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of the Salesian Society
of St John Bosco

OFFICIAL ORGAN OF ANIMATION AND COMMUNICATION FOR THE SALESIAN CONGREGATION

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***“Witnesses
to the radical approach
of the Gospel”
Work and temperance***

DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER XXVII
OF THE SOCIETY OF SAINT FRANCIS OF SALES

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PRESENTATION

Dear Confreres,

As happened at the last General Chapter, the GC27 ended on 12th April. This date is particularly dear to us as it recalls the beginning of Don Bosco's work in Turin Valdocco. It was in fact on 12th April 1846, Easter Sunday, that Don Bosco was able to settle down in a place that was "all his own" in order to gather his boys together. Recalling that day as the bicentenary of his birth draws near, as a Congregation following the path marked out by the General Chapter we are preparing for a fresh start.

Every General Chapter has a stage of preparation, beginning with the publication of the Rector Major's letter convoking it and concluding with the holding of the Provincial Chapters; a stage of celebration which consists in the life of the Chapter Assembly from its opening day until its conclusion; a stage of implementation which begins with the closing of the celebration of the Chapter and continues until the next General Chapter. With the publication of the Acts of the GC27 which I am now presenting to you, the third stage begins, that of implementation.

The Acts of the GC27 are divided into three fundamental parts: the text which develops the theme "Witnesses to the radical approach of the Gospel"; the deliberations; the appendices. All these parts are important and contribute to an understanding of the Chapter event and of its spirit. Added to these are my presentation and the analytical index of the development of the theme. It should not be forgotten that these Acts find in the letter of convocation written by the Rector Major emeritus Fr Pascual Chavez, some ideas which can help with a better interpretation of even the Chapter itself.

Witnesses to the radical approach of the Gospel

The fundamental theme of the GC27 is "Witnesses to the radical approach of the Gospel. Work and temperance". Now I want to tell you about some of the emphases this received; some other important features are present in

the introduction, as for example, the biblical icon of the vine and the branches.

Conversion

The theme of the Chapter is fascinating and promising for the future of the Congregation, but at the same time it is very demanding. It requires of us a journey of conversion, which we cannot plan; we may want it to happen, but that it will cannot be taken for granted. Conversion is the work of the Spirit Who changes our ways of thinking, our hearts and our lives. It is the responsibility of each one of us and of every community to ensure that we are attentive and open to whatever the Spirit may suggest to us. The task is ours of finding the right conditions to foster spiritual, fraternal and pastoral conversion. Conversion is the goal which the GC27 sets for all of us, a conversion which is both personal and communitarian.

Discernment

After the experience of the GC25 and GC26 we have arrived at a method of discernment that to me seems better defined. It employs three new expressions more consistent with the action of the Spirit: *listening*, *interpretation* and the *way forward*. During the Chapter it was a method difficult to understand, especially the part regarding interpretation, but in the end it seems to me that it was welcomed and put into practice. This method is one that draws its inspiration from that much used by the Church in Latin America and again employed in the last General Conference of the Latin American Bishops at Aparecida.¹ If it is used, it can give good fruits in the life of the confreres, of the communities and of the provinces; discernment is the way the Spirit is pointing out to us nowadays to find the will of God.

The starting point is to put ourselves in an attitude of *listening*: to life, to situations, to the expectations people have. God speaks to us through life, the people He places beside us, the events of history. Listening leads us to come out from ourselves, to look at reality and to allow ourselves to be questioned by it and to overcome any ego-centric tendency, and to accept what is new and challenging in the life of young people and families, of the Church and the Congregation, of culture and the world. It is a question of

¹ Cf. Aparecida Document, 19.

a reflective listening so that we not only “hear” reality but are helped to “see it”, to contemplate it in the light of God’s Providence; it is a listening in faith undertaken by believers.

The second step is also demanding: *interpretation*. It is necessary to interpret facts and situations in order to understand them better and to identify their causes. We must not stop at the symptoms, we need to get to the roots of the situations. It is a matter of the interpretation of reality by a believer, which draws on the gospel and on the charism, which uses criteria coming from faith and from reason, and therefore is a true communitarian discernment. Sometimes there can be differences in the interpretations; it is therefore necessary to arrive at a shared interpretation. We are invited to judge reality according to Jesus Christ, the way, the truth and the life.

Finally, the *way ahead* proposes the path to be followed, indicating a goal towards which to aim, the processes by which some starting points and some targets can be identified and some steps that can make the journey for the next few years more concrete.

The three stages form an inseparable unity; they are different but intertwined. We must not forget that we are dealing with a discernment process in order to know the will of God and to put it into practice. “The assent of faith, joyfilled and trusting in God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, together with integration in the Church [and in the Congregation], are indispensable prerequisites to ensure the effectiveness of this method”.²

Vocation and the grace of unity

Fundamental elements to be found throughout the Chapter document regarding witnessing to the radical approach of the gospel are the issues of vocation and the grace of unity. These are theological issues that need to be taken up seriously.

The witness of the gospel being lived in a radical manner is a call from God and not only a decision on our part. With the gift of Salesian consecrated life that God has given to each of us we are called to be witnesses to the gospel. The profile of the Salesian that we have to take on therefore

² Cf. Ibid.

becomes that of someone who is “called to be a mystic in the Spirit, a prophet of fraternity and a servant of the young”. Witnessing is first of all a vocational gift and therefore a task and a responsibility. From this comes the importance of putting as the foundation of our witnessing acknowledgement and gratitude for the gift of our vocation; without this foundation our witness would be weak.

The gratuitous gift of God and our response in cooperating with it come together in a reciprocal relationship. This is the grace of unity; this is the primacy of God in our life. These are gifts of the Spirit for each one of us. In those situations in which we come face to face with our personal and community fragility, in the various difficulties in the cultural and social context and in the mission, the grace of unity is the way ahead in order to respond with generosity and to be ourselves: consecrated Salesians, brothers at the service of the young. In welcoming this gift we encounter a characteristic feature of our spirituality – union with God; this fosters the unification of our life: prayer and work, action and contemplation, reflection and the apostolate. Here we will discover ecstasy in action. The witnessing to which we are called is not only with regard to some partial aspects of our life; if we want it to be authentic it has to cover the whole of it.

Work and temperance

Living a radical approach in the following of the Lord cannot be imposed, nor is it a command, but rather it is an expression of love for Jesus with whom we need to be vitally united; for this reason the Chapter document has chosen the icon of the vine and the branches.

Work and temperance are the Salesian way of living the radical approach of the gospel. They are our badge and our characteristic feature. For us it is a question of two inseparable realities: “Work is the visible sign of Salesian mysticism and the expression of the passion for souls, while temperance is the visible sign of Salesian asceticism and the expression of the *cetera tolle*” (AGC 413, p. 44). There is no mystic element without asceticism and vice-versa; there is no work without temperance and there is no temperance without work; this too is the grace of unity.

“Da mihi animas” is visibly expressed in the life of a Salesian and of the community through apostolic, untiring, passionate and sanctified work;

“cetera tolle” is expressed in temperance which is renunciation, sacrifice and the price we are ready to pay for souls. Work and temperance are united and summed up in the total gift of oneself to God for the young. They are a vocational criterion for discernment and formation. All of this takes us back to what article 18 of our Constitutions says.

Deliberations

The 19 deliberations of the Chapter regard the Constitutions, the General Regulations and the life of the Congregation. For the most part they refer to the structures of the central government of the Congregation, but they also have an effect on the life of the confreres, communities and provinces. Therefore all the deliberations should be studied, on account also of the practical consequences they have at all levels. By way of example I will mention some of them.

The deliberation that entrusts the Salesian Family to a Central Secretariat directly dependent on the Rector Major, implies not simply a change in the organisation or allocation of responsibilities but also offers an aid to bringing about a change of mentality regarding the way of understanding and animating the Salesian Family on the part of our Congregation.³

There is a deliberation approved regarding the way of electing the Councillors for the Sectors. This has introduced an important criterion for the naming of a confrere for a specific role: it is necessary to know beforehand the names of candidates to be considered in the discernment process before any voting, and at the same time to set in motion a process that is transparent and communitarian so that candidates may emerge. The same criterion could also be used in the appointments of confreres and of lay people.⁴

Another deliberation asks the Rector Major to set up a central financial commission with the roles of study, consultation and checks. This implies the need to monitor finances at all levels in a collective manner, to initiate transparent procedures in arriving at decisions, to make use of the skills of professionals.⁵

³ Cf. Deliberation 4.

⁴ Cf. Deliberation 9.

The last example of a deliberation concerns the responsibility for the provision of personnel for the Salesian special places which is entrusted to the Rector Major and his Council. This requires greater involvement on the part of provinces called to be generous in offering confreres who are competent and available for services that regard the whole Congregation; this applies also to all the other needs of the Congregation.⁶

Appendices

The third part of the Acts of the GC27 provides some relevant addresses. These are not offered primarily for the purpose of documentation; above all they are provided for study and reflection, since they contain important elements to understand the decisions of the Chapter. They are related to the interpretative dimension of our actions.

With the publication of the Acts of the GC27 we now have something that we can examine together; in this way the direction we should go is being pointed out to us. The Chapter Assembly was committed to providing essential texts. Now it is up to everyone, confreres, communities and provinces to study and examine these documents more closely with open minds and ready hearts. Only by knowing, studying and understanding what is being offered to us will we be able to move forward together and bear abundant fruit.

Let us entrust this postchapter journey to Mary Help of Christians, whom we invoke as the model of a radical gospel approach. She is the Woman who listens, the Mother of the new community, the maidservant of the poor. She teaches us to be open to the Spirit; She guides us on our journey of renewal and conversion. Let us walk with Mary together!

Fr Ángel Fernández Artime
Rector Major

Rome, 24 May 2014
Solemnity of Mary Help of Christians

⁵ Cf. Deliberation 15.

⁶ Cf. Deliberation 17.

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

INTRODUCTION



"The vine and the branches"
Ancient Icon - Greece: sec. XV-XVII

The significance of the icon

In the icon what draws our attention is the inter-twining of the branches which represent the trunk of the vine. This is a reference to the image in the Gospel "I am the vine" and indicates the foundation and strength that Jesus Himself is for those called and sent out by Him. The figure of Christ constitutes a single entity with the root of the vine: his kind and pensive face and his twofold gesture of blessing make him similar to the iconography of the Pantocrator. Nevertheless in this context the Lord's blessing takes on a double ecclesial significance: it indicates both a protective guardianship and a kind of mandate. He who is the Master safely gathers his own together in communion but in order to send them out to proclaim the Kingdom.

Above all this strong link with the Lord is the source of abundant fruit. It is the flourishing life of the Church, and its most visible fruits are the 'apostolic college'. This group is the 'prototype' of all the disciples-apostles: just as the Son keeps the Word close to Himself, so each individual is shown with the writings attributed to him in the New Testament. The blossoming of the Congregation and the Salesian Family is the same.

It is also worth noticing a certain similarity in iconographic terms between the Twelve and the Master, a similarity which does not ignore the differences and the characteristic physical features distinguishing young, mature and elderly men. In fact, the relationship of listening to and obeying Christ shapes the personality of the disciple without altering it: simply by taking on the 'features' of the Master the disciple becomes capable of writing with his life the riches of the Gospel.

Finally it should be pointed out that the fruitful relationship of the disciples with Jesus is not one closed in on itself but gives a certain balance to the human community: in the picture an harmonious expansion of the vine can be noticed; this becomes an expression of the service of love we are called upon to offer to the young.

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 with a view to 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 single 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 returning tide and delivering the experience to local and provincial communities.

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), an icon for the theme and a synthesis of our Chapter work. Its central message takes us back to being deeply united, “rooted”, then, in love for Jesus as

was Don Bosco whose life was profoundly unified around the person of the Son of God, bearing “much fruit”.

Remaining, loving, bearing fruit are, therefore, the three verbs that throw an 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 our 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 prolific, always bears fruit.

The grace of unity

Preparation by the 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 a gift from God 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 generates 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 transfor-

mation of mind and heart, a deep purification. This is the challenge to be tackled with boldness and courage, the process to be set in motion to regenerate ourselves, our educative and pastoral communities and the young.

John Paul II stated: “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”.¹

This reference to the roots, the depths of the heart, allows those around us who are watching us to glimpse our motives for giving our lives to God and the young, the ultimate meaning of our lives 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 see in Him the Son of God united to each human being in the incarnation.² 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” (C. 21) shines through.

Pope Francis reminded us of this in the audience on 31 March: “I imagine that during the Chapter – which had as its theme “*Witnesses of the Gospel’s radical demands*” – you had ever before you Don Bosco and the young; and 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 one thinks of working for the good of souls, one overcomes the temptation to spiritual worldliness, one does not seek after other things, but only God and his Kingdom. Temperance, then, is a sense of proportion, being content, being simple. May the poverty of Don Bosco and of Mamma Margaret inspire every Salesian and each of your communities to live an austere life based on the essentials, on closeness to the poor, on transparency and responsibility in managing temporal goods”.

Contemplation and action, the practice of the evangelical counsels, fraternal community and the apostolic mission are thus led back to “a

¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Vita Consecrata*, 93.

² Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

single movement of love towards God and towards our brothers” (C. 3). With regard to this, “work is the visible sign of Salesian mysticism and the expression of the passion for souls, while temperance is the visible sign of Salesian asceticism and the expression of the *cetera tolle*”.³

“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*).

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 in some way 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 were 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 was possible to penetrate to the deep roots of our identity as disciples and apostles.

³ AGC 413, p. 44; cf. C. 18.

The third phase, pulling together the results of the first two, allowed us to outline the *way ahead* on which we need to embark, 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 our lives. The way ahead offers a *goal* that is the horizon towards which we are moving; it envisages certain *processes* which make it more concrete, suggesting a situation from which to start and a point of arrival 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 in the final version by a series of phrases placed at the beginning of each section: *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 community 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.

Mary our model of the radical Gospel approach

To Mary the Immaculate Help of Christians, Mother of a "radical and unconditional 'yes'", we entrust our assent of faith, our wish and desire for communion and our apostolic commitment to the young.

Blessed are you **Mary, the Woman who listened,**
Because you lived in the search for God's will for you.
And when His plan for you was revealed
you had the courage to accept it,
abandoning your own life project
to make the Lord's your own.
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 outpouring of the Spirit of the Risen One in the Upper
Room.

Mother of the brothers and sisters of your Son,
teach us how to build communities
which are of one heart and soul.
Let our communion, our fraternity and our joy
be a living testimony
to the beauty of faith and of 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 to the human race
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 neighbours,
so that while we respond to their needs,
we may offer them Jesus, God's gift, the most precious gift!

Amen.

I. LISTENING

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 also alive in young people and in the laity: we find them responsive to life values expressed in simplicity, austerity and genuine relationships between people. Young people in particular are seeking significant adults to accompany them and help them to mature in life.
2. We find that we are working in different *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 be afraid of speaking about Him, so as not to offend, or out of respect for the other person, or to protect ourselves from the opinions of others. Sometimes there is no encounter with the Gospel because of the lack of openness, or the 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 and of modern day cultures is partial and superficial. By uncritically responding to social needs and demands, we are silent as regards the experience of God and run the risk of no longer understanding our specific mission as religious in today's world.
3. There are *signs of the primacy of God in our lives*: fidelity to the Lord through the practice of 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. At the same time we find 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 which builds and strengthens fraternal life is too easily set aside. 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 persons and our educative and pastoral mission.

... journeying together moved by the Spirit...

4. We are grateful to God for the *fidelity* of so many confreres and for the *holiness* of some members of the Salesian Family that has been recognised by the Church. Every day we are in contact with adults and young people, confreres old and young, sick or at the height of their activity who bear witness to the fascination of the search for God, the radical approach of the Gospel lived joyfully and with a keen passion for Don Bosco.
5. 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, offering a human way of life that achieves fulfilment by going against and offering an alternative to a worldly mentality.⁴ The practice of *lectio divina*, with community sharing of God's Word and the *personal plan of life* have become for many confreres a great resource for personal renewal, an effective antidote to the temptation of spiritual superficiality.

⁴ Cf. POPE FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 93-97.

6. Given the difficulties and daily challenges related to proclaiming the Gospel, we are very much aware that there is a connection between *pastoral charity and spiritual life* as the sources of our fruitfulness.
7. We note certain *symptoms of ego-centricity* where we do not go out of ourselves to be open to the demands of God or go out to meet others: a lack of updating, of reference to a stable spiritual director and a “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...

8. Since GC25 there has been a growing commitment to *living our community life more authentically* through better animation of prayer times, and an effort to 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 in communion as brothers who live, reflect and work together: community day, the annual formative project, *lectio divina* and spiritual sharing, reflection on our Salesian experience, times for celebrating and relaxing together. Community structures, settings and their location, the style and rhythms of life express our view of community and allow us to live it.
9. Some negative influences from society are also noted in our communities. We risk losing our Gospel-inspired *ways of thinking* by taking up negative features of today’s culture. For example, we mask our indifference towards or lack of care for our confrere with the excuse of showing “respect” or “tolerance”, or we unnecessarily make public information that should be kept among ourselves. Creeping materialism and activism make us perceive community time as time ‘stolen’ from the private sphere or the mission.

10. Fraternal life in community especially shows signs of the low appreciation of the meaning of our consecrated life which is seen 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.
11. We note that prayer and the offering up of a life of sacrifice by *elderly and sick 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 are making every effort to see they are not excluded from the mission. We still find some difficulty in accepting and taking care of confreres who are in situations of fragility, in trouble, senile and sick.⁵
12. Among our confreres and in our communities there is also the *issue of spiritual fatherliness*, expressed 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 projects have been developed for growth as human beings in the emotional, relational and spiritual sphere.

... available for planning and sharing...

13. The *Community Plan* and the *Educative and Pastoral Plan* (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 little awareness of the essential function of the *Educative and Pastoral Community* (EPC). We recognise the importance of working with shared responsibility, notwithstanding the struggle to feel that we are an active part of the EPC and to recognise it as having responsibility for the mission. Sometimes our Educative and Pastoral Plan is limited to organising our activities, without shared and ongoing reflection on the objectives, on priorities, on processes and on the evalua-

⁵ Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 209-210.

tion of the objectives achieved. Some confreres nevertheless through a tendency to favour areas of personal activity continue to find difficulty in sharing the mission.

14. Over these years the field of intervention for *Rectors/Directors* has broadened. They are fully engaged in managerial tasks as well as being spiritual guides of the confreres and leaders of the EPC. Therefore the Rectors/Directors are not always in the position to fulfil the obligations of their service and often they do not receive adequate cooperation from the confreres, and sometimes they are deprived of a systematic formative accompaniment at provincial level.
15. We see greater *involvement and activity by the laity*, helped by sharing and joint responsibility with and within the educative and pastoral community. A number of difficulties with regard to Salesian-lay relationships have been overcome in the combined effort to converge around a single project. Where this kind of teamwork exists, in a climate of trust and family spirit, respecting roles, that place becomes fruitful and purposeful, also in vocational terms. Systematic formation of the laity continues to be weak in certain contexts.
16. Some of us allow ourselves to become 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 to our collaborators. Many lay people who are paid for their leadership roles and assistance offer a truly professional and Salesian service, in comparison with others who have shortcomings especially due to our lack of involvement in formation procedures.
17. 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 us to feel joy and satisfaction as we experience the regenerating truth of the Salesian charism: evangelising and 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 mis-

sionary dimension.⁶ Within the Salesian youth volunteer movement there is sometimes a lack of adequate spiritual and pedagogical accompaniment for it to become an authentic experience of a meeting with Christ in the poor.

