our apostolic work coherent. The profession of the counsels helps us to live a life of fellowship with our brothers in the religious community as in a family which enjoys the presence of the Lord. The evangelical counsels, by fostering purification of the heart and spiritual freedom, render our pastoral charity more concerned and productive: the obedient, poor and chaste Salesian is quick to love and serve those to whom the Lord sends him, especially poor youth.”(C. 61). To the contrary we note a community life lacking in brotherly relationships that endangers our obedience, poverty, chastity and encourages us to seek compensation in personal success, ease and comfort, and in “ambiguous or dangerous conduct or behaviour” (R. 68) with regard to our “relationships with people and our friendships”.

Practising the evangelical counsels is an inestimable gift but the mandatory responsibility of responding comes with it. The struggle in our response to our vocation also comes from the lack of appreciation we have of it as a gift received. Such appreciation is itself a gift we must be open to in faith: “It is not everyone who can accept what I have said but only those to whom it has been granted” (Mt 19:11). Following Jesus' and Don Bosco's example, obedience, poverty and chastity are precious pearls which we must love passionately. Love of obedience coincides with our love of God since we do the will of someone we love: “In true obedience lies the perfection of every virtue” (Don Bosco, “To the Salesian confreres”, Introduction to the Constitutions, p. 229). “We need to have poverty of heart to practise it” (Don Bosco, quoted by GC26, 87). “The virtue that is supremely necessary, the great virtue, the angelic virtue, the one to crown all others, is the virtue of chastity” (Don Bosco, “To Salesian confreres”, Introduction to the Constitutions, p. 233). Perhaps we have not meditated sufficiently on the “dream of the diamonds” in which Don Bosco revives our love for the abundance of gifts God has offered us by calling us to Salesian consecrated life.

Another reason for problems associated with the following of Christ has been identified by Provincial Chapters in our natural reluctance to enter by the “narrow gate” and take the “narrow path” (Mt 7:13) that leads to life and life “in abundance” (Jn 10:10). The narrow gate and path are in fact symbols of “the radical Gospel approach” which Jesus points out as an essential precondition for following him (Lk 14:27.33). He knew how to “empty himself” (Phil 2:7). Salesian life in community means supporting each confrere in this commitment to being radical, by way of community and individual spiritual direction by the

Rector, and mutual fraternal correction and mutual edification. The witness of our confreres' fidelity and joy in our communities is the mature result of this spiritual direction. This gives us first-hand experience of the paschal mystery, the belief that is, that in Christ abundant life comes from knowing how to die to ourselves. This is the Apostle Paul's experience: "I have been crucified with Christ, and I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me. The life I now live in this body I live in faith: faith in the Son of God who loved me and sacrificed himself for my sake." (Gal 2:19-20). This is also the source of our unconditional dedication to the educative and pastoral mission entrusted to us by the Church and the Congregation: "The love of Christ urges us on" (2 Cor 5:14).

A final cause for our difficulties is the weakness of formation. Too often we limit our understanding of formation to the initial stages instead of seeing formation as an ongoing challenge in our life until the culminating moment of our death. Care for formation both initial and ongoing is an essential condition for following Christ fully. Formation helps us to purify our motivations, habituating us to live with right intention; it helps us grow in emotional maturity, curing possible psychological wounds incurred from past experiences; it educates us to work and temperance through disciplined and disinterested apostolic involvement which knows how to set the necessary boundaries within interpersonal relationships; it trains us in a moderate lifestyle which does not avoid manual work and humble service in community.

[7] God sends us to the young (C. 2)

Confreres totally dedicated to the mission are capable of great generosity because they are sustained by an intense life of personal and community prayer and solid brotherly relationships. They are an example to us in knowing how to tackle the positive appeals today's culture makes to our life and work today: invitations to consistency, vitality, freedom, the search for meaning and fullness, the desire for deep, authentic relationships, etc.

At the root of so many difficulties in life and work is the fact that, sent by God to the world, we sometimes allow ourselves to be influenced by it rather than by the Word of God and our Rule. We find ourselves influenced by negative aspects of our culture, that is by secularism, relativism, pragmatism, materialism, individualism, prometheism, consumerism, hedonism, [and what the Italian text calls 'borghesismo' - which can be anything from a 'middle-class' lifestyle to a conservative, reactionary, small-mindedness]... and consequently we become victims of fragmentation, dissipation, competition, sensuality, weakened ties, superficiality, an obsessive search of ease and comfort etc. We often find ourselves caught up in apostolic mediocrity manifested by disengagement, listlessness and lack of enthusiasm; in this kind of condition we are no longer able to attract the young and offer them ideals and horizons in life.

It is then that we really do not succeed in "being in the world without being of the world" (cf. Jn 17:10.14-15.18). Called as we are to be "the salt of the earth", we are in danger of losing our flavour and "if the salt loses its flavour what can make it salty again? It is good for nothing and can only be thrown out to be trampled underfoot by men" (Mt 5:13; Lk 14:34-35). We are urged then to overcome this mediocrity. We will be good salt of the earth if, with Don Bosco, each of us can say to the young: "*For you I study, for you I work, for you I live, for you I am also ready to give my life*" (C. 14).

[8] God offers us the “grace of unity”

In the midst of these difficulties, God comes to our aid by offering us the “grace of unity”. Confreres who have received or are now receiving this grace and therefore “are living or have lived to the full the Gospel project of the Constitutions are for us a stimulus and help on the path to holiness. The witness of such holiness, achieved within the Salesian mission, reveals the unique worth of the beatitudes and is the most precious gift we can offer the young” (C. 25). Holiness is the fruit of the “grace of unity”; knowing the figures of holiness in the Salesian Family encourages us to be holy; this is a holiness with many faces, determined by the gifts of the Spirit and historical circumstances.

One obstacle to receiving this grace is the lack of real Salesian spiritual direction. According to the Provincial Chapters our young Rectors are often lacking in the deep awareness of being the spiritual guides of their communities, and also offered as such to individual confreres. The crisis of the daily good night and the frequent chat/talk with the Rector are signs of what is happening. As a consequence our communities do not provide an atmosphere that encourages the growth of confreres as “mystics of the Spirit”.

