# THE SALESIANS OF DON BOSCO

# GENERAL CHAPTER 29

# PASSIONATE

# ABOUT JESUS CHRIST

# DEDICATED TO YOUNG PEOPLE

# *Living our Salesian vocation*

# *faithfully and prophetically*

# FINAL DOCUMENT

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TURIN - VALDOCCO, 16 FEBRUARY - 12 APRIL 2025

# Introduction

**1.** Being passionate about Jesus Christ and dedicated to young people is at the heart of our identity and the energy that drives our lives. These two essential features of the Salesian vocation were not only the subject of the 29th General Chapter, but the deep soul of what we experienced in sharing and in prayer. They were the perspective from which we looked at today’s world, with its riches that fascinate us and the many educational and pastoral challenges that confront us.

**2.** We gathered in Valdocco, in the house of our father and founder, where we were able to pause for a long time in prayer and recollection. The meditations offered to us by the Rector Major emeritus, Fr Pascual Chávez, during the first days, dedicated to spirituality, helped us to deepen the vision of our charismatic identity. The visit to Colle Don Bosco, Chieri and other places where Don Bosco left the mark of his presence, nourished the awareness of our roots and our gratitude for what we have received. In particular, on this 150th anniversary of the first missionary expedition, the visit to Sampierdarena, Genoa, and the memory of the departure of the first confreres for Argentina revived the awareness in us that Don Bosco’s charism is a gift for the whole Church and for all cultures. The appeal to further develop our missionary presence in Oceania resounded in this spirit. Unity in the roots and diversity in expressions are the great wealth of our Congregation, something that we must safeguard wisely and promote creatively.

**3.** The high office that the Holy Father entrusted to the Rector Major Emeritus Fr Ángel Fernández Artime while his mandate was still in progress, brought the usual six-yearly appointment for the Chapter forward by one year. Despite his absence, the perspectives of the Letter of Indiction and the Report on the State of the Congregation gave a clear direction to our work. We would therefore like to renew our heartfelt gratitude to him for his generous service of animation and governance, together with our best wishes for the new mission he is carrying out in the Holy See at the service of the universal Church.

**4.** The Chapter took place at a time marked by great ecclesial points of reference. First and foremost we are experiencing the Jubilee of Hope, the inspiration of which we felt in a special way in the week of the elections and in the final pilgrimage to the tomb of Peter, when we passed through the Holy Door. The recent celebration of the Synod “For a Synodal Church: communion, participation, mission” offered valuable ecclesiological and spiritual guidance for our work. Indeed, we endeavoured to practise conversation in the Spirit as a way to carry out community discernment. The Holy Father’s illness moved us every day to pray for him, with the sincere and filial affection that Don Bosco taught us to have for the Pope.

**5.** World events were also woven through our reflections and prayers. The wars that continue to devastate many countries, the drama of migrants and refugees, the persecution of many brothers and sisters in the faith and ethnic and religious minorities, the unrest and violence that hinder peaceful coexistence in many regions, natural disasters that have come to us not only through the media, but above all thanks to the direct testimony of many confreres who live in the most difficult areas of the planet and work at the service of the poorest and most needy. Listening to their words was a real life lesson.

**6.** Young people, above all, have been at the centre of our thoughts. Faced with the freshness of their dreams, the generosity with which they are able to commit themselves, the creativity with which they look to the future, we continue to be amazed. With their enthusiasm they help us not to give in to the weight of habit and to maintain inner drive and apostolic passion. Living with them every day, we also get to know at first hand the difficulties they encounter, together with the hardships and disappointments they experience in becoming responsible adults. Many of them carry painful wounds for which they are often not responsible. We give our lives for them every day and our greatest desire is to help them discover how much God loves them and how close he is to their hearts.

**7.**  We were inspired above all by two references in the development of the Chapter theme which very frequently came up in our discussions. The mystery of the Eucharist welcomed, received and celebrated, reminded us of the love with which the Lord gave his life for us and his ardent desire to gather us into communion. Every day we draw the energy from his sacrifice to give our lives, and the strength not to give in to evil. The mystery of his presence in the humble and daily signs of bread and wine reminded us that our presence among young people must be a sign and instrument of his presence. Standing beside the tabernacle where Saint Dominic Savio experienced his ecstasy, we thought about how central the Eucharist and the sacraments are in our pedagogy and as the true source of holiness. So at various times we recalled the need to celebrate them lovingly and to prolong their grace and gift in our lives.

**8.** Together with the Eucharistic theme, the invocation of the Holy Spirit characterised our Chapter experience with particular intensity. Conversing “in the Spirit” reminded us that he is the great protagonist of discernment and that only with his light can we recognise the signs that God gives us so we can manifest his will. In the week of the elections, in particular, we experienced his guidance and rejoiced at the gift of the eleventh Successor of Don Bosco in the person of Father Fabio Attard, and his Council. The Spirit, giver of charisms and creator of holiness, is the fire that burns in our hearts: passion for Christ and dedication to young people depend on him.

**9.** The Document we have drawn up contains the fruits of our labour. The first two core areas develop the theme of “Animation and care of the real life of each Salesian” and “Salesians, Salesian Family and lay people together ‘with’ and ‘for’ young people”, respectively. They are structured according to the three steps that are familiar to us: *listening*, in which a description of the reality is reported, *interpretation*, where we have sought to explore the reasons and offer criteria to enlighten our understanding, and *choices* proposed to the confreres, to communities, to provinces and to the Rector Major with his Council. The section on choices offers a wide range of recommendations which we deliberately chose not to limit. Indeed, it is up to the individual provinces and regions to identify the most urgent priorities and the most appropriate concrete steps for their context. This is also a way to safeguard both the unity of the journey and the specific nature of the paths taken.

The third core area contains the Resolutions approved by the Chapter. Some amend articles of the Constitutions or Regulations, others ask the Rector Major with his Council to pay attention to issues of particular importance. These decisions are the result of extensive and detailed reflection, which also concerned issues that remained pending from the 28th General Chapter due to its early closure.

**10.** Mary Help of Christians was a discreet but constant maternal presence during the Chapter. She welcomed us to the Basilica dedicated to her in the most solemn celebrations and in the silence of personal prayer. We paused several times at Don Bosco’s altar in filial dialogue with him. We thanked him for his presence in our lives, we entrusted him with sorrows and pastoral concerns, we talked to him many times about our young people, their dreams and their hopes. We entrust the fruits of the General Chapter to Mary and Don Bosco, so that they may become a road map for the future of our communities and provinces, and a gift for our service to the young. May the Lord give us the strength to be consistent with what we have expressed here and keep the flame of apostolic charity alive in us.

Confreres of the 29th General Chapter

**CORE AREA 1**

**ANIMATION AND CARE OF THE REAL LIFE**

**OF EACH SALESIAN**

1. **CENTRALITY OF CHRIST AND CARE OF THE SALESIAN VOCATION**

## Listening

**11.** We recognise that our Salesian consecration is profoundly rooted in Jesus Christ. With gratitude we note that many of our confreres, with joyful fidelity, maintain a personal and passionate relationship with the Lord, generously following him along the path traced out by Don Bosco. Despite these signs of hope, it seems clear that contemporary society, characterised by breakneck speed, the need for efficiency, individualism and the lure of consumerism, tends to push the transcendent dimension of existence to the margins, and this ends up having an impact on the life of consecrated persons as well. We live in a time marked by armed conflicts, economic uncertainties and profound cultural changes and environmental crises, but we want to serve this world through humble listening and a kindly outlook, recognising the many values that speak of the presence of God in history.

**12.** The Rector Major emeritus, in his Report prepared for the General Chapter, highlighted “a certain weakness or fragility in the way of living the spiritual life and relationship with God. This is a factor found very much in all consecrated life, but also in ours, as Salesians, and which affects our own charismatic identity” (A. F. ARTIME, *Report of the Rector Major to the 29th General Chapter*, p. 10). We are talking about a subtle disease found throughout the body of consecrated life and which, even among us Salesians, affects us like rust that corrodes our fidelity. In places we see a drift towards a comfortable and conformist lifestyle that reveals a lack of the radical approach to the gospel that should be our distinguishing mark. The management of our structures is sometimes a burden that risks absorbing too much energy. Despite these difficulties, there are positive signs. In some regions and provinces there is significant increase in vocations, accompanied by creative ways of inculturating the charism, all of which is particularly significant in this 150th anniversary of the first Salesian missionary expedition.

**13.** The Eucharist, the summit and source of Christian life, constitutes “the central act of every Salesian community” (C 88). However, the Chapter discernment has led us to recognise lights and shadows in the liturgical life of the Salesian communities. While in some houses the Eucharistic celebration is experienced with fervour and becomes a generator of communion and mission, in others habit and formalism is noted.

Listening to the Word of God and the practice of daily meditation are foundations of our spirituality, but in more than one context they are sacrificed for activities that are considered to be more urgent. Activism, an ongoing challenge of Salesian life, continues to threaten the balance between prayer and work, revealing not only a problem of how time is organised, but a deeper question of how the charism and the life of faith are interpreted.

The “grace of unity”, that invisible thread that should weave together our apostolic mission, community life and the practice of the evangelical counsels, risks fraying, losing its splendour and strength as a result of a weak and tired spiritual life.