18. We have gained greater awareness of the importance of accompanying the young in coming to know and to meet 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.
19. Our awareness of being a *Salesian Family* has grown, thanks also to positive cooperation in provincial and local communities, to “Salesian Spirituality Days”, the Rector Major’s yearly Strenna 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 single charismatic movement. Moreover, shared responsibility in the mission between Salesians, other Salesian Family 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.
20. 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 needs to be reconsidered in close connection with youth ministry.
21. *Initial formation* at times continues to be disconnected from pastoral processes. After the specific period of formation of candidates for the priesthood and brothers, difficulties and problems arise 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 into ordinary educative and pastoral activity.

⁶ Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 106.

... going out to the peripheries...

22. The Congregation is becoming more decisively oriented to *youngsters who are poor* and at risk as we listen to their cry for help. There is a growing sensitivity among confreres to a culture of human rights, especially those of minors, which is seen in certain prophetic choices on the new frontiers and at the margins in the broader sense.
23. Moreover, the Congregation is committed to insisting strongly that employing any approach which does not respect young people, and having recourse to *violence* of any kind are clearly contrary to Salesian pedagogy. All Provinces have taken or are about to finish taking the necessary steps in order to formulate 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 legislation of the countries in which we operate.
24. We are becoming aware that there is at times *a certain distance between us and the young*; it is a mental and cultural one rather than a physical one. In some situations we look on 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 confronts us.
25. The new technologies of information and communication and the *digital environment* in which we are living are a cultural, social and pastoral space encouraging an experience of life; they are an integral part of daily life and have an impact on our way of feeling, thinking, living and relating. They allow us to maintain ties and cultivate healthy relationships among confreres and young people, reduce geographical distances that would otherwise hinder immediate and frequent communication. As Salesians we feel we are not present as educators and evangelisers in a significant way in this environment.

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

26. 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 to financially support traditional structures limits our openness to new forms of poverty and new social emergencies.
27. 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 activities, experience a sense of tiredness, tension, fragmentation, inefficiency and *burnout*. Sometimes we are far too concerned with and worn down by all the efforts at preserving and helping works to survive. When we are concerned with the young, at times we focus only on their social well-being while neglecting their accompaniment in the spiritual life and in their vocation.
28. The *visibility and credibility* of our consecrated life has gradually lessened. Not always can the witness to the primacy of God be recognised in us, through the practice of the vows, our modest lifestyle, commitment to work, dedication to the mission, personal and community prayer faithfully practised.
29. *Intercultural living* within our communities is an opportunity, a witness to unity for the world; it also reveals certain limits to our charity and uncovers prejudices which resist evangelical fraternity. International communities and collaboration in worldwide projects contribute to creating a greater sense of fraternity and solidarity.
30. We recognise that the responsibility for *caring for the environment* is an emerging sensitivity in our communities as 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 the young.

II. INTERPRETATION

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

31. Immersed in history, marked by limitation and fragility, we are supported by the certainty that *God accompanies the human race* with his interventions of salvation which culminate in the Pasch of the Lord Jesus: “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”.⁷ Following Jesus’ example in his transfiguration and covering his disciples in the light of Tabor⁸ and listening to the warnings in Don Bosco’s “dream of the Ten Diamonds”, we appreciate the grace of the Salesian vocation, the fruitfulness of the evangelical counsels, communion in community and among 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.
32. 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 become too caught up in our activities and forgetting that we are essentially “seekers of God” and witnesses of his love among 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 recall the meanings and needs that underpin our vocation.⁹

⁷ Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 276.

⁸ Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 14-16.

⁹ CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, *Rallegratevi*, 4.

33. Our *mysticism* is expressed as both our personal and community lives become more profoundly human.¹⁰ It is based on the mystery of the Incarnation: Jesus made his own 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.
34. 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”.¹¹
35. Today, other than noting cultural changes, we are convinced that we are experiencing *an historic turning point*,¹² 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 urgent needs, to live the culture of encounter and dialogue,¹³ avoiding self-referentiality and embodying a missionary spirituality.
36. The difficulties we experience in responding to God’s call to live 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 to be people of compassion, especially for the poor.

¹⁰ Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 87, 92, 266.

¹¹ BENEDICT XVI, *Deus caritas est*, 1.

¹² Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 52; cf. 61-70.

¹³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 220.

37. Called as we are to testify to the reality of the Kingdom and to dialogue with thinking that sometimes tends to relativise and marginalise religious discourse, we become irrelevant when we back away from our *prophetic role* in proposing a culture inspired by the Gospel.
38. The risk of easily being considered mere “social workers” instead of educators and pastors capable of witnessing to the primacy of God, of proclaiming the Gospel and of spiritual accompaniment, demands that we *take care of our vocation*. The most significant challenge consists in finding creative ways to state the importance of spiritual values and a personal encounter with the God of life, love, tenderness and compassion. This requires that we encourage the experience of faith and the encounter with Jesus Christ: young people demand a down-to-earth and coherent lifestyle of us.

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

39. We believe that the community “is put forward as an eloquent witness to the Trinity”¹⁴ 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 conscious, direct, effective and joyful (cf. *Ps* 133:1).
40. We recognise that *community life* is one of the ways of having *an experience of God*. Living “mystical fraternity”¹⁵ is an essential element of our apostolic consecration and a great help in being faithful to it. 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

¹⁴ *Vita Consecrata*, 21; cf. 16.

¹⁵ Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 87, 92.

coming apart, we offer an alternative lifestyle based on respect and cooperation with the other person; at a time marked by inequality and injustice, we offer a witness of peace and reconciliation (cf. C. 49). Community is also revealed in the common mission. Unanimity in our apostolic activity brings about the prophecy of the community and such testimony gives rise to new vocations.

41. 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. *I Cor* 10:16), with which we nourish ourselves 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.¹⁶ 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.
42. *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, relationships limited to the functional, retreat into our private sphere and a not always balanced use of *personal media*. These factors become a facile excuse for not facing up to the demands of community life. *Conflict situations* should not be seen as negative things but as an opportunity to mature: they need to be enlightened by the Gospel, tackled and then resolved with greater courage, human skill and mercy.¹⁷
43. A certain tendency to perfectionism and, on the contrary, resistance to change lies behind the lack of community renewal. The capacity to be realists and at the same time know how to dream,

¹⁶ Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Lumen Gentium*, 11.

¹⁷ Cf. *Mt* 5:20-26; *Evangelii Gaudium*, 226-230.

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”.¹⁸

44. What we offer as a community is meant to reveal an “outgoing Church”,¹⁹ and to realise an open educative environment and an “outward-looking” *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”.²⁰
45. Living out the *spirituality of communion* is what the Church asks of us today, integrating community life and service in our work,²¹ 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.²²
46. In the Church, which is the People of God on the march and a communion of individuals with different charisms and roles, we share with the laity the service of building the Kingdom of God. The Salesian charism requires us to cultivate the involvement and shared responsibility of all the members of the *animating core of the Educative and Pastoral Community* (cf. C. 47), Salesians and lay people, to foster a planning mentality and common action on

¹⁸ *Evangelii Gaudium*, 49. 27.

¹⁹ Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 20-24, 46.

²⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 46-47.

²¹ Cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 43-45.

²² Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 93-97.

behalf of the young, of families and of adults among the ordinary people.

47. The *Preventive System* is not only about pastoral animation but also shapes relationships in the community in a Salesian way. It inspires us to be prophets of fraternity for one another in the community, especially in times of suffering and when seeking more meaningful relationships. We are, then, “signs and bearers of God’s love” (C. 2) not only for young people but also for our confreres.
48. “*Home*” and “*family*” are the two terms frequently used by Don Bosco to describe the “spirit of Valdocco” that must be clearly visible in our communities. In this respect we respond to the evangelical and charismatic appeal for mutual understanding and shared responsibility, for fraternal correction and reconciliation.
49. 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 to the practice of the sacrament of reconciliation.
50. Formation, when taken up personally, helps us to purify our motivations, accustoming us to live with the right intention; it educates us to *work and temperance* through disciplined and detached apostolic involvement which knows how to set the necessary boundaries within interpersonal relationships; it trains us in a moderate lifestyle which enables us to undertake manual work and ordinary and humble services in community.
51. 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. Because of 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!***

52. Young people are “our burning bush”²³ 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.²⁴
53. We are aware that *union with God* is something to be experienced *among 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”.²⁵ The mission is strengthened authentically when we see it as coming from God, and when we draw sustenance for our service from Him.
54. We are aware that the strength and the sharing of *motivations of faith* and daily seeking union with God enrich pastoral reflection, confer creativity on the proclamation of the Gospel, and induce 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 an ‘anticipating love’ (C. 15).
55. 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 of being more available and prompt in responding to the needs of the young, bringing about in our life a genuine

²³ Cf. *Ex* 3:2ff.; cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 169.

²⁴ Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 187-193; 211.

²⁵ GC23, 95.

exodus towards the most needy. Migrants, refugees and unemployed youth challenge us as Salesians in all parts of the world: they invite us to find ways of collaborating and provide concrete responses, and to adopt ways of thinking that are more open, supportive and courageous.²⁶

56. *A pastoral ministry without a specific focus* does not effectively reflect the Salesian charism and is the result of inadequate planning (cf. AGC 334). This is due to insufficient recognition of the deepest longings of the young, a lack of appreciation of the indications coming from Salesian magisterium and weak observance of the Constitutions.
57. Our educative and pastoral activity is in tune with the *local Church* and cooperates with *institutions around us*, for a more incisive and appropriate service of the young and workingclass areas. Youth ministry and the Salesian pedagogical proposal are not our ‘private property’ nor for exclusive use within our Congregation, but a precious gift for the Church and for the transformation of the world.
58. The *Preventive System* is for us Salesians a pedagogical approach, a proposal of youthful evangelisation, a profound spiritual experience. There is need on our part 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 (cf. C. 20) and for their salvation.
59. *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, expending all our efforts “until our last breath”²⁷ and bearing witness by the gift of our life according to the spirit of the cross. By living

²⁶ Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 210.

²⁷ Cf. BM XVIII, 216.

this way we share in the paschal dynamic, and are certain that the beauty of the resurrection will fill this authentic gift of ourselves with joy and peace.

60. Practising the twofold *work and temperance* replenishes a Salesian's life, nourishes his apostolic zeal and brings him close to the young, the Lord and his confreres. The apostolic front must be proportionate to the required quality and number of the community and the Educative and Pastoral Community.
61. We insist on the need for *formation* to take into account the training and preparation for serving the young, including through deeper study, cultural dialogue and significant pastoral experiences, ensuring a constant updating in accordance with the guidelines of the Church and of the Congregation.
62. The *digital world*, “the new areopagus of modern times”,²⁸ challenges us as educators of the young: it is a “new playground”, a “new oratory” which demands our presence and encourages us to new forms of evangelisation and education. Our “knowledge and information era”, however, tends towards the commodification of human relationships and a monopolisation of human knowledge, in this way becoming a source of “new and often anonymous kinds of power”²⁹ which we must tackle through our pastoral and educative involvement.

²⁸ JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris missio*, 37.

²⁹ Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 52.

III. WAY FORWARD

1. GOAL

63. To witness to “a radical Gospel approach” by means of **continual spiritual, fraternal and pastoral conversion**:
1. living the PRIMACY OF GOD by contemplating what happens each day and by following Christ;
 2. building up authentic communities through relationships and work in accordance with the FAMILY SPIRIT;
 3. putting ourselves more decisively and significantly at the SERVICE OF the poorest of the YOUNG.

2. PROCESSES AND STEPS

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

64. *To be MYSTICS in the Spirit we need to move:*
1. from a fragmented spirituality to a unifying spirituality, the result of contemplating God in Jesus Christ and in the young.
 2. from an attitude where we feel we are already formed, to humbly and constantly listening to God’s Word, our conferes and the young.
65. *To bring about these processes we commit ourselves to:*
1. 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 our path to conversion.

2. Cultivating personal prayer in daily contact with the Word of God, making our daily meditation and cultivating the quality of community prayer, sharing it with the young and members of the EPC.
3. 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 its heart.

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

66. *To be MYSTICS in the Spirit we need to move:*

1. 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 it back to a life of simplicity.
2. from a pessimistic outlook on the world to a *vision of faith* which discovers the God of joy in the events of life and in the history of the human race.

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

1. Living the grace of consecration with joy and authenticity by drawing up or redefining our personal plan of life and the community plan.
2. Having a stable spiritual director and referring to this person periodically.
3. Exploring our spirituality through frequent reading of the Constitutions and the study of Salesian Sources.
4. Arranging times for community spiritual sharing starting out from the Word of God, making use of *lectio divina* in particular.
5. Evaluating and promoting the harmony between prayer and work, reflection and apostolate, as a community and as individuals, through appropriate *scrutinies*.
6. Seeing to the translation of the *Fonti salesiane* (Salesian Sources) in different languages.

7. Updating the prayer book known as *In dialogue with the Lord* and other aids to prayer.
8. Setting in place formation initiatives for Salesians and lay people and suitably preparing a Centre for Ongoing Formation at Regional level or making use of those in other Regions.

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

68. *To be PROPHETS of fraternity we need to move:*
 1. from functional and formal relationships to *warm and supportive ones, relationships of profound communion*;
 2. from prejudice and closure to *fraternal correction and reconciliation*.
69. *To bring about these processes we commit ourselves to:*
 1. Making room for the practice of dialogue with others,³⁰ using positive dynamics of interpersonal communication amongst confreres, young people, lay people and Salesian Family members, also making use of the contributions of the human sciences.
 2. Having relationships of fraternity and empathy, where we listen to our dependants and collaborators, avoiding authoritarian attitudes and counter witness.
 3. Encouraging every confrere to share the task of responsibility for the community with the Rector/Director and his Council.
 4. Meeting the needs of sick and elderly confreres and involving them in the life and common mission in accordance with their real possibilities.
 5. Giving special support to communities working on the “frontiers”.
 6. Ensuring consistency in number and quality of communities by wisely and courageously reshaping communities.

³⁰ Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 88.

7. Seeing to the two complementary forms of the Salesian religious vocation by following the guidelines from GC26³¹ and continuing reflection both on the consecrated life aspect and the specific nature of the Brothers with regard to fraternal life and the mission.
8. Reinforcing ways of maturing in spiritual and human terms, and providing adequate support processes for confreres in difficulty.
9. Ensuring adequate accompaniment processes for individuals involved in possible cases of abuse.
10. Evaluating and relaunching the proposal for formation of Rectors/Directors³² as part of the next six year plan.
11. Seeing to the updating of the *Handbooks for Rectors/Directors and for Provincials*, on the part of the Rector Major and General Council.

... available for planning and cooperation...

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

1. from individualistic pastoral initiative to unconditional *availability* for the mission and community and province planning.
2. from considering young people as simple beneficiaries and lay people as collaborators to *promoting* young people in leading roles and lay people as sharing responsibility for the one mission.

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

1. Growing in communion and shared responsibility by taking up the community plan and SEPP, developing and giving visibility to “a Salesian culture”.³³

³¹ GC26, 74-78.

³² Cf. GC21, 46-57; GC25, 63-65.

³³ Cf. AGC 413, p. 51.

2. Creating teamwork with other Salesian Family Groups who are working for the young and promoting their rights.³⁴
3. Networking by linking effectively with the local Church, other Religious Families, educational, social and government agencies.
4. Setting up more suitable processes in initial formation aimed at involvement in youth ministry, the acquisition of an ability to understand the social problems in the locality and to undertake educational and pastoral planning.
5. Integrating family ministry into the Provincial and local SEPP, providing for the formation and involvement of lay leadership.³⁵
6. Organising a unified and comprehensive Salesian ministry in provincial and local communities in accordance with the *Youth Ministry Frame of Reference* and with the agreed planning by Sector and Regional Councillors.
7. Ensuring attention is given to family ministry and lay formation at all levels and encouraging coordination of reflection and intervention by the Sectors for the Salesian mission and for Formation.

... going out to the peripheries...

- 72.** *To be SERVANTS of the young we need to move:*
1. from being distant from the young to an active and enthusiastic *presence* among them with the passion of the Good Shepherd.
 2. from a ministry of preservation to an *outgoing ministry* that starts with the deepest needs of the poorest young people from their family and social perspective.

³⁴ Cf. *Charter of Identity of the Salesian Family*, 21, 41.

³⁵ Cf. GC26, 99, 102, 104.

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

1. Promoting in Provinces a profound assessment of our significance for and presence among poorer youth in our works in accordance with the criteria offered by General Chapters and the Rector Majors, in view of “structural pastoral conversion” and a shift towards new poverties (cf. Reg. 1).
2. Taking up, together with lay people, the *Youth Ministry Frame of Reference*, activating renewal processes, making use of existing voluntary service efforts and considering the new existential and geographical frontiers of young people who are poorer.
3. 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, youth unemployment and migration and human trafficking.
4. Encouraging in our centres an atmosphere of respect for the dignity of minors, committing ourselves to creating conditions which prevent any form of abuse and violence, where every Province follows the guidelines and directives of the Rector Major and General Council.
5. 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 spirit of service for the common good.
6. 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!

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

1. from a life marked by the trend to upward mobility to a missionary and prophetic community which shares with the young and the poor.

2. 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 perspectives.

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

1. Developing a culture of vocation and care for vocations to Salesian life, cultivating the art of accompaniment and preparing Salesians and lay people to become spiritual guides of the young.
2. Living the twofold “work and temperance”, cultivating a visibly poor lifestyle, eliminating waste and making ourselves available for domestic and community services.
3. Practising real solidarity with those who find themselves in need, with the poor and among Salesian houses.
4. Entering into the digital world where the young in particular are at home in a significant and educational manner, ensuring the appropriate professional and ethical formation of confreres and collaborators, and applying the Salesian Social Communication System (SSCS).
5. Encouraging international communities also through a worldwide redistribution of confreres and the promotion of missionary projects in the Congregation.
6. Putting procedures in place, including auditing, which guarantee transparency and professionalism in the management of goods and works.
7. Carrying out a careful assessment of the Generalate and other building structures in the Congregation, so that they are a clear and credible sign of our radical Gospel approach.

DELIBERATIONS OF THE GC27

On the basis of the assessment of the structures of central government of the Congregation undertaken by the Rector Major and the General Council as requested by GC26 n. 118 and on the basis of the proposals sent in by Provincial Chapters, individual confreres, and also the Chapter Assembly itself, after they were examined by the Juridical Commission and the Assembly, the General Chapter approved the following **deliberations**. Some of them concern **articles of the Constitutions and of the General Regulations**; others are **operative guidelines for the government of the Congregation**.

1. DURATION IN OFFICE OF THE RECTOR MAJOR AND THE MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

76. The 27th General Chapter,

with reference to articles 128 and 142 of the Constitutions, that set the duration in office of the Rector Major and the members of the General Council at 6 years,

having considered that 6 years are a sufficient period of time for the governance and animation of the Congregation,

confirms the duration of 6 years in office for the Rector Major and the members of the General Council as articles 128 and 148 of the Constitutions provide.

