

Regional Formation Centres in the Interamerica Region Fr. Jaime Morales, COB Provincial

In this Goodnight I wish to present to you the regional Formation Centres located in the Interamerica Region.

The initial and ongoing formation of Salesians in the Region has been a constant concern of the Provincials since the beginning of the two Regions in the Americas. So they have put all the necessary efforts into developing joint experiences that in practice have resulted in three distinct but complementary experiences.

The first initiative came out of the 20th General Chapter (1972), known as the “Special” GC, and arose from a concern about *helping Salesians to assimilate the new mentality of the Congregation in the wake of the Second Vatican Council*. The Provincials of the then Caribbean-Pacific Region began drawing up strategies, and amongst them was the idea of creating an Ongoing Formation Centre for Salesians, based in Quito. This happened on 4 December 1974, under the responsibility of Fr Fernando Peraza Leal, who was just finishing his term of office as Provincial of Bogotá-Colombia. From then until his death, for over 38 years, he was the heart and soul of the Salesian team at this Centre, a father and teacher who with scientific passion, but above all through his witness and enthusiasm all throughout his life, systematically fostered a knowledge and love of Don Bosco throughout the Salesian Family in the Americas.

“*We are Don Bosco on the march*” is the title of a text he wrote and that became a hymn. A hymn about the kind of Salesianity of which Fr Viganó said: “this is the most beautiful description I have heard of *Don Bosco*”. The refrain goes like this:

*“Somos Don Bosco que camina
y en medio de la Iglesia
queremos anunciar
todos los signos de la vida
que en nuestra propia vida
se vuelven un cantar”...*

*“We are Don Bosco on the march
and in the Church
we seek to proclaim
all the signs of life
which in our own lives
become a song”...*

A year ago Fr Fernando, or “Grandfather” as everyone used to call him, returned to the Father’s House. To him we express our gratitude and eternal remembrance. From him our Ongoing Formation Centre at Quito inherited a style, a pedagogy, and a way of studying Don Bosco that is passed on through the many Salesian leadership courses it runs: the School of Salesianity, study-days for new Rectors, formation courses for formation personnel, proximate

preparation of deacons for the priesthood, Youth Ministry and Parish encounters, and most recently, the School of Spiritual Accompaniment.

A second initiative of a regional nature set up by the Provincials is found in the Central American Provinces. *El Centro Regional de Formación Específica del Salesiano Coadjutor*, CRESCO. It opened in 1995. For the first 10 years it was in San Salvador. Now it is in Guatemala City. This Centre focuses on the *specific formation of the Salesian Brother*. We recall that the specific formation of the Salesian Brother is the final stage of his basic initial formation and as such must not be confused with his professional or technical formation. At CRESCO, over a two year period, the Salesian brother focuses on a deeper study of the lay dimension of his vocation in a community atmosphere. The experience takes place after Practical Training and also includes a proximate preparation for the final vows.

The third regional formation initiative is *Don Bosco Hall*. This is in the San Francisco, U.S. Province, in Berkeley, California. It was set up for ongoing formation in Salesianity for English-speaking confreres. It also offers specialisation in theology and philosophy, tied in with the *Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology*. Today it also takes in priests and religious from other orders and university students interested in Salesianity.

The *Institute of Salesian Studies* is also part of this Centre, led principally by the renowned teacher, Fr Arthur Lenti, who has given the Congregation the result of his studies in his work: *Don Bosco: History and Charism*. It has been published in English and translated into Spanish, Portuguese and Italian, thanks especially to the editorial work of Frs Juan José Bartolomé and Graciliano González.

It is important to note that these three Regional Formation Centres were opened to serve all of Salesian America and are run, in the first two cases, by the Provincials of the two Salesian Regions of the Americas while *Don Bosco Hall* is run by the San Francisco Province.

This brief presentation of our Regional Centres will now be completed with a short video prepared by the Salesian Regional Centre at Quito.

Video text

THE SALESIAN REGIONAL ONGOING FORMATION CENTRE - QUITO

The Salesian Regional Ongoing Formation Centre came into being as a result of the enthusiasm and the profound spirit of renewal generated by two great events in the Catholic Church: Vatican Council II in 1971 and the Salesian Special General Chapter in 1972.

The first important steps taken were the appointment of Fr. Fernando Peraza as Director of the Salesian Centre, and Fr Pedro Creamer as its executive secretary, and the choice of Quito as the location for the centre.

The Salesian Regional Ongoing Formation Centre is a flexible and functional institution, and in the 40 years of its existence, it has been of invaluable help in preserving and continuing the Salesian charism on the basis of a serious study of Don Bosco, in the light of new situations and pastoral needs. It has a very big library where one finds good quality books, journals, pamphlets and research papers.

Our comfortable facilities and our staff provide the participants with courses and meetings, and the necessary conditions for studying the life and work of our Founder and for a practical experience of the Preventive System.

There is a Team Coordinator responsible for drawing up the programmes and the timetable of activities. Courses are offered for teachers of Salesianity at four levels: the first, second and third level are in Quito – Ecuador while the fourth level is a study-pilgrimage in the holy places of Don Bosco in and around Turin, Italy. There are also courses offered for Rectors, Deacons, formation personnel and missionaries, and this year we are beginning the School of Spiritual Accompaniment. Various services are also offered to the different provinces.

