**2.2. OUTLINE FOR REFLECTION AND WORK ON THE GC29 THEME**

This outline offers some suggestions for what Provinces must do in preparation for GC29. They can be useful to focus the attention of the confreres, local communities and the Provincial Chapters on the theme of GC29, guiding the reflection and work of everyone.

# 2.2.1. Letter of convocation of GC29

The letter of convocation of our 29th General Chapter (GC29) comes at a crucial moment for the Congregation, marked by the celebration of the 200th anniversary of the dream at nine years of age and the appointment of the Rector Major, Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, as Cardinal. GC29 intends to follow up on the recent Chapters, GC27 and GC28, focusing on charismatic identity and the profile of the Salesian today, in collaboration with the laity. It is essential to carefully study the letter of convocation of the Rector Major and discuss its contents in community.

The main theme of the Rector Major’s letter and therefore of the GC29 is “Passionate about Jesus Christ, dedicated to young people”. This theme underlines the importance for us to return to the heart of the *Christ-centred Salesian consecrated identity*. The three core areas that articulate it concern the need to renew the spiritual life and formation of Salesians through an authentic relationship with Christ and a deep commitment to mission. This encourages personal and community growth through prayer, reflection and spiritual accompaniment In addition, GC29 stresses the importance of collaboration between Salesians, lay people and members of the Salesian Family in the educational and pastoral mission. It is important to recognise the value and contribution of each member of the EPC in the realisation of the Salesian Educational Project and to promote a synodal culture of communion and sharing of responsibilities. Finally, the structures of animation and governance of the Congregation need to be reviewed and updated to make them more effective and responsive to the challenges of today. This requires us to critically evaluate leadership methods and courageous decisions for the good of the Congregation and its mission.

It will therefore be important, at all steps and levels of reflection, to bear in mind that while the theme is unique, it is divided into core areas that delve into different aspects of Salesian vocation and life. Their understanding is fundamental, but they are not independent of each other. There is a continuity that is not limited to simple chronology in the study, but is also systemic and thematic. The common thread of this continuity is communion with Jesus, which gives rise to synodality with the laity, with and for young people. In addition, GC29 will have to make it clear how decisive the institutional core area – the third – is for guaranteeing and fostering our fidelity and the fraternal and pastoral charity explored in the first two core areas. It is clear that the service of authority finds in its etymology and vocation the growth, development and welfare of individuals, communities and especially the beneficiaries of our mission. During the work of the Provinces and the Chapter Assembly, this link between the personal spiritual and vocational level, the community and pastoral level, and the institutional level that keeps our Society cohesive and efficient due to animation and government will be highlighted.

Reflecting on the chapter theme “Passionate about Jesus Christ, dedicated to young people” is a journey with deep connections with the current Magisterium of the Church and that of the Congregation. Pope Francis, with his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, invites us to care for creation and an integral ecology. *Fratelli Tutti*, moreover, emphasises the importance of *taking care* of the other and of universal brotherhood, with the emphasis on the call received from Christ. This call implies care for oneself and one's neighbour, shared mission and the consequent *accompaniment of both confreres, our co-workers, and especially young people*, especially those in situations of poverty. Many of us remember the document “New wine in new wineskins (cf. Mk 2:22)” which in 2017 addressed the issue of the revision of consecrated life, inviting a constant renewal of the *sequela Christi*, fraternal life and the evangelical counsels. These aspects are found in the third core area of GC29, which deals with the review of congregational governance at all levels. From the Salesian point of view, the 28th General Chapter, and the recent 2023 Strenna of the Rector Major, with their focus on the identity of the Salesian today and on collaboration with the laity and young people themselves in mission and formation, underline the importance of this synodal dimension.

The 29th General Chapter therefore represents a unique opportunity for the Congregation to discuss the challenges and opportunities presented by the theme and the three proposed core areas, in the light of ecclesial documents and biblical reflections. We are all invited by the Spirit to work together for a faithful and prophetic life of our Salesian vocation, rediscovering the essence of our consecrated identity and renewing our commitment to the educational and pastoral mission with the EPC, with and for today’s young people.