2. THE POSSIBILITY OF RE-ELECTION OF THE RECTOR MAJOR AND THE MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

77. The 27th General Chapter,

with reference to article 128 of the Constitutions which foresees that the Rector Major could be re-elected only for a second con-

secutive six-year period, and in reference to article 142 of the Constitutions which foresees that the Vicar of the Rector Major, the Councillors in charge of the Sectors and the Regional Councillors could be elected for only a second consecutive six-year term in the same office,

having considered that the present formulation of articles 128 and 142 leaves the Chapter Assembly free to:

- confirm or not the Rector Major, the Vicar of the Rector Major, the Councillors in charge of the Sectors and the Regional Councillors, for a second six-year term in the same office;
- take into consideration the acquired experience for the possibility of holding another office in the General Council,

A. confirms the possibility of electing the Rector Major only for one consecutive second six-year term as provided by article 128 of the Constitutions;

B. confirms the possibility of electing of the Vicar of the Rector Major, the Councillors for the Sectors and the Regional Councillors only for one consecutive second six-year term in the same office, as provided by article 142 of the Constitutions.

3. COMPOSITION OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

78. The 27th General Chapter,

with reference to articles 130, 131, 133 of the Constitutions, regarding the duties and the composition of the General Council;

having considered that the present structure of the General Council composed of the Vicar, Councillors in charge of special Sectors and of the Regional Councillors in charge of groups of Provinces, permits the integration of the global vision of the Congregation (proper of the Rector Major, the Vicar and the Councillors in charge of special Sectors), with the in-depth vision of the groups of Provinces, proper of the Regional Councillors,

confirms the present composition of the General Council, as given in article 133 para 1 of the Constitutions.

4. THE VICAR OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

79. The 27th General Chapter,

with reference to article 134, para 3 of the Constitutions, that attributes the duty of animating the Salesian Family to the Vicar of the Rector Major;

having considered the request of the 26th General Chapter to carry out an assessment of such an assignment at the end of the six years;¹

since it holds that it is preferable to assign the animation of the Salesian Family to a Central Secretariat, directly dependent on the Rector Major in accordance with article 108 of the General Regulations, for the following reasons:

- a) in these years a strong impetus has been given to the Salesian Family whose members have grown in number and in the knowledge of the Salesian charism and in its visibility at world and provincial levels, through the acceptance of the Charter of Identity of the Salesian Family and the Strenna of the Rector Major;
- b) the only charismatic reference point for the entire Salesian Family is the Rector Major as he is the Successor of Don Bosco;
- c) a central Secretariat instituted by the General Chapter and directly dependent on the Rector Major can better ensure this link, in a stable way and with greater availability and continuity, through persons called to make up the Secretariat;

¹ Cf. GC26, 116.

d) the duties assigned to the Vicar of the Rector Major by article 134 of the Constitutions are potentially many, as are his various and clear duties described by the *Vademecum for the life and action of the General Council*, so as to require a very demanding commitment,

A. suppresses paragraph 3 of Article 134 of the Constitutions which attributes to the Vicar of the Rector Major the task of animating the Salesian Family;

B. establishes a *Central Secretariat for the Salesian Family*, directly dependent on the Rector Major, in accordance with article 108 of the Regulations, with the following duties:

- to animate the Congregation in the Sector of the Salesian Family and ensure interaction with the other Sectors of the Congregation at world level;
- to promote, in accordance with article 5 of the Constitutions, the communion of the various groups, respecting their specificity and autonomy;
- to direct and assist the Provinces so that in their own territories they develop, according to their own statutes, the Association of the Salesian Cooperators, the Movement of the Past Pupils and ADMA.

5. THE NUMBER AND AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY OF THE COUNCILLORS FOR THE SECTORS

80. The 27th General Chapter,

with reference to articles 133, 136 and 138 of the Constitutions, confirms that the Councillors in charge of special sectors are: the Councillor for formation, the Councillor for the youth apostolate, the Councillor for social communication, the Councillor for the missions and the Economer general as indicated in article 133 § 2 of the Constitutions.

6. DUTIES OF THE REGIONAL COUNCILLOR

81. The 27th General Chapter,

with reference to articles 140 and 154 of the Constitutions regarding the duties of the Regional Councillors and the groups of Provinces (or Regions) respectively,

having considered that the duties assigned by the Constitutions to the Regional Councillors are adequate for the present requirements of the Congregation, because, without constituting an intermediary level of government, they make it possible to:

- promote the unity of the Congregation and the good functioning of the processes of animation in different contexts;
- keep alive the liaison between the Rector Major and the General Council on the one hand, the Provinces, the local communities and the individual confreres on the other;
- have, within the General Council, a real and up-to-date vision of the various areas of the Congregation, such knowledge being decisive for animation and government;
- make present a fundamental aspect of our charism, namely the attention and listening given to individual confreres, particularly during the course of the extraordinary visitation,

confirms the duties assigned to the Regional Councillors by article 140 of the Constitutions.

7. METHOD OF ELECTION OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

82. The 27th General Chapter,

with reference to article 141 of the Constitutions and to articles 126, 127 and 128 of the General Regulations, regarding the method of the election of the Rector Major and the members of the General Council;

having seen that the process of discernment, guided and coordinated by a facilitator from outside the Congregation permits the creation of a positive climate of searching for God's will,

confirms the method of the election of the Rector Major, as indicated by article 141 of the Constitutions and by articles 126 and 127 of the General Regulations.

8. METHOD OF ELECTION OF THE VICAR OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

83. The 27th General Chapter,

with reference to article 141 of the Constitutions and to articles 126, 127 and 128 of the General Regulations, regarding the method of the election of the Rector Major and the members of the General Council,

having seen that

- the present method assigns complete and exclusive responsibility to the General Chapter that holds in the Society supreme authority and exercises it according to law (C. 147),
- the direct election of the Vicar of the Rector Major on the part of the Assembly highlights better his institutional role,

confirms the method of the election of the Vicar of the Rector Major, as indicated by article 141 of the Constitutions and by articles 126 and 127 of the General Regulations.

9. METHOD OF ELECTION OF THE COUNCILLORS FOR THE SECTORS

84. The 27th General Chapter,

with reference to article 141 of the Constitutions and to articles

126, 127 and 128 of the General Regulations, regarding the method of the election of the Rector Major and the members of the General Council,

considering that in the phase of discernment for the election of the Councillors for the Sectors, it is necessary to:

- identify the candidates more suitable for their capacity and competence;
- facilitate the shared responsibility and the participation of all the Regions “in the choice of those responsible for government” (C. 123) at world level;
- involve the members of the Chapter, gathered according to Regions, in the process of discernment that matures through dialogue and common search;
- arrive at convergence on some candidates,

deliberates that the election of the Councillors for the Sectors be preceded by a process of discernment on the part of Chapter members divided according to Regions, on the important challenges of the Sector and on the profile of the candidates. Such a process of discernment concludes with the proposal to the Assembly of one candidate from one’s own Region and of another from outside the Region, identified through secret ballot. Accordingly, article 127 of the General Regulations shall be modified.

10. METHOD OF ELECTION OF THE REGIONAL COUNCILLORS

85. The 27th General Chapter,

with reference to article 141 of the Constitutions and articles 126, 127 and 128 of the General Regulations regarding the method of the election of the Rector Major and of the members of the General Council;

having considered that the formulation of article 128 of the General Regulations as modified by the 26th General Chapter² allows the Chapter Assembly to know with greater clarity the consensus opinion of the confreres of the Region,

confirms the modality of the election of the Regional Councillors indicated in article 128 of the General Regulations.

11. COORDINATION OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

86. The 27th General Chapter,

having studied article 133 of the Constitutions and article 107 of the General Regulations;

having studied the deliberation of the 26th General Chapter, no.117;

having considered the outcome of the consultation in the Provinces, with the motivations and suggestions expressed by them, and the Assembly discussions prior to the election of the members of the General Council from which the need for a greater coordination of action of the Councillors in charge of specific Sectors among themselves and with the Regional Councillors clearly emerged,

and because it maintains:

- a) that the composition of the General Council, as envisaged in article 133 of the Constitutions, is meant to favour simultaneously action at world level in specific Sectors and action from close at hand with the Provinces in the geographical areas (Regions or groups of Provinces);
- b) that such an articulation, in order to be effective, calls for synergy and coordination so as to avoid their interventions being unfocused and unconnected,

² Cf. GC26, 119.

deliberates to modify in the following way article 107 of the General Regulations:

“The animation of the Salesian mission at world level calls for the identification of common objectives and for synergy among the Councillors in charge of specific Sectors and for the coordination of their interventions with the Regional Councillors, through systematic meetings of planning and evaluation.

The General Councillors in charge of specific Sectors can avail themselves of the services of technical offices and consultant boards in carrying out the duties confided to them.

Their establishment, mode of operation and internal organization are to be determined by the Rector Major with the consent of his Council”.

12. CONFIGURATION OF THE REGIONS OF EUROPE AND THE MIDDLE EAST

87. The 27th General Chapter,

having seen the results of the consultation among all the Provinces of Europe and of the Middle East,

having considered the opinion of the General Council,

having considered that the internal configuration of the three Regions has significantly changed after the recent re-structuring of France-Belgium South (2008), of Italy (2008) and of Spain (2014),

taking into account the decrease in the number of confreres in the whole of Europe and the re-dimensioning of the works in progress in various Provinces,

having considered that the “Project for Europe” set in motion by the 26th General Chapter³ is meant to promote and strengthen the synergy among the various Provinces in view also of re-invigorating the charism,

having considered that within the Regions more provincial conferences could be established in order to guarantee closer interaction (C. 155),

having considered that while the importance of the extraordinary visitation for the knowledge of the confreres and the situation of each Province remains important, different ways of carrying out the visitations could be used (for example, with an extraordinary visitor other than the Regional Councillor), in such a way as to guarantee the service of animation by the General Councillor as an expression of communion and co-ordination,

establishes in the place of the Regions (Northern Europe, Western Europe, Italy and Middle East) the following two groups of provinces:

- **MEDITERRANEAN REGION: made up of the Circumscription of Central Italy, the Circumscription of Piedmont and Val d’Aosta, the Italian Provinces of Lombardy-Emilia, Southern Italy, North-Eastern Italy, Sicily, the Provinces of the Middle East, Portugal, Barcelona-Spain, Bilbao-Spain, León-Spain, Madrid-Spain, Seville-Spain and Valencia-Spain.**
- **CENTRAL and NORTH EUROPEAN REGION: made up of the Provinces of Austria, North Belgium, Croatia, France-South Belgium, Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, Krakow-Poland, Piła-Poland, Warsaw-Poland, Wrocław-Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary and the special Circumscription of Ukraine.**

³ Cf. GC26, 108-111.

13. THE EXTRAORDINARY VISITATION

88. The 27th General Chapter,

with reference to article 104 of the General Regulations,

having considered the positive opinion of the Provinces consulted and the motivations cited;

having considered the opinion of the General Council and the motivations cited;

considers that the extraordinary visitation is a valid and fraternal way of animating the Provinces, the local communities and the individual confreres, besides being also the juridical instrument of government according to Canon Law.

It also considers that

- a) taking into account the number of Provinces in a Region, the languages spoken, the total number of confreres, and in order to give the Regional Councillor also the possibility of carrying out other duties assigned to him by the Constitutions and the General Regulations, the Rector Major, according to article 104 of the General Regulations, can assign the making of the extraordinary visitation, in addition to the Regional Councillor, to another member of the General Council or to one or more confreres who will work in conjunction with the Regional Councillor;
- b) it is necessary that every Region should have a research and documentation centre to support the work of the Regional Councillor also in view of the extraordinary visitation;
- c) during the extraordinary visitation, it is indispensable for the visitor to listen personally to each confrere and to meet with the bodies which participate in our mission and with the lay people in positions of responsibility;
- d) the preparation for the extraordinary visitation, its follow-up and periodic meetings with the Provincial and his Council are fundamental elements of fraternal support, unity with the

Rector Major and the active assimilation of the guidelines of the General Chapters.

Therefore,

it confirms the method of the extraordinary visitation, as laid down in article 104 of the General Regulations.

14. THE TEAM VISIT

89. The 27th General Chapter,

having considered the present practice of making one or more “team visits” in each Region, midway in the term of office of the Rector Major and the General Council,

since it considers that this is a useful way of animation that permits, in flexible ways,

- greater knowledge of the Regions,
- a sharing on the common problems and directives of the Congregation,
- communion with the Rector Major and his Council,
- direct listening to the provincial Councils, and
- verification of the implementation of the deliberations of the previous General Chapter,

confirms the validity of the “team visit” as an instrument of animation of the Congregation, according to flexible ways, that permit direct listening and sharing.

15. THE FINANCIAL COMMISSION

90. The 27th General Chapter,

having studied the report of the Economist General to the Chapter Assembly;

having considered the need to give a stable form at world level to what is envisaged in article 185 of the General Regulations,

asks the Rector Major and the General Council to set up a non-resident “Financial Commission”, composed of Salesians and non-Salesian professionals, to collaborate on a regular basis with the Economer General.

The Financial Commission will have the following duties:

- a) to analyse the budget and the balance statements of the Provinces and Vice-provinces of the Congregation;
- b) to submit an annual report to the General Council on the economic and financial situation of the Provinces and of the Vice-provinces;
- c) to study the administration of the moveable assets of the Generalate in keeping with the required ethical criteria and the responsible and prudent management of the resources;
- d) to undertake a review of the material structures of the Generalate, their use and the cost of ordinary and extraordinary maintenance;
- e) to review the budget and the annual balance sheet of the Generalate, suggest ways of improvement in keeping with the criteria of poverty, functionality and transparency, and to keep the Provinces and the Vice-provinces informed of the use of the resources;
- f) to propose forms of solidarity;
- g) to study the situation of the Provinces and the Vice-provinces which are in financial difficulties and to suggest the necessary remedial measures;
- h) to study annually the financial situation of the Salesian Pontifical University and the Vice-province of the UPS, with a view to their sustainability;
- i) to make an annual study of the agreements in place with the Special Circumscription of Piedmont and Val d’Aosta (ICP) for the major “Salesian places” (Valdocco-Mother House, Colle Don Bosco);

- j) to offer advice to the Economer General on particular issues or on issues indicated by the Rector Major and the General Council;
- k) to prepare with the Economer General the programme of the courses of formation for the Provincial Economers.

16. REPRESENTATION IN THE GENERAL CHAPTER

91. The 27th General Chapter,

having examined article 114 of the General Regulations regarding participation in the General Chapter;

having examined article 123 of the Constitutions which ratifies the principle of the participation of the confreres in the choice of those responsible for government and in the working out of their decisions “in the most suitable way” (C. 123);

having considered that:

- by its nature the General Chapter in its composition should be representative of the entire Society, and on the basis of what is stated in article 151 of the Constitutions, which lists first the “ex officio” members by right and then the elected delegates from among the perpetually professed members in the various circumscriptions of the Congregation;
- to ensure a majority of the elected Chapter members in comparison with those taking part by right in the General Chapter, the procedure for the election of delegates was organised according to a quantitative criterion;
- the progressive unification of Provinces which has taken place in the Congregation with very high numbers of confreres, and the existence of Provinces with smaller numbers makes necessary a revision of the election criteria for the delegates to the General Chapter in view of a more equitable representation according to the number of confreres present in the Province;

modifies as follows article 114 of the Regulations:

Provinces with less than 200 professed members, and Vice-provinces, will send to the General Chapter one delegate elected by the respective Chapters. Moreover, Provinces will send another delegate for every additional two hundred members or fraction thereof. Other eventual juridical circumscriptions referred to in article 156 of the Constitutions will have their representation defined in their decree of erection.

17. PERSONNEL FOR THE SALESIAN PLACES

92. The 27th General Chapter,

having studied the request made by the Provincial Chapter of the Circumscription of Piedmont and the Val d'Aosta (ICP);

having studied the guideline of the 26th General Chapter which asked the Rector Major and his Council to promote "an international team of confreres to provide for the animation of the places of origin of the Salesian charism" (GC 26, 12);

having considered the historical and charismatic importance of the Salesian places which are the inheritance of the entire Congregation to be preserved, promoted and valued;

having considered the need for a project that can utilize fully the places of Salesian origins in pastoral and vocational terms for the young and for the Salesian Family, especially in view of the bicentenary of the birth of Don Bosco,

deliberates that the finding of Salesian personnel for the communities of Valdocco Turin "Maria Ausiliatrice" and of Colle Don Bosco be within the competence of the Rector Major and his Council, within a comprehensive project that involves the General Council, in dialogue with the Provincial and the Provincial Council of ICP, and the solidarity of all the Provinces.

**18. THE ACTS OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL,
WWW.SDB.ORG WEB PORTAL
AND SALESIAN INFO AGENCY**

93. The 27th General Chapter,

having seen the results of the consultation in the Provinces,

having seen the opinion of the General Council,

taking into consideration that:

- the **Acts of the General Council** is the official bulletin of information from the Rector Major and the General Council;
- the **sdb.org web portal** assists knowledge and the diffusion of a great wealth of contents;
- the **Salesian INFO Agency (ANS)** has been consolidated as a necessary means of information both within and outside the Congregation,

confirms the validity of the Acts of the General Council, of the sdb.org web portal and of the Salesian INFO Agency (ANS), as means of information and formation.

**19. THE SIX YEAR PLAN OF ANIMATION
AND GOVERNMENT OF THE RECTOR MAJOR
AND THE GENERAL COUNCIL**

94. The 27th General Chapter,

having considered the outcome of the consultation in the Provinces;

having considered the opinion of the General Council;

having considered that:

- the six-year plan of animation and government of the Rector Major and of the General Council is a means that allows the main lines of the plan of animation and government at world level to be indicated starting from the guidelines of the General Chapter;
- it helps the General Council to identify objectives, create synergy and coordinate the manner and the timing of their interventions;
- dialogue with the Regions and with the world consultative bodies of the specific Sectors allows for the understanding of the expectations and sensibilities of all concerned prior to the actual plan being drawn up,
- a basic, operative and verifiable text with clear deadlines for the lines of action favours the communication and the harmonization of the planning in all the Provinces and the provincial conferences,

confirms the validity of the six-year plan of animation drawn up by the General Council to implement the guidelines of the General Chapter and respond to the needs of the Congregation.

APPENDICES

**ADDRESS OF THE RECTOR MAJOR
FR PASCUAL CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA
AT THE OPENING OF THE GC27**

*“You must live your whole life according to the Christ
you have received - Jesus the Lord; you must be rooted in him and built on him,
and held firm by the faith you have been taught,
and full of thanksgiving”
(Col 2:6-7)*

1. A word of welcome and a greeting

Your Eminence
Cardinal João Braz de Aviz,
Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of
Apostolic Life

Your Eminences
Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone
Cardinal Riccardo Ezzati
Cardinal Raffaele Farina
Cardinal Oscar Rodríguez Maradiaga

Most Reverend Gino Reali,
Bishop of Porto and Santa Rufina
Most Reverend Francesco Brugnaro,
Archbishop of Camerino - Salesian Past Pupil
Most Reverend Salesian Archbishops and Bishops

Mother Yvonne Reungoat,
Superior General of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians
Dear Leaders of the various Salesian Family Groups

Very Reverend Father David Glenday,
Secretary General of the Union of Superiors General

In the name of all Chapter members, a heartfelt thanks for having accepted the invitation to be with us and to share our joy and prayer on the day on which we are opening the 27th General Chapter of the Society of St Francis de Sales. We appreciate your presence as a sign of your fraternal interest and we count on your understanding and prayers for the success of this Assembly. Thank you, all of you.

