

«And he took pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he set himself to teach them at some length » (Mk 6, 34)

SALESIAN YOUTH MINISTRY

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Rome, 25 April 2010
Good Shepherd Sunday

My Dear Confreres,

I am writing to you once again to wish your every blessing in this season of grace in the light of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus, who with his Paschal Mystery has filled history with joy and hope. And we are witnesses to it. This is our vocation and our mission: to walk "with the young so as to lead them to the risen Lord, and so discover in him and in his Gospel the deeper meaning of their own existence and thus grow into new men" (C. 34).

In the last issue of the Acts of the General Council (n. 406) I presented to you the Strenna for 2010. Immediately afterwards I wrote again to make an appeal for fraternal solidarity with our confreres in Haiti. After my visit to this people so sorely tried I wrote once more sharing my experience and my assessment of the situation, making known to everyone the plan for reconstruction. I repeat the expression of my gratitude for the generous response with which all the Provinces made their presence felt and for the many efforts of houses and centres to involve the educative communities in the desire to help the people of Haiti to rise from the ruins, to come alive as new men and women.

Certainly there have been other important and significant events in the Congregation such as the unification of the Provinces of Argentina on 31 January 2010, but I shall not stop to reflect on these, also because always more and more the information in ANS is arriving accurately and promptly for everyone.

Instead I shall immediately move on to the presentation of this letter. It is very different in its literary form from the three previous ones, (that for the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Salesian Congregation [AGC 404], that for the centenary of the death of Don Rua [AGC 405] and that for the Strenna on evangelisation [AGC 406]), but it is just as important as them or more so: in the first place because it deals with our mission, that which as Art. 3 of the Constitutions says, «sets the tenor of our whole life; it specifies the task we have in the Church and our place among other religious families,» but, above all, because in obedience to what was asked for by the GC26 we are carrying out a rethink regarding our pastoral work.

I think that the reflection which is being undertaken at the UPS, in other study centres of the Congregation and in the Provinces will find in my presentation of Salesian Youth Ministry a point of reference. In fact, I describe in the letter *what* is being done in the Congregation and *how* Salesian Youth Ministry should operate. But I should also like to help people to understand the *why*.

The biblical quotation I have chosen to introduce this letter of mine seems to me to be very illuminating. Unlike the well-known passage in chapter 10 of the Gospel according to St John in which Jesus presents himself as the Good Shepherd, in the text of Mark 6, 30-44 we have a practical expression of Christ's mind, heart and shepherd's hands.

The evangelist says that gazing at the large crowd waiting for him, "he took pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he set himself to teach them at some length."

It is his being moved as a good shepherd that expresses itself first of all in his setting himself "to teach them at some length," but only after multiplying the loaves, and feeding all that crowd.

This means that for Jesus the first response of his pastoral compassion is evangelisation, inseparable, however, from his concern to satisfy the basic human needs of the people - to eat, for example.

I shall try to offer a coherent and clear view of the current state of Salesian Youth Ministry. Right from the start I want to say that this text needs to be studied by Provincials, Provincial Councils, Rectors and those in formation. I have the impression that the pastoral model of the Congregation is not fully understood, and even less put into practice, even in the more dynamic Provinces and by the most zealous pastoral workers. I am convinced that there needs to be a veritable 'cultural revolution' in the Congregation which, at the same time, would be a real 'conversion' to the young. I therefore hope and pray that the presentation of our Salesian Youth Ministry will be interpreted with the eyes of Jesus, who teaches us to see what even those who seek him do not see, that is to say the abandonment, the lack of guidance with which young people are nowadays living. In this way our educative-pastoral action will become the revelation of God, a demonstration that "Deus Caritas est".

1. THE JOURNEY OF THE CONGREGATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SALESIAN YOUTH MINISTRY AFTER VATICAN COUNCIL II

Salesian educative and catechistical action was modelled in its structure on that of the Valdocco Oratory within which, to respond to the needs of the boys, were established a house for boys without families or far from home, workshops for arts and trades to teach them a job, and a school for those boys who were able to undertake literary or academic studies.

The animation of these works was entrusted to some individuals who were the nucleus of the community: the Rector, the centre of unity and the guide of the community in its educative-pastoral undertaking; the Prefect, the first collaborator of the Director and the one also responsible for administration; the Prefect of Studies, responsible for discipline and for the academic and organisational aspects; the Catechist, who animated the religious aspect, catechetical formation, the groups... This model was to guide development of the educative works of the Congregation and was codified in the Constitutions and Regulations until 1972.

In the last fifty years the need began to be felt to adapt this model to the new social circumstances. In this way a process was begun of re-thinking and of renewal of educative and pastoral practice, which has led to the present pastoral model.

1.1 A long journey

1.1.1 The first steps: from GC19 (1965) to GC21 (1978)

The GC19 represents the first collective stock-taking by the communities in the Congregation with regard to the changes taking place in the areas of youth, and the need to reformulate the traditional educative-pastoral praxis. A start was made with some small changes, but above all an attempt was made at a first renewal of the central structures of animation and government in order to make them suitable to the new circumstances, while remaining faithful to the original arrangement.¹

Until that time, the structures of animation and government of the mission of the Congregation were organised according to the main sectors of activity: one Consultor of the Superior Chapter charged with responsibility for the schools, another for professional formation, the Catechist who coordinated the animation of the aspects of religious and Christian formation ... The GC19 adopted, *ad experimentum* until the following General Chapter, a structure of world-wide animation which showed a more unified vision of Salesian pastoral work, creating a Consultor for Youth Apostolate who assumes responsibility for the animation of all the sectors of Salesian pastoral work in the different works.² At Province level, in similar fashion, Provincial Delegates charged with responsibility for the various activities were established with the tasks of studying, developing, organising and coordinating.

With regard to the area covered by Youth Apostolate the Chapter only proposed some priorities: the Oratory “fittingly brought up to date and reshaped ... so that it may attract and serve as many boys as possible, with a variety of subsidiaries (youth centres, clubs, various associations, courses, night schools.”³ It drew up a specific document for the Professional Schools, requesting that in the Provinces « a commission for the education of the young worker...should be appointed... to study the problems, gather

¹ Acts of the GC19. “The structure of the Congregation”. ASC 244, January 1966, pages 17-47.

² “The General Chapter thought it opportune to entrust to a single Consultor the care of our parishes and the apostolate of the young because of their close interdependence... This Consultor will have care of their general formation, religious, moral and intellectual in every kind of Salesian house: oratories, hostels, day schools, boarding schools, youth centres, sodalities and other youth organisations; due regard being paid to the authority of provincials, and with the collaboration of the Consultor in charge of the group of provinces concerned when there is question of specific local requirements in technical, scholastic or professional matters, or in methods of organisation, etc.” *Idem*, page 24

³ GC19. “Youth Apostolate”. ASC 244, January 1966, pag. 101.

documentation and be an advisory service for the houses.».⁴ At central level, under the Presidency of the Consultor for Youth Apostolate, a central Commission for the education of young workers was to be established.

The GC20 (SGC), in its efforts to re-think the life and mission of the Congregation re-formulates the Salesian mission and those it is aimed at, re-affirming the “absolute priority of pastoral work for youth,”⁵ presents the fundamental pastoral attitudes which ought to guide the Salesians in their pastoral activity⁶ and gives encouragement to the opening up of the Salesian presence to the new needs of the young through “new presences” which will broaden the horizons of the pastoral activities undertaken in the traditional works.⁷ At the same time, it re-affirms the new structure of the central animation of Youth Apostolate including it in the Constitutions.⁸

The GC21, taking up the guidelines of the GC20, re-thinks and develops them presenting the educative contents within the framework developed up until that time; it proposed the fundamental lines for a Educative-Pastoral Plan which responds to the new situation of the young;⁹ re-affirms the close connection between education and evangelisation in the Salesian educational system.¹⁰ In addition it committed the Provinces to a re-thinking of the Preventive System, to a study of today’s youth condition, to the expression, in a suitable manner, of the aims, the contents and the Salesian style in the Educative-Pastoral Plan, to set up and to expand in every Salesian centre the educative-pastoral community.¹¹ These guidelines will then be codified in the Constitutions and Regulations by the General Chapter 22.¹²

1.1.2 The development of the guidelines of the GC21 promoted by the Department (1978-1990)

The GC21 had committed the Congregation to a profound renewal of the Youth Apostolate. To help the communities and the Provinces to understand it and to implement it fully, the Councillor for the Youth Apostolate, Fr Juan E. Vecchi, and his team made a great effort to study and clarify the fundamental elements of the Salesian Educative-Pastoral Plan and of the educative-pastoral community, offering practical material as a guide in drawing it up, in order to provide educative and pastoral programmes in the various centres according to the indications of the Chapter.¹³ Through these aids, the Department enabled the Provinces to come to know, take up and develop in their own concrete situation the central lines of the model of the Salesian Youth Apostolate as something unified and structured.¹⁴

⁴ *Idem*, pag. 125.

⁵ GC20, n. 180

⁶ Cf. GC20, nn. 360-365

⁷ “The salesian mission in many areas has unfortunately not been able to find that new presence which a changing world demands. *Much of the work of the XIX General Chapter has remained dead letter*” (GC20, n. 393)

⁸ Constitutions of the Society of St. Francis of Sales. Ed. 1972. Art. 137. 140.

⁹ GC21, cf. n. 14. 80ss. 96ss; cf. n. 105 (province educational plan); and subsequently for the various works: n. 127 (oratory); n. 132. 134 (school), n. 140 (parish)

¹⁰ *Idem*, cf. n. 4. 14

¹¹ *Idem*, cf. nn. 63-68. 79.

¹² Cf. Constitutions art. 47; Regulations art. 4 and 5.

¹³ Cf. The documents drawn up by the Department for Youth Apostolate during the years 1979 – 1988. There is a list in *Salesian Youth Ministry. A basic frame of reference*. Second edition. Rome 2000, pag. 21-23

¹⁴ For a final synthesis see the book: YOUTH PASTORAL DEPARTMENT. *Salesian Youth Pastoral Work*. Rome. 1993. The basic elements of Salesian Youth Ministry are brought together with

It should be recognised that this effort of systematic all-round reflection, formation and communication was followed up in the Provinces in a very haphazard way. While some Regions and Provinces did so and put it into practice, others, for various different reasons, continued with the previous model, sometimes only changing a few names. In general, one can see the difficulty the confreres and the communities had in taking on board the new mentality and renewing their daily praxis.