**14.** “*Da mihi animas, cetera tolle*” – the motto that inspired Don Bosco – continues to challenge our charismatic identity. The Rector Major emeritus expressed his surprise at finding that “some confreres have presented me with doubts about our charismatic identity, or about the Salesian identity of us consecrated persons; or about what should be essential and radical in our Salesian life” (A. F. ARTIME, *Report of the Rector Major to the 29th General Chapter*, p. 10).

The departure of confreres who are already priests or candidates for the priesthood, asking to move to the diocesan clergy, as also the difficulties of understanding, promoting and accompanying the vocation of the Salesian brother are worrying signs of a deeper identity crisis. Sometimes it concerns the understanding of the charism, and at other times the formative process of assimilation. In a cultural context in which God is perceived by many as the great Absent One and in which disorientation prevails, our testimony often appears to have faded and be lacking in impact. Some confreres struggle to fully recognise themselves in the Salesian charism, experiencing consecration as a formal belonging rather than as a substantial identity. This fragility of identity is also seen in the scant ability to impart the beauty of the Salesian vocation to young people. The frequent departures indicate that the formation process is failing to touch hearts in depth and sufficiently consolidate charismatic identity, leaving the confreres vulnerable in the face of the challenges and seductions of the contemporary context. Of particular concern is the tendency of some Salesians to seek recognition and gratification, feeding attitudes that contradict the radical gospel nature of our consecration.

The figure of the Salesian brother, an original expression of Don Bosco’s charism, is going through a particularly difficult time in many regions. Despite the efforts and official declarations, a clerical mentality persists in many settings that fails to bring out the proper nature of the brother’s vocation. The drastic decrease in Salesian brother vocations in several provinces represents a serious loss for the richness and completeness of the charism.

## Interpretation

**15.** Along with encouraging elements of fidelity and dedication, listening to the life of our communities has allowed us to recognise the struggles and uncertainties which we feel can be summed up in one core notion: the difficulty of a truly unified life in which prayer and work, service to young people and spiritual depth, mission and contemplation are not juxtaposed, but feed each other. If the grace of unity constitutes the vital gift that we have received in the Salesian charism, inner dispersion would seem to be the great temptation from which we must guard ourselves as individuals and as communities.

It is not difficult to recognise that for many reasons this temptation is more insidious today than in the past. The pervasive influence of digital technology, while offering opportunities for communication and education, presents a serious risk of individualism, superficiality and isolation within communities. The accelerating pace of life, the increasing complexity of reality, the drive to activism and individualism strongly affect our lives. They fuel inner fragmentation and threaten the ability to be silent, go deep, and have a genuine experience of God. However, in addition to these external reasons, there are other factors more related to how our works are run and how community life is organised, such as the disproportion between pastoral fronts and the number of confreres, the excessive number of tasks entrusted to the same individual, neglect in caring for community prayer, the lack of commitment to reflection and study.

**16.** We do not wish, however, to simply be nay-sayers or look for justifications. Indeed, we are convinced that even in today’s fast-paced world and in the midst of the many difficult situations in which many confreres live their mission, God comes to meet us, speaks to us and offers us the possibility of unifying our lives in Christ. It is what we experience every day in prayer and listening to the Word, culminating in the celebration of the Eucharist. Therefore, there is a very clear response to our fragmentation: enter into the grace that the Eucharist offers us each day. When we approach the altar, inwardly we hear the words that Jesus said at the Last Supper: “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you” (*Lk* 22:15). As Pope Francis wrote, through these words “we are given the surprising possibility of intuiting the depth of the love of the persons of the Most Holy Trinity for us” (Francis, Apostolic Letter *Desiderio desidervi* 2).

In the Eucharist we experience that prayer, fraternity and mission are born together and come from a gift that precedes us and that we do not deserve. The only response that this gift asks of us is to surrender to love, laying down the claim to place ourselves, our projects and our works at the centre. It is, as Pope Francis reminds us, the “most demanding asceticism” (*Ibid.* 6), but it is undoubtedly the profound secret of an authentic consecrated life.

Our activism sometimes pretends to drag the Lord along behind us, but in a direction that is not always the one in which the Spirit is blowing. This happens, for example, when we identify more with our role than with our vocation. The Eucharist, on the other hand, allows us to make the Paschal transition from a life spent rushing around chasing our own ideas to a life that follows the breath of the Spirit with serene confidence. As Article 88 of the Constitutions states, “For us sons of Don Bosco the Eucharistic presence in our houses is a reason for frequent encounters with Christ.” Eucharistic adoration experienced in community and the practice of the “visit to the Blessed Sacrament” recommended by Don Bosco, nourish union with God and revive friendship with the Lord.

 **17.** We therefore recognise that at the basis of inner dispersion and fragmentation there is not only the much work we have, but also – and perhaps above all – the tendency to live it in a disorderly way, relying more on ourselves than on the Lord. Don Bosco, in fact, engaged in an impressive activity which took place on several fronts and required so much effort, yet those who met him had the impression of being before a deeply peaceful man who radiated the presence of God. In order to follow him on this path of holiness, we therefore perceive the need to understand his spiritual experience more deeply. We cannot be satisfied with knowing his history and activities, but we need to rediscover the secret of his continuous union with God, the spiritual path that led him to live the grace of unity. We need to reach out to, almost touch, the inner fire of the *Da mihi animas*, in which prayer and work are united in sharing the pastoral charity of the Risen Lord. This is being passionate about the Lord!

We will be helped in this by the valuable spiritual teaching of St Francis de Sales, whose fourth centenary of death we recently celebrated. In fact, he taught that holiness is achieved in the concrete circumstances of daily life and, by proposing an authentic mysticism of apostolic action, he laid the foundations for a solid spirituality of self-giving. The words with which the Holy Father recalls his spiritual doctrine in the Encyclical *Dilexit Nos* encourage us to rediscover his teachings to live the centrality of Jesus Christ and the care of our vocation.

## Choice

**18.** In light of our listening and interpretation, we choose to

**RESOLUTELY RENEW THE CENTRALITY OF JESUS CHRIST, REDISCOVERING THE GRACE OF UNITY AND AVOIDING SPIRITUAL SUPERFICIALITY.**

This choice implies concrete commitments for the confreres, the communities, the provinces and the central government of the Congregation, which we exemplify below.

Let the Salesian

1. draw up a personal plan of life, updating it annually
2. see to personal and community prayer, with particular attention to *lectio divina*, the centrality of the Eucharist and devotion to Our Lady;
3. cultivate spiritual accompaniment as an essential element of growth, in serious and systematic discussion;
4. develop a critical, prophetic and constant reading of the socio-cultural context in which he operates, in order to be a significant witness to the gospel, grasping the signs of the times.

Let the Community

1. celebrate the Eucharist as an authentic “central act” of community life, propose times for Eucharistic adoration and ensure adequate times and places for personal and community prayer;
2. place value on daily meditation, adapting it to apostolic rhythms without ever sacrificing it, and plan times for sharing the Word of God and for *lectio divina*;
3. renew the tradition of the monthly memorial of Mary Help of Christians as an opportunity to intensify and spread devotion to Our Lady;
4. encourage in-depth knowledge of Don Bosco and Saint Francis de Sales, valuing their spirituality;
5. give witness to evangelical poverty and solidarity with the poor through concrete choices;
6. place emphatic value on the vocation of the Salesian brother as an original and precious expression of the Salesian charism.

Let the Province

1. foster a deeper understanding of charismatic identity through appropriate initiatives, and develop formation opportunities that help the confreres to live the “grace of unity” in our contemporary context.
2. place value on the study centres at the UPS and in the IUS for theological and spiritual research on Don Bosco’s experience;
3. ensure that there is at least one Salesian with a Licence in Salesian spirituality, for the animation of the confreres and the educative and pastoral communities;
4. invest significant resources in the promotion and formation of the Salesian brother;
5. promote creative ways of inculturating the charism in the variety of cultural contexts;
6. see to the quality and animation of the annual retreat, so that it is truly a time for spiritual recovery and renewal.
7. **FRATERNITY AND ATTENTION TO THE POOR**

## Listening

**19.** Valdocco’s courtyards over the weeks of the Chapter have shown how the variety of faces, colours, languages and traditions are the clearest photograph of a Congregation with a worldwide countenance. In just a few days, the desire for communion and fraternity gave shape to “living and working together”, to the desire to know, meet and listen to each other deeply. We can say that this dimension of fraternity is in the DNA of our call and many confreres are exemplary in living and witnessing to the family spirit typical of our spirituality.

**20.** Our communities are home to many Salesians who are generous and courageous in living fraternity; some communities open themselves to new forms of life with young people by manifesting the desire for sharing and service, and witnessing the joy of being together. We find that such communities have a more lively, prophetic and attractive style and allow a sharing between Salesians and lay people in spirituality and mission. The interculturalism found in many of our houses is seen as a valuable and delicate gift that requires preparation and a constant attitude of openness and acceptance.

This hymn of gratitude also includes some notes that are out of tune with our Salesian community identity: lack of communion and of fraternal correction, routine, isolation of some in private spaces, resistance to change, neglect in relationships and lack of sharing, some emotional immaturity, little attention to situations of tired and suffering confreres, unease in transforming structures, lack of attention to consistency in number and quality; the exclusion or self-exclusion of some confreres due to age and health from working with young people, the impact of the digital world on community life.

