salesians of don bosco

general chapter 28

w**hat kind of salesians**

**for the youth of today**?



**Post-chapter document**

approv**ed by the rector major**

**and the general council**

16 August 2020

First nucleus

**PRIORITY OF THE SALESIAN MISSION**

**AMONG TODAY’S YOUNG PEOPLE**

*This first nucleus was presented during GC28 and substantially approved by the Chapter Assembly.*

*It was merely revised during the 2020 summer session of the General Council in the light of observations from Chapter commissions.*

**RECOGNISING**

1. ***A faith perspective***

As members of the 28th General Chapter, we are convinced that God, through his Spirit, is present in the lives of all the young people of our time. We have first of all sought to recognise his action through discernment, seeking to enter into the rhythm of “a twofold docility on our part: docility to the young and their needs and docility to the Spirit and to everything He wishes to transform” (from *Pope Francis’ Message to* *GC28*).

From the very beginning, this has led us to take a positive perspective, one shaped by humility, sympathy, courage, intelligence, faith and hope, in the certainty that this “is how God the Father see things; he knows how to cherish and nurture the seeds of goodness sown in the hearts of the young” whom, therefore, we should consider to be “holy ground” (cf. *Christus Vivit*, no. 67).

Called to be fathers, pastors and guides of the young, we wish to make this divine way of seeing things our own, aware that in this way we are following in the footsteps of our beloved father Don Bosco, who carried out his work right here at Valdocco, led by the hand of the Help of Christians.

1. ***Listening to the cry of the young***

Who are the young people of today? What is their situation? What are they looking for? What are they asking of us? First of all we have listened to them in order to answer these questions.

We have had the gift of having some young people from all over the world among us. They represented the very many young people who were present in our Provincial Chapters during the preparations for GC28. We have listened attentively to their voice and been moved by it. They have spoken to us of their spiritual restlessness and their hunger for God, their desire to be key players in and creators of a better world, their struggle to believe and to go against the logic of our time... They asked us to be less “managers” and more “pastors”; to be among them and to have time to accompany them.

In our many opportunities to work together, we have also become aware of the many forms of poverty young people suffer from, which leaves us horrified in the same way that Don Bosco was horrified on his first visit to the prisons in Turin. The cry of so many young people still touches our hearts today: economic, social and cultural poverty; emotional, relational and family poverty; moral and spiritual poverty. In many contexts, unemployment and the inability to study penalise large swathes of young people.

In many ways, the young people have shown themselves to be prophets for us: through their presence the Lord continually makes known to us his expectations and his appeals for the renewal of our mission. It is like Don Bosco, who “did not discover his mission in front of a mirror, but in the pain of seeing young people who had no future. The Salesian of the 21st century will not discover his own identity unless he can suffer with ‘the large numbers of young lads... fine healthy youngsters, alert of mind but seeing them idle there, infested with lice, lacking food for body and soul, horrified me… Public disgrace, family dishonour, and personal shame were personified in those unfortunates’ (*Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales*, 48); and we could add: youngsters of our very Church” (from *Pope Francis’ Message to GC28*).

1. ***In an age of change***

We are experiencing an age of change: today, more than ever, “no one can say with certainty and precision (if ever one could) what will happen in the near future on a social, economic, educational and cultural level” (from *Pope Francis’ Message to GC28*). It is clear, then, that it is no longer possible to think of our mission in terms of “this is how it has always been”. While on the one hand this is bewildering for us, on the other, it asks us to humbly and courageously get involved, and asks of us that we recover the youthful dynamics that were so vibrant in Don Bosco. We are more convinced than ever of what Pope Francis told us right here in Valdocco, in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, on 21 June 2015: “Your charism is of great relevance today. Look at the streets, look at the children and make risky decisions. Do not be afraid. Do as he did.”

Along with some perennial issues that continue to challenge us, our times present us with some new ones that we must inevitably tackle. The digital revolution asks us to understand the profound transformations that are taking place not only in the field of communication, but above all in the way we set up and manage our human relationships. The area of our emotions, with all the issues related to gender and sexual identity, challenge our anthropological perspective. The situation of women and their role in society and in the Church requires us to reflect more carefully and deeply. Ecological sensitivity, which is growing rapidly in the world of youth, calls on us to be prophetic in this field through clear and coherent choices. Contact with young migrants, refugees and many others deprived of their fundamental rights becomes for us a pressing call to action. Finally, the painful experience of abuse, which also touches our Congregation, is a strong call to conversion.

1. ***Passing on the faith***

The rapid change taking place affects the ordinary processes of faith transmission. In this regard we find considerable differences: while in some contexts the life of faith does not pose any problem and young people experience their belonging to the Church in a natural way, in other strongly secularised contexts the Christian faith has become an issue that no longer has any personal or social relevance. In some areas where we are present there is fundamentalism, discrimination and even persecution; in others we can freely propose the Gospel. We also work in many multi-religious contexts in which the majority of young people who attend our Works belong to other religions or other Christian confessions.

Faced with a global crisis of authority, tradition and transmission, we are challenged regarding style, content and ways of proclaiming Jesus Christ, insofar as we all feel that we are called to be “missionaries of the young”. Convinced of the need to reach their hearts, we feel the urgency of offering initial proclamation with more conviction, because “Nothing is more solid, profound, secure, meaningful and wisdom-filled than that initial proclamation” (*Christus Vivit*, no. 214)

1. ***The desire to journey together***

Young people are bearers of the Salesian charism and help us to know, to deepen our understanding of, and to better take up the mission entrusted to us. From the beginning, “far from being passive agents or spectators of missionary work they became, beginning with their own circumstances – in many cases they were “religious and social illiterates” – the main protagonists of the entire founding process. Salesianity is born precisely from this encounter capable of arousing prophecies and visions,” in the belief that “every charism needs to be renewed and evangelised, and in your case especially by the poorest young people” (from *Pope Francis’ Message to GC28*).

Hence, we feel that it is our duty to involve the young and we uphold their right to be involved within the educative and pastoral community that is first of all a family where everything is shared in an attitude of friendship, listening, respect and cooperation. We recognise that many of them “find themselves in a deep sense of orphanhood to which we must respond by creating an attractive and fraternal environment where others can live with a sense of purpose” (cf. *Christus Vivit*, no. 216). It is precisely in this direction that the recent synodal journeys have helped us rediscover the family nature of the Church, so much so that the latter can be thought of as “a family of families, constantly enriched by the lives of all those domestic churches” (*Amoris Laetitia*, no. 87).

Finally, we are aware that many times we fail to satisfy this very real “nostalgia for community” that young people and families have: they ask us for time and we give them space; they ask us for relationships and we provide them with services; they ask us for fraternal life and we offer them structures; they ask us for friendship and we provide activities for them. All this commits us to rediscovering the riches and potential of the “family spirit”.

**INTERPRETING**

1. ***Accompanied by Don Bosco***

To interpret what we have recognised so far, we would like to allow ourselves be guided by one of the most significant passages of the “Letter from Rome” in 1884. Don Bosco saw that a physical and spiritual barrier had been created in the Oratory at Valdocco between the Salesians and the young people, which hindered educative activity and betrayed the charism. In dialogue with one of the young people in the dream, he tried to interpret the situation to find a way to resolve it: “How then are we to set about breaking down this barrier?” The reply he received is also enlightening for us: “By a friendly informal relationship with the boys, especially in recreation. You cannot have love   without this familiarity, and where this is not evident there can be no confidence. If you want to be loved, you must make it clear that you love. Jesus Christ made himself little with the little ones and bore our weaknesses. He is our master in the matter of the friendly approach.”

This text illuminates the three fundamental core issues around which we have gathered the interpretation of this nucleus: meeting young people where they are to be found and where they express themselves spontaneously; closeness that creates confidence and makes accompaniment possible; the warm emotional tone of the educational relationship that Don Bosco calls for with a term that comes from family experience. It is in this perspective of faith that we want to look for the reasons for what we experience, with its lights and shadows, to bring out the challenges that await us and identify the criteria for facing up to them.