1.1.3 General Chapters 23 (1990) and 24 (1996)

Subsequently the GC23 resumes the previous journey of the Congregation and presents a unified proposal for a pastoral process which brings together and organises all the fundamental elements of the Salesian educative pastoral Project.

In his report to the Chapter on the state of the Congregation the Rector Major said: «The area of Youth Apostolate needs a further serious examination of its structure and of its operating method [...] Looking at it from the world level point of view, one could say that the youth area has been given a lot of general encouragement but not the innovative decisive and operative structural impetus, with the allocation of the necessary personnel, means and directives.»¹⁵ It can be said that GC23 constitutes the response to that need: a unified, structured and practical presentation of the whole of the Salesian pastoral Project.

The Chapter gave the Congregation the fundamental lines of a Salesian process of education to the faith which corresponds to the complex youth situation in its various expressions, achieves in practice the synthesis between education and evangelisation which is a feature of our educational system; it presents, in a dynamic and progressive form, the central elements of the four areas/dimensions of the process of education to the faith, areas which correspond perfectly with the four dimensions of the Salesian educative-pastoral project, that is, the dimension of human maturity; the dimension of an encounter with Jesus Christ, the dimension of belonging to the Church, the dimension of a commitment for the Kingdom.¹⁶

The Chapter also develops the values of Salesian Youth Spirituality which, as a distinctive plan of Christian life and a path of holiness, constitutes the goal and the inspiration which ought to guide and support the whole process of education to the faith.¹⁷

In addition to presenting the contents, values and stages of the project, the Chapter also offers some guidelines to help put it into practice: the Salesian community as the animator of an educative-pastoral community, as the fundamental subject of the project;¹⁸ a pastoral animation at Province level which fosters and promotes the structural unity of the various aspect of the pastoral work (the Provincial Delegate for Youth Pastoral work and his team);¹⁹ vocational guidance as a characteristic element of the process;²⁰ the importance of social communication as the current process and method of evangelisation.²¹

diagrams and brief comments.

¹⁵ Cf. "The Society of Saint Francis of Sales in the six year period 1984-1990". Report of the Rector Major (to GC23), n. 180

¹⁶ Cf. GC23, nn. 120-157.

¹⁷ Cf. GC23, n. 161 ss.

¹⁸ Cf. GC23, nn. 232-238.

¹⁹ Cf. GC23, nn. 239-246.

²⁰ Cf. GC23, nn. 247-253.

²¹ Cf. GC23, nn. 254-260.

After the Chapter, making great efforts and with enthusiasm, a number of Provinces set out to put the directives about the process of education to the faith into practice, in very practical ways in their own circumstances,. But often the very limited formation of the animators makes these plans quite ineffective.

The GC24 examined further a central aspect of the pastoral model, its essential subject, the educative-pastoral community, in which Salesians and lay people share the spirit and mission of Don Bosco. In the light of an extensive assessment of the situation and of the progress made in the Congregation, the Chapter presented the ecclesial, charismatic and cultural reasons for going further and for offering criteria for action and the necessary working guidelines.

The novelty, the Rector Major said at the end of the Chapter, «stems from the sudden entrance of the laity on the Salesian horizon and from the insertion of their experience as freshly understood in the heart of the charism».²² The Chapter invites us to pass from accepting lay people as simple collaborators to their real involvement in the mission, from practical help to very real co-responsibility, from relationships which were mainly formal to serious individual and group interpersonal communication regarding the values of Salesian pedagogy and spirituality, and all of this with good systematic formation procedures.

In this way the GC24 re-affirms and emphasises the importance of the EPC, as the practical way of implementing the Salesian educative-pastoral plan, by involving, in a family atmosphere, young people, educators, religious and lay; it defines the specific role of the Salesian religious community in the animation of the EPC, and the fundamental criteria for the Salesian pastoral formation which ought to animate it.²³

1.2 The great goals of this journey

In the course of this process the Congregation discovers and re-affirms some characteristic aspects of its pastoral praxis, which I believe it is important to present briefly in order to better understand the overall basic frame of reference for Salesian Youth Ministry.

1.2.1 An ever deeper perception of the new situation of the young

Everything associated with society and the church has changed profoundly. Young people are living according to new values and have new criteria for their lives which constitute a culture that really is new; the traditional links in the chain for the transmission of culture and religion (the family, the school, the church ...) have become weakened and are often in crisis. The circumstances surrounding the work of education and the apostolate are very different and are constantly changing. Therefore it is not possible to limit ourselves to small modifications or adjustments to our traditional praxis, nor to think in terms of a programme for action which is the same for everyone.

²² GC24, n. 231

²³ Cf. GC24, nn. 149-161.

With this awareness ever more explicit a start was made to design a “new” Salesian presence among the young,²⁴ a “new evangelisation”,²⁵ a “new education”,²⁶ even a “new preventive system”.²⁷ The use of these terms was intended to express the need to re-think and examine more deeply the content and the structure of Salesian education and pastoral practice in response to the new situation of the young.

1.2.2 An effort to re-formulate the traditional educative and pastoral contents and methods

The repeated and pressing calls by the Church to renew catechesis and Christian formation, especially of the young immersed in profoundly secularised situations, giving priority to evangelisation and a renewed proclamation of Jesus Christ, as well as the experience of the inadequacy of many proposals offered in our educational circles, make us aware of the urgent need to seriously re-think the contents and the methods of education to the faith, in particular as regards certain key issues or fundamental points:

- Above all the *unity and completeness of the educative-pastoral project*, overcoming the compartmentalisation of a praxis which considers pastoral work as just one sector (‘the religious aspect’) which is added on to the other aspects of education, rather than the characterising feature of the whole programme. Thinking of pastoral activity as an organic unity means seeing it as a single process in which the different elements making it up are structured and assist each other, contributing together to the achievement of the same aim which is the all-round development of the young person considered in the totality of his or her being.

An expression of this unity is the close relationship existing between the four dimensions of the Salesian pastoral approach (the educative dimension, the evangelising dimension, the associative dimension and the vocational dimension) which ought to be thought of and developed in close connection with each other, and especially education and evangelisation: an education which develops the religious meaning of life and encourages and opens the way to the process of evangelisation, and an evangelisation which proposes to education the model of a human life which is fully successful and respects the educative process, in its development.

- *The community sense of the Salesian proposal* which arises in a community and creates community. The educative-pastoral community, in which Salesians and lay people share the Salesian spirit and mission, is the real subject of Salesian pastoral work. In this broad educative community the Salesian religious community assumes specific roles of witness, animation, communion and formation, as GC24 declares.²⁸
- *A planning mentality*. Even though the Provinces had been asked in 1978 to draw up the Educative Pastoral Plan,²⁹ which was codified in the General Regulations six years

²⁴ Cf. PASCUAL CHÁVEZ. *Together for the young people of Europe*. Final address of the Rector Major at the meeting of the Provincials of Europe, 5 December 2004. AGC 388, January-March 2005, pag. 113-115

²⁵ Cf. EGIDIO VIGANÒ. “The new evangelisation”. AGC 331, October-December 1989

²⁶ Cf. EGIDIO VIGANÒ. “New education”. AGC 337, July-September 1991.

²⁷ Cf. EGIDIO VIGANÒ. *Called to freedom. Let us re-discover the Preventive System by educating young people to values*. Commentary on the Strenna for 1995. Rome. FMA. pag. 9-12.

²⁸ “In particular its special duty consists in testifying to the primacy of God and total dedication to education and evangelisation through the vocational figures of the salesian priest and salesian brother; guaranteeing the charismatic identity; being the centre of communion and participation; prompting, urging, and calling on the laity to share in Don Bosco’s spirit and mission; promoting spiritual, salesian and vocational formation” (GC24, n. 159).

²⁹ Cf. GC21, n. 105.

later,³⁰ and it had been studied by the Department with a selection of guidelines which clarified its contents and methodology, its practical implementation had not been easy. The communities had not managed to understand that it was not so much a question of drawing up a document in which were described the many varied activities and initiatives they wanted to implement in the work of education as rather, above all, organising and coordinating them so that they represented a progressive process towards concrete and verifiable objectives, with clear options regarding priorities and orders of sequence. Without this planning mentality, in fact, the Plan would not succeed in guiding and giving direction to daily praxis.

- *A style of animation* which expresses in the new youth situation some central elements of the Preventive System: a style of presence among the young which gives more importance to interpersonal relationships than to formal ones, an accompaniment which makes the effort, above all, to explain the reasons for the guidelines rather than simply see them implemented, an approach which creates communion and convergence around a shared plan rather than multiplying initiatives.

1.2.3 Broadening the field for action in response to the new situation.

With the crisis of the traditional educational agencies, new places and new experiences emerge which become significant for the young and capable of transmitting values and life style. As the years of youth lengthen there are also new possibilities for formation and involvement; an environment which is progressively secularised and the growing expansion of the marginalisation of the young present new challenges and open the way to new opportunities for the education of the young. On this account, everywhere “new presences” appear which try new kinds of approach to and encounter with the young, both in the area of youth marginalization and in the field of youth groups, which around 1988 evolve into the Salesian Youth Movement; Youth Apostolate and Catechetical Centres also arise, as well as social communication initiatives aimed at the young in order to develop the new youth languages and forms of expression, spirituality centres, greater attention being given to the world of young university students by means of hostels and youth centres specially for them, the development of missionary voluntary service, etc.

If at the beginning a few of these new presences appear to be in contrast with and even in opposition to the traditional ones, gradually they are taken up by the Provinces and integrated in their educative-pastoral plans. Even more, the idea of the “new presence” is extended to all the works, stimulating the renewal of their pastoral praxis so that they become new forms of presence and of educational service among the young.

This new type of presence requires a new educative and pastoral approach, a new relationship with the ecclesial community and the local area; for this reason slowly but surely the Provinces renew their own presences and try to make them more significant (Schools, Vocational Training Centres, Oratories and Youth Centres ...).

