

GENERAL CHAPTER 29
SALESIANS OF DON BOSCO

**PASSIONATE ABOUT JESUS CHRIST,
DEDICATED TO YOUNG PEOPLE**

*Living our Salesian vocation
faithfully and prophetically*

Chapter Documents

GC29

Turin, February 16 - April 12, 2025

acts

**of the General Council
of the Salesian Society
of St John Bosco**

OFFICIAL ORGAN OF ANIMATION AND COMMUNICATION FOR THE SALESIAN CONGREGATION

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PASSIONATE ABOUT JESUS CHRIST, DEDICATED TO YOUNG PEOPLE

***Living our Salesian vocation
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**DOCUMENTS OF THE 29th GENERAL CHAPTER
OF THE SOCIETY OF SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES**

Turin, February 16 - April 12, 2025

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PRESENTATION

Dear confreres,

The Final Document that we are handing over to the Congregation today is the result of a very intense spiritual and communal experience. It was an experience that touched the hearts of each and every member of the GC29. This Final Document is the living memory of a journey guided by the Spirit, celebrated in the home of our origins, here in Valdocco, where everything began. Here we wanted to pause and listen deeply, aware that all true renewal comes from an authentic return to the sources. In this blessed place, immersed in the silent presence of Don Bosco, we experienced days of prayer, discernment and sincere dialogue. We felt guided by the maternal gaze of Mary Help of Christians, convinced that our vocation today requires a heart as ardent as hers, the clear vision she had and courageous choices she made.

The theme chosen for the Chapter, “Passionate about Jesus Christ, dedicated to young people”, was not only the backdrop to our work, but also the driving force behind every discussion and decision. This was not a theme conceived at a desk, but one that matured through listening to provinces around the world. It was the fruit of an authentic synodal process inspired by the ecclesial methodology of “Conversation in the Spirit” which profoundly marked the tone of the General Chapter. Listening to one another, humility in questioning ourselves, the desire to allow the voice of the Spirit to emerge among us, fostered an atmosphere of real communion, which made shared, honest, mature discernment possible. We joyfully acknowledge that this is the first fruit of GC29: an ecclesial experience that one again helped us discover that only when we journey together under the Spirit’s guidance can we be faithful to the gospel and meaningful to young people today.

The Final Document we are presenting is split into three

main areas. The first two – “Animation and Care of the Real Life of Each Salesian” and “Salesians, Salesian Family and Lay People Together With and For Young People” – are structured according to the threefold process of listening, interpretation and choice. We recognise an intellectual and spiritual honesty in them, as they deal with the lights and shadows of our personal, community and apostolic lives. During GC29, we were not afraid to name the struggles that mark the spiritual life of many confreres, the inner fragmentation that sometimes weakens the grace of unity, the vocational crisis that profoundly questions the quality of our accompaniment in some regions, and the cultural challenges that test the consistency of our witness. But along with these shadows, we gratefully recognised the many signs of life, fidelity, generosity and hope. The choices that the Final Document proposes are not abstract norms but concrete indications, the result of shared reflections rooted in reality. They ask each of us to put Christ back at the centre of our lives, to cultivate a deeper spirituality, to live fraternity authentically, to value in particular the vocation of the Salesian Brother, and to promote an educational mission increasingly shared with lay people and the various groups of the Salesian Family.

The third core area brings together the twenty-three Chapter resolutions which represent a courageous and lucid response to the needs for government of the Congregation that is more consistent with the mission, closer to reality, more agile and transparent. Some of them amend articles of the Constitutions and General Regulations, others address key operational issues. These are concise but incisive texts. I would like to recall some of them here, to bring out their significance. The change to Article 187 of the Constitutions, which removes any ambiguity about the relationship between evangelical poverty and financial sustainability, is a significant one. The establishment of a second Region in Africa-Madagascar is a hugely important decision which not only recognises the numerical growth of the confreres, but also apostolic maturity and local planning capacity.

Even more symbolic is the resolution amending Article 30 of the Constitutions on the Salesian mission, broadening the horizons beyond first evangelisation to explicitly include “revitalisation of the faith in countries of ancient Christian tradition.” This is a lucid acknowledgement of our times and a prophetic revival of our missionary identity, precisely on the 150th anniversary of the first Salesian expedition and as the Church celebrates the Jubilee of Hope. In this context, the resolution to formally include works for young people in situations of vulnerability or exclusion in the Regulations gains even stronger meaning, by recognising them as a charismatic and prioritised response to the wounds of our time. Similarly, the commitment to safeguarding, expressed at various points and in various reflections, runs through the Final Document as an indispensable evangelical principle: the protection of the little ones and the vulnerable remains an essential criterion of evangelical authenticity and pastoral credibility.

Alongside the three main core areas, the final Document is supplemented by a section of **Appendices**, which should not be considered marginal. We treasure the Holy Father’s message, the various opening addresses, and the Rector Major’s final address along with the weekly reflections that Fr Pascual offered and which bear the title “Taking Stock”. In our journey of learning about the Final Document over the coming years, we will be helped by the contribution that I asked Fr Pascual to share with the whole Congregation. It is his concluding reflection made after GC29 came to an end. I am convinced that his accompaniment, appreciated by everyone, is further enriched by this final contribution. While it completes his weekly reflections, it will also help us to revive the memory of what we experienced in Turin and concluded in Rome.

These are pages to meditate on. They are pages that restore to us the spirit with which GC29 was conducted: a spirit of faith, searching, fraternity and love for the mission.

Dear confreres, this Final Document is now entrusted to you,

the communities, provinces, lay people and young people who share Don Bosco's dream with us. To become fruitful it needs to be read, mediated upon, discussed, internalised. Above all, it needs to be lived. Nothing we have developed will make sense unless it is reflected in the real lives of individuals and communities. GC29 did not end with the proclamation of the final vote. GC29 begins now, with the responsibility each of us takes in receiving this mandate.

We entrust this journey to Mary Help of Christians, who we felt as a discreet but very strong presence during GC29. It is She who continues to be present every day in our lives and in our homes. We entrust this journey to Mary Help of Christians, whose discreet but very strong presence during GC29 was something we felt. She continues to be present every day in our lives and in our houses. She who "continues to do everything" is the one to whom we entrust our desire to be Salesians who are truly *passionate about Jesus Christ and dedicated to young people*. And we ask Don Bosco, who tells us once more today as he did then, that "It is not enough to love young people, they must realise that they are loved," to guide us by his intercession and example so that the flame of apostolic charity may never be extinguished in our hearts.

Rome, 24 May 2025 - Solemnity of Mary Help of Christians

Fr Fabio Attard
Rector Major

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ACTS OF GC29
PASSIONATE ABOUT JESUS CHRIST,
DEDICATED TO YOUNG PEOPLE

Living our Salesian vocation faithfully and prophetically

Introduction

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

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

3. The high office that the Holy Father entrusted to the Rector Major Emeritus Fr Ángel Fernández Artime while his mandate

was still in progress, brought the usual six-yearly appointment for the Chapter forward by one year. Despite his absence, the perspectives of the Letter of Indiction and the Report on the State of the Congregation gave a clear direction to our work. We would therefore like to renew our heartfelt gratitude to him for his generous service of animation and governance, together with our best wishes for the new mission he is carrying out in the Holy See at the service of the universal Church.

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

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

6. Young people, above all, have been at the centre of our thoughts. Faced with the freshness of their dreams, the generosity with which they are able to commit themselves, the creativity with which they look to the future, we continue to be amazed. With their enthusiasm they help us not to give in to the

weight of habit and to maintain inner drive and apostolic passion. Living with them every day, we also get to know at first hand the difficulties they encounter, together with the hardships and disappointments they experience in becoming responsible adults. Many of them carry painful wounds for which they are often not responsible. We give our lives for them every day and our greatest desire is to help them discover how much God loves them and how close he is to their hearts.

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

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

9. The Document we have drawn up contains the fruits of our

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

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

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

Confreres of the 29th General Chapter

CORE AREA 1
ANIMATION AND CARE OF THE REAL LIFE
OF EACH SALESIAN

A. CENTRALITY OF CHRIST AND CARE OF THE SALESIAN VOCATION

Listening

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

12. The Rector Major emeritus, in his Report prepared for the General Chapter, highlighted “a certain weakness or fragility in the way of living the spiritual life and relationship with God. This is a factor found very much in all consecrated life, but also in ours, as Salesians, and which affects our own charismatic identity” (A. F. ARTIME, *Report of the Rector Major to the 29th General Chapter*, p. 10). We are talking about a subtle disease found throughout the body of consecrated life and which, even among us Salesians, affects us like rust that corrodes our fidelity. In places we see a drift towards a comfortable and conformist lifestyle that reveals a lack of the radical approach to the gospel

that should be our distinguishing mark. The management of our structures is sometimes a burden that risks absorbing too much energy. Despite these difficulties, there are positive signs. In some regions and provinces there is significant increase in vocations, accompanied by creative ways of inculturating the charism, all of which is particularly significant in this 150th anniversary of the first Salesian missionary expedition.

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

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

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

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

The departure of confreres who are already priests or candidates for the priesthood, asking to move to the diocesan

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

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

Interpretation

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

would seem to be the great temptation from which we must guard ourselves as individuals and as communities.

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

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

In the Eucharist we experience that prayer, fraternity and mission are born together and come from a gift that precedes us

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

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

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

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

Choice

18. In light of our listening and interpretation, we choose to RESOLUTELY RENEW THE CENTRALITY OF JESUS CHRIST, REDISCOVERING THE GRACE OF UNITY AND AVOIDING SPIRITUAL SUPERFICIALITY.

