THE MESSAGE OF THE VICAR

Father Stefano Martoglio, SDB

**On WINGS of HOPE**

While continuing my service as Vicar in the coming months, quietly, very simply, and completely in continuity, I’ll replace the Rector Major in leading the Congregation to the General Chapter, the 29th, in February 2025.

Dear readers of the *Salesian Bulletin*,

I’m about to write these lines with trepidation because, having been a reader of the *Salesian Bulletin* since I was a child in my family, I now find myself on a different page, having to write its first article, the one reserved for the Rector Major. I do so willingly because this honor allows me to give thanks to God for our Don Angel, now a cardinal of Holy Roman Church, who has just finished ten years of valuable service to the Congregation and the Salesian Family, following his election at General Chapter XXVII in 2014.

Ten years later, he’s now completely at the service of the Holy Father, to do whatever Pope Francis will entrust to him. We continue to carry him in our hearts and accompany him with grateful prayer for the good he’s done for us because time doesn’t diminish but, rather, strengthens gratitude. His personal story is a historic event not only for him but also for all of us. Although he leaves us, in the canonical sense, for an even greater service to the Church, he remains always with us and within us.

**In complete continuity**

Now, as a Congregation, and by extension as a Salesian Family, how do we move forward? Quietly, very simply, and completely in continuity.  According to the Salesian Constitutions, the Vicar of the Rector Major also has the task of filling in for or replacing the Rector Major in case of need. This will be the situation until the next general chapter. The Salesian Constitutions say this in a more organic and articulated way, but this is the fundamental concept. Remaining in my service as Vicar in the coming months, I will replace the Rector Major in leading the Congregation to the General Chapter, the 29th, in February 2025. This is indeed a demanding task and one for which I ask you immediately to pray and invoke the Holy Spirit for fidelity to the Lord Jesus Christ, with the heart of Don Bosco.

**My name is Stefano**

Before moving on to the important things, a few words to introduce myself. My name is Stefano, and I was born in Turin to a typical Italian family. My father, a Salesian past pupil, wanted to send me to the same school that he had attended in his time; my mother, also a past pupil of a Catholic school, was a teacher. From them I received life, and a simple, concrete faith life. This is how my sister and I grew up; there are only the two of us.

My parents are already in Heaven, in God’s hands, and they’ll break into huge smiles seeing what’s happening to their son. They’ll surely comment:*dun Bosch tenje nà man sla testa!\**(“Don Bosco, keep your hand on his head!”)

As a Salesian, I always belonged to the Province of Piedmont-Valle d’Aosta, until GC27, when I was asked to coordinate the Mediterranean Region (all the Salesian realities around the Mediterranean Sea, on the three continents that overlook it, but also including Portugal and some areas of Eastern Europe). This beautiful Salesian experience transformed me, making me international in the way I see and feel things. GC28 took a further step, asking me to become Vicar of the Rector Major, and here we are! I’ve spent the past ten years alongside Don Angel, learning in those years to feel the heart of the world, in a Congregation that’s truly spread over the entire earth.

**The near future**

The service I’ll give in these coming months, until February 2025, is to accompany the Congregation to the next General Chapter, which will be celebrated in Valdocco (Turin), starting on February 16, 2025.

Dear friends, a general chapter is the highest and most important moment in the life of the Congregation. Representatives from all the provinces of the Congregation gather together (we’re talking about more than 250 confreres) to do three things, essentially: to get to know each other, to pray and reflect in order to “think about the present and the future of the Congregation,” and to elect the next Rector Major and his entire council. This is the very important moment about which Don Angel spoke in his reflection on its theme: “Passionate about Jesus Christ and Dedicated to the Young.”

This theme that the Rector Major chose for our Congregation will be articulated in three different and complementary aspects: the centrality of Christ in our personal lives and Religious consecration; the dimension of our community vocation, in fraternity and in co-responsibility with the laity to whom the mission is entrusted; and the institutional aspects of our Congregation: an evaluation of the animation and governance by our congregational leadership. These are three aspects of a single, life-giving theme.

Our Congregation needs this general chapter experience very much after so many events that have touched us all. Imagine—our last General Chapter began very close to the beginning of the pandemic, and it was precisely because of Covid that it had to end early.

**Building Hope**

To celebrate a general chapter is to celebrate hope, to build hope through institutional and personal decisions that allow us to continue Don Bosco’s “dream,” to give it a present and a future. Each of us is called to be a dream, the dream in God’s heart, and a dream come true.

In our Salesian tradition, there’s a beautiful phrase that Don Bosco spoke to Don Rua when he recalled him to Valdocco from Mirabello—really to take Don Bosco’s own place: “You were Don Bosco in Mirabello. Now you’ll be that here at the Oratory.” This is what really matters: “to be Don Bosco today”—this is the greatest gift we can give the world.

\**Spoken in the Piedmontese dialect, the one Don Bosco and Mamma Margaret spoke!* (translator’s note).

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