Another cause is the superficial, if not indeed mistaken interpretation of Don Bosco's “Work! Work! Work!” This interpretation leads to justifying a weakened witness to being “mystics in the Spirit”: lack of regularity in community prayer, a lack of balance in activities as if they were the equivalent of mission, allowing pastoral work to unduly interrupt our community at prayer, bringing disruption; not knowing how to take advantage of moments of prayer together with the people and with young people, or not knowing how to act so that work is a help and not a hindrance to our growing in holiness.

A third cause identified by Provincial Chapters is a certain crisis of identity in apostolic consecrated life that is insinuating itself into our communities made up of priest and lay members. There are Salesian priests whose pastoral ministry, and Salesian lay members whose professional activity unduly obscure the fact that they are consecrated persons. Salesian priests and Salesian lay members need to be visible, credible and vocationally fruitful witnesses to their identity as consecrated individuals dedicated to the pastoral and educative ministry.

A final obstacle consists in the seeking of ease and comfort that harms our witness of life. The evangelical counsels of consecrated life are to be lived in unity. Lack of witness in one vow obscures the witness of the other vows. Lack of fidelity to evangelical poverty cools the fervour of our prayer, disrupts fellowship in community, dampens our apostolic passion. If we are not converted to the “grace of unity” we risk living a comfortable life that ignores the effort needed for ongoing formation, that does not feel the attraction of the unfathomable beauty of the vocation God has given us, that experiences work not as mission but as a place for individual self-fulfilment.

Today, to receive the gift of the “grace of unity” and to experience union with God with the abundance that characterised the beginnings of the Salesian Society, the profound desire for God that we feel must urge us to respond with an authentic conversion of mind and heart and deep purification. In fact we are easily fouled up by the less positive aspects of culture today, especially consumerism and the bourgeois lifestyle indicated earlier. Article 18 of the Constitutions reminds us of two of Don Bosco's sayings which are very pertinent to this: the first says: “*Work and temperance will make the Congregation flourish*” (MB XII, 466); the second comes from his spiritual testament where he warns us: “*When the desire*

for ease and comfort grows up amongst us, our Pious Society will have run its course” (MB XVII, 272).

THE WAY FORWARD

GOAL

[9] *Experiencing ongoing spiritual conversion that helps us accept and bear witness to the “grace of unity” of our apostolic consecration.*

STEPS TO BE TAKEN

The Confrere...

[10] Embraces the gift of ongoing conversion through the grace of unity and the radical approach of the Gospel by providing himself with a personal plan of life (R. 99). He includes the commitments of the community plan of life in it by discerning in the Spirit what is God's will for him in daily life; he concretizes his aspiration to “a high level of ordinary Christian living” according to the spirit of the beatitudes, and includes the effort needed to live out the motto “work and temperance”; he establishes ways of struggling against spiritual superficiality, mediocrity and routine. He draws up his plan of life through adequate reflection and in dialogue with a spiritual guide.

[11] Builds communion with his confreres by being there for community prayer. He commits to faithful participation each day in the community Eucharist, Liturgy of the Hours, Meditation and Spiritual Reading.

[12] Cultivates personal prayer: he expresses his love for Jesus in the Eucharist by frequent visits (C. 88); by saying the rosary each day he shows his filial devotion to Mary and imitating her, he practices prayerful contemplation (C. 87); he makes frequent use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation choosing a regular confessor and prepares for this by a daily examen of conscience.

[13] Trains himself “to pray always, and never lose heart” (Lk 18:1) “praying without ceasing in a simple heart-to-heart colloquy with the living Christ and with the Father whom he feels close at hand” (Cf. C. 12 and 95), a constant form of prayer which in spiritual tradition is called the prayer of aspiration and which culminates in union with God. In particular, he meditates and prays the daily Liturgy of the Word during the day in the spirit of *Lectio divina*, understood as a way of living which is totally enlightened by the Word of God.

[14] Is committed to spiritual accompaniment, determining the frequency of his talks with the Rector and his spiritual director, and together with them seeking God's will in personal experience and in the circumstances and signs of the times.

[15] Cultivates the habit of “reading and studying those branches of knowledge proper to his mission” (R. 99). As a way of forming his mystical awareness he commits himself to a

deeper understanding of the spiritual writings of St John Bosco and St Francis de Sales on the occasion of their upcoming centenaries. He contributes to creating a community atmosphere of recollection, reflection, study, and enriching communication amongst confreres by sharing spiritual and pastoral experiences.

The Community...

[16] Draws up its annual plan of life, led competently and effectively by the Rector as the community's spiritual guide; the community keeps in mind the various aspects of the consecrated vocation which are to be lived as the "grace of unity": primacy of God, following Christ, fraternal life and apostolic activity; the community especially creates a favourable setting for the continuous spiritual growth of its confreres and becomes the first and most important place for ongoing formation.

[17] Plans its timetable for liturgy: Eucharist and Liturgy of the Hours, community prayer: meditation and spiritual reading, all in such a way that it allows all confreres to take part regularly.

[18] Studies a way of ensuring "an atmosphere of recollection and prayer" (R. 43), as a personal and community discipline and an aid to forming the habit of personal prayer, reading, study and reflection.

[19] Determines common ascetic practices such as the "community penance" on Fridays, the "community practice of mortification" in Lent (R. 73), the Stations of the Cross and the "via lucis", etc. as visible signs of our paschal desire for conversion, temperance and sharing with the poor.

[20] Ensures a regular community revision of how to bear visible, credible and fruitful testimony to the evangelical counsels; it once more takes up the practice of fraternal correction (C. 90); it encourages a culture of how to live in the digital world; it tackles the question of moderate use of journeys and means of transport.

[21] Accepts timely encouragement and loving intervention by the Rector in preventing or correcting any likely deviation; this is another way for the Rector to be an authoritative spiritual guide of the community.

[22] In support of personal reading, study and reflection sees that the library has both classic and current works on spirituality, especially by St Francis de Sales and St John Bosco, in both digital and paper formats.

The Province...

[23] Evaluates the witness of religious poverty in all communities, giving attention to lifestyle, community structures, use of transport and journeys, beginning with the Provincial Centre.

[24] Carries out a Provincial Plan for Formation as a way of helping confreres clarify their motivations, strengthen personal beliefs, integrate the life of faith with community life and apostolic work, and guarantee the needed skills in spiritual direction and educative and pastoral work. It does this by offering a strong experience of yearly retreats and other

provincial gatherings thus creating a culture in the province of “aiming high”, one that encourages others to experience and live out the “grace of unity”.

