

GC27
***An opportunity for belonging more to God,
the confreres, the young.***

*“Whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty,
for cut off from me you can do nothing.
It is to the glory of my Father
that you should bear much fruit,
and become my disciples.”
(Jn. 15:5.8)*

Dear Confreres,

With this address of mine, and the final greetings we will exchange, we conclude our 27th General Chapter, a true and proper time of Grace and Presence of the Spirit.

I believe we have translated what is indicated in our Constitutions into reality. It has been a particularly important occasion, a “sign of the Congregation's unity in diversity” (C. 146) in which, at a meeting which has certainly been fraternal, we have brought to completion the community reflection which will help us remain faithful to the Gospel and the Charism of our Founder, and sensitive to the needs of times and places (cf. C. 146). Through these simple pages which I am addressing to the confreres at the Chapter and all the confreres of the Congregation, I would like to offer some points that seem to me to be the more important ones to accompany the reflection and assimilation of what is central: what the General Chapter is offering the entire Congregation as the result of its work, reflection and the life we shared while it was taking place.

1. A BRIEF LOOK AT THE DIFFERENT STAGES OF GC27

The seven weeks we have spent as a General Chapter have been marked by various moments which have given it its own special character and which have helped our journey to be a more profound one:

- We began our Chapter in Turin and surrounds *with a personal and community Pilgrimage* to **‘our birthplace: the Becchi’**. With great insight, the Rector Major, Fr Pascual Chávez, proposed beginning our journey with this Icon that we so much love: all of us, given that we are Salesians, were born at the Becchi. It was, then, a return to the place of our birth, not only Don Bosco's. Our Salesian heart felt enveloped, there is no doubt, by that historical and spiritual atmosphere. Places like the Becchi and Colle Don Bosco, Valdocco (Pinardi Chapel, St Francis de Sales and the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians ..), Valsalice, the Consolata and the church of St John the Evangelist ... were scenarios which challenged us strongly but in a beautiful climate of meditation, prayer and fellowship. We began getting to know each other more, and better, and laying the foundations for what was a very special feature of our GC27: a strong experience of communion and fraternity along with the diversity and universality of our Congregation.

Many of us were not coming to this *‘birthplace’* for the first time since we had already been there, but this occasion was marked by something quite singular: the *hic et nunc* of the General Chapter. Other confreres were visiting *‘the Becchi’* and

“our holy places” for the first time, as a spiritual and charismatic experience to be relived, a space and occasion for remaining more united and ‘conquered’ by the fascination that Don Bosco awakens in everyone and especially in us, his sons. Undoubtedly these were days that touched everyone's heart profoundly, because the Becchi and Valdocco never leave someone with a Salesian heart feeling indifferent.

- When we arrived in Rome we dedicated some days to **the presentation and understanding of the state of the Congregation**, with the Rector Major's report and presentations by various Sectors and Regions. The consignment of the book containing all the items on the state of the Congregation concluded this well-prepared occasion where we had a presentation of data, statistics, evaluation of the six year programme showing goals achieved and indicating the shortcomings that we recognise. It certainly was a great help in getting to know this report better so we could be more aware of the reality of our Congregation with its lights and shadows, and with the certainty that we are all the Congregation and we all give it life and light or limit it by our shortcomings.

The report really did allow us to focus more precisely on further approaches to the theme awaiting us as the core of GC27.

- I believe it would not be an exaggeration to say that during **the days of Retreat**, right from the outset we were surrounded by a very special atmosphere.

On various occasions over the days and weeks that followed, we have shown the belief that we were experiencing very important moments of Faith, Hope and the Presence of the Spirit. In this regard, we experienced these Spiritual Exercises as being focused on interpreting what the Word of God was saying to us, in attentive silence, many personal and community moments of prayer, well-prepared celebrations of the Eucharist and a Reconciliation celebration in which we all felt joyfully involved. And all this - framed by reflections inviting us, on the basis of the Gospel, authenticity - prepared us for what we then experienced as we worked on things during the days that followed.

I have the feeling that a spiritual and faith experience was engendered in us, at a personal and community level, where we expressed the very best of ourselves. When one experiences *abandonment* to God's love, a Love that is always *healing* in itself, the Spirit sees that each individual is ready to give of his best. And I believe this was the vital attitude with which we began the work of the Chapter properly so-called.