Dear Chapter members, Provincials and Superiors of Vice Provinces, Provincial Delegates, Observers by invitation from all over the world taking part in this important gathering of our beloved Congregation.

2. Led by the Spirit

On Sunday 10 November 2013, the final day of my visit to the Kolkata Province, I had the grace of visiting the Mother House of the Sisters of Charity of Mother Teresa once again. On the first occasion I was welcomed by Mother Nirmala, but this time it was Mother Prema who received me and came with me to pray beside the bed on which Mother Teresa had breathed her last, in the same room she had occupied up to the moment of her 'Passover'. Our prayer then continued before her sepulchre, in the chapel at the Mother House.

I must confess that at that moment I felt a deep inspiration, similar to the one I had felt before the Casket of Padre Pio last July, concerning what it implied for our "radical Gospel approach". The Saints, especially Padre Pio and Mother Teresa, are a testimony, like Don Bosco, for how we should live the Gospel radically.

2.1. Following on from the 'radical approach of the Gospel'

Right then, in those holy places, I prayed for the entire Congregation and for the spiritual and pastoral success of our General Chapter. I so much hope that this particular experience of prayer and reflection may lead us back to Christ – to his grammar, which is his Gospel, and to his logic, which is the cross.

I would very much like to say that what concerns us is not the future of the Congregation, almost as if it were a matter of survival, but rather our prophetic capacity, that is to say, our charismatic identity, our apostolic passion which constitutes our true social and ecclesial relevance, following the criterion which Jesus himself gave us: "By this will everyone know that you are my disciples, that you love one another" (*Jn* 13:35).

Charismatic identity and apostolic passion come from a “radical Gospel approach”, which is none other than *contemplating Christ in such a way that it allows us to become, little by little, a faithful image of him*. Our conformity with Christ, on the other hand, consists in making his way of being and acting our own, obedient, poor and chaste, filled with compassion for the poor, loving them and loving poverty. He made this a true beatitude such that it can be lived joyfully, humbly and simply.

2.2. Listening to the Lord

Hence the importance of this Chapter, which is offered us as a *kairos*, a powerful and graced opportunity in the history of the Congregation, and thus in the history of salvation, in so far as the Congregation participates in the communion and mission of the Church, until the Lord comes again.

In the life of the Church

I believe it behoves me here to refer to the captivating and charismatic model which Pope Francis has introduced into the Church. By his gestures, attitudes and interventions he is already profoundly renewing it, seeking to enlighten minds, warm hearts and strengthen the will of all through the light and vigour of the Gospel to make us all courageous witnesses, “missionary disciples of Christ”, sent into the world, fearlessly, to serve the poor and the excluded and thus transform this society. I do not believe that as a Congregation we can remain indifferent or detached concerning this; through Pope Francis, I am convinced, the Spirit is speaking to the Churches and proposing that we undertake a true “personal and pastoral conversion”.

I would highlight especially his attitudes and gestures. These are not simply news items for journalists and newspapers who are emphasising everything he does, and how he does it. They are already communicating his view of the Church, his teaching and way of governing.

Actually, since his very first address to the Cardinals who elected him, Pope Francis has proposed a model of Church in harmony with the great choices of Vatican II - even though he does not mention it so often; in harmony naturally with new evangelisation - even if he has not explicitly emphasised this either - under the influence of Latin American pastoral ministry, from Medellín with its option for the poor, to Aparecida with its choice of a Church made up of disciples, missionaries of Christ, fully part of daily reality.

The first thing to note with Pope Francis is, then, how he pays attention to the

everyday, but with exquisite pastoral sensitivity, seeking to contemplate God in everything and look at everything from God's perspective. This way we can discover the need this society has for salvation and the urgency of setting processes of transformation in motion which are suited to making it more human and fraternal, more in keeping with God's plan. He tries to do all this by maintaining and building unity, without exacerbating social differences.

This is the Church that Pope Francis feels called to build in fidelity to Jesus and his Gospel: a Church at the service of this world. It is about a Church free from *a spiritual worldliness* which leads to vanity, arrogance, pride; all things that are really part of idolatry. He wants a Church free from theological narcissism and the temptation to freeze itself within its own institutional framework; free also from the risk of self-reference, a bourgeois mindset, being closed in on itself, from clericalism.

He also wants a Church that is truly the body of the Word incarnate, embodied in our reality as He was, attentive to the poor and suffering; a Church that cannot be reduced to being a small chapel since it is called to be a home for all of humanity; a Church always on the road towards those who are the least and for whom it expresses predilection without abandoning others; a Church that feels comfortable on the frontiers and fringes of society.

This does not mean that the Church must make sons and daughters out of every man and woman in the world nor does it mean that we must force everyone to enter it. Pope Francis' Church wants to offer itself as an open place where everyone can feel at home and meet because there is room in it for dialogue, diversity, acceptance. We should not oblige the world to enter the Church; it is rather the Church which must welcome the world as it is, that is, as a place for salvation.

The current Pope's dream is a Church that goes out on the street to evangelise, gains first-hand experience of people's hearts; a Church ready to serve and that proposes to go out not only to geographical confines but also to people on the edge where our brothers and sisters are often struggling to survive; a poor Church which favours the poor and gives them a voice and that sees in the elderly, the sick or in disabled young people the "wounds of Christ"; a Church that commits itself to overcoming the terrible culture of indifference we are going through, that leads those who feel increasingly let down, exploited and excluded to choose violence; a Church that gives proper attention and relevance to women, both in society and within its own institutions.

We can find many of these things in daily and weekly newspaper reports, or in religious magazines, as if they were simply curious anecdotes. But it is not

like this. What the Holy Father is proposing in simple, daily terms is part of an abundant magisterium of a new Gospel approach. There is a new concept of Church here! There is a new way of thinking about how to govern the Church here! There is so much we can learn from it!

Speaking to the *Bishops* of Brazil, he said that it seems the Church has forgotten that there is nothing more lofty than Jerusalem, stronger than the abasement of the cross, more convincing than kindness, love, the pace of pilgrims; because ours is not a marathon but a pilgrimage. So we need to measure our pace with that of the people we wish to stay beside, find the time to be with those who are walking, be able to accompany them patiently, with a readiness to listen to and understand situations that are so different. We should not be travelling so fast that we see nothing around us!

In Rio de Janeiro, speaking to *political and cultural leaders* the Pope sought to emphasise the importance of the culture of encounter for promoting a society which can make room for everyone, excludes no-one, and which regards no human being as disposable. A culture of encounter which should eliminate the social exclusion of the young people who are so often denied possibilities for work and a future.

In his *address to the young* particularly, he invited them to join the fray themselves, invest their energies in building a Church and a new society, spend their life for things that are worth living for, especially Jesus Christ and service of the poor, not allowing themselves to be stripped of hope and joy nor giving in to promises of a cheap paradise of happiness.

At times the Church lacks the vitality, fascination, visibility and credibility for continuing to attract to itself the men and women of our time, especially the new generations. In less than a year of his pontificate, Pope Francis has presented himself as a new wind of the Spirit blowing on the Church, slimming down its bureaucracy, making the Church poorer and more simple, and above all urging it to go out into the world's highways and byways to evangelise. He has made us feel that the Church is a Mother filled with tenderness and love, filled with kindness, humility, patience. He has taught this through his gestures, attitudes and personal choices, his way of relating to the world.

All of this is an outstanding example and a powerful stimulus for us, dear Chapter members! If we want to lead the young to an encounter with the mystery of God, this should happen through great experiences of love which can open hearts and not merely transmit ideas about or knowledge of Him. We need to do this within the limitations of our means. Indeed, as Pope Francis told the Brazilian Bishops, the Church is not an "ocean liner", but a little boat, a

simple fishing boat. This means that God works through poor means. Success does not depend on human sufficiency but on God's energy and creativity. All this is clearly valid for us too.

The Congregation's way forward

It seems to me that it is important to recognise, understand and take up this splendid ecclesial moment we are living through. Without being too pretentious, I would say that the road we are on as a Congregation and a Salesian Family, in preparation for the bicentenary of the birth of our beloved Father and Founder Don Bosco, is in fact along these same lines. We are aware, I am sure, as Chapter members, that this event demands the greatest responsibility of everyone, and all of us, if we are to hear the Lord's voice, discern His will and take it up as our project of life. Only this way will we be able to interpret the situation of young people today and deal with it as Don Bosco did yesterday.

I would like to invite you then to put the Word of God at the centre of our Assembly, right from this opening celebration for the General Chapter, so that it will be Him who tells us and gets us to understand what Christ wants of the Congregation today. We know what He asked of Don Bosco and how he gave over his entire life "to the glory of God and the salvation of souls" in order to realise God's 'dream' and then entrust it to us to continue, extend and consolidate.

Today so many people do not come to believe in Christ because His face has been obscured or even hidden by religious institutions lacking transparency. Over these last 12 years we have suffered much due to many unpleasant events confreres and provinces have been involved in. I am certain, however, that with God's help, these ills can be fully overcome and that this sorrowful experience will lead the Congregation to recover its splendour and credibility right where these things have been lacking. At any rate, for this to be possible we need to tackle the problems with humility and courage.

Let us take a step forward now by asking ourselves what, at this moment, is God's will for us as an institution? I am convinced that as it is for the Church, so also is it for the Congregation – that its identity, unity and vitality be the *summum desideratum* of Christ, who wants His disciples to be "salt of the earth", "light of the world", "a city built on a hill-top" (cf. *Mt* 5:13-16).

Challenges to be faced up to

Thanks be to God the Congregation has thus far not experienced division and has been loved and blessed by the Lord. Thanks be to God it has grown im-

mensely over these 150 years, multiplying its presences throughout the world. Today, however, there are new and powerful challenges on the horizon. In my view, and with the experience of these 12 years of government, there are three we must pay particular attention to:

Community life

Before he died, in his letter of convocation of GC25, Fr Vecchi maintained that community life was not only a topic to be studied but rather a turning point for renewal of the Congregation's life. He was convinced that if we were able to create communities that were engaging and rich in humanity, at the same time animated by spiritual energy that would urge us to get back amidst young people as companions on their journey, the Congregation would be profoundly renewed.

Life in common does not find its greatest assurance just in numerical consistency, which is not an indifferent factor, but it is based especially on our capacity or otherwise to create deep personal relationships. The great challenge, then, is precisely that of shifting from community life to communion of life. Community life sometimes risks deteriorating into a kind of communitarianism: just because we gather in the same locations, are together at prayer time, or in the workplace, does not necessarily mean sharing what we feel, think and want, things that would truly make us companions on the journey; living together is not yet sharing a charismatic project, an apostolic mission.

In our General Council we set about the renewal of communities, looking for superiors, provincials and rectors who could really be the soul of their communities (provincial or local), and who might firstly be people with a triple focus.

Above all a *charismatic focus* in the sense that the superior should be the point of reference for everything regarding Salesian identity. His exercise of authority, channelled through a fatherly and benevolent presence among the confreres, fosters the building up of a 'Salesian culture': goodnights, selection of readings, the kind of monthly and quarterly recollections prepared, the spiritual accompaniment offered to the confreres.

A second aspect for the Rector or Provincial is the particular *focus on fraternal life*. We need to choose and form superiors who have a real spiritual fatherliness, who are able to create a climate of fellowship, a genuine family spirit, and who are always ready to welcome and accompany confreres.

The third dimension is a *pastoral focus*. It is our hope that we can have superiors who can really be the heart and soul of the pastoral plan, especially at a

time like this when there is much sharing with lay people of the mission and important roles.

To succeed in this we need to be totally dedicated, body and soul. It is not possible to carry out these functions entrusted to us *part time*, still less those connected with the exercise of authority.

The young

When we hear Pope Francis say that “we cannot keep our church doors closed, that we must open the doors, keep them open and go out into the street”; that he prefers “a Church bruised on the streets to a Church dying from suffocation”, I feel confirmed in the profound belief that I have been expressing for some time: if we do not go out to meet young people – especially those who do not come to us – if we content ourselves with the thousands of young people who frequent our works and then think that we know and are serving the young, we are making a huge mistake. The great challenge today in fact, is how to reach the young who are furthest from us and most in difficulty, how to truly reach into their world, how to understand their culture, language, needs, expectations. Remaining locked up in our works, the risk is that we think we are pastorally alive while we are suffocating. The young, especially those who do not come looking for us and wander through life without a compass, are our ‘homeland’, our mission.

On a personal note, I would like to tell you that one of the great gifts the Lord has given me is to have been called to live amongst the young, to love the young. That is my confession! I cannot understand my life, my ministry without thinking of the young! They have never been just a pastime for me, a stage in the history of my Salesian life, as when I was a practical trainee; indeed it was precisely then, during my practical training, that I began to understand that it was for them that the Lord was calling me to spend my life.

Young people have become a huge challenge for us. The serious risk we run and, at the same time, the great temptation we can be subject to, is that of becoming administrators of our works but ceasing to be *pastors and educators of the young*. We can be driven to this by age or an incorrect Salesian educational culture or also by the limited way in which we understand mission, often identified with the management of works. If we do not succeed in getting back among the young and working not only for them but with them, we will not truly succeed in getting to know them, understand them, and especially – the most tragic thing of all – in loving them. “It is enough that you are young for me to love you very much”. This cry of Don Bosco’s cannot be suffocated. It has to be continuously transmitted through our life.

When the Pope says that the shepherd must have the smell of the sheep on him, he is reminding us of our Salesian experience, what we have all experienced among the youngsters, playing and sweating with them. It is a very eloquent expression, but one especially in tune with what Don Bosco experienced and with what so many of us have experienced. In my letter of convocation of the previous General Chapter, I wrote that young people are very sensitive to three values in particular – freedom, life and happiness, and that at times they can be badly understood and this leads to dangerous delinquency. Today I would no longer speak of the dangers young people face; I have come, rather, to the belief that for us the challenge is the young people themselves, their world, their culture.

Vocation and formation

The third challenge the Congregation is called to tackle is the point regarding the “*vocation and formation*” of Salesians. I consider this topic to be of vital importance. This is why I wanted to make it the topic of my last letter as Rector Major. I consider the problem of vocation and formation to be a very strategic one!

Unfortunately there are so many confreres, and not only the young ones, who live their Salesian life as if they were part of a volunteer movement. It begins when and where they want to; they interpret it, live it, and leave it because and how they want to. No thought is given to a salvific plan, to God’s will that involves me in such a way that it helps me see that it is worth living and making it a reality, giving God a hand – with my very life. Without this faith perspective, but with a merely social motivation, vocation is experienced as a free and temporary service, an arbitrary form with no reference to some ultimate project.

In the last visit I made to the Kolkata Province I had an opportunity to meet with the religious superiors of that region. While I was talking with them I referred to something that had struck me during the Symposium on Consecrated Life organised by the USG and the UISG, which was held in Rome. On that occasion a woman theologian representing South Asia, highlighted a problem she had come across in her country. She said that “people, when they want to resolve their particular social needs, usually come to us, but when they need spiritual experiences, they go elsewhere”. On the same occasion, speaking with the Superior General of the Sisters of Charity founded by Mother Teresa, she confirmed that this was actually the case. What is killing the more profound meaning of consecrated life is the fact that it is known and appreciated only for the social service rendered by Congregations. And so it

happens that consecrated individuals are considered to be *social service providers* and nothing more. This distorted view is often one of the causes of the fall in vocations.

These two observations have remained impressed in my heart. I think that what continues to be a great challenge for all of us is the grace of unity which harmonises our giving of ourselves to God and our service of our brothers and sisters. Living like Don Bosco, we need to realise in ourselves a splendid blending of nature and grace, living our consecration to God and at the same time dedicated tirelessly to those to whom we are sent (cf. how Don Bosco is presented in article 21 of the Constitutions).

In my last circular letter I wanted, besides, to highlight the fact that ours is, before anything else, a vocation we have received freely from God and that needs to be accepted by nurturing a commitment to ongoing formation. It is already a worrying fact that many who knock on our doors to enter the Congregation do not come from our works, and that means they may not have a suitable Salesian and family background. For many confreres the charism has not been assimilated almost by osmosis since their pre-teen years, as used to happen among us in the past. On the contrary, and this is not a rare occurrence, not a few confreres have had experiences that have not been favourable to the choice of Salesian life. To this we need to add the fact that the person selecting candidates does not always choose individuals of a proactive psychological disposition, able to make courageous decisions and then order their lives around them.

Today in formation we find ourselves responding to a threefold problem that emerges from psychological fragility, vocational inconsistency and a certain ethical relativism. At our recent Superiors General meeting, Pope Francis insisted on the importance of selection, which needs to be careful and responsible. It is necessary, he said, to not accept people who are mentally ill or morally corrupt. People who primarily think of themselves and do not accept that they are a gift of God for others do not serve our cause.

We Salesians have often been trained in the main to create a community environment, to lead and animate groups of young people, but have not always been enabled to accompany individuals on their particular human and spiritual journey. Sometimes in our educational settings, but also in formation houses, we take in boys and young men with very different family, social, religious, Salesian backgrounds and quite unwisely in formation terms we put them all together, ignoring whatever they have previously experienced and getting all of them to simply do the same things. Evidently all this does

not form an individual within, but rather trains him to conform to a setting, situations and external rules. Indeed it is clear that if the Lord is calling me, he is calling me not only with my temperament but with my history, my sensitivities, my qualities, and with the path in life I have already followed. Forming our young people and confreres, taking account of all this, is very demanding and much more difficult. So I repeat that formation is a key problem, and to carry out formation correctly we need new formation personnel able to understand, motivate, correct, accompany, enthuse. So this also raises the issue of preparing new formation personnel and re-qualifying those already working in this field.

The Chapter's tasks

Therefore the Congregation is called in this Chapter, which is an extraordinary moment for spiritual and charismatic preparation for the celebration of the bicentenary of Don Bosco's birth, to understand its *Founder and Father* ever more deeply, to take up with conviction his pedagogical experience, his preventive system and to make its own his spirituality which is marked by pastoral and educative charity. In this Chapter the Congregation is called to renew itself in such a way as to have the freshness of its origins, the missionary impulse of its teenage years, the energy of its youth, the holiness of its mature years.

We must recover our spiritual fruitfulness by becoming saints, while living the precious gift of our Salesian vocation; a pastoral fruitfulness, while carrying out the Salesian mission on behalf of the young, and a vocational fruitfulness, while helping young people to understand their lives as vocation, to discover the beauty of 'being for others' and to involve themselves in causes worth espousing. Accompanying them with the same love as Don Bosco had, walking with them, we want to help them to draw up true projects of life.

But unity in the Congregation does not mean uniformity. Salesians are called to embody and inculturate Don Bosco's charism in very different contexts from a social, economic, political, cultural and religious point of view. It is evident therefore that the Chapter must open the doors to a discussion that takes account of all these things. Everyone is free to express his thoughts regarding the Congregation's task today and its more urgent challenges. At the same time, all proposals should start from the spirit and guidelines of the Gospel, in fidelity to what the Constitutions indicate, since they are our Salesian way of reading and wanting to live the Gospel, and in conformity with what is a healthy tradition of the Congregation, the result of its history.

Certainly, laws and traditions which are purely accidental can be changed, but not every change means progress. We need to discern whether such changes will really contribute to reaffirming our identity, reinforcing our unity, fostering our vitality and the holiness of the Congregation. We certainly must avoid every change that does not have these positive results for its criteria.