[25] Evaluates and guarantees consistency in number and quality of local communities, such that confreres are not weighed down by work and therefore not tempted to overlook occasions for prayer and fraternal life; in this regard it sets up a planned set of interventions that makes this direction effective.

[26] Chooses, appoints and forms Rectors able to guide the local community with a right balance of prayer and work, in an ongoing rhythm from God to world and back to God again, for the salvation of the young, so that the confrere is never far from God when he is with the young and never far from the young when he is with God.

[27] Offers confreres and communities timely encouragement and firm but charitable interventions on the Provincial's part in preventing, correcting and encouraging; at the same time it offers occasions and stimuli for ongoing formation.

PROPHETS OF FRATERNITY

“I give you a new commandment: love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also must love one another. By this love you have for one another, everyone will know that you are my disciples.” (Jn 13:34-35)

LISTENING

[28] The Community as a reflection of the Trinity (C. 49)

In the Salesian community we feel we are called by the Father to be disciples of Christ together with our brothers for a mission of salvation of the young. We perceive the bonds that unite us to one another as a reflection of the infinite communion of love that binds the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In union with the Father of Jesus in the Spirit we are called to bear abundant fruit as Jesus says: “I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains with me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty, for cut off from me you can do nothing ... You did not choose me. No, I chose you; and I commission you to go out and bear fruit, fruit that will last.” (Jn 15:5)

Despite our limitations of mutual misunderstanding, or being closed in on ourselves, or our fragility, all of which we are well aware of, we feel supported by love and pervaded by the grace poured into our hearts by the Spirit of Christ. The Body and Blood of Jesus with which we nourish each day make us “one heart and one soul” (C. 50), urged on by Christ's love to spend ourselves for the salvation of the young, following in Don Bosco's footsteps.

[29] Thirst for relationships and communication (C. 51)

The call to experience fellowship and fraternity satisfies one of the most vital needs that we have: in fraternal life *“we find a response to the deep aspirations of the heart, and we become for the young signs of love and unity”* (C. 49). In the great majority of confreres we perceive a thirst for deep interpersonal relationships which overcome purely functional bonds.

The Provincial Chapters note a growth in our brotherly life; at the same time they perceive that much is still lacking to quench the thirst for relationship and communication. Beyond the question of different cultures and generations there is a great convergence on the fact that we all want relationships which recognise our dignity as people, which integrate our differences, value our gifts and assets. Listening to this profound desire helps us to create communion beyond diversity, or better, through it. Also this search for fraternal life, relationship and communication is very much present in the young; this is an excellent point of contact with them.

Despite this desire for relationships, we find attitudes amongst us which run contrary to fraternal life: individualism, a haste which leaves little room for encounter, lack of giving to the community without claiming something back, prejudices, rejection of difference, isolation, inability to overcome conflicts, struggles with mutual forgiveness; some confreres then experience loneliness in community and feel ill at ease there. The oft-expressed perception that community time is time “stolen” from the mission, neglect of settings and times for community, poverty of fraternal relationships and sharing, all weaken the strength of fraternal life and make us close in on ourselves.

The confrere's emotional, affective dimension is not well cared for either in initial or in ongoing formation. There is a deficiency in educating to inner being and emotional balance, for want of appropriate formation curricula and properly prepared formators. Our communication then becomes cold and detached. All of this reflects on the attitudes we adopt as educators and on the pastoral work we carry out, especially in educating young people to love, or what we do for engaged couples, or the attention we give to married life and families.

The digital environment and the Web are an experience of life; they are an integral part of personal and social existence and our way of life today. The digital world is not a parallel one but a part of daily reality; it is a reality that has a strong impact on our way of sensing things, thinking, living, relating. This is why we speak of physical and digital relationships and no longer of virtual ones. The Web especially influences our way of seeking God, our community life, the way we bear witness and evangelise. We need to form ourselves to maturity and transparency in relationships established via the Web.

Formal relationships amongst us are not opposed to a deeper communication. The role of the Rector has great importance for overcoming functional and bureaucratic relationships, making him more than just an “organizer”. If he is little given to building fraternal relationships, the community freezes up. Difficulties in fraternal life in common then become a challenge. We have clear proposals from the Word of God, the Constitutions and Regulations, General Chapters and various interventions by the Salesian Magisterium, but we have not always assimilated nor put into practice all the means and expressions for communion to which we have been called.

[30] Witness of fraternal life (C. 52)

We make communion of life in community visible when we follow the demands of the family spirit Don Bosco wanted (C. 16 and 51). Communion requires that we share our faith and plan of life as well as exercising a relational style marked by listening. It asks that we be near to a confrere, look after his needs, help him to live his vocation faithfully, share his concerns and aspirations, sacrifice ourselves for him, play a responsible part in the community plan, be open to fraternal correction, combat whatever in us runs against community life. Only thus can Salesian fraternal life be attractive and awaken attitudes of authentic Gospel love in the young and in lay people, encouraging them to live a style of relationships with others which is an alternative to the one we find in society today. “I give you a new commandment: love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also must love one another. By this love you have for one another, everyone will know that you are my disciples” (Jn 13: 34-35).

Without this commitment to living together in community, Salesian life and the results of our pastoral work are weakened because the message they seek to offer is no longer credible. Common fraternal life is an essential content of the community's mission.

The Salesian community is open to the Church and the values of the world in which its apostolic activity is carried out, and it is supportive of the community amongst which it lives, thus becoming a sign which reveals Christ and can give rise to vocations (C. 57). Communion of life in community when lived consistently and with passion, joy, optimism, becomes a prophecy for today's society, for lay people who share in our educative and pastoral activity and for the young we are with: they can see us as "signs of love and unity" (C. 49). Especially when confreres of different circumstances, age, formation, social origin, culture, nationality, mentality, qualification live united and with same the plan of life and action, the witness of our fraternal life becomes very obvious.

Amongst the diverse set of circumstances we include multiculturalism, a phenomenon found in many contexts today, not only western ones, due to migration of peoples or the fact that various ethnic groups coexist in the same area. This multicultural and multi-ethnic situation can be found in many of our communities; it has brought us new vocations and has required that we find new ways to live in community and exercise pastoral activity. We are aware that multiculturalism is a challenge but also a treasure: it needs to be transformed into interculturalism; in the Gospel we can find indications that help us to build unity in diversity.

