Our Journey to the 29th General Chapter

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1. Introduction

On 24 September 2023, in a gesture of profound significance for the Salesian Congregation, the Rector Major, Father Ángel Fernández Artime, officially convened the 29th General Chapter (GC29) This extraordinary event, which will be held from 16 February to 12 April 2025, aims to explore the theme “Passionate about Jesus Christ, dedicated to young people”. GC29 sets itself the ambitious goal of reflecting on the fidelity and prophecy of the Salesian vocation in our contemporary context, expressing it through three fundamental core areas.

The choice of Valdocco, Turin, as the venue for the Chapter is not accidental. It underlines the deep desire to reconnect with the roots of the Congregation, in a place that breathes history and embodies the Salesian charism. The members of the Technical Commission, appointed by the Rector Major, have been working together for about a year to ensure the success of this important event.

In preparation for this crucial moment, significant symbolic elements have been developed: an evocative logo and a specific prayer. The latter, fervently recited in numerous Salesian provinces and houses, has been adopted and adapted for some Provincial Chapters, creating a climate of spiritual communion that embraces the entire Congregation. In more recent weeks, there has also been a musical version.

2. Steps taken so far

2.1 Organisational aspects

The Moderator, supported by the Technical Commission, has undertaken intensive coordination and communication work with moderators of Provincial Chpaters. The secretariat has maintained a constant link with the 92 moderators of Provincial Chapters, facilitating a number of exchanges and valuable formation sessions through the dedicated portal. In a gesture of encouragement and support, the Moderator sent a personalised letter of greeting to each province before their respective Chapter.

The publication of the Acts of the General Council No. 441 provided the essential guidelines for preparation of the Chapter. The secretariat made itself available to clarify doubts and answer questions regarding the Chapters, methodology and rules of the various elections.

At the end of the Provincial Chapters, there were 224 future Chapter members elected for GC29, including 209 priests and 15 brothers. They will be joined by a support team consisting of 17 translators, 12 logistics staff, 12 for the Press and Director’s Office, and 4 for IT, making a total of 269 people involved. The preparatory material, subdivided by core areas and juridical topics, has already been brought together in several languages, with a predominance of documents in English (125) and Italian (77), followed by Spanish (60) and parity between French and Portuguese (31 each). The core area breakdown sees an even distribution among the first three core areas (89, 89 and 86 documents respectively), while juridical topics include 47 contributions and 13 other topics. This voluminous material will now enter a phase of careful review by the secretariat and the moderator, to ensure maximum accuracy and relevance of the content for the upcoming work of the Pre-Chapter Commissions.

2.2 Logistical aspects

A general calendar has been defined outlining the 7-week programme of the GC29, from the days of the initial retreat to the conclusion in Rome, in the context of the 2025 Jubilee.

The IT aspect has received particular attention. Engineer Sandro has created a bespoke portal to facilitate sending out documents, managing participant files and systematically answering moderators’ and provincials’ questions. Given the impossibility of using the old portal, collaboration is underway with the *Protocolli Creativi* Company to develop a new tool for future Chapters. This innovative project, in addition to the secretariat, also involves experienced confreres such as Fr Stefano Vanoli, Fr Saimy, Fr Francesco Valente, Fr Andrei Munteanu and Fr Pierluigi Lanotte. This technological solution will not only facilitate the communication and sharing of documents, but will also guarantee greater efficiency and security in the performance of Chapter work. The use of this integrated digital platform represents an important step towards a more modern and sustainable management of the General Chapter, in line with the needs of our time.

Another significant innovation for this General Chapter is that each participant in GC29 will receive a tablet, a device on which they will do all the Chapter work, using the new software in intranet mode.

As for translations, we have opted for a cutting-edge approach that takes advantage of the latest technologies. In addition to the systematic translation of working texts, an API provided by DeepL will be implemented in the new platform to allow the real-time translation of interventions in English, Italian, French, Spanish and Portuguese. Under the expert coordination of Fr Gianni Rolandi, two specialised teams will be operating: the “interpreters” for simultaneous translation and the “translators” for the revision of important texts.

2.3 Aspects regarding core areas

The provinces dealt with the three core areas following the three-stage methodology of reflection - Listening, Interpreting and Choosing - suggested by Pope Francis for the 2018 Youth Synod. The juridical issues arising from GC28 have been treated separately, some of which have been taken up in the context of the third core area.

Discernment plays a central role in this experience. Fr Pascual Chavez, Rector Major Emeritus, will lead the three days of initial spiritual retreat. The Vicar of the Rector Major, Fr Stefano Martoglio, as president of the Chapter, will lead weekly discussions on the core areas. Father Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori, Superior General of the Cistercians, will accompany the Chapter assembly in the discernment and elections of the Rector Major and the General Council.

Organisation of the liturgy, group dynamics and the contribution of the Salesian Biblical Association (ABS) in the form of *Lectio divina* will contribute to making GC29 a genuine event of listening to the Spirit.

3. Next steps until December 2024

In the recent plenary session of the General Council, it emerged that the 92 provincial chapters took place regularly and the material was uploaded to the server in two formats: as an archive (file) and as individual responses in special fields. During August the secretariat will study this material to present to the members of the Pre-chapter Commission at an online meeting on 26 August and then when they come to Rome for their working session.

Subsequently, the Pre-chapter Juridical Commission will meet in Rome for ten days of work on the third core area and on juridical issues. The Pre-Chapter Commission will begin its session on 17 September 2024, working on the material received to produce the *GC29 Instrumentum Laboris*.

In October and November, while the team that collaborates with *Protocolli Creativi* will carry out tests and any adjustments of the new software, the tablets that will be the main tool for Chapter members will be prepared . By the end of October 2024, Chapter members will receive the GC29 working tool to begin study and spiritual preparation. There will be two online meetings of Chapter members to familiarise themselves with the portal and exchange experiences.

In the months prior to the Chapter, the logistical preparation in Valdocco will be intensified, defining workspaces, accommodation for Chapter members and all the practical aspects necessary for the event to run smoothly.

4. Conclusion

The preparation of GC29 is configured as a journey that involves the entire Congregation in a process of reflection and profound renewal. The Rector Major urges us to intensify personal and community prayer, reminding us that “without prayer, without a heart that continually matures in faith, all we can do are sociological things that will end almost before they begin. Only in faith does God have the power to make all things new.”

We entrust this journey of preparation to Mary Help of Christians, invoking her maternal intercession so that GC29 may prove to be a “propitious moment” of grace and renewal for the entire Salesian Congregation. May the Holy Spirit illuminate our journey, helping us to remain faithful to the charism of Don Bosco and open to the challenges of our time, to continue to be signs and bearers of God’s love for the young people of today.