**COMMUNICATION - EXPLORING CONCEPTS, PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES – A JOURNEY WE MUST TAKE TOGETHER**

**Fr Gildasio Mendes – sdb**

1. God has communicated with humanity through the incarnation of the Word who became a message of love and salvation for everyone.

*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14)*

2. Communication is an intrinsic aspect of evangelization. Jesus entrusts his disciples with the mission of communicating the Gospel: “*And he said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation’” (Mk 16:15-18).*

3. The Trinity is the model of shared communication and community. “*Such a capacity for understanding and communication among human persons is based on the communion of love among the divine Persons. God is not Solitude, but Communion; he is Love, and therefore communication, because love always communicates; indeed, it communicates itself in order to encounter the other. In order to communicate with us and to communicate himself to us, God adapts himself to our language, establishing a real dialogue with humanity throughout history (c*f. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, 2) – Message of the Holy Father Francis for the 53rd World communications Day, 24 January 2019).

4. The Church, the Body of Christ, is the communicator of the Gospel and the Kingdom of God in the world*. “The Church is invited by Christ to proclaim His message of salvation to the whole world. The Church is the body of Christ. For this reason, she assumes concretely and visibly the figure of the body, that is, she needs a set of structures and organization that is as visible as the body”* (Battista Mondini. Chiesa, Sacramento d’amore. Trattato di eclesiologia, Edizione Studio Domenicano. PDUL Edizione Studio Domenicano. Bologna, 1993).

5. The Salesian charism, a gift of the Holy Spirit (C. 1), is one of God’s ways of communicating his love for the young. Don Bosco was chosen to be a communicator–educator of God’s love for the young. *“Faithful to the commitments Don Bosco has passed on to us, we are evangelizers of the young, and the more so if they are poor; we pay special attention to apostolic vocations; we are educators of the faith for the working classes, particularly by means of social communication; we proclaim the Gospel to those who have not yet received it. In this way we contribute to building up the Church as the body of Christ, so that also through us she may appear to the world as the ‘universal sacrament of salvation’”* (C. 6).

6. To this effect, the Salesian Constitutions stress that communication is a charismatic dimension of the Salesian mission. For the Salesians, to evangelize is to communicate; to educate is to communicate. As an intrinsic part of the charism, communication is fundamental for the realisation of the Salesian mission. Therefore, communication has its own nature and identity. With its own methodology and nature, it dialogues with the other sciences, it is transversely present in pastoral care/ministry, and it shapes interpersonal, social, community and institutional relationships..

7. Communication goes together with theology and anthropology. Communication is a mediation of human relationships. Communication is manifested in a variety of ways: pastoral communication, educational communication, institutional communication, marketing communication, political communication, etc.

8. In these recent times, communication has been rapidly changing. One of the fundamental changes is the shift from formal and technical communication to interactive communication; from structural communication to synergistic and convergent communication. This change puts the human person at the centre with their right to express themselves, their freedom, their active role, their cultural, social and political identity. In this shift, internet, information technologies and social networks play a large and extensive role.

9. We are part of a true global village. The virtual world is a real world. The internet open us up to new realities of human contact. The internet has recently completed 50 years of existence and in our own times has changed our lives, our ways of working, relating, educating and evangelizing. According to recent data we speak today of 4 billion connected people in the world. It grows by around a million new users every day. 57% of the world is connected to the internet.

- 86%: European and American citizens

- 78% - in the Americas

- 95% - United States

- 71% - Middle East

- 52% - Asia

36% - Africa – but a greater number who access the internet via smartphone

- In 2025 – we will have around 7 billion people connected.

- Social media: 45% of humankind uses them

- There are more than a billion sites

We still have the problem of the digital divide, especially in Africa and the world’s poorest regions. The right to digital access, to democracy of information is a basic one.