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

– *Let the Salesian*

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

– *Let the Community*

- e. celebrate the Eucharist as an authentic “central act” of community life, propose times for Eucharistic adoration and ensure adequate times and places for personal and community prayer;
- f. place value on daily meditation, adapting it to apostolic

rhythms without ever sacrificing it, and plan times for sharing the Word of God and for *lectio divina*;

g. renew the tradition of the monthly memorial of Mary Help of Christians as an opportunity to intensify and spread devotion to Our Lady;

h. encourage in-depth knowledge of Don Bosco and Saint Francis de Sales, valuing their spirituality;

i. give witness to evangelical poverty and solidarity with the poor through concrete choices;

j. place emphatic value on the vocation of the Salesian brother as an original and precious expression of the Salesian charism.

– *Let the Province*

k. foster a deeper understanding of charismatic identity through appropriate initiatives, and develop formation opportunities that help the confreres to live the “grace of unity” in our contemporary context.

l. place value on the study centres at the UPS and in the IUS for theological and spiritual research on Don Bosco’s experience;

m. ensure that there is at least one Salesian with a Licence in Salesian spirituality, for the animation of the confreres and the educative and pastoral communities;

n. invest significant resources in the promotion and formation of the Salesian brother;

o. promote creative ways of inculturating the charism in the variety of cultural contexts;

p. see to the quality and animation of the annual retreat, so that it is truly a time for spiritual recovery and renewal.

FRATERNITY AND ATTENTION TO THE POOR

Listening

19. Valdocco’s courtyards over the weeks of the Chapter have shown how the variety of faces, colours, languages and traditions are the clearest photograph of a Congregation with a worldwide countenance. In just a few days, the desire for communion and

fraternity gave shape to “living and working together”, to the desire to know, meet and listen to each other deeply. We can say that this dimension of fraternity is in the DNA of our call and many confreres are exemplary in living and witnessing to the family spirit typical of our spirituality.

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

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

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

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

21. In this context of light and shadow, the key role of the

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

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

We recognise how working with the poor renews the community, brings us closer to God, and strengthens fraternal life. We read in the Rector Major’s *Report to the General Chapter*: “it is true that there are numerous confreres with great sensitivity. But we are not all like that. (...) we take care of the poor, but we are not ‘with the poor’ nor ‘are we poor’, and with little capacity for personal and institutional testimony. And where – alongside holy Salesians – there are ‘bourgeois’ Salesians who desire more social life than missionary life, attracted by careerism and with superficial attitudes, with distractions and

various comforts and – what’s worse – everything is considered normal” (*Ibid.* p. 20) This risks leaving only a few charismatic confreres in pastoral work with the poor and not the community; the option for the poor is implemented, but missionary audacity is lacking, falling back into a dangerous pastoral inertia.

Interpretation

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

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

formality that leads the heart to harden and no longer perceive the contradictions in which it lives.

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

25. All of this primarily concerns the figure of the rector, who is often overloaded with excessive tasks that hinder the main dimension of his service of animation and government: the accompaniment of his confreres and the care of their vocation. It is also about bodies that involve community engagement such as the house council and community assembly. These are structures codified in the Constitutions and Regulations, and it is important to take care of their quality so that they are not reduced to sterile meetings that generate disaffection. The final document of the Synod on synodality offers valuable insights for carrying out the processes of discernment for mission in a more mature and participatory way, as well as the articulation of decision-making processes and the care for transparency,

accountability and evaluation (FRANCIS - XVI GENERAL ORDINARY ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *For A Synodal Church: Communion, Participation And Mission. Final Document*, Part Three). While appreciating the testimony of the fraternal life of religious, the same document invites them not to be self-referential and to live with the other members of the People of God in an authentic exchange of gifts within the local Churches.

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

27. The family spirit that characterises us also has a profound apostolic and vocational value (cf. C 57). Fraternal communion is the most eloquent sign of God's love, and we want to be signs and bearers of this for young people, especially the poorest (cf. C 2). Precisely for this reason it is important that the dedication to the most needy youngsters is not the exclusive commitment of

some confreres, but is the expression of the entire community and the criterion for its choices. It can happen that the sole or excessive concern for the financial sustainability of the works ends up translating into choices that distance us from the poor and demonstrate little trust in Providence. However, Pope Francis has repeatedly reminded us that contact with the Eucharistic Body of the Lord in the Eucharist cannot be separated from contact with the body of our brothers and sisters in need. Only within this dual relationship – with the Lord and with poor young people – does the body of the Salesian community grow healthy, avoid spiritual worldliness and witness to the love of God, including in the places of greatest conflict and suffering. Thus it remains faithful to the initial inspiration of the Oratory from which it was born.

Choice

28. In light of our listening and interpretation, we choose to REVITALISE FRATERNAL LIFE IN COMMUNITIES AND STRENGTHEN SERVICE TO THE POOREST YOUNG PEOPLE AS AN AUTHENTIC EXPRESSION OF THE SALESIAN CHARISM.

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

– *Let the Salesian*

a. contribute to making the community a true family (cf. C 83) by fighting whatever tendencies against community he may discover in himself and by participating generously in the life and work of the community (cf. C 52);

b. avoid all forms of worldliness and comfortable lifestyle, seeking evangelical authenticity in his relationships and choices.

– *Let the Community*

c. guarantee a healthy balance between work and fraternal life, preserving quality time for relationships and free sharing;

d. value the contribution of experience and wisdom of the

elderly confreres and offer them appropriate attention and care;

e. pay particular attention to wounded and struggling confreres, creating a welcoming and non-judgemental environment; let the rector in particular become involved, where necessary, in offering specialist support;

f. adopt the Oratory criterion as a community style, sharing significant moments of daily life and growth with young people;

g. relaunch community day as an opportunity to celebrate the Eucharist together and experience moments of dialogue and sharing;

h. see to quality of the community assembly and council meetings as opportunities for synodality and shared responsibility;

i. develop the Community Plan in synodal style, in harmony with the local Salesian Educative and Pastoral Plan and the progress of the Educative and Pastoral Community, and provide for its periodic evaluation.

– *Let the Province*

j. guarantee the consistency in number and quality that is necessary for an authentic fraternal life, ensuring as far as possible the complementarity between priest and brother confreres (cf. C 45);

k. take up the option for poorest young people as a fundamental criterion for community and provincial discernment;

l. offer formation opportunities on the emotional and relational dimension of the confreres and form people specifically prepared for such accompaniment;

m. promote a strong sense of internal solidarity, concretely supporting the communities most involved in frontier works;

n. implement processes for assessing the social impact of the works;

o. promote a simple and counter-current lifestyle;

p. promote the vital insertion of communities in the local Church, in the spirit of ecclesial synodality.

– *Let the Rector Major with his Council*

q. continue the commitment to guaranteeing the consistency in number and quality of the communities;

- r. promote frontier communities for abandoned young people;
- s. promote reception of the Church's synodal journey.
- t. promote advocacy for poor young people in international institutions;
- u. offer clear guidelines to prevent and counter a comfortable lifestyle;
- v. develop a specific Salesian service for migrants and other young people in vulnerable situations.

C. FORMATION OF THE SALESIAN

Listening

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

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

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

However, we note that not all confreres allow themselves to be accompanied, showing personal closures and little awareness of their own needs. At the same time, we do not always find prepared and committed spiritual guides and rectors who prioritise

accompaniment. In some situations support is not understood as a relationship that wishes the other well, with particular attention to the care and creation of bonds of trust, but is reduced to a formality.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

33. Ongoing formation has been enriched with quality

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

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

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

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

Interpretation

35. “Through the motherly intervention of Mary, the Holy Spirit raised up St John Bosco to contribute to the salvation of youth. The

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

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

36. To overcome this mentality which sharply divides times of formation and times of mission, we have been talking about

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

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

In other words, we cannot be satisfied with the formal

correctness of behaviours that can be observed from the outside, but we must help each confrere to reread his own experience, to recognise the authentic motivations that guide his daily choices in the light of the Word of God, and to grow in true docility to the action of the Spirit. Without personalised accompaniment, someone can go through all the stages of initial formation without reaching a true inner synthesis which resists the trials of life and feeds zeal for the mission.

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

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

Choice

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

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

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

– *Let Initial Formation Communities*

a. encourage personalisation of the formation process, helping people to recognise the action of the Spirit in their growth process through spiritual and pastoral accompaniment;

b. not limit themselves to proposing content, but offer tools for developing the personal project of life, growth in prayer, *lectio divina* and meditation;

c. propose specific courses on the subject of affective maturity, including with the help of experts;

d. help in living critically, ethically and creatively in digital culture;

e. provide for the presence of suitable female figures in formation processes;

f. integrate formation in the protection of minors and vulnerable people (*safeguarding*) through specific protocols;

g. promote the culture of dialogue as a formative methodology and ensure the formation of young confreres to leadership in a synodal style;

h. be open to the local area and to local youth realities and overcome the distance between formation and mission, constantly integrating significant pastoral experiences that have been accompanied and re-developed;

i. prevent the risk of seeking a comfortable lifestyle and clericalism, educating to evangelical simplicity and the culture of work.

– *Let the Province*

j. guarantee consistent, qualified and quality formation teams;

k. ensure that the brothers have adequate formation and

professional qualifications; resolutely promote the vocation of the Salesian brother through specific strategies of vocational proposal and appreciation of his unique contribution;

- l. promote shared formation of Salesians and lay people;
- m. organise formation for rectors in a synodal style;
- n. provide for confreres between 40 and 50 years of age so they may experience a suitable time of spiritual and pastoral renewal;
- o. offer psychological support to confreres who need it and develop formation programmes to deal with relational and affective challenges;
- p. critically review the formation structures to ensure an environment that really encourages the integral growth of the person;
- q. analyse the causes of vocational abandonment and critically rethink the vocational animation and initial formation processes to strengthen charismatic identity;
- r. see to drafting, implementing and evaluating the “Guidelines for the protection of minors and vulnerable persons” to prevent cases of abuse.