# 2.2.2. Process for preparation for GC29

The preparation of the 29th General Chapter of the Salesians of Don Bosco (GC29) involves several phases, including the Provincial Chapters, which play a crucial role in the process. The forthcoming Provincial Chapters, convened by the Provincials and Superiors of Vice-Provinces as soon as possible, constitute an important step on the journey to GC29. According to our Constitutions (Articles 171 and 172), Provincial Chapters have different objectives and functions. First of all, they allow the members of the Congregation to reflect and discuss issues related to Salesian life and mission, taking into account the specific challenges and opportunities of each province. They offer a space to share the experiences, concerns, and aspirations of the Congregation’s members at the local level. Secondly, the Provincial Chapters will contribute to the preparation of GC29 by providing information, suggestions and proposals on the topics and issues to be addressed during the General Chapter. These contributions are essential to ensure that GC29 addresses issues that are relevant and significant to the entire Congregation. Finally, the Provincial Chapters are also an opportunity for the members of the Congregation to actively participate in the process of discernment and election of superiors, taking into account the needs and priorities of the Congregation at the local and international levels.

# 2.2.3. Articulation of the GC29 theme

The Salesian is a mystic of the Spirit, a prophet of fraternity and a servant of the young. By living and working together in community, his following of Jesus Christ becomes prophetic and attractive. Through his personal life project, he gives primacy to God and asks him for the “grace of unity”. With his planning mentality, he actively plans, executes and reviews the educative and pastoral plan with the members of the Educative and Pastoral Community to ensure the integral evangelisation of young people. Aware of his charismatic identity, he shares with the laity the charism and mission of educating young people in the faith.

This is how the last General Chapters defined the Salesian. This vocation is a following of the Eucharistic Christ, faithful to the Father and to those for whom he gives his life. As stated in our Constitutions, “From him we draw energy and endurance in our work for the young” (C 88). *The true life of each Salesian is called to be a Eucharistic life.* Through this quasi-sacramental fidelity, a deep communion and a sharing of responsibilities in journeying together is created. Consequently, the service of authority is also lived with and out of love, “in imitation of Christ and in his name” (C 121), for the Master and King who washed the feet of his disciples.

# Animation and care of the true life of each Salesian

*The importance of Salesian consecrated life centred in Jesus Christ.* Salesian consecrated life is of importance for us for our identity as believers conquered by God. We are therefore called to focus our attention on this spiritual dimension, recognising the central role of Jesus Christ as a guiding figure and model to follow. Our Salesian charismatic identity is based on total dedication to God and a commitment to live according to Gospel values, putting into practice the teachings of Jesus in our daily lives and in our actions, following in the footsteps of Don Bosco our father. In this way, we can deepen our relationship with God and grow in our faith, contributing at the same time to the proclamation of the Gospel and the spreading of the Kingdom of God on earth.

*Caring for our own and others’ vocation.* We are called to pay special attention to caring for our own vocation and that of other members of the community. Fr Vecchi saw in these two aspects an expression of an authentic fraternal life and pastoral care.[[1]](#footnote-2) We must recognise the importance of nurturing and supporting each individual's calling so that all may realise their full spiritual potential and contribute to the common good. The care of vocation also involves attentive listening to the Word and voice of God (C 87), which calls each one to follow a particular path of life and service. It is necessary to be ready to help and support everyone in their vocational discernment, offering them spiritual support, advice and guidance.

*Fidelity to God and fraternity in the community.* We feel called to live together as a community, sharing a common vocation and building an authentic, evangelical and attractive fraternity (C 49). This requires fidelity to God and a commitment to put Christian and Salesian values into practice in daily life, promoting unity, solidarity and brotherly love among community members. Salesian fraternity is based on mutual respect, understanding and accepting differences, favouring the spiritual and personal growth of each individual. God calls us to be witnesses of this evangelical fraternity in the world, showing by our example how it is possible to live together in harmony and peace, despite – and even because of – cultural, social and religious differences.