For a deep renewal of Salesian fraternal life we need, as Don Bosco wanted, to strengthen the service of animation and government of the Rector as a spiritual, fraternal and pastoral guide. The complexity of our works and the diversity of functions entrusted to him hinder him from seeing to, caring for fraternal life and shared responsibility in the context of the community plan of life and its educative and pastoral plan. (Cf. GC21, 46-57, CG25, 63-65; AGC 413, 36).

[31] The community as the centre of communion (C. 57)

The fraternal communion we experience and the mission entrusted to us urge us, like Don Bosco, to involve a network of people in communion of spirit and fellowship all dedicated to the same mission. This circle of people involved with us in communion and mission includes lay people who see a point of reference and convergence in Don Bosco and who are willing to share responsibility and commitment with us; with them we are the animating core of the educative and pastoral community in animating, guiding and realising the mission, together with the young and families. With groups who draw their inspiration from Don Bosco in various ways we make up a true family, the Salesian Family, animated by the same charism, united in the same vocation and permeated by the same ideal of service of the young.

We recognise that while over the years there has been a growth in awareness of being the Salesian Family, and of our belief in the importance of the educative and pastoral community, there is still a lack in practice of full sharing of spirit and mission with lay people (GC24). At times we take refuge behind our command and control structures; there is not yet a real sharing of roles and shared tasks of equal responsibility; the attitude is still prevalent whereby we use the services of our close helpers without valuing their specific skills and without entrusting them with responsibility. We can often add to this the

prejudices we have about working with lay people; this impoverishes our sense of family and our spirit of communion.

This communion, beginning in the community, ripples out to the educative and pastoral community and the Salesian Family, and then extends to the local Church and the neighbourhood. With regard to this we note that we must grow more in our sense of belonging to the local Church and in strengthening our relationships within the neighbourhood. Often we see that we are closed within our works and do not succeed in going beyond them; we ought broaden these levels of communion in order to be true prophets of fraternal living.

INTERPRETATION

[32] The Community as a reflection of the Trinity (C. 49)

Our Salesian style of fraternal life is characterised by simple, familiar, close relationships. Thus many see us as people able to offer a witness of visible, legible communion. When communities know how to make room for dialogue, live in an attitude of community discernment and strengthen their relationships in awareness of their vocation, they become a reflection of Trinitarian communion.

The educative and pastoral impact of what we offer needs a setting as an essential condition for putting the preventive system into action. We see that in many of our works this setting is well looked after. Therefore we see the general appreciation people have for what we are offering. At the basis of this are our spiritual experience and the deep motivations of many confreres.

Obstacles to fraternal communion often arise when we forget the deep origins of our fellowship, origins which lie in Trinitarian love; or we may have only a partial vision of what fraternal life is. Sometimes we have allowed ourselves to 'catch the disease' of secularised culture which encourages individualism and particular interests instead of solidarity, or encourages privacy and closing in on ourselves rather than transparency, or facilitates superficiality of relationships instead of deep and lasting bonds. At times the Eucharist is not seen nor experienced as the source and support of communion, and prayer in common which builds and strengthens fraternal life is too easily let go of.

In our listening phase we perceived that the lack of community, that is of fraternal life in common, is a great challenge. The difficulties we encounter in this regard are fundamentally due to the fact that, in practice we tend not to believe that "to live and work together is for us Salesians a fundamental requirement and a sure way of fulfilling our vocation" (C. 49). Through faith we need to nurture a genuine sense of mutual belonging as brothers called together by God.

[33] The thirst for relationships and communication (C. 51)

We have a strong willingness to overcome functional relationships amongst us, to deepen our bonds, communicate our experience of life in depth. Our strong identification with Don

Bosco and the Salesian tradition helps us to create communion. Our sense of family (C. 51), and the setting built upon reciprocal relationships of confidence and affection (C. 16), an educational relationship based on empathy and a willingness to be in contact with the young (C. 39), the spirituality of loving-kindness and close fellow-feeling (C. 20), our “being there” amongst the young: these are all key elements of our charismatic legacy that respond to the great desire for communion and more intense relationships.

Some of the things that hinder our taking up the prophecy of fraternal life can be identified in our inability to see community problems as occasions for growing together - instead they become cause for closure and detachment; or there is a lack of clarity in many active role descriptions leading to interference and the many community meetings that are merely habit; or there is a poor consistency of number and quality of communities; or multiculturalism is not seen nor profited from as a richness for communion. There can be a lack of fraternal correction in confronting cases of confreres in difficulty and thus in refusing to be “my brother's keeper” (Gen 1:4) or there can be an inability to deal with conflict.

To satisfy the thirst for relationships it is not enough to have well-differentiated and distributed roles, tasks and a community experience where life is merely well-organised. We know that this thirst is not quenched except by mature and warm relationships; we feel the need to experience communion by drawing from the sources of spiritual life that sustain all fraternal life. We also recognise the natural tendency to seek our own interests before that of others and our poor notions of the common overall good.

Initial and ongoing formation play a crucial role in preparing people for community life. Psychological immaturity and emotional problems destroy community; therefore we must pay more attention to the human dimension, aware that grace builds on nature. Without a solid human formation, unhealed wounds condition interpersonal relationships. If formation is not personalised, the radical and counter-cultural demands of the Gospel of Jesus, such as unconditional acceptance of the other, taking the first step towards reconciliation, sincere forgiveness, not judging people, gratuitous love etc., are neither taken in nor assimilated.

The digital world too has influenced our relationships. At the root of an inadequate understanding of the Web lies our inability to inhabit the digital world, getting to know its positive and more risky aspects: the immediacy of a broad-based communication offers very many possibilities, but on the other hand presents limitations to establishing deeper bonds: “It is true that we can be in contact with very many people almost anywhere in the world and all at the same time; but the use of these channels of communication does not guarantee communion, since this is always the result of a personal link, of a real relationship with someone who seeks to be acknowledged, recognised and respected in their own individuality ...” (AGC 413, p. 34).

The same ambiguity is found in the world of social networks: groups of people with common interests are set up in it and they communicate amongst themselves frequently and easily enough, but there is a risk of a kind of uniformity which loses a sense of otherness, tension, integration of differences. We need to recognise that candidates who come to the Congregation bring a certain baggage with them: understandings, affections and friendships created on the Web; we need to help them discern and choose the relationships that have emotional resonance, thus guiding them to a more profitable pastoral use of the Web.