– *Let the Formation Sector*

- s. coordinate tasks and roles in the *Curatorium* with the Regional Councillors and include them in the new *Ratio*;
- t. expand the school of accompaniment in collaboration with the regional centres and prepare formators for spiritual and pastoral accompaniment;
- u. develop a formation plan for formators that integrates Salesian tradition and the challenges of the contemporary world;
- v. promote the formation of provincials for leadership in a synodal style;
- w. study the possibilities and contents of the proposal for spiritual and pastoral renewal for confreres between 40 and 50 years of age;
- x. develop guidelines for formation on the protection of

minors and vulnerable persons (*safeguarding*) for initial formation houses, with help from the Sectors;

y. develop guidelines for an adequately contextualised formation in the different regions, respecting local cultures while maintaining charismatic unity, and ensure continuity between the different formation phases;

z. develop specific tools for education in affectivity and sexuality, adequately forming formators in this area.

CORE AREA 2
SALESIANS, SALESIAN FAMILY AND LAY PEOPLE
TOGETHER “WITH” AND “FOR” YOUNG PEOPLE

A. SHARING SPIRITUALITY AND MISSION IN THE EPC

Listening

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

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

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

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

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

The lay landscape in the Salesian context is therefore extremely varied and requires differentiated attention: there are volunteers and hired employees, adults with long experience and young people at the beginning of their journey, members of the Salesian Family and friends of Don Bosco, Catholics and Christians of different confessions, people of other religions or without any defined religious affiliation. Starting from this complexity, which reflects the richness of our presence in the

world, we see three levels of involvement emerging that outline a possible path of growth in the shared mission: professional collaboration, (volunteers and employees working in our Works) shared educational responsibility (volunteers and employees who consciously choose to adhere to the educative and pastoral project), and deep sharing of Salesian spirituality (those who, due to their personal vocation, are part of the animating nucleus of the EPC or the Salesian Family). This distinction does not express a hierarchy of the value individuals have, but rather different degrees of identification with the charism, which must be recognised and respected.

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

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

journey of shared discipleship that requires a deep personal commitment on the part of both Salesians and lay people.

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

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

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

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

and participatory mentality that is absolutely necessary for truly shared responsibility.

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

Interpretation

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

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

At the same time, the 24th General Chapter took up the ecclesiological inspiration of the Second Vatican Council with courage and conviction, recognising the missionary task entrusted to every baptised person, the communal nature of the people of God and the reciprocity between the different vocations in the Church. The clear vision of the Council today is enriched by the magisterium offered by Pope Francis in his Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* and by the contribution of the recent Synod "For A synodal Church: communion, participation, mission", which sought to prolong the inspiration of the Second Vatican Council and relaunch its prophetic force. Synodality is, in this sense, the

translation of the Council into a “style” of life and action (*modus vivendi et operandi*) that requires conversion in relationships, implementation of processes and renewal of structures.

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

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

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

be prophetic and generative in the discernment of the educative and pastoral community .

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

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

To this sacramental root are added reflection, study, dialogue, sharing on Don Bosco, the Salesian charism and the daily lived

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

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

Choice

51. In the light of our listening and interpretation, we choose to SHARE SPIRITUALITY, MISSION AND FORMATION WITH LAY PEOPLE AND MEMBERS OF THE SALESIAN FAMILY IN EVERY EDUCATIVE AND PASTORAL COMMUNITY.

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

– *Let the Community*

a. make the Educative and Pastoral Community Council operational as a body for discernment, formation and shared responsibility and, where it does not exist, establish it;

b. draw up a plan for shared formation of Salesians and lay people that provides for the sharing of life and prayer and educative and pastoral reflection;

c. promote a culture of simplicity, financial transparency and active involvement of the laity in financial management, seeking new and diversified sources of funding.

d. see to the preparation of budgets and financial statements and the financial soundness of the work, with the guidance of Salesian or lay administrators and external consultants, ensuring transparency and accountability.

– *Let the Province*

e. increase the commitment to a shared mission among members of the Salesian Family in the territory

f. prepare a systematic and differentiated plan for the qualification of lay people the Salesian charism;

g. place value on competent professionals in administration and finance;

h. identify concrete and up-to-date ways for the research and accompaniment of benefactors;

i. establish a committee for the accompaniment of the provincial and his council for the regular evaluation of resources and financial management and adopt ethical financial strategies by diversifying fundraising and strengthening accountability.

– *Let the Rector Major with his Council*

j. offer indications to refer appropriately and uniquely to the different types of lay people involved in various ways in our works;

k. offer guidelines and appropriate tools, through the Formation and Youth Ministry Sectors, for shared Salesian and lay formation, and involve the UPS and other formation centres in the organisation of suitable courses;

1. promote the reception of the final document of the Synod on Synodality in the Congregation and in the Salesian Family;

B. EDUCATING AND EVANGELISING

Listening

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

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

53. The youth world, therefore, is very varied. Although globalisation tends to standardise lifestyles, each context has its own specific characteristics. However, one trait unites them: all young people carry in their hearts a deep – often silent – question about the meaning of life. In a more or less conscious way they ask themselves about their future, about what matters to them, about what will make them happy. The technology that fascinates them,

the continuous flow of information, the web of relationships and connections in which they are immersed, are their world, one which seems to ignore or be indifferent to the proclamation of the faith. The number of family models has increased and the relationships that should give them warmth and security often become a place of conflict rather than affection.

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

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

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

This vital synthesis is not always present in the hearts of all our confreres and the members of our educative and pastoral communities. Those who observe us point out – not without

reason – that we risk reducing our mission to the management of educational or social welfare activities. Youth ministry runs the risk of becoming the management of services for young people. To evangelise, as our tradition reminds us, is to accompany people along a journey of faith in the Risen Lord, offering procedures and processes.

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

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

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

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

Christian initiation, we note, sadly, the estrangement of many adolescents from the ecclesial community.

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

Interpretation

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

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

The relationship between education and evangelisation is so central to us that the Congregation has reflected on it several times in order to remain faithful to the mission that the Lord entrusted to Don Bosco and to take up the challenges posed by

changing times and contexts. The 26th General Chapter, for example, recalled attention to “safeguard[ing] both the proclamation in its entirety and the gradual way in which it is offered”, convinced that “evangelisation offers education a model of fully developed humanity and that education, when it succeeds in touching the heart of the young and developing the religious meaning of existence, encourages and accompanies the process of evangelisation” (GC26, no. 25). The Youth Ministry “Frame of Reference” offers an overall view of the problem and valuable practical advice.

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

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

We must not forget that in the deepest desires of young

people, in their sensitivity for peace, justice, ecology, the dignity of every person, there is also a prophecy that we must grasp. Young people who share the faith and are passionate about Don Bosco often manifest an enthusiasm from which we have much to learn: they themselves evangelise us, showing us the young face of the Church which reflects God's eternal youth.

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

59. In some strongly secularised contexts, or ones marked by distrust of the ecclesial institution, there is a degree of difficulty in proclaiming the faith and there is a risk of giving up on a joyful and proactive transmission of the light of the gospel. In other situations, however, the teaching of Jesus is joyfully welcomed as a word that gives hope to the poor and the little ones, renews society and opens up to the ultimate meaning of existence. Popular piety, especially Marian piety, is an extraordinary

resource in many regions for the handing on of the faith embodied in the context of a people's sensitivity. Where an explicit proclamation of Jesus Christ is not possible, our presence as Christian educators takes on a prophetic significance and sows the seed of the Word of God through the testimony of our life and the exercise of charity. Some communities operate in contexts where Christians find not only obstacles, but persecution: they demonstrate that nothing can prevent passionate witness for Christ and his gospel. The commitment to dialogue between religions and the building of a true brotherhood among peoples is, according to the current teaching of the Church, part of the Christian mission. In any case, a heart that is passionate about Christ is not ashamed to talk about him and to share the beauty of having encountered him. As Pope Francis wrote: "To be able to speak of Christ, by witness or by word, in such a way that others seek to love him, is the greatest desire of every missionary of souls. This dynamism of love has nothing to do with proselytism; the words of a lover do not disturb others, they do not make demands or oblige, they only lead others to marvel at such love. With immense respect for their freedom and dignity, the lover simply waits for them to inquire about the love that has filled his or her life with such great joy" (FRANCIS, *Dilexit nos*, 210).

Choice

60. In light of our listening and interpretation, we choose to OFFER GRADUAL AND SYSTEMATIC PROGRAMMES OF FAITH EDUCATION AND RENEW THE PRACTICE OF THE PREVENTIVE SYSTEM ENSURING SAFE SETTINGS EVERYWHERE.

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

– *Let the Educative and Pastoral Community*

a. promote gradual and systematic programmes of education in the faith and boldly see to the first proclamation of the gospel;

b. promote shared planning with young people, offering them opportunities for active participation and responsibility in educative and pastoral planning, according to the method of synodality.

– *Let the Province*

c. see to establishing a school of pedagogical, spiritual and charismatic formation for Salesians, members of the Salesian Family and lay people so they can know and live the combination of Evangelisation and Education;

d. develop missionary communities in the digital world, mad up of young people, lay people and Salesians who can create educational and evangelising content;

e. accompany educative and pastoral communities in acquiring a synodal style, making use of conversation in the Spirit and community discernment.

f. promote vocations to Salesian consecrated life.