*Accompaniment and formation.* We accompany and support the different stages of our life and that of the confreres of all ages, taking care of initial and ongoing formation. Accompaniment and formation are essential to ensure the growth and maturation of the confreres and colleagues, so that they can successfully face the challenges and opportunities that arise in their journey of life and service.[[2]](#footnote-3) Beyond that, we must be ready to learn from each other, sharing their experiences, knowledge and wisdom, in a climate of dialogue and mutual exchange.

*Commitment to evangelical fraternity and openness to the excluded.* God has called us to live evangelical fraternity in our religious communities and to be open to those who suffer experiences of exclusion in the world. The theme of GC29 reminds us of the need to be sensitive to the needs and suffering of others, especially the poorest, the marginalised and the oppressed. Christ calls us and teaches us to actively engage in the promotion of justice, peace and solidarity, working for the transformation of social and political structures that generate injustice and inequality, so as to “be in the Church signs and bearers of God’s love for young people, especially the poorest of them” (C 2). This also implies remaining ready to welcome and support those seeking refuge and protection, offering them a place of hope and spiritual renewal.

# Salesians, Salesian Family and lay people together “with” and “for” young people

*Completing the reflection undertaken by GC28*. The main objective continues to be, after clarifying and consolidating the profile of the Salesian, to progress in the mission shared with the laity, strengthening collaboration between the various members of the Family and the Salesian community. The encounter and collaboration between religious men and women and the lay faithful in particular, appears as an example of ecclesial communion and at the same time enhances apostolic energies for the evangelisation of the world. To achieve this goal, it is essential to deepen the paths of reflection undertaken by the GC28, analysing the different issues, best practices and challenges faced while giving “our attention to the lay people responsible for evangelization of their local area, and to the family where different generations come together and build the future of humankind” ( C 29).

*Increasing spiritual and apostolic vitality*. To sustain the commitment to young people in situations of poverty, the spiritual and apostolic vitality of the Salesian community must be renewed and strengthened. We feel the need to deepen the life of prayer, daily meditation, the experience of the sacraments and opportunities for spiritual renewal (C 91), a greater dedication to the service of those most in need, and a constant search for new ways of evangelising and promoting social justice. We encourage the ongoing formation of community members, in order to develop increasingly effective pastoral and pedagogical skills.

*Educating and evangelising.* As the Rector Major says well, in addition to providing quality educational services, it is crucial to accompany young people on their path of personal growth, offering them new opportunities and helping them overcome the difficulties they encounter in their daily lives. Therefore, a constant commitment to listening, dialogue and sharing is necessary to create an environment of trust and mutual support. It is also important to promote the integration between education and evangelisation, enhancing the spiritual and transcendent dimension of human experience and fostering the discovery of the meaning of life and personal vocation.

*Seeking new models of presence and new expressions of the Salesian charism.* In order to respond to the needs of young people and spread the Salesian charism, it is essential to explore new forms of presence and some preferential options. We must pay constant attention to the social, cultural and religious dynamics of the context in which we operate, in order to identify emerging challenges and opportunities for evangelisation. This requirement also corresponds to the third priority of the current six-year period, relating to the “Salesian sacrament of presence” (Priority 3, AGC 434). The Spirit calls us to value creativity and innovation in the design and implementation of pastoral, educational and social activities, in order to make the Gospel message ever more relevant and meaningful to our young people today (cf. GC28).

*Communion with young people and formation in integral ecology and digital culture*. Working closely with young people is essential to promote an integral ecology and to form them in digital culture in order to understand and interact with the world in which they live. Through GC29, we want to promote a holistic approach to the education and evangelisation of young people, thus taking into account the social, economic and environmental dimensions. Therefore, our educational and pastoral commitment should be constant in the involvement of young people in community life. In addition, it is essential to develop digital and media skills, in order to effectively and responsibly use new technologies in communication, education and evangelisation.