10. Virtual communication especially, changes the method and style of people who communicate and take part in society, especially through the media culture, the internet, the digital world and social media. Clearly, virtual communication is part of economic and political systems, and ideologies. Therefore, communication always demands an ethic at the personal and social levels. An anthropological aspect of essential communication is the integral and total vision of communication, where the virtual-real, real-virtual dimension integrate.

11. Media culture has created immersive communication, that is, with technologies that allow a person to “enter with the 5 senses” into the communication environment through a smartphone. This means that the world of the Internet is not media, not even a medium, but a digital environment where images, texts, sound, interactivity and its instant nature converge.

12. Therefore the person, environment, media, content, interaction become a true communicative ecosystem. Living connected means being immersed in an ecosystem. Working, listening to music, watching a movie, chatting, buying, selling, finding friends, studying, researching, praying, and finally, communicating are all part of a great ecosystem.

13. Eco (oikos-home) system – Ecosystem – expresses the interactive relationship of individuals with their environments, their culture, their artefacts, their relationship with nature, life, people, media, school, the community*. "Communicative ecosystem" is what appears to be strategic, rather than the intervention of media; it is the appearance of a communicative ecosystem that is converting itself into something as vital as the green, environmental ecosystem" (*Jesus Martin-Barbero, 1999). Communication as a system involves people in an integral way with the 'common home', as Pope Francis says in *Laudato Si'*. Similar to integral ecology, communication as an ecosystem represents a human, integral and collaborative vision..

14. Within this ecosystem you can find people, along with technology, internet, social media, networks, communication systems. Communication is present in life, relationships, work, culture and the economy. The interactivity and instantaneous nature of communication is found in networking, in social media, in communication platforms happening within the ecosystem.

15. Given this ecosystemic view of media culture, the way of constructing information through interactivity and immediacy offered by new technologies changes, as does the architecture of the new platforms, planning and development of systems, protocols, software, applications.

16. A communication platform adapted to the new times permits the optimisation of the procedures of an institution with the aim of offering more human communication possibilities, facilitating and simplifying processes.

17. With the ease of producing information, we have an immense amount of information coming in from so many people and places in text, image, sound, video, etc. This production and sharing of information is positive, but it is necessary to simplify the way information is circulated. Hence, the communication platform and unified communication are fundamental in the information society.

18. The integration of unified communication facilitates the simplification of real-time communication services (chat, email, IP telephony, video conferencing, shared services, information regarding presences, among others). Together with the up-dating of technology and platform, we need to update the profiles of people who will work directly in communication, change the organisational structure and flow chart, reorganise the manner of production and diffusion of the message. Our Publishing Houses, the BS, the Graphics, Sites, ANS and other services must be updated with these new criteria. The creation of networking and communication agencies in each region of the Congregation will give more energy and opportunity for participation for Salesians, the Salesian Family, lay people and young people in the production and sharing of content and information.

19. Digital platforms facilitate human relationships, offering fast and practical interaction between people, between the Central Office and Provinces, for example, Departments and other services. The concept of platform in the digital age grows and offers more quality and participation of people (users) in the platform, be it writing, reading and sharing information. In this sense, today we speak of a digital experience platform and digital transformation, with the objective of fostering greater authorship and engagement of people in the values, proposals and mission of the institution.

20. The updating of the digital platform always requires a monitoring of the platform, of the level of people's participation, how they evaluate their experience in the platform (DXP - Digital Experience Platforms are an example). However, it is important to add other ways to ensure this evaluation is always updated.

21. Creating an up-to-date digital environment is fundamental in terms of the technical aspect (intranets, Mobile Apps, Sites, Social Media) and the aspect of participation, interaction, information creation and visibility.

22. Given a digital communication platform, the institution has the possibility of creating a quality video conferencing system that facilitates distance learning (distance courses, EAD), meetings, marketing, work sharing and projects, directly from the Centre for the Region and Provinces, for example.