All this will be possible on condition that we allow the Holy Spirit to continue to enliven and renew our life, to give an impulse to our mission, make our presence fruitful. He transcends any sociological analysis or historical forecast. He overcomes scandals, internal politics, social climbing and other social problems which could obscure the face of Christ, which instead should shine out through the dense clouds of daily complexity.

2.3. Reinterpreting the charism for today

At the Assembly of the Union of Superiors General in November 2011 we made an analysis of consecrated life in Europe and this revealed an alarming situation resulting from certain very strong factors. Among these, ageing of personnel, a weak or minimal inflow of vocations, the imbalance between people available and works to be run. But this picture, while worrying, was not entirely desperate. New projects and fields of mission are always possible.

One item of data was highlighted: many institutes of religious and apostolic life were founded following the French Revolution, in and for a society which had fragmented from a spiritual and moral perspective. However, what religious need to do is to clarify the basic objectives for their presence in today's world,¹ remaking themselves according to the founding features of their origins.

The urgent need to understand our origins

The invitation of the Superiors General to look back to the origins was not motivated by nostalgia for the past, but by the need to know how founders and religious institutes tackled social challenges and the apostolic needs of their time and responded to them. At the same time they sought to ask themselves how we can respond *today* – in a *renewed fidelity to the original charism* – to the challenges of mission, education and evangelisation, in a spiritual and cultural climate which is very similar (in Europe for the moment, but with a constant tendency to extend throughout the world) to the one in those days. Two eras (that of our Holy Founders in the 19th century and our own) which

¹ Cf. E. BIANCHI, *Testimoni*, No. 14, 2011.

have a similar character in so far as they have given rise to “major turning points”.

The invitation of the Superiors General seems timely and necessary: we need to go to the roots of how so many Congregations came into being. They came into being at a precise historical moment as a response of the Spirit to particular issues in society and in the Church. Today it is our task to question ourselves so we can see how to respond in our historical moment to the current needs of the young and to the demands of society and the Church, without however reducing ourselves to being simple social service providers. We need to do this by “reinvestigating” the charism of our origins to recognise its relevance and capacity to respond to such situations.

Over these three years of preparation for the bicentenary of Don Bosco’s birth, but already since the last Chapter and its appeal to ‘return to Don Bosco’ we have asked ourselves how he went about things in his time. He founded the Congregation at a time when an atmosphere of de-Christianisation was already beginning to assert itself. He knew how to find strategies, approaches and a particular proposal of human and Christian formation to respond to teenagers and young men coming from the countryside and finding themselves in Turin without a roof over their heads, no preparation for a trade, no point of reference, and exposed to exploitation and delinquency.

Like other founders who were his contemporaries, Don Bosco had a profound sense of urgency and of the need to form consciences, firstly of people but also of institutions that were central to society. Hence the attention he gave to *the world of the young* (through school and other settings peculiar to young people), to *family* (a place of convergence for so many of life’s factors), to *catechesis* (for a Christian and non-superficial education), to *preaching* (for a relevant proclamation of the Word of God). These were all sectors of apostolate he left us as a legacy. They are all settings we need to tackle professionally and with apostolic passion.

Today, as then, the challenge is the same: bringing the values of the Gospel back into moral, social, cultural, political life through education, not creating a new “Christianity” or even regaining areas or privileges we have lost, but making a contribution to forming an individual and collective culture which knows how to bring to the fore the real needs of the human being.

Historical and ecclesial significance of Don Bosco

In my view, Don Bosco’s original contribution is to be found, prior to it being in the many “works” and in certain relatively original methodological elements, such as the famous “preventive system of Don Bosco”

- in the intellectual and emotional perception he had of the universal, theological and social import of the *problem of “abandoned” youth*, that is, of the enormous quantity of young people in whom no one was interested or whose interest was inappropriate, with unsuitable solutions;
- in his insight into the presence – in Turin first of all, later in Italy and the world – of a strong sensitivity, in the civil and political world with regard to the *problem of the education of youth* and the understanding on the part of intellectuals attentive to social situations and clergy who were open to new responses and, in general, by a large cohort of public opinion;
- this contribution is also to be found in his idea of launching *much-needed projects* on a large scale in the Catholic and civil world, as a first-order need for the life of the Church and its very survival in the social order;
- and in his *ability to communicate his project and involve large groups of collaborators*, benefactors and admirers.

Neither politician, nor sociologist, nor trade unionist *ante litteram*, but simply a priest and educator, Don Bosco started from the idea that education could achieve so much, in any situation, if it happened with the best of good will, commitment and the ability to adapt. He set about changing consciences, forming them to honesty in human terms, to civic and political loyalty and in view of this, to “changing” society through education.

He transformed the strong values in which he believed – and which he defended against everyone – into social activity, concrete gestures, without retreating from the spiritual dimension or the ecclesial setting as an area free from the problems of the world and of life. Indeed with a strong sense of his vocation as a priestly educator, he nurtured a style of daily life that was not without its horizons, but filled with values and ideals. He did not want it to be a protective niche and a refuge from open encounter but rather a sincere measuring up to wider and more diversified circumstances. His choices were not under the banner of a refusal of every tension, or demanding sacrifice, risk, struggle. He maintained freedom for himself and his Salesians and was proud of his autonomy. He did not want to tie the fate of his works to the unpredictable vagaries of political regimes. The glory of God and the salvation of souls were his only project.

3. The General Chapter

I chose to put a quotation from the Letter to the Colossians at the head of this opening address, because it seems to me that it expresses very well what we are called to do in this General Chapter.

Actually, by means of a heartfelt exhortation, Paul is telling us that we must live in Christ, remaining faithful to the Gospel against whatever false theory there might be. If the exhortation to “walk in the Lord” is an appeal to a life corresponding to the vocation we have received, the expression “rooted in him and built on him, held firm in the faith”, which uses images taken from nature (‘root’) and the building industry (‘built’), reaffirms the absolute need for an intimate bond with Christ. The conclusion to the comparison “as you have been taught”, in parallel with “as you have received”, on the other hand expresses the bond with what is essential and ongoing, not dependent on cultural sensitivities.

If it is true that any General Chapter is an event that in substance goes beyond the merely formal fulfilment of what is prescribed by the Constitutions, then there is even greater reason, I believe, to state that GC27 must be this. It will be a Pentecostal event which will have the Holy Spirit as its main protagonist.

This is why it will take place between memory and prophecy, between faithful recognition of the origins and unconditional openness to the novelty of God. And we will all be active players, with our responsibilities and expectations, abundant experience, ready to listen, discern, accept God’s will for the Congregation.

From this point of view GC27 points to something new and unprecedented. The urgency of the radical approach of the Gospel is what is driving us. We are called to return to the essential, to be a poor Congregation for the poor, and to rediscover inspiration from the very apostolic passion of Don Bosco. We are invited to draw on the bountiful wellsprings of the charism and at the same time open ourselves bravely and creatively to new ways of expressing it today.

For us it is how to discover new facets of the same diamond, our charism, which better allow us to respond to the circumstances of the young, to understand and serve their new poverties, to offer new opportunities for their development as human beings and their education, for their journey of faith and their fullness of life.

3.1. Attitudes for taking part

So then, how are we to live this experience of the Chapter in a constructive way? What kind of commitment should every Chapter member take on board? What are the attitudes one should have when taking part in a General Chapter?

The awareness of being called by God reawakens in us the *prophetic spirit* which means a sense of dependence on Him and profound acceptance of the

mission He entrusts to us. That demands that we allow the Holy Spirit to be the chief character because it will be Him who gets us to understand God's will, what is good, what will be pleasing to Him. We are asked to be in a constant attitude of humble, obedient listening, an attitude of discernment and debate concerning the life of the Congregation and our charism, which is a great gift of God for the Church and for the young.

GC27 requires our complete involvement. We are all called to live this event responsibly, to see its vital importance and to refresh our interest and availability each day for the road on which the Spirit is leading us.

This *discernment* in the light of what the Spirit wants to reveal to us, requires of the assembly and each Chapter member in particular, serious reflection, calm, profound prayer, a personal contribution, awareness that we are called individually to be part of it, a readiness to listen to God and ourselves.

I am certain that the days spent at the Becchi and in Turin, the Retreat, and the two days of presentation of the Congregation through reports by the Sectors and Regions have contributed to creating this spiritual atmosphere.

The Spirit acts, breathes His yearning for life and scatters His tongues of fire wherever there is a community gathered in the name of Christ and united in love. It is the communion of hearts that calls us together around the same apostolic project, Don Bosco's project, and makes possible unity amidst the diversity of contexts, cultures, languages.

It is the Spirit who lets us hear God's voice in our history. And today the situation of the world and the Church asks us to *walk with God in history*. The Christian vocation in general and the religious vocation in particular is marked by the prophetic dimension which leads us to be 'sentinels' of the world and 'sensors of history', able to interpret the signs of the times and set new signs and transforming forces in place in history, and this has to do with our identity, credibility and visibility.

Our openness to the questions, provocations, stimuli and challenges of modern man, in our case those of the young, frees us from every kind of sclerosis, tonelessness, stalemate or bourgeois mentality and sets us on the road "in step with God". Only this way can we overcome the risk – by no means an imaginary one – of the 'spiritual worldliness', ego-centrality, theological narcissism decried by Pope Francis since the beginning of his pontificate.

Historical sensitivity has been a typical element of Don Bosco and of the Congregation, and today more than ever we cannot overlook this. It makes us attentive to situations in the Church and the world. It sets us "on the way" and

“pushes us out” in search of the young. It all needs translating into an essential, courageous Chapter document, one which is able to fill the hearts of the confreres with fire. This is why an interpretation of the “signs of the times” is important, some of which I have pointed out in AGC 413 in the letter of convocation of GC27.

There is no way of becoming ‘witnesses to the radical approach of the Gospel’ without being built on Christ. This is the only secure guarantee *for building on rock*. Among the numerous attempts to renew consecrated life over the last 50 years, we have the word ‘refounding’. Well, Paul warns us, “everyone doing the building must work carefully. For the foundation, no one can lay any other than the one which has already been laid, that is Jesus Christ” (*I Cor 3:10b-11*).

The explanation is very simple: our community and our life cannot be built on any other foundation than Christ nor can it be built with outmoded materials. Many experiences confirm the suspicion that at times, here and there, we have tried to build the house on sand, and not on rock. Every attempt to refound consecrated life which does not lead us back to Christ, the foundation of our life, and which does not make us more faithful to Don Bosco, our founder, is destined to fail.

If we wish to recover the enthusiasm of our origins and be God’s presence in the Church and the world, we have to avoid the temptation to conform to a secularised, hedonistic and consumer mentality, and to allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit who gave rise to consecrated life as a privileged way of following and imitating Christ.

3.2. The theme

The theme chosen for GC27 regards testimony to *the radical approach of the Gospel*, found in the motto “*work and temperance*” (cf. C. 18) an explicit formulation of Don Bosco’s programme of life, the “*Da mihi animas cetera tolle*”. It is aimed at helping us explore our charismatic identity more deeply, make us aware of our vocation to faithfully live out Don Bosco’s apostolic project.

It is a huge topic. This is why we sought to focus the attention of GC27 on *four thematic areas*: living our Salesian consecrated *vocation* in the grace of unity and joy since this vocation is God’s gift and a personal project of life; having a strong *spiritual experience*, taking on the way of being and acting of the obedient, poor and chaste Jesus and becoming seekers of God; building *fraternity* in our communities of life and action; dedicating ourselves generously to the *mission*, walking with the young to give hope to the world.

Being “*witnesses to the radical approach of the Gospel*” is an appeal addressed to the entire Congregation which finds its Salesian translation in the twofold “work and temperance”. In the well-known dream of the ‘ten diamonds’, in the first part, we are presented with the Salesian ‘*sicut esse debet*’, marked strongly by theological features – faith, hope and charity – given a particular tone through work and temperance and characterised by a life consecrated to the Lord which finds its support in fasting and prayer.

In the second part of the dream we are presented with a warning of what could happen if our personal, community and institutional life is not up to the measure of the gift of vocation we have received. The image of that worn out and ugly personage could not be more eloquent. This is why we went to the Becchi and Valdocco: not out of nostalgia, but to nurture the flame of enthusiasm and the faithful commitment of those early Salesians.

The theme of the Gospel and its radical approach can be well illustrated by taking into consideration a semantic and etymological perspective. Actually, the word ‘radical’ is connected with ‘root’, putting down roots. To understand things better we could use the image of a plant and its seed. Let us look at the features and value of the roots:

- *Stability and firmness* of the plant tell us that a tree without roots will dry up or collapse. In this sense the image is analogous – not equal – to a building without foundations.
- *Vitality*, since the substances that nurture a plant come from the roots above all, even if it is clear that air, sun, etc. are also involved.
- “*Planted in the ground*”, meaning that their natural place is underground, they are “hidden”.

In this sense the title of our theme, “witnesses to the radical approach of the Gospel”, expresses an interesting paradox in itself. On the one hand, the word *witnesses* speaks of public manifestation, and therefore of visibility, “sacramentality”, while paradoxically the term “radical” alludes precisely to *what is not seen*, to what is *hidden*, “*buried*”.

I believe that often when we speak of being radical, we start out from the *semantic* idea of the word, emphasising the significance of it being unconditional, of absolute fidelity, choice without compromise, of the desire to be “all of one piece”, etc., overlooking the more precise etymological meaning.

At times there is a tendency to identify our being radical with perfection or seeking it, but it is not so: we do not expect fruit from a small plant, and even more so from a seed just planted in the ground, but that it puts down *good*,

deep roots. For someone who wants to enter Salesian life, or religious life in general, we cannot demand that he be “holy” (unfortunately, at times, not even after many years of consecrated life) unless he is *well-rooted/radical* in his life choices.

I believe this has implications for *formation*, in the first place for the *initial* formation stage, where I would emphasise two aspects along the semantic lines of this word ‘radical’. The first is *depth* (typical for a root) of life, inviting young confreres to row against the current, since they are part of a culture that places more emphasis on the superficial and outward appearances than the ability to see deep down what is true, just, valid and noble for human life, and even more so for the religious. The second aspect refers to a much forgotten virtue in our day, perhaps because it is often misunderstood: *humility*. We know that the roots of this word come from *humus*... *Humus* and *root* are inseparable. Humility is none other than “life hidden in Christ”, from which and only from which, can spiritual, apostolic and vocational fertility (fruits!) spring forth.

So for all of us, being radical is a fruitful return to Christ, the Gospel, being faithful to the *sequela Christi* and it is also a return to the specifics of our charism. Going to the roots of our Congregation’s birth means thanking God for Don Bosco, for his spiritual maturity and the apostolic path he set out on; questioning ourselves on the call that God gives us now and responding at this historical moment, faithfully and generously to the needs of the young and the demands of society and the Church.

3.3. Aims and results

GC27 aims to help every confrere and every community to faithfully live out Don Bosco’s apostolic project. GC27 desires then, in continuity with GC26, to further strengthen our charismatic identity. This aim is presented in the initial articles of the Constitutions: we Salesians are called to “carry out the Founder’s apostolic plan in a specific form of religious life” (C. 2); also in our specific form of life, “our apostolic mission, our fraternal community and the practice of the evangelical counsels are the inseparable elements of our consecration which we live in a single movement of love towards God and towards our brothers” (C. 3).

As a result of GC27 we expect to make our Salesian life still more authentic and thus visible, credible and fruitful. That is possible when it is profoundly and vitally built on God, courageously and convincingly rooted in Christ and in His Gospel. The logical consequence is the strengthening of its identity. For

the same reason, over the last six years we have committed ourselves to returning to Don Bosco, reawakening the heart of every confrere with the passion of the “Da mihi animas, cetera tolle”.

Living Don Bosco’s apostolic project with fidelity, or in other words our charismatic identity, makes us more authentic; from our lived identity, then, comes clearer *visibility*, more convincing *credibility* and renewed *vocational fruitfulness*. Visibility is not principally looking to our image, but it is a beautiful testimony to our vocation. If we give witness joyfully, generously and faithfully to Don Bosco’s apostolic project, that is, the consecrated Salesian vocation, then our life will become attractive, fascinating, especially for the young and then we will see a new vocational fruitfulness everywhere.

4. Conclusion

My dear confreres and Chapter members, on 25 March 2008 I was re-elected as Rector Major by GC26 and on the days that followed the Vicar and other Sector and Regional Councillors were elected, with the task of animating and governing the Congregation for the six year period, 2008-2014. Over these six years we have sought to live this task intensely, investing our best energies in it.

Thanks be to God, over these six years we have not experienced the death of any member of the General Council – including myself. I overcame a critical moment of illness, and have been graced and blessed by the Lord who has given me the necessary health, energy, enthusiasm and serenity to bring the mandate entrusted to me to its natural conclusion.

Nevertheless circumstances have not been wanting that have led to the need for changes in the make-up of the Council. Firstly a serious heart problem led Fr Stefan Turanský to the decision to offer his resignation as the Regional for the North Europe Region on 21 July 2010. To take his place, and with the consent of the General Council, six days later on 27 July 2010, I appointed Fr Marek Chrzan, then provincial in Krakow Province.

Then just 6 months later, on 26 January 2011, the Economist General, Bro. Claudio Marangio, left his role to undertake a period of discernment accompanied by myself, which concluded on 10 October 2011 with an indult to leave the Salesian Congregation, dispensation from his vows and the obligations of religious profession. And again with the consent of the General Council, on 25 January 2011, I appointed Bro. Jean Paul Muller, then Director of the Bonn

Mission Office, as the new Ecomer General. In both cases we made a choice of someone who had already been indicated as a candidate for these roles at GC26.

While I thank each of the Councillors for their closeness and loyal, generous and expert collaboration in the various roles entrusted to them, today is the day to give the word once more to the Chapter Assembly, the highest expression of authority in the life of the Congregation. Over to you, then, dear conferees, but yours is also the invitation to open your hearts to the Spirit, the great inner Teacher who always guides us to the truth and fullness of life.

I conclude by entrusting this Pentecostal event of our Congregation to Our Lady, to Mary the Immaculate Help of Christians. She has always been there in our history and her presence and help will not be lacking at this time.

As she did in the Upper Room Mary, who is an expert in the Spirit, will teach us to let ourselves be guided by Him “to discover the will of God, and know what is good, what it is that God wants, what is the perfect thing to do” (*Rm* 12:2b).

Rome, 3 March 2014

**ADDRESS OF CARDINAL JOÃO BRAZ DE AVIZ
PREFECT OF THE CONGREGATION
FOR THE INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE
AND THE SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE**

Witness to the radical approach of the Gospel in consecrated life

I greet you cordially, also in the name of His Excellency Archbishop José Carballo and the Dicastery. Greetings to the Salesian Cardinals and Bishops, the Rector Major, Fr Pascual Chávez, Mother Yvonne Reungoat, Superior General of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and all Salesian Chapter members.

Introduction

In his letter of convocation of this 27th General Chapter, the Rector Major, Fr Pascual Chávez asked himself: “What kind of consecrated life is necessary and significant for today’s world?” He then went on: “The reply can only be that which is a mystical, prophetic and servant religious life with the radical approach of the gospel both personal and communitarian, a life therefore full of humanity and of spirituality, the source of hope for mankind. Our Congregation too is called to pursue this path”.¹ It seems to me to be the way Don Bosco translated his programme, “da mihi animas, cetera tolle” into real life (cf. C. 4).