*Seeking, together with the laity, financial sustainability of Salesian presences, without ever excluding the poor*. To ensure the financial sustainability of Salesian presences, the experience of our provinces teaches us how important it is to collaborate with the laity and other members of the Salesian Family, in order to identify and implement self-financing and resource management strategies. We are called to pay attention to the efficiency and effectiveness of the activities carried out, in order to optimise the use of available resources, to establish a greater system of solidarity in the works, in the Provinces and in the Congregation, and to always guarantee a quality service to young people and their families. In addition, it is essential to maintain a priority commitment to the poor and the marginalised, and thus bear witness to the Gospel in promoting social justice and the good of all.

# A courageous review and re-planning of the governance of the Congregation at all levels

*Charismatic fidelity.* Charismatic fidelity emphasises the importance of governance and animation that cares about people’s lives, the mission and the poorest. In this context, it is critical that our institutions commit to supporting and promoting human dignity, social justice and solidarity among community members. To achieve these objectives, it is necessary that the animation and governance structures are updated and modernised, in order to respond to the needs and challenges of the contemporary world. Moreover, a culture of dialogue, listening and cooperation between the different levels of responsibility should be promoted, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity.[[3]](#footnote-4)

*Evaluation of the leadership.* This evaluation concerns the assessment of the effectiveness of the animation of the General Council, considering the discernment for the elections at the General Chapter and developing reflections to make courageous decisions regarding Sectors, Secretariats, the structuring of the Regions of the Congregation, and the services of the General Council itself. This process of review and evaluation is essential to ensure that the various levels of leadership are able to guide the Congregation towards achieving its goals and responding to the challenges of the current context. We want to promote a climate of transparency, responsibility and participation among the members of the Congregation, in order to foster a constructive and collaborative work environment.

*Evaluating the governance of the provinces and the animation of their life.* The evaluation of the governance of the provinces and the animation of their lives consists in ensuring the correspondence between the juridical issues already proposed and those that will emerge from the Provincial Chapters. This evaluation process is essential to ensure that the provinces are able to effectively fulfil their role of supervising and coordinating the Congregation's activities at local and regional levels. It will also be essential to adapt to the changes and new challenges that emerge in the social, cultural and religious context in which they operate. Article 15 of the Regulations also implicitly suggests forming and exercising young people in leadership and the micro-social dynamics of the *polis* in our works and institutions.

*Courageous and innovative approach in the management of the Congregation.* The importance of a courageous and innovative approach in the management of the Congregation is reflected in the special focus on charismatic fidelity, leadership and governance of the provinces, but also on a worldwide level, thus affecting three levels: the Rector Major and his Vicar, the General Councillors, the Secretariats. However, in recent years, the experience of governing the Congregation has highlighted the importance of the intermediate level constituted by the Regions, the Provincial Conferences and the Extraordinary Visitations as a method of accompaniment. Evaluating even this intermediate level is of fundamental importance to ensure adequate management of the Congregation in its growing complexity. This approach requires a critical, proactive and dynamic vision, able to anticipate and face the challenges of the contemporary world and to promote the growth and development of the Congregation in its service of animation and governance.

# 2.2.4. Methodology of Community Discernment

At recent General Chapters, we adopted the methodology of community discernment. In “Evangelii Gaudium”, “Amoris Laetitia”, in the “Preparatory Document” for the Synod of Bishops on Young People, in “Gaudete et Exsultate”, Pope Francis invites us to take up *the practice of discernment*. It is believed that, in keeping with the current direction of the Church and the experience gained in GC28, we can continue with this methodology.

***Listening***. The first step asks us to listen attentively to the reality around us, with an eye on the lives of the confreres, our communities, EPC and our beneficiaries. We need to recognise the challenges that the current situation presents to us, as well as the opportunities it offers for their growth. In this way, we will be able to identify certain priorities as well as promising or risky expressions that need to be developed or addressed and overcome.