23. The internet of things (IoT) is a reality that's advancing, along with super-intelligence. This means a big change in digital culture. IoT means that connection via wireless and cable forms part of objects in our daily life, from the way we listen to music to the way we control the key to the house; our way of shopping to the way we control energy in the house. It means that anything can contain a chip. Everything is connected and controlled remotely. IoT refers to ubiquitous connectivity, communication and non-stop transaction.

24. Mobile communication, especially through the mobile phone, is today the way people talk to others, read, buy, share news, photography, music, connect with the economic, cultural and social world, and participate instantaneously and interactively in the complex reality of the communicative ecosystem. It is fundamental that our news (e.g. ANS) be digitally accessible in mobile phones used by our Salesians, young people, lay people, all our users. The shift of our communication system to mobile will help us involve more people in the production of news, in actively creating and sharing information with more diversity and agility.

25. Together with a team of Salesians and lay experts in communication, it is essential to further explore and integrate into our work aspects of Artificial Intelligence, to understand the phenomenon of Post-truth better, how visual communication, management and marketing communication are applied. Updating, using and being open to integrating new technologies in education, and following new trends in technology such as: Telepresence (Suitable Technologies - ST)/ Telepresence Robots- "Skype Online Voice Routes" (Beam), Virtual Worlds (Augmented Reality), Brain Computer Interface (BCI), Neurocience.

26. The use of new information technologies, the construction of communication platforms will facilitate shared work in networks. This requires a change of mentality towards communication. Opening our minds up to a communication that requires not only the use of cutting-edge technologies, but above all, a new approach where discernment is fundamental for communication to be a way of pastoral conversion and witnessing to the Gospel.

27. The methodology of communication must be in dialogue with the methodology of spirituality and pastoral ministry. Today, pastoral methodology offers the path of listening, discerning and living as a way to deepen our understanding of processes in pastoral work. As Pope Francis says: *“Listening”* is *“to learn how to view things with the eyes of faith.”“Discerning”* is to *“understand where and to what he or she is being.” “Living”* is realising that we are called *“to become a witness of the Lord* ” (22 April 2018 – Message for the 55th World Day of Prayer for Vocations).

28. To this effect, communication is not just technology, information and content. Communication is process. Interaction is process. While maintaining its identity and epistemological nature, communication dialogues and interacts with pastoral ministry. We are speaking here specifically of youth ministry in its deepest dimensions and in its methodology. Clearly, discernment requires a deepening, an anthropological and biblical basis, knowledge and experience so that it can be well established in dialogue between the person and reality, the group and the institution in its totality.

29. The GC28 working document says that *“discernment is above all listening to God and his word, to the young and their appeals, to the experience of the Church and the Congregation. And finally also to the deep desire for goodness, fullness and joy that everyone carries within themselves.”*

*30. Discernment becomes a spiritual journey and a pedagogical methodology for working together because “Through sincere listening and sharing the contribution of each one, the dynamic of discernment takes us deep into the depths to seek the reasons and roots of what we are experiencing. This allows us to verify our criteria, to question our habits, so as to be creatively faithful to the one mission that has always been entrusted to the Congregation: that of accompanying young people to encounter the Lord, to experience his love and respond to his call.”*

31. Following this path, discernment offers a path where the steps are clear, yet processes are consistent and help us interpret reality. Discernment in communication helps us to communicate, starting our from a gospel perspective but one that is also consistent with reality. To this effect, *“Discernment thus becomes a pastoral instrument, capable of identifying the paths to be taken, proposing ways and paths that are liveable for young people today, and offering orientations and convenient suggestions for the mission that are not pre-established around a table but are the fruit of a path that allows one to follow the Spirit. A path structured in this way invites us to be open and not be closed, to ask questions and raise questions without suggesting pre-packaged answers, to propose alternatives and explore opportunities."*

32. The digital world always requires everyone to be brought up-to-date. The ability to interpret the cultural and social reality where Salesians work and use new technologies to respond to these demands, is part of the dynamism of the Salesian charism. As Don Bosco used to say: "*walk with the times*". This attitude requires that the Congregation offer a more qualified and continuous formation to the digital and social media world, one that is integrated into the formation project, so that Salesians of all ages can respond with creativity and freshness to the challenges of the new world that we are learning in this moment of history, where communication with competence, ethics and pastoral sense is fundamental.