- **The first three weeks** of Chapter work were marked by that involvement in work which allowed us to make contact with the challenge proposed in the Rector Major's letter of convocation: *being Witnesses to the radical approach of the Gospel as Mystics in the Spirit, Prophets of Fraternity and Servants of the Young*. The work in commissions and their first contribution to the assembly gave us the sense of having many lights and some shadows that we would not want to let hinder us from being, in reality, what we were dreamed of being, the beautiful choice we made of our religious and consecrated life as Disciples of the Lord in Don Bosco's style.

In those first moments I was able to read a kind of nostalgia between the lines: being able to look at the reality of every community, every Salesian presence, every Province and the whole Congregation. It is truly a living body filled with authenticity, so a body in which we suffer when one or other of us does not achieve the desired

heights or where the attitudes proper to someone who truly loves the young, looks after their lives, gives Life and gives them their own life, are lacking. We felt a desire to *fly higher* through truth, authenticity, and by being radical, and felt that at times we do not even succeed in getting off the ground.

The Rector Major, Fr Pascual Chávez, invited us to look ahead, with hopeful realism and courage, when it comes time to propose challenges as a Congregation.

Following this, the reflections, dialogue, interventions in the auditorium took place for the most part in tune with this climate.

Let me add something else. The fruits of our Chapter cannot consist merely in looking for novelty. The strength of GC27 first of all passes through the personal conversion and transformation of spirit and mind of all who take part; it is communicated through our ability to enthuse our confreres and communicate the 'Good News' to them of what we experienced and heard, of what we dreamed and shared, the fellowship we experienced over these weeks. And all this in the hope of being able to generate life and arouse the desire to tackle with true courage this new moment of our Congregation and our life in our Provinces: a new moment of evangelisation and passion for the young.

- Accompanied in a special way in discernment by Fr José Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, we began the week that led us to **the election of the new Rector Major and General Council**.

Much of what has been said about the pilgrimage to the Salesian holy places and the Retreat, was made concrete that week. Everyone experienced it with his own sensitivities and very personal resonances, but I dare say that most of us feel that it was a week of searching for the best from the point of view of faith: a quest made conscientiously, in freedom and truth. I believe I would not be the only one to say that what was approved as the method for electing Sector Councillors was a success. It could also be that a further exploration of this in the next General Chapter could allow us to perfect the method a little further, even extend this discernment to the election of the Rector Major, his Vicar and Regional Councillors.

The week was marked therefore, by a profound experience of inquiry, in the truth that comes from the Spirit, and also of true gratitude for those who accepted a new responsibility and even more so for the confreres finishing six years or more of service, beginning with the Rector Major, Fr Pascual Chávez, his Vicar, Fr Adrian Bregolin and the other members of the General Council. They gave of their very best over these years, with unlimited dedication to the good of the Congregation and the mission. Moving applause, such as at the Goodnight by the Rector Major, Fr Pascual Chávez, was a clear manifestation of this deep gratitude.

- On Monday 31 March we received a much awaited gift. **The audience with Pope Francis** certainly fulfilled the expectations of even the most demanding of us. The Pope fascinated us by his empathy and simplicity, which are so much spoken of, but also with his spontaneity and his much applauded decision to personally greet every member of our Chapter Assembly. Each confrere was presented by Fr Pascual Chávez and since I was by his side, I was witness to this very special moment.

Moreover, we took away with us a message from Pope Francis that cannot be reduced to a simple anecdote amongst us. In fact it must form part of our Chapter conclusions, these final words of mine and also of the planning and decision-making

that will be up to the Rector Major with his Council, and Chapter members in their provinces, once they have returned.

The Pope underscored many important things for us, some of which I simply list here, and other that will be developed in the following pages:

- ✓ “We need to prepare the young to work in society according to the spirit of the Gospel, as workers of justice and peace, and to play a pivotal part in the Church”.
- ✓ “Always keep Don Bosco and the young before you, Don Bosco with his motto: ‘*Da mihi animas, cetera tolle.*’ He strengthened this programme with two other elements: work and temperance.”
- ✓ “May the poverty of Don Bosco and Mama Margaret inspire every Salesian and each of your communities to an essential and austere life which is close to the poor, transparent and responsible in its management of goods.”
- ✓ “Going out to marginalised youngsters requires courage, maturity and much prayer. And you need to send the best people for this kind of work! The best.”
- ✓ “Thanks be to God you do not live and work as isolated individuals, but as a community: thank God for this!”
- ✓ “Apostolic vocations are ordinarily the result of good Youth Ministry. Care of vocations requires specific attention ...”