Some confreres carry deep, unaddressed and unresolved “wounds” in their life story that cause suffering to the individual and the community. Generic accompaniment cannot be improvised for these individuals, and we often find ourselves unprepared in the face of such situations.

The consistency in number and quality of our communities is an essential element for regular religious life and the serious and timely management of cases of irregularities ensures the serene and orderly atmosphere of the house.

In this context of light and shadow, the key role of the rector as father of the community appears evident. He is at the centre of the community as “a brother among brothers, who recognise his responsibility and authority” (C 55). He plays a fundamental role in promoting fraternity and ensuring charismatic fidelity. It can be seen that the conditions in which many of our confreres called to the service of authority live and operate are not favourable, as they are often overloaded with commitments and responsibilities within and beyond the Work and are not always adequately prepared for their service. In some provinces it is clear that there is a difficulty in selecting and forming confreres for this service. On the other hand, ordinary participatory bodies and tools, such as “Animating and Governing the Community: The Ministry of the Salesian Rector”, the house council, the educative and pastoral community council, the community assembly, and other leadership bodies, are not always adequately valued and prepared.

**22.** Our fraternity opens us to the mission and leads us to the service of young people. In the *Report* *of the Rector Major emeritus to the* 29th *General Chapter* he wrote: “Despite the complexity of today’s world in terms of poverty that is not diminishing, the option for young people, and among them the poorest, is made concrete in a wide variety of services, projects and even works, all expressions of our charismatic identity in the name of Don Bosco” (A.F. Artime, *Report* *of the Rector Major to the 29th* *General Chapter*, p. 19) .

We recognise how working with the poor renews the community, brings us closer to God, and strengthens fraternal life. We read in the Rector Major’s *Report to the General Chapter*: “it is true that there are numerous confreres with great sensitivity. But we are not all like that. (...) we take care of the poor, but we are not ‘with the poor’ nor ‘are we poor’, and with little capacity for personal and institutional testimony. And where – alongside holy Salesians – there are ‘bourgeois’ Salesians who desire more social life than missionary life, attracted by careerism and with superficial attitudes, with distractions and various comforts and - what’s worse - everything is considered normal” (*Ibid.* p.20) This risks leaving only a few charismatic confreres in pastoral work with the poor and not the community; the option for the poor is implemented, but missionary audacity is lacking, falling back into a dangerous pastoral inertia.

## Interpretation

**23.** The first Salesian community was born in the oratory and from the oratory. This is the fundamental light that guides us in the interpretation of what we have observed about our fraternal life and openness to the poor. Born from the oratory experience of Valdocco, our communities have carried the stamp of the Preventive System from the beginning and have been characterised by the family spirit that animates “work and prayer, meals and recreation, meetings and other encounters” (C 51). For us Salesians, the family spirit is the concrete way to practise the fraternal love taught by Jesus and the most eloquent sign of the presence of God in our midst. Community life not only has a functional and organisational value, but belongs to the soul of Salesian life.

Before being the fruit of our efforts, fraternal life in community is a gift of God and a fruit of the Eucharist that we celebrate: “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (*1 Cor* 10:17). This statement of St Paul’s reminds us that the communion made possible by the Eucharist infinitely exceeds our best natural dispositions, and at the same time warns us that we cannot delude ourselves that we are united to Christ if we are divided from our brothers. Don Bosco was well aware of this in 1861 when he told cleric Albera, future Rector Major: “Dear Paolino, you will come cross some real beauties in your time; you will see everyone together at the same communion rail...together, and combining hate, sacraments, prayers and sins: all in one!” (A. CAVIGLIA, *Conferences on the Salesian Spirit.* Conference no. 10). These are bitter words which make us reflect on the risks of formality that leads the heart to harden and no longer perceive the contradictions in which it lives.

**24.** Convinced of the value of fraternity, we seek to once more become aware that convinced and generous participation in the life of the community is in no way an option we can dispense with. “To live and work together”, in fact, “is for us Salesians a fundamental requirement and a sure way of fulfilling our vocation” (C 49). There is no place in the Salesian community for individualism and for autonomous management of life and work. We realise, on the other hand, that in the face of the changes that have occurred in the structure of many communities (different relationship between community and work, changes in the generational balance, interculturalism), in order to guarantee the actual conditions of fraternal encounter it is necessary in some cases to rethink priorities. Without this community rethinking, in fact, we risk being so absorbed by commitments that we no longer find the time for dialogue, *lectio divina* and sharing the Word, evaluation, being freely together as Don Bosco knew how to do with the first confreres. If we really believe in fraternal life, we must have a healthy imagination and guard the space for relationships not only in the heart, but also in the calendar of the community.

**25.** All of this primarily concerns the figure of the rector, who is often overloaded with excessive tasks that hinder the main dimension of his service of animation and government: the accompaniment of his confreres and the care of their vocation. It is also about bodies that involve community engagement such as the house council and community assembly. These are structures codified in the Constitutions and Regulations, and it is important to take care of their quality so that they are not reduced to sterile meetings that generate disaffection. The final document of the Synod on synodality offers valuable insights for carrying out the processes of discernment for mission in a more mature and participatory way, as well as the articulation of decision-making processes and the care for transparency, accountability and evaluation (Francis - XVI General Ordinary Assembly Of The Synod Of Bishops, *For A Synodal Church: Communion, Participation And Mission*. *Final Document*, Part Three). While appreciating the testimony of the fraternal life of religious, the same document invites them not to be self-referential and to live with the other members of the People of God in an authentic exchange of gifts within the local Churches.

**26.** Fraternal life undoubtedly requires adequate relational maturity, which can never be considered a given, be taken for granted or acquired once and for all. In fact, without the commitment to keep moving forward, we all risk giving in to tiredness, withdrawal, disillusionment and closing in on ourselves. The presence of some wounded confreres, who over the years become more rigid and less willing to engage, constitutes a demanding challenge for many communities and a warning to pay attention to the forms of relational discomfort and affective immaturity that can manifest themselves from the earliest years of Salesian life. Sometimes relational difficulties refer to a crisis of faith and a weakening of prayer; other times they are rooted in family experiences that have not been reinterpreted during their formation and have repercussions on the relationship with authority, their confreres, with young people, with the female world. It is important that at least at the provincial level there are people prepared for the accompaniment required by more marked immaturity and that communities do not give up on helping those who are going through difficult situations. Fraternity is both a gift of God and a workshop of humanity: caring for fraternal life means encouraging balanced and harmonious human growth to maturity.

**27.** The family spirit that characterises us also has a profound apostolic and vocational value (cf. C 57). Fraternal communion is the most eloquent sign of God’s love, and we want to be signs and bearers of this for young people, especially the poorest (cf. C 2). Precisely for this reason it is important that the dedication to the most needy youngsters is not the exclusive commitment of some confreres, but is the expression of the entire community and the criterion for its choices. It can happen that the sole or excessive concern for the financial sustainability of the works ends up translating into choices that distance us from the poor and demonstrate little trust in Providence. However, Pope Francis has repeatedly reminded us that contact with the Eucharistic Body of the Lord in the Eucharist cannot be separated from contact with the body of our brothers and sisters in need. Only within this dual relationship – with the Lord and with poor young people – does the body of the Salesian community grow healthy, avoid spiritual worldliness and witness to the love of God, including in the places of greatest conflict and suffering. Thus it remains faithful to the initial inspiration of the Oratory from which it was born.

## Choice

**28.** In light of our listening and interpretation, we choose to

**REVITALISE FRATERNAL LIFE IN COMMUNITIES AND STRENGTHEN SERVICE TO THE POOREST YOUNG PEOPLE AS AN AUTHENTIC EXPRESSION OF THE SALESIAN CHARISM.**

This choice implies concrete commitments for the confreres, the communities, the provinces and the central government of the Congregation, which we exemplify below.

Let the Salesian

1. contribute to making the community a true family (cf. C 83) by fighting whatever tendencies against community he may discover in himself and by participating generously in the life and work of the community (cf. C 52);
2. avoid all forms of worldliness and comfortable lifestyle, seeking evangelical authenticity in his relationships and choices.

Let the Community

1. guarantee a healthy balance between work and fraternal life, preserving quality time for relationships and free sharing;
2. value the contribution of experience and wisdom of the elderly confreres and offer them appropriate attention and care;
3. pay particular attention to wounded and struggling confreres, creating a welcoming and non-judgemental environment; let the rector in particular become involved, where necessary, in offering specialist support;
4. adopt the Oratory criterion as a community style, sharing significant moments of daily life and growth with young people;
5. relaunch community day as an opportunity to celebrate the Eucharist together and experience moments of dialogue and sharing;
6. see to quality of the community assembly and council meetings as opportunities for synodality and shared responsibility;
7. develop the Community Plan in synodal style, in harmony with the local Salesian Educative and Pastoral Plan and the progress of the Educative and Pastoral Community, and provide for its periodic evaluation.