**COMMUNITY OUTREACH TO POOR YOUNG PEOPLE**

1. ***Two sides of a single problem***

Too often, poverty distances young people and older youth from the opportunity to grow up peacefully, to have a proper education, to decide about their future. Not infrequently, poverty also distances them from the Christian community and from the possibility of encountering the joy of the Gospel, which is aimed at the very least among them: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me… he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor” (*Lk* 4:18). Thus, poverty today becomes an exclusionary barrier that must be overcome.

The prophetic Magisterium of Pope Francis is helping the Church to become increasingly aware that distance from the poor betrays the Gospel and generates many ills in the Christian community. We too feel the need to go deeper into the interpretation of the times we are living in, to the point of recognising that social phenomena and spiritual challenges, appeals of the young and movements of the Spirit are closely linked, without any possibility of separating them. This was Don Bosco's experience, which made him able to respond to the most urgent needs of his young people and to have them feel the tenderness of God that warms their hearts and instils hope. Where this also happens today, through generous commitment and pastoral creativity, we see a true flourishing of the charism. On the other hand, where communities lose “familiarity” with the poor, religious life becomes lukewarm, risking becoming salt that loses its flavour, a lamp placed under a bushel. (cf. *Mt* 5:13,15).

1. ***Consecrated to God for young people who are poorer***

Going out to poor young people and doing so as a community of believers is certainly an ever new challenge, but it is also a prospect that fills us with enthusiasm. Like our father Don Bosco, we too said to God on the day of our religious profession: “I offer myself totally to you. I pledge myself to devote all my strength to those to whom you will send me, especially to young people who are poorer.” (*Constitutions*, art. 24).

In the first instance, this demands of us a capacity for community discernment: it is not a question of entrusting new projects to an individual confrere to launch, but of listening together to God's call coming to us through forms of youth poverty. It also requires spiritual depth, so as not to fall into activism or a corporate mentality; cultural preparation, to understand the phenomena in which we are immersed and the new forms of youth poverty; a willingness to work together, abandoning all pastoral individualism; flexibility in rethinking our lifestyle and our Works, especially when they no longer express the missionary energy of the charism and respond primarily to the logic of maintenance.

**Accompaniment OF THE YOUNG FROM A VOCATIONAL PERSPECTIVE**

1. ***A rich tradition***

“You cannot have love   without this familiarity, and where this is not evident there can be no confidence.” These words of Don Bosco are enough for us to understand the value it had for him to reach the boy's heart, allowing him an opening in trust and sincere confidence. Don Bosco did not use the word “accompaniment”, but all his actions aimed precisely at this. His educational commitment, rich in proposals and attentive to the different dimensions of growth, aimed at accompanying young people in a simple and concrete way to holiness. To neglect this dimension of the preventive system means to distort it.

While the whole Church, in the Synod on Young People, has rediscovered the value of accompaniment for discernment, we too are invited to re-interpret the riches of our tradition in this regard. It gives us three closely related levels of accompaniment: the setting, the group and personal accompaniment. The first is achieved through the offer of a welcoming, joyful atmosphere, rich in varied proposals and capable of triggering paths of growth. The second fosters a greater commitment to personal maturity and the journey of faith, sees the value of each individual’s aptitudes and inclinations, and promotes the spirituality of the Salesian Youth Movement, as well as belonging to it. The third leads the young person to more deeply discern the meaning of his or her existence before God. In this respect, the Synod on Young People spoke of accompaniment “from a vocational perspective” (*Final Document of the Synod,* nos. 138-143; *Christus Vivit*, Ch. Eight), helping one to think of life not as a project of individual self-realisation, but as a path to discover and respond to the divine call. Pope Francis' expression “I am a mission” (*Christus Vivit,* no. 254) points clearly to the goal that accompaniment has before it: to help each one to discover his or her uniqueness as a gift for others.

1. ***Individuals and the goal of accompaniment***

Since it arises from familiarity in everyday life, accompaniment involves many people and is not the exclusive task of one individual. The entire educative and pastoral community is involved, even if not everyone has the same aptitude and preparation for guiding personal discernment. In any case, the key player in each act of accompaniment is the Spirit of the Lord, who fills us with gifts and charisms; we are simply servants and mediators of God's work.

It is very important to emphasise that good accompaniment does not place the young person in a passive or subordinate position, but on the contrary promotes that individual’s active participation in community life and shared responsibility in the service of the poorest. It is therefore an accompaniment for involvement, for active and responsible presence in society and in the Church. The active role young people played in the founding of our Congregation and their active commitment to sodalities at the Oratory in Valdocco still have much to say to us in this respect.

In the certainty that “those who accompany others in their growth must be people with broad horizons, capable of holding both limitations and hope together, thus helping them to always see things, ultimately, from a saving perspective” (from *Pope Francis’ Message to GC28*), we are called to foster a renewed commitment to accompaniment that first of all requires that we take greater care of the preparation of confreres and lay people in this delicate area and that we ourselves have the experience of being accompanied. This perspective of the active involvement of young people then presupposes a greater trust in their resources: we should not be afraid of their healthy restlessness, their questions and their sensitivity to new issues which we are not always ready to face. So let us learn every day to listen with empathy and to offer our help with humility. The genuine authority of an educator does not consist in the power to manage, but in the strength to promote freedom: this is how Don Bosco exercised his role as father.

**JOURNEYING WITH FAMILIES AND AFFECTIVE EDUCATION**

1. ***Being close to families***

We are aware that the family is the school of love in which we learn the grammar of the affection through which God makes himself known and encountered. The recent synods on the family and the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* have offered many pastoral indications on the accompaniment of families and on educating emotions, which we too are called to accept and assimilate.

For us Salesians, the interest in the family springs spontaneously from the very heart of our educational charism. We know how much Don Bosco learned from Mamma Margaret, so much so that he wanted her with him in Valdocco as a valued presence for making the Oratory a true “home”. On the other hand, John Bosco as a boy did not grow up in a perfect family: he experienced the suffering of losing his father, the lack of understanding of his brother Anthony, the humiliation of poverty, the need to leave home to work. All this contributed to maturing a fatherly heart in him that was rich in mercy and acceptance.

Today, we too feel the need for great closeness to families, acknowledging their efforts, but above all fostering their strengths. Through our Works we actually meet many families in the most diverse situations: Some turn to us for what we offer by way of education, others share our religious choice and charismatic inspiration, others are in the first years of marriage and ask for accompaniment. Not a few are in situations of poverty, discomfort or are wounded families and the result of second marriages. Then there are young people who have grown up with us and ask us to accompany them in preparation for marriage, while there are also people who live in new relational configurations who come to our settings.

This complexity is undoubtedly a challenge and requires adequate preparation. However, the presence of so many families in the groups that make up the Salesian Family and others who collaborate with us is a great resource, especially if we are able to listen to their experience and value their witness.

1. ***Youth Ministry, family, emotional education***

The fundamental criterion for our work with families is the educational nature of our mission. We do not want to pursue a family pastoral ministry parallel to youth ministry, but rather to present the educative and pastoral community as the place and form of our journey with families.

Deriving from this criterion is the need to take up the challenge of the emotional and sexual education of young people in a more courageous way. This is a request which the Council had already addressed to the Church’s educational institutions (cf. *Gravissimum Educationis*, no.1) and one we have pursued too little. It is not simply a matter of giving information but of accompanying a journey of self-knowledge and discovery of the call to love. We know the importance that Don Bosco attributed to purity in the growth of children and the delicacy with which he spoke about it. In a context that not infrequently trivialises sexuality, we are called to present a serene, positive and balanced vision of the emotional side of life, to shed light on the languages of the body and on the sense of reciprocity between man and woman in conformity with the Word of God. Seeing to proactive and “preventive” settings, animation capable of involving young people in all their dimensions (theatre, sport, art, play, music ...), personal accompaniment that looks after the profound dynamics of the person, are all tools that our tradition gives us and that we are called to rethink in today's new contexts.