2. KEYS FOR INTERPRETING THE REFLECTIONS OF GC27

2.1. LIKE DON BOSCO, CAUGHT UP IN GOD’S STORYLINE

“Through our religious profession we offer ourselves to God in order to follow Christ and work with him in building up the Kingdom.” (C. 3).

We recognise in our Chapter document that even though the times we are living in are not the best ones for transcendence we do desire, both personally and as communities to give primacy to God in our life, encouraged by Salesian holiness and the thirst for authenticity that young people have. The Pope invited us to this when at the beginning of his greeting he told us: “when one thinks of working for the good of souls, one overcomes the temptation to spiritual worldliness, and seeks no other thing than God and his Kingdom.” This was Don Bosco’s great certainty and passion, that he was so completely caught up in ‘*God’s storyline*’ and, abandoning himself to Him, he pushed on to the point of recklessness.

It is in this transcendent dimension, in ensuring that all of our life is caught up in *God’s storyline* and that He has *pre-eminence in our lives*, that we find our strength when this becomes reality, and it is also where we discover our fragility.

We are called to take our heart, mind and all our energies back to the 'beginning' and the 'origins', to our first love where we experienced *the joy of being looked upon by the Lord Jesus* and for which we said yes. We want to experience the primacy of God in daily contemplation of ordinary existence, in following Christ.

As I suggested just a few lines earlier, it is here that our major conversion has to take place. Certainly we find many confreres who are exemplary in this aspect, however when so many Rectors Major (just to refer to the most recent: Fr Viganò, Fr Vecchi and Fr Pascual Chávez) have warned us of this fragility, it means that it is something we have to take seriously. GC27 invites us to turn this tendency around. It would be really worrying if someone came to the conclusion that 'the fragility we see in living the primacy of God in our lives' was something that was part of our Salesian DNA. It is not! It was not for Don Bosco who, on the contrary, lived by being radically caught up in *God's storyline*. Therefore, for us it is nothing more and nothing less than *the central point of our conversion, what leads us to being much more radical for the Kingdom*.

2.2. A FRATERNITY THAT IS 'IRRESISTIBLY' PROPHETIC

"Our apostolic mission, our fraternal community and the practice of the evangelical counsels are the inseparable elements of our consecration." (C. 3)

On different occasions during the Chapter assembly we have manifested the conviction that fraternity experienced as community is one of the ways of having an experience of God, of experiencing the mysticism of fraternity in a world where at times human relationships are so damaged. "*Fraternity experienced in community*, made up of acceptance, respect, mutual help, understanding, courtesy, forgiveness and cheerfulness, testifies to the humanising power of the Gospel", Pope Francis also told us.

And this is another key for interpreting not only the Chapter document but especially our life and the revision we are making of it and which we want to continue making. Young people need us to really be their brothers—brothers who, with the simplicity and family spirit typical of Don Bosco, experience an authentic fraternity which, though not exempt from daily problems, grows and is purified by faith to the point where it becomes 'counter-cultural' and attractive as the Gospel proposes it be.

In the *Prophecy of true fraternity experienced in the simplicity of daily life* we have a great opportunity for renewal and growth.

This will also often mean a change of mentality. Not infrequently, at the four corners of the earth where our Congregation has been established, we run a certain risk of sacrificing the community, our fellowship and at times even our communion, for the sake of work, activity, including sheer activism. Hence our Constitutions, with preventive pedagogy, say that the three elements of our consecration are inseparable. When one of them is weak or non-existent, we cannot speak of consecration as it belongs to Don Bosco's charism; it will be something else, but it will not be Salesian.

2.3. A VERY SALESIAN WAY OF BEING RADICAL: "WORK AND TEMPERANCE"

"Work and temperance will make the Congregation flourish" (C. 18). We know this word couple so well that Fr Viganò, in his reflections on the Grace of unity, defined them as 'inseparable'. "The two weapons armed with which", Don Bosco wrote, "we will succeed in winning over everything and everyone." (Don Bosco as quoted in AGC, 413, p.43).

The Pope also referred to this word couple as he spoke to us in the audience while encouraging us with this challenge: "Temperance refers to a sense of balance, being content, being simple. May the poverty of Don Bosco and Mama Margaret inspire each Salesian and each community to an essential and austere life, one that is close to the poor, transparent, responsible in managing goods."