– *Let the Rector Major with his Council*

g. promote a reflection on the combination of education and evangelisation that takes into account the diversity of geographical, cultural and multi-religious contexts;

h. enable working by project rather than by Sectors in the General Council;

i. promote research and studies to explore and relaunch the preventive system as a spirituality and integral method of education and evangelisation

j. promote the revision and updating of texts on Salesian youth spirituality, making the missionary dimension and the value of accompaniment more explicit.

C. NEW EXPRESSIONS OF THE CHARISM

Listening

61. The life of the Congregation is replete with experiences that represent new expressions of the charism. Many presences

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

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

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

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

63. We recognise the urgent need to develop a more systematic and critical approach to digital culture, which has a profound impact on worldviews and relationships. Although the digital world and the development of artificial intelligence

have great potential for progress, it also raises questions of an anthropological and ethical nature and urges us to deeply reflect on education. In addition to offering much potential for growth, it can also cause harm and injury, such as bullying, misinformation, sexual exploitation and addiction. Our confreres in initial formation are now “born digital”: if accompanied and wisely formed they can help the entire Congregation to open up to using new technologies for the mission. There are already positive experiences of digital communities in the Congregation, but not a few educators recognise that they do not have adequate formation and use digital spaces only for information purposes.

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

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

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

Interpretation

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

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

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

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

Choice

69. In light of our listening and interpretation, we choose to
 BE PRESENT IN THE NEW FRONTIERS OF THE MISSION:
 THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT, INTEGRAL ECOLOGY,
 THE NEW EXPRESSIONS OF THE CHARISM.

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

– *Let the Community*

a. conduct a study on emerging forms of poverty in its neighbourhood, setting up concrete action plans with its educative and pastoral community to address them;

b. consider accessing renewable energy where possible.

– *Let the Province*

c. plan for the specialisation of Salesians and lay people to

address the new emerging challenges for the Salesian mission (artificial intelligence, inter-religious dialogue, bioethics, migrants, refugees, safeguarding, etc.);

d. promote works for young people in situations of hardship and marginalisation, including with the laity and with groups of the Salesian Family;

e. study a concrete plan for communities more open to young people, inviting them to share community life, including from a vocational perspective;

f. experiment with new forms of community with the Salesian Family, families, young people, and ensure the verification and continuity of innovative experiences already in place;

g. promote formation in integral ecology, ecological education of young people and presence in the digital world as an evangelising witness and educating action.

– *Let the Rector Major with his Council*

h. offer the provinces guidelines, through the Formation, Youth Ministry and Social Communication Sectors, for formation and activity for their presence in the digital world;

i. develop guidelines, through the Formation and Youth Ministry Sectors, for socio-political, ecological and financial education in Salesian institutions;

j. promote a platform to share best practices in integral ecology, digital evangelisation and responses to the new forms of poverty present in the Congregation;

k. promote collaboration between provinces for a better accompaniment of young migrants and displaced persons;

l. strengthen our institutional presence in civil and ecclesial bodies, as well as in government institutions at all levels (international, national, regional and local) to promote advocacy on behalf of the poorest young people.

CORE AREA 3
**A COURAGEOUS REVIEW AND RE-PLANNING
OF THE CONGREGATION'S GOVERNANCE
AT ALL LEVELS**

Here are the 23 resolutions of GC29 sorted by subject.

A - Changes to the Constitutions

RESOLUTION NO. 1

The 29th General Chapter

- having considered the advisability of assigning the vice-provincial a primary, non-discretionary task;
- having regard to the practice in use in several provinces of entrusting the care of life and religious discipline to the vice-provincial;
- having taken into account that religious discipline at world level is entrusted to the Vicar of the Rector Major;
- in order to allow the provincial to maintain the typical paternal profile of his figure in our tradition,

RESOLVES

to amend Article 168 of the Constitutions, inserting after the words “as also in those matters specially entrusted to him” the words: “The care of life and religious discipline is ordinarily entrusted to him.”

RESOLUTION NO. 2

The 29th General Chapter

- having considered that in the 28th General Chapter the Juridical Commission had already begun a reflection, with the help of experts, on art. 187 of the Constitutions;
- having considered that the wording used in §2 of this article (“Acquiring and holding real estate with the sole object of

producing income and every other kind of permanent interest-bearing investment is forbidden”) is given different interpretations and does not correspond to current needs;

- having considered that income-generating activities, ethically lawful and with a clear allocation of profits, have been considered legitimate both in the past and in the present, without this having generated scandal or constituted grounds for any counter-witness to institutional poverty;
- considering that C. 187 does not forbid provinces from promoting income-generating activities;
- considering that C. 188 no. 3 allows for the acceptance of inheritances, legacies, or donations upon payment, and that this may entail restrictions on the use of the proceeds, as established by the donor, such as requiring, for example, the preservation of the real estate received;
- considering that C. 188 no. 4 allows the establishment of life annuities, charities, foundations that must - by statute - be endowed with their own stable assets; having considered that works that are not self-sufficient from a financial point of view, such as social works, formation houses, houses for the elderly, need stable sources of livelihood;
- without prejudice to the forbidding of speculative real estate or financial transactions,

RESOLVES

to amend Article 187 of the Constitutions, removing the words “are directly useful for works. Acquiring and holding real estate with the sole object of producing income and every other kind of permanent interest-bearing investment is forbidden except in the cases referred to in article 188 of the Constitutions”, replacing them with the words “are directly useful for the purposes provided for by the Constitutions. The use of purely speculative real estate or financial transactions is forbidden.”

RESOLUTION NO. 3

The 29th General Chapter

- having considered the transformation in the notion of mission linked to specific territories;
- having noted the fact that countries who once received missionaries today send confreres to countries evangelised a long time ago;

RESOLVES

to amend Article 30 of the Constitutions, removing the words “were the special object of” and replacing them with the words “were always the object of” and adding after the words “founding the Church within a group of people” the words “and revitalizing the faith, including in countries of ancient Christian tradition.”

B - Changes to the General Regulations

RESOLUTION NO. 4

The 29th General Chapter

- having considered the request of various Chapter commissions;
- having noted the decrease in the number of confreres;
- having recognised the difficulty in some provinces in founding new communities with six confreres;
- having seen increased the need to give juridical substance to existing small communities,

RESOLVES

to amend Article 150 of the Regulations, removing the words “The number of confreres in a house shall normally not be fewer than six” and replacing them with the words “The number of confreres with perpetual vows in a house will be no fewer than four”.

RESOLUTION NO. 5

The 29th General Chapter

- having considered that in various provinces works and services have been developed for young people in situations of vulnerability or exclusion;
- believing that these works correspond to the nature of our charism;
- having considered that in chapter III of the Regulations there is no specific reference to these works;
- in order to institutionally recognise its importance and specific nature,

RESOLVES

to add to the Regulations after no. 14, a new article formulated as follows:

“We also carry out our mission in works and services for young people in situations of vulnerability or exclusion to respond to problems arising from social injustice, the violation of human rights, financial, emotional and spiritual poverty. Through specific educative and pastoral proposals and projects we work to help those to whom we are sent discover their dignity as children of God and enable them to participate fully in the life of society and the church. Each province, attentive to everything that generates poverty and exclusion, offers specific settings and services, collaborates with other organisations in the promotion of the common good, and carries out actions that have an impact on youth policies.”

RESOLUTION NO. 6

The 29th General Chapter

- having considered the distinction between the economer of the religious house and the administrator of the work;
- having considered that in some cases both tasks are carried out by a confrere, while in others the administration of the work is entrusted to a layperson;

– having considered that this assignment is not reflected in the Regulations,

RESOLVES

to amend Article 190 of the Regulations – “The formulation of detailed rules of administration at provincial and local levels is left to provincial chapters. In particular, directives will be given:”

– adding point 4a with the following wording: “on the role and duties of the lay administrator of the work, where applicable.”

RESOLUTION NO. 7

The 29th General Chapter

– having considered the special role of the rector in the community and the work;

– considering that Article 176 of the Constitutions establishes that the rector is “first in order of responsibility for its religious life, its apostolic activities and the administration of its goods”;

– having considered that the Constitutions provide for a clear distinction between the role of the rector, who presides over the Council, and the economer who is a member of it (cf. C 178-179);

– considering that Article 184 of the Constitutions states that “The economer is the one immediately responsible for the administration of the temporal goods of the religious house, in dependence on the rector with his council”;

– in order to ensure that he “should keep himself free from commitments which could interfere with his fundamental duties of service to the confreres” (R 172);

– in order to ensure greater transparency and shared responsibility,

RESOLVES

to add to Article 172 of the Regulations after the words “to the confreres” the words “He shall not hold the office of economer”.

RESOLUTION NO. 8

The 29th General Chapter

- having considered the reduction in the number of confreres in some provinces;
- in order to keep the role and duties of the economer distinct from those of the rector;
- in order to ensure transparency and shared responsibility,

RESOLVES

to remove from Article 182 of the Regulations The words “Ordinarily, however, the office of vice-rector should not be combined with that of economer”.

RESOLUTION NO. 9

The 29th General Chapter

in line with the reflection of the Congregation expressed in the General Chapters and in the magisterium of the Rector Major on the animating nucleus of the educative and pastoral community,

RESOLVES

to amend Article 5 of the Regulations by replacing the words “whose animating nucleus is the Salesian community” with the words “whose animating nucleus is made up of a group of people who identify with the ecclesial mission, Don Bosco’s educational system and his spirituality. Its charismatic point of reference is the Salesian community.”