33. At the institutional level, it will be necessary for us to review the way we communicate, creating an extensive project of digitalization of the Provinces, courses, updating our communication system, creating communication networks in the region, marketing, news agencies. The use of new technology for education (video conference), digital playground, and other initiatives will be fundamental for the Congregation.

34. Communication with young people playing a key role is the characteristic Salesian way of pastoral activity. Involving the young so that they can play a leading role, be authors in the Salesian communicative and pastoral world. As Salesians put it in the GC28 working document: recognising that*: “The digital environment characterises the contemporary world and now constitutes a natural habitat for many young people, which changes the way they access knowledge, establish relationships and perceive reality. For us Salesians it is a new mission land. Web and social networks are a two-faced reality: a place of meeting and communication.”*

35. The Ethics of Communication offers us criteria to communicate and promote solidarity among people, groups, communities. This is why it is necessary to establish norms and ethical prototypes of communication for our pastoral work and to accompany international policy on human rights, border control, authoritarianism and nationalism, genocidal manipulation, human trafficking and others.

36. Communication is never neutral. Personal, group, corporate and government-based ideologies are very much interested in controlling communication and information agencies for their own agenda. The virtual world also has its vices, fake news, manipulation and violence. Humanising the world of communication is part of the ethics of communication. On this Pope Francis said: *“Communication has the power to build bridges, to enable encounter and inclusion, and thus to enrich society. How beautiful it is when people select their words and actions with care, in the effort to avoid misunderstandings, to heal wounded memories and to build peace and harmony. Words can build bridges between individuals and within families, social groups and peoples. This is possible both in the material world and the digital world. Our words and actions should be such as to help us all escape the vicious circles of condemnation and vengeance which continue to ensnare individuals and nations, encouraging expressions of hatred. The words of Christians ought to be a constant encouragement to communion and, even in those cases where they must firmly condemn evil, they should never try to rupture relationships and communication”*(Message of the Holy Father Pope Francis for the 50th World Communications Day – 24 January 2016)*.*

37. The strength of communication comes from the originality and credibility of the author and the source of information. For the Salesian Congregation, the originality, credibility and visibility of all its communication comes first of all from its charismatic mission of service to the poorest young people, from the presence of the Salesians in places of mission, volunteer service, its transparency in educating the poorest with an integral vision of the world today.

In this sense we can speak of incorporated values that are present in our mission, in the preventive system and in our Salesian spirituality. These values are the identity card of our communication. Along with the incorporated values, there are the values perceived, meaning the values lived, real experience, lived witness. The originality and strength of communication come precisely from lived experience – which becomes a message.

38. Communication in a globalised world can never ignore the strength of regional and local communication. Every community and every people have their cultural identity, the values of their history and patrimony. These values express their way of living, creating relationships, using their own symbols and languages – therefore, their own values and behaviours that define their communication policy. It is important that in every province, every community, every group can express their own central role and their vision.

39. Communication is, in itself, a relationship process, part of a coded, internationally accepted and recognised system of signs. Art is a universal language. Music, painting, dance, architecture and theatre are intrinsic expressions of communication. Don Bosco was able to integrate art into the heart of his educational system. He himself was an artist who used art to educate. New technologies are now integrated into art. Music, in a special way.

40.While it is not easy to establish a dialogue between interior life and the digital world,  between  spirituality and virtuality, we do have to contribute to this dialogue and this new way of interpreting the present and the future of digital communication. The challenge is to see and explore the interior world *within* the digital world (not just ‘added’ to it). People are looking for something within the digital world and they are immersed in it regardless of wanting to be there or not. We have to find the encryption key which releases its meaning for what they are seeking. This something they  are looking for within the digital world has to some extent related to the search for beauty, longing for something deep inside human beings, searching for the fire within and much more we have to continue to look for.