Let the Province

1. guarantee the consistency in number and quality that is necessary for an authentic fraternal life, ensuring as far as possible the complementarity between priest and brother confreres (cf. C 45);
2. take up the option for poorest young people as a fundamental criterion for community and provincial discernment;
3. offer formation opportunities on the emotional and relational dimension of the confreres and form people specifically prepared for such accompaniment;
4. promote a strong sense of internal solidarity, concretely supporting the communities most involved in frontier works;
5. implement processes for assessing the social impact of the works;
6. promote a simple and counter-current lifestyle;
7. promote the vital insertion of communities in the local Church, in the spirit of ecclesial synodality.

Let the Rector Major with his Council

1. continue the commitment to guaranteeing the consistency in number and quality of the communities;
2. promote frontier communities for abandoned young people;
3. promote reception of the Church’s synodal journey.
4. promote advocacy for poor young people in international institutions;
5. offer clear guidelines to prevent and counter a comfortable lifestyle;
6. develop a specific Salesian service for migrants and other young people in vulnerable situations.
7. **FORMATION OF THE SALESIAN**

## Listening

**29.** We recognise with gratitude that in recent years the Congregation has taken a significant step towards personalised accompaniment, emphasising that formation is not primarily about programmes and structures, but about people: it is a process that aims at the growth of the confreres in their passion for Christ and for the young. Not rigid schemes, but living relationships.

What emerged in our listening was the importance of reference figures who know how to be fathers, brothers and guides. Numerous testimonies have highlighted how many Salesians owe their vocational perseverance to the encounter with confreres who were teachers for them, capable of bringing out their talents and their vocation.

The recent establishment of the *Salesian School of accompaniment* promoted by the Formation Sector, and other current programmes for the formation of formators represent a valuable resource that is producing good results. The growing demand for participation in this initiative testifies to a greater sensitivity in the Congregation to understand formation in terms of continuous accompaniment.

However, we note that not all confreres allow themselves to be accompanied, showing personal closures and little awareness of their own needs. At the same time, we do not always find prepared and committed spiritual guides and rectors who prioritise accompaniment. In some situations support is not understood as a relationship that wishes the other well, with particular attention to the care and creation of bonds of trust, but is reduced to a formality.

**30.** God continues to bless the Congregation with new vocations. The Congregation is committed to ensuring the quality of initial formation and the preparation of formators and teachers, although much work still needs to be done to consolidate formation teams and study centres. In addition, internationalisation represents a prophetic path for the formation of confreres from different contexts.

Alongside these positive aspects, significant challenges remain. The difficulties encountered by some young confreres in the first steps of Salesian life raise questions about the quality of vocational animation in youth ministry and about the proposal offered to aspirantates and prenovitiates. A degree of distance has emerged between initial formation communities and apostolic communities, as well as between formation and mission. Initial formation sometimes appears disconnected from pastoral reality and from the world of the young, poorly inculturated, and some houses of formation are poorly integrated into the territory.

**31.** Much remains to be done to personalise the formation processes. Initial formation encounters obstacles in places where the formators do not know the confreres in depth and the structures do not favour personalised growth in freedom and responsibility. Adequate growth in freedom requires, including for formators, following a constant path of self-knowledge to prevent any forms of personal immaturity from coming into conflict with the accompaniment of those being formed. The challenge is to strengthen the “inner man”, that is, the attitude of continuous conversion, avoiding a sterile formality that does not help one mature.

During initial formation it is important to carefully accompany young confreres in apostolic experiences, so that they learn to develop deep motivations, reflect on the educative and pastoral criteria they are acting with, and achieve a personal synthesis between formation and mission.

Some confreres show “signs of weakness” right from the start of their formation regarding specific kinds of fragility and immaturity (time management, communication tools, distractedness...) that are not always adequately addressed. In addition, a plan for affective and sexual formation appears to be lacking in initial formation: the issue of affectivity is not always treated in a holistic and systematic way, with the risk that those affected are not adequately educated.

There is concern about the risk of making the confreres less responsible and distancing them from the reality of many of their peers and families. In some contexts, the formation process seems to encourage clericalism and the search for power, influenced by a socio-cultural environment that emphasises self-realisation and self-referentiality.

**32.** We acknowledge the good availability and great commitment of the confreres who serve in formation carried out with competence, generosity and total dedication. However, the need has emerged for greater care in identifying confreres who can be prepared to become quality formators through apostolic experience, the ability to accompany others, and being rooted in the Salesian charism.

Critically relevant to this is the fact that the confreres who have had the opportunity to specialise do not always work directly in the houses of formation and study centres. In some contexts, formation does not seem to be considered a priority, given the constant rotation of formators and the lack of stability of formation teams. The urgent need to clarify coordination of this area is stressed as being at the root of this difficulty.

Another tension still not sufficiently resolved concerns the balance between inculturation of the charism and the intercultural nature of formation processes at the level of the Congregation. This challenge requires strategic coordination by the Formation Sector to ensure greater charismatic identity in the different regions.

**33.** Ongoing formation has been enriched with quality proposals at local and provincial levels, with the involvement of Salesians and lay people. The various interprovincial initiatives carried out in the Regions and Conferences have contributed to this, together with the cultural and academic proposals of the various study centres and our academic institutions.

However, there is not always continuity between the initial formation phase and the ongoing one, the content and value of which are not always understood. We note a weakness in experiencing the ordinary moments of formation already laid down by the Constitutions (meditation, listening to the Word, monthly recollection, friendly talk with the rector) and the community day. The role of the rector as an animator is often weakened by his many commitments and the overload of responsibility. In a culture that exalts the autonomy of the individual, the meaning of the friendly talk with the rector is not always understood and this practice is often neglected.

The sometimes unresolved emotional issues affect the ability to effectively serve young people. Awareness of fragility and the need for healing within individuals and communities requires the ability to respond with empathy and courage, including with competent professional help.

**34.** We cannot ignore the painful cases of sexual abuse that have ruined entire lives, causing indelible wounds in the victims, and scandal and bewilderment in civil and ecclesiastical circles. Although at different paces, the provinces have reacted courageously and firmly, both in accompanying the victims and in developing guidelines for prevention. The determination to guarantee a safe environment for all those who frequent our works encourages us to intensify our formation efforts for our confreres, lay people and young people themselves, in order to avoid any kind of abuse, harassment or inappropriate behaviour.

## Interpretation

**35.** “Through the motherly intervention of Mary, the Holy Spirit raised up St John Bosco to contribute to the salvation of youth. The Spirit formed within him the heart of a father and teacher, capable of total self-giving” (C 1). These are the words with which the first article of our Constitutions presents God’s action in the life of Don Bosco and in the foundation of our Congregation. Don Bosco did not become the father and teacher of young people alone, but it is the Holy Spirit who formed his heart; and this did not happen only in his seminary years but throughout his life. This perspective, so clearly expressed at the beginning of our Rule of Life, is the point of reference for understanding our formation journey and for interpreting and evaluating what we have recognised through listening. Not surprisingly, the same article ends by passing from the action of the Spirit in Don Bosco to the action of the Spirit in us: “From this active presence of the Holy Spirit we draw strength for our fidelity and support for our hope” (C 1). Commitment to formation, therefore, is nothing more than the continuous correspondence to the Lord’s call. In fact, Article 96 of the Constitutions presents it as follows: “We respond to this call by committing ourselves to an adequate and ongoing formation for which the Lord daily gives us his grace.”

If we leave this vocational perspective aside, formation is misunderstood as a more or less successful preparatory stage which then leaves room for real Salesian life. This is probably the profound reason for the resistance or devaluation of personal accompaniment by many confreres. Having made perpetual profession or received priestly ordination, they think they have reached a goal that no longer requires inner discernment and now makes them autonomous and independent. This mentality is very different from the attitude of Don Bosco, who after becoming a priest continued to look to Fr Cafasso, to the *Convitto ecclesiastico* and to his pastoral activities for the enlightened guidance that would help him discern the voice of the Spirit. We cannot help but wonder why the mentality of many of our confreres is so far removed from that of our Father.

**36.** To overcome this mentality which sharply divides times of formation and times of mission, we have been talking about “formation in mission” for some years. Properly understood, this formula indicates that the mission entrusted to us “sets the tenor” (cf. C 3.) for the entire formation programme, which is aimed at forming an educator and pastor of young people, and that in our encounters with young people we are called to learn in a concrete way the exercise of pastoral charity and the grace of unity that allows us to encounter God in them and through them. Formation in mission is therefore an element that characterises the entire formation path, not just the initial phase. It is not enough to be among young people with kindness and a philanthropic disposition, but to contemplate the presence of Christ acting in them and among them. What young John saw in the dream when he was nine years old, contemplating Jesus and Mary in a courtyard, in the midst of young people in need of help, is what we must also learn to see in the daily exercise of apostolic charity. And since this aptitude does not develop automatically, we all need spiritual and pastoral accompaniment. The Virgin Mary, from that dream onwards, was for John the teacher who accompanied him on his vocational journey. Under her guidance he learned to obey the Lord with a total “Here I am”. We too, following her example, “entrust ourselves to her, the lowly servant in whom the Lord has done great things, that we may become witnesses to the young of her Son’s boundless love” (C 8). Only in this way will we achieve an authentic inner synthesis and true charismatic identification.

**37.** Naturally, we must be introduced to this above all during the years of initial formation through an adequate pedagogy which is attentive to the journey of each person and duly contextualised within his cultural horizons. This is what we mean by “personalising formation”. This term has sometimes been misunderstood as if it favoured the individualistic approach of self-fulfilment; instead it aims to involve the person in the depth of his convictions and to promote a free and responsible response to God's call.