[34] Witness of fraternal life (C. 52)

Fraternal life as experienced in community is more visible, credible and fruitful when it is well led by the Rector and sustained by the vocational fidelity of the confreres. When instead there are shows of individualism, or when confreres take no part in drawing up, putting into practice and evaluating the community plan, then the witness of fraternal life is diminished. The Provincial Chapters highlight the fact that self-sufficiency, selfishness, merely functional relationships, an overly-personal management of affairs, absence in community meetings, lack of quality in drawing up and evaluating the community plan, inability to handle conflict, personal unhealed wounds, these things, as well as ruining family spirit, end up in us losing out on the visibility, credibility and fruitfulness of our witness to fraternal life.

At the root of these limitations lies the culture today which projects the notion of the autonomous, self-sufficient and powerful being but overlooks the real limitations and weaknesses of each individual. Relationships where we are not asking for any *quid pro quo*, and looking after our brother remedy this view and lead to right relationships amongst individuals. A community that makes an effort to unite brothers of different cultures, ages and sensitivities to carry forward a common project bears eloquent testimony to the fellowship proclaimed by the Gospel for all humankind, and becomes an appeal to society to practise this attitude of acceptance of diversity.

The Rector “at the centre of the community, a brother among brothers, who recognise his responsibility and authority” (C55), carries out an essential service by animating confreres in their vocation, uniting people and guiding them all towards pastoral and educative objectives. According to the Provincial Chapters dialogue and fraternal colloquy are important tools we need to recover. We need Rectors with an authentic understanding of their role and not allow administrative functions to take precedence over their duty of spiritual, fraternal and apostolic leadership in and of the community.

[35] The Community as the centre of communion (C. 57)

We often find ourselves locked into old schemes of excessive organisation and centralisation where we are at the centre of things, which also reflects on fraternal life and pastoral activity in the educative and pastoral community. These schemes are the remnants of a bureaucratic and hyper-efficient mentality; this seems to be more inspired by an entrepreneurial model from the business world than the sense of Church as a communion of love. We forget that our fraternal life is rooted in the experience of Church and draws its vitality from the Eucharistic 'sap' like branches from the one vine that is Christ. There is the lack of a believer's viewpoint that our fraternal communion is the first circumstance that should bear witness of the mission; it is the clearest prophecy in the face of a world fractured by lacerating divisions.

The hyper-efficient mentality does not allow for a true sharing of roles and shared responsibility of tasks with lay people. We mistrust the skills of lay people who work with us or are afraid of delegating management responsibilities to them. We often lack the ability to work hand in hand with them in a planned way and with a sense of teamwork. Deep-down we have a deficient view of Church as a communion of individuals with different charisms and roles at the service of building the Kingdom. So we have not yet succeeded in fully putting into practice what GC24 said.

When we exercise leadership in the Salesian Family our witness is stronger and more meaningful. Nevertheless, we often ignore accompaniment of the Salesian Family because we are focusing more on the efficiency of our own pastoral work. We are aware that we have a poor ability to lead and animate because we are not convinced of the impact that Salesian Family witness has.

In the same way our belonging to the local Church sometimes leaves something to be desired because we are focusing too much on work within our Works and on our pastoral and educative offering without discovering the wealth of communion as a team. The same goes for our relationships with the local neighbourhood; there seems to be a mentality of self-sufficiency; this leads, maybe without our noticing it, to our presences being closed.

THE WAY FORWARD

GOAL

[36] *Witnessing to fraternal conversion, seeing the worth of interpersonal relationships and visible expressions of fraternal life.*

STEPS TO BE TAKEN

The Confrere...

[37] Concretises the elements of our charismatic legacy for building up fraternal life in his personal plan of life; he seeks ways to mature in his ability to create free and vital bonds and to recognise his own limitations; he commits himself to looking to the source which nurtures his fraternal sense and cultivates the spirituality of communion.

[38] Accepts and practises fraternal correction and values community scrutinies which highlight everything in him that runs counter to community.

[39] Develops the skills that enable him to be a man of communion: dialogue, shared responsibility, shared work, sincere communication, attention to others, etc.

[40] Takes up the means that our tradition offers for building up true family spirit, but in an updated way: the talk with the Rector, community meetings, domestic services, interpersonal communication, sharing his life experience, etc.

The Community...

[41] Draws up a community plan of life as a way of discerning God's will and with a view to guaranteeing common identity, a community overview of apostolic work and attention to communion with lay people who share responsibility with us.

[42] Gives proper place to community day as a genuine opportunity for deeper communication and spiritual and pastoral formation and sees to the formative and fraternal dimensions of regular community meetings.

[43] Creates spaces for co-existence, prayer and formation with the young, lay people and families belonging to the educative and pastoral community and with the Salesian Family.

[44] Draws up and evaluates the pastoral and educative plan with our lay partners, ensuring a unified set of aims to achieve, convergence of strategies to be employed, and creating a stricter communion amongst all.

[45] The Rector gives priority to his principal task which is to look after the confreres and the community in view of a more effective mission; he offers resources for personal and community accompaniment; he sees occasions for community formation, with an effort to update the means offered by our Salesian tradition: the good night, the fraternal talk, monthly recollection, quarterly retreats/recollections, community scrutinies, being close to confreres, especially the young and the elderly.

The Province...

[46] Courageously carries forward the process of *reshaping its presences*, studying how to give greater significance to some, reshape others, open new ones according to needs and new frontiers of the young, and be involved in identifying works to be carried out together with some groups in the Salesian Family.

[47] Sees to *consistency in number and quality of communities*; avoiding consolidating communities without at the same time changing the way works are managed; proposing that certain works come under direct lay responsibility accompanied by the province; it commits to achieving a regular number of confreres in recently opened presences.

[48] Sets up *international communities*, especially in multi-ethnic and multicultural contexts, as prophetic signs and schools of communion amongst the people and in the local Church: encouraging mutual acceptance by community members, seeing the value of differences, recognising common and complementary cultural, charismatic and evangelical aspects.

[49] Accompanies *Rectors* with special care; is committed to formation of confreres to leadership from the specific formation stage and the quinquennium onwards; offers concrete formation programs after they take up responsibility and helps them to be capable of encouraging and leading/animating fraternal life in community, in the educative and pastoral community and the Salesian Family, in the neighbourhood and the local Church.

[50] Ensures that candidates and confreres are accompanied in their growth to emotional *maturity* in formation, beginning with initial formation,.