**CHOOSING**

1. Com***munity outreach to poor young people***

**Let us go out to poor young people by going beyond a pastoral ministry of maintenance and renewing our community dynamics.**

**Attitudes and mentalities to convert**

1. From a pastoral care of conservation to a pastoral care of mission that has the needs of young people as its criterion of choice.
2. From an elitist and exclusive pastoral ministry to one that is popular and inclusive.
3. From a community that retreats to its comfort zones to a witness of evident fraternity in sharing with poor young people.

**Processes to put in place**

1. Let the *Youth Ministry and Missions Sectors* propose a specific plan of attention and acknowledgement of forms of youth poverty.
2. In reshaping presences, let *Provinces* provide for communities with Salesians that can welcome children and young people in difficulty (migrants, refugees, street children, etc.), to offer them opportunities for study, job training and integration into the world of work.
3. Let *the Congregation at all levels* ensure that the conditions for the promotion and defence of the rights of young people are guaranteed, especially through the protection of minors and vulnerable adults.

**Structural circumstances to guarantee**

1. *At central level l*et a coordinated form of networking be developed with other religious, national and international organisations serving the poorest young people.
2. Let a Code of Conduct be drawn up *at provincial and local level* to ensure real, safe and guaranteed contact with young people, especially the poor.
3. Let *communities* have specific times and ongoing circumstances that can welcome young people: reviewing timetables, structures, environments and relational styles so they are genuinely open and welcoming communities.
4. Accompaniment of the young from a vocational perspective

**Let us promote a renewed commitment to accompaniment from a vocational perspective, seeing to an adequate formation of Salesians and lay people in this area.**

**Attitudes and mentalities to convert**

1. From a pastoral ministry of initiatives and activities to a focus on personal paths of growth.
2. From the fragmentation of pastoral work in many areas to its integration within a vocational perspective.
3. From a mentality of pastoral self-sufficiency to the involvement of young people according to their degree of maturity.

**Processes to put in place**

1. Let *the Youth Ministry and Formation Sectors* propose courses of accompaniment for Salesians and lay people.
2. Let *the Youth Ministry Sector* animate, support and guide the commitment of the Provinces on vocational issues.
3. Let every *Province* offer young people a “time destined for the maturation of adult Christian life” to be spent in our Houses, through a precise project of shared life, fellowship, apostolate and spirituality (cf. *Synod Final Document*, no. 161).

**Structural circumstances to guarantee**

1. Let the *Rector Major with his Council* consider establishing central coordination for vocation animation.
2. Let *Regions* implement the development and establishment of regional formation centres for Salesians and lay people on accompaniment.
3. Let the *Provinces* facilitate the inclusion of young people in youth ministry teams, provincial consultative bodies and other structures of pastoral animation.
4. Journeying with families and emotional education

**Let us strengthen our journeying with families in the educative and pastoral community and propose more carefully-attuned paths for emotional education.**

**Attitudes and mentalities to convert**

1. From family considered only as the recipient of pastoral care to the idea that the family is an active participant in the mission that must be involved in the educative and pastoral community.
2. From a rigid and simplistic mindset to the acceptance and accompaniment of family life while respecting its complexity.
3. From considering our emotional life as something achieved once and for all, to a Salesian formation that sees it as a path of growth and maturation of the heart.

**Processes to put in place**

1. Let *the Youth Ministry and Formation Sectors*, by valuing the experience and contribution of families, give indications for drawing up adequate proposals for emotional and sexual education and see to the formation of Salesians and lay people in this area.
2. Let the *Provinces* promote family groups inspired by Salesian spirituality, encouraging their apostolic leadership and their active involvement in the educative and pastoral community.
3. Let the *Provinces* value the reflection already initiated by the Congregation at the International Congress on “Youth Ministry and Family” (Madrid, 2017) and develop tools and paths to support families in their educational task.

**Structural circumstances to guarantee**

1. Let the *Provinces* invest in the formation of personnel for the accompaniment of families and for emotional education.
2. Let the *Provinces* encourage the inclusion of certain families in the educative and pastoral community council, promoting regular moments of communion and formation.
3. Let the *Provinces* foster the apostolic commitment of the lay groups of the Salesian Family in service of the family.

Second nucleus

**PROFILE OF THE SALESIAN TODAY**

*This second nucleus was drawn up during GC28 as a first draft, but it was not possible to present it to the Chapter Assembly.*

*It was completed during the 2020 summer session of the General Council.*

**RECOGNISING**

1. ***Vocation and formation: the power of the charism challenges us***

In the dream at nine years of age the Virgin Mary, after pointing out to John Bosco the field he was to work in, invited him to become “humble, strong and energetic”. With these words she was proposing he enter a demanding path of formation closely linked to the vocation received and the mission entrusted to him. We too recognise that formation is a precious gift from the Lord and an indispensable requirement of the vocational journey. This commitment to formation touches on all the dimensions of our apostolic consecration: this is why the 27th General Chapter was consistent in outlining the profile of the Salesian as a mystic in the Spirit, prophet of fraternity and servant of the young.

By examining the statistics of the Congregation we have learned that in the last decade we have had a yearly average of around 2600 young men in formation. This fills us with joy and hope because it shows that our charism continues to be fruitful. At the same time, the data challenges us and calls on us to be responsible, asking that we assess the quality of our initial and ongoing formation.

We note, in fact, that at times the Salesian consecrated identity seems weak and not deeply rooted: the primacy of God in personal and community life does not always emerge clearly; forms of clericalism and secularism risk bringing “spiritual worldliness” into the Congregation; the promotion of the lay Salesian in some regions is scant; the lack of trained personnel in the area of Salesianity, despite the abundant material available, is a sign of insufficient attention to the deepening of the charism.

1. ***Formation and mission: a gap to be aware of***

One concern clearly emerged in the Chapter reflection on the profile of the Salesian today: the gap between the formative journey in its different phases and the reality of the ordinary educative and pastoral mission. Some speak of a gap between formation and mission, others of a separation between initial and ongoing formation, while some others still speak of a degree of inconsistency between what the Congregation proposes in initial formation and what is in fact experienced in apostolic communities.

Formation as it is now, with its structures styles and methods, sometimes appears to be more informative than performative, because it does not always succeed in transforming the heart. The apostolic mission, on the other hand, does not always succeed in drawing elements for ongoing formation from the reality of young people and from the concreteness of life: the “university of life” struggles to become a way of interpreting life in the light of faith (*lectio vitae*) and offering elements for a continual renewal of our way of being and working.

We also recognise that there is an urgent need to examine in depth some of the matters that must be fully integrated within the formation journey: enabling individuals for the spiritual accompaniment of young people, which requires the maturation of specific sensitivities; the clear awareness that our mission is shared with the laity and therefore requires new relational skills; the growing attention to ecological issues which requires specific preparation in this area. Finally, the new digitised world calls for a rethinking of the way we approach our fraternal life and apostolic mission as a whole, because “individualistic withdrawal, so widespread and fashionable in this profoundly digitised culture, requires special attention not only with regard to our pedagogical models but also with regard to the personal and communal use of time, and of our activities and assets” (from *Pope Francis’ Message to GC 28*).

1. ***Ongoing formation: living life in a formative way***

We are thankful for the presence of a good number of Salesians who constantly rekindle the gift of God they have received (cf. 2 *Tim* 1:6), through “a contemplative attitude, one that is able to identify and discern the focal points” (from *Pope Francis’ Message to GC28*). This is the only way to overcome the unfortunately deep-rooted idea that formation ends with the conclusion of the initial stages and access to the ministry.

In fact, some confreres lack the conviction that commitment to their own formation is a precise style of taking on the mission, so much so that it is difficult to ignite the desire and passion for ongoing formation. We recognise that at both the central level and at the provincial level there has been an effort to offer resources and paths of formation, but these do not always bear the hoped-for fruits. It is difficult, in particular, to transform daily pastoral experience into a formative occasion, since we have not begun to discern things from the concrete nature of reality. For this reason, both the religious and educative and pastoral community are unable to become the natural and ordinary environment in which one is formed.