In other words, we cannot be satisfied with the formal correctness of behaviours that can be observed from the outside, but we must help each confrere to reread his own experience, to recognise the authentic motivations that guide his daily choices in the light of the Word of God, and to grow in true docility to the action of the Spirit. Without personalised accompaniment, someone can go through all the stages of initial formation without reaching a true inner synthesis which resists the trials of life and feeds zeal for the mission.

Therefore, it is not enough to offer solid content in formation but it is also necessary to provide concrete tools for the personal journey This concerns all areas of Salesian life, but in a particular way that of affective and sexual development, in order to live the evangelical counsel of chastity in a more joyful and conscious way. This is a dimension that “touches some of the deepest drives of human nature” (C 82) and that is particularly challenged by the changes in affective culture. It is therefore urgent for the Congregation to better prepare formators to accompany this dimension of personal growth and to reflect on the possibility of offering specific tools and paths.

**38.** The formation of formators has been a challenge for the Congregation for many years. Although it has already been indicated several times as a priority, we recognise that despite the steps taken, an adequate investment in formation has not yet been made. A first difficulty depends on the lack of clarity in the assignment of coordination tasks in this area. The increasingly interprovincial nature of initial formation houses requires collaboration in sending confreres for the role of formators and teachers. This often encounters resistance, delays and uncertainties. The structure of the *Curatorium* itself, at times, does not function well. It is therefore really urgent to define a clear and well-coordinated system that will allow us to begin a new season in this field.

### **Choice**

**39**. In the light of our listening and interpretation, we choose to

**RENEW THE FORMATION PROCESSES, TAKING CARE OF ACCOMPANIMENT AND FORMATION IN THE MISSION.**

This choice implies concrete commitments for the confreres, the communities, the provinces and the central government of the Congregation, which we exemplify below.

Let Initial Formation Communities

1. encourage personalisation of the formation process, helping people to recognise the action of the Spirit in their growth process through spiritual and pastoral accompaniment;
2. not limit themselves to proposing content, but offer tools for developing the personal project of life, growth in prayer, *lectio divina* and meditation;
3. propose specific courses on the subject of affective maturity, including with the help of experts;
4. help in living critically, ethically and creatively in digital culture;
5. provide for the presence of suitable female figures in formation processes;
6. integrate formation in the protection of minors and vulnerable people (*safeguarding*) through specific protocols;
7. promote the culture of dialogue as a formative methodology and ensure the formation of young confreres to leadership in a synodal style;
8. be open to the local area and to local youth realities and overcome the distance between formation and mission, constantly integrating significant pastoral experiences that have been accompanied and re-developed;
9. prevent the risk of seeking a comfortable lifestyle and clericalism, educating to evangelical simplicity and the culture of work.

Let the Province

1. guarantee consistent, qualified and quality formation teams;
2. ensure that the brothers have adequate formation and professional qualifications; resolutely promote the vocation of the Salesian brother through specific strategies of vocational proposal and appreciation of his unique contribution;
3. promote shared formation of Salesians and lay people;
4. organise formation for rectors in a synodal style;
5. provide for confreres between 40 and 50 years of age so they may experience a suitable time of spiritual and pastoral renewal;
6. offer psychological support to confreres who need it and develop formation programmes to deal with relational and affective challenges;
7. critically review the formation structures to ensure an environment that really encourages the integral growth of the person;
8. analyse the causes of vocational abandonment and critically rethink the vocational animation and initial formation processes to strengthen charismatic identity;
9. see to drafting, implementing and evaluating the “Guidelines for the protection of minors and vulnerable persons” to prevent cases of abuse.

Let the Formation Sector

1. coordinate tasks and roles in the *Curatorium* with the Regional Councillors and include them in the new *Ratio*;
2. expand the school of accompaniment in collaboration with the regional centres and prepare formators for spiritual and pastoral accompaniment;
3. develop a formation plan for formators that integrates Salesian tradition and the challenges of the contemporary world;
4. promote the formation of provincials for leadership in a synodal style;
5. study the possibilities and contents of the proposal for spiritual and pastoral renewal for confreres between 40 and 50 years of age;
6. develop guidelines for formation on the protection of minors and vulnerable persons (*safeguarding)* for initial formation houses, with help from the Sectors;
7. develop guidelines for an adequately contextualised formation in the different regions, respecting local cultures while maintaining charismatic unity, and ensure continuity between the different formation phases;
8. develop specific tools for education in affectivity and sexuality, adequately forming formators in this area.

**CORE AREA 2**

**SALESIANS, SALESIAN FAMILY AND LAY PEOPLE TOGETHER “WITH” AND “FOR” YOUNG PEOPLE**

1. **SHARING SPIRITUALITY AND MISSION IN THE EPC**

## Listening

**40**. Today, our mission at the service of young people bears the essential imprint of collaboration between Salesians and lay people. Many of our works, in fact, would not exist without this communion and sharing that is configured as an authentic sign of the times. We recognise that in many provinces the educative and pastoral community has become a living and consolidated reality, an authentic space for growth where the sharing of life, faith, passion for Christ according to the spirit of Don Bosco and love for young people flourish. The lay people who are on this journey with us truly share responsibility, and are an integral and vital part of the new subject of the mission made up of Salesians, lay people and young people together in a synergy that enriches everyone and gives new vigour to the charism.

**41.** The figure of Don Bosco and our charism maintain their special attraction intact and are capable of giving rise to fondness for and adherence to the Salesian mission. In different parts of the world, we witness a fruitful integration between the Salesian charism and local cultures, often thanks to the mediation of lay people deeply identified with the mission of educating and evangelising in the style of the Preventive System. The Salesian charism’s power to attract has generated significant experiences of collaboration, including with people of other religious confessions and non-believers who recognise a heritage of values in our educational method that contribute to the good of young people and that precisely for this reason they feel they share.

**42.** A careful look at reality, however, also reveals some shadows that we cannot ignore, together with the lights. In some communities, a degree of explicit resistance remains in delegating real responsibilities to the laity, with the risk of impoverishing life and the mission. Trust and openness are necessary to overcome hesitation in fully integrating the laity into decision-making and leadership roles, while respecting the specific role of the Salesian Rector of the community.

We must also note that the Congregation’s magisterium on the subject of the educative and pastoral community is not always known, and that questions continue to be raised even regarding matters that have already received precise answers and guidelines. This is undoubtedly linked to the diversity of local situations and the pace of implementation of the Congregation’s choices, but perhaps also to inadequate processes of accompaniment of provinces in assimilating the guidelines of the General Chapters.

**43**. There is still some ambiguity in some regions around the concept of “lay” in our Salesian context.. When we speak of “lay people” or the laity, in a proper sense we are referring to the “*Christifideles laici*” or the vast majority of the members of the people of God: men and women who have been reborn to new life through Baptism and follow the Lord as members of the ecclesial community. In a broader sense, however, we use this term to refer also to other people who collaborate with us at various levels, often recognising themselves in the educational style that Don Bosco has passed on to us.

The lay landscape in the Salesian context is therefore extremely varied and requires differentiated attention: there are volunteers and hired employees, adults with long experience and young people at the beginning of their journey, members of the Salesian Family and friends of Don Bosco, Catholics and Christians of different confessions, people of other religions or without any defined religious affiliation. Starting from this complexity, which reflects the richness of our presence in the world, we see three levels of involvement emerging that outline a possible path of growth in the shared mission: professional collaboration, (volunteers and employees working in our Works) shared educational responsibility (volunteers and employees who consciously choose to adhere to the educative and pastoral project), and deep sharing of Salesian spirituality (those who, due to their personal vocation, are part of the animating nucleus of the EPC or the Salesian Family). This distinction does not express a hierarchy of the value individuals have, but rather different degrees of identification with the charism, which must be recognised and respected.

**44** . Formation in the journey of “communion and sharing in the mission and spirit of Don Bosco” (GC24) is not an optional extra but the beating heart of a shared mission that seeks to be authentic and lasting. Many Provinces and Regions have initiated systematic and quality formation programmes aimed at lay people as well as Salesians and lay people together, creating valuable opportunities for exchange and mutual enrichment. These initiatives, although qualitatively valid and well-structured, need further strengthening and continuity to become an integral part of our organisational culture.

In several contexts, unfortunately, formation is still insufficient or fragmented, preventing a true rooting of the charism beyond the group of consecrated Salesians. Among the main difficulties we find: a prevalent attention to the operational aspect, to the detriment of proposals of apostolic spirituality; an inadequate and unsystematic handing on of the Salesian charism to the laity; the scarcity of human and economic resources destined for quality formation; the high turnover of lay personnel which makes it difficult to build continuous and effective paths. It should also be honestly noted that sometimes the confreres themselves are not adequately prepared for collaboration with the laity, not having received the necessary tools during initial formation for them to value this essential aspect of contemporary mission. Shared formation must go beyond programmes: it is a journey of shared discipleship that requires a deep personal commitment on the part of both Salesians and lay people.

