



**Salesiani di Don Bosco  
Capitolo Generale 27**

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

**Final document**



# INTRODUCTION

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Living the “radical approach of the Gospel” is the theme for GC27 launched by the Rector Major, Fr Pascual Chávez, as the “open conclusion” to the journey that began with the renewed Constitutions (1984) and has been followed until today in view of recognising the major demands of Vatican Council II and listening to the voice of the Spirit with particular reference to consecrated life.

The last four General Chapters have focused attention on the target, the beneficiaries of our mission (GC23), on sharing and communion with and shared responsibility between Salesians and lay people in the one mission (GC24), on the community (GC25) and on Salesian spirituality (GC26). In continuity with these GC27 highlights the Gospel roots of our apostolic consecration.

The three core topics (“mystics in the Spirit”, “prophets of fraternity”, “servants of the young”) on which we have reflected and from which we have drawn up the path to follow for the next six years, constitute the one yet threefold dynamic of the “grace of unity”, a gift and task for our communities and for each one of us.

The Chapter experience has been a continual invitation to intense listening, interpreting our life in depth, identifying the contours of a way ahead for the Congregation. The Chapter document aims at reflecting this, almost like a wave washing back and delivering the experience to local and provincial communities.

## 1. The vine and the branches

The book of the Gospels has accompanied the Chapter experience, with humility and splendour. Every day in the assembly hall, the Word of the Lord has been proclaimed in various languages and solemnly enthroned.

Prompted by this daily listening, we have felt particularly challenged by the Gospel passage of the “vine and the branches” (*Jn 15:1-11*), icon for the theme and a synthesis of our Chapter work. Its central message takes us back to being united, “rooted”, then, in love for Jesus as was Don Bosco whose life was a profoundly unified one around the person of the Son of God, bearing “much fruit”.

*Remaining, loving, bearing fruit* are, therefore, the three verbs that throw intense light on the three core topics of GC27.

Jesus remains with us and invites each one to remain with Him, to learn fraternal love and fruitfully serve the young entrusted to us. In this faithful love we continually experience the Father's closeness, thanks to giving heed to Jesus' word.

In love, which translates into gift of self to our brothers, lies the full realisation of our existence, both of the individual and of the community. The love which we learn from Jesus, as we remain united with Him like the branch to the vine, is always plenteous, always bears fruit.

## 2. The grace of unity

Preparation by local and provincial communities, and the Chapter experience, have helped us rediscover Salesian identity from the four different angles which were recalled in the letter of convocation of GC27: "Living in the **grace of unity** and with joy the Salesian consecrated *vocation*, which is God's gift and a personal plan of life; having a strong *spiritual experience*, taking up the way of life and action of Jesus obedient, poor and chaste and becoming seekers of God; building up *fraternity* in our communities of life and action; generously dedicating ourselves to the *mission*, walking side by side with the young so as to give hope to the world." (AGC 413, p. 5).

The three core topics – *mystics in the Spirit, prophets of fraternity, servants of the young* – are not to be thought of as isolated in themselves or separate, but as contained within the "grace of unity": a single dynamic of love between the Lord who calls and the disciple who responds (cf. C. 23). It is the unique and manifold grace of God which wells up, involving individuals, situations and resources, and generating a movement of goodness, beauty and truth.

In order to correspond to the "grace of unity" there is a need for a genuine conversion to the radical Gospel approach, a continuous transformation of mind and heart, a deep purification. This is the challenge to be tackled with boldness and courage, the process to be triggered to regenerate ourselves, our educative and pastoral communities and the young.

John Paul II states: "The spiritual life must therefore have first place ... Apostolic fruitfulness, generosity in love of the poor, and the ability to attract vocations among the younger generation depend on this priority and its growth in personal and communal commitment." (VC 93).

This reference to the roots, the depths of the heart, allows us to glimpse those around us who are scrutinising our motivations for giving our lives to God and the young, our ultimate *raison d'être* in this world. It is about the deepest and truest reality which guides our life.

It is enough to contemplate Jesus, Lord and Teacher, to glimpse in Him the Son of God united to each human being through incarnation (cf. GS, no. 22). It is enough to look at Don Bosco to see that in him "a splendid blending of nature and grace ... in a closely-knit life project, the service of the young" (. 21) shines through.

Pope Francis reminded us of this in the audience on 31 March: "I imagine that during the Chapter ... you have always kept 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. 'Work and temperance' he said 'will make the Congregation flourish.' When we think of working for the good of souls we overcome the temptation to spiritual worldliness, seek no other thing than God and his Kingdom alone. Temperance then is a sense of balance, being content, being simple. 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."

Contemplation and action, the practice of the evangelical counsels, fraternal community and the apostolic mission are thus led back to "a single movement of love towards God and towards our brothers." (C. 3). With regard to this "work is the visibility of Salesian mysticism and is an expression of the passion for souls, while temperance is the visibility of Salesian asceticism and is an expression of the *cetera tolle*." (AGC 413, p. 45; cf. C. 18).

"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). For us, holiness consists in the "grace of unity", in fully realised humanity, in the

harmony of what there is in and around us of "everything that is true, that is noble, everything that is good and pure, everything that we love and honour", everything "that can be thought virtuous or worthy of praise..." (*Phil 4:8*).