However, there is also a need to recognise that there is a degree of confusion concerning the individuals responsible and the paths of ongoing formation: there is often a lack of confreres who have been prepared to accompany this journey, while there is a multiplicity yet weakness of formative references at the provincial and local level. Some warn of the risk of reducing ongoing formation to a few sporadic refresher courses or entrusting it to the delivery of some new manual. Finally, in an ever more fluid world, there is the challenge of “cultural diligence” in the Congregation, because without study, reading, and continuous updating it will not be possible to escape from a pastoral ministry of maintenance and repetition.

1. ***Initial formation***: ***a reality in progress that must be accompanied***

From the data and discussions that emerged at the Chapter, we recognise that initial formation is, as a whole, a multifaceted, positive and promising reality. It is a great mosaic of different situations in which we recognise the presence of new dynamics in the Congregation.

Who are the young people in formation today? By way of summary we can say that most of them come from Asia and Africa; as a whole they are “young adults”, and not “teenagers” as in the past; they are young men of our times, who therefore bring with them all the potential and fragility of young people today; they are seeking an authentic life and a prophetic fellowship, even if sometimes the motivations that have led them to Salesian life need to mature; being closer to the younger generation, they have an ease of contact and a natural commonality of language with the world of youth. All of this implies a completely different formative approach in our formation houses and study centres.

Due to this epoch-making metamorphosis, we understand that being on the lookout for and forming the formators is a real urgency that must be tackled in the best possible way. Recognising that being a formator is a “vocation within a vocation,” there will be a need to shift from improvisation to authentic discernment for the competent choice of formators and teachers: it is not a question of “recruitment”, but of true vocational dialogue. Recognising the community, then, as the first place of formation, Chapter members stressed how decisive the team of formators is, acting collaboratively and under the direction of the Rector who has the task, above all others, of accompanying and coordinating the commitment of everyone involved.

1. ***The need to take on a new style of formation***

As Pope Francis tells us, “reflecting on the profile of the Salesian for the young people of today implies accepting that we are immersed in a time of change” (from *Pope Francis’ Message to GC28*). There is a need, then, to renew our style of formation, something that needs to be thought of more and more in personalising, holistic, relational, contextual and intercultural terms.

Above all, what is needed is a style that is capable of acquiring its fundamental tenor from the mission, because it is the mission that “sets the tenor of our whole life; it specifies the task we have in the Church and our place among other religious families” (*Constitutions*, art. 3) and also because we are all convinced that “when we isolate ourselves or distance ourselves from the people we are called to serve, our identity as consecrated persons begins to be distorted and becomes a caricature” (from *Pope Francis’ Message to GC28*).

This new style of formation that we dream of should make the unity of the Congregation shine forth in the plurality of its expressions: it is most important, faced with the “serious risk of levelling and homogenising cultures,” that we recognise that the worldwide presence of our charismatic reality “is a stimulus and an invitation to guard and preserve the richness of many of the cultures in which you are immersed without trying to get them all to conform” (from *Pope Francis’ Message to GC28*).

**INTERPRETING**

1. ***Don Bosco’s experience of formation***

In order to make a healthy discernment of our formation, it is useful to reflect on the experience Don Bosco had of formation. He himself recounts the main moments in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, with many observations that give a clear glimpse of his outlook in this regard. We dwell here in particular on one of the formative stages for which Don Bosco showed the greatest appreciation, that of the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* or Pastoral Institute. Don Bosco says of that institution:

“*Qui si impara ad essere prete*”, here one learns to be a priest (J. Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales*, in ISS, Salesian Sources, 1. Don Bosco and his work, Kristu Jyoti, Bangalore, 2014, p. 1393).

Formation at the *Convitto* put together a solid spiritual and cultural proposal (“Meditation, spiritual reading, two conferences a day, lessons on preaching, a secluded life, every convenience for study …”) and accompaniment in the live encounter with “the malice and misery of human beings” in the places of greatest poverty. The main strength that guided the young priests in achieving a synthesis of prayer and ministry, reflection and pastoral practice, was a group of formators of the highest calibre, among whom Fr Cafasso stood out. Don Bosco met them in the classroom while they were teaching, but he also saw them personally involved in the most varied and difficult kinds of ministry. For him and his companions they were solid teachers of doctrine, enterprising apostles and true models for life. Today we would speak of an exemplary, compact team that accompanies people as they take up the mission in an integral way.

His years at the *Convitto* were decisive for Don Bosco’s growth to apostolic maturity, and it is beautiful to see that they were a choice he made, something he was under no obligation to do. He took on this commitment when he was already a priest and could have already immersed himself in activity on a full-time basis. But on Cafasso's advice he pursued another more demanding but immensely more fruitful path. His example teaches us that formation does not end with the completion of studies, perpetual profession or priestly ordination, but remains an open process to be cultivated with care throughout life. It also reminds us that the true apostle does not mature by swiftly forging ahead, and that the most fruitful investment for the mission is that of a good formation.

**FORMATION AND VOCATION: ACCOMPANIMENT IN THE LIGHT OF THE CHARISM**

1. ***The gift of formation***

Formation, in consecrated life, is not reduced to a mere collection of techniques and methods, but is a faith experience which has its roots in the very mystery of vocation. God the Father, who chose us before the creation of the world, continues to be at work in us through the power of his Spirit, to make us more and more conformed to Christ. Indeed, the goal of the journey of formation is to arrive at having in oneself the sentiments of the Son, or in other words feeling, thinking and acting in him (cf. *Phil* 2:5).

Understanding formation within the context of vocation helps us to see it not as a duty imposed from without – by rules of the Church or the Congregation – but as a gift of grace that helps us to make the “form” of Salesian consecrated life something that is truly ours, avoiding it being a kind of external habit.

The fact that there are vocational failures reminds us of just how delicate this process is, and how initial acceptance of the call does not automatically protect us from the risk of losing our way or turning back. What, in fact, are clericalism, secularism and individualism if not deviations from vocational energy which extinguish its beauty and deaden its growth for want of depth, motivation or generosity? Vocation without adequate formation is then confused with a kind of “volunteerism for life” in which the heart is not truly handed over to God and to young people and the formative conversion that this entails is not accepted.

1. ***The preventive system as a system of formation***

Since formation is a pedagogy of grace, it can never be first and foremost a matter of rules and standards. Undoubtedly these are necessary, because they safeguard against errors and point to well-established paths, but they do not suffice alone to create the conditions for an authentic experience of formation. We must therefore be careful not to give mainly normative solutions to a challenge that is primarily charismatic and generative. Formation is something crafted daily, it is practical wisdom, quality of witness, ability to read situations and to touch hearts: all things that no law can guarantee and no manual is enough to ensure. As the venerable Fr Giuseppe Quadrio, an extraordinary model of the formator and teacher, reminds us, these qualities are first of all the fruit of inward *docibilitas* to the Spirit [openness to allowing oneself to be taught], who raises up true masters of life in our charismatic family.

All the indications of practical wisdom that Don Bosco put into practice in education are therefore valid for our formative proposal. The Preventive System must be rediscovered more and more as the principal inspiration and profound soul of our system of formation. This means asserting the primacy of theological charity and trust over all legalism and formalism; passing on vocational values through a genuine family spirit; actively involving the youngest confreres and making them jointly responsible for formative choices. The pedagogy of the Preventive System, in fact, is one of trust that believes in the resources of the young and urges them to a generosity of commitment, without ever stifling their intuitions or crippling their creativity. This is the logic behind article 99 of our Constitu*t*ions where it says: “Each Salesian accepts responsibility for his own formation.” Through fidelity to this inspiration the Congregation shows itself to be a mother to each confrere and helps him to mature on his vocational journey.

**FormaTION AND MISSION: A UNIFIED PROCESS**

1. ***The “da mihi animas” as the energy of the formation process***

The apostolic nature of our charism determines our formation in a decisive way. As Pope Francis reminds us, “it is important to say that we are not formed *for* the mission, but that we are formed *in* the mission. Our whole life revolves around it, with its choices and priorities. Initial and ongoing formation cannot be a prior, parallel or separate instance of the identity and sensitivity of the disciple” (from *Pope Francis’ Message to GC28*). These words very clearly indicate that formation and mission are closely intertwined and cannot go ahead without each other.