**45.** Within the reflection on the educative and pastoral community, the question of the sustainability of the works and financial transparency also emerges. The involvement of well-formed and competent lay people in the financial management of the works has brought greater professionalism, rigour and transparency, encouraging the development of a planning mentality and accountability that finds concrete and operational expression in the planning and development offices in the provinces. This process has contributed in many contexts to strengthening the financial foundations of our presences, ensuring continuity even in times of uncertainty.

It should be gratefully recognised and emphasised that despite the recent and widespread global financial difficulties, Salesian Provinces have faithfully maintained their commitment to the poorest, often seeing the support of Providence develop in a surprising way through benefactors and public contributions, a sign that fidelity to the charism attracts blessings, including material ones.

**46.** In some geographical and social contexts, it is increasingly difficult to compete financially with other public and private organisations, thus losing valuable employees who are qualified and identified with our charism. This problem appears to be particularly acute in some specialist sectors and in more advanced economies. The differences in this matter, related to the geographical, cultural and ecclesial context and to the numerical presence of the Salesians, are notable.

Significant organisational issues emerge that deserve particular attention: the nature and tasks of the House Council (C 178) called to effectively support the entire mission in complex contexts; relationships between the House Council and the educative and pastoral community council that are not always clear and well defined, with consequent confusion of roles and responsibilities; and the absence, in some contexts, of a planning and participatory mentality that is absolutely necessary for truly shared responsibility.

It is essential to grow in a culture of responsibility and transparency at all levels, especially in a historical time marked by change, growing distrust of ecclesial institutions in some contexts, and the risk of losing the support of benefactors, with a consequent danger for the future sustainability of our educational projects, especially those aimed at the poorest.

## Interpretation

**47.** To interpret and evaluate the journey made in the provinces we find a solid and essential reference in the Document of General Chapter 24 which identified the solid foundations on which the sharing of the charism with the laity is based on Don Bosco’s experience and on the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council.

As Article 5 of the Constitutions tells us “Don Bosco inspired the start of a vast movement of persons who in different ways work for the salvation of the young.” Indeed, our father and founder involved many lay people in his mission to the young and ordinary folk from the beginning, convinced as he was that we had to join forces to help the most needy children and help them discover the love of God. The first to be involved were the young people themselves, whom Don Bosco was able to transform into apostles of their companions and true protagonists of Oratory life.

At the same time, the 24th General Chapter took up the ecclesiological inspiration of the Second Vatican Council with courage and conviction, recognising the missionary task entrusted to every baptised person, the communal nature of the people of God and the reciprocity between the different vocations in the Church. The clear vision of the Council today is enriched by the magisterium offered by Pope Francis in his Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* and by the contribution of the recent Synod “For A synodal Church: communion, participation, mission”, which sought to prolong the inspiration of the Second Vatican Council and relaunch its prophetic force. Synodality is, in this sense, the translation of the Council into a “style” of life and action (*modus vivendi et operandi*) that requires conversion in relationships, implementation of processes and renewal of structures.

**48.** The synodal perspective leads us to recognise first of all the need to convert our relationships. Our works are not companies based on functional relationships and power struggles, but communities of faith that thrive on mutual acceptance, deep sharing and attention to the poorest of the poor. It is therefore essential to rediscover the “spiritual savour” (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* 268) of journeying together, in other words the “mysticism” of fraternity that Pope Francis has so often reminded us of. The educative and pastoral community is alive when it experiences the new relationships generated by the gospel. Young people, especially the most wounded ones, are in immense need of such relationships.

When relationships are authentic it becomes possible to experience real participatory and synodal processes within the educative and pastoral community, the most important of which is “ecclesial discernment for mission”. This consists in the shared search for God’s will, learning to read the challenges we face and the steps we are called to take in the light of his Word. The Synodal Document offers valuable indications in this regard, which are not limited to indicating methodological steps, but propose a true spirituality to be lived together in docility to the action of the Spirit. Before organising activities and distributing assignments, we must listen to the Lord together: this is the best attitude to develop an educative and pastoral project that truly stems from the apostolic passion of the *Da mihi animas*.

Synodal-style community discernment is also the lever for improving the functioning of participatory organisations and for recognising at a local level the structural changes that are necessary to respond to the needs of today’s young people courageously and creatively. The resignification of our presences, which is the profound meaning of reshaping, cannot in fact take place around the table, but finds the most appropriate place to be prophetic and generative in the discernment of the educative and pastoral community .

**49.** It is not possible to share spirituality and mission without also sharing formation. Shared formation between Salesians and lay people is therefore a priority into which resources and energy must be invested. The final document of the Synod insisted on “the need for a common and shared formation, in which men and women, laity, consecrated persons, ordained ministers and candidates for ordained ministry participate together, thus enabling them to grow together in knowledge and mutual esteem and in the ability to collaborate”, recalling that the formation needed must be “integral, ongoing and shared. Such formation must aim not only at acquiring theoretical knowledge but also at promoting the capacity for openness and encounter, sharing and collaboration, reflection and discernment in common. Formation must consequently engage all the dimensions of the human person (intellectual, affective, relational and spiritual) and include concrete experiences that are appropriately accompanied” (Francis - XVI General Ordinary Assembly Of The Synod Of Bishops, *For A Synodal Church: Communion, Participation And Mission*. *Final Document*, 143).

Of course for believers, formation is not purely the development of their talents but is correspondence to the love of God who with his Spirit has us share in the life of the Risen Lord. As Pope Francis wrote: “The full extent of our formation is our conformation to Christ […]: it does not have to do with an abstract mental process, but with becoming Him” (Francis, Apostolic Letter *Desiderio desideravi* 41). Precisely for this reason, the fundamental experience from which the educative and pastoral community – and above all the animating nucleus – draws formation is the celebration of the Eucharist: in it the gift of communion and mission are continuously renewed and nothing can replace its effectiveness.

To this sacramental root are added reflection, study, dialogue, sharing on Don Bosco, the Salesian charism and the daily lived educative and pastoral experience. Experience confirms that it is very positive to entrust the organisation of the different formation initiatives to mixed teams made up of Salesians, lay people and members of the Salesian Family, so that it does not turn out to be unidirectional and integrates different skills and approaches. Precisely for this reason, the initial formation of the confreres must already include experiences shared with the laity, proportionate to the objectives of the individual stages of maturation, and encourage the specific contribution that they can give to healthy vocational growth.

**50.** Also, from the point of view of the financial sustainability of the works, the contribution of lay professionals who identify strongly with the charism is often indispensable. Trust in Providence, which Don Bosco witnessed to us in a heroic way, and the clear destination of our goods for the service of the poor, are fundamental criteria to guide our action in this area. In the face of increasingly complex regulations, the use of the specific expertise of experts in the sector is a gesture of responsibility that cannot be avoided. Insufficient preparation and poor planning can compromise the service to the poor and cause difficulties for our institutions. Specialist competence, however, does not exempt one from evaluations that, due to their profound inspiration, must be evangelical and charismatic. Hence the need for transparency, accountability and evaluation of financial management, as well as education in a simple lifestyle and shared responsibility.

## Choice

**51**. In the light of our listening and interpretation, we choose to

**SHARE SPIRITUALITY, MISSION AND FORMATION WITH LAY PEOPLE AND MEMBERS OF THE SALESIAN FAMILY IN EVERY EDUCATIVE AND PASTORAL COMMUNITY.**

This choice implies concrete commitments for the confreres, the communities, the provinces and the central government of the Congregation, which we exemplify below.

### Let the Community

1. make the Educative and Pastoral Community Council operational as a body for discernment, formation and shared responsibility and, where it does not exist, establish it;
2. draw up a plan for shared formation of Salesians and lay people that provides for the sharing of life and prayer and educative and pastoral reflection;
3. promote a culture of simplicity, financial transparency and active involvement of the laity in financial management, seeking new and diversified sources of funding.
4. see to the preparation of budgets and financial statements and the financial soundness of the work, with the guidance of Salesian or lay administrators and external consultants, ensuring transparency and accountability.

### Let the Province

1. increase the commitment to a shared mission among members of the Salesian Family in the territory
2. prepare a systematic and differentiated plan for the qualification of lay people the Salesian charism;
3. place value on competent professionals in administration and finance;
4. identify concrete and up-to-date ways for the research and accompaniment of benefactors;
5. establish a committee for the accompaniment of the provincial and his council for the regular evaluation of resources and financial management and adopt ethical financial strategies by diversifying fundraising and strengthening accountability.

### Let the Rector Major with his Council

1. offer indications to refer appropriately and uniquely to the different types of lay people involved in various ways in our works;
2. offer guidelines and appropriate tools, through the Formation and Youth Ministry Sectors, for shared Salesian and lay formation, and involve the UPS and other formation centres in the organisation of suitable courses;
3. promote the reception of the final document of the Synod on Synodality in the Congregation and in the Salesian Family;
4. **EDUCATING AND EVANGELISING**

## Listening

**52.** Don Bosco was not afraid to display his priestly identity any time and any where, yet he practised his priesthood on behalf of young people with a deep focus on education. He heard confessions every morning, celebrated the Eucharist with deep faith, preached, but at the same time he walked the streets of Turin in search of young workers to help, opened schools and workshops, published booklets for popular education, wrote the treatise on the Preventive System for the education of the young. Following him, our Salesian vocation is deeply characterised by the inseparable combination of education and evangelisation. They are two sides of the same coin, well summarised by the well-chosen expression, “we educate by evangelising and we evangelise by educating”.