Starting from GC20 there was a rapid expansion in our presence in parishes, which ceased to be considered ‘exceptional’. Their number grew in the Congregation; but as this development took place there was notable difficulty in their adopting the new perspectives and identity of Salesian pastoral work. In his report at the GC22 (1984) the Rector Major spoke about the difficulties encountered in giving our parishes a youthful image and an organisation consistent with Salesian educative-pastoral practice; the

³⁰ Cf. General Regulations, art. 4.

working model of the youth apostolate and the programmes for education to the faith were neither clarified nor put into practice.³¹

1.2.4 Renewal of the structures of pastoral animation and government in the Congregation and in the Provinces.

Starting from the GC19, the Congregation felt the need to renew the structures of pastoral animation. In the new situation, marked by the enormous variety of the contexts in which the Salesians were working, it cannot be imagined that the same programme or scheme of working can be applied in the same way everywhere. The guidelines and the general frame of reference need to be taken up by the Provinces in order to adapt them to their own circumstances, taking into account the social and cultural situation of the place. In order to do this, it is indispensable that in the Provinces a system of apostolic animation and government is developed which is capable of undertaking this reflection and of accompanying the local communities in putting into practice the pastoral model, while also ensuring easy communication with other Provinces and with the centre of the Congregation.

Structural unity of Salesian pastoral practice in the apostolate requires that there be a single point of reference for the whole of the pastoral practice in its various forms and sectors, and this is the Councillor for Youth Ministry at world level and the Delegate for Youth Ministry at Province level; it is for them to animate and guide the various sectors and areas of the apostolate in a unified and coordinated manner in practice; and for this there needs to be, with the Delegate, a team which shares with him the responsibility for animation.

This structure had already been fully explained in the GC23³² and spread throughout the Congregation. The difficulty consists, on the part of the confreres, in assuming this important role of pastoral animation, which cannot be reduced to organising some activities with the young people, or to coordinating some events or areas, but ought to mean accompanying the local communities in their efforts to put into practice the apostolate model, overcoming the tendency to compartmentalise, while growing in the planning mentality and in the community dimension of the youth apostolate. In addition, the Delegate, with the collaboration of the team, ought to coordinate all the areas of the apostolate of the Province, ensuring that in each of them there are the four fundamental dimensions, and that there is a real practical convergence and service of the educative and evangelising mission of the young. This requires a full-time Delegate with the ability to be in contact with the local communities and in close connection in pastoral animation with the government of the Province, the Provincial and his Council.

This new arrangement was not easy to understand, and especially to put into practice in some places, where it took a long time to assimilate and implement the pastoral model. It has been seen that where the Provinces have been able to count on a team for pastoral animation, set up on the basis of the renewed criteria, if there is a Provincial Council which devoted time to pastoral reflection, and continuous dialogue and an exchange of ideas with the department and other intermediate bodies of animation (Conferences, national Centres, etc.), in fact they make progress in developing a Salesian youth apostolate which is energetic, meaningful and corresponds to the new situations.

³¹ Cf. "The Society of Saint Francis of Sales in the six year period 1978-1983". Report of the Rector Major (to the GC22), n. 184

³² Cf. GC23, nn. 243-246.

1.2.5 The focal point for attention: the quality of the educative-pastoral action

A first glance at the path pursued starting from 1970 shows us a type of development which was mainly expansive in character. This was required particularly on account of the new openings in the missions, the emerging social needs, the growing involvement of lay people in our works. Because of this, there was an increase in the size of individual works and a multiplication of foundations in almost all the Provinces.

Often this expansion led to a certain loss of quality in the communities, weakened and burdened by organisational and management tasks; and above all without the hoped-for regeneration of forces.

In these last twenty years especially, there has been an insistence that, by preference, there should be concentration on improving the quality of the educative-pastoral activity. In not a few areas of today's complex society, quality has been seen as a necessary condition for making an impact and also for improving the quantity of a product. Therefore efforts have been made to concentrate all the energy of animation on quality, especially in these areas:

- *not being content with an apostolate of the first steps only*, of 'keeping them amused', of generalised projects for the large group, or of keeping administrative or management control of the activities, but rather concentrating what is being done on the objective of developing human maturity, and of education to the faith, with explicit and powerful projects, devoting time and resources to a systematic accompaniment of groups and of individuals, offering a variety of approaches according to the level reached ...
- *ensuring a systematic process of evangelisation* (the proclamation of Jesus Christ) and of education to the faith, capable of leading young people to a personal encounter with Jesus and with the Church; educating to a sense of life as a vocation and to a life of generous commitment, which awakens and accompanies vocations of special commitment and consecration in the Church and in the Salesian Family.
- *developing the educational dimension* in our works and in our programmes, so that values become a matter of personal conviction, and the Christian meaning of life is pursued, paying attention to the kind of culture we are transmitting in what we teach and the way in which we teach it, encouraging concern for and the acceptance of others and care for the common good, giving special attention to the development of the religious dimension of the individual ...
- involving with more co-responsibility and *better preparation all those carrying out the apostolate*: the Salesian communities, lay collaborators, youth leaders, etc. to enable them to respond adequately to the educational and pastoral challenges presented by today's young people and to live the mission with enthusiasm and dynamism.

These were the primary preoccupations in the area of the pastoral animation in these last years.

2. THE CURRENT SITUATION

At the end of the 80s there was an extraordinarily rich and sound heritage of reflection and practice on Salesian pastoral action, and the need was felt to have a complete overall

view, and to bring together, in a structured and shared synthesis, the fundamental guidelines so as to facilitate their personal assimilation and provide directives for the praxis. The Youth Ministry Department tried to respond to this need by offering the Provinces and the communities a guidance manual, and in these years providing a systematic process of pastoral formation, in particular for those confreres with responsibilities for animation and government, insisting on certain key issues to be borne in mind.³³

2.1 Knowledge and assimilation of the pastoral model

The different Provinces and communities put a considerable effort into assimilation, and they worked at putting into practice the fundamental guidelines of the pastoral model, in order to respond better to the new demands of youth. In this process some difficulties were experienced, such as the rejection of a number of proposals received and the possibility of implementing them, the different rates of assimilation of the new pastoral mentality on the part of the communities and the Provinces, the increase in the number of requests and the requirements which often resulted in a fragmented style of activity and frequently with little planning, which leaves little room for reflection. From all this it follows that the Provinces succeeded with difficulty and in a limited way in assimilating, and above all, putting into practice the guidelines of the Congregation.

In these years this pastoral model has been presented to all the interprovincial teams of the Delegates for youth ministry for them to study, and the progress made has been assessed, and the fundamental elements clarified, in particular the understanding of the 'unified and holistic nature' of the Salesian apostolate in a plurality of works, services and activities, assisting in overcoming a compartmentalised system still frequently present. The pastoral model was also studied in the meetings of Provincials in their Provincial Conferences; guidance was provided for some Regions and Provinces so that there was a better knowledge of the fundamental guidelines and a more effective pastoral coordination.

In this effort at assimilation, none the less, one often sees some very restricted views of pastoral practice, as when it is reduced to some form of immediate activity, which leads to a view with very little connection seen between pastoral practice, community life and spirituality, making it difficult to have a sense of vocational unity and the complete development of "Da mihi animas".

Salesian spirituality, a practical expression of pastoral charity, is a fundamental element of Salesian pastoral action: it is the source of its evangelical vitality, the criterion by which to discern and to face up to daily challenges, the source of enthusiasm and apostolic zeal, the foundation of the unity of all those who share and collaborate in the mission. «For us the recovery of spirituality cannot be separated from the mission... Therefore it is inconceivable and unjustifiable to maintain that the mission is an obstacle to our meeting God and cultivating an intimate relationship with Him. ».³⁴

In the same way, community life is not only a practical way of making pastoral action effective, it rather constitutes a fundamental element of it: "To live and work together is for us Salesians a fundamental requirement and a sure way of fulfilling our vocation" (C. 49). As GC25 reminded us: «the first educative service that the young need from us is the

³³ Cf. SALESIAN YOUTH MINISTRY DEPARTMENT. *Salesian Youth Ministry. A basic frame of reference*. Second edition. Rome 2001.

³⁴ GC25, n. 191.

witness of a fraternal life that becomes a response to their profound need for communication, a proposal for a truly human life, a prophecy of the kingdom, an invitation to welcome the gift of God.»³⁵

Spirituality, community and pastoral action together express the rich variety of our mission from different points of view, and ought always to be thought of and lived in constant connection with each and in profound unity.

2.2 A more systematic relationship of the Department with the teams of the Provincial Delegates for YM

An important strategy in this effort has been the promotion in all the Regions or groups of Provinces of the systematic collaboration of the Provincial Delegates with regular meetings for assessment, study and planning. Frequent contact with the Provincial teams and their accompaniment on the part of the Department has made it possible to guide the pastoral action of the individual Provinces along the lines set out in the planning for the six-year period and to promote fruitful links among them.

To facilitate this relationship and dialogue between the Department and the teams of the Provincial Delegates, an “International Consultative Committee” has been established with representatives of all the Interprovincial groups of Delegates, which provides a significant opportunity for reflection and study of the central aspects of pastoral work, encouraging unity of vision and direction.

Looking at the individual Provinces, one is aware that the role of animation of the Provincial Delegate and his team has been understood and appreciated better, for example in the choice of the Delegate, in the continuity of his service, in the assessment and the reorganisation of the Province team to make it more active and effective, etc...; nevertheless one has to recognise that in some Provinces this position of the Delegate needs to be strengthened and his role as coordinator of all Pastoral work.

2.3 Some aspects of pastoral renewal

- **Generous and creative openness to the new youth frontiers**, above all to the new and old forms of poverty (street children, drop-outs, immigrants...), to the world of youth groups and to the new forms of expression (music, theatre, travel...), to voluntary service and, in a more modest but significant way, to the area of youth spirituality (houses and teams for youth spirituality).

In fact, those sectors are still not fully integrated in the Provincial Plan; there is difficulty in their becoming coordinated with the more traditional and organised presences such as the schools, parishes, etc. and often running and organising them require such an effort that the Salesians responsible have little energy left to attend to the quality and the systematic development of the educative project which they provide.

- A renewed sensitivity in order to give more **educative and evangelising quality** to the educative-pastoral project we offer in our works, by means of a re-think of the Preventive System in order to adapt it to the new challenges the world of education

³⁵ GC25, n. 7; cf. also n. 192.

presents, to the new requirements of work with young people at risk, to the urgent need for a renewal of evangelisation and education to the faith.