C – Resolutions on the Configuration of the Regions

RESOLUTION NO. 10

The 29th General Chapter

- having taken note of the rapid growth in the number of confreres, works and pastoral fronts of the provinces of Africa-Madagascar;

- having taken note of the request from the provincials of the Region;
- having considered the geographical extent of the Region and its cultural and linguistic diversity;
- having regard to the unanimous proposal of the Chapter commissions;
- in order to allow a better accompaniment of the provinces and confreres by the Regional

RESOLVES

to establish a second region in Africa-Madagascar, in accordance with Art. 154 of the Constitutions;

RESOLUTION NO. 11

The 29th General Chapter

- having considered the resolution with which a second Region was established in Africa-Madagascar, pursuant to art. 154 of the Constitutions;
- having considered that the establishment of groups of provinces is the responsibility of the General Chapter, in accordance with Art. 154 of the Constitutions;
- having regard to the proposal of the members of the Chapter from Africa and Madagascar;

ESTABLISHES

the following two groups of circumscriptions:

- EAST and SOUTH AFRICA REGION including the AFE, AGL, ANG, TZA provinces and the AET, AFM, MDG, MOZ, ZMB vice-provinces;
- CENTRAL and WEST AFRICA REGION including the AFC, AON, AOS, ANN and ACC, ATE provinces.

RESOLUTION NO. 12

The 29th General Chapter

- having regard to the request of the Provincial Chapter of Croatia;

- taking into account that this request could not be dealt with in GC28;
- having considered the geographical proximity and cultural affinity with the Mediterranean Region;
- having considered that for many years the initial formation of the confreres of the province has taken place in the Mediterranean Region,

RESOLVES

that the St John Bosco Province of Croatia be transferred from the Central and North Europe Region to the Mediterranean Region, in accordance with Art. 154 of the Constitutions;

D – Resolutions for the Rector Major with his Council

RESOLUTION NO. 13

The 29th General Chapter

- having taken note of the complexity of the governance of the Congregation;
- having taken note of the indications of Art. 107 of the Regulations;
- in order to promote a more agile and unified government action;
- in order to avoid overlapping initiatives and facilitate their implementation in the provinces;
- in order to promote a planning culture that improves the processes envisaged in the Directory of the General Council,

ASKS

the Rector Major with his Council to promote a more effective coordination of the Sector Councillors among themselves and with the Regional Councillors, and to implement a system of periodic evaluation of central government.

RESOLUTION NO. 14

The 29th General Chapter

- having taken note of the numerous tasks entrusted to the Regional Councillor in Art. 140 of the Constitutions, articles 135-140 of the Regulations, and in numbers 119-136 of the Directory of the General Council.
- having considered the difficulty of reconciling the accompaniment of provincials, provinces, interprovincial bodies and Curatoriums of formation houses, together with the regular conduct of extraordinary visitations,

ASKS

the Rector Major with his Council to review the priorities and methods of implementation of the tasks of the Regional Councillor to better implement what is required in Art. 140 of the Constitutions, in articles 135-140 of the Regulations, and in numbers 119-136 of the Directory of the General Council.

RESOLUTION NO. 15

The 29th General Chapter

- having taken note of the numerous tasks entrusted to the Regional Councillor in Art. 140 of the Constitutions, articles 135-140 of the Regulations, and in numbers 119-136 of the Directory of the General Council.
- having considered the geographical extent of the Regions and their linguistic and cultural diversity;
- in order to allow the Regional Councillor to focus on the priorities of his office,

ASKS

the Rector Major with his Council to guarantee the Regional Councillors adequate personnel to support their service.

RESOLUTION NO. 16

The 29th General Chapter

- having noted the decrease in the number of confreres in Europe;
- taking into account the need to ensure joint initial and ongoing formation processes;
- taking into account the need to reshape the Salesian presence in the Continent;
- in order to promote coordination in the study of problems and in the development of projects,

ASKS

that the Rector Major with his Council develop a renewed reflection on the common challenges that the Congregation faces today in Europe and on synergy between the two Regions.

RESOLUTION NO. 17

The 29th General Chapter

- having noted the increase in formation centres and interprovincial study centres;
- having noted the difficulty in specifying the nature and tasks of the Curatorium and in defining who is responsible for chairing and coordinating decision-making processes;
- having acknowledged the difficulty in identifying criteria for the recruitment, preparation and management of staff in formation houses and study centres,

ASKS

the Rector Major, with his Council, to specify

- the nature and tasks of the Curatorium,
- presidency and decision-making responsibilities,
- the role of the Regional Councillor, the Formation Councillor, the local provincial and the other provincials concerned,
- criteria for finding, preparing and managing the staff of formation houses and study centres.

RESOLUTION NO. 18

The 29th General Chapter

- having noted the absence of regulatory legislation regarding the Team Visit;
- having noted that, according to current practice, the main purpose of the Team Visit is to check on the implementation of the General Chapter in the Region;
- having considered that it is a privileged and strategic moment of unity, participation and shared responsibility (see C 123);
- having regard to the request of the Chapter commissions for a greater impact of the Visit and that more effective forms of collaboration be defined within the Region;
- to encourage the greatest possible interaction between the central government and the government of the provinces,

ASKS

the Rector Major, with his Council, to review the methodology of the Team Visit, so as to ensure:

- adequate preparation involving the Provincials with their councils,
- an active participation in synodal style,
- mutual listening on specific issues of the Region,
- evaluation of interprovincial bodies and regional centres.

RESOLUTION NO. 19

The 29th General Chapter

- having taken note of the multiplicity of tasks assigned to the Regional Councillor;
- having taken note of the possibilities provided for in Art. 104 of the Regulations;
- in continuity with the request already made in the 28th General Chapter,

ASKS

the Rector Major, with his Council, to establish the times and

ways for carrying out extraordinary visitations in each region in accordance with Art. 104 of the Regulations, so as to ensure, in any case:

- the possibility for each confrere to have a personal chat with the Visitor;
- that the Visitor has the opportunity to gain in-depth knowledge of the context in which the province carries out its mission;
- that the Regional Councillor has the possibility of being present at certain times of the visit, if carried out by another Visitor;
- that there is communication between the Visitor and the Regional Councillor to ensure further accompaniment by the Regional Councillor after the visitation;
- that there is adequate time for the Regional Councillor to carry out the tasks of his office at the service of the region and the individual provinces (see C 140 and 154; R. 135-137).

RESOLUTION NO. 20

The 29th General Chapter

- considering that the *Rescriptum ex audientia Ss.mi* of the Holy Father Francis of 18 May 2022, granted the Supreme Moderator of an Institute of Clerical Consecrated Life of pontifical right the power to appoint, with the consent of his council, a non-clerical member as local Superior,
- having considered the variety of positions expressed in the rich Chapter debate,

ASKS

the Rector Major to avail himself of the aforementioned possibility *ad experimentum* for the next six years and to commit the next General Chapter, after a serious historical, theological, charismatic, pastoral and juridical in-depth study, to express view concerning the potential change to articles relating to the rector in the Constitutions, Regulations, and consequently in the other documents of the Congregation (“Animating and Governing the

Community. The Ministry of the Salesian Rector”, *Ratio institutionis et studiorum*, other animation and governance documents in force).

RESOLUTION NO. 21

The 29th General Chapter

- having considered the variety of current experiences and the complexity of the subject,

ASKS

the Rector Major, with his Council, to draw up guidelines on the relationship between the local Council and the Council of the educative and pastoral community, with regard to the governance of the work.

E – Deliberations for Provincials, Provincial Councils and Provincial Chapters

RESOLUTION NO. 22

The 29th General Chapter

- having considered the need to consolidate a culture and policy at the institutional level for the protection of minors and vulnerable people in each province;
- having considered the need to have a group of competent and up-to-date people on the development of legislation in this area;
- having regard to the experience gained in various provinces;
- in order to guarantee a system of security for minors and vulnerable persons in compliance with civil and ecclesiastical laws,

RESOLVES

that a Commission for the protection and safeguarding of minors and vulnerable persons be set up in every province.

RESOLUTION NO. 23

The 29th General Chapter

- in light of what is stated in no. 34 of the Chapter Document: “The determination to guarantee a safe environment for all those who frequent our works encourages us to intensify our formation efforts for our confreres, lay people and young people themselves, in order to avoid any kind of abuse, harassment or inappropriate behaviour.”
- in continuity with the resolution that asked each province to establish a Commission for the Protection and Safeguarding of Minors and Vulnerable Persons;
- in accordance with the Preventive System that Don Bosco passed on to us as the most precious legacy of our charism,

RESOLVES

that every province

- continue the commitment undertaken to guarantee safe environments for minors and vulnerable persons, complying with canonical legislation, directives issued by Episcopal Conferences and collaborating with civil authorities, in compliance with the legislation of individual countries;
- value the best practices tried out in other provinces and be eager to share their own;
- include its approach (policy) in the Provincial Directory for the protection of minors and vulnerable persons;
- make it known to all those who collaborate in any capacity in their works and services; prepare adequate formation; require compliance with them and periodically evaluate their implementation;
- provide in particular within the policy, reporting procedures, the kinds of support for those who declare they have been abused, and appropriate communication methods;
- promote restorative justice pathways.

MESSAGE FROM THE HOLY FATHER
to those taking part in the 29th General
Chapter of the Salesian Congregation

16 February – 12 April 2025

Dear brothers,

Unfortunately, since I am not able to meet you, I am sending you this message on the occasion of the 29th General Chapter of the Salesian Congregation, as well as for the 150th anniversary of Don Bosco's first missionary expedition to Argentina. I greet the new Rector Major, Fr Fabio Attard, wishing him every success in his work, and I thank Cardinal Ángel Fernández Artime for the service he has rendered in recent years to the Institute and which he now offers to the universal Church.