Understanding formation within the context of the mission means first of all highlighting the *Da mihi animas* as the deep energy of the formation process. If this energy is extinguished and no longer radiates zeal for the good of the youngsters, then vocational maturity is seriously compromised. Instead, if apostolic passion is alive, it nurtures human growth, commitment to study, care for spiritual life, growth to pastoral maturity. The *Da mihi animas* is, indeed, the way in which God makes us partakers in his love for the world.

“Don Bosco” says the Pope once more, “not only did not choose to separate himself from the world to seek holiness, but he let himself be challenged by it and chose *how* and *which* world to live in”. Taking up the mission as a formative principle requires developing the shepherd's gaze and the courage of the prophet who knows how to be with poor young people and to dream of a different world with them and for them. Hence “the mission *inter gentes* is our best school: beginning with this we pray, reflect, study and rest” (from *Pope Francis’ Message to GC28*).

1. ***For greater integration***

To overcome the gap between formation and mission, it is first of all necessary to get out of the delegation mentality which often tends to unload responsibility in this delicate area onto the formation communities. The passing on of the charism does not occur, in the first instance, in appropriately structured communities, but in the freshness of daily sharing of service to the young. The first source of formation in the Congregation lies in the treasure of the generous life of the confreres. Where communities are lively in service, solid in spirituality and capable of reflection, the proposals of the formation houses are more penetrating because they introduce a way of living Salesianity that the young confreres encounter in the ordinary reality of the houses. This explains the importance that our tradition has always attributed to practical training, which is a typically Salesian formation stage. Instead, where the mission is confused with work and ongoing formation in the community is not taken care of, the entire formation journey is impoverished.

Greater integration, then, requires that we “find a style of formation capable of structurally taking on the fact that evangelisation implies the full participation, and full citizenship… of the baptised,” making of our houses an “ecclesial laboratory” capable of recognising, appreciating, stimulating and encouraging the different calls and missions in the Church”. This is what we are trying to do by implementing the model of the educative pastoral community. How this model can and should affect initial formation is a question that has not yet been clearly answered. The Synod on Young People spoke, for example, of the importance of forming differentiated formation teams, including women, in which different vocations interact. (cf. *Final Document of the* S*ynod*, no. 163). Dialogue between provincial communities and houses of formation can further encourage more meaningful interaction with the journey of the educative and pastoral communities and allow formators greater presence alongside the young confreres in their pastoral exercises. More than a single structural solution which would not take into account the remarkable diversity of contexts, it is therefore necessary to work towards a renewed formative planning in the missionary sense, which will seek its most adequate implementation in each setting.

**FORMATION AND STRUCTURES: A NECESSARY RENEWAL**

1. ***Institutional references and taking care of formation processes***

One of the risks of our formation process, repeatedly warned against in the Congregation, is a degree of fragmentation between the different stages. Undoubtedly, the movement from one phase to another of initial formation offers a wealth of new stimuli and contributes to broadening horizons, but it brings with it the strain of having to resume the journey of accompaniment several times over. This strain becomes more onerous when the imposition of formation choices and the instruments offered for accompaniment are not adequately coordinated.

This makes clear the need for the Congregation to clarify and, where possible, simplify the institutional references and to determine more precisely the tasks and responsibilities of the structures of coordination between the different phases and between the different levels of formation. Too often, in fact, important decisions for the formation process are hampered or remain unfulfilled due to uncertainties in the system.

The Ratio and its associated documents do not lack valuable indications for formation work, especially with regard to the objectives to be achieved and admission criteria. On the other hand, the methodology and instruments are weaker. It is therefore important to implement the process of revising formation accompaniment that has been undertaken in the Congregation and to verify its results. Clarity and sharing on this theme are the first condition for a more solid and personalised formation.

1. ***Formators and formation centres***

Any growth process needs the structural conditions that will facilitate it. Following this reasoning, the desire to foster better accompaniment must translate into a generous investment on the part of the Congregation in finding and adequately forming formators who know how to work in a team under the guidance and responsibility of the Rector.

No less important is renewal within our study centres, called to take up with determination the indications in the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium*. They offer an indispensable service not only to the young confreres who attend these centres, but also to the cultural robustness of our provinces. Among these centres, the Salesian Pontifical University stands out in particular as the most authoritative cultural voice of the Congregation in the Church. The renewal it needs requires rediscovering the reasons that led to its foundation eighty years ago.

The regional formation centres offer an appreciated service to the ongoing formation of the confreres and are increasingly called on to take up joint formation with the laity. Regions that do not yet have such centres will have to identify the most suitable ways of guaranteeing this type of service.

**CHOOSING**

1. Forma***tion and vocation***: ***accompaniment in the light of the charism***

**Let us foster a renewed commitment to the formative accompaniment of confreres in the light of the charism.**

**Attitudes and mentalities to convert**

1. from a view of formation as an “institutional obligation” to a faith perspective that sees it as a gift and a vocational requirement.
2. From outward formalism to taking care of accompaniment, the rationale for which is the sincere trust and family spirit of the Preventive System.
3. From an undervaluation of ongoing formation to personal and community concern for one’s own spiritual and apostolic growth.

**Processes to put in place**

1. Let the *Rector Major with his Council* study the problem of the discontinuity between the stages of initial formation, to encourage a more unified process of accompaniment.
2. Let *the Formation Sector* promote the implementation and monitoring of the Guidelines and directives known as *“Young Salesians and accompaniment”*.
3. Let Initial *Formation communities* see to a formative approach consistent with the spiritual and pedagogical guidelines of the Preventive System: family spirit, active involvement of the confreres, pedagogy of trust and confidence; let the *curatiorum* monitor and foster this approach.
4. Let the *Provinces* and c*ommunities* foster a renewed culture of accompaniment, helping confreres to rediscover its importance and value.

**Structural circumstances to guarantee**

1. Let there be the guarantee in *Initial Formation communities* of teams capable of passing on the Preventive System in a vital way; let formators propose personal spiritual accompaniment which is consistent with the formation proposal of the community; let there be adequately prepared confessors.
2. Let *Provincials and Provincial Delegates* see to dialogue and discussion with formation communities, to encourage the continuity of accompaniment in initial formation.
3. Let the *Confreres in initial formation* be helped to discover the value of personal spiritual accompaniment.
4. Forma***tion and mission***: ***a unified process***

**Let us commit ourselves to overcoming the gap between formation and mission, encouraging a renewed culture of formation *in* the mission at all levels.**

**Attitudes and mentalities to convert**

1. From delegation to the houses of formation to the awareness that the lifestyle of the communities has a strong influence on the formation of the young confreres.
2. From formation understood as a moment prior to the mission, to caring for cultural and spiritual robustness as an ongoing requirement of apostolic life.
3. From an elitist style of formation to the commitment to valuing the formative contribution of the laity and the missionary responsibility of every baptised person.

**Processes to put in place**

1. Let the *Provinces* see to the quality of formation in practical training, guaranteeing the conditions for the practical assimilation of Salesian pedagogy and formative accompaniment.
2. Let the *Initial Formation Communities* maintain a simple lifestyle that guards against an attitude of ease and comfort, forms to the needs of the mission, and increases accompaniment of pastoral exercises.
3. Let the *Provinces* invest in the qualification of confreres in Salesianity and see to greater cultural robustness; let the *local communities* monitor and strengthen their commitment to formation in day to day life.

**Structural circumstances to guarantee**

1. Let *the Formation Sector* offer pointers so that the model of the educative and pastoral community may find adequate implementation in formation communities as well, through involvement of the laity and families in the formation process.
2. Let the *Practical Training communities* guarantee the formative accompaniment of the practical trainees, help them to fit into the educative pastoral community, and be committed to monitoring their vocational growth.
3. Let the *Provincial Formation Commissions* assist communities in monitoring and strengthening their commitment to formation in the mission.
4. Forma***tion and structures***: ***a necessary renewal***

**Let us invest energy into finding and forming formators and let us courageously tackle the rethinking of institutional references and formative structures.**

**Attitudes and mentalities to convert**

1. From retreating into emergencies to courageous investment in the formation of confreres.
2. From a local needs perspective to a readiness to offer confreres and resources for the formation needs of the Congregation and for collaboration among provinces.
3. From the risk of superficiality to caring for serious study and cultural robustness on the part of the confreres.