### 3. A point of arrival and a point of departure

GC27 adopted a *community discernment* approach articulated over three interrelated and consecutive phases: listening, interpreting, way ahead.

In the first phase we adopted an attitude of *listening* in order to capture the situation in its manifold and important aspects: the more positive and promising ones, the more critical ones which challenge and question us. Paying attention to the signs and expressions of a radical Gospel approach already present in our life and the historical moment we are experiencing, allowed us to distinguish expressions of fidelity and testimony from expressions of inconsistency and conformity.

From this listening to the reality, we sought to *interpret*, throw light on the situation and signs and expressions of life that had been highlighted earlier, attempting to go back to the causes that produce them and to recognise the challenges they elicit, going beyond the surface and appearances. The keys to interpretation are offered by the Gospel, the Church's life and teaching, Don Bosco's charismatic experience, the Constitutions, the appeals of the young that reach us. By keeping this perspective in mind it has been possible to penetrate to the deep roots of our identity as disciples and apostles.

The third phase, pulling together the results of the first two, allowed us to outline the *way ahead* which we need to embark on, consolidating whatever has been highlighted as positive, identifying new expressions of being radical in a Gospel way and overcoming manifestations of infidelity, weakness and risk, in order to transform the world. The way ahead offers a *goal* which is the horizon we are moving towards; it envisages certain *processes* which make it more concrete, advancing a possible circumstance for departure and the point to which we are tending and which will bring us closer to our goal. The *steps* as they have been identified, formulated and arranged, are aimed at giving concreteness to our Congregation's journey over the next six years.

The common thread linking these three is summed up by a sentence placed at the beginning of each discernment phase: *Like Don Bosco, in dialogue with the Lord, we journey together moved by the Spirit, having an experience of fraternal life as at Valdocco, available for planning and cooperation, "going out" towards the peripheries, becoming prophetic signs in the service of the young.*

From this "map" each local and provincial circumstance can select and arrange its own way ahead, fitting in with its context and the many pointers coming from the experience of GC27 as it listens to the Congregation and the local and universal Church.

#### 4. Prayer to Mary who is our model of a radical Gospel approach

To Mary Help of Christians, Mother of a “radical and unconditional 'yes'”, we entrust our assent of faith, our consent of communion and our apostolic commitment to the young.

Blessed are you **Mary, the Woman who listened**,  
Because you lived in search of God's will for you.  
And when God revealed his plan for you,  
you had the courage to accept it,  
abandoning your own life project  
to do the Lord's.  
Mother of believers,  
teach us to listen to God  
and to make His will our own,  
so that He may realise his plan  
for the salvation of the young!

Blessed are you **Mary, Mother of the new community**,  
who at the foot of the Cross welcomed  
as your son the beloved disciple of Jesus  
and helped in the birth of the Church,  
the new Body of your Son,  
a mystical reality of brothers and sisters united by faith and love.  
You accompanied the life and prayer of the Apostles,  
calling down the Spirit of the Risen One in the Upper Room.  
Mother of the brothers and sisters of your Son,  
teach us how to form communities  
which are of one heart and soul.  
Let our communion, our fraternity and our joy  
be living testimony  
to the beauty of faith and our Salesian vocation.

Blessed are you **Mary, Handmaid of the poor**,  
because you promptly set out along the way  
to serve a mother in need  
and you were there at Cana,  
sharing the joys and sorrows  
of a newly married couple.  
You did not look to your own needs,  
but to theirs,  
and you pointed out your Son, Jesus,  
as the Lord who could give humankind  
the new wine of peace and joy in the Spirit.  
Mother of servants, teach us to go out of ourselves,  
to go and meet our neighbour, them  
so that while we respond to their needs,  
we may offer them Jesus, God's gift, the most precious gift!

Amen.

*Rome, 12 April 2014*

# LISTENING

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## ***Like Don Bosco, in dialogue with the Lord ...***

1. We recognise that the time in which we are living is a place of encounter with the Lord. We wish, as individuals and communities, to give **primacy to God** in our lives, challenged by Salesian holiness and the thirst young people have for authenticity. We are more aware that only a personal encounter with God, through his Word, the Sacraments and our neighbour, can make us significant and authentic witnesses in the Church and society. The **desire for God**, which is **something we feel** within us, is alive even **in youth and laity**: we find them responsive to life values expressed in simplicity, austerity and genuine relationships between people. Young people in particular seek significant adults to accompany them and help them mature in life.

We find that we are working in various cultural contexts manifesting in various ways the sense of God. The yearning to have God at the centre of our lives can at times be in conflict with **a secular culture** which could lead us to fear of speaking of Him, so we do not offend, or out of respect for the other, or to protect ourselves from others' opinions. We do not have an encounter with the Gospel sometimes due to the lack of availability or indifference of the listeners, and at other times because of our laziness or lack of missionary courage. Sometimes we consider **our era** only as a problem; our awareness of history is partial and superficial. By uncritically responding to social needs and demands, we relativise the experience of God and risk no longer understanding our specific mission as religious in today's world.