Although from a distance, I would like to encourage you experience this time of listening to the Spirit and synodal discernment with confidence and commitment.

As the theme for your work you chose the motto, "Salesians, passionate about Jesus Christ and dedicated to young people". This is a beautiful programme: being "passionate" and "dedicated", allowing yourself to be fully involved in love for the Lord and serving others without keeping anything for yourself, just as your Founder did in his time. Even if today, compared to then, the challenges you have to face have altered somewhat, faith and enthusiasm remain the same, enriched with new gifts such as the gift of interculturalism.

Dear brothers, I thank you for the good you do all around the world and I encourage you to continue with perseverance. I wholeheartedly bless you and your Chapter work, as well as the confreres scattered across the five continents, and I kindly ask you to pray for me. May Mary Help of Christians always accompany you.

Francis

From the Vatican, 2 April 2025

SOCIETY OF SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES
29th General Chapter, 2025

PASSIONATE ABOUT JESUS CHRIST,
DEDICATED TO YOUNG PEOPLE

Message to Chapter members

THE DISCIPLES OF EMMAUS: Lk 24:13-35

¹³Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven mile from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?'. They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?'. ¹⁹He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth,[c] who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place ²²Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. ²⁴Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.' ²⁵Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?'. ²⁷Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

²⁸As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³²They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' ³³That same hour

they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴They were saying, ‘The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!’ ³⁵Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Dear Brothers, dear Sisters,

At the opening of the 29th General Chapter of the Salesians of Don Bosco I suggest we allow ourselves to be enlightened by the biblical icon of the Disciples of Emmaus (Lk 24:13 -35), and allow it introduce us to the art of discernment which can transform our lifestyle in an increasingly evangelical sense and which is expressed in a more evident and important way in moments and paths of particular importance for a family of consecrated persons, such as that of a General Chapter.

Before being indicated as a paradigm of the process of Conversation in the Spirit, a fruitful methodological tool used by the Synod on Synodality 2021-2024¹ for common discernment, the passage from Luke’s Gospel was a source of inspiration and enlightenment for the Synod on “Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment”, which took place in 2018. The example of the Disciples of Emmaus, according to *Christus Vivit*, can also be a model of what happens in youth ministry, as a “slow, respectful, patient, trusting, tireless, compassionate process”.²

The scene presents us with a journey together. In fact, two kinds of journey together on that first day after the Sabbath.³ There is a journey together along the road that leads away from Jerusalem, away from the community, away from the painful and tiring experience of Friday and Saturday, away from the Cross.

¹ Cf. XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *For a Synodal Church: communion, participation, mission. Instrumentum Laboris* for the first session, Rome October 2023, no. 36.

² FRANCIS, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit*, Loreto 25 March 2019, no. 236.

³ Cf. FRANCIS, *Regina Caeli*, 26 April 2020.

It is a journey of geographical and inner descent, legs and hearts heavy with disappointment, mourning, bitterness, defeat, the pace punctuated by a myopic conversation that leaves them looking sad: "We had hoped he was the one to redeem Israel..."

And there is another journey together, one of return, late at night, towards Jerusalem, towards the community, towards life. Darkness all around, uphill road but legs flying, joyous sparkling eyes and hearts inflamed by an encounter that frees the inner senses, opens them to the Light and arouses an uncontrollable urge to communicate it to others.

And between these two journeys, in fact, there is an encounter. The two travellers become three. The third approaches the two, in their daytime progress on the road that leads away from life. He does not impose a change of course but comes up close, goes down with them and in them, listens, until the relational space opens up to a question: "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?"

It is the possibility of freeing the heart from the pain that weighs it down, which prevents sight despite it being daytime. The road now flows quickly under their feet, the journey away from Jerusalem reaches its destination, but their hearts, now inflamed, release their desire in a warm, insistent invitation: 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' God enters, and remains there. He stays right there, with them, away from Jerusalem. In that very place, far away, the two disciples realise they have been reached, sought after, comforted, nourished, and healed by Jesus who went down with them in their suffering, in their affliction, a time they were running away. Restored by the Broken Bread, freed from the darkness of the heart, they no longer fear the night outside: Jesus is now within them, an inner presence, and the mission urges them on! Urges them to return to Jerusalem immediately, to the community of disciples. Urges communion, to gather, meet, find each other again, to journey together and to let everyone know that the night is now bright.

There is a journeying together that is far from God, introverted,

self-referential, closed to the light, mulling over our burdens, our labours and our illnesses together, prisoners of desolation. It is a journeying together that extinguishes the inner senses, that makes the heart unable to recognise the good, oppressed by a pain that degenerates into evil, a contagious, infectious evil. Yes, there is a journeying together, an alliance, a solidarity in evil, a ‘sick synodality’, folded in on itself, which produces a regressive movement, far from life, from Love, from God.

And there is a journey together towards God, a missionary journey, an outgoing one, “hearts on fire, feet on the move”,⁴ which can be tiring, at night, but is driven by the joy of an encounter that puts wings on our feet and heart, that frees, heals, captivates, sets alight our desire to be with Jesus, to welcome him within ourselves, to be his, to also become broken bread, to share it with others, with everyone. This is Christian synodality, which is missionary.

“Jesus walks with two disciples who did not grasp the meaning of all that happened to him, and are leaving Jerusalem and the community behind. Wanting to accompany them, he joins them on the way. He asks them questions and listens patiently to their version of events, and in this way he helps them recognize what they were experiencing. Then, with affection and power, he proclaims the word to them, leading them to interpret the events they had experienced in the light of the Scriptures. He accepts their invitation to stay with them as evening falls; he enters into their night. As they listen to him speak, their hearts burn within them and their minds are opened; they then recognize him in the breaking of the bread. They themselves choose to resume their journey at once in the opposite direction, to return to the community and to share the experience of their encounter with the risen Lord.”⁵

⁴ Cf. FRANCIS, *Cuori ardenti, piedi in cammino*, Message for the 97th World Mission Day 2023, Rome 6 January 2023.

⁵ FRANCIS, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit*, Loreto 25 March 2019, no. 237.

The verbs stressed by Pope Francis identify the main steps of a process of discernment. ‘Discernment commits those who participate in it at a personal level and all participating together at a community level to cultivate dispositions of inner freedom, being open to newness and trusting surrender to God’s will in order to listen to one another so as to hear “what the Spirit is saying to the Churches” (Rev. 2:7).’⁶

In the light of the icon of Emmaus, I ask with you in prayer for the grace of a true, deep, active listening that leads you to recognise the movement of the Spirit in your heart, in the Confreres, in the Assembly. In the Chapter, let the flame of the charism shine brightly and ardently! Let this flame warm your hearts so that you can revisit your vocational life in creative fidelity to the gift received through St John Bosco, and may it make you increasingly passionate about Jesus Christ, dedicated to young people.

Sr Simona Brambilla, MC

Turin, 16 February 2025

⁶ XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *How to be a Synodal missionary Church. Instrumentum Laboris* for the second session (October 2024), 59.

**Address by the Vicar of the Rector Major
Fr Stefano Martoglio at the opening of GC29**

Some words of greeting and welcome

Most Reverend Sister Simona Brambilla,
Prefect of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and
Societies of Apostolic Life

Your Excellencies, Salesian Archbishops and Bishops

Dear Mother Chiara Cazzuola,
Superior General of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help
of Christians

Dear Leaders of Salesian Family Groups,

Mr Mayor and esteemed Civil Authorities
of the City of Turin and the Piedmont Region
Military authorities

On behalf of all the Chapter members, I would like to thank you for your presence and availability, as you seek to accompany the day of the official opening of the 29th General Chapter of the Society of Saint Francis of Sales (Salesians of Don Bosco) in this meaningful way.

Feeling that we are supported by each of you honours us and reminds us of the responsibility we have before the Church, the Salesian Family and especially before Don Bosco's Congregation. All this encourages us to start work with a prophetic and hopeful outlook.

At the same time, I officially welcome the Chapter confreres from all the juridical circumscriptions of the Congregation: provincials, superiors of vice-provinces, provincial delegates, observers and guests.

Each of you is essential. In the light of the vision of faith that

everyone carries in their heart, we are aware of one fact: it is the Lord who has gathered us here, through the “mysterious” ways of Providence, to experience a very important event. We find confirmation of this in the words of Don Bosco himself, words he spoke at the first General Chapter of our Congregation: “We now begin our first general chapter... It is of extreme importance for our Congregation.”¹

Well then, today too we are called to a very special task and what will emerge in listening to the Spirit as the result of our GC29 will be of the utmost importance for our Congregation. We all profoundly believe this.

The right attitude of all of us will undoubtedly be decisive for the results of this Chapter Assembly.

1. The GC29 of the Society of St Francis de Sales

Don Bosco convened the first General Chapter on 5 September 1877 in Lanzo Torinese. There were twenty-three participants and the Chapter lasted three full days.

Other General Chapters followed, some of them right here in Valdocco. Therefore, it is no small matter to be celebrating a General Chapter in one or other place. Certainly, here in the “cradle of the charism” we have the opportunity to rediscover our origins and rediscover the originality that constitutes the heart of our identity as consecrated persons and apostles of young people.

Therefore, we entrust ourselves to the Lord and his Holy Spirit who continues to assist our Congregation. Let us allow ourselves to be guided by Mary Help of Christians, who “continues to do everything”, listening to the appeal that Don Bosco addresses to us in this holy Salesian place.

At the opening of the first General Chapter, Don Bosco said to our confreres: “Our Divine Savior tells us in the Gospel that where two or three are gathered in His name He will be there

¹ *BM XIII*, 183.

among them. Our sessions have no other purpose than God's greater glory and the salvation of souls, redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ."² We can therefore be sure that the Lord will be among us and that he will conduct things in such a way that everyone will feel comfortable.