**Processes to put in place**

1. Let the *Rector Major with his Council* promote a generous commitment by the Congregation to finding and forming formators; let the provinces invest in the formation of the confreres and preparation of formators.
2. Let the *Rector Major with his Council* verify the structure of governanceof formation to make it clearer, simpler and more functional.
3. Let the *Rector Major with his Council* review the number and distribution of initial formation communities within a unified project; let them promote the renewal of the Pontifical Salesian University, the strengthening of study centres, care of regional formation centres.

**Structural circumstances to guarantee**

1. Let *the Formation Sector* review the parts of the *Ratio* which need to be adapted to current circumstances, strengthening the concrete indications of shared methods and instruments.
2. Let *the Formation Sector* study better ways to accompany inter-provincial formation communities; let it specify the tasks of the *curatorium* and follow up how it functions in dialogue with the Regional Councillors; let it accompany Provincials as they take on their responsibility for formation.
3. Let the *Regions* promote the regional formation centres, and monitor what they offer; where they are still lacking, let the sector establish them.

Third nucleus

**TOGETHER WITH THE LAITY**

**IN THE MISSION AND IN FORMATION**

*During the 2020 summer session, the General Council worked on the third nucleus of GC28, insofar as it had not been taken into consideration during the General Chapter because of the latter’s forced interruption due to the pandemic.*

*Starting from the “Working document”, the General Council employed the same discernment method as GC28 and worked in the same way as the Chapter commissions did. In drawing up the text it sought to maintain the same form as the first and second nucleus, just as they were drawn up by GC28.*

**RECOGNISING**

1. ***Achievements and resistance in the shared mission with the laity***

We recognise that *GC24 is,* *for everyone, a “point of no return”* for the renewal of our way of living and working together. It is at the centre of the Salesian post-conciliar magisterium, and at the same time marks a return to the origins of the Salesian charism: From the beginning, Don Bosco involved so many lay people in his youthful and popular mission.

We recognise that many steps forward have been taken throughout the Congregation, even though at different speeds and in different ways: the involvement of the entire educative and pastoral community; the spiritual, pedagogical and pastoral formation of the laity; the inclusion of young people in animation teams; entrusting a number of Works to lay people. This perception of growing mutual involvement, of shared wealth, of the strength of mutual assistance and of the fruitfulness of the charism is gradually materialising, *shifting from the perspective of involving the laity in educative pastoral activity to one of sharing our spirituality with them*.

At the same time we note that some difficulty still remains, because we do not always succeed in getting the laity to share in the Salesian spirit and mission: many provinces still need to *shift from utilitarian involvement of the laity to the strategy of evangelical co-responsibility.* At times we even encounter situations of real resistance: some confreres complain about the excessive prominence of the laity while some lay people show opportunistic motives in their offer of collaboration. Then, for the lay people most committed to educative and pastoral activity, it is not easy to reconcile the needs of the Salesian mission with personal and family life. Finally, in some situations we note the tendency to level out the different states of life, to the extent that some think that consecrated Salesians are no longer needed to keep the charism alive.

1. ***Reciprocal relationships between Salesians and lay people***

Very often the relationships between Salesians and lay people are inspired by esteem, respect, cordiality and collaboration, especially where there is clear vocational identity, a systematic proposal of formation and a shared journey with the appropriate bodies and instruments such as the Educative and Pastoral Community Council and the Salesian Educative and Pastoral Project.

There is not always an acceptance and appreciation of the particular contribution of the laity, taking into consideration their identity and vocational experience: *we know what they do but we do not appreciate what they are*. Where there is a lack of clarity about the respective identities, we see a kind of “clericalisation of the laity” and a “laicisation of the consecrated members”. In this case, instead of bringing out the specific nature of each, daily collaboration leads to a flattening of identities. Sometimes lay people are simply classified and positioned within a hierarchical and pyramidal model of “Salesian Work”.

Sometimes we find a certain unease among Salesians in the management of complex Works that demand managerial ability, and a lack of preparation for the challenges that come from the pastoral model of sharing with lay people. We recognise that *faced with epoch-making change we really are not able to “discern”*, and hence risk remaining trapped within the logic of pastoral maintenance based on “things have always been done this way”.

We note that *there are different types of lay people*: employees, volunteers, young adults, Catholic Christians or of other denominations, practising or more distant from the Church. The same word “laity”, which in ecclesial language indicates the baptised (*Christifideles laici)* is sometimes also used in reference to people who are involved in our Works but who belong to other religions. To avoid confusion or inflexibility, it is important to deal seriously with the theological and pastoral issues underlying such complexity. In this way it will be possible to better illuminate the form which the educative pastoral community is called to take in multi-religious or secularised contexts.

1. ***Joint formation of Salesians and lay people***

Over these years, *some fine initiatives of joint formation of Salesians and lay people have emerged.* With regard to formation courses there are some excellent proposals at local, provincial and regional level. Sometimes there is a lack of a systematic approach to formation programmes that then manifests itself in the weakness of educative and pastoral planning. Indeed there is a lack of a more systematic formation that aims at integrating all aspects of the Salesian charism (spiritual, pedagogical, pastoral and professional). The formation of collaborators belonging to other religions and beliefs remains an open question.

In daily life, joint formation occurs mainly through options chosen by the educative and pastoral community, with its various bodies and processes of animation, discernment and governance. The life of the educative and pastoral community is one of the most effective areas for joint formation of Salesians and lay people and is *an excellent example of “formation in the mission”*.

We note a degree of resistance on the part of some confreres to being involved in formation with lay people, and the difficulty in setting aside an attitude of presumed superiority. Another source of difficulty in joint formation is fatigue, excessive activity and the accumulation of tasks and roles. There is little awareness of their task in the Church for some lay people, and therefore little willingness to take on the formative responsibilities that come with it.

1. ***The various kinds of relationships between the religious community and the Salesian Work***

At the moment in the Congregation there are various kinds of relationships between the religious community and the Salesian Work: there are some Works or work sectors entrusted *jointly* to the Salesian community and to lay people; there are Works *entrusted to lay people* within the framework of a provincial plan; there are also Works where *pastoral animation*, but not the management, is entrusted to a nearby Salesian community. There are still Works where the number of confreres allows them to hold all roles of responsibility: in this case there are many lay collaborators with little or no responsibility; here, the animation structures of the educative pastoral community are very weak or absent.

Where it is a case of a Work jointly entrusted to the Salesians and lay people, what GC24 says in nos. 149-159 is not always carried out. When it is the case of a work managed by lay people under the direction of the province, in many cases the provinces have made a great effort of reflection and creativity to face the challenge of accompaniment.

While recognising the positive aspects, there are also problems that are quite serious: the difficulty of Salesians guaranteeing systematic accompaniment; the struggle lay people have in combining the commitments required by these Works with the demands of family life; the difficulties linked to the turnover of lay people, the absence of criteria and control mechanisms; the need to initiate management evaluation practices; the need to find an appropriate legal framework; the need for a change of formation culture on the part of both parties in order to be better prepared for managing these new situations. There are even situations in which the role, skills and functions of the Salesians and lay people with responsibilities in the houses are neither clear nor well defined.

The entrusting of a Work or work sector entirely to lay people forms part of the province’s planning and responsibility. There are situations where the province entrusts an an activity, a work or sectors of a work and the use of real estate belonging to it to a legal entity (foundation, association, cooperative, society). In this case an agreement regulating legal and economic relationships is not always concluded.

**INTERPRETING**

1. ***Don Bosco, father and teacher in involvement and co-responsibility***

The fundamental elements for a deeper exploration of the theory and practice of communion and sharing in the spirit and mission of Don Bosco are provided in the GC24 text. It continues to be an essential reference in this area.