There are **signs of the primacy of God in our lives**: fidelity to the Lord through a life lived according to the evangelical counsels, our service of poor youngsters, the sense of belonging to the Church and the Congregation, our increasing knowledge of Don Bosco and his Preventive System, the simple and abundant legacy of our everyday spirituality, marked by family spirit and positive interpersonal relationships, sensitivity to accompaniment and spiritual fatherliness. We find, moreover that **who we are and what we do does not always appear to be rooted in faith, hope and charity**, and does not clearly show that the initiative begins from God and always returns to Him. At times the **Eucharist** is not seen nor experienced as the source and support of communion, and prayer in common is **prayer in common** which builds and strengthens fraternal life is too easily let go of. It is our young people and their families in particular who question us on our spiritual roots and vocational motivation, reawakening in us our identity as consecrated individuals and our educative and pastoral mission.

## ***... journeying together, moved by the Spirit ...***

2. We are grateful to God for the **fidelity of so many confreres** and for the **holiness of so many members of the Salesian Family that has been recognised by the Church**. Every day we are in with adults and young people, confreres old and young, sick or at the height of their activity who testify to the fascination of the search for God, the radical approach of the Gospel lived joyfully and with keen passion for Don Bosco.

Generally our consecration **reveals the sense of God** in history and in the life of human beings, in circumstances of seeking meaning or of poverty, with the power of a witness that gives hope and enthusiasm, proposes a successful humanity by going

against and offering an alternative to a worldly mentality (cf. EG 93-97). The practice of **lectio divina**, with community sharing of God's Word and the **personal project of life** have become for various confreres a great resource for personal renewal, an antidote to the temptation of spiritual superficiality.

Given difficulties and daily challenges related to proclaiming the Gospel, we are very much aware that there is a strict connection between **pastoral charity and spiritual life** as sources of our fruitfulness.

We note certain **symptoms of self-referentiality** where we do not go out of ourselves to be open to the demands of God and go out to encounter others: lack of updating, reference to a stable spiritual director and “do it yourself” spirituality. These forms of self-sufficiency often make us forget that we are cooperating with God and hinder us from making Christ the point of reference in our lives.

### **... experiencing fraternal life, as at Valdocco ...**

3. Beginning from GC25 there has been a growing **commitment to living our community life more authentically** through better animation of prayer times, and effort grow in sharing and more qualified and participative apostolic work. Communities have seen an increase in **more systematic meeting schedules** and the quality of these has seen improvement. In particular some **community choices** have helped people come together as brothers who live, reflect and work together: community day, the annual formative proposal, *lectio divina* spiritual sharing, reflection on our Salesian experience, profound prayer, celebrations, relaxing together. **Community structures** settings and their location, style and rhythms of life express our view of community and allow us to live like that.

Some negative influences from society are also noted in our communities. We risk losing our Gospel-inspired **ways of thinking** by picking up negative features of today's culture. For example, we hide behind “respect” and “tolerance”, our indifference towards or lack of care for our confrere, or we unduly make public information that should be kept amongst ourselves. Creeping materialism and activism make us perceive **community time as time 'stolen' from the mission** or the private sphere.

Fraternal life in community especially senses the low estimation of our consecrated life which shows up in a weak concern for **the Salesian Brother vocation**, with its specific contribution to the community and the Salesian mission, and the excessive clericalism so often manifested in our community and pastoral relationships.

We note that prayer and offering up the sacrifices of life by **elderly and ill Salesians** are a true apostolate with and for the young; they remain an active part of the community and live out the “*da mihi animas*”. Moreover, communities make every effort to see they are not excluded from the mission. We still find some difficulties in accepting and taking care of confreres who experience situations of **fragility**, are in trouble, senile and sick (EG, nos. 209-210).

In our confreres and communities there is also the **question of spiritual fatherliness**, in a comprehensive network of giving and receiving, lived in a harmonious family spirit. We recognise that over these years, especially in **initial formation**, valuable proposals



have been developed for our growth as human beings in the emotional, relational and spiritual area.

### ***... available for planning and sharing ...***

4. The **Community Plan** and the **Educative and Pastoral Project (SEPP)** have been drawn up more frequently than in the past in almost all Salesian communities and works, even though there is still a limited understanding and weak acceptance of the essential function of the **Educative and Pastoral Community (EPC)**. We recognise the importance of **working by way of shared responsibility**, notwithstanding the struggle in feeling that we are an active part of the EPC and recognising it as having responsibility for the mission. Sometimes our Educative and Pastoral Plan is limited to organising our activities, without common and ongoing reflection on the objectives, on priorities, involving the processes and on the evaluation of objectives achieved. Some confreres nevertheless continue to find difficulty **sharing the mission** through a tendency to favour personal activity.

Over these years the field of intervention for **rectors/directors has broadened**. They are called to take on managerial tasks as well as being spiritual guides of the confreres and leaders of the EPC. The rectors/directors are not always able to honour their service nor do they always receive adequate cooperation from the confreres and sometimes they are deprived of a systematic formative accompaniment at provincial.

We see greater **involvement and activity by the laity**, helped through sharing and shared responsibility with and within the educative and pastoral community. A number of difficulties regarding Salesian-lay relationships have been overcome in the unanimous effort to converge around a single project. Where this kind of teamwork exists, in a climate of trust and family spirit, respecting roles, that setting becomes fruitful and purposeful, also in vocational terms. Systematic formation of the laity continues to be work in certain contexts.