But it is difficult to translate this desire for renewal into practical plans and procedures. In fact, our apostolate is still not very missionary, that is to say, it pays little attention to the need for a first proclamation or a renewed proclamation of the Gospel; it has not found a way of adapting itself to the capacities to be found in large groups without neglecting the needs of those who are more open and receptive; it lacks a systematic approach to the vocational apostolate, animated by the community and finding its secure place within the ordinary youth apostolate. For this reason, only with great difficulty do the vast majority of the initiatives organised produce solid programmes of education to the faith which help the young people to make it their own and for it to become a real part of their lives.

- ***Systematic processes for the pastoral and Salesian formation of educators.***

In the Provinces there is a concern for the pastoral and Salesian formation of the collaborators and youth leaders, with many forms of initiatives: courses for the teachers in the schools and in the vocational training centres, training centres for youth leaders, various meetings in the communities and in the Provinces, etc. In addition, there are some Centres for the pastoral and Salesian formation of Salesians and for lay collaborators such as the Regional Centre for Ongoing Formation in Quito, for the Interamerica Region, which has introduced pastoral formation into its programme, and is developing a course of pastoral formation for the Provincial Delegates for youth ministry and their team members; the Don Bosco Centre in Lyon (France) or the “DonBoscovormingscentrum” in North Belgium, etc. In collaboration with the IUS and the American Commission for the Salesian School in America, a course has begun on the internet for the Salesian formation of school teachers, along the lines of the second continental meeting (Cumbayá II), in which 702 teachers have already taken part.

In this area of pastoral formation, more care needs to be given to making the proposals more systematic, to their having more impact in the everyday life of the centres, to the coordination and the sharing of initiatives and planning, to an organisation according to the model of Salesian Youth Ministry which fosters a more unified and integrated view of the apostolate; in addition attention needs to be given to team work and net-working, and to the development of ways of operating which are geared to facing in a positive manner the complexity of the apostolate and to rising above compartmentalisation.

The strategic objective to be pursued in a special way is the pastoral formation of Salesians so that they may become the animators of the new model of YM and carry out their specific role as promoters and guides of the Salesian and pastoral formation of the collaborators.³⁶

3. THE DIFFERENT SECTORS OF SALESIAN YOUTH MINISTRY

Salesian youth ministry takes place in a given area “in a variety of ways which depend in the first place upon the actual needs of those for whom we are working” (C. 41) and on the situations in which the young people are living, especially those marked by economic, political and cultural poverty. Through this variety of works and services it shows its unity and at the same time its rich variety. Each separate work and structure

³⁶ Cf. GC24, n. 159.

brings its own specific characteristics to the whole, and contributes to the realisation of the oratorian criterion which art. 40 of the Constitutions refers to. To clearly express this unified nature of the Salesian apostolate in a given area and in the local church the various works and services which constitute the Salesian presence in that area need to think of themselves in terms of relating to each other and of their complementary nature.³⁷

3.1 Oratories and Youth Centres

The Oratory is at the origin and constitutes the prototype of every Salesian work. As such, today too, it is the first form of Salesian presence among the young. Nevertheless, nowadays, the Oratory, in trying to respond to the needs and expectations of the young, and to reach the largest possible number of them, in particular those who are poor and in most need takes on a whole variety of forms and features.

In December 2007 in the Congregation there were 635 festive or weekend Oratories,³⁸ plus 164 daily Oratories which offer a variety of services to youngsters after school hours; there were also 529 Youth Centres for older teenagers and young people; a number of these provide the young unemployed or those on the margins of the educational system the possibility of acquiring a basic formation or of preparing themselves for work; some also try to rehabilitate young people in serious at-risk situations.

This variety of forms constitutes a great wealth, offering multiple possibilities of contact with the mass of youngsters, adolescents and young people and is an enormous educative resource. But there is also the danger of concentrating the energies of the Oratory almost exclusively on sporting-recreational activities, while reducing those more specifically educational - formative. On this account several Provinces have been engaged in re-thinking the identity of the Oratory and of the Youth Centre, and in re-creating its former pastoral methodology, involving the Salesian communities and the educative communities together with the various groups of the Salesian Family. A commitment to be encouraged and accompanied.

We want to ensure that the Oratory-Centre is open to all young people, in particular to those who are poor or at risk, who do not manage to benefit from any other educational structures or projects, so that the Oratory may become the missionary frontier of the Christian community. A pastoral methodology needs to be found which succeeds in responding to the more immediate needs of the great mass of young people, without, however, forgetting the most demanding and challenging proposals for those young people who are open to following a formation path at some depth.

The Valdocco Oratory, too, while it responded to the need for the entertainment and the elementary formation of the majority of the boys, provided for the better ones demanding proposals of formation and Christian commitment. Even more, it had within it the power to awaken in the boys the desire to grow and to improve in their own formation, moving on from simple recreational or educational needs to a more systematic and serious human and Christian development, from being those making use of the activities to becoming protagonists and animators of them, and creators of the educative environment at the service of their companions. How are we nowadays to reproduce in our oratories this characteristic feature of the early days?

³⁷ Cf. SALESIAN YOUTH MINISTRY DEPARTMENT. *Salesian Youth Ministry. A basic frame of reference*. Second edition. Rome 2001, pag. 85-86.

³⁸ The numbers given in this and in other sections of this part are taken from the *Dati statistici. Appendix to the Report of the Rector Major*. GC26. Rome 2008.

Another challenge to which we want to respond is that of making the Oratory-Youth Centre a real educative community with a strong identity and a formative force, which is expressed in an environment which is profoundly human and Christian, in which there is a significant presence of Salesians and educators among the young, sharing their lives, varied educational opportunities according to the circumstances and the needs of the young people themselves, the development of a sense of co-responsibility on the part of the lay people and of the youth leaders within a SEPP, shared by all, a process of formation and accompaniment appropriate for the groups and the individuals which can help to make the proposals and the opportunities offered suited to the individual.

3.2 The Parish entrusted to the Salesians

The commitment of the Salesians in the parish area is expressed mainly in the parishes which are entrusted to the Congregation, and in the mission parishes. The number of these has grown considerably in recent years. In 2007 there were 1212 parishes entrusted to the Congregation and missionary parishes in which more than 3000 Salesians had the pastoral care of over 11 million of the faithful.

Most of these parishes are to be found in working class areas or in situations of first evangelisation. In many places the parish entrusted to the Salesians also has an Oratory, a school or a Centre for social promotion, with particular attention being given to young people at risk. In this way the Salesians, directly inserted in the structure of a particular local Church, offer it the original and specific support coming from their charism.

In spite of the considerable number of parishes entrusted to the Congregation, often this area of the Salesian apostolate is not given the appropriate attention, accompaniment and coordination on the part of the Province. In these years regular meetings are being organised for parish clergy and other Salesians engaged in parishes for their formation and coordination, interprovincial and national meetings to study certain important challenging issues regarding our Salesian presence in the parish field; but much remains to be done, and to be done better.

Here are some issues to be examined urgently:

- 1°. *Ensuring the Salesian identity* in the apostolate carried out in the parish. This demands that certain charismatic choices are made in the life and mission of the parish community; in particular:
 - building up the parish as a *community of the faithful animated by the Salesian religious community*; a community organised into groups and small communities in which there is greater communication, a more intense commitment, a more real participation and a visible relationship between all these groups and the human and social context of the parish;
 - offering everyone a *systematic programme of evangelisation and of education to the faith*, promoting a more missionary style of apostolate, which tries to reach out to everyone, especially the young and those at a distance, in this way often becoming the first place of a sympathetic and meaningful contact with the Church, with a project of evangelisation and first proclamation of the gospel for those at a distance, and a continuous and progressive programme of education to the faith, especially for the young and for families;
 - promoting an *option for youth* which ensures that the youth apostolate is not only one sector among others but the characteristic which is the special feature of all the life of the parish, so that the young find themselves “at home” in the Salesian parish.

- 2°. Another important challenge consists in promoting *a more missionary and Salesian pastoral methodology* with great educative sensitivity capable of accepting people where they are so as to arouse in them the desire to be open to the faith and to become involved in a continuous and gradual progression in the Christian way of life, in harmony with the concerns and experiences of their daily lives, in a special way the young, discovering in them the seeds of the Gospel and the action of the Spirit.
- 3°. In addition there is a need to help the parish community to draw up the *unified, global and shared Pastoral Plan*, which gives unity and continuity to all the initiatives which it has to offer.

To make progress in this direction it is essential that attention be given to the *pastoral formation* of the Salesians who are dedicated to the animation of the parish and that of their lay collaborators, and to have a *Province coordination procedure* capable of accompanying and supporting the parish communities in their lives.

3.3 The School and the world of formal education

Salesian presence in the field of formal education, and in particular in schools, is one of the most consistent, significant and wide-spread.

In 2007 the Congregation was responsible for 1208 educational institutions at various levels with slightly more than a million students, especially at the pre-adolescent phase, even though in this last six year period the number of students has grown considerably in the high schools and in particular at university level. There are 2286 Salesians working full-time and 1364 part time in this area with the collaboration of a considerable host of lay people, almost 60,000.

The Salesian school is a significant Christian presence in the world of education and culture; it helps young people to prepare themselves in a fitting manner for life, and contributes to the formation of a mentality and the transformation of society according to human and Christian values; for this reason it is a fundamental means of evangelisation. In a good number of countries in Asia and Africa the school is often the only form of the presence of the Church which is permitted, and in it the Christian community offers the witness of disinterested service to the poorest sections of society, a human environment permeated by Gospel values as a silent witness of Jesus Christ and also as a valuable opportunity for Christian families in the locality to educate their children in a Christian manner.

In these years the Congregation has made a considerable effort to renew its presence in this field, especially in the following main areas:

- 1°. The *educative and pastoral quality* of the environment in which people live, of the programmes and of the projects on offer, of the methodology in use, of the facilities and material resources, of the people engaged in them, through a SEPP which works and is agreed by the whole educative community, in such a way that it becomes capable of directing and guiding the way the school functions on a daily basis.

In this regard it is important to overcome the danger of pastoral practice being considered a section alongside the others, rather than the characteristic quality of the whole life of the school, of its culture, of its method of working, of relationships, of projects etc. in which it is presented and achieved; often this is well presented in documents, but it remains a real challenge to succeed in putting it into practice in the daily life of the educative community.