In our Chapter reflection we have expressed various indications in this respect. The teaching that Fr Pascual Chávez left us regarding these two words in his letter of convocation of GC27 is very clear, and we can read Fr Vecchi and Fr Viganò speaking similarly. There is no lack of enlightenment on this. I believe that the challenge must pass into our life, and while it is certain that in so many parts of the Congregation we have presences which have the least, the poor, the excluded as their priority, it is equally certain that the radiance of this testimony will be full if our way of life is characterised by sobriety, austerity and also poverty. Undoubtedly the confrontation with this reality that we have professed passes via each one's own conscience, but we have to help one another in the community over these six years. We are invited to act in such a way that the testimony of poverty and sobriety becomes more evident where it is lacking. Any movement, advance, turn around in our various Provinces in this regard will be a show of authenticity and will make the radical Gospel approach we are proposing more concrete.

2.4. SERVANTS OF THE YOUNG, OWNING NOTHING AND NO ONE ...

“Our vocation is graced by a special gift of God: predilection for the young. “That you are young is enough to make me love you very much”. This love is an expression of pastoral charity and gives meaning to our whole life.” (C. 14).

With Don Bosco we follow the Lord Jesus who placed a child at the centre when asked who was the most important in the Kingdom. We Salesians of Don Bosco, *carried in the womb at the Becchi like him* and born in Valdocco, have offered our life to the Father to be consecrated for Him, so we can live for the young. As we have put it in the Chapter document, the young are “*our burning bush*” (Cf. Ex 3:2 ff). In them God speaks to us and awaits us in them. They are the reason why we felt able to say yes to the Lord's call; they are the reason for our life as Salesians, educators, pastors of the young. How could we only go halfway? How could we only work some of the time as if we were dealing with a working day? And even more so, how can we remain at peace when in our suburb, area, city there are poverty-stricken young people, loneliness, family violence, aggression by those who have power over them...?

We are called to give them a voice in circumstances where they have none, called to offer them friendship, help, acceptance, the presence of an adult who likes them, who only wants them to be happy, ‘here and in eternity’. To be their friends, brothers, educators and fathers who only want them to play their part and be masters of their own lives.... Only from this key perspective is it possible to be a servant and never a master, employer, “authority”...

3. WHERE TO DIRECT OUR FUTURE CHOICES FOLLOWING GC27

As can be easily understood in an address such as this, I do not pretend to be suggesting all the options we can take after this Chapter. Just being part of it, the ample reflections we shared, and the study we made of the state of the Congregation allows us to glimpse some of the ways forward that I consider to be essential and of prior concern. Provinces no doubt will establish some other options appropriate to their context and circumstances,

always within the framework of GC27.

I merely list those that seem to me to be more universal and of priority. Later the General Council in its subsequent planning, and Provinces with theirs, can establish an appropriate set of strategies to follow throughout the Salesian world.

3.1. KNOWLEDGE, STUDY AND ASSIMILATION OF GC27

In some of the early interventions in the assembly hall, as also in commission meetings, there was a concern that we achieve a *final document* not destined to end up in a library, making no impact on renewal. With a view to overcoming this fear I consider that the first step has to be a commitment on the part of us all to think of ways and a spiritual approach – rather than simple strategies – that can encourage a knowledge of what GC27 offers the whole Congregation. Later, I invite you to find an appropriate manner of arriving at personal and community assimilation including conversion (if the Spirit grants this to us). Only this assimilation and conversion will generate *new life*.

I believe it would be an error to think that by encouraging knowledge of GC27 at a Retreat or a weekend meeting, the objective has been achieved.

This is why I am proposing that we dedicate at least these first three years to reading it, reflecting on it, meditating on it, and making it the object of our local and provincial planning, and of the various animation and government plans of the Provinces; evaluating it then at the next Provincial Chapter (the one known as the Intermediary Provincial Chapter) to see what results it is producing.

3.2. DEPTH OF INTERIOR LIFE: WITNESSES TO THE GOD OF LIFE

As I have shown in previous pages I believe that we recognise in the Congregation that, speaking in general terms, *depth of interior life is not our strength*. I resist thinking, I told you, that this is part of our Salesian DNA, because Don Bosco was not like that nor did he want us to be. And with the recognition of this weakness (abundantly expressed by previous Rectors Major, and also some General Chapters), with the help of the Holy Spirit we need to find the strength to reverse this trend. It requires authentic conversion to the Gospel's radical approach, which needs to touch hearts and minds. When Pope John Paul II was talking about Consecrated Life, he asked that we put spiritual life '*in first place*'. He was not inviting us to a strange kind of spiritualism but to depth in life that at the same time makes us really brothers, generous, giving ourselves to others, to the mission and especially to the poorest ones. This makes our choice of life truly attractive.