Some of us get too caught up in managerial tasks or take refuge in our comfort zones, delegating **assistance and presence amongst the young** to confreres in practical training, or our collaborators. Many lay people who are paid for their leadership roles and assistance offer a truly professional and Salesian service, compared with others who have shortcomings especially due to our lack of involvement in formation processes.

In recent years we have seen the development of a healthy **pivotal role of young people**, especially within the Salesian Youth Movement. This factor leads to the joy and satisfaction we find as we experience the regenerating truth of the Salesian charism: educating the young with the young. We are ever more conscious that the **volunteer movement** helps young people to mature in a complete way which includes the vocational and missionary dimension (cf. EG 106) . Within the Salesian youth volunteer movement there is a lack of adequate spiritual and pedagogical accompaniment for it to become an authentic experience of encounter with Christ in the poor.

We have gained greater awareness of the importance of accompanying the young in getting to know and encounter Jesus. The young have a right to Christ and his Gospel and we owe it to them. Strengthened by this belief, in certain contexts we have explored

more deeply the **inseparable bond between education and evangelisation**, obtaining appreciable results.

Our awareness of being a **Salesian Family has grown**, thanks also to positive cooperation at provincial and local community levels, and to “Salesian Spirituality Days”, the Rector Major's yearly Strennas and the *Charter of charismatic identity*. Some **experiences of working “together”** on behalf of the young have helped us to grow as a united body sharing responsibility within the Salesian Family, and thus growing in our awareness that we are a unique charismatic movement. Moreover, **shared responsibility in the mission** between Salesians, SF members, lay people and the young has helped us improve the quality of our ministry, broaden horizons and expand the heart of our apostolic mission.

An emerging apostolic front that we have begun to take better care of is **family ministry**, and not only in parish or adult formation contexts. It is to be seen in strict connection with youth ministry.

**Initial formation** at times continues to be disconnected from real-life daily pastoral processes. After the specific formation of candidates for the priesthood and brothers, difficulties and hardships emerge for these confreres in fitting back into ministry in a significant and effective way or returning to the dynamics of community life. Not all communities accepting confreres at the end of their initial formation have an explicit plan envisaging appropriate ways of helping them fit back into ordinary educative and pastoral activity.

### **... going out to the peripheries ...**

5. The Congregation is more decisively oriented to **youngsters who are poor and at risk** as we listen to their cry for help. There is a growing sensitivity amongst confreres to a culture of **human rights**, especially amongst minors, which shows up in certain prophetic choices on new frontiers and “existential peripheries”.

Moreover, the Congregation has strongly insisted that employing any approach which does not respect young people, and having recourse to **violence** of any kind are clearly contrary to Salesian pedagogy. Almost all Provinces have taken or are about to finish taking the necessary steps for organising both their **code of ethics** as statutes of our preventive pedagogical culture, and the **protocol for legal procedures** to tackle possible cases of abuse, in accordance with Canon Law and the law of the countries in which we operate.

We are becoming aware that **there is a certain distance** between us and the young; it is a mental and cultural one, before being a physical one. In certain contexts we relate to the new generations as if they were a “problem” and not an “opportunity”, an appeal from the Lord, an eloquent reflection of the “signs of the times” and a challenge that puts major questions to us.

The **new technologies** of information and communication and the **digital environment** in which we live are a cultural, social and pastoral space encouraging and experience of life; they are an integral part of personal and social existence and our way of life today and have a strong impact on our way of thinking, feeling, living and relating. They allow us to maintain ties and cultivate friendships amongst confreres and young people,

reduce geographical distances that would otherwise hinder immediate and ongoing communication. As Salesians we feel we are not present in a significant way in this environment as educators and evangelisers.

### ***... becoming prophetic signs in the service of the young!***

6. We have put consistent efforts into **giving new meaning to and restructuring presences** so that their charismatic identity is relevant and to guarantee creative fidelity to Don Bosco's educational system in response to the needs of the young in our time. In certain contexts however, the **preference for the poorest young people** is not sufficiently clear. The concern for financially supporting traditional structures limits our openness to new forms of poverty and new social emergencies.

The people and the young often admire us for **the amount of work** we do on their behalf. Nevertheless, some of us, overwhelmed by so many apostolic activities, tiredness, boredom, fragmentation, inefficiency and *burnout*. Sometimes we are far too concerned with and worn down by all the efforts of preserving and helping works to survive. When we are concerned with the young, at times we only focus on their social well-being while overlooking their accompaniment in spiritual life and their vocation.

The **visibility and credibility** of our consecrated life has gradually lessened. We do not always recognise amongst us the testimony of the primacy of God, through the practice of the vows, our modest lifestyle, commitment to work, dedication to the mission, personal and community prayer faithfully practised.

**Intercultural living** within our communities is an opportunity, a witness to unity for the world; it also reveals certain limits to our charity and reveals prejudices which resist evangelical fraternity. International communities and collaboration in worldwide projects contribute to creating a greater sense of fraternity and solidarity.

We recognise that the responsibility for **caring for the environment** is an emerging sensitivity in our communities is well. However, we are still not sufficiently convinced of this priority in our choice of a modest and essential lifestyle and in the education of young.