With gratitude we note that many confreres, in the challenges of the contemporary context, continue to witness to this dual dimension of our charism both passionately and creatively. The contexts in which we work are not all the same: some are secularised, others multi-religious, and others still are predominantly atheistic. This plurality of situations challenges us to find different ways to evangelise, to seize the specific opportunities offered by each environment and to maintain the unity of our mission in such a variety of contexts.

**53.** The youth world, therefore, is very varied. Although globalisation tends to standardise lifestyles, each context has its own specific characteristics. However, one trait unites them: all young people carry in their hearts a deep – often silent – question about the meaning of life. In a more or less conscious way they ask themselves about their future, about what matters to them, about what will make them happy. The technology that fascinates them, the continuous flow of information, the web of relationships and connections in which they are immersed, are their world, one which seems to ignore or be indifferent to the proclamation of the faith. The number of family models has increased and the relationships that should give them warmth and security often become a place of conflict rather than affection.

Yet, despite everything, we are convinced as Don Bosco was that “in every young person there is a point accessible to good”. The desire for God remains a fundamental need of the human heart, not satisfied with living on bread alone. We believe that young people are open to the novelty of the gospel if it is presented in a language that is able to reach their heart. But above all we are convinced that they do not remain insensitive to the testimony of those who have touched the Word of life with their own hands (cf. *1 Jn* 1:1) and were transformed.

In this varied panorama of lights and shadows, of expectations and hopes, popular piety continues to be a significant space in which many young people live their faith. The attractiveness of places of prayer, journeys of faith and youth pilgrimages, the strong commitment to ecology, volunteering in its various forms, tell us that the fire is not extinguished, but waits to be revived and nourished.

**54.** As Salesians we recognise that our mission requires a constant balance between commitment to education and a passion for evangelisation. The threefold formula “reason, religion and loving-kindness” is not just a slogan but a constant source of inspiration that helps us keep in mind the lofty goal of youthful holiness and the gradual nature of the journey, the powerful educational resources of the Sacraments and the Word of God, and the pedagogy of the playground and the street that leads us to encounter young people “at their present stage of freedom” (C. 38).

This vital synthesis is not always present in the hearts of all our confreres and the members of our educative and pastoral communities. Those who observe us point out – not without reason – that we risk reducing our mission to the management of educational or social welfare activities. Youth ministry runs the risk of becoming the management of services for young people. To evangelise, as our tradition reminds us, is to accompany people along a journey of faith in the Risen Lord, offering procedures and processes.

We gratefully acknowledge the strengths of our educational and pastoral presence. We are valued as good educators in the Church and a reference point for other ecclesial institutions. In some circumstances we are particularly proactive and well-prepared in terms of education. The acceptance of our proposals of faith is for us a sign of hope in a world that is often indifferent or hostile.

Lay people are appreciated and are actively involved in evangelisation, both directly and indirectly, through the evangelical witness of their lives. Many educators, Salesians, lay people and members of the Salesian Family continue to feel passion for this vocation and are able to see challenges as opportunities for growth and renewal.

**55.** The Christian proposal is at the centre of our pastoral efforts and translates into a variety of initiatives that differ according to the contexts and territories. Many young people encounter the Lord Jesus in our houses and experience the joy of faith and belonging to a community. Not a few collaborate with us in the animation of other young people, especially in summer experiences, in missionary service and charitable activity. They feel that Don Bosco and Salesian youth spirituality offer them an inspiration for growth and a guide for their future. Many adults who have attended our works remember with joy and gratitude the education they received and try to put its teachings into practice in everyday life.

However, we recognise that sometimes our commitment fails to translate into systematic paths of faith education. The evangelising approach sometimes appears to be timid and incapable of reaching the hearts of young people in depth. In some regions, while trying out new catechesis proposals for Christian initiation, we note, sadly, the estrangement of many adolescents from the ecclesial community.

Management and organisation of many activities sometimes risk distancing us from young people and from direct contact with them, making us lose sight of the centrality of the educational relationship that is the basis of the Preventive System. Valfré’s question, the past pupil of the Oratory in the dream contained in the letter from Rome in 1884, still resonates today: “where are the Salesians?”

## Interpretation

**56.** Our Constitutions clearly identify the “lasting criterion for discernment and renewal in all our activities and works”, finding it once again in the pastoral experience of the first oratory, “ that was for the youngsters a home that welcomed, a parish that evangelized, a school that prepared them for life, and a playground where friends could meet and enjoy themselves” (C 40). In Don Bosco’s experience with the first boys in Valdocco, the intertwining of education and evangelisation presents itself as a happy original synthesis which we call the Preventive System.

According to this inspiration, the commitment to education is undertaken as an expression of the love of God that accompanies each young person in their growth, and the proclamation of the gospel is realised with attention to the pedagogical gradual nature of the stages, as well as to the language of young people. Article 38 of the Constitutions reminds us of this when it states: “Imitating God’s patience, we encounter the young at their present stage of freedom. We accompany them, so that they develop solid convictions and gradually assume responsibility for the delicate process of their growth as human beings and in the faith.”

The relationship between education and evangelisation is so central to us that the Congregation has reflected on it several times in order to remain faithful to the mission that the Lord entrusted to Don Bosco and to take up the challenges posed by changing times and contexts. The 26th General Chapter, for example, recalled attention to “safeguard[ing] both the proclamation in its entirety and the gradual way in which it is offered”, convinced that “evangelisation offers education a model of fully developed humanity and that education, when it succeeds in touching the heart of the young and developing the religious meaning of existence, encourages and accompanies the process of evangelisation” (GC26, no. 25). The Youth Ministry “Frame of Reference” offers an overall view of the problem and valuable practical advice.

**57.** Charismatic references and reflection on them, therefore, are not lacking. Indeed, they are rich, abundant and up-to-date. The challenge is to take them up courageously and creatively by implementing gradual and differentiated paths and avoiding the risk of multiplying activities and events that do not always affect the real lives of young people. The different regions in which we operate have great differences in culture, economy, social structure, family experience, inter-generational relationships, but all young people are united by the desire to be heard in the uniqueness of their history and accompanied to open up to a promising future.

This naturally requires pedagogical and pastoral competence which must be constantly updated in the confreres and those who share responsibility for the mission. It also requires familiarity with young people, which is acquired only by being among them and sharing their world. The logic of the incarnation urges us to start from the daily reality of their lives and interpret it with an educational approach and pastoral wisdom. When they share with us their search for happiness or their discomfort, they manifest, often without knowing it, a need for salvation that we must be able to intercept. In the depths of the human soul, an educator and pastor recognises the action of the Spirit who, with sighs too deep for words, leads each conscience to open itself to truth and love.

We must not forget that in the deepest desires of young people, in their sensitivity for peace, justice, ecology, the dignity of every person, there is also a prophecy that we must grasp. Young people who share the faith and are passionate about Don Bosco often manifest an enthusiasm from which we have much to learn: they themselves evangelise us, showing us the young face of the Church which reflects God’s eternal youth.

**58.** Some of the great anthropological questions of today, in particular, require our attention, because they constitute a real challenge for our educative and pastoral proposal. We are thinking in particular of the transformations in emotional and sexual behaviour which concern a very sensitive and delicate area in a person’s growth and require new skills to welcome and delicately accompany each individual. We are thinking about digital culture and the way it changes learning processes, the perception of time, space, the body, interpersonal relationships and ultimately the whole way of thinking and being in the world. Finally, we are thinking about migration, often caused by conflict and injustice, which exposes many young people to insecurity and the need to live by their wits, damaging their dignity. In the face of these situations, we understand with even greater awareness that we cannot proclaim the gospel of the Lord without taking care of the pressing educational needs of young people and that we cannot point them to a reliable hope without pointing to the light of Love that comes from God and that will find its fullness in heaven. As Don Bosco said, we want to form “good Christians, upright citizens and one day fortunate inhabitants of heaven” (*The Companion of Youth* , 1847, p. 7).

**59.** In some strongly secularised contexts, or ones marked by distrust of the ecclesial institution, there is a degree of difficulty in proclaiming the faith and there is a risk of giving up on a joyful and proactive transmission of the light of the gospel. In other situations, however, the teaching of Jesus is joyfully welcomed as a word that gives hope to the poor and the little ones, renews society and opens up to the ultimate meaning of existence. Popular piety, especially Marian piety, is an extraordinary resource in many regions for the handing on of the faith embodied in the context of a people’s sensitivity. Where an explicit proclamation of Jesus Christ is not possible, our presence as Christian educators takes on a prophetic significance and sows the seed of the Word of God through the testimony of our life and the exercise of charity. Some communities operate in contexts where Christians find not only obstacles, but persecution: they demonstrate that nothing can prevent passionate witness for Christ and his gospel. The commitment to dialogue between religions and the building of a true brotherhood among peoples is, according to the current teaching of the Church, part of the Christian mission. In any case, a heart that is passionate about Christ is not ashamed to talk about him and to share the beauty of having encountered him. As Pope Francis wrote: “To be able to speak of Christ, by witness or by word, in such a way that others seek to love him, is the greatest desire of every missionary of souls. This dynamism of love has nothing to do with proselytism; the words of a lover do not disturb others, they do not make demands or oblige, they only lead others to marvel at such love. With immense respect for their freedom and dignity, the lover simply waits for them to inquire about the love that has filled his or her life with such great joy” (Francis, *Dilexit nos*, 210).