He explained the three adjectives: “mystical, prophetic, servant”, at another stage in the letter thus: “centring our lives on God, the only Absolute, who is calling and inviting us to follow his Son in giving our lives in love; living the prophecy of communion and fraternity; rediscovering the mission among the young as the place par excellence for encountering the God who continues to speak to us”.²

¹ P. CHÁVEZ, *Letter of convocation of the XXVII General Chapter*, 8 April 2012, AGC 413, p. 22.

² *Ibid*, p. 5.

Among the many aspects in which we are called to express our radical witness to the Gospel, and which Fr Chávez has summed up in the three ways indicated above, I would like to highlight just one which seems to me to be so important in today's ecclesial and social context, for our consecrated lives to be authentic and truly a credible witness to our choice of God and to the validity of the Gospel for our time: living the prophecy of communion and fraternity. It is from here that we can gain a new impulse for recovering the beauty of our choice of life in the service of the Gospel and a new incentive to carry out the mission which – for you Salesians specifically – is to be bearers of the love of God for young people, as it says from the outset of your Constitutions (cf C. 2).

Following Christ together

For you Salesians too, as is the case for all consecrated individuals, the fundamental elements of your identity are the choice of God expressed through the practice of the evangelical counsels, fraternal life in community, and the mission, as well summed up in article 3 of the Constitutions: “Our apostolic mission, our fraternal community and the practice of the evangelical counsels are the inseparable elements of our consecration which we live in a single movement of love towards God and towards our brothers”.

As I have had occasion to say at other times, it seems to me that this shift from the *sequela Christi* as an individual thing, albeit still necessary, to the *sequela Christi* as a community is a novel element for consecrated persons, and really needed in today's culture. Someone, paraphrasing St Teresa of Avila's image, has written that today we should be involved in building an ‘exterior castle’ in addition to an ‘interior castle’ or personal relationship with God: going to God together with our brothers and sisters. For sure, this is true not only for consecrated people but for everyone baptised in the Church, for all Christians. But for those of us who are consecrated, this should be especially true. Indeed the Church entrusts us with the special role of being an example to other Christians of how to live out this radical choice of God and the Gospel, not alone but in communion: communion with God and communion amongst ourselves

In the document *Religious and human promotion* by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, religious are described as “experts in communion”. We read in no. 24: “Experts in communion, religious are, therefore, called to be an ecclesial community in the Church and in the world, witnesses and architects of the plan for unity which is the

crowning point of human history in God's design. Above all, by the profession of the evangelical counsels, which frees one from what might be an obstacle to the fervour of charity, religious are communally a prophetic sign of intimate union with God, who is loved above all things. Furthermore, through the daily experience of communion of life, prayer and apostolate – the essential and distinctive elements of their form of consecrated life – they are a sign of fraternal fellowship". In fact, in a world frequently very deeply divided and before their brethren in the faith, they give witness to the possibility of a community of goods, of fraternal love, of a programme of life and activity which is theirs because they have accepted the call to follow more closely and more freely Christ the Lord who was sent by the Father, so that, first born among many brothers and sisters, He might establish a new fraternal fellowship in the gift of his Spirit".³

A new paradigm – the spirituality of communion

Today we are at a new moment of human history and the history of the Church, marked by phenomena like secularism, globalisation, taking refuge in the private sphere, and other phenomena as well which tend to lead humankind to new choices for meaning in life. The new millennium we are now living in means that the Church too must be aware of this change and practise Gospel values in this new moment so as to open up horizons of life and hope for the entire human race.

The most significant proposal for us Christians, it seems to me, may be the one from 2001 from Blessed Pope John Paul II who, introducing the Church in the new millennium indicated fostering a spirituality of communion as a new paradigm for the life of the Church and an educational principle everywhere where the human being and Christian is shaped, where ministers of the altar, consecrated individuals, pastoral workers are formed, where families and communities are being built up.⁴

We can neither understand nor practise relationships amongst consecrated individuals and with all other vocations in the Church as communion, mission and service, without being aware of and decisive in taking up this vital principle of the spirituality of communion. It is the essential theological and ecclesiological feature of our time, telling us what the Holy Spirit is asking of the

³ CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, *Religious and human promotion*, 25 April 1978, no. 24.

⁴ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, 6 January 2001, n. 43.

Church today in order to provide new thrust to the evangelising mission. “To make the Church the home and the school of communion: that is the great challenge facing us in the millennium which is now beginning, if we wish to be faithful to God’s plan and respond to the world’s deepest yearnings”.

The spirituality of communion proposed by John Paul II can certainly not be reduced to mere intimacy. After recalling how its source is in the very life of the Triune God, he lists some very practical consequences which are directly related to the life of our consecrated communities: “The spirituality of communion indicates above all the heart’s contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us, and whose light we must also be able to see shining on the face of the brothers and sisters around us. A spirituality of communion also means an ability to think of our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the Mystical Body, and therefore as “those who are a part of me”. This makes us able to share their joys and sufferings, to sense their desires and attend to their needs, to offer them deep and genuine friendship. A spirituality of communion implies also the ability to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and prize it as a gift from God: not only as a gift for the brother or sister who has received it directly, but also as a “gift for me”. A spirituality of communion means, finally, to know how to “make room” for our brothers and sisters, bearing “each other’s burdens” (*Gal 6:2*) and resisting the selfish temptations which constantly beset us and provoke competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy. Let us have no illusions: unless we follow this spiritual path, external structures of communion will serve very little purpose. They would become mechanisms without a soul, “masks” of communion rather than its means of expression and growth”.⁵

If the whole Church is meant to take up this indication from John Paul II, consecrated individuals do so as “specialists”, since this is the very essence of their choice of life: union with God and union among themselves in fraternal life. This is why the Church entrusts consecrated communities with the special task of “helping the spirituality of communion to grow first among themselves and then in the ecclesial community and beyond”.⁶ We can well understand too that living together in community, as consecrated persons do, even when things are well set up and with the best of projects, is reduced to being a sociological fact unless it is deeply informed by this soul of communion. Putting this in Fr Chávez own words: “A community without communion, with all that this implies with regard to acceptance, appreciation and esteem, mutual assistance

⁵ *Ibid*, no. 43.

⁶ JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Exhortation *Vita consecrata*, 25 March 1996, no. 51.

and love, is reduced to a group in which people may have a place but where in fact they are left isolated”.⁷ And this can happen even where “the family spirit” (according to the expression so dear to Don Bosco) that belongs to your charism should be so evident.

“On earth as it is in heaven” – the model is the Trinity

Among the many images we can use to describe the Church (and *Lumen Gentium* briefly lists some of these: sheepfold, flock, God’s field, building, family, church, spouse, body; all drawn from the Scriptures), the Council preferred the *people of God* (LG gave an entire chapter to it, the 2nd). This people has Christ as its head, the new precept of love as its law, based on His love, and is “a lasting and sure seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race” (LG no. 9). The Trinity is the source and model of communion among those who make up this unique people, to the point where it describes the Church as “a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (LG no. 4), according to the famous expression of St Cyprian. It follows that the task of the Church in history is to help human beings to practise the communion with God and among themselves which Jesus had already definitively wrought by his death and resurrection, but which must now gradually inform the life of believers and then of the entire human race so that it may put into place the “on earth as it is in heaven” which we ask for each day when we pray the *Our Father*, that “all may be one” (*Jn* 17:20).

Just as a migrant leaving his country to go to some distant land brings with him the habits, language, way of living of his country of origin, so Jesus – the divine migrant – coming to earth brings us His way of living in His place of origin, the Trinity. He not only made us aware of that but taught us to live among ourselves in the same way. This is how I like to interpret that part of the “Our Father” which says: “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”: help us to live here on earth as you live in heaven, practising the same relationship and dynamic that goes on in the Trinity.

Consecrated life, being a living part of the Church, plays a special part in the unique ecclesial communion and expresses this in a significant and characteristic way, thus offering itself as a privileged place for experiencing and witnessing to the life of the Trinity. “Every kind of community in the Church in fact draws from the depths of the very being of the Trinitarian community, through the communication that the Trinity makes of itself and of the mystery

⁷ P. CHÁVEZ, “*Witnesses to the radical approach of the Gospel*”, in: AGC 413, p. 34.

of its very unity... The Trinitarian dimension, then, envelops consecrated life in all its dimensions of consecration, communion, mission”.⁸ Also in the variety of inspirations and forms in which it has been historically expressed, consecrated life has always been aware that it needs to look not only to the example of communion indicated by the Acts of the Apostles among the primitive Christian community in Jerusalem, where they were all “one heart and one soul” (*Acts* 4: 32), but even more radically to its original model, the prototype of communion of the three divine persons in the Trinity.

This normative reference to Trinitarian communion has certainly not always been explicit for Founders and Foundresses. But in the Rules and writings of many of them it is possible to rediscover this basic inspiration. One who says it quite precisely is St Vincent de Paul who writes to the Daughters of Charity whom he founded: “In the same way that God is one in himself, and the three Persons exist within him without the Father being greater than the Son nor the Son than the Spirit, so must the Daughters of Charity be; they are to be an image of the Holy Trinity; although many, let them be one heart and one soul... This way you will make this Society a reproduction of the Most Holy Trinity. And this way your Society will represent the unity of the Most Holy Trinity”.⁹

It is wonderful that your Constitutions too, contain explicit reference to this lofty and normative model of our life which is the unity of the three Persons in the Trinity. As it explains the value of living and working together it says: “This is why we come together in community, 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. The community is a reflection of the Mystery of the Trinity; there we find a response to the deep aspirations of the heart, and we become for the young signs of love and unity” (C. 49). This then is how community life lived according to the model of love in the Trinity becomes the source of joy and self-fulfilment for everyone, and makes us capable of carrying out our apostolic mission to the young”.

We need to explain that the life of communion stamped by the Trinity which is part of the identity and mission of the Church in the first place, and then of consecrated life, is first of all a gift; otherwise it would be a superhuman pretence and an impossible ideal to achieve. In the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici* (no. 31) the gift of ecclesial communion is

⁸ F. CIARDI, *Koinonia. Itinerario teologico-spirituale della comunità religiosa*, Città Nuova, Roma 1992, pp. 206-207.

⁹ Quoted in: F. CIARDI, *Esperti di comunione. Pretesa e realtà della vita religiosa*, San Paolo, Cinisello B. (Milano) 1999, p. 113.

“the reflection in time of the eternal and ineffable communion of the love of God”; and being a gift it is compared to a talent that “must be put to work in a life of ever-increasing communion”. And in turn “communion generates communion”¹⁰ and spreads out like concentric circles through the Church, to Christians of other confessions, to the faithful of other religions and to the whole human race. It is this that makes Christian witness and the Church’s witness credible: “Thus the life of ecclesial communion becomes a *sign* for the world and an attractive power leading people to believe in Christ: ‘As you Father are in me and I in you, may they also be one in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me’ (Jn 17: 21)”.¹¹

Applied to the religious community, *Vita consecrata* expresses it thus: it is “a human community in which the Trinity dwells, in order to extend in history the gifts of communion proper to the three divine Persons”.¹² It is because they are made partakers, as indeed are all the baptised, in the Trinitarian life, and are in fact introduced to it, that consecrated individuals can then become credible and prophetic witnesses of it in the Church and in the world, including among young people.

The third precept of love – “love one another”

The commitment to practise fraternal relations in community modelled upon Trinitarian communion is made possible because the same love that binds the three in the Trinity has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (cf. *Rom* 5:5). By implementing the new commandment given us by Christ: “Love one another as I have loved you” (*Jn* 13:34-35; 15:12-13.17), we practise the mutual love which is a sign of the communion which exists among the divine persons of the Trinity. Before being the result of our good will, this love in fact, to the extent that Christ practised it (the Cross is its true measure) is a consequence of the divine love itself at work in us. It was God who first loved us and through the redemption healed our capacity to love Him and our neighbour.

As is well explained in the document *Fraternal life in community*: “Before being a human construction, religious community is a gift of the Spirit. It is the love of God, poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, from which religious community takes its origin and is built as a true family gathered together in

¹⁰ JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, 30 December 1988, no. 32.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, no. 31.

¹² *Vita consecrata*, no. 41.

the Lord's name. It is therefore impossible to understand religious community unless we start from its being a gift from on high, from its being a mystery, from its being rooted in the very heart of the blessed and sanctifying Trinity".¹³

Naturally the duty of personal response (relationship with God) and building up fraternity on a daily basis arises from the gift of Trinitarian communion. This twofold dimension of personal communion with God and communion amongst the members "is the fundamental element constituting the unity of the religious family".¹⁴ If from God's side the gift of communion is full from the outset, from our side it is earned and regained daily along a path that demands everyone's involvement and which can also be an effort, with some falling back. Bringing about fraternal community life is something that requires self-denial, accepting our confreres' limitations; in a word, a courageous and persevering ascetical journey.

Some may see this address as somewhat tough. We can only understand and accept it by beginning from the logic of the Cross, the total gift of self out of love, to God and one's confreres: "Love one another *as* I have loved you". Let me read another passage from *Fraternal life in community*: "It must be admitted that this kind of reasoning presents difficulty today both to young people and to adults. Often, young people come from a culture which overrates subjectivity and the search for self-fulfilment, while adults either are anchored to structures of the past or experience a certain disenchantment... Right from the beginning, it is necessary to prepare to be not only consumers of community, but above all its builders; to be responsible for each other's growth; to be open and available to receive the gift of the other; to be able to help and to be helped; to replace and to be replaced. A fraternal and shared common life has a natural attraction for young people but, later, perseverance in the real conditions of life can become a heavy burden".¹⁵

This is how I understand the famous phrase of the young Jesuit St John Berchmans (1599-1621): "*Vita communis mea maxima poenitentia*". Perhaps it has often been interpreted negatively, highlighting the difficulty of living together in community. But it says much more, really. For those called by God to follow Christ together with their brothers or their sisters in a religious community, there is no need to look for any other penances or ascetical ways of being holy.

¹³ CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, *Fraternal life in community*, 2 February 1994, no. 8.

¹⁴ CONGREGATION FOR RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR INSTITUTES, *Essential Elements of the Church's Teaching on Religious Life*, 31 May 1983, no. 18.

¹⁵ *Fraternal life in community*, nos. 23-24.

The daily requirements of loving a brother, a sister, with all the nuances that evangelical charity demands, is where we exercise our virtue, it is the characteristic place for becoming holy together. This certainly implies one aspect of ascetics, renouncing the old man, but it is also our great opportunity to encounter and love God practically in the brother or sister around us. So the asceticism that fraternal life demands is not an end in itself, but flourishes in a new experience of God's love: it is "the 'mystique' of living together" which Pope Francis hints at, that makes our life "a holy pilgrimage".¹⁶

From the ideal to real life

This Trinitarian communion we partake of is a lofty gift then, but also a great responsibility to make fruitful the gift received and to effectively demonstrate that divine life in each of the members leads to overcoming differences and obstacles which are implied by any kind of human shared existence. We do not want to delude ourselves: without losing sight of the human-divine model which we seek to be inspired by, we know that we have to deal daily with human limitations and the root of sin and selfishness still there in us. We are very different from each other, with temperaments, tastes and stories that distinguish us from each other, and this makes fraternal life difficult.

We also know that the first community in Jerusalem, ideally described in the so-called 'summary' in Acts (cf. *Acts* 2:42-47; 4:32-35; 5:12-16) and which religious life has always looked to as its paradigm,¹⁷ was not without its difficulties and problems. Jesus Himself, knowing human frailty, before He died, asked the Father as a special gift from on high for the unity of the apostles and of all believers: "Holy Father, keep those you have given me true to your name so that they may be one like us... I pray not only for these, but for those also who through their words will believe in me. May they all be one... may they be completely one" (*Jn* 17:11. 20-21. 23).

It is interesting to note, running through the letters to the Apostles addressed to the early communities, what and how many were the practical pointers they offered on the new commandment of Jesus to love one another. Together, these practical pointers became a real "handbook" for fraternal life in community:

- "love each other as much as brothers should, and have a profound respect for each other" (*Rm* 12:10);

¹⁶ POPE FRANCIS, Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 24 November 2013, no. 87.

¹⁷ Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 15.

- “there must be no competition amongst you, no conceit” (*Phil 2:3*);
- “treat everyone with equal kindness” (*Rm 12:16*);
- “treat each other in the same friendly way as Christ treated you” (*Rm 15:7*);
- “advise one another” (*Rm 15:14*);
- “wait for one another” (*I Cor 11:33*);
- “serve one another rather in works of love” (*Gal 5:13*);
- “give encouragement to one another” (*I Thes 5:11*);
- “bear with one another charitably” (*Eph 4:2*);
- “be friends with one another and kind, forgiving each other” (*Eph 4:32*);
- “nobody thinks of his own interests first but everybody thinks of other people’s interests instead” (*Phil 2:4*);
- “give way to one another in obedience to Christ” (*Eph 5:21*);
- “pray for one another” (*Ja 5:16*);
- “wrap yourselves in humility to be servants of one another” (*I Pt 5:5*);
- “let your love for each other be real and from the heart” (*I Pt 1:22*);
- “do all that has to be done without complaining or arguing” (*Phil 2:14*).

I found a beautiful echo of these practical indications in a text of your founder Don Bosco as well: “Firstly let us be charitable to one another, bearing with faults patiently and being mutually indulgent. Let us encourage each other to do good, to observe our rule, and to love and respect each other like brothers. Let us pray, that we may all form one heart and one soul to love and serve God”.¹⁸

At the same time, mutual love among confreres in community ensures unity among the members without ignoring each one’s differences and gifts. Just as in the Trinity we have perfect unity because of the divine love circulating amongst them, but at the same time the Three are not confused and operate in distinct ways from one another, so in the community, mutual love strengthens communion and fraternity, guaranteeing each his freedom according to God’s plans for him. This dynamic of unity and distinction too, modelled on the relationships between the three Persons, is the result of mutual respect and shared commitment to achieving fellowship. So that the community can foster both the human and spiritual fulfilment of all its members and the achievement of common apostolic purposes, “we must continue to seek a just balance, not always

¹⁸ *Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco*, IX, p. 168.

easy to achieve, between the common good and respect for the human person, between the demands and needs of individuals and those of the community, between personal charisms and the community's apostolate... Religious community is the place where the daily and patient passage from "me" to "us" takes place, from my commitment to a commitment entrusted to the community, from seeking "my things" to seeking "the things of Christ". In this way, religious community becomes the place where we learn daily to take on that new mind which allows us to live in fraternal communion through the richness of diverse gifts and which, at the same time, fosters a convergence of these gifts towards fraternity and towards co-responsibility in the apostolic plan".¹⁹

The presence of the Risen Lord

The most important result of this community life style stamped with Trinitarian communion and guided by the logic of the Cross, is the stable and palpable presence of the Risen Christ, given His promise: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am with them" (*Mt 18:20*; cf. PC 15 a). Coming together "in his name" means in His love, in fulfilling His will, summed up in the commandment that He Himself called "His" and "new". So, He makes Himself present, so mystically but real, and you can experience, almost touch His presence, especially thanks to the gifts of Easter that the Risen Christ among us will let us experience: peace, the joy of being together, light, "family spirit" (to use an expression dear to Don Bosco), apostolic zeal.