It is with the same conviction and with the same outlook of faith that I have wanted to highlight Don Bosco's words: they are words that surpass us and remind us of the continuity of vision and journey in fidelity to God and to Don Bosco.

We read in our Constitutions: "The General Chapter is the principal sign of the Congregation's unity in diversity. It is the fraternal meeting in which Salesians carry out a communal reflection to keep themselves faithful to the gospel and to the charism of the Founder and sensitive to the needs of time and place.

Through the General Chapter the entire Society, opening itself to the guidance of the Spirit of the Lord, seeks to discern God's will at a specific moment in history for the purpose of rendering the Church better service."³ This is what we are all called to do and experience.

It is with this spirit of faith that we want and must face up to the important task that the entire Congregation entrusts to us in this GC29.

2. Theme and goal of GC29

The Rector Major, Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, through his letter of 24 September 2023, convened the 29th General Chapter noting that the chosen theme had been identified by the General Council after an appropriate and widespread consultation of the provinces around the world, receiving a large number of contributions from them.

Despite the fact that the time for convocation and preparation

² *BM XIII*, 183.

³ *C* 146.

were hastened, the Rector Major noted the profound motivation and great commitment on the part of the entire Congregation in this process.

It has been an unforeseen and unpredictable “five-year period”, given everything that has happened, and my heartfelt thanks go to the confreres of the Council and to all of you for having been able to cope with what has happened in recent years and that has brought us here.

The theme for reflection, which we all know, which we have prepared for in the Provincial Chapters and which we are called to further explore over these weeks, is as follows:

**“Passionate about Jesus Christ, dedicated to young people”
Living our Salesian vocation
faithfully and prophetically**

and it is developed in three core areas:

- Animation and care of the true life of each Salesian
- Salesians, Salesian Family and lay people together “with” and “for” young people
- A courageous review and re-planning of the Congregation’s governance at all levels,

In the proposed theme, the centrality and primacy of God is evident. It is in this that we find the energy and motivation for dedication to the mission to the young, together with the members of the Salesian Family, the laity and the young people themselves.

Even the reference to the revision of our model of governance model is not something juxtaposed, but is part of the path that, in fidelity to our tradition and with an open look to the future, will enable us to better operate in the field of our mission as educators and pastors. It is an important and courageous point of obedience to reality.

Finally, the subtitle captures the current concern, both in religious life in general and in our consecrated life in particular, of the specific characteristic of religious life that is configured as

“prophetic”. The journey that the Church is making under the guidance of Pope Francis urges us to be faithful to God and prophetic in our openness to the poverty of the world, according to the heart of Don Bosco.

As mentioned, this is the result of the work carried out by the General Council in tune and together with with the rich and convergent response received from the provinces in the summer 2023 consultation.

2.1. Motivation for choosing the theme

With the theme proposed for GC29 we believe that the Congregation can concretely highlight the efforts and shortcomings which, instead of launching us forward on the path of fidelity to the Lord and in the prophetic witness of our lives, slow us down, limit us, make us or can make us unable to seize the many opportunities that the current context presents.

There are many positive things in the life of the majority of the confreres, of the provinces and of the Congregation, but this is not enough and cannot serve as a “consolation”, because the cry of the world, the great and new forms of poverty, the daily struggle of so many people – not only poor but also simple and hardworking people – rises strongly as a request for help. These are all questions that should challenge and unsettle us, instead of letting us remain undisturbed. These are all questions that require personal and institutional responses from us.

With the help of the provinces through consultation, we believe we have identified the main reasons for concern on the one hand, and on the other the signs of vitality of our Congregation, always expressed through the specific cultural traits of each context.

During the Chapter we propose to focus on what it means for us *to be Salesians truly passionate about Jesus Christ*, because without this, while we will offer good services, will do good to people, will help, we will not leave a deep trace. Our identity as consecrated religious is at the heart of our being here.

The words of the gospel, “Jesus called those he wanted to be with him and sent them out to preach” (Mk 3:14-15), tell us that Jesus chooses and calls those he wants. We are among them. The Kingdom of God is present and those first Twelve are an example and a model for us and for our communities.

The Twelve are ordinary people with strengths and weaknesses; they do not form a community of the pure or even a simple group of friends.

At the time of our profession we opted for a true company of Jesus, totally involved in a person-to-person relationship. It is precisely this involvement with Jesus that urges us towards young people.

Jesus’ mission continues and is visible in the world today also through us, whom he has sent. We are consecrated to build broad areas of light for today’s world, to be prophets. We have been consecrated by God and placed in the following of his beloved Son Jesus, to truly live as conquered by God.

Therefore, once again the essential is played out in the fidelity of the Congregation to the Holy Spirit, living, with the spirit of Don Bosco, a Salesian consecrated life centred on Jesus Christ. If this is missing – and sometimes it is missing – we can offer services, have schools and vocational training centres, oratories and youth centres, reception homes for young people..., but if the essential thing is missing, namely our belonging to the Lord Jesus, we do not honour the mission received. Therefore, the call to fidelity to our consecrated identity constantly returns.

Several voices in the Congregation ask to address this reality of consecrated life and our way of living in the Lord with and for young people, especially the poorest. It is clear that greater authenticity is sought and desired.

And there is a strong desire and expectation that this is to be a courageous General Chapter in which things are said, without getting lost in correct, well-packaged sentences but ones which

do not touch on life. There is a strong desire to give a boost to the future of the Congregation.

In general, the confreres desire a Congregation that is faithful to the Lord and to Don Bosco. One in which all of us, as Salesians of Don Bosco, have this intense passion for God and for the mission to the young.

It hurts a lot when we realise that we are not living like this, when there are varying paces in the journey of dedication and the gospel's radical approach, and when the "grace of unity" is not lived in its entirety but reduced to intimism or activism.

This is what is at stake in GC29, provoked also – dare I say it – by the Spirit of God through many mediations including, first and foremost, the Holy Father himself with his decisions.

Dear confreres, I would like to recall one aspect that surely many of you have perceived. I am referring to continuity and harmony with the experience of GC28. In fact, the theme focuses strongly on our Salesian consecrated identity, with a true desire to grow in fidelity and in the prophetic value of our life, as well as focusing on the mission shared with the laity and the Salesian Family, always carrying the young people and their families in our heart, who are so often poor and troubled.

There is continuity also in reference to issues concerning the animation and governance of the Congregation that were not dealt with previously. I can assure you that almost all the provinces have asked to dedicate time in the Chapter Assembly – since it was impossible to do so in the previous one – to investigate these essential and vital situations.

Let me pick up on what has been said thus far, looking at the three core areas.

- **Animation and care for the true life of each Salesian:** as believers conquered by God, we fix our gaze on Jesus and are consecrated to him. This is safeguarded in each of us, every day, in caring for our own vocation and that of others,

in faithfulness to God and to ourselves.

It is important to be faithful to God, as a community, living the experience of God together in a simple, concrete and evangelical fraternity.

It is a journey that accompanies our whole life without ever being interrupted: from initial formation to the final encounter with the Lord.

Our fraternity, open to the poverty of the world, makes us human and attentive to everyone, starting with the poorest and most excluded.

“Rekindle the gift of God that is within you” (2 Tim 1:6)

- **Salesians, Salesian Family and lay people together “with” and “for” young people:** we are called to complete, in continuity, the reflection of GC28 and grow in the shared mission.

Apostolic vitality, as spiritual vitality, is a commitment to older youth, youngsters caught up in the most varied forms of poverty. Therefore we cannot stop at offering educational services alone. The Lord calls us to educate by evangelising, bringing his presence and accompanying life with opportunities for the future.

We are called to seek new models of presence, new expressions of the Salesian charism in the name of God. This is done in communion with young people and the world, through “an integral ecology”, in the formation of a digital culture in the worlds inhabited by young people and adults.

We must therefore be careful to develop a model of economically sustainable goods, without excluding the poor.

“One heart and soul” (Acts 4:32)

- **A courageous review and re-shaping of the governance of the Congregation at all levels:** obedience to reality requires us to be concrete, to look at and evaluate the forms of animation and governance of the Congregation,

to evaluate and verify whether they are adequate for accompanying people's lives – starting with the Salesians – and the mission.

Faith makes us concrete: in the Provincial Chapters we evaluated the structures of animation and governance of the Congregation; we will do similarly and to an ever greater extent in this General Chapter. We have the task of developing and making courageous and forward-looking reflections on this activity. And evaluation of the institutional dimension is the concrete condition for the possibility of personal and community life, in the mission and in the different contexts.

All this, together with various juridical issues that we have addressed in the Provincial Chapters and that, as you well know, we are called to take up and complete as a Chapter Assembly.

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:2).

Conclusion

Let me finish with a final reference to Don Bosco and our Mother the Help of Christians.

One day in 1875 Our Founder, aware that not everything would end with him, but that it would certainly be only the beginning of a long journey to be travelled, said to Fr Giulio Barberis, one of his closest collaborators: “You will complete the work that I begin; I shall sketch it, you will colour it... You see, I am now sketching a rough copy of the Congregation. I shall leave it to those who will come after me to perfect it.”⁴

With GC29 that we are beginning today we will clean up other parts of the rough draft that Don Bosco left us, as has always been done in all the General Chapters throughout the history of the

⁴ *BM XI*, 289.

Congregation, confident that today, too, we can continue to be enlightened by the Spirit to be faithful to the Lord Jesus in fidelity to the original charism, with the faces, music and colours of today.