This depth of life, this authenticity, this radical Gospel approach, this way to holiness is the "most precious gift we can offer to the young" (C. 25). In fact we cannot explain Don Bosco's radical predilection for the young without Jesus Christ. "In following (sequela) Christ we find the source, the watershed of his originality and vitality. This is an initial gift from on High, the 'first charism' of Don Bosco". (Fr Viganò, AGC 290, p.16).

This is why I dare to suggest that each Local community could 'tell itself' in a concrete way, and as a result of GC27, what it thinks and proposes could be done about putting 'God in first place', being a Salesian community called by the Lord, that not only meets but lives in his name.

3.3. LOOKING AFTER OURSELVES, LOOKING AFTER OUR CONFRERES, LOOKING AFTER OUR COMMUNITIES

“This is why we come together in communities, where our love for each other leads us to share all we have in a family spirit, and so create communion between person and person” (C. 49).

For us Salesians community life, ‘communion of life in common’, is not only a circumstance, a way of organising ourselves, a way of being more effective in our activity. For us the authentic fellowship we experience in communion of persons is essential, constitutive; it is one of the three inseparable elements which the already cited article 3 of our Constitutions speaks of.

The power of our witness of evangelical fraternity is why I invite everyone to be really aware that we have to look after ourselves, to be well and vocationally fit, and we have to look after our confreres in the community with attitudes of real “acceptance, respect, mutual help, understanding, courtesy, forgiveness and cheerfulness” (audience with the Pope), experiencing true brotherly love which, in the end, accepts and integrates differences and combats loneliness and isolation; and we also have to look after our communities in the Provinces.

I have already implied this earlier. We often sacrifice community life, spaces and occasions for the sake of work. In the end this costs us too many very painful bills.

This is why I ask each Province to carry out a real study and practical effort to look after and consolidate our communities, ensuring a robust human quality and also quantity of confreres, even at the price of there not being a religious community in some presences, and making progress in giving new meaning to and reshaping Houses and Provinces, as has been asked of us in recent years and in various team visits to the Regions.

We certainly have to overcome great resistance that comes from emotion, from having spent so many years in a house, from the pressure of the educative community itself, the suburb or citizens associations, right up to local and regional government ..., however the foreseeable difficulties should not impair either our clarity or our capacity to act in prudent freedom.

3.4. IT IS ENOUGH THAT YOU ARE YOUNG FOR ME TO LOVE YOU

In GC26 we read that returning to the young means ‘being in the playground’, and we know that being in the playground goes well beyond physical space. It is wanting to be with and amongst them, meeting up with them in our daily life, getting to know their world, encouraging them to play their part, accompanying the awakening of their sense of God and boldly encouraging them to live their lives as the Lord Jesus lived his.

When we contemplate Don Bosco in what those who have studied him tell us about him, and in the fascination he himself awakens, we are struck by the force of his vocational passion for the young. Fr Ricceri wrote something in one of his letters that I think is very beautiful when he said: “The pastoral predilection for youngsters and older youth showed up in Don Bosco as a kind of ‘passion’, or better, as his ‘super vocation’ to which he dedicated himself, avoiding every obstacle and leaving aside everything, good though it may be, which could hinder this in any way” (AGC 284, 1976, p.31).

Predilection for the young became the basic and most fundamental option in his life, and it is the mission of the Congregation. We find much already written about this, and thought

through concerning this reality of Don Bosco. Our General Chapters also tell us this. The most recent of them, GC26 dedicated a number of guidelines to “returning to the young”.

As a Chapter Assembly we did not speak of 'returning to the young', and because of this I am not sure to what extent it was realised over the last six years, however it will always be something that will continue to be relevant.

This is why I dare to ask each Province and local community that, as a response to the plan of animation and government for each Province, where a confrere has the strength, the educative and evangelising passion, the authentic vocation to be with and for the young and amongst them, whatever his age, everything possible be done to free him of other tasks and management, so that he can do what we should best know how to do by our vocation: be educators and pastors of the young. I invite you to concretise and translate further into decisions of government what we well know to be the result of our Salesian legacy.