The Rector Major and Council...

[51] Sees to the updating of the *Rectors Handbook*, paying attention to new developments in the life and guidelines of the Congregation which have matured in a special way over recent General Chapters.

SERVANTS OF THE YOUNG

“All authority in heaven and in earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations, baptise them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And know that I am with you always, yes, to the end of time” (Mt 28:19-20)

LISTENING

[52] Union with God, source of the mission (C. 12)

We are aware that God calls us to service of the young and to follow Christ to be signs and bearers of His love, like Don Bosco. We are also aware that our mission is a participation in God's mission; he sent his Son Jesus, the redeemer, and the Spirit as sanctifier, so our mission is part of the mission of the Church, carried out by the mandate of the risen Lord and animated by the Spirit. Jesus reminds us that our work follows along the lines of his work and the Father's work: “My Father goes on working and so do I” (Jn 5:17). Therefore for us “our highest knowledge... is to know Jesus Christ and our greatest delight is to reveal to all people the unfathomable riches of his mystery” (C. 34).

Through Don Bosco we have received the gift of predilection for youth: “for you I study, for you I work, for you I live, for you I am ready to give my life” (C. 14). This predilection is expressed in the pastoral work which is our way of salvation. By living the radical approach of the Gospel we become more available for the mission to the young. Don Bosco's passion for the salvation of the young is carried out through the preventive system which inspires our way of being present in our mission. We are helped in this by a life style based on a sense of sacrifice, on self-gift and temperance. These strengthen the pastoral work we carry out each day.

We have first-hand experience in our lives that apostolic passion and pastoral charity are in proportion to personal and community spiritual depth; our experience is that the measure of our radical approach and the source of our fruitfulness are determined by apostolic zeal; we are convinced that apostolic passion and pastoral charity do not age. So there is a strict link between pastoral activity and spiritual life.

We recognise the tiredness that comes from loss of a sense of God's presence and from secularism; such circumstances weaken our identity first of all, also transforming much of our work into frenetic activity without an apostolic and charismatic perspective to it. We are well aware that this deadening of our union with God leads to poverty of pastoral reflection, lack of creativity in proclaiming the Gospel, weakening of our presence amongst the young. The source of our fruitfulness and effectiveness in apostolic work comes from living the grace of unity and union with God.

[53] Community as the subject of mission (C. 44)

By vocation and our apostolic mission, we Salesians work in community where all confreres offer their contribution to common pastoral activity. The community is open to involving lay people, to young people playing their part, to working closely with families, aware that the mission is shared with all the educative and pastoral community. Service to the young is also a charismatic gift of the entire Salesian Family; we Salesians are responsible for keeping this gift alive, drawing attention to it, improving it. The Salesian community is the subject of involvement in the mission, by letting everyone help and by moving ahead in the spirit of communion; sometimes however lay people are still seen more as agents or collaborators than as people who share responsibility with us.

We know that working as a team in the context of the community is a difficulty; at times our communities go through pastoral tensions because of the dialectic between listening to the world with all its challenges and the pastoral *modus operandi* of the community which can often be outdated and detached from reality. At other times generation gaps in the community create conflict situations. We are however convinced that the community dimension of the mission is crucial for the educational, evangelising and vocational effectiveness of our activity.

We pay the price for not being sufficiently committed to formation, updated according to the pastoral guidelines of the Congregation. There is resistance to evolution of our works so they will be kept alive in a way that responds to the questions that come from young people; sometimes we are more concerned with preservation and perpetuation of these very works. In this field the Rector, who has the specific task of providing leadership in pastoral discernment, involving everyone in apostolic activity, risks finding himself in difficulty in the face of differing pastoral mentalities.

[54] Our presence amongst the young (C.39)

We recognise that our presence amongst the young is where we encounter God and it is where we can show them that He is close to them. In the Salesian tradition presence amongst the young is known as “assistance”; we feel the need to explore the meaning of this more fully and get our young confreres and lay people to put it into practice. It is a presence expressed through empathy, physical closeness which accompanies and leads/animates, a commitment to be ever closer to young people and show them that we are with them. We feel challenged by the young, and we learn from their questions; it is thanks to them that we feel encouraged to renew ourselves.

Our presence amongst the young challenges us to look to the future and thus know how to read the “signs of the times”. Pastoral discernment becomes an intense and positive interpretation of the social and youthful reality; it becomes an ability to question ourselves regarding the world's desire for justice, the peoples' hopes in life, the need for spirituality stemming from our times; at the same time it opens us up to the truth that lies behind the tragedies, break-ups, labours, misunderstandings and injustices that our world creates and that youthful generations suffer to the point where their future is stolen from them. Attention to the signs of the times urges and stimulates us to engage in a mission which is keener, truer, closer to the young, as we are taught by looking at Don Bosco. We recognise the positive attitudes of the young regarding our mission and we appreciate the testimony of our sick and elderly confreres who continue to live out their mission to youth even though in a different way; we are grateful to God for this.

We are aware that this does not always happen and we know the “cultural distances” even before there are the generational ones, aware that they are a brake on pastoral activity and our presence amongst the young themselves. These distances have real consequences: zeal is snuffed out, there is a lack of acceptance of and closeness to the world of the young; we can find ourselves separated from it out of ignorance, fear and misunderstanding; lack of creativity and passion in pastoral planning; rigidity and digging in to secure positions. When this happens, young people cease to be our principle concern.

The Provincial Chapters underline the difficulty of reaching out to the young where they live: various confreres manifest fear of them, have a sense of inadequacy, or even just plainly refuse to be with them; a few Salesians work directly with the young but prefer to “hide” behind roles and managerial positions; a prevalence of work in institutional settings is noted; there are still few works for needy youngsters and few courageous pastoral efforts on new frontiers. There is a lack of concrete proposals of spirituality and adequate faith curricula. At times we tip too far in the direction of social and educational programs and approaches meaning that education takes prevalence over evangelisation. We are not always able to tap into the desire of young people to play their own active part, or their positiveness. All the above highlights not only the difficulty of being there amongst the young, but more profoundly the clouding of awareness of the meaning and practice of assistance that effectively invalidates our educational and accompanying presence each time.

We still find ourselves in the early stages where the digital world is concerned and we are weak in reflecting on the positive side of this grand new continent. In our pastoral work we often see the absence of the family as an interlocutor in education of the young, and a lack on our part of family ministry.