2°. *The educative-pastoral community*: making real efforts to build up the school as a community of people at the service of the education and of evangelisation of the young, and not only as an institution providing educational services. A school is an educative-pastoral community when people, especially young people, are put at its centre, with interpersonal relationships, with a sharing in the values of Salesian pedagogy and spirituality, with the involvement and the protagonism of everyone in their own different roles.

3°. A school as a *platform for effective and normal evangelisation*, especially through the promotion and the transmission of a culture and of a mentality inspired by Gospel values. Salesian youth pastoral practice in the field of education ought to foster in the young not only a Christian life but also a culture inspired by the faith and evangelical values, which is an alternative to the culture of their surroundings often characterised by secularism, relativism, subjectivism and consumerism.

The cultural values which are offered in daily life in the school, in the different subjects, in the method of teaching, in the surroundings and in relationships, etc. do not always receive the attention they need in order to ensure consistency between the material being transmitted or the methods employed and the values of the Christian faith, in such a way that this informs in an effective manner peoples' personal, professional and social lives, and a fruitful relationship is established between faith and culture.

4°. A school *attentive and open to the poorest young people*; with an organisation and an approach which prevents scholastic failure and helps to overcome it with revision courses, evening classes for youngsters who find themselves outside the formal school structures, etc.; which, through the various subjects and activities it offers, fosters contacts with and involvement in society in order to discover the causes of situations of marginalisation and exclusion experienced in it and to give rise to the commitment to overcome them; a school which promotes the culture of dialogue, of collaboration, of the acceptance of what is different, of solidarity.

These objectives have been promoted in recent years through a systematic and continuous effort made in several Regions of the Congregation. Exemplary in this is the process taking place in Salesian America starting from the continental meetings in Cumbayá (1994 and 2001) and Brasilia (2008). The conclusions of these meetings have been further studied in the various Province or area teams in order to translate them into working programmes which guide the activities of the different educative communities, helping them to assess their educative praxis and improve it. This effort is being made together with the various groups of the Salesian Family which are responsible for schools in America.

Something similar is also being done in Europe (meetings in Rome in 1994 and 2000, in Krakow in 2004 and in Seville in 2010) and in South Asia through interprovincial and national links.

In Brazil with the same purpose the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians have set up a network of Salesian schools, through which the formation of the teachers and the production of school books according to Salesian educational methods are organised.

This process of renewal certainly demands a more systematic ongoing formation of the educators. In addition to the efforts of the Provinces to ensure a good educational and Salesian formation with systematic programmes, in some Provinces and zones there has

also been the development of various centres and Salesian educative and pastoral formation projects for lay collaborators, especially for the teachers in our schools.

3.4 Professional Formation and work preparation

From its beginnings the Salesian Congregation has been known and appreciated for its vocational training centres through which it offers the poorest youngsters, those who often from their being small have had to work to help their families, or those who did not manage to follow a regular school programme, a human formation and a good quality preparation for work which enables them to face their future with confidence and a sense of responsibility. Even today, many countries which do not allow the Church to have an explicit presence, entrust to us vocational training centres, and through them we can be a silent but clear witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The vocational training centres nowadays are of many kinds, from technical schools, about 180, which offer the youngsters a systematic secondary education which enables them subsequently to continue with university studies, to schools of vocational training (457) which offer the youngsters who are preparing to go to work a high quality preparation with a regular recognised programme. Among those schools the 46 agricultural schools deserve special mention.

In the field of non-formal vocational training, in these years there have grown up more than 300 small work-preparation centres, which offer young workers or those about to begin working short and very practical courses to give them a certain level of qualification for work.

Often these vocational training centres foster and support practical assistance initiatives for the occupation of young workers, cooperatives for mutual support, handicraft centres and other initiatives to help provide work for the poorest youngsters.

In modern societies in rapid evolution, the technical world and that of work is a sector experiencing profound and rapid changes; on this account if it really wants to help young people to enter this new world, vocational training has to make changes in its programmes, methods and also its funding.

All this requires that there be special support and guidance, in particular in the following aspects:

- 1°. Promoting the *all-round formation of the young*. Human, moral and spiritual formation is as important as the technical and professional. Very often a pupil from a Don Bosco vocational training centre is preferred to others particularly on account of the qualities of his character rather than for the training or qualifications obtained. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the professional training should be considered as of secondary importance. The final aim of a Salesian vocational training centre, in fact, is precisely that of being able to ensure that a young person has employment suited to the training he has received. The all-round curriculum of formation is precisely directed to this end. Consequently it is essential that every centre has an Educative Pastoral Plan, which effectively directs its daily activities.
- 2°. Strengthening, in their educative role in the technical-professional schools, the *processes for developing personal qualities of character*. Nowadays a good technical and professional preparation is not sufficient; what are needed more and more are people capable of making up their own minds, with enquiring minds and with a critical sense; people able to establish positive, stable and effective relationships, of fostering collaboration in shared projects; capable of managing and resolving

conflicts, of facing up to changes with imagination and creativity. The need for this is also greatly felt by the young themselves who want the educators to take a greater interest in their lives. For this reason it is important to provide opportunities for and forms of communication and personal relationships between educators and pupils, with families and with society; fostering a form of educational guidance which is respectful but at the same time pro-active; planning a moral formation and a education in values that is truly personal, communitarian and open to the needs of others.

- 3°. Developing in the various educational procedures a *systematic and serious social formation* which leads to a mentality which is more open to the needs of others and a greater capacity to be engaged effectively in the pursuit of justice. The GC23, in the face of the enormous challenges of poverty, indicated formation in the social sphere of charity as a fundamental task to make education to the faith concrete and credible.³⁹

Here are some elements which should not be missing in this formation:

- an adequate knowledge of the complex socio-political situation, beginning with those closest and most immediate;
- a complete and systematic presentation of the social teaching of the Church as the key to an understanding of the real situation and as an indication of the ideal goals to be aimed at in daily commitment;
- introducing the young people to the situations requiring solidarity and assistance especially in the world of work, for example in the face of the tragedy of youth unemployment, of exploitation, of immigration and of racism, etc.

- 4°. Developing in our educative project the *pedagogy of work* as an important element in an all-round human formation, going beyond a pedagogy which is too intellectual and selective. Many young people are exposed to or have already experienced in their lives lack of scholastic success and/or problems of fitting in as individuals, families or in society in general. For them a work experience which is positive, well-planned and followed up with educational criteria, can constitute a excellent opportunity for personal rehabilitation; the young person can re-acquire self esteem, re-discover his own abilities and the capacity to be motivated in his own formation.

This requires that in the educative project we offer sufficient space for some work experience, service in the community, work within "non-profit" organisations..., appreciating in them, above all, the opportunity for personal fulfilment and being of service to the common good. It also means developing useful and effective contacts with individuals, institutions and other areas in the world of work, fostering dialogue, discussion and mutual awareness and collaboration in formation.

- 5°. Offering a *process of evangelisation as a significant contribution to be included in the educational process and the work experience*. All our activity on behalf of young workers is aimed at evangelisation, but an evangelisation which is really part of their world.

This kind of evangelisation project ought to pay particular attention to the following:

- offering the pupils a human and evangelical view of society, the economy and the world of work, through lessons of religion, of moral formation and study of the Social Teaching of the Church;
- providing experiences of a spiritual nature and an opening to God, both in ordinary life and on special occasions, with a gradual process of initiation to prayer and celebration;

³⁹ Cf. GC23, n. 204.

- offering some experiences of voluntary service for the benefit of the poor, beginning with those in their own locality;
- provide explicit moments of evangelisation and education to the faith through groups suited to their sensitivities and needs;
- linking up with the pastoral initiatives of the Church in the world of work and facilitating the participation of the young.

6°. A significant measure of the quality and effectiveness of the formation received will be the ease with which *the pupils who complete the formation find employment and work*, and how capable they are of changing for the better the society in which they take their place. This means establishing close contacts and collaboration with the world of industry and business, encouraging their cooperation in the programmes of practical experience offered to the pupils and in the "stages" of updating for teachers, seeking their advice in the process of renewal and modernisation, preparing, in conjunction with the businesses and industry, programmes of ongoing formation especially for the young people already at work, thinking about initiatives to accompany the young people in their first steps on entering the world of work.

In this area, Past Pupils can be of great importance and a real help: they can form an excellent bridge between school and the world of work in which they already have their place; they can collaborate in the educative role of the school through their professional work and through their voluntary services; in addition many of them can help the young people who have completed their studies, accompanying them as they enter the work place, assisting them in initiatives of self-employment, creating work bursaries, etc.

In the Congregation there are some magnificent experiences in this field of technical vocational training: technical schools which are in the forefront, which not only offer young people a high-quality professional training but also promote various initiatives to help them to take their place with dignity in the world of work.

Precisely because of the importance which vocational training has in our mission of education for the poorest young people and because of the difficulties and challenges it has to face nowadays in a society in rapid development, it is a matter of urgency that we support it, encouraging greater coordination among the various centres at both Provincial and National level, fostering an exchange of experiences, projects, resources and closer collaboration between the more developed centres and those more modest. especially in the formation of the teachers, in the production of good quality programmes and in methodology... seeking together ways and means of ensuring the continuous support and renewal of the centres.

In recent years the Department for Youth Ministry has promoted some initiatives in this regard, but there is certainly still much more to be done.

3.5 The world of the University: the progress made by the IUS and other forms of presence in the university world.

By a decision of the Rector Major, the Department for Youth Ministry has assumed in this six-year period the animation of the IUS (Salesian University Institutions). The aim proposed was that of taking up and implementing the identity and policies approved by the Rector Major with his Council regarding a Salesian presence in higher education (January 2003) through the "2nd Common Plan" (2003-2008), drawn up in the IUS Assembly (July 2003). This plan corresponds to the three strategic objectives ("beams"):

1°. *The formation of the personnel.* This formation takes place especially through the IUS Virtual Course: "Shared learning and education techniques in the university, in a

Salesian style (CVI)". This is about a project carried out in a systematic and professional manner, which in a relatively short time has reached a significant number of the teachers in the IUS (about 3000); it has also had a strong impact on the renewal of the IUS themselves and on the positive development of the "2nd Common Plan"; without this group of people who share the values of Salesian education the success of the proposed plan would have been very difficult to achieve.