41. Both in a liquid society and in a Covid/post-Covid 19 society, communication plays an important role in dialogue and pastoral discernment in the face of reality. There is a need for continuous and transversal study in order to understand the human, cultural, economic, social, political, ethical and religious phenomena of each society where we work with our target groups to find, together with educators, families, a path of dialogue between the Gospel, the Preventive System, and the new realities of the world of health, social distancing and its consequences in terms of communication, especially in the virtual world.

42. The Church, as teacher of humanism and messenger of the Gospel, calls humanity's attention to the crisis of modern anthropocentrism. Poep Francis says in *Laudato Si’ (No. 115): “Modern anthropocentrism has paradoxically ended up prizing technical thought over reality, since ‘the technological mind sees nature as an insensate order, as a cold body of facts, as a mere “given’”, as an object of utility, as raw material to be hammered into useful shape; it views the cosmos similarly as a mere ‘space’ into which objects can be thrown with complete indifference’[[92]](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html" \l "_ftn92) The intrinsic dignity of the world is thus compromised. When human beings fail to find their true place in this world, they misunderstand themselves and end up acting against themselves: “Not only has God given the earth to man, who must use it with respect for the original good purpose for which it was given, but, man too is God’s gift to man. He must therefore respect the natural and moral structure with which he has been endowed.”*

43. Communication has a prime role to play in times of crisis such as the current health crisis caused by Covid 19, in the construction of new paradigms, in the process of educating the new generation for its active role in the family, school, church and society. Together with Youth Ministry and Mission, Communication must open up to synergy and collaborative vision in order to find creative responses, at the pastoral and institutional level, for the society of today and tomorrow.

44. In the Congregation's communication planning, it is very important to have an integral and practical policy that can work together with the Institution in educating to communication that promotes life based on new paradigms. At this time of crisis and certainly the search for new economic, social, and educational paradigms, the proposal presented in Chapter 5 of Laudato Si' offers us, as a starting point, an expanded vision and some lines of direction and action for environmental, economic, and social conversion. This programme interpreted from within a Salesian perspective can make a significant contribution to communication today. 1) Dialogue on the environment in international politics; 2) Dialogue towards new national and local policies; 3) Dialogue and transparency in decision-making processes; 4) Politics and economy in dialogue for human fullness; 5) Religion in dialogue with science.

45. This planning needs to consider:

– the Congregation's historical journey with regard to communication, the reality of change that is happening in the world today, with the crisis of Covid-19 and the educational and cultural challenges of the world of youth in media culture.

– the objective of GC28 with the three themes it proposed: Priority of the Salesian mission among the young people of today; Profile of the Salesian for today’s young people; Together with the laity in mission and Formation.”

– the suggestions, proposal, revision offered by the former Councillor, and the new demands of communication today,

– the objectives and proposals of the Rector Major and General Council for this six-year term, proposing 6 intrinsically linked dimensions for the Communications Project, each with its own objectives, steps and interventions.

– these 6 dimensions, in the light of the conceptual ideas considered in this text, taken as the basis for constructing a communication project together with provincials, delegates, and those with direct responsibility for communication.

Dimension 1: SHARED SALESIAN MISSION AND MANAGEMENT

Dimension 2: FORMATION AND MISSION IN COLLABORATION WITH THE LAITY AND THE SALESIAN FAMILY

Dimension 3: DIGITAL ECOSYSTEMS AND PLATFORMS

Dimension 4: COMMUNICATION AGENCIES AND NETWORKING

Dimension 5: MEDIA CULTURE AND THE WORLD OF YOUTH

Dimension 6: A CULTURE OF EMPATHY, MEMORY AND ART AND HERITAGE