[55] Our service to the young (C. 31)

Our educational and pastoral approach is made concrete in the practice of the preventive system based on reason, religion and loving-kindness and on assistance as a close, animating and accompanying presence.

We are overcoming a way of thinking that confuses mission with activities, and are seeking to be servants of the young, not of works or structures. We are engaged in personal accompaniment in addition to community accompaniment, guiding each young person to realising God's dream for him or her. The not always clear relationship between education and evangelisation does not help us to spiritually accompany the young. We are grateful to God for the ecclesial and social significance our works continue to play, and for the service to the young who are in difficult circumstances; we are also involved in reaching out to so many poor youngsters, moving ahead with a culture of human rights.

We note the struggle we have in preparing young people to take on responsibility in society, with the ability to transform it according to the spirit of the Gospel as agents of justice and peace, and with an acute social sensitivity that can discern what are the structures of injustice and sin. The same situation is also found in preparing young people to be active in the Church. We lack attention to forming young people in leadership. Our pastoral work must also pay more attention to multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious situations young people live in, helping them to overcome barriers of gender, ethnicity, nationality, culture, religion and social status.

There is often a kind of generic approach prevailing in pastoral work: plenty of work but the activity is emptied of charismatic significance. Our works continue to be full of young people but the pastoral quality we offer them is lacking at times. The balance tips too far towards education instead of seeing to a strong educational but also evangelising proposal. The lack of pastoral quality shows up in our not always knowing how to be a point of reference for the Church and the neighbourhood we find ourselves in, and in not knowing how to tap into the young who do not go to Church or come to us.

It is often the case that young people leave our pastoral work when they arrive at the stage where they are making choices for life and taking social or professional directions. We also note that amongst the young people who are with us we do not always know how to accompany them as they make their life choices, and in the direction they take in vocational terms. And in a particular way amongst all vocational possibilities we still see an insufficient vocational accompaniment and care for apostolic vocations and the vocation to Salesian consecrated life in both its forms; thus our faith journeys are not reaching their point of culmination.

INTERPRETATION

[56] Union with God, source of the mission (C. 12)

The positive aspects noted by Provincial Chapters and indicated in the 'listening' phase are based on the certainty that our vocation is fruitful if lived by God's energy and the grace of unity. The source of our apostolic passion is the ongoing awareness of being called and sent by God, consecrated for a mission, following the example of Jesus the Son of Man and servant of all, who *"did not come to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many"* (Mk 10:45). We well know that the mission is not ours, but is participation in God's mission and the mission of the Church, as Don Bosco did, cooperating with everyone, going out to everyone, especially those who are poorer. This fidelity is our guarantee for the future; Jesus reminds us: *"without me you can do nothing"* (Jn 15:5).

We live our identity as consecrated people and we measure the Gospel's radical approach in our daily lives by our awareness of the mission God has entrusted us with: *"resolved to carry out the Founder's apostolic plan in a specific form of religious life: to be in the Church signs and bearers of the love of God for young people, especially those who are poor"* (C. 2). This commitment to being *"signs of God's love for the young"* determines our way of understanding the quality of our life as consecrated persons, of our radical Gospel approach and the absolute primacy of God. Only from this source can we animate lay people with whom we share our life and mission and open ourselves to a vocational reciprocity which is mutually enriching.

In practical terms we share Don Bosco's conviction that young people are good, and that this was something he could work on, and his positive view of humankind as created by God, redeemed by his Son and sanctified by the Spirit. We are convinced that the Salesian Family has a great contribution to make to the salvation of the young including those outside the Church. The Church's push for renewal through new evangelisation and educating to a good life according to the Gospel also renew and stir up our apostolic zeal.

We know that we do not always live the “grace of unity” as a visible credible and fruitful testimony; we are aware that we cannot be true servants of the young if we are not at the same time mystics in the Spirit and prophets of fraternal life. The reasons for our fragmented lives is our seeking comfort and our lack of temperance, which smother the fire of sacrifice and dedication to the good of the young. In our relationships with the young and with people generally, temperance allows us to be close to them but with the necessary distance for a true pastoral and educative relationship. Amongst the treasures of our tradition and history we also note that at times we sell out on the notion of the Salesian mission by limiting it solely to our own works for the young.

Cultural changes put us in difficulty; little awareness of what is so rapidly undergoing change, the struggle in giving time to ongoing formation and our poor commitment to charismatic updating all dampen our energies. At the same time the weakening of spirituality and loss of a sense of God's presence, as also individualism in action and a lack of fellowship, lessen the impact of the mission.

[57] The community, subject of mission (C. 44)

Our “living and working together” is a widespread energy for good and leads us to greater shared responsibility with the educative and pastoral community following the educative and pastoral plan, and this allows us to share our charism with lay people, sharing responsibility with them, and with young people and families. This participative style in a family spirit is the essential condition for the effectiveness of our pastoral activity; experienced in community, it is also passed on to others with whom we work.

Communities which have little significance in terms of number and quality can strongly weaken the mission. Claims to seniority in certain contexts in community dynamics can be a weakening element, where there is little involvement and shared responsibility. We are aware that the role of the Rector, because of its fundamental importance, needs to be rethought and updated in this context.

When there is a lack of real planning and evaluation, both at a local and/or province level we are stuck with the current structures and institutions, and end up losing the community witness dimension in the mission. This is also a reason for our struggle in rethinking communities and works which are obedient to the reality, not evaluating everything we do, but just doing what we can do well. This explains how in some contexts we do not always know how to involve lay people and the young so they can share responsibility for the life of the educative and pastoral community.

[58] Our presence amongst the young (C.39)

We recognise the roots of some essential conditions that allow us to be true servants of the young: presence, empathy, a desire to proclaim the Gospel and foster their holistic growth, our availability to accompany them. These are the kinds of energies that determine the joy we experience in being with the young and our ability to stay with them. Only presence can allow us to understand their real needs.

We place ourselves explicitly amongst those who are committed to building an educative path of fraternal accompaniment of the young, thus allowing each and every one to have

an experience of hope leading to a personal encounter with God. This happens by paying particular attention to pastoral ministry, education to love, building up a civic sense by handing on the social teaching of the Church, vocational accompaniment. The loss of this perspective determines our separation from the young, the smothering of creativity in approaching them, the lack of flexibility in transforming our works. We become rigid in forms and hard in our interpretation of the youth situation, losing our ability to understand what is positive and allowing ourselves to be challenged by that.