One particular development of the CVI has been the "Virtual Course of formation for teachers in Salesian schools in America", carried out by several IUS in collaboration with the Department for Youth Ministry and the Commission for the Salesian school in America; it is intended to strengthen the identity and the educational skills of the teachers, creating among them a culture of cooperation and of working in groups, developing new resources for educational work in the schools, along the lines of the Second American Meeting Salesian Schools (Cumbayá II). The first course (2006-2007) was followed by 702 teachers.

2°. The second objective is to ensure the fundamental principles of the Institutions according to the suggestions in the "*frame of reference*" in the documents on the identity and policies. It includes these aspects or columns:

- The "Navigational Chart," that is, a series of methods and procedures to ensure the direction and the management of Institutions are within the frame of reference of identity and policies;
- The human resources, the management of personnel and senior staff, the role of the Salesian community;
- Economic resources, funds and the production of resources, professional management of the resources, policies for investments, synergy, etc.

The development of the second strategic objective (or beam) has been the fundamental task of the IUS in these years. It has been a rigorous, systematic and well-accompanied process. The response of the IUS has been good, but not uniform; in general the majority have taken part with dedication and according to the conditions requested; a significant group of senior staff has been involved, led by the Rector. Participation in the Seminars held in Brasilia, São Paulo, Lima, El Salvador and in the Conferences (Chile 2004, Guatemala 2006, Porto Alegre 2009) has been satisfactory. Nonetheless, the final result (the drawing up of the "Navigational Chart"), although praiseworthy for the number involved (more than 50% of the IUS took part) and for its quality (it was a first attempt), there are clearly still considerable difficulties in the Universities for there to be a real process of strategic planning.

3°. The third strategic objective (or beam) is the aim of promoting *relationships of specific groups among the IUS*. This is a very practical and important initiative in order to create among the IUS a true academic community of collaboration in projects shared by the various Universities, so as to arrive eventually at the construction and the smooth running of a real network of Salesian Universities, making a significant contribution to the academic world in fields more in harmony with our educational and youth charism. At present there is a group of the Virtual Course engaged in the formation of personnel, the "IUS-Engineering" Group, the "IUS-Education" Group; while in preparation there are the "IUS--Pastoral Formation" Group and the "IUS-New Technologies."

Through the development of this programme, the IUS have not only grown numerically (in 2006 there were 61 university institutions of various levels: 19 in America, 25 in India, 9 in Europe, 5 in East-Asia and Oceania, 1 in Africa), but especially they are consolidating and growing in quality, in particular those in America and Europe. Through this ongoing process there has been a change in the way of thinking about and

organising a Salesian presence in the University, and new forms of presence and university management are being encouraged through the official commitment to the drawing up of the “Navigational Chart.”

In every IUS a *group of people* is being created who share the Salesian mission and vision and university projects; these groups are becoming capable of forming the animating nucleus of the academic community and being the promoters and leaders in the renewal of the Institutions. Greater *synergy and collaboration* among the IUS is growing, overcoming the self-centred approach and promoting in them a common understanding and vision of the overall picture.

In July 2007 the V IUS Assembly was held, in which the III Common Plan/Programme was drawn up, which took and examined further the objectives and the steps already taken so far.

3.6 Attention to the world of marginalised young people

Attention to young people in situations of risk has always been a characteristic of the Salesian apostolate. The new situation of our societies challenges us to find new solutions. Poverty is constantly growing and has reached tragic dimensions which afflict many individuals and communities, and among these many young people, so as to have become part of the world in which we live. We can also speak about “new forms of poverty” and therefore of “new forms of marginalisation – social exclusion”, among which those which strike us particularly as they put at risk the very possibilities of young peoples’ development, creating situation of serious hardship and for some even delinquency.

The most worrying aspect is the development of a mentality or a way of living life (individualism, consumerism, the seeking after efficiency at all costs, and profit ...) which leads to more marginalisation, exclusion, poverty and suffering, in particular for the weakest groups such as the young.

For this reason, during the last fifty years, there have been many projects, initiatives and works with the intention of responding to this situation and of offering young people a fresh opportunity to build their lives in a positive fashion and to take their place in society in a responsible way. There are “family homes” to take in and educate youngsters and young people in situations of serious danger (youngsters without any family, street children, youngsters the victims of sexual abuse or of prostitution...); projects offering care, protection and education to child or young workers, often from infancy, those welcoming and providing rehabilitation for young people victims of drugs or those coming out of prison ... accommodation and formation for young immigrants often with families ... and many others.

In the Provinces, sensitivity and a commitment to respond to the various situations of youth poverty and hardship have grown, not only through works, projects and specific activities on behalf of young people in serious situations of hardship, but above all by putting this commitment into the Educative Pastoral Plan of the Province, and in every educative community fostering concern so that special attention to be given to the issues of marginalisation and exclusion. This attention and this commitment need to increase even more in individual communities and works; more attention needs to be given to the culture and the mentality which they promote, making every effort to foster effectively a culture of solidarity and of active citizenship; it is also important to strengthen net working and collaboration among the various works and services in the Provinces and

with other institutions in the locality, attending to the formation and the educative and Salesian preparation of the educators in this specific area of commitment.

The Department for Youth Ministry has promoted and /or accompanied various initiatives in this regard, for example the European meeting on marginalisation (Barcelona 2003); the Regional meeting on education and work preparation of the young (San Salvador 2004); followed by the meeting on the approach to work in Salesian pedagogy for young people at risk (Medellín 2006); the meeting on Vocational Training and work preparation (Africa e Madagascar – Johannesburg 2004). There are also various Regional or National organisations which promote net-working and co-involvement and collaboration with social institutions working in this field, such as the YAR (“youth at risk”) organisation in India, SCS in Italy, “Social Platform” (Spain), and others.

In the animation and the coordination of this sector special importance attaches to the “*Planning and Development Offices*” set up in several Provinces. These Offices help the Provinces in the strategic planning of their efforts in the area of development and in their fund raising to finance the projects. Cooperation is very important between these Offices and the Provincial Delegation for Youth Ministry in order to ensure that projects are put into the Provincial SEPP and, at the same time, to promote a systematic planning system and a demanding assessment process of the objectives of the SEPP.⁴⁰

3.7 Other presences and flexible forms of service of the young

In our complex and pluralistic society we are assisting at the emergence of *new places or forms of the education of youth*, which propose models and styles of life which the masses of young people find very attractive; one can think of the parallel school of the mass-media, of fan clubs for those interested in music or sport, of tourism, of the new kinds of social or church commitment, of the area of free time, which all become new places for individuals to identify with.

To respond to this new situation there have grown up in various places in the Salesian world *new types of youth groups, new kinds of education, services or works* which are more flexible, able to respond and to adapt to changing needs and demands with greater freedom of action and initiative. These make more use of the possibility of communicating with the young in their natural environment rather than in the stability of a physical location; they give more emphasis to spontaneity in relationships and freedom to opt in, the centrality of the individuals rather than that of the structure or the project; they cultivate close links and work together with other institutions and services in the locality, in an attempt to offer a complete response to the situations. In these things it is relatively easier to help the young people themselves to become aware that following the path together is in their hands.

Here are some of these new forms of presence among the young.

1°. The Salesian Youth Movement

One of the most wide-spread and comprehensive of the presences among the young is the Salesian Youth Movement (SYM). This is a Movement with an educational character, offered to all the young to make them the subjects and the protagonists of their human and Christian development, with a missionary slant, open to those at a distance, with a

⁴⁰ Cf. Conclusions from the meeting for Planning and Development Offices. Rome, the Generalete, 2005.

desire to make an impact in the locality and in civil society and to be an active part of the local Church.

The youth groups and associations which, while retaining their autonomy in organisational terms, identify with Salesian spirituality and pedagogy, constitute, in an explicit or implicit manner the Salesian Youth Movement.

Its animation is shared among the groups of the Salesian Family, in particular the SDB and the FMA. A significant occasion for the Movement was the 'World Forum' held in Turin and Rome during the year 2000: in the places where the Salesian charism had its beginnings, representatives of the various Provinces shared their experience of being a Movement, of the great challenges nowadays affecting the world of youth, the possible new ways of responding and of being committed, and finally suggesting to all the young people of the Movement some tasks for the years ahead. This Final Message of the Forum became the frame of reference for the animation which in these last years has developed through various initiatives:

- the annual message of the Rector Major to the young people of the SYM on the occasion of the Feast of Don Bosco, a matter for study and reflection in the groups;
- further reflection on the identity of the Movement (various Provinces have drawn up an "Identity Card of the SYM");
- an increase in the direct leadership of the young people with various Province and Interprovince forms of coordination of the Movement (in particular, in the previous six-year period a European Coordinating Committee of the SYM with a large participation of the young people as a result of the *Confronto* 2004);
- a considerable number of meetings at Province or Regional level of the groups of the SYM, such as "Campobosco" in Spain and Portugal, the numerous pilgrimages of youth groups to the places of the origins of the Salesian charism, European meetings such as *Confronto* and *Eurizon*, meetings of the groups of the SYM in Argentina, Brazil, the "Boscoree" for the Don Bosco Scouts in India, etc.;
- efforts made for systematic and serious formation of the leaders and the development, in a good number of Provinces, of a "programme of Christian formation for the different groups"; within the SYM there is a growth of different movements and associations which are clearly of an evangelising nature;
- a greater presence of the SYM in the local Churches, etc.

The SYM is something very promising as it involves many youngsters, adolescents and young people, but it demands an ever-greater effort, which is more systematic and coordinated in evangelisation and Christian formation according to the values of Salesian Youth Spirituality, in the care of the formation and personal accompaniment of the leaders, in the promotion of a commitment of support for other young people, especially the poorest and those at risk, and in an active and responsible presence in the various youth circumstances in Society and in the Church.

Throughout the last six-year period the *youth pilgrimages to the Salesian places in Turin and to Colle Don Bosco* have multiplied and expanded, especially from the Provinces in Europe, as well as Spirituality meetings (retreats in the Salesian places for young people and adults ...), meetings for the Salesian formation of lay collaborators, a formation experience for young pre-novices from some Salesian Provinces of Europe, etc. The ICP Province is making a considerable effort to strengthen, with the help of the European Provinces, and coordinate better the Salesian teams which animate the Colle and Valdocco Project. The whole Congregation is grateful for this.