From an inspirational point of view there are some valuable paragraphs demonstrating that throughout his life our Founder was concerned with involving the greatest number of collaborators possible in his plan of operation, giving rise to “a vast movement of persons who in different ways work for the salvation of the young” (*Constitutions*, art. 5): from his close friends to fellow students, from Mamma Margaret to potential employers, from helpful members of the public to theologians, from aristocrats to the politicians of the time (cf. GC24, 69-86).

We were born and raised historically in communion with the laity and they with us. In particular, we must stress the importance that the young had in the development of the Salesian charism and mission: Don Bosco found his first collaborators in the young who thus became, in a certain sense, co-founders of the Congregation!

In this constant process oriented towards the search for communion, sharing and co-responsibility we still find one of the qualifying features of our call to work for the coming of the Kingdom of God in the world.

**A SYNODAL CHURCH FOR THE MISSION AND SPECifIC VOCATIONS**

1. ***At the root of achievements and resistance***

Much of the resistance to the serious acceptance of sharing the Salesian spirit and mission is rooted in the *weak reception of the two great pillars of the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council*: the reality of the Church as the people of God on a journey through history and the consequent ecclesiology of communion that highlights the reciprocal and complementary nature of different vocations in the Church.

Coming from this perspective, it is clear that the laity’s participation in the Salesian charism and mission is not a generous concession made on the part of consecrated Salesians, nor is it a survival strategy. St Paul clearly teaches that charisms are gifts that the Spirit distributes for the common good (*1 Cor* 12); they are not the prerogative of a certain state of life, but enrich the life of the Church in the diversity and complementarity of its vocations.

Convinced that there is no higher dignity than that which has been conferred through baptism, such that “All the baptized... are agents of evangelization” and that “it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 120), we feel called – Salesians, members of the Salesian Family, lay people and young people – to live out our vocation, each in his or her specific way, with a view to mutual edification. Where this ecclesiological approach is welcomed with joy and developed with conviction the results are clearly visible: the educative pastoral community flourishes and becomes an experience of the Church that lives communion and mission in an attractive and fruitful way.

1. ***The*** “***missionary synodality***” ***of the Church***

The rediscovery of the Church’s synodal nature was one of the defining points of the recent Synod on Youth: “The fruit of this Synod, the choice that the Spirit has inspired in us through listening and discernment, is to walk with the young, going out towards everyone, so as to bear witness to the love of God. We could describe this process by speaking of synodality for mission, or missionary synodality” (*Final Document of the Synod*, no. 118). More than asking us to do something for them, young people have asked us to walk with them!

Pope Francis is even more radical when he declares that “it is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium” (cf. *Address for the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 17 October 2015). Consistent with these statements, the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops – still in its preparatory stage and to be held in October 2022 – will have synodality as its theme: “*towards a synodal Church: communion, participation, mission*”.

Such words cannot leave our Salesian settings indifferent. Instead, they demand conversion of heart and mind, combined with a renewed readiness to change practices. It is precisely youth ministry – which “has to be synodal” (*Christus vivit*, no. 206) – that should advance without delay in this direction, opening new paths for the benefit of all. It is increasingly clear that only men and women of communion will build the spirit of family and share the mission.

1. ***Reciprocity of relationships***, ***charism of the laity*** ***and the role of the religious community***

Good identification with one’s own vocation and an adequate understanding of the vocation of others are fundamental, in order not to reduce the shared mission to executive collaboration. Salesians who live their specific calling with joy and freshness are capable of an effective and fraternal animating presence and are able to offer the laity emotional and effective support in the difficulties they encounter. The lay people who assume their baptismal call to witnessing to the Gospel with conviction are free from the complex of being relegated to second-degree pastoral services. Together they become an “ecclesial laboratory” and a prophetic sign of communion for the Church and society.

Sometimes young people understand the testimony of the laity better because it is less obvious and it is presumed they are not speaking and acting out of a sense of belonging. The laity’s vocation, by placing them in the heart of the world, sometimes makes them more suitable for responding to the new cultural demands of young people. In this way the laity speak a language more suited to the ordinary situations of life and often possess professional skills which make them valuable in the mission.

The change in the role of the religious community will depend on various factors, but among them the following will become increasingly more relevant: the willingness to reinterpret its role regarding the fundamental charismatic option; the readiness to question its role as manager and its sole responsibility for the work, given shared responsibility with the laity; the ability to reinterpret the significance of its presence within the context in which it finds itself.

**MANAGEMENT OF THE WORK, COMMUNITY LIFE AND ANIMATING NUCLEUS**

1. ***Two models*** ***and the centrality of the animating nucleus***

Today the Congregation recognises only two models of relationship between the Salesian community and the work. The first and most important one, which must be considered the reference standard, is made up jointly of the Salesian community and the laity; the second refers to “activities and works of the laity accepted within the provincial project” (cf. GC24, nos. 180-182).

We believe that there is no longer the model – which could be considered valid before Vatican Council II – that provides for the animation of the Work by Salesians alone. We strongly reaffirm that the Salesian mission is structurally communitarian and is entrusted to an educative pastoral community and its animating nucleus, which will be made up of Salesians and lay people in different and complementary ways and proportions: the mission that Don Bosco has given us is never an individual action nor is it self-referential!

In each of these two models the “animating nucelus” or “educative and pastoral community council” is central. It is to be considered as the engine and heart of the entire educative pastoral community, because the smooth running of the work depends on its quality and proper functioning. It is a very valuable animation body and key to the life of the work: we are talking about “a group of people who identify themselves with the Salesian mission, educational system and spirituality, and together take up the task of assembling, motivating, and involving all those who are concerned with a work, so as to form with them the educative community and to carry out a plan for the evangelization and education of the young” (cf. *J.E. Vecchi* in AGC 363, p. 9; *Salesian Youth Ministry Frame of Reference*, V,1,3; *Animating and governing the community*, nos. 121-122).

1. ***Works entrusted to Salesians and the laity***

In Works entrusted to the religious community and to lay people, the community is a significant part of the animating nucleus and the charismatic point of reference: “Such a sharing of the spirit and mission of Don Bosco with lay people is a new phase in the development of our charism. From it follows the need for the Salesian religious community to reflect on and assume fully its relatively new role within the EPC... This involves a momentous shift from a pyramidal structure of authority to a more participative style, where personal relationships and processes are of the greatest importance” (*Animating and governing the community*, no. 124).

The concrete form of the relationship of the religious community with the Work as a whole cannot be reduced to a single model (cf. GC26, no. 120). Hence it is necessary to take into account certain determining factors: the different levels of belonging and sharing and the Salesian spirit and mission; the different degrees to which shared responsibility is achieved; the kind of Work; the voluntary or contractual nature of the presence of lay people. And finally, it should be remembered that “the precise relationship between the Salesian community and the Work, as also the authority of the Rector, is codified in the provincial and local Salesian Educative and Pastoral Plan (SEPP)” (*Animating and governing the community*, no. 125).

1. ***Activities and Works managed by the laity within the framework of the Salesian provincial project***

Twenty-four years ago, GC24 placed this second kind of Work among “Some particular new situations” (cf. GC24, Chapter III). Today we can say that those new situations have become part of the ordinary patrimony of the Congregation at the world level, even though with very different proportions, forms and procedures among the regions and provinces.

It is important to restate the two essential conditions for entrusting a work to lay people: first of all criteria of identity, communion and Salesian significance must be ascertained; secondly the constant and competent accompaniment of the provincial and his council must be guaranteed (cf. GC24, nos. 180-182; *Salesian Youth Ministry Frame of Reference*, VIII, 2,2; *Animating and governing the community*, no. 126).

These conditions must be carefully considered when discerning and entrusting the work to lay people. A charismatic choice and appropriate formation are necessary, especially for those in top positions, as well as fair and just remuneration and working conditions. Finally, it should not be forgotten that this journey undertaken with the laity, as well as being accompanied, must be constantly monitored.