## INTERPRETATION

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### ***Like Don Bosco, in dialogue with the Lord, journeying together, moved by the Spirit...***

7. **Immersed in history**, marked by limitation and fragility, we are supported by the certainty that **God accompanies humankind** with his interventions of salvation which culminate in Jesus' Pasch: "His resurrection is not something of the past; it contains a vital power which has permeated this world. Where all seems to be dead, signs of the resurrection suddenly spring up" (EG, no. 276). Following Jesus' example in his transfiguration and covering his disciples **in the light of Tabor** (cf. VC 14-16) and listening to the warnings in Don Bosco's "dream of the Ten Diamonds", we appreciate the grace of vocation, the fruitfulness of the evangelical counsels, communion in community and amongst the young. We look upon the Virgin Mary who in her *Magnificat* sings to a God who faithfully leads his People along the paths of history, working wonders and miracles in favour of the humble and the poor. With her we rediscover the joy of the faith which infuses optimism and hope.

As for Don Bosco, for us too the **primacy of God** is the cornerstone of our *raison d'être* in the Church and in the world. This primacy gives meaning to our consecrated life, helps us avoid the risk of letting ourselves get too caught up in our activities and forgetting that we are essentially "seekers of God" and witnesses of his love amongst the young and the poor. We are called, then, to redirect our heart, our mind and all our energy to the "beginning" and the "origins": *the joy of that moment when Christ looked upon us*, to call on the meanings and needs that underpin our **vocation** (cf. CIVCSVA, *Rallegratevi*, no.4).

Our **mysticism** is expressed as the **profound humanisation** of both our personal and community life (cf. EG 87, 92, 266). It takes account of the mystery of the Incarnation: Jesus embraced the needs and aspirations of the people and did the will of his Father in building the Kingdom. **Don Bosco** lived and passed on an original style of **union with God** to be lived always (cf. C 12, 21, 95) and everywhere according to the oratory criterion (cf. C 40). **The Salesian**, then, **bears witness to God** when he spends himself for the young and remains with them in sacrificial dedication "to his last breath", lives the "cetera tolle", and knows how to tell them of his own experience of the Lord.

The experience of our encounter with God demands a personal response that is developed over a journey of faith and in deep **relationship with the Word**, because "Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction." (BENEDICT XVI, *Deus caritas est*, no. 1).

Today, other than noting cultural changes, we are convinced that we are experiencing **an historic turning point** (cf. EG 52, 61-70) perhaps without precedent. This has significantly modified the reasons which induce people to choose and live consecrated life. Pope Francis invites us to hear the cry of the poor, to go out to meet those most urgently in need, to live the culture of encounter and dialogue (cf. EG, no. 220) avoiding self-referentiality and embodying a **missionary spirituality**.

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 in our mission to the young**. Taking up the gift of vocation and being responsible for the processes of our ongoing formation help us to mould the culture with the Gospel and be people of compassion, especially for the poor.

Called as we are to testify to the reality of the Kingdom and to dialogue with thinking that sometimes tends relativise and marginalise religious discourse, we become irrelevant when we back away from our **prophetic role** in proposing a culture inspired by the Gospel.

The risk of easily being considered mere "**social workers**" instead of educators and pastors capable of testifying to the primacy of God, proclamation of the Gospel and spiritual accompaniment, demands that we **look after our vocation**. The key challenge consists in finding creative ways to state the importance of spiritual values and personal encounter with the God of life, love, tenderness and compassion (cf. EG 88). This requires that we encourage the experience of faith and encounter with Jesus Christ: young people demands a down-to-earth and coherent lifestyle of us.

### ***... experiencing fraternal life, as at Valdocco, available for planning and cooperation...***

8. We believe that the community "is put forward as an eloquent witness to the Trinit" (VC 21; cf. 16) and our **living together** is the result of the initiative of God the Father who calls us to be disciples of Christ for a mission of salvation (cf. C 50). In order not to lose this particular gift, offered to us and the whole Church, the visibility of the fraternal dimension of our life must be more aware, direct, effective and joyful (cf. *Ps* 133:1).

We recognise that **community life** is one of the ways of having **an experience of God**. Living "mystical fraternity"(cf. EG, nos. 87, 92) is an essential element of our apostolic consecration and a great help in being faithful to it. But there is another clear link with our mission and with the world of the young thirsting for authentic communication and transparent relationships. At a time when families and society are coming apart, we offer an alternative lifestyle based on respect and cooperation with the other; at a time of inequality and injustice, we offer a witness of peace and reconciliation (C 49). Community is also revealed in the **common mission**. Unanimity in our apostolic activity brings about prophecy of the community and such testimony gives rise to new vocations.

Our limitations of mutual misunderstanding, our being closed in on ourselves and our daily fragility, depend on a lack of acceptance of the love and grace poured into our hearts by the Spirit of Christ (cf. *Rm* 5:5). We recognise that the **communion with the Body and Blood of Christ** (cf. *1 Cor* 10:16), with which we nourish each day, makes us "one heart and one soul" (*Acts* 2:42; C 50). The Eucharist is the source and summit of our fraternity, consecration and mission (cf. LG 11). Urged on by the charity of Christ and being part of the gift of self of Jesus the Good Shepherd, we participate in Don Bosco's spiritual experience and spend ourselves as he did for the salvation of the young.