"In the life of the community", *Vita consecrata* notes once more "it should in some way be evident that, more than an instrument for carrying out a specific mission, fraternal communion is a *God-enlightened space* in which to experience the hidden presence of the Risen Lord",²⁰ according to the promise in *Mt 18:20*. Your Constitutions too make reference to this Gospel verse: "The profession of the counsels helps us to live a life of fellowship with our brothers in the religious community as in a family which enjoys the presence of the Lord" (C. 61). The Father and the Spirit are also present in Christ: the community united by the bond of mutual love enjoys the presence of the Triune God and becomes its sign and witness.

The 'family spirit' your Founder and the Constitutions speak of is the atmosphere of joy and freedom where all members of the community feel at ease,

¹⁹ *Fraternal life in community*, no. 39.

²⁰ *Vita consecrata*, no. 42c.

enjoy one another's presence, feel accepted and understood, where their gifts are appreciated and excuse is made for their inevitable weaknesses. So then "how good, how delightful it is for all to live together" (cf Ps. 132), and the most visible fruit is joy, as Pope Francis also reminded us speaking last October to the Poor Clares at Assisi: "See to friendship among you, family life, love. May the Monastery never be Purgatory, but a family. Problems there are and will be, but as we do in a family, through love, look for the loving solution; don't destroy one thing to resolve another; do not compete with one another. Look after community life, because when community life is like this, like a family, it is the Holy Spirit who is in your midst. Always with great heart, let things go, no bragging, put up with everything, smiling from the heart. Joy is its sign".²¹

May the Risen Christ in the community united in His love, fascinate many young people today and call them to join the Salesian religious family to continue to be witnesses for young people today of God's love for them.

²¹ POPE FRANCIS, *Per una chiusura di grande umanità*, Assisi, 4 ottobre 2013, in: L'Osservatore Romano, Sunday 6 October, p. 6.

**ADDRESS OF HOMAGE OF THE RECTOR MAJOR
TO THE HOLY FATHER
ON THE OCCASION OF THE PAPAL AUDIENCE**

Dear Pope Francis,
Dear Father,

We are very happy to be here with you. Thank you for this opportunity to meet you. For us it is a very precious gift and a unique occasion, allowing us to express the feelings we bear for you in our hearts. We love you, Father! We greatly value your courage and your testimony. With joy we see your great love for the Lord Jesus, for the Church, and your desire for the profound renewal of the whole Christian community over which you preside in service and love.

We know very well that for Don Bosco, love for the Pope meant love for the Church and love for the mission. Our meeting would have no meaning were it not accompanied at the same time by the desire to express to you, dear Father, our willingness to renew our charismatic and missionary commitment to the Church and the world with particular attention to the young, especially the poorest and most abandoned. So we accept your invitation to open the doors of our houses and our hearts, to be announcers of Gospel joy, believing strongly in a God who loves human beings and desires their salvation. In the words of “Gaudium et spes”, we want to share the joys and sorrows of today’s world and of the young people who live in it, fully committing ourselves to building the Kingdom of God.

During this General Chapter, with the theme of being “Witnesses to the radical approach of the Gospel”, we have felt that we are deeply in tune with your Apostolic Exhortation “Evangelii Gaudium”. This text has enlightened and guided our reflection.

It has been an occasion to reflect deeply on our Salesian charismatic identity, bearing in mind at the same time the need to interpret what Don Bosco experienced and passed on to us, in a way that is relevant. We have identified a path to renewal in which we commit ourselves to *living the mystical dimension of consecrated individuals* who intend to give absolute primacy to God, the

Lord of our life. Moved by the Spirit of Jesus therefore we want to be “seekers and witnesses of God”, joyfully accompanying young people on a journey of human and Christian growth.

We are proposing to renew *the prophetic witness of our fraternal life*. In a world often torn by conflict at every level, it seems to us that our religious life has as one of its principal tasks witnessing to the joy of a communion of brothers who feel they are all disciples of the Lord. It is a fellowship that involves our daily life, our work, our prayer and it becomes in itself a proclamation of a life expressed in new relationships inspired by the words of the Gospel and able to attract young people to the precious experience of a life given for others according to Don Bosco’s charism.

In our mission we want to reaffirm *our desire to be servants of the young*, through an educative proposal inspired by Gospel values and with a generous commitment to transforming the world. We want to reaffirm the criterion of Don Bosco’s choice: preferential availability for the poorest of the young, the most disadvantaged peoples, those on the margins, in traditional missionary settings and in the more secularised societies.

We welcome, dear Pope Francis, your words and proposals for an ecclesial choice of the major guidelines which will guide us over the next six years.

With the entire Salesian Family I take this opportunity to thank you for having agreed to come to Turin for the Second Centenary of Don Bosco’s birth. With the affection of children we assure you of our prayers, as we entrust your mission to the Virgin Help of Christians, Mother of the Church, and we ask for your paternal blessing.

Rome, 31 March 2014

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
AT THE AUDIENCE FOR THE CHAPTER MEMBERS
ON 31 MARCH 2014**

Dear Brothers,

Welcome! I thank Father Angelo for his words. I hope that he and the new General Council will ably serve the Salesian Congregation by leading, by guiding and supporting it along its journey. May the Holy Spirit help you to grasp the expectations and challenges of our time, especially those of young people, and interpret them in the light of the Gospel and your charism.

I imagine that during the Chapter – which had as its theme “*Witnesses to the radical approach of the Gospel*” – you had ever before you Don Bosco and the young; and Don Bosco with his motto: “*Da mihi animas, cetera tolle*”. He strengthened this programme with two other elements: work and temperance. I remember that at boarding school it was forbidden to take a siesta!... Temperance! For the Salesians and for us! “Work and temperance” – he said – “will make the Congregation flourish”. When one thinks of working for the good of souls, one overcomes the temptation of spiritual worldliness; one does not seek after other things, but only God and his Kingdom. Temperance, then, is a sense of proportion, being content, being simple. May the poverty of Don Bosco and of Mamma Margaret inspire every Salesian and each of your communities to live an austere life based on the essentials, on closeness to the poor, on transparency and responsibility in managing temporal goods.

1. The evangelization of youth is the mission which the Holy Spirit has entrusted to you in the Church. It is intimately joined with their *education*: the journey of faith is inserted into that of their growth and the Gospel also enriches human maturation. It is necessary to prepare young people to work in society in harmony with the spirit of the Gospel as workers of justice and peace, and to live as active members of the Church. You therefore avail yourselves of needed pedagogical and cultural advancements and updates in order to respond to the current educational crisis. May Don Bosco’s experience and his “*preventive system*” always sustain you in your commitment to life with the young. May your presence among them be distinguished by that tenderness which

Don Bosco called loving-kindness, employing other forms of language too, but well aware that the language of the heart is fundamental for approaching and befriending them.

The vocational dimension here is fundamental. Sometimes a vocation to the consecrated life is confused with a choice of voluntary work, and this distorted view is not good for Institutes. Next year – 2015 – which has been dedicated to consecrated life, will be a favourable occasion to present its beauty to young people. Partial visions should always be avoided so as not to arouse vocational responses that are frail and based on weak motives. Apostolic vocations are ordinarily the result of good youth ministry. Caring for vocations requires specific attention: first, prayer, then appropriate activities, personalised programmes, courage in making the proposal, guidance and family involvement. The vocational geography has changed and is changing, and consequently more demanding formation, guidance and discernment is needed.

2. In working with young people, you encounter the world of excluded youth. And this is dreadful! Today, it is dreadful to think that there are more than 75 million unemployed young people here, in the West. Let us consider the vast reality of unemployment, with its many negative consequences. Let us think about the dependencies, which unfortunately are many but which derive from the common root of a lack of true love. Reaching out to young people who have been marginalised requires courage, human maturity and much prayer. The best should be sent to do this work! The best! There can be a risk of getting caught up in enthusiasm, sending people to these frontiers who are keen, but not suitable. Careful discernment and constant guidance are therefore needed. The criterion is this: the best go there. “I need this one to be a superior here, or to study theology...” But, if you have that mission, send him there! The best!

3. Thanks be to God, you do not live or work as isolated individuals but as a community: and thank God for this! The community supports the whole of the apostolate. At times religious communities are fraught with tensions, and risk becoming individualistic and scattered, whereas what is needed is deep communication and authentic relationships. The humanizing power of the Gospel is witnessed in fraternity lived in community and is created through welcome, respect, mutual help, understanding, kindness, forgiveness and joy. The family spirit that Don Bosco left to you helps greatly in this respect, it promotes perseverance and draws people to the consecrated life.

Dear brothers, the bicentenary of the birth of Don Bosco is almost upon us. It will be a propitious moment to propose your Founder’s charism anew. Mary

Help of Christians has never failed to help the Congregation, and certainly she will never let it be lacking in the future. May her maternal intercession obtain for you from God the desired and longed for results. I bless you and pray for you and, please, pray for me, too! Thank you!

Rome, 31 March 2014

MESSAGE OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER TO THE SALESIAN CONFRERES

Dear Confreres,

All of us who have taken part in the 27th General Chapter wish to share with you the extraordinary experience we have had over these months, called to Rome in the Lord's name and sustained by the power of His Spirit. For each one of us the Chapter has been an event of grace to which we want to witness when we return home. When we take up our tasks and concerns once more we would like to tell you "what marvels indeed he did for us and how overjoyed we were!" (*Ps 125/126:3*).

In the beginning there was Valdocco

We began our journey in the Salesian Holy Land, at Valdocco, a place of the Gospel and daily miracles. We went there as people who are tracing a river back to its source. Our thirst was quenched and the fresh water of our origins refreshed us. Our father's story is an ever new invitation. We sought inspiration from his life and what he offers so we could revive his charism today. Rediscovering Don Bosco has helped our evangelical vocation to take root more deeply and has revived the reasons for giving ourselves for the Kingdom as he gave himself on behalf of the poorest of the young. In the light of his experience, we set out under the gaze of Mary Help of Christians, sure of her maternal intercession.

God gifted us with a Father

When we came back to Rome we began our work of demanding reflections and decisions. Fraternal spirit and common seeking made it possible for us to weave warm and sincere relationships among us immediately. These gave us

a first-hand experience of multicultural abundance and the prophecy of fraternity during the days of the Chapter.

We have felt in communion with those communities which, in countries experiencing conflict, are living through tragic times in their history: Syria, Venezuela, the Central African Republic, Sudan have been very much in our prayers. In remembering them, we have been brought face to face with the suffering of so many peoples and the stark reality of the witness of the many confreres who are living the radical approach of the Gospel in very complex situations and who encourage us in our commitment.

God then gifted us with a father. While we express our gratitude for the outstanding and fruitful ministry of Fr Pascual Chávez Villanueva, we feel that the election of Fr Ángel Fernández Artime as Rector Major and tenth Successor of Don Bosco was a gift of Providence for us all, for the entire Salesian Family and for the young. His open and sincere smile, his simplicity, his great humanity and spontaneous rapport with each of the confreres immediately let us see the face of the promised father in him: “A new Rector Major will be chosen who will take care of you and your eternal salvation. Listen to him, love him, obey him, pray for him...” (Don Bosco). Thank you, Fr Ángel, for your heart of the good shepherd and for your generosity.

Pope Francis fascinated us

A very special and intense occasion was our meeting with Pope Francis. He made us welcome and in blessing us he blessed each one of you and the young people the Lord has entrusted to us. His word, which was precise and trenchant, touched our hearts. He reminded us that we must be, like Don Bosco, men of the Gospel who live our daily lives simply and generously, austere and freely. He reminded us that our father taught us to love the young with the loving kindness that is proper to the Preventive System and that makes God's tenderness for the weakest of his children present. He asked us insistently to go out to the peripheries where the young dwell and where we see their various forms of poverty more acutely. He begged us to spare no effort in assigning our best individuals to the poorest, those who have no prospects and no future. Really, Pope Francis set fire to our Salesian hearts. His embrace was an expression of sincere affection for Don Bosco's sons and as he took our hands in his it renewed the filial devotion to Peter's Successor that Don Bosco always wanted his Salesians to have. The Holy Father's message will remain in our hearts and will be a programme for all of us to follow.

Going against the flow, in hope

The theme of our General Chapter, the Gospel's radical approach, has given rise to deep reflection, stimulating us to conversion. What we have experienced over these weeks is already in anticipation of the journey we wish to undertake with all of you and with our educative and pastoral communities. We have dreamed of the future and now we commit ourselves to making it a reality.

United with the vine like new branches (cf. *Jn* 10:1-10), we Salesians dream of a consecrated life which is able to question the culture and social reality in which we live when we live it with profoundly evangelical attitudes. For our communities we want a simple lifestyle, one marked by the joy of the Gospel and passion for the Kingdom. We want to live as men who are marked by a strong experience of God, with their feet on the ground, able to give reason for the hope we bear in our hearts, our life completely given over, authentic, whole. We are committed to seeking out the peripheries and deserts where the most abandoned young people are to be found.

We will be significant today if we go against the flow. When individualism grows around us, then fellowship becomes a credible alternative. We take up the challenge of building communities in which we learn to move from "I" to "we", always putting our brother's good before our own. We must be able to open up room for acceptance and dialogue which can help heal wounds through mature and regenerating relationships. We need to be decisively committed to humanising our common life so that we overcome loneliness and multiply mercy. Taking the risk of pardon and peace makes our way of living credible in our world, and makes our proclamation more clearly evangelical. For Francis, this is the pastoral conversion of mercy and tenderness.

Refocused

Aware of the new ecclesial moment we are living through, we are convinced that our consecrated life is a cry against selfishness and self-reference: it is about meeting the needs of others and beginning from our poor and supportive lifestyle. Our cloister is the world of the young who are in difficulty and our prayer is our hands raised up and our action in giving dignity back to those who are most excluded. This is why we cannot spare our energy, nor do we have any more time for "our things", or to close ourselves within our personal interests. We are faced with an exodus which will help us reach another

land, one promised a thousand times over: the land of the most abandoned and poorest. As Salesians we will find our Tabor there.

Francis invited us to place ourselves at the frontiers, on the margins, on the peripheries of the world, in the existential deserts where there are many like sheep without a shepherd and who have nothing to eat (cf. *Mt* 9:36). This is the key to interpretation which the Pope offers us to refocus ourselves: to seek other vistas offering us different points of view and which help us interpret reality beyond ourselves. This is the challenge for religious life today: thinking and living in a way that refocuses our way of looking at reality where we are too certain of ourselves, too settled in guaranteed works, too occupied with structured and satisfying work. When we think of the renewal of our Congregation, do we not have here a criterion of significance that can help us offer new horizons to our structures? It is not so easy to refocus, but it is urgent to do so if we want to continue to be faithful to God's call.

Dear confreres,

Over these days we have felt the breath of the Spirit "making all things new" (*Ap* 21:5). This is the moment to go to work on the guidelines for the way ahead which our General Chapter is proposing to us. Moved by the power of the Holy Spirit and enlightened by Him, we want to "put out into the deep" (*Lk* 5:4), navigate towards deeper waters in our consecrated life and mission to the young and ordinary people. We sense the urgency of boldly proclaiming the liberating Gospel of Jesus Christ, good news for the little ones and the poor. And if, seeing the dedication of our life and our joy, someone should ask: "Why are you doing this?" we will answer in all freedom that God fills our life and His great love is challenging us so that the young "may have life and have it to the full" (*Jn* 10:10).

Rome, 12th April 2014

**ADDRESS OF THE RECTOR MAJOR
FR ÁNGEL FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME
AT THE CLOSING OF THE GC27**

**THE 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 review of 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 its surroundings *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 devoted some days to *the presentation and understanding of the state of the Congregation*, with the Rector Major's report and presentations by the various Sectors and Regions. The consignment of the book containing all the items on the state of the Congregation concluded this well-prepared occasion in which 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, to 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, in which 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 to it 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 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 believe I was able to read between the lines a kind of nostalgia: being able to look at the reality of every community, every Salesian presence, every Province and the whole Congregation, truly as a living body filled with authenticity, 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 his own life, are lacking. We felt a desire to *fly higher* through truth, authenticity, and by being radical, and felt that at times we were flying too close to the ground.

The Rector Major, Fr Pascual Chávez, invited us to look ahead, with hopeful realism and courage, when the time comes 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 of us who took part; it passes through our ability to enthuse our confreres and communicate the ‘*Good News*’ to them of what we have seen and heard, of what we have 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 in our Provinces with true courage this new moment of our Congregation and our life, 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 already 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 would dare to 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 search, 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 of the mission. The 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 greet personally 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 will not be that since it forms part of our Chapter conclusions, of these final words of mine and also of the planning and decision-making process that will be the responsibility of the Rector Major with his Council, and the Chapter members in their provinces, once they have returned.

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

- “It is necessary to prepare young people to work in society in harmony with the spirit of the Gospel as workers of justice and peace, and to live as active members of the Church”.
- “Keep before you Don Bosco and the young; and 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 of Mamma Margaret inspire every Salesian and each of your communities to live an austere life based on the essentials, on closeness to the poor, on transparency and responsibility in managing temporal goods”.
- “Reaching out to young people who have been marginalised requires courage, human maturity and much prayer. The best should be sent to do this work! The best!”
- “Thanks be to God, you do not live or work as isolated individuals but as a community: and thank God for this!”
- “Apostolic vocations are ordinarily the result of good youth ministry. Caring for 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 being open to 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, one does not seek after other things, but only 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 the daily contemplation of ordinary existence, in following Christ.

As I suggested earlier, it is here that our major conversion has to take place. Certainly we find many confreres who are exemplary in this respect. However, when so many Rector Majors (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 more 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, which will lead 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 expressed the conviction that fraternity lived as community is one of the ways of having an experience of God, of living the mysticism of fraternity in a world in which at

times human relationships are so damaged. “The humanising power of the Gospel is witnessed in *fraternity lived* in community and is created through welcome, respect, mutual help, understanding, kindness, forgiveness and joy”, 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, live 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 to be.

In the *prophesy 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, in the four corners of the world 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, or simply sheer activism. Hence our Constitutions, with preventive pedagogy, state that the three elements of our consecration are inseparable. When one of them is weak or non-existent, we cannot speak of consecration according 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 these two words 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. 42).

The Pope also referred to these two words as he spoke to us at the audience while encouraging us with this challenge: “Temperance, then, is a sense of proportion, being content, being simple. May the poverty of Don Bosco and of Mamma Margaret inspire every Salesian and each of your communities to live an austere life based on the essentials, on closeness to the poor, on transparency and responsibility in managing temporal goods”.

In our Chapter reflection we have made several suggestions on this point. 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 in a similar vein. There is no lack of enlightenment on this. I believe that the challenge must become part of our lives, and while it is true that in many parts of the Congregation we have presences which have as their priority the least, the poor, the excluded, it is equally true that this testimony will shine out brightly if our way of life is characterised by sobriety, austerity and also poverty. Undoubtedly dealing with this situation according to the profession we have made is a matter of personal conscience, but we have to help each other in the community over these coming six years. We are invited to act in such a way that the witness of poverty and sobriety becomes more evident where it may be lacking. Any change, advance, improvement in our various Provinces in this regard will be a sign 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 by Him, so that we can live for the young. As we have said in the Chapter document, the young are “*our burning bush*” (cf. *Ex 3:2 ff*). In them God speaks to us and He 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 stop halfway? How could we dedicate ourselves to them only for a short time as if it were a matter of a working day? And even more so, how can we remain at peace when in our suburb, district, city there are poverty-stricken young people, suffering from loneliness, family violence, aggression...? 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 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 am not attempting to suggest all the options we could take after this Chapter. Everything we experienced in it, the ample reflections we shared, and the study we made of the state of the Congregation allow us to glimpse some of the ways forward that I consider to be *essential and of prior concern*. Provinces no doubt will determine some other options appropriate to their specific context and always within the framework of the GC27.

