

**Goodnight of the Provincial of GER**  
**Salesian answers to the needs of the young people of Germany**  
**2 April 2014**

Dear confreres,

Let me express my gratitude for having invited me to give you a “goodnight” during the General Chapter. I willingly take the occasion to give you first-hand informations on the situation of the province of Germany which, after the 2005 successful unification of the two previously existing provinces has drawn its Provincial Organic Project, outlining four priorities to clarify its challenges and tasks.

Life and work of communities spiritually united (at the moment we have 27 houses, 277 confreres: 216 of them belong to the German Province and 61 come from other provinces.)

The renewal of the mission in our presences, projects and parishes.

The formation and ongoing formation of the Salesians and of the nearly 2000 lay collaborators in our houses.

The situation in general with a futuristic view (structures, direction administration, finances)

Since the time is limited I will just illustrate some of the aspects of our mission and our work for the young people of Germany:

***New categories of intervention in our mission***

Our pedagogical approach to disadvantaged young people is the key point of our mission. Besides schools, youth centers, vocational centers and formation houses, in our province we have training centers in both the educational and professional field. These last years, all of these institutions have been facing hard challenges in their growth. Here are the most remarkable ones:

***Assistance to under age refugees***

These last seven years we have accommodated in our houses under age refugees from Asian and African countries. Divided into coordinated groups they live with us, are assisted by specialized personnel and are taught the language. We help them with their problems and, where possible, we have them enter a formation course. Our house of Helenberg, near Trier, coordinates this work at the national level, aiming at having these young people, who entered Germany illegally and don't have relatives here, hope for a better future. We have now concrete guidelines for our assistance to these young men who are mainly concerned about their living.

***Projects for young people with penal problems***

Even the work with this kind of young people has seen a remarkable progress. Instead of

being fined or imprisoned these young people can be sent to work in social institutions. We salesians provide them with this opportunity. (For instance, at the environment and culture center of *Benediktbeuern*, these young people are given specific educational assistance to motivate them to change their behavior. In our house of *Sannerz* since last year we provide educational assistance to 8 kids from 10 to 14 of age who have escaped from structures where they had been confined previously. Because of their conduct nobody is willing to host them, but with the salesians they are given a chance once again. They receive an intensive educational care, but this work is a real challenge for the educators.

### ***Caring for young people with psychological disabilities***

In many of our professional training centers we have accepted young people who need special assistance because of their psychological disabilities (for instance autistic children). They need special care and specialized educators to go through their training programs in spite of their mental handicaps. Taking care of these young people requires a specific training for the educators and the support of a psychologist.

### ***Possibility of accommodation and education for young mothers and their children***

In some of our centers we have young girls (even under age) who have become pregnant in their school days. *At Berlin, Burgstadt and Wurzburg* we have started of groups of young mothers and their children so that they can complete their professional training. Children are taken care of during work time and their young mothers are assisted by experts in their education.

### ***A new presence: Berlin Don Bosco Center***

In 2005, after the two provinces were united into one, the German province has built a new center in Berlin-Marzahn district, in the former German Democratic Republic (DDR). After a few years the center is well-known for assistance given to the illiterate, jobless young people who often don't even have a family nor an abode. The center is run in collaboration with the St. Mary Magdalene Postel sisters, enjoys state subsidies and offers interesting possibilities of work to the young people who got into difficulties.

### ***Development at Benediktbeuern***

It has been very sad for the province to close in 2013 the faculties of philosophy and theology at Benediktbeuern. Even nowadays course in social pedagogy are highly requested. From autumn 2014 at Benediktbeuern it will be possible to obtain a first level degree in pedagogy of religion combined with courses in social pedagogy. Education, Youth Ministry and Salesian Formation Programs (JPI Youth Ministry Institute) (ISS Salesian Spirituality Institute) have an important role and continue their work.

### ***Pastoral Care in special situations***

After the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 (26 years ago) we have started works and projects even in communist areas like Berlin, Burstadt, Chemnitz and Heiligenstadt, where 85% of the people doesn't have a religion and just 2 or 3% are catholic at the moment. In these presences we work with collaborators who often are not even baptized. Very few youths of those presences are Christians (catholic or protestant). But even in the other houses of West Germany the number of young people who have had an experience of church life is diminishing remarkably. In many of our houses we find young Muslims who are not refugees. To come up with differentiated pastoral programs for these youths and our collaborators according to our approach which is "evangelization through education and education through evangelization" is a priority, but a big challenge as well. Our collaborators, even the not Christian ones, accept the profile of our salesian work which is well expressed by guidelines to which they bound.

### ***The future of our institutions***

Our institutions and projects are important even in view of our future. However, taking into consideration that the number of confreres who can still work is diminishing we deem it important to share roles of responsibility at the local and provincial level with our lay collaborators. In order to prepare them for these roles we offer them training programs and on going formation courses with the collaboration of Benediktbeuern Youth Ministry Institute.

To secure means of support for our institutions we collaborate with the dioceses, with other religious congregations and partners who share with us the spirit of Don Bosco and the responsibilities concerning human and economic resources.

The experiences we had so far encourages us to continue walking on this path to strengthen Don Bosco's charisma in Germany and in the German speaking Switzerland.

May Don Bosco accompany us in our journey and sustain us with his prayers.

Thank you for your concern for our province and the collaborations with the other provinces.

Do, please, have our province in your prayers.

Fr. Joseph Grunner  
Provincial