3.5. AS IT WAS FOR DON BOSCO: OUR PRIORITY IS THE YOUNG WHO ARE POOREST, THE LEAST, THE MOST EXCLUDED

Fr Vecchi wrote in one of his letters: “Poor young people have been and still are a gift for the Salesians. Returning to them will allow us to recover the central characteristic of our spirituality and our pedagogical practice: the relationship of friendship that creates correspondence and the desire to grow” (AGC, 359, p.24). It is clear that no one could interpret Fr Vecchi as defending poverty by this, but we do understand that where unfortunately poverty and poor young people exist, if we are with them and among them they are the first to do us good, evangelise us and help us to really live the Gospel with the charism of Don Bosco. I am encouraged to say that it is poor young people who will save us.

Our being *Servants of the young* means, as we reflected in our General Chapter, leaving behind our securities, not only of life but of pastoral activity in order to take up an outgoing ministry which begins from the deepest needs of the young and especially the poorest of them. “By working with the young, you come across the world of youth exclusion. It is something fearful.” (Audience with the Pope).

This is why I dare to ask that with the "courage, maturity and much prayer" with which we are sent to the most excluded young people, we choose in each of our provinces to take another look at where we are, where we must remain, where we should go and where we can leave ... needy young people challenge us with their groans and their cries of pain. In their own way they are calling out to us. This is to be translated into times for reflection in each Province over these six years so that, in the light of GC27 and our option of being *Servants of the young.... going out to the peripheries*, we arrive at decisions with courage, maturity and a profound gaze of Faith, at the level of provincial government, always in dialogue with the confreres, so we can make what I am asking happen. Let us not be afraid of being prophetic in this.

3.6. EVANGELISERS OF THE YOUNG, ‘COMPANIONS ON THE JOURNEY’, BOLDLY PUTTING CHALLENGES BEFORE THEM

Article 6 of our Constitutions contains in essence all the richness of the mission entrusted to us by our charism: “... Faithful to the commitments Don Bosco has passed on to us, we are evangelisers of the young, and the more so if they are poor; we pay special attention to apostolic vocations; we are educators of the faith for the working classes, particularly by

means of social communication; we proclaim the Gospel to those who have not yet received it.” This is and will continue to be our great challenge because even in our best achievements, we can always achieve more; it will never be sufficient and too often we see that we are only halfway.

Don Bosco is our great model in this ‘knowing what to do’ with a Salesian heart for the education and evangelisation of the young. His young people were convinced that Don Bosco loved them, wanted what was good for them, both in this life and in eternity. This is why they accepted his proposal to know and be friends with the Lord. As educators we must know how to be with the young and walk side by side with them in their circumstances and concrete situation, in their personal processes of maturing. As evangelisers, our goal is to accompany young people so that in freedom they can encounter the Lord Jesus.

So dear confreres, even in these brief few lines I cannot but emphasise this as being **essential**: we are *evangelisers* of the young, and as a Congregation, as concrete Provincial and local communities, we must *live and grow in a genuine pastoral love for the young*. It will be very difficult to do this if we do not make the Proclamation of the Lord Jesus to the young a matter of priority and urgency and at the same time be capable of *accompanying them* in their circumstances of life. This has to be our strength: accompanying each young person in his situation. It is often a task we leave to others, or we say we do not know how to do it. And in this accompaniment *it is of vital importance to establish the culture of vocation that we have spoken of so much*. We have not yet achieved it. We are often afraid, or we disqualify ourselves by the ‘self-justification’ that we do not believe that what we should be doing is ‘fishing’ for vocations. If we really believe this and ‘sell this line’ *we are killing something that is very much ours, very much our charism: the ability to accompany each teenager, each young man in his personal quest, his challenges, his questions about life, his choices in life*. Something that is **fascinating** in our Salesian vocation we put aside or in someone else’s hands... or anyone’s.

Therefore I dare to ask each Province to also appoint the most capable confreres to look after youth and vocational ministry, with truly evangelising proposals, developing systematic processes of education in the Faith, preferring attention to the person and personal accompaniment of the individual, proposing bold challenges for discerning their choices in life, with equally bold proposals for every kind of vocation in the Church, and also the Salesian vocation in its various forms, involving the whole community.

Hopefully it will not happen as GC23 said it could – one of the most brilliant outlooks of our Chapter magisterium on educating young people in Faith – when it says that in this process that I have referred to, a young man could arrive at the point of dropping out, “not only because of the difficulties linked with faith, but because of mistakes or inadvertence on the part of educators more concerned with extraneous things than with a fraternal accompaniment of the dialogue between the youngster and God” (GC23, no. 137).