I simply 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, will be able to establish an appropriate set of strategies to be followed 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 arrive at a *final document* not destined to be consigned to 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. Subsequently, 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 a mistake to think that by encouraging knowledge of GC27 at a Retreat or a weekend meeting, the objective had 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 Intermediate Provincial Chapter) to see what results it is producing.*

3.2. Depth of interior life: witnesses to the God of life

As I have said on previous pages I believe that speaking in general terms, we need to recognise that in the Congregation *depth of interior life is not our*

strength. I refuse to think, 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. Having recognised this weakness (mentioned quite abundantly by previous Rector Majors, and also by 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 radical approach of the Gospel, 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 the first place*’. He was not inviting us to a strange kind of spiritualism but to a depth in life that at the same time makes us really brothers and generous in giving ourselves to others, to the mission and especially to the poorest ones, thus making 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 the following of Christ we find the life-giving source of his vitality. This is the initial gift from the Most High; the first ‘charism’ of Don Bosco” (Fr E. Viganò, AGC 290, p.16).

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

3.3. Taking care of ourselves, our confreres, and 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 quoted article 3 of our Constitutions speaks about.

It is on account of the power of our witness to evangelical fraternity that I invite everyone to be really aware that we have to take care of ourselves, to be well and vocationally fit, and that we have to take care of our confreres in the community with an attitude of “welcome, respect, mutual help, understanding, kindness, forgiveness and joy” (cf. the audience with the Pope). In order to live a spirit of true brotherly love which, in the end, accepts and

integrates differences and combats loneliness and isolation we have to take care of 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 makes us pay too high a price and a tremendously painful one.

This is why I ask each Province to undertake a real study and practical effort to look after and consolidate our communities, ensuring a robust human quality and also number 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 attachments, from having spent so many years in a house, from the pressure of the educative community itself, of the suburb or citizens’ associations, right up to local and regional government..., however the foreseeable difficulties should not impair either our clear-sightedness 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 means wanting to be with and among 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 encouraging them to live their lives as the Lord Jesus lived his.

When we contemplate Don Bosco in what those who have studied him well 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 valuable 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’; he had to dedicate himself to it by-passing every obstacle and leaving behind all things, even good ones that could in any way hinder its accomplishment” (cf AGC 284, 1976, p. 33).

Predilection for the young became the basic and most fundamental option in his life, and it is the mission of the Congregation. We can find much already written and thought through about this aspect of Don Bosco. In our General Chapters much has also been said about 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 about this ‘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 continue to be something that will always 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 roles, so that he can do what we should know best what to do according to our vocation: be educators and pastors of the young.* I invite you to take the practical steps and translate into decisions of government what we well know to be the result of our Salesian heritage.

3.5. For us as it was for Don Bosco: our priority is the young who are poorest, the least, the excluded

Fr Vecchi wrote in one of his letters: “Poor youngsters therefore were and still are a gift for the Salesians. Returning to them will enable us to recover the central element of our spirituality and our pedagogical practice: the friendly rapport which creates correspondence and the desire for growth” (AGC 359, p. 25). It is clear that no one could interpret Fr Vecchi as defending poverty by this, but we do recognise that 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 dare to say that *it is poor young people who will save us.*

Our being *Servants of the young* means, as we said in our General Chapter, leaving behind our securities, not only of life but of pastoral activity in order to move towards ‘an *uphill*’ ministry which begins from the deepest needs of the young and especially the poorest of them. “In working with young people, you encounter the world of excluded youth. And this is dreadful!” (Pope Francis in his Audience).

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 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 during these six years so that, in the light of GC27 and of our option to be *Servants of the young*.... *going out to the peripheries*, we arrive at decisions at the level

of provincial government, always in dialogue with the confreres, so that with courage, maturity and a profound gaze of faith 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 most successful achievements, we can always do more; it will never be enough and all too often we see that we are only halfway there.

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 boys 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 process of growing to maturity. As evangelisers, our aim 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 are not capable of *accompanying them* in the circumstances of their lives. This ought to be our strength: *accompanying each young person in his situation* but it is often a task we leave to others, or one we say we do not know how to do. In this accompaniment *it is of vital importance to begin with the culture of vocation that we have spoken so much about*. We have not yet succeeded in it. Often it frightens us, or we excuse ourselves with the ‘self-justification’ that we do not believe that we should be ‘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 person in their personal quest, their challenges, their*

questions about life, their choices in life. Something that is **fascinating** in our Salesian vocation we are putting aside or into someone else's hands... or no one's.

Therefore I ask each Province to appoint the most capable confreres to youth and vocational ministry, with truly evangelising projects, developing systematic processes of education in the faith, giving priority to individuals and to their personal accompaniment, proposing bold challenges for the discernment of their life choices with equally bold proposals for every kind of vocation in the Church, including 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 insights of our Chapter magisterium on educating young people to the faith – when it says that in this process that I have just referred to, someone 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, 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 – without going back to earlier magisterium – the Rector Major and his Council were asked to make known initiatives and experiences of collaboration between SDBs and lay people (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 SDBs and lay people is no longer optional – I say this in case there is anyone who still believes it – and it is because the Salesian mission in the world today so clearly*

demands it. It is true that in the Congregation we have different ‘speeds’ in our Provinces and in relations between them, however the shared mission between SDBs 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 SDBs 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 for Europe and the Bicentenary

I am not going to develop these topics. I just want to point out that they are not being overlooked. On the contrary, they are three issues that already have their place in the planning for the next six years. The last two, **Project for Europe and the Bicentenary**, are already well developed in their own right, and we need to continue to keep a watch on them, and the **Missionary activity of the Congregation** (*‘Missio ad Gentes’*) will be given special attention within the overall coordination of all the Sectors for the mission, including youth ministry, especially for the poorest, the education of ordinary people, with particular oversight from social communication, and the 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.

With all my heart, I thank you, dear Fr Pascual, 9th Successor of Don Bosco, who have 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, the 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 in this long twelve year journey. May the Lord bless you and may Don Bosco reward you for your devoted service in his name.

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

A lively thank you, full of affection, for your Fr Vicar, and all the members of the General Council who for six or twelve years have zealously looked after each of the parts (I mean Sectors of animation or Regions in the world) which the Congregation entrusted to them. In the name of all the confreres, of the Salesian Family and of all young people a huge thanks for so much generosity and dedication.

I conclude by calling on our Mother, our Mother the Help of Christians 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 obtain for us the gift of the Spirit so that we may have a heart which *belongs above all to God, together with our confreres, for the young and among 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

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS AT THE 27th GENERAL CHAPTER

General Council

1	P	CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA Pascual	<i>Rector Major, President</i>
2	P	BREGOLIN Adriano	<i>Vicar of the Rector Major</i>
3	P	CEREDA Francesco	<i>Councillor for Formation - Moderator</i>
4	P	ATTARD Fabio	<i>Councillor for Youth Ministry</i>
5	P	KLEMENT Václav	<i>Councillor for the Missions</i>
6	P	GONZÁLEZ Plascencia Filiberto	<i>Councillor for Social Communication</i>
7	L	MULLER Jean Paul	<i>Economer General</i>
8	P	BASAÑES Guillermo	<i>Regional Councillor</i>
9	P	CHRZAN Marek	<i>Regional Councillor</i>
10	P	FRISOLI Pier Fausto	<i>Regional Councillor</i>
11	P	KANAGA Maria Arokiam	<i>Regional Councillor</i>
12	P	NÚÑEZ MORENO José Miguel	<i>Regional Councillor</i>
13	P	ORTIZ G. Esteban	<i>Regional Councillor</i>
14	P	VITALI Natale	<i>Regional Councillor</i>
15	P	WONG Andrew	<i>Regional Councillor</i>
16	P	STEMPEL Marian	<i>Secretary General</i>
17	P	MARACCANI Francesco	<i>Procurator General</i>

Salesian Region: AFRICA - MADAGASCAR

18	P	GEBREMESKEL Estifanos	<i>Sup. V. Prov. Africa Ethiopia - Eritrea</i>
19	P	TAKELE Seleshi	<i>Delegate Africa Ethiopia - Eritrea</i>
20	P	NGOY Jean-Claude	<i>Provincial Africa Central</i>
21	P	MAKOLA MWAWOKA Dieudonné	<i>Delegate Africa Central</i>
22	P	ROLANDI Giovanni	<i>Provincial Africa East</i>
23	P	ASIRA LIPUKU Simon	<i>Delegate Africa East</i>
24	P	DUFOUR François	<i>Sup. V. Prov. Africa South</i>
25	L	MHARA Marko	<i>Delegate Africa South</i>

26	P	GARCÍA PEÑA Faustino	<i>Provincial</i>	Africa West French-speaking
27	L	CORDERO Hernán	<i>Delegate</i>	Africa West French-speaking
28	P	CRISAFULLI Jorge	<i>Provincial</i>	Africa West English-speaking
29	P	OCHE Anthony	<i>Delegate</i>	Africa West English-speaking
30	P	SWERTVAGHER Camiel	<i>Sup. V. Prov.</i>	Africa Great Lakes
31	P	NGOBOKA Pierre Célestin	<i>Delegate</i>	Africa Great Lakes
32	P	RODRÍGUEZ MARTIN Filiberto	<i>Sup. V. Prov.</i>	Angola
33	P	SEQUEIRA GUTIÉRREZ Victor Luis	<i>Delegate</i>	Angola
34	P	JIMÉNEZ CASTRO Manuel	<i>Sup. V. Prov.</i>	Africa Tropical Equatorial
35	P	NGUEMA Miguel Ángel	<i>Delegate</i>	Africa Tropical Equatorial
36	P	CIOLLI Claudio	<i>Sup. V. Prov.</i>	Madagascar
37	P	BIZIMANA Innocent	<i>Delegate</i>	Madagascar
38	P	CHAQUISSE Américo	<i>Sup. V. Prov.</i>	Mozambique
39	P	SARMENTO Adolfo de Jesus	<i>Delegate</i>	Mozambique
40	P	CHALISSERY George	<i>Sup. V. Prov.</i>	Zambia-Malawi-Namibia- Zimbabwe
41	P	MBANDAMA Michael Kazembe	<i>Delegate</i>	Zambia-Malawi-Namibia- Zimbabwe

Salesian Region: AMERICA SOUTH CONE

42	P	CAYO Manuel	<i>Provincial</i>	Argentina North
43	P	ROMERO Héctor Gabriel	<i>Delegate</i>	Argentina North
44	P	FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME Ángel	<i>Provincial</i>	Argentina South
45	L	VERA Hugo Carlos	<i>Delegate</i>	Argentina South
46	P	MARÇAL Márcio	<i>Delegate</i>	Brazil Belo Horizonte
47	P	SHINOHARA Lauro	<i>Provincial</i>	Brazil Campo Grande
48	P	FIGUEIRÓ Tiago	<i>Delegate</i>	Brazil Campo Grande
49	P	ALVES DE LIMA Francisco	<i>Provincial</i>	Brazil Manaus
50	P	RIBEIRO Antônio de Assis	<i>Delegate</i>	Brazil Manaus
51	P	FISTAROL Orestes	<i>Provincial</i>	Brazil Porto Alegre
52	P	DA SILVA Gilson Marcos	<i>Delegate</i>	Brazil Porto Alegre
53	P	VANZETTA Diego	<i>Provincial</i>	Brazil Recife
54	P	RODRIGUES João Carlos	<i>Delegato</i>	Brazil Recife

55	P	CASTILHO Edson	<i>Provincial</i>	Brazil São Paulo
56	P	SIBIONI Roque Luiz	<i>Delegate</i>	Brazil São Paulo
57	P	LORENZELLI Alberto Riccardo	<i>Provincial</i>	Chile
58	P	ALBORNOZ David	<i>Delegate</i>	Chile
59	P	LEDESMA Néstor	<i>Provincial</i>	Paraguay
60	P	ZÁRATE LÓPEZ Nilo Damián	<i>Delegate</i>	Paraguay
61	P	CASTELL Néstor	<i>Provincial</i>	Uruguay
62	P	COSTA Daniel	<i>Delegate</i>	Uruguay

Salesian Region: EAST ASIA - OCEANIA

63	P	CHAMBERS Greg	<i>Provincial</i>	Australia
64	P	GRAHAM Bernard	<i>Delegate</i>	Australia
65	P	FEDRIGOTTI Lanfranco	<i>Provincial</i>	China
66	P	FUNG Ting Wa Andrew	<i>Delegate</i>	China
67	P	CRUZ Eligio	<i>Provincial</i>	Philippines North
68	P	GARCES Alexander	<i>Delegate</i>	Philippines North
69	P	MILITANTE George	<i>Provincial</i>	Philippines South
70	P	GERONIMO Honesto Jr.	<i>Delegate</i>	Philippines South
71	P	CIPRIANI Aldo	<i>Provincial</i>	Japan
72	P	YAMANOUCHI Mario Michiaki	<i>Delegate</i>	Japan
73	P	GUTERRES João Paulino	<i>Sup. V. Prov.</i>	Indonesia - East Timor
74	P	SOERJONOTO Yohannes Boedi	<i>Delegate</i>	Indonesia - East Timor
75	P	NAM Stephanus (Sanghun)	<i>Provincial</i>	Korea
76	P	YANG Stefano	<i>Delegate</i>	Korea
77	P	VALLENCE Maurice	<i>Sup. V. Prov.</i>	Myanmar
78	P	SOE NAING Mariano	<i>Delegate</i>	Myanmar
79	P	PRASERT SOMNGAM Paul	<i>Provincial</i>	Thailand
80	P	SUPHOT RIUNGAM Dominic Savio	<i>Delegate</i>	Thailand
81	P	TRAN Hoa Hung Giuseppe	<i>Provincial</i>	Vietnam
82	P	NGUYEN Thinh Phuoc Giuseppe	<i>Delegate</i>	Vietnam
83	P	NGUYEN Ngoc Vinh Giuseppe	<i>Delegate</i>	Vietnam

Salesian Region: SOUTH ASIA

84	P	D'SOUZA Godfrey	<i>Provincial</i>	India Bombay
85	P	FERNANDES Ajoy	<i>Delegate</i>	India Bombay
86	P	ELLICHERAIL Thomas	<i>Provincial</i>	India Calcutta
87	P	PUYKUNNEL Shaji Joseph	<i>Delegate</i>	India Calcutta
88	P	GURIA Nestor	<i>Provincial</i>	India Dimapur
89	P	CHITILAPPILLY Varghese	<i>Delegate</i>	India Dimapur
90	P	VATTATHARA Thomas	<i>Provincial</i>	India Guwahati
91	P	ALMEIDA Joseph	<i>Delegate</i>	India Guwahati
92	P	RAMINEDI Balaraju	<i>Provincial</i>	India Hyderabad
93	P	THATHIREDDY Vijaya Bhaskar	<i>Delegate</i>	India Hyderabad
94	P	ANCHUKANDAM Thomas	<i>Provincial</i>	India Bangalore
95	P	KOONAN Thomas	<i>Delegate</i>	India Bangalore
96	P	VETOM Jose	<i>Delegate</i>	India Bangalore
97	P	RAPHAEL Jayapalan	<i>Provincial</i>	India Madras
98	P	SWAMIKANNU Stanislaus	<i>Delegate</i>	India Madras
99	P	ANTONYRAJ Chinnappan	<i>Delegate</i>	India Madras
100	P	PEEDIKAYIL Michael	<i>Provincial</i>	India New Delhi
101	P	PARAPPULLY Jose	<i>Delegate</i>	India New Delhi
102	P	FIGUEIREDO Ian	<i>Provincial</i>	India Panjim
103	P	RODRIGUES Avil	<i>Delegate</i>	India Panjim
104	P	MALIEKAL George	<i>Provincial</i>	India Silchar
105	P	LENDAKADAVIL Anthony	<i>Delegate</i>	India Silchar
106	P	JOHNSON Albert	<i>Provincial</i>	India Tiruchy
107	P	JOSEPH Antony	<i>Delegate</i>	India Tiruchy
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109	P	SAJEEWAKA Paul	<i>Delegate</i>	Sri Lanka

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111	P	KETTNER Siegfried	<i>Delegate</i>	Austria
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113	P	WAMBEKE Wilfried	<i>Delegate</i>	Belgium North
114	P	VACULÍK Petr	<i>Provincial</i>	Czech Republic
115	P	CVRKAL Petr	<i>Delegate</i>	Czech Republic
116	P	ORKIĆ Pejo	<i>Provincial</i>	Croatia
117	P	STOJIĆ Anto	<i>Delegate</i>	Croatia
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119	P	GARDNER James Robert	<i>Delegate</i>	Great Britain
120	P	GRÜNNER Josef	<i>Provincial</i>	Germany
121	P	GESING Reinhard	<i>Delegate</i>	Germany
122	P	VON HATZFELD Hatto	<i>Delegate</i>	Germany
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124	P	FINNEGAN John Christopher	<i>Delegate</i>	Ireland
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127	P	YASHEUSKI Aliaksandr	<i>Delegate</i>	Poland Warsaw
128	P	CHMIELEWSKI Marek	<i>Provincial</i>	Poland Piła
129	P	KABAK Vladimir	<i>Delegate</i>	Poland Piła
130	P	KLAWIKOWSKI Zenon	<i>Delegate</i>	Poland Piła
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136	P	IŽOLD Jozef	<i>Delegate</i>	Slovakia
137	P	POTOČNIK Janez	<i>Provincial</i>	Slovenia
138	P	MARŠIČ Franc	<i>Delegate</i>	Slovenia
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145	P	MORAIS Tarcizio	<i>Delegate</i>	Portugal
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149	P	VILLOTA José Luis	<i>Delegate</i>	Spain Bilbao
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151	P	BLANCO ALONSO José Maria	<i>Delegate</i>	Spain León
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156	P	PÉREZ Juan Carlos	<i>Delegate</i>	Spain Seville
157	P	SANCHO GRAU Juan Bosco	<i>Provincial</i>	Spain Valencia
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160	P	SANTIAGO Hiram	<i>Delegate</i>	Antilles
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164	P	SANTOS René	<i>Delegate</i>	Central America
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166	P	GRAJALES Wilfredo	<i>Delegate</i>	Colombia Bogotá
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172	P	MÉSITOR Jean-Paul	<i>Delegate</i>	Haiti
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178	P	PACHAS José Antonio	<i>Delegate</i>	Perù
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181	P	PLOCH Timothy	<i>Provincial</i>	United States West
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193	P	CACIOLI Claudio	<i>Provincial</i>	Italy Lombardy Emilia
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195	P	VANOLI Stefano	<i>Delegate</i>	Italy Lombardy Emilia
196	P	CRISTIANI Pasquale	<i>Provincial</i>	Italy South
197	P	BELLINO Fabio	<i>Delegate</i>	Italy South
198	P	DAL MOLIN Roberto	<i>Provincial</i>	Italy North East
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202	P	MAZZEO Marcello	<i>Delegate</i>	Italy Sicily
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209 L CALLO Raymond	<i>Invited</i>	Philippines North
210 L BEHÚN Rastislav	<i>Invited</i>	Slovakia
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220 P CAUCAMÁN Honorio	<i>Invited</i>	Argentina South

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