Worth highlighting in a particular way is the loss of meaning of assistance, therefore of our concrete presence amongst the young. This is due to cultural distance, but especially to diminished pastoral zeal and as a consequence a diminished sense of the pastoral urgency of salvation of the young entrusted to us; it is also due to rigid ways of thinking from leading to a lack of understanding of our times and of the young, with all that is positive about them. Or it can be due to the complexity of our works where often times we sink to organisational and managerial tasks which take us away from the front line of the mission. We also note that this struggle we have in being present and practising assistance also comes from our poor formation and the formation we give those who work closely with us in the meaning and depth of presence: presence is the channel for accompaniment and whatever we are proposing. For many the preventive system is only an educational method and not a school of spirituality; this touches off a radical change of viewpoint in contrast to Don Bosco's.

The influence of secularism on the young leads to a weakening of their search for God in so many contexts; and this same influence tends to dampen our apostolic zeal. We are in daily contact with difficult situations experienced by families and which we try to take on board. Through a lack of temperance we are now carrying the burden of paedophilia and other deformities which, if they do not separate us from others, separate others from us.

[59] Our service to the young (C. 31)

We find our way to holiness in a pastoral and educative commitment which we live out daily in generous dedication. This is a prophecy for our time: "The history of the Church, from antiquity down to our own day, is full of admirable examples of consecrated persons who have sought and continue to seek holiness through their involvement in education, while at the same time proposing holiness as the goal of education. Indeed, many of them have arrived at the perfection of charity through teaching. This is one of the most precious gifts that consecrated people today can offer to young people, instructing them in a way that is full of love, following the wise counsel of Saint John Bosco: "The young must not only be loved, but must also know they are loved." (VC 96)

The path of reflection that the Congregation has traversed over these years on the identity of Salesian youth ministry is considered a source of important and special growth, a point of reference for provinces and communities. The bicentenary of Don Bosco's birth spurs us on to an imitation of our Founder and his zeal, to deepening our charismatic identity and to the study and updating of the preventive system. The opening to all kinds of youth poverty is a guarantee of fidelity to our charism, as also our involvement in new evangelisation, in proposing education programs and curricula and in learning to accompany the young in their growth and in discovering their vocation.

We see that a lack of real planning and evaluation, both at local and province level, is the root of generic pastoral activity. If we do not see to thinking things through and updating

we can only do what we have always done. In losing a sense of God's presence, under the influence of the secularised culture in which we live we risk becoming employees and not apostles. Our unpreparedness for rapid cultural change encourages this generic approach and lack of pastoral quality. We end up wasting our educational and evangelising efforts because we lack in-depth knowledge young people and their demands. The structural circumstances of our works or our superficial and bourgeois life style are also reasons for lack of quality and merely generic activity. They dissipate and impoverish the power of our charism and the preventive system and hinder the growth of shared responsibility with lay people.

The lack of pastoral quality leads us to our inability to prepare the young to play an active role in life in society and the Church. They do not come to us to be accompanied but go to others; at the same time our separation from them means we disappear from their horizons. Our youth ministry proposals show up as weak; reflection on our pastoral and educative proposals by provinces and communities is insufficient at times; as is also their evaluation. Also from the point of view of evangelisation and looking after vocations to apostolic and consecrated life we are often weak in what we propose and inadequate in accompanying individuals, relying instead on broad-based proposals to the masses. In this field especially we feel the weight of the secular atmosphere with the loss of the sense of God that compromises our very understanding of the call, beginning with the vocation to family.

WAY FORWARD

GOAL

[60] *Promoting pastoral conversion, seeing to apostolic discernment in community and committing ourselves to presence amongst the young.*

STEPS TO BE TAKEN

The Confrere...

[61] Looks after his spiritual life, which makes him more open to the motivations and inspirations of the Spirit, by drawing up and evaluating the pastoral dimension of his personal plan of life, asking the Rector's advice and that of his spiritual director.

[62] Studies documents on the Salesian mission to discover how it is based on the mission of God and the Church which we are part of; he also studies the dynamics of the spirituality of the preventive system, being also informed by the Scriptures, the Church's Magisterium and the tradition of the Congregation.

[63] Plays a part in community dialogue, seeking God's will in view of the common mission and is involved in sharing the spirit and mission of Don Bosco with lay people within the educative and pastoral community and from the point of view of the pastoral and educative plan.

[64] Makes sure he is amongst the young and looks to the meaning of assistance in creating educational relationships, with special attention to new frontiers and the poorest situations, to spiritual accompaniment and fostering vocations.

[65] He accepts the conclusions that community discernment comes to (C. 66) with an open heart and generously applies himself to the decisions of the community he belongs to.

The Community...

[66] Interprets situations, especially the situation of the young, and seeks God's will with a prayer to the Holy Spirit and by drawing up a community plan, where discernment is part of that dynamic; the Rector plays a particular role in leading this pastoral discernment.

[67] Points to the sources of inspiration for pastoral discernment: the Word of God, the Constitutions, the signs of the times, the frame of reference for youth ministry, the province's pastoral and educative plan ... It sees that the confreres are in circumstances where they have the time to make this discernment meaningful.

[68] Enters into dialogue so it can generously and courageously seek the pastoral options best suited to the needs of the young in response to God's expectations of us, with particular attention to poverty in the world and new frontiers and vocation ministry.

[69] Creates an atmosphere of cooperation and shared responsibility in the mission involving the Salesian Family and lay people in the educative and pastoral community; it keeps the Salesian community's testimony alive as the animating core of the educative and pastoral community.

The Province...

[70] Highlights criteria for significance in drawing up the Province's Strategic Plan and Educative and Pastoral Plan on the basis of: the identity of the Province, the challenges in the area it covers, Salesian presence, and the Salesian Family.

[71] Forms confreres and communities to pastoral practices and discernment that overcome individualism and other ways where they simply dig in or remain closed.

[72] Accompanies and sees to formation of Rectors in their task of pastoral discernment, listening to them, supporting them and comforting them.

[73] Helps Salesian communities and pastoral and educative communities to assimilate and put into practice the frame of reference for youth ministry.

The Rector Major and Council...

[74] Provides evaluation tools for criteria to be used by Provinces in pastoral discernment on the basis of the Congregation's frame of reference