With the help and the collaboration of the Institute of Spirituality of the UPS, a process has also begun of reflection and sharing of ideas among those responsible for the *Salesian Houses of Spirituality* in Europe (May 2004); the basic elements have been

identified for a programme of Salesian Youth Spirituality to be offered in these houses, and the role of a Salesian House of Spirituality in the pastoral project of the Province.

2°. *Voluntary service*

In these years in the Provinces and in the SYM a large number of groups and associations for voluntary service, especially for the young, have grown up. The GC24 recognised voluntary service as *a new style of life of openness to others*, especially in the area of poverty and marginalisation, a challenge to the rampant forms of injustice and selfishness, a significant vocational expression and a valid endorsement of the educative process followed by young people with the SDBs.⁴¹

In the Congregation, Voluntary Service continues to grow through a considerable number of groups and organisations. In some Regions, local or national voluntary service has developed both missionary and social or vocational (America); in others international and missionary voluntary service has developed a great deal (Europe); others receive volunteers (Africa and Asia).

Salesian voluntary service is usually presented as something special to the young who have followed the formation process of the youth apostolate and it helps them to mature and to further reflect on their vocational option for a committed Christian life; but often it also becomes a special occasion of contact, and of an opportunity for evangelisation for young people who come from outside our own centres.

The Departments for Youth Ministry and for the Missions have drawn up a document "Voluntary Service in the Salesian mission", containing the valuable reports from the International meeting in 2001 and the experiences of the Provinces and the Salesian NGO. In this document the identity of Salesian voluntary service is presented, and some basic requirements and conditions for its development, for the formation and the accompaniment of the volunteers and for the animation and promotion of Salesian voluntary service in the Provinces and in the Congregation.

In 2007 this document was presented to the whole Congregation in seven Regional Meetings, so that it would be known and put into practice in the various Provinces through a Provincial Plan for voluntary service inserted in the Provincial SEPP.

4. FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR SALESIAN YOUTH MINISTRY

After having described how Youth Ministry has developed and how it is now organised in the Congregation, together with a profound thanks to God for the great amount of good He has raised up among us in the service of the young, through the power of the attraction of Don Bosco and of his charism, through the generous commitment of so many confreres, lay collaborators and the young themselves, I should like to put to you and share with you some prospects for the future, several of which were proposed by the GC26 as priority objectives for the next few years.

⁴¹ Cf. GC24, n. 26.

4.1 Continuing the effort to assimilate and to put into practice the model of Salesian Youth Pastoral ministry

We have seen the great efforts made by the Congregation in these last fifty years to re-think and to renew its educative and pastoral praxis, responding with greater fidelity to the new needs and expectations of the young and to the inspirational values of the Preventive System of Don Bosco. Today we can draw on a collection of criteria, guidelines, structures, lines of action which translate in today's situation the spirit and the model of action as lived by Don Bosco in the first Oratory: the Preventive System.

All this effort in re-thinking the educational practice necessarily implies an openness to new schemes and a new practices, a new way of thinking and a new way of organising those elements which are part of the educational process, a new methodology and a new way of being present among the young ... These are things which require reflection to assess everyday experience, courage to take up new ways of seeing and doing things, patience to give sufficient time to the slow process of changing ways of thinking and attitudes, a sharing of ideas because these processes of change are not achieved alone but with others in a group.

Today the Congregation has an operative model for Youth Ministry, that is to say, a practical way of structuring and organising the various elements of its educational and pastoral practice in order to ensure its identity, its consistency with regard to the objectives of the project and its structure; a model faithful to the inspirational principles of Don Bosco's Preventive System, and one which, at the same time, responds better to the needs and the circumstances of young people today. There is an urgent need, therefore, to commit ourselves to becoming thoroughly familiar with this model, applying its principles, and above all putting it into practice in the various contexts and situations. In these last years a great effort has been made in this regard, but it needs to continue helping individual Salesian and the local communities to measure their praxis against the model to make it more faithful and effective.

In particular, it is important to adopt a **unified and organic vision** of a ministry, centred on the individual young person and not so much on works or services, overcoming a compartmentalisation still present in everyday practice. One should also strengthen **the community dimension of pastoral activity** which can be seen, above all, in the efforts to make the Salesian work an educative-pastoral community, in which people are at the centre, interpersonal relationships prevail, the aspects of communion and of collaboration over management and organisational preoccupations. Another aspect on which the last Chapters insisted is **the planning mentality**, that is to say, considering pastoral action as a process which is gradually developed according to precise and verifiable objectives, and not just as the sum total of all the various activities undertaken with little connection between them.

All this implies that efforts in pastoral formation must be re-doubled as regards both Salesians and lay collaborators. In this area there are many initiatives, but there is need for them to be organised and be given some continuity, so that in every educative-pastoral community a nucleus may be built up of people who are fully identified with the values and the organisation of Salesian pastoral practice capable of encouraging and leading the others.

4.2 An evangelising pastoral practice clearly directed to proclaiming Christ and to the education of the young to the faith

The educative-pastoral activity of the Congregation is spreading everywhere; the needs of the young and requests from society and from the Church are always more numerous and pressing. In the effort to respond to them there is the danger of overstressing ourselves and leaving in the shade the heart of our mission.

In many of the societies and cultures in which we carry out our educative and pastoral services, a culture is developing which puts religion, and particularly Christianity, to one side, a style of life which fosters the growth of the material and spiritual poverty of many and which multiplies the factors leading to social exclusion ... In this climate, religious values and the motivations of believers which in other times were obvious and recognised in the service of education and human development often become insignificant and irrelevant.

This situation has urged many Salesians and lay collaborators to renew their vocational identity and to devote themselves with great generosity and sacrifice to the task of education and pastoral service; but there is also the danger of « spiritual superficiality, frenetic activity, a bourgeois life style, weak evangelical witness, a half-hearted approach to the mission. This translates into awkwardness in bringing out our proper identity as consecrated persons and into apostolic timidity».⁴²

All of this means that we need to recover the roots and the driving force of our pastoral praxis, the missionary passion of the “Da mihi animas”, the only thing which can guarantee its meaning and effectiveness, and to concentrate our many and varied educative-pastoral activities on evangelisation and on education to the faith, where everything finds its unity and its meaning.⁴³

In the light of the guidelines proposed by the GC26 on the subject of evangelisation, here are some **priorities** which ought to characterise youth pastoral practice in the coming years:

1°. *A more missionary pastoral practice* which would propose «to the young with joy and courage that they live their lives in the way Jesus Christ lived his ».⁴⁴ Today it is not enough to place young people in a positive environment with a great number of activities and proposals, nor even to simply offer them catechetical training, or help them become accustomed to religious practices [prayer and the sacraments]; what is needed is a clear and explicit proclamation of Jesus Christ, which can awaken in the young the desire to know him and to follow him; it is necessary to teach them and guide them in Christian prayer, in the reading and meditation of the Word of God; there is also a need to awaken in them a desire to commit themselves to a systematic and serious process of increasing their knowledge of the faith, and to help them to plan and live their lives according to Gospel values.

2°. *An evangelisation which is fully inserted in the field of education.* Salesian Youth Ministry lives and develops in the field of education where it tries to promote in the young not only a Christian way of life but also a culture inspired by the faith and by gospel values, which can be an alternative to the culture of their surroundings characterised by secularism, relativism, subjectivism, consumerism...

Consideration of the cultural contents which we offer in the daily activities of a work does not always receive the attention it ought to have in order to ensure consistency between what is offered or the methods used and the values of the

⁴² GC26, “The urgent need for evangelisation”, n 27

⁴³ Cf. Concluding address of the RM at the GC26: first key to interpreting the chapter document: “Warming the hearts of the confreres.”

⁴⁴ GC26 “The urgent need for evangelisation”. Guidelines for action 5, n. 36.

Christian faith (the meeting between culture and faith), and to ensure a Christian life capable of giving a person's private, professional and social life that Christian quality it ought to have.

Nowadays, therefore, there is an urgent need to organise pastoral practice, taking special care to integrate evangelisation and education according to the criteria of the Preventive System:⁴⁵

- an evangelisation capable of being adapted to the evolving condition of the young person, which takes care to develop the fundamental human attitudes which make a personal opening up to God and a meeting with Jesus possible, attentive to the values and views concerning life of the young people in order to transform them in the light of the Gospel;
- an education capable of forming the way of thinking, of inspiring a view of life which is open to the religious dimension, of bringing to maturity life choices inspired by the Gospel of Jesus; an education which is attentive, in particular, to developing the religious dimension of the individual and to fostering the attitudes fundamental to a positive openness to the faith; an education which attends to the formation of a moral conscience and educates the young to a social commitment according to the inspirations of the social teaching of the Church.

4.3 Deepen and strengthen the vocational dimension of every pastoral project

Vocational promotion and guidance are an essential element of a Youth Ministry which helps every young person to make life choices in a responsible manner, in the light of faith. «Today we feel more strongly than ever the challenge of creating a vocational culture in every setting, such that young people may discover life as a call and that all Salesian ministry may be truly vocational».⁴⁶ But the best youth ministry does not awaken apostolic and consecrated vocations without giving specific attention to an explicit vocational call, to a decisive personal proposal, to constant spiritual accompaniment.

The lack of vocations has led communities and confreres to reflect on the way of carrying out vocation promotion, but this is still being considered and undertaken as a task seen as complementary to ordinary educational and pastoral work, to be done by those given the task, or by some confreres who are particularly interested. This is to impoverish the two processes: a youth apostolate which does not succeed in guiding young people towards a vocational view of their life, towards the gospel options of gift and service; and a vocation promotion approach which is based too much on enthusiasm and too little on a relationship of deep personal faith with Jesus Christ.

For this it is necessary to change the way of thinking and introduce some new ways of doing things, particularly in these three areas:

- 1°. Promoting in all our centres a culture of vocation, through a youth ministry which is decidedly evangelising, which leads the young people to recognise their lives as God's gift, and to respond to it with a generous commitment to the service of others, in particular those in most need.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ GC26, "The urgent need for evangelisation". Cf. Guidelines for action 6, n. 41.

⁴⁶ GC26, "Need for vocation ministry", n. 53.

⁴⁷ GC26, "Need for vocation ministry", Cf. n. 60.

