**The Internet is a vast network of human and cultural rituals**

 Interview

 With Fr. Gildásio Mendes

 World Councillor for Social Communication

Dear friends!

Let me share with you, in all simplicity, one part of the interview I gave to the editor of the Salesian Bulletin in Italy, Fr Bruno Ferrero.

I emphasise some of the points regarding communication today from a Salesian perspective, based on the planning of the Communications Department for the next five years.

Thanks for your attention and fellowship.

 Fr Gildasio Mendes

Councillor for Social Communication

 Rome, 20 March 2021

SB:

Is leading, animating and providing for the growth of communication within and beyond the Salesian Congregation a heavy task?

I am very happy to be able to work in the Congregation through communication. Taking on this service as Councillor for Social Communication is a considerable challenge and a fascinating mission! I would not call it heavy, but demanding.

Fr Àngel Fernàndez Artime, in the Rector Major‘s Action Programme given to the Salesian congregation after the 28th General Chapter, proposes that we move forward together, as educators, in order to inculturate the Gospel in the digital habitat.

We are a Congregation with great communicative strength and creativity. We are involved in radio, TV, social media, publishing houses, communication faculties, internet, always with the involvement and collaboration of young people and lay people who share Don Bosco's spirit and mission..

Communication is something of a fascination in the context of the digital world and social media, but it is also a challenge.

For us Salesian educators, communication is fundamental to our mission. We are in fact a vast communications movement throughout the world!

I believe that it is very important for us today to communicate on the basis of our identity as consecrated persons, Salesians, educators. To communicate on the basis of the Gospel and Don Bosco‘s charism.

It is not enough today to be qualified communicators in social media. We need to act together under both the institutional and the charismatic aspects. This means having an educational plan, shared values, a group which is a point of reference and belonging, acting as members of a single body.

Today we often speak of networks, communicative ecosystems, the convergence of information technologies. We need to accompany these new communication perspectives but always as a community and from a pastoral and educative perspective.

SB

What do you think of the world of communication today?

It is a fact that digital and online communication is a real cultural revolution.

In just a few decades the world has experienced a profound change of cultural and social paradigm due to information technologies, internet, social media, the smartphone.

We know that the Church and the Salesian Congregation, in an updated and secure form, offer reflection, criteria and methodologies for living and working in this digital habitat.

Clearly, with the growth of the digital world, there are still challenges emerging such as security, privacy; and among all these other challenges we still need to remember that of the digital divide.

For us Salesians, the big challenge is how to educate and evangelise in this new habitat. By this stage we have undertaken any number of studies on the phenomenon of communication in our universities around the world, as well as study and reflection groups and pastoral practice in the digital habitat.

I believe that we need to continue to deepen our understanding of how to evangelise the digital habitat. We could certainly limit ourselves to simply providing information on the internet and in social media; or being online day and night. All this is good but the challenge is bigger than that!

SB

How do we communicate on the basis of the Salesian charism, creatively, meaningfully and with quality?

This demands certain criteria and clear methodologies, all of which need to be shared.

To be honest, the Internet is a vast network of human and cultural rituals.

On the internet we find art, cooking, politics, fashion, sport, music, film, shopping, people relating to one another, information on daily life, religious content, life and death rituals. Human beings communicate because they are always looking for meaning, a way of expressing their freedom and their dreams.

Therefore, we need to look at the internet as part of our life, as an expression and extension of human rituals. I think that on the basis of these rituals, from these anthropological and cultural elements we can gain a better understanding of evangelising in the digital habitat.

We are also urged to accompany the evolution of technology. 5G will bring another big change in the way we communicate, especially by enabling faster access and more capacity to handle data and information. Mobile internet is growing everywhere in the world.

The world of communication is simple in itself. However, considering the speed of digital transformation, it is always important to accompany and give an educational response to new developments now and in the future in this field.

For example, learning more about how the language of algorithms works in the digital world; how large companies use these languages and what is the impact on the lives of people and communities. Distance education is a new reality that will very much change the way we teach and learn.

Communication in the service of creation, sustainability, digital inclusion, education and health security are very important for us, for families. Artificial intelligence is a growing reality and will continue to be so. Controlling information at company and government level, ethical and security aspects certainly deserve our attention, study and support.

SB

What kind of planning guidelines are being proposed?

We have three main priorities for the Communication Sector: the training of our communication delegates, the accompaniment of Salesians and lay people involved in communication, and institutional communication (internal and external communication, collaborative and networked activity, quality of digital infrastructure within the institution, crisis management, networking, creation and distribution of information...).

As for institutional communication, we want to look after the Salesian Bulletin, publishing houses, websites and social networks. All this requires dialogue, a sense of collaboration and a lot of work.

Working in shared management with the laity is a fundamental choice for communication at this time.

The digitalisation of our communities and works and the professional and pastoral preparation of Salesians and lay people are important steps that we want to share in the Provinces and with the Salesian Family.

In addition, we want to give depth to the missionary dimension of communication and develop management in a collaborative way especially with the Youth Ministry, Formation, Missions Sectors, and the Salesian Family.