**JOINT FORMATION FOR THE MISSION**

1. ***An absolute priority that engages the different levels of government and animation***

The sharing of the Salesian spirit and growth in shared responsibility require the sharing of certain formation programmes and experiences oriented towards spirituality and mission, obviously without neglecting specific formation programmes for Salesian consecrated persons and lay people. Joint formation in shared mission is an absolute priority and should be directed above all to the members of the animating nucleus. (cf. *Animating and governing the community*, nos. 106,122). Our lay collaborators need to experience and know Don Bosco closely, and to reflect on the lived experience in our Works.

It is the task of the Province and Region to offer appropriate formation paths for Salesians and lay people. The province is called to develop a joint formation plan at provincial level and accompaniment of processes at the local level, guaranteeing adequate resources of personnel and means. At the local level, one of the first objectives that the Salesian Rector pursues, together with the Salesian community council and the educative and pastoral community’s animating nucleus, is the development of a formation plan which ensures specific attention to the theme.

Experience confirms that it is very positive to entrust the organisation of the various formation initiatives to mixed teams made up of Salesians and lay people,: the Salesians offer the wisdom acquired in formation, assistance and spirituality; in turn the lay people offer, in addition to their specific skills, the fruits of contact with the professional world, a greater attention to family life, a style of simplicity and friendship in relationship with women and an evangelical sense of everyday life.

Finally, it is good to remember that formation does not just happen through academic courses, but above all from the experience of living and working together, because “the first and best mode of self-formation to participation and shared responsibility is the correct functioning of the educative and pastoral community” (GC24, no. 43).

1. ***Initial and ongoing formation of Salesians***

“It is important to say that we are not formed *for* the mission, but that we are formed *in* the mission. Our whole life revolves around it, with its choices and priorities. Initial and ongoing formation cannot be a prior, parallel or separate instance of the identity and sensitivity of the disciple. The mission *inter gentes* is our best school: beginning with this we pray, reflect, study and rest. When we isolate ourselves or distance ourselves from the people we are called to serve, our identity as consecrated persons begins to be distorted and becomes a caricature.” These strong statements by Pope Francis in his *Message to GC28* speak to us of the importance of a radical change of perspective in the formation of all the confreres, and in particular of those who are experiencing initial formation: we must learn more and more to reflect critically on the pastoral experience we have among young people!

Formation in and for the shared mission must also touch on the initial formation of the Salesians not only as a topic for study but also through weekly and summer pastoral experiences. The experience of working with and under the direction of lay people during practical training, as well as taking part in the Educative and Pastoral Community Council, are precious moments of formation, especially if well accompanied by the members of the animating nucleus, both lay and Salesian.

1. ***Collaborators belonging to other religions and beliefs***

In secularised and multi-religious contexts, our educational commitment is shared by people of different religions and beliefs. Many of them are also included in the animating nucleus of the Educative and Pastoral Community. Their formation is a delicate challenge that requires wisdom, courage and creativity. The Church's doctrine teaches that the revelation of God in Christ, while surprisingly surpassing human wisdom and the experience of other religious traditions, brings to completion the seeds of truth that they contain and invites in many ways to engage in inter-religious dialogue. For this reason it is possible to identify common values which lay the foundations for a differentiated, inculturated and contextualised formation without losing the originality of the Christian faith.

GC24 had already dedicated a rich reflection to this issue (cf. GC24, nos. 113,183-186), identifying two fundamental elements that form the basis for working with people of other traditions and beliefs: first of all the sharing of the Preventive System (in its human and lay values for those who do not believe in God; in its religious values for those who accept God and the Transcendent; in the Gospel of Christ with Christians of other Churches and ecclesial communities); secondly, openness to the search for God by those who do not profess a faith (cf. GC24, nos. 185,100). Since “the mission to youth leads us to an education which is at the same time evangelisation”, GC24 had also recognised that positions hostile to the Catholic Church such as are found in certain ideologies, sects or movements, instead are incompatible with our mission (cf. GC24, no. 185).

Following on from the experience of these decades It would be useful to verify the implementation of these criteria and the concrete results that they have in terms of education and evangelisation, so as to highlight the good practices to be enhanced and the risks to be avoided. Certainly the fundamental condition is the consistent presence of Salesians and, where possible, of lay Christians who live their vocational identity with joy and authenticity. (GC24, nos. 183-185; *Animating and governing the community*, no. 135), without hiding what constitutes the heart and the underlying motivation of their life. Equally important is the climate of respect, patience, acceptance and friendship which avoids both the imposition of values and beliefs and the fear of touching upon issues that characterise our identity.

We are convinced that we can share with all people of good will who wish to share in the Salesian mission, in Don Bosco’s fatherly loving-kindness, in the reasonableness inherent in his educational system and his trust in the resources of the young, and in the privileged choice of the poorest and the commitment to a culture of acceptance that knows no limits of race, colour, nation, culture and religion.

**CHOOSING**

1. ***Synodal Church***, ***shared mission*** ***and educative pastoral community***

**Let us decisively take up the mission shared between Salesians and lay people, valuing the reciprocity of vocations.**

**Attitudes and mentalities to convert**

1. From a mission entrusted to the “personal roles” of the consecrated members to the awareness of the ecclesiology of communion and the rediscovery of the role of the laity.
2. From seeing the laity as simple “collaborators” for better implementation of apostolic work to considering lay co-responsibility as a foundational charismatic criterion.
3. From seeing the young as mere beneficiaries of our educational interventions to feeling that they share responsibility for the one mission.

**Processes to put in place**

1. Let the *Formation and Youth Ministry Sectors* facilitate the drawing up of some guidelines for the animation and accompaniment of the educative and pastoral community, based on the Congregation's “best practices”.
2. Let the *Provinces* pay particular attention to strengthening the understanding of the educative pastoral community, see to the formation of its members and the preparation of the Salesian Educative and Pastoral Project, and periodically monitor the road traversed.
3. Let the *Provinces* gradually entrust institutional roles of responsibility to charismatically founded and professionally prepared lay people at the local and provincial level, involving them in pastoral planning and economic management.

**Structural circumstances to guarantee**

1. Let the *Provinces* study and define management models for the various kinds of tasks entrusted to the laity within a provincial plan (Overall Province Plan, Provincial Salesian Educative and Pastoral Project, Provincial Directory), with particular reference to duties, appointments, fair remuneration, duration of office and decision-making bodies.
2. Let the *Provinces* carry out a serious accompaniment of lay-managed Works through the presence of the provincial and provincial animation team, and draw up a charter for this purpose.
3. Let the *Provinces* involve Salesian Family Groups in planning the reshaping of Salesian presences, preparing experiences of collaboration on behalf of those who are poorest.
4. ***Joint formation for the mission***

**Let us ensure spaces and times for joint formation and sharing of life between Salesians and lay people for a better educative and pastoral service of the young.**

**Attitudes and mentalities to convert**

1. From a sporadic and casual joint formation to a more systematic formation that aims at integrating all aspects of the Salesian mission (spiritual, pedagogical, pastoral and professional).
2. From a formation given only by consecrated persons to a formation designed and carried out together with the laity.
3. From a mentality of self-sufficiency to the real experience of the need for joint formation.

**Processes to put in place**

1. Let the *Formation and Youth Ministry Sectors* promote reflection at regional level for a renewed understanding and appreciation of joint formation in the context of the shared mission.
2. Let the *Missions Sector* coordinate reflection to explore the necessary conditions for the participation of lay collaborators of other religions and beliefs in the Salesian mission, proposing suitable and differentiated paths of formation focused on the pillars of the preventive system.
3. Let the *Provinces* invest in joint formation – including in initial formation – with the help of regional ongoing formation structures and ensuring economic support to encourage lay participation.

**Structural circumstances to guarantee**

1. Let the *Provinces* develop a joint formation plan that distinguishes levels of formation, contents, recipients and participants through diversified formation paths (human, spiritual, Salesian and professional).
2. Let the *Local community* carry out formation processes for Salesians and lay people able to share spiritual and fraternal life as well as educative and pastoral activity.
3. Let the *Local community* undertake ways of building the educative and pastoral community and educative pastoral community councils as an animating nucleus and an effective place for initiating systematic experiences of spirituality, communion and service with lay people and the young.