- 2°. Ensuring that in every plan of education to the faith special attention is given to fostering in the young an apostolic commitment, rooted in the personal awareness of friendship with Jesus Christ, experienced in communion and collaboration within a strong community experience and matured with a systematic commitment to personal formation.⁴⁸
- 3°. Witnessing with courage and joy the beauty of one's own Salesian vocation, totally devoted to God in the mission for youth, making of it an explicit proposal, and committing ourselves to accompanying the young as signs of the Salesian religious vocation and in their process of discernment and vocational formation.⁴⁹

4.4 A special attention to the poorest youngsters and those at risk as a characteristic feature of every Salesian presence and work

With joy I recognise that there has been an increase in sensitivity and concern, in reflection and commitment with regard to the world of marginalised and disadvantaged youth. This situation is no longer a rather particular area, identified with some special work or animated only by a particularly motivated confrere. Concern for the least, the poorest, the most disadvantaged is becoming one of the Congregation's "characteristic features" which, little by little, involves many houses in the Provinces.

But there still exists a certain resistance to a change of mentality and of practice in educational matters, so that every one of our presences may truly be at the service of the most needy youngsters.⁵⁰ Faithful to the directives of the GC26, we need to continue along this path and concentrate our efforts on developing some procedures which involve the whole of our youth ministry:

- 1°. Concern for young people in situations of risk as a *characteristic and a commitment of every Salesian presence and of every educational project*. It is not enough to have in the Province some works or services explicitly dedicated to the poorest young people; it is necessary that an openness to and concern for situations of poverty, exclusion and marginalisation are adopted by every centre, to the extent of it becoming a characteristic of its significance. It is important that every educative community: identifies those aspects of the surroundings, of its own functioning and working, or certain criteria of evaluation more or less explicit, which in fact produce discrimination and exclusion, and efforts are made to change them; fosters the presence, the participation and the protagonism of the most needy and at-risk youngsters in the activities, in the groups, in positions of responsibility...; and that it identifies with special care those aspects of Salesian pedagogy more suited to these young people and it commits itself to putting them into practice.
- 2°. Focusing on the *transformation of mentality and of cultural tendencies* not only so as to respond to the immediate expectations, promoting a culture of solidarity according to the criterion of "giving more to those who have received the least". The poverty and marginalisation in our societies are not only economic or social phenomena but also, and I believe especially, cultural phenomena; there exists a

⁴⁸ GC26, "Need for vocation ministry". Guidelines for action 9, cf. nn. 65-67.

⁴⁹ GC26, "Need for vocation ministry". Guidelines for action 8, cf. nn. 61-64. Guidelines for action 10, cf. nn. 69-73.

⁵⁰ GC26 "Evangelical Poverty". Cf. n. 82. "New frontiers". Cf. n. 101.

individualistic, competitive, hedonistic and consumeristic way of looking at life which results in the exclusion of the weakest; we cannot therefore be content to help the most disadvantaged to overcome their situations of marginalisation, but what we do must be aimed at the transformation of their way of thinking and that of the whole of society. In this regard every educative-pastoral community needs to be very attentive to the values and the styles of life which it promotes through its daily work of education.

- 3°. Developing in a special way the *religious dimension of the individual, considered as a fundamental element in the process of becoming fully human and of prevention*. In the anthropological view of Don Bosco's Preventive System the religious dimension is a fundamental aspect of the individual and of society; for this reason its development, up to the proclamation of Jesus Christ, has to be an indispensable element in the Salesian educational project. We believe that in this personal relationship with God, through the mysterious workings of the Spirit Who is active in the heart of every individual and in a special way in those of the poor and most needy, unsuspected strength can be found for the building up of the personality and for its all-round development,⁵¹ and we believe that this is an important element to give hope to the young who are suffering in a special way the tragic consequences of poverty and social exclusion.

Therefore, in its educative pastoral plan, every educative community should provide for these young people experiences and procedures which reawaken in them the religious dimension of life and help them to discover Jesus as the Saviour.⁵² This programme of evangelisation needs to play a full part in the educational process of prevention and rehabilitation, and be expressed in simple projects closely connected with everyday life and similar to the planting of small seeds.

The witness of the educators and of the educative community, the atmosphere of joy, of welcome, of a family, the defense and the promotion of personal dignity, become a first proclamation and a first realisation of the salvation of Christ and a offer of freedom and the fulness of life.

This first spark needs to be encouraged and helped to develop with patience and perseverance, always awakening the positive aspect to be found in every young person, an awareness of his dignity, his desire to pick himself up. The whole community offers him religious experiences which are simple but of good quality, such as moments of prayer or celebration, which help him to open himself to the presence of God and a personal relationship with Him. Starting from this experience the Christian community will be able to proclaim with respect, but also with joy, the person of Jesus Christ.

4.5 Redefine our presences to make them more significant, that is, "new presences"

The profound renewal of Youth Ministry to respond better to the needs and to the demands of the young requires as an indispensable prerequisite the serious review of the purpose, the organisation and the management of our works. For this reason, for a number of years in the Congregation we have been invited to re-structure our presences,

⁵¹ J. E. VECCHI, "He had compassion on them". AGC 359, page 33.

⁵² CG26, "New frontiers". Guidelines for action 15. Cf. nn. 105-107.

to change them and make them more meaningful, opening them up to new frontiers, making the presences “new” and promoting them anew.⁵³

To make the traditional works that we have, Schools, Vocational Training Centres, Parishes, Oratories and Youth Centres, University hostels etc. new requires that we concentrate the role of the Salesian community not so much on the management and organisation of the work as on the accompaniment and on the formation of the educators and of the young people, ensuring a presence for their benefit, in the animation of a gradual process of education and evangelisation until it arrives at a proposal for a Christian life of commitment, with the involvement of a vast movement of people in a Salesian educative pastoral Project which is open and shared. It is also about giving preferential and decisive attention to young people at risk, making the necessary decisions with courage and creativity; it is a matter also of promoting initiatives and projects which involve the largest number possible of individuals and institutions at the service of the education and evangelisation of the young, net-working together and working in communion with society and the Church.

It is not enough to renew the already existing presences. Often there is also the need to take the necessary steps to create new kinds of presences, with a strong emphasis on evangelisation and education to the faith, on the Salesian formation of the collaborators, with teams which animate Salesian houses of spirituality, catechetical centres, centres for the formation of lay collaborators; presences for explicit vocational animation and proposal, for the animation and guidance of youth associations and movements for evangelisation and commitment, and for voluntary service, etc...

To facilitate this commitment to make the Salesian presence in a given area more significant and effective, to coordinate better the various kinds of Salesian presence there, to foster the re-location and re-organisation of works, the GC25 asked every Province to draw up a Provincial Organic/Structural Plan (POI) which could offer the criteria, the conditions and the practical requirements necessary in order to reach this objective.⁵⁴ The process was begun, but it needs to move ahead by means of a continuous assessment and renewal of the POI.

4.6 A pastoral animation which is more and more inter-linked and coordinated among the different Departments, in particular the Departments for the Salesian Mission: Youth Ministry, Social Communication and the Missions.

Animation of youth ministry has become more and more complex: the different sectors or areas have multiplied with new features to be organised and coordinated. Some of these aspects are closely linked to others entrusted by the Constitutions to other Departments, for example the phenomenon of voluntary service in its various forms has a specific and practical relationship to the missions (when it is a question of missionary voluntary service); the parish entrusted to the Salesians in mission lands also assumes the dynamic associated with mission stations, looked after by the Department for the Missions; the Department for Social Communication, in addition to the animation of the aspects specific to the means of social communication and businesses, contributes to the formation of educators so that they may create strong relationships and foster communication; this aspect is closely linked to youth ministry which animates the educative-pastoral community, the fundamental subject of education and evangelisation; the pastoral formation of the SDB and of lay people ought to be of help to each other and linked together, and in this there ought to be close collaboration between the Department

⁵³ Cf. for example GC26, “New frontiers”, n. 100; Concluding words of the Rector Major at the meeting of the Provincials of Europe, 5 December 2004. AGC 388, 5.2.

⁵⁴ Cf. GC25, nn. 82-84. Cf. also GC26, “New frontiers” n. 113.

for Formation and the Department for Youth Ministry ... And similarly with other areas which are becoming more and more interdependent, and the concern of various Departments, so that their animation is not seen as the task of only one preexisting from the others.

In the face of this situation, GC26 asked the Rector Major and his Council to foster during the next six-year period a more structured collaboration between the three Departments of the mission (Youth Ministry, Social Communication and the Missions), so that, while safeguarding the organic unity of youth ministry, these areas benefit from the mutual help given to with the support of the three departments which have direct responsibility for the animation of the complementary aspects of the one Salesian mission: the education and evangelisation of the young, especially the poor and the working classes, which, in a culture which is profoundly shaped by social communication and is more and more secularised, requires a clearly missionary approach in which priority is given to the first proclamation of the Gospel.

This directive of the GC26 is not simply an organisational issue but implies a much broader, integrated and linked view of some central aspects of the Salesian mission entrusted to these departments. Youth Ministry needs to be more and more missionary, that is to say, assuming the characteristics and dynamics of missionary action, giving special care to the awakening of the religious dimension of the young who are living immersed in a secularised society, giving priority to the first proclamation of Jesus Christ, fostering dialogue with other religions... Youth Ministry must also assume more and more the new culture of social communication, which shapes a style of life and action, a set of values which is a feature of society, especially that of the young, in which youth ministry carries out its educational and evangelising role.

Therefore, the Salesian as an educator-pastor of the young people of today has to acquire many of the features of the missionary and of the communicator; the educative-pastoral community has to become a powerhouse of high quality human and Christian communication; the Salesian educative-pastoral project has to ensure that it contains and develops the missionary dimension and the dynamism and qualities of the world of communication. Salesian Youth Ministry, Social Communication and Missionary promotion are integral aspects which together contribute to the total implementation of the Salesian Mission.

CONCLUSION

Dear Confreres I wanted to send you this letter on the IVth Sunday of Easter, which the Church dedicates to Christ the Good Shepherd, precisely so as to learn from Him as our beloved Father Don Bosco did, when he felt his call as a vocation and mission to be a good shepherd of the young.

May Mary, his mother and teacher, teach us, as she taught him, the field of action, the mission to be undertaken, and the way in which to carry it out.

Affectionately, in Don Bosco

Fr Pascual CHÁVEZ V., SDB