**Personal** relationships in community can become **formal, fragmented and less significant** due to a number of factors: individualism and personal reticence, less than engaging formation, excessive concern for one's own work or being under-occupied, interaction limited to the functional, retreat into our private sphere and a not always balanced use of *personal media*. These factors become a facile alibi for not facing up to the demands of community life. **Conflicts** should not be seen as negative things but as an opportunity to mature: they need to be enlightened by the Gospel, tackled and resolved with greater courage, human skill and mercy (cf. Mt 5:20-26; EG, nos. 226-230).

A certain tendency to perfectionism and, on the contrary, immobility lies behind the lack of community renewal. The capacity to be realists and at the same time know how to dream, is diminished. We find ourselves challenged by Pope Francis: "I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security ... I dream of **a missionary option** capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today's world rather than for her self-preservation." (EG, nos. 49. 27).

What we offer as a community tends to reveal an "outgoing Church" (cf. EG 20-24; 46), and to realise an open **educative environment** and an "extroverted" Educative and Pastoral Community. The Salesian community has the task of creating fellowship too with lay people who share responsibility with us, especially with members of the Salesian Family, overcoming every kind of clericalism and directing ourselves towards new frontiers, "leaving the doors always open" (cf. EG 46-47).

Living out the **spirituality of communion** is what the Church asks of us today, integrating community life and service in our work (cf. NMI, nos. 43-45), in a renewed **sense of belonging**. To build community we need to **shift from life in common to communion of life**, in such a way that each confrere establishes deep ties and gives himself unreservedly, feeling no need to alienate himself or seek worldly compensations (cf. EG, nos. 93-97).

In the Church, which is the People of God on the march and a communion of individuals with different charisms and roles, we share the service of building the Kingdom of God with the laity. It is charismatic to see to the involvement and shared responsibility of all the members of the **animating core of the EPC** (cf. C 47), Salesians and lay people, foster a planning mentality and common action on behalf of the young, families and adults amongst the ordinary people.

The **Preventive System** is not only about pastoral animation but also relates relationships in the community in a Salesian way. It inspires us to be prophets for one another in the community, especially in times of suffering and when seeking depth. We are, then, "signs and bearers of God's love" (C 2) not only for young people but also for our confreres.

**"Home"** and **"family"** are the two terms frequently employed by Don Bosco to describe the "spirit of Valdocco" that must be resplendent in our communities. In this respect we the evangelical and charismatic appeal to mutual **understanding** and **shared responsibility**, to **fraternal correction** and **reconciliation**.

**Formation**, both initial and ongoing, is called to have an impact, by making use of the human sciences, on our deep relational dynamics, on our **emotional life** and on sexuality, all of which influence a balanced community life. In **our** formation processes, it would be good to tackle such issues more competently, frequently and in a more shared way, without limiting them exclusively to spiritual direction and the practice of the sacrament of reconciliation.

**Formation**, when taken up personally, helps us to purify our motivations, habituating us to live with right intention; 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.

The **Rector/Director** is a central figure; more than a manager he is, a father who brings his family together in communion and apostolic service. Due to the complexity of our work, the diversity of functions and less than adequate formation, he is not always in a position to look after fraternal life, discernment and shared responsibility in accordance with the community plan of life and its pastoral and educative plan. In some situations, weak support from the confreres has its effect .

### ***... going out to the peripheries, becoming prophetic signs in the service of the young!***

9. Young people are “our burning bush” (cf. *Ex* 3:2ff.; EG 169) through which God is speaking to us. This is a mystery to be respected, accepted, its more profound features recognised, and before which we should *remove our sandals* to contemplate God's self-revelation in each and everyone's story. This strong experience of God can allow us to respond to the cry of the young (EG 187-193; 211).

We are aware that **union with God** is something to be experienced **amongst the young**: “We believe that *God is awaiting us in the young* to offer us the grace of meeting with him and to dispose us to serve him in them, recognising their dignity and educating them to the fullness of life.” (GC23, 95) The mission is strengthened authentically when we see it as coming from God, and when we draw sustenance from Him for our service.

We are aware that **the strength and sharing of faith motivations and daily seeking union with God** enrich pastoral reflection, confer creativity on the proclamation of the Gospel, and challenge us to give our life to the young. Thus a double movement, one proper to the preventive system, occurs; in the school of God's love where God goes before us by loving us first. (cf. *1 Jn* 4:10.19) including through the young, we become capable of a ‘prevenient love’ (C 15).

We want to be a **Congregation of the poor for the poor**. Like Don Bosco we maintain that this is our way of living the Gospel in a radical way and being more available and relevant to the needs of the young, bringing about in our life a genuine exodus towards the most needy (cf. EG 105-106). **Migrants, refugees** and **unemployed youth** put a question to us as Salesians in all parts of the world: they invite us to find ways of collaborating and spur us on to concrete responses and a change to ways of thinking that are more open, supportive and courageous (cf. EG 210).



**Pastoral genericism** does not show effective adherence to the Salesian charism and does not translate into appropriate planning (cf. AGC 334). It is due to insufficient relevance to the deepest longings of the young, a lack of appreciation of indications coming from Salesian magisterium and weak observance of the Constitutions.

Our educative and pastoral activity is in tune with the local **Church** and cooperates with **institutions around us**, for a more trenchant and qualified service of the young and popular settings. Youth ministry and the Salesian pedagogical proposal are not 'private property' or for exclusive use within our Congregation, but a precious gift for the Church and the transformation of the world.