Since its inception in 1974 till today, 585 courses have been offered to 16,961 individuals belonging to the vast Salesian Movement in the Americas.

The Salesian Regional Ongoing Formation Centre is a Formation house at the service of all of Salesian America.

REGIONAL SPECIFIC FORMATION CENTRE FOR THE SALESIAN BROTHER – CRESCO

Cresco is a centre for reflecting on and making known the Salesian Brother vocation. Its basis lies in C. 116 of the Constitutions and no. 479 of the revised Ratio.

It is situated in Guatemala City, the capital of the Republic of Guatemala.

The centre is entrusted with the specific formation of Salesian Brothers; it is a suitable setting, both within the context of the provincial community and within the intercultural context of the Congregation and the Church. This formation stage lasts 2 years.

The formation centre offers personal accompaniment for each brother and an accompaniment of the community as well. It also helps in the immediate preparation of the Salesian Brother for perpetual profession through a constant review of his personal life, a deeper study of religious life, and a specific reflection on the identity, vocation and mission of the lay Salesian.

CRESCO is at the service of the all-round formation of the Salesian Brother after his practical training. It takes care of the four fundamental dimensions of his formation: Human, Spiritual, Intellectual and Educative-Pastoral.

What is required of anyone coming to the Formation Centre is that he be ready to live a pastoral and intellectual experience in community. The Salesian Brother is made to feel that he shares in the responsibility for his own formation and where he is constantly facing up to his own life and personal issues.

The expected outcome of this process is a mature Salesian Brother with a clear vision and a well-defined project of life which will allow him to take up his tasks in Salesian life as a consecrated layman.

DON BOSCO HALL - BERKELEY

Welcome to “Don Bosco Hall” in Berkeley, California, located in the San Francisco Bay area, in the United States. Before giving you an overall view of the projects and formation programmes offered through the Institute of Salesian Studies (ISS), let us present our community. Firstly the Salesians: some are professors and/or regular personnel in the House; others take part in the *ongoing formation programme*. We also have some University students from the San Francisco Bay area.

Our doors are open not only to Salesians but also to other priests and religious, diocesan clergy as well as consecrated individuals. These members of the community are the main participants in the *sabbatical year programme* offered by the Jesuit school; we also have a theology student from another religious order.

Don Bosco Hall is not only a place for religious and priests but also for lay students doing graduate and postgraduate studies. These students study at local universities, either at the University of California in Berkeley or at the Dominican School. Most of them would not be able to do their studies if it were not for the help offered them by the Salesians. All of them express their deep gratitude by taking part in the life of the religious community and enriching it with their gifts.

Don Bosco Hall is also home to the *Institute of Salesian Studies (ISS)* which is recognised for the research it has carried out and published in the *Journal of Salesian Studies*, along with the work of Father Arthur Lenti: “Don Bosco: History and Charism”. This setting along with the easily available academic courses and a comfortable study atmosphere, provides a fertile ground for formation.

Academically speaking, there are two main study courses on offer. One of them is made up of one or two semesters of study to gain a *Certificate in Theology with a specialisation in*

Salesian Studies, and the other longer programme is for the *Masters of Arts in Theology*, which includes a concentration on Salesian Studies. The courses in these programmes are accredited through our affiliation with the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology (DSPT) where we have adjunct professors, both full-time and visiting. The Dominican School is a member of the Graduate Theological Union (GTU) which has eight theological schools, two of which are Catholic: one Jesuit and the other Dominican.

It is through the Graduate Theological Union (GTU) that our students and professors have access to the library and classes at the world-renowned University of California at Berkeley.

Apart from the academic side, those who form part of the “Don Bosco Hall” community have ample opportunities for spiritual formation, rest, amusements and excursions.

Amongst the many projects at “Don Bosco Hall” and the Institute of Salesian Studies (ISS), some stand out among others :

First, the *Lay Formation Programme* in the Province. We are studying plans to offer a systematic and effective approach to lay leadership in the Salesian mission, to help to set up a formation system for Salesian schools, to coordinate workshops and seminars, and to offer courses for initial and ongoing formation.

The Dominican School, in collaboration with the Institute for Salesian Studies, has also given priority to lay formation, by getting involved in developing a formation structure in various local churches. It is our intention to offer this programme in English and Spanish. The materials will be available online, but there will also be offered retreats, workshops, seminars and debates. Right now we are finalising the programme of studies in dialogue with various bishops, and making use of the resources on the web. We are also on the look-out for Spanish-speaking teachers.

Perhaps the project with the greatest visibility is in the digitalised field: we are republishing and relaunching the Journal of Salesian Studies. At the time when this video was recorded, our team had finished fully digitalising the first twenty five issues of the Journal and had made considerable progress in putting them all online at www.SalesianJournal.org.

The team has also been working on formatting the text for an online academic journal (thus opening the way for new challenges) which we have in mind to offer this year.

(Fr. Arthur Lenti:) "I believe it will have a very great impact because of the new media which make the work possible".

This is a presentation of *Don Bosco Hall and the Institute of Salesian Studies!*

We pray for all of you and we hope that you will consider supporting us, by praying for us and by sending your missionaries for one or two semesters with us.

You will not be sorry for this decision!