***Interpretation***. In the second step, starting from the aspects recognised through listening, it is a question of interpreting the situation in depth, identifying the deep causes of well-being or discomfort and understanding the challenges and risks that it entails. This step is a particularly complex one, but also decisive for the success of the entire process of discernment. Only through a correct interpretation of the situation, based on the principles of the Gospel, the life of the Church, the Constitutions and the signs of the times, are we able to identify the concrete actions to be taken to respond to the needs of young people and the Salesian community. In this regard, the interpretation of the situation prepares the ground for the next step, the step where choices are made.

***Choices.*** The third and last step of the discernment process consists in identifying the choices to be made, which will lead us towards new ways of living the Salesian consecrated identity, taking care of our own vocation and that of others, of communion in the Salesian Family and the whole EPC and with the young people, and of the service of animation in our community, in the Province and in the Congregation. The choices we make must be the result of careful listening and interpretation of the situation, and they must also be prophetic and bold, capable of reinforcing what already present but still unfinished, overcome what is weak and risky, and finding new ways. The choices must also be essential and fundamental, and may concern processes and steps to be implemented, so that the needs of young people and the Salesian community can be met effectively and efficiently.

***Please note.*** The third core area of GC29 “A courageous review and re-planning of the Congregation’s governance at all levels” will only be addressed by the Provincial Chapters once the complete text, prepared by the General Council, is available. This text will be sent to the Provinces from January 2024.

The process of discernment asks us to focus on some priorities, both in listening and consequently in interpretation, and in choices. A written document will constitute the contribution of the Provincial Chapter to GC29. For each core area, the written document to be sent to the Moderator as the Provincial Chapter's contribution to GC29 should not exceed two pages.

The Provincial Chapter is advised to avoid paper documents as much as possible and to use digital technology instead, in order to foster an ecological mindset and to ensure cost savings.

# 2.2.5. Contributions to be sent to the Moderator of GC

**By 1 July 2024** the various contributions must be received by the GC29 Moderator; they can be of five different types:

●*contributions from the Provincial Chapters on the theme of GC29 “*Passionate about Jesus Christ, dedicated to young people”. These contributions refer to the first two core areas, each of which has a specific form;

● *contributions from the Provincial Chapters on topics concerning the life of the Congregation, the Constitutions or the Regulations;* these contributions also have their own separate form; only one proposal should be placed on each form;

●*contributions by individuals or groups of confreres on the theme of GC29* “Passionate about Jesus Christ, dedicated to young people”. These contributions refer to the three core areas and have their own form;

● *contributions from individuals or groups of confreres on topics concerning the life of the Congregation, the Constitutions or the Regulations.* These contributions have their own form; only one proposal should be placed on each form.

●*contributions from Provincial Chapters, individuals or groups on topics concerning the service of governance and animation of the Congregation, at all levels.* As explained in the Methodology, we will work on the latter core area later when the text arrives from the General Council for the Provincial Chapters. These contributions also have their own form.

Let us prepare ourselves with prayer and courage for the approaching General Chapter. We are grateful to the Lord for the opportunity to participate in this important event and we are committed to carefully discern His will for our Congregation and for our mission in the Church and in society. We entrust the work of the provinces, commissions, chapter members, experts and facilitators to the intercession of Mary Help of Christians, who guides and enlightens us along this path. We are certain that her maternal guidance accompanies us in every decision and helps us to pursue our commitment of service to the young and the Church, following the example of Don Bosco. Let us make our own her example and her invitation to the servants: “Do whatever he tells you!” (Jn 2:5)

1. Vecchi, J. E. (1992). *Pastorale giovanile: una sfida per la comunità ecclesiale*. Elle Di Ci. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Departments for Formation and Youth Ministry (2020). *Young Salesians and Accompaniment. Orientations and Guidelines* - Headquarters, Rome. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Scola, A. (2007). *La dottrina sociale della Chiesa*. Vita e Pensiero. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)