The **Preventive System** is for us Salesians a pedagogical approach, a proposal of youthful evangelisation, a profound spiritual experience. There is need for a greater commitment to its renewed understanding and practice in today's altered circumstances. We would like to highlight in particular that it is a "spirituality to be lived"; the fruitfulness of our work is the result of an intense spiritual life lived with the young (C 20) and for their salvation.

**Salesian assistance** is a fundamental aspect of our spirituality. Being with the young, making ourselves their neighbour, earning their confidence and accompanying them in their allegiance to the faith, allows us to encounter God and listen to him, giving all our effort "until our last breath" (MB XVIII, 258) and testifying by the gift of our life according to the logic of the cross. By living this way we begin to own the whole paschal dynamic, and are certain that the beauty of the resurrection will fill this authentic gift of ourselves with joy and peace.

Practising the twofold **work and temperance** replenishes Salesian life, nurtures his apostolic zeal and brings him close to the young, the Lord and his confreres. The **apostolic front** must be proportionate to a community and an EPC that is consistent in number and quality.

We insist on the need that **formation** has to take account of a training and preparation for serving the young, including through deeper study, cultural dialogue and significant pastoral experiences, seeing to a constant updating in accordance with the guidelines of the Church and the Congregation.

The **digital world**, "the new areopagus of modern times" (John Paul II, *Redemptoris missio*, 37), challenges us as educators of the young: it is a "new playground", a "new oratory" which demands that we be there and requires our pastoral and educational involvement, encouraging us to new forms of evangelisation and education. Our "knowledge and information era", however, tend to a commodification of human relationships and a monopolisation of human knowledge, thus becoming a source of "new and often anonymous kinds of power." (cf. EG 52) which we must tackle through our pastoral and educative involvement.



# WAY FORWARD

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## I. Goal

10. To witness to “a radical Gospel approach” by means of **continual spiritual , fraternal and pastoral conversion**:
- living the **PRIMACY OF GOD** by contemplating what happens each day and by following Christ; [Tr. note: the term is 'sequela di Cristo' in Italian which mixes Latin and Italian; English readers may be less familiar with 'sequela']
  - building up authentic communities through relationships and work in accordance with the **FAMILY SPIRIT**;
  - putting ourselves more decisively and significantly at the **SERVICE OF** the poorest of the **YOUNG**.

## II. Processes and steps

### Like Don Bosco, in dialogue with the Lord ...

11. To be **MYSTICS in the Spirit** we need to move:
- from a fragmented spirituality to a **unifying spirituality**, the result of contemplating God in Jesus Christ and the young.
  - From an attitude where we feel we are already formed, to humbly and constantly **listening** to God's Word, our confreres and the young.
12. To bring about these processes we commit ourselves to:
- Experiencing our daily **Eucharist** as the source of our apostolic fruitfulness and celebrating the **Sacrament of reconciliation** as a way of frequently setting out once more on the path to conversion.
  - Cultivating **personal prayer** in daily contact with the Word of God, engaging in meditation and seeing to the quality of **community prayer**, sharing it with the young and members of the EPC.
  - Giving a special character to the project of animation and government at all levels for the next six years, by putting **God's Word at the heart of it**.

### ... journeying together, moved by the Spirit ...

13. To be **MYSTICS in the Spirit** we need to move:
- from a weak testimony of the evangelical counsels to a life filled with passion for following Jesus which is able to **wake up the world**, calling us back to a life of simplicity.
  - from a pessimistic outlook on the world to a **vision of faith** which discovers the God of joy in the vicissitudes of life and in the history of humankind.
14. To bring about these processes we commit ourselves to:
- Living the grace of consecration with joy and authenticity by drawing up or redefining our **personal plan of life** and the **community plan**.
  - Having a **stable spiritual director** and referring to this person periodically.

- c) Exploring our spirituality through **constant reading of the Constitutions and the study of Salesian Sources**.
- d) Envisaging **times for community spiritual sharing** starting out from the Word of God, making use of *lectio divina* in particular.
- e) Evaluating and promoting **the harmony between prayer and work**, reflection and apostolate as a community and as individuals, through appropriate *scrutinies*.
- f) Seeing to the **translation of the *Fonti salesiane* (Salesian Sources) in different languages**.
- g) Updating the prayer book known as *In dialogue with the Lord* and other aids to prayer.
- h) Setting formation initiatives in place for Salesians and lay people and qualifying a **Centre for Ongoing Formation** at Regional level or making use of those in other Regions.

### ... experiencing fraternal life, as at Valdocco ...

15. *To be PROPHETS of fraternity we need to move:*

- a) from functional and formal relationships to **warm and supportive ones, relationships of profound communion**;
- b) from prejudice and closure to **fraternal correction** and **reconciliation**.