## Choice

 **60.** In light of our listening and interpretation, we choose to

**OFFER GRADUAL AND SYSTEMATIC PROGRAMMES OF FAITH EDUCATION AND RENEW THE PRACTICE OF THE PREVENTIVE SYSTEM ENSURING SAFE SETTINGS EVERYWHERE.**

This choice implies concrete commitments for the confreres, the communities, the provinces and the central government of the Congregation, which we exemplify below.

### Let the Educative and Pastoral Community

1. promote gradual and systematic programmes of education in the faith and boldly see to the first proclamation of the gospel;
2. promote shared planning with young people, offering them opportunities for active participation and responsibility in educative and pastoral planning, according to the method of synodality.

### Let the Province

1. see to establishing a school of pedagogical, spiritual and charismatic formation for Salesians, members of the Salesian Family and lay people so they can know and live the combination of Evangelisation and Education;
2. develop missionary communities in the digital world, mad up of young people, lay people and Salesians who can create educational and evangelising content;
3. accompany educative and pastoral communities in acquiring a synodal style, making use of conversation in the Spirit and community discernment.
4. promote vocations to Salesian consecrated life.

### Let the Rector Major with his Council

1. promote a reflection on the combination of education and evangelisation that takes into account the diversity of geographical, cultural and multi-religious contexts;
2. enable working by project rather than by Sectors in the General Council;
3. promote research and studies to explore and relaunch the preventive system as a spirituality and integral method of education and evangelisation
4. promote the revision and updating of texts on Salesian youth spirituality, making the missionary dimension and the value of accompaniment more explicit.
5. **NEW EXPRESSIONS OF THE CHARISM**

## Listening

**61.** The life of the Congregation is replete with experiences that represent new expressions of the charism. Many presences are authentic places of salvation for poor and marginalised young people. The provinces respond sensitively to the needs of the poorest: migrants, refugees, street children and those who are discriminated against. In many Salesian houses there are exemplary experiences of reception, for example through the establishing of migrant desks that coordinate multiple solidarity initiatives. Collaboration with government and non-government organisations has allowed us to share projects and build networks to help minors in precarious circumstances.

As educators and evangelisers we are aware of the new challenges that young people pose to us: the lack of reference points, loneliness and isolation, the emergence of psycho-affective fragility, the spread of dependencies of various kinds, an increase in the phenomenon of NEETs (*Not in Education, Employment or Training*), the lack of an education in citizenship and political thinking in a radicalised world, the presence of ideologies that create disorientation.

**62.** There are promising experiences of renewal of community life in the Congregation, characterised by greater sharing with young people. Some of them come to live in our houses, being involved in the mission, fraternal life and prayer with us. It would be important to reflect on these experiences, evaluate their impact and recognise how they can enrich our lives without remaining sporadic and occasional.

In the history of our provinces there have been confreres who have initiated innovative pastoral initiatives, but it has not always been possible to achieve their integration into the overall provincial plan to ensure their continuity. When the community is able to make room for new intuitions, in humble dialogue and thoughtful discernment, we experience the fact that pastoral renewal is possible and fruitful.

**63.** We recognise the urgent need to develop a more systematic and critical approach to digital culture, which has a profound impact on worldviews and relationships. Although the digital world and the development of artificial intelligence have great potential for progress, it also raises questions of an anthropological and ethical nature and urges us to deeply reflect on education. In addition to offering much potential for growth, it can also cause harm and injury, such as bullying, misinformation, sexual exploitation and addiction. Our confreres in initial formation are now “born digital”: if accompanied and wisely formed they can help the entire Congregation to open up to using new technologies for the mission. There are already positive experiences of digital communities in the Congregation, but not a few educators recognise that they do not have adequate formation and use digital spaces only for information purposes.

**64.** Integral ecology emerges as a privileged field of educational and pastoral work. Pope Francis has made this issue a consistent part of his magisterium: his voice challenges us to be more prompt in listening to the cry of the earth and of the poor, and in promoting an authentic ecological spirituality that recognises creation as a gift from God and teaches us to have a contemplative outlook and a simple lifestyle.

Attention to environmental issues is growing in our educative and pastoral communities,, but an integral and systematic plan is often lacking; for this reason, initiatives risk being short-lived and do not affect the change of mentality. We appreciate the various proposals for formation in this area already to be found in the Congregation but we recognise the need to better understand the paradigm shift that the assumption of integral ecology entails.

**65.** The socio-political dimension of Salesian education needs to be revitalised. Our presence has grown in the social, political and ecclesial arenas where decisions that influence the lives of young people are made through our representatives in international institutions and bodies. However, we are not yet sufficiently committed to helping young people in socio-political commitment, offering them an adequate formation according to the social doctrine of the Church.

## Interpretation

**66.** The experiences of sharing life with young people, in addition to reflecting on what Don Bosco did in Valdocco, also constitute a response to the request made in the Synod for young people to offer “a time destined for the maturation of adult Christian life.” This proposal should be built around at least three indispensable cornerstones: “an experience of fraternal life shared with adult formators that is essential, simple and respectful of the common home; a firm apostolic programme for living together; an offer of spirituality rooted in prayer and sacramental life” (XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *Young People, The Faith And Vocational Discernment*, *Final Document* 161).

**67.** Faced with the uncontrolled activity of the human being that risks destroying nature, “The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change.” (Francis, *Laudato Si’* 13). The cry expressed in the Encyclical *Laudato Si’* challenges us as educators and pastors of young people. If, in the 23rd General Chapter, we described our educational activity through the three nodes of education to moral conscience, love and the social dimension of charity, the time has come for us to also integrate the dimension of ecological spirituality. This novelty demands “the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life” (*Ibid.* 202).

An ecology that is truly “integral” must clearly involve “the human and social dimensions” (*Ibid.* 137) not considered separately but in the ways they interact: this is the sense in which we can speak of a social ecology (*Ibid.* 142). In fact, there will be no new relationship with nature without a new human being, in the light of biblical anthropology. In short, it is a matter of “continuing to make all this reality the object of reflection and practical decisions in every presence, combining the pastoral, formative, social, economic and environmental dimensions” (A.F. ARTIME, *Report of the Rector Major to GC29*, 27).

**68.** We recognise that the digital world is not just a tool but a culture that shapes the way young people interact, learn, and shape their identity. While on the one hand it offers educational opportunities, global connections and religious content, on the other it exposes young people to misinformation, cyberbullying, and addictive behaviours that weaken relationships. Without adequate formation, we risk leaving young people to face these challenges alone. Pope Francis’ appeal in the Encyclical *Laudato Si’* to ecological responsibility extends to the digital world, which, like the natural environment, is polluted by misinformation and ethical neglect. A solid biblical, theological and charismatic and technical preparation is necessary so we can commit ourselves not only to using digital spaces, but to transforming them as much as possible into places of truth, authentic encounter and evangelisation. However, an inadequate approach can also lead to less pastoral depth, superficial interactions and neglect of community and prayer life. Without discipline, digital engagement can gradually shift priorities, distract from the core mission, and dilute the essence of Salesian identity.

## Choice

**69.** In light of our listening and interpretation, we choose to

**BE PRESENT IN THE NEW FRONTIERS OF THE MISSION: THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT, INTEGRAL ECOLOGY, THE NEW EXPRESSIONS OF THE CHARISM.**

This choice implies concrete commitments for the confreres, the communities, the provinces and the central government of the Congregation, which we exemplify below.

Let the Community

1. conduct a study on emerging forms of poverty in its neighbourhood, setting up concrete action plans with its educative and pastoral community to address them;
2. consider accessing renewable energy where possible.

Let the Province

1. plan for the specialisation of Salesians and lay people to address the new emerging challenges for the Salesian mission (artificial intelligence, inter-religious dialogue, bioethics, migrants, refugees, safeguarding, etc.);
2. promote works for young people in situations of hardship and marginalisation, including with the laity and with groups of the Salesian Family;
3. study a concrete plan for communities more open to young people, inviting them to share community life, including from a vocational perspective;
4. experiment with new forms of community with the Salesian Family, families, young people, and ensure the verification and continuity of innovative experiences already in place;
5. promote formation in integral ecology, ecological education of young people and presence in the digital world as an evangelising witness and educating action.

Let the Rector Major with his Council

1. offer the provinces guidelines, through the Formation, Youth Ministry and Social Communication Sectors, for formation and activity for their presence in the digital world;
2. develop guidelines, through the Formation and Youth Ministry Sectors, for socio-political, ecological and financial education in Salesian institutions;
3. promote a platform to share best practices in integral ecology, digital evangelisation and responses to the new forms of poverty present in the Congregation;
4. promote collaboration between provinces for a better accompaniment of young migrants and displaced persons;
5. strengthen our institutional presence in civil and ecclesial bodies, as well as in government institutions at all levels (international, national, regional and local) to promote advocacy on behalf of the poorest young people.

**CORE AREA 3**

**A COURAGEOUS REVIEW AND REPLANNING OF THE CONGREGATION’S GOVERNANCE AT ALL LEVELS**

*All approved resolutions will appear here*