3.7. WITH LAY PEOPLE IN THE URGENCY OF A SHARED MISSION

In our Chapter reflection we have noted the more pivotal role being played by lay people, encouraged by shared responsibility and the shared mission in the educative and pastoral community. Already eighteen years previously, in GC24 – no need to go back to earlier magisterium – the Rector major and his Council were asked to make initiatives and experiences of collaboration between sdb's and lay people known (GC24, no. 127), and it was recognised in the same Chapter reflection that “The process of involvement leads to

communion in spirit, to shared responsibility, and then to sharing of the Salesian mission. Communion and sharing, involvement and shared responsibility, these are the two faces of the same medal” (GC24, no. 22).

We have made progress in our view of the shared mission. Fr Pascual Chávez said this several times, as a result of his reflection on the matter, that with the outlook and theological vision of ecclesiology today, the Salesian mission cannot be thought of without the laity, for what they bring to it is also vital for our charism.

Let me add this, dear confreres: *The shared mission between sdb's and lay people has ceased to be optional should there be someone who still believes this, and this is because the Salesian mission in the world today so clearly demands it. It is certain that in the Congregation we have different 'speeds' in our Provinces and in relations between them, however the shared mission between sdb's and laity, reflection on this mission, the process of conversion by our sdb confreres in this regard, is something we cannot go back on.*

This is why I dare to ask each Province that in the first three years after GC27 it makes the programme for shared mission between sdb's and lay people that is in place more concrete still – where this already exists – or that the situation in the Province be studied and the concrete project and planning be developed over the years leading up to the next General Chapter.

3.8. MISSION 'AD GENTES', PROJECT EUROPE AND THE BICENTENARY

I am not going to develop these topics. I just want to note that they are not overlooked. To the contrary, they are three realities that already have their place in the planning for the next six years. The last two, **Project Europe and the Bicentenary**, are already well developed in their own right, and we need to keep a watch on them, and the **Missionary activity of the Congregation** (*Missio 'Ad Gentes'*) will be part of special attention given within the overall coordination of the Sectors for the mission, spanning youth ministry, especially for the poorest, education of ordinary people, with careful oversight from social communication, and proclamation of the Gospel to peoples who have not yet received it - *Missio ad gentes* - (cf. C.6).

3.9. THANK YOU - FROM THE HEART

I could not conclude these words without making reference to the former Rector Major and his Council. It is 18 years since the last time a Rector Major followed on from his predecessor. Before that it was not possible for health reasons.

This is why am I fully certain that these words of mine as Rector Major are the words of the entire Chapter Assembly of GC27, all the confreres in the Congregation, the entire Salesian Family and all the young people around the world who would like to have a voice at this moment.

From the heart – thank you, many thanks dear Fr Pascual, 9th Successor of Don Bosco, who has been our Rector Major for the last twelve years, giving life, committing your life, being a Father, leading our Congregation surely and certainly, like a good captain who knows how to navigate despite fog and nightfall each evening. Thank you for being a Father for all the Salesian Family, an enthusiastic Successor of Don Bosco for young people all over the world. Thank you for your rich, solid magisterium, thank you for bringing home the ship of the Congregation over this long twelve year journey. May the Lord bless you and may Don Bosco reward you for your service in his name. A keen thank you, full of affection, for you Fr Vicar, and all the members of the General Council who for six or

twelve years have zealously looked after each of the 'plots' (I mean Sectors of animation or Regions in the world) you gave them and which the Congregation gave you. In the name of all the confreres, the Salesian Family and all young people a huge thanks for so much generosity and service.

I Conclude by calling on our Mother, our Mother the Help of Christians to whom, in the prayer Fr Pascual prepared for this Chapter document, we invoke as the Woman who listens, the Mother of the new community and Handmaid of the poor. May She, through her intercession grant us the gift of the Spirit so that we may have a heart which is *more of God, together with our confreres, for the young and amongst them.*

May Don Bosco guide and accompany us in bringing to life what we have experienced, thought and dreamed in this GC27. May he give us a heart like his and make us *true seekers of God (Mystics), brothers capable of loving those whom God gives us along life's journey (Prophets of fraternity), and true Servants of the young with the heart of the Good Shepherd.*

Rome, 12 April 2014