16. *To bring about these processes we commit ourselves to:*

- a) Making room for the practice of dialogue with others (cf. EG 88), using positive dynamics of **interpersonal communication** amongst confreres, young people, lay people and Salesian Family members, also making use of the contributions of human sciences.
- b) Having relationships of **fraternity and empathy, where we listen to our dependants and collaborators**, avoiding authoritarian attitudes and counter witness.
- c) Encouraging every confrere to share the task of responsibility for the community with the Rector/Director and his Council.
- d) Meeting the needs of **sick and elderly confreres** and involving them in the life and common mission in accordance with their real possibilities.
- e) Giving special support to **communities working on the "frontiers"**.
- f) Ensuring **consistency in number and quality** of communities by wisely and courageously reshaping communities.
- g) Seeing to the two **complementary forms of the Salesian religious vocation** by taking up the guidelines from GC26 (cf. 74-78) and continuing reflection both on the consecrated life aspect and the specific nature of the Brothers with regard to fraternal life and the mission.
- h) Reinforcing ways of maturing in spiritual and human terms, and envisaging adequate **support processes** for confreres in difficulty.
- i) Ensuring adequate **accompaniment processes** for individuals involved in possible cases of abuse.
- j) Evaluating and relaunching the proposal for **formation of Rectors/Directors** (cf. GC21,46-57; GC25, 63-65), as part of the next six year plan,.
- k) Seeing to the updating of the **Rector's/Director's and the Provincial's Handbook**. This is the task of *The RM and General Council*.

## ... available for planning and cooperation ...

17. *To be PROPHETS of fraternity we need to move:*

- a) from individualistic pastoral initiative to unconditional **availability** for the mission and community and province planning.
- b) from considering young people as simple beneficiaries and lay people as collaborators to **promoting** young people as pivotal players and lay people as sharing responsibility for the one mission.

18. *To bring about these processes we commit ourselves to:*

- a) Growing in communion and shared responsibility by taking up the **community plan** and **SEPP**, giving development and visibility to “a Salesian culture” (cf. AGC 413, p. 53).
- b) Creating **teamwork with other Salesian Family Groups** who work for the young and promote their rights (cf. *Charter of Identity of the SF*, 21, 41).
- c) **Networking** by linking effectively with local Church, other Religious Families, educational, social and government agencies.
- d) Setting up more adequate processes in **initial formation** aimed at involvement in youth ministry, social problems, with the appropriate attitudes to planning and cultural dynamics in the local area.
- e) Integrating **family ministry** into the Provincial and local SEPP, envisaging the formation and involvement of **lay leadership** (GC26, 99, 102, 104).
- f) Organising a **unified and comprehensive Salesian ministry** in provincial and local communities in accordance with the *Youth Ministry Frame of Reference* and agreed upon planning by Sector and Regional Councillors.
- g) Ensuring attention to **family ministry** and **lay formation** at all levels and encouraging coordination of reflection and intervention by the Sectors for the Salesian mission and Formation.

## ... going out to the peripheries ...

19. *To be SERVANTS of the young we need to move:*

- a) from distance from the young to an active and enthusiastic **presence** in their midst with the passion of the Good Shepherd.
- b) from a ministry of preservation to an **outgoing ministry** that starts with the deepest needs of the poorest young people from a family and social perspective.

20. *To bring about these processes we commit ourselves to:*

- a) Promoting in Provinces a profound **evaluation of our significance for and presence among poorer youth** in our works in accordance with criteria offered by General Chapters and the Rector Majors, in view of “structural pastoral conversion” and a shift towards new poverties (cf. Reg. 1).
- b) Taking up, together with lay people, the *Youth Ministry Frame of Reference*, activating renewal processes, making use of existing **volunteer** efforts and considering **new existential and geographical frontiers of young people who are poorer**.
- c) Promoting and defending **human rights and the rights of minors** through the innovative approach of the Preventive System, paying particular attention to child labour, the sex trade, drug dependency and all forms of exploitation, unemployment, youth migration and human trafficking.
- d) Encouraging in our settings an atmosphere of respect for the dignity of minors,

committing ourselves to setting up conditions which prevent any form of **abuse and violence**, where every Province follows the guidelines and directives of the Rector Major and General Council.

- e) Educating the young to **justice and lawfulness**, to the **socio-political dimension of evangelisation** and **charity**, walking side by side with them as agents of social transformation in a logic of service for the common good.
- f) Sensitising communities and the young to respect for creation, educating them to **ecological responsibility** through concrete activities which safeguard the environment and sustainable development.

## **... becoming prophetic signs in the service of the young!**

21. *To be SERVANTS of the young we need to move:*

- a) from a life marked by the trend to upward mobility to a missionary and prophetic community which **shares** with the young and the poor.
- b) from a ministry of events and activities to a complete and systematic ministry able to **accompany** processes of vocational maturing, in tune with new Church and Salesian vistas.

22. *To bring about these processes we commit ourselves to:*

- a) Developing a culture of vocation and care for vocations to Salesian life, cultivating the **art of accompaniment** and enabling Salesians and lay people to become spiritual guides of the young.
- b) Living the twofold *work and temperance*, seeing to a **visibly poor lifestyle**, eliminating waste and making ourselves available for domestic and community services.
- c) Practising **real solidarity** with those who find themselves in need, with the poor and amongst Salesian houses.
- d) Entering into the **digital world** where the young dwell in particular in a significant and educational manner, ensuring the appropriate professional and ethical formation of confreres and our collaborators, and applying the Salesian Social Communication System (SSCS).
- e) Encouraging **international communities** including through a worldwide redistribution of confreres and promoting missionary projects in the Congregation.
- f) Putting procedures in place, including *auditing*, which guarantee **transparency and professionalism in management** of goods and works.
- g) Carrying out a careful evaluation of the **General House and other building structures in the Congregation**, so that they are a clear and credible sign of our radical Gospel approach.