We are not alone in this mission. We know and feel that the Virgin Mary is a model of fidelity.

It is good to return with mind and heart to the day of the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of 1887 when, two months before his death, Don Bosco said to some Salesians, all emotional, who looked at him and listened: “Until now we have walked on a sure path. We cannot go wrong. It is Mary who leads us.”⁵

So then, it is Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco’s Madonna, who is guiding us. She is the Mother of us all and at this time of our GC29 it is she who is saying, as she did at Cana in Galilee, “Do whatever he tells you.”⁶

May our Mother the Help of Christians enlighten us and guide us, as she did with Don Bosco, to be faithful to the Lord and never disappoint young people, especially those most in need.

Don Bosco very often tellingly reminded those who lived at or came to Valdocco, to the Mother house: if we are here it is because Our Lady brought us here.

We all strongly believe this in listening to the “do whatever he tells you” of Canaanite memory. And on this we rely, open to the wonder of the presence of God that we will experience in this crucial experience.

Thank you for listening.

Turin, 16 February 2025

Fr Stefano Martoglio
Vicar of the Rector Major

⁵ *BM XVIII*, 373

⁶ *Jn* 2:5.

Words of Greeting to the 29th General Chapter Assembly of the Salesians of Don Bosco

Turin, 16 February 2025

Dear Fr Stefano, Vicar of the Rector Major,
and dear Salesian confreres,

I stand here in the name of all the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians around the world who have accompanied the life and mission of the Salesian Congregation in recent years, in a particular way with affection and prayer.

We were close by when the Rector Major – Fr Ángel Fernández Artime – was appointed Cardinal by Pope Francis, understanding everything that this appointment entailed on a concrete level. It is a choice that expresses esteem and trust in his person, honours the Salesian Family, each of you, and that has led to anticipating the celebration of this 29th General Chapter.

We are close to you now in prayer, and we assure you of this for as long as the Chapter Assembly will last.

May the Holy Spirit come down upon it in abundance, with his gifts of wisdom and discernment, and may Mary Help of Christians continue to guide your choices and “do everything”, as She has done in the life of Don Bosco and our Saints.

The theme of the 29th General Chapter is beautiful and engaging: *PASSIONATE ABOUT JESUS CHRIST, DEDICATED TO YOUNG PEOPLE. Living our Salesian vocation faithfully and prophetically.*

As Daughters of Mary Help of Christians we feel fully in tune with your need for the in-depth study expressed in the subtitle.

Living our Salesian vocation faithfully and prophetically is a theme that invites us to return to the essentials, to the charismatic identity centred on Christ and on the evangelising education of young people.

It is a new call of the Spirit and of the contemporary world to renew the very heart of the Salesian vocation, to revive the spiritual and apostolic fervour that distinguished the charism at its origins and that distinguishes your life and mission today on all continents.

The three priority areas you have chosen: renewing the spiritual life and formation through an authentic relationship with Christ and a deep commitment to mission; collaboration with lay people and members of the Salesian Family in the specific mission proper to the Salesian charism; and, finally, a courageous revision of the Congregation's animation and governance structures to make them more effective and adequate to the ever new and unprecedented challenges of this contemporary world, are three great choices that will guarantee the entire Congregation renewed vitality, both at the missionary and vocational levels, and a strong commitment to the present and the future.

The future of the charism, in fact, is in the hands of each of us, as active members of the Salesian Family who share in the responsibility, but at this moment it is above all in your hands, as a world Chapter Assembly.

We know very well that the General Chapter is an event of grace and synodality of decisive importance in the Church today, an event of the Holy Spirit. He can radiate all his light, his grace in our little daily lives to make us more courageous, more prophetic, in such a complex and challenging time from so many points of view.

I am thinking of the not-so-easy social and political situations that some of you come from. I think of the situations of pain, violence, poverty and injustice, the dramatic situations caused by the various conflicts that afflict the world, and that affect your Provinces.

I am thinking of the communities in precarious, suffering circumstances where many Confreres and Sisters live and work, and who face the daily challenge of education faithfully and courageously, in order to promote the life of the young generations entrusted to them and ensure a better future for all.

The greatness and breadth that you embrace in this Chapter Assembly offers a wonderful vision of the vitality and strength of the charism, from which the mission of the Salesian Congregation takes its creative driving force.

The jubilee year we are living through propels us toward a radiant horizon of hope, rooted in the Risen and living Lord. May he support you in looking to the future with confidence without being discouraged by the uncertainties of the present, which are contradictory, complex and constantly changing in many ways.

Your journey together in deep communion is a strong sign of hope for the entire Salesian Family and for the Church. May the certainty that Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco are guiding you sustain you as you look to the future with courage and foresight. The whole Salesian world, all the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, are with you, accompanying you in prayer with affection and esteem. Personally, I take this moment to thank you for your closeness, the joy of sharing the same Salesian vocation, of experiencing the beauty of the same spirituality and mission.

I am grateful to you for the richness of your priestly ministry that you so generously offer to our communities, to young boys and girls, young people, children, and families that we meet in educational works, sometimes in easy situations and, very often, in difficult ones. I have seen this in my visits to our communities in many parts of the world. For this reason, I speak on behalf of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians to say a “collective thank you”.

I hope that this event of grace can generate a renewed charismatic vitality and new and holy vocations. I entrust this wish to our Saints and, in particular, to Saint Mary Domenica Mazzarello who will not let you be lacking her intercession.

Thank you for the invitation, for the opportunity to be here with you and to participate in this important moment for the entire Salesian Family.

Good work and best wishes!

Sister Chiara Cazzuola
Superior General of the FMA Institute

Association of Salesian Cooperators WORD COORDINATOR

Prot.: 011/2025
Rome, 31/01/2025

It is with immense joy and deep emotion that I find myself here today for the opening of the 29th General Chapter of the Salesian Congregation. This crucial moment, which sees you gathered in the name of Don Bosco, marks a fundamental stage in our shared journey of faith and mission.

This General Chapter, GC29, takes place in a particularly significant period: we have just celebrated the 200th anniversary of Don Bosco's dream at nine years of age; we are remembering the 150th anniversary of the first missionary expedition, and we have rejoiced in the appointment of our Rector Major, Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, as Cardinal.

These events trace an ideal path from the origins to the present day, and remind us of the importance of returning to the heart of your consecrated Salesian identity, centred on Christ, and of renewing your commitment to young people.

The theme that will guide the work of these days, **“Passionate about Jesus Christ, dedicated to young people”**, is an invitation to rediscover the passion for Christ and to revive your apostolic zeal. A theme that encourages you to once more take up the founding values of the charism, to translate them into concrete actions in everyday life.

As Salesians, as sons of Don Bosco, you are called to be “mystics of the Spirit, prophets of fraternity and servants of the young”. This threefold identity is the compass that guides your spiritual, community and pastoral life. You are called to live the following of Christ in community, with a prophetic and engaging spirit. This implies a deep relationship with Christ through prayer, reflection and spiritual accompaniment.

The theme “Passionate about Jesus Christ, dedicated to young people” traces the path that the Congregation will follow

towards a future of hope, a future in which the Salesian Family is the protagonist, just as Don Bosco had imagined it.

Brothers, this General Chapter is not an isolated event, but a fundamental stage of the path of renewal that you are about to undertake. We recall, as underlined in several documents, that the Salesian Congregation has an animating role within the Salesian Family.

You are called to be **“companions on the journey”** with a spirit of welcome, closeness and friendship, taking care of each other’s vocation. Your animation must strengthen people’s interiority, instil enthusiasm for life and help discover reasons for improvement, revitalising the heart and opening up to hope.

It is your duty to keep alive the flame of Don Bosco’s charism, in the conviction that the Charism is not an individual property but is embodied in a **“charismatic and spiritual community”** formed by different groups linked by bonds of spiritual kinship and apostolic affinity.

As the Charter of Identity of the Salesian Family reminds us, unity is part of our being and our identity. This synodal journey that you are about to undertake demands that we work together for a faithful and prophetic life of our Salesian vocation.

The entire Salesian Family, as a Charismatic Family in the Church, made up of lay people and consecrated persons, is called to safeguard, deepen and actualise the Charism, creating places of encounter and shared formation.

The three fundamental core areas challenge you deeply in these days of discernment:

Renewing Spiritual Life and Formation

Brothers, return to the core of your faith, following the example of Don Bosco!

This core area invites you to rediscover the authentic relationship with Christ, an inexhaustible source of enthusiasm and dedication for your mission, just as it was for Don Bosco. It is not a simple call to prayer, but an invitation to a deep experience of faith that enlightens your every step, following Don Bosco’s path of holiness. Formation is not an individual path, but a shared

path, as Don Bosco taught us by involving his collaborators.

Open the doors of your formation, inspired by Don Bosco's inclusiveness! Actively involve the laity and members of the Salesian Family in your formation processes. Their diversity of experiences and vocations is a richness that enriches your journey and helps you better understand the challenges of today's world. Together, we can grow in an integral formation which involves all dimensions of the person, following the example of Don Bosco who took care of every aspect of young people's lives. **"Conversation in the Spirit"** becomes a valuable tool for community discernment, an opportunity to listen to the voice of the Spirit and to make decisions that come from an open and sincere heart, as Don Bosco did in his work.

Value Collaboration in the Mission

The mission is a collective work, a dream that Don Bosco realised with his Family!

This core area reminds you that you are not alone in this adventure. Be part of a great Family made up of Salesians, lay people and members of different groups, all called to collaborate with joy and generosity, following the example of Don Bosco who involved everyone in his work. Synodality is your way, a way of being Church that Don Bosco anticipated! This means recognising that we are all responsible for the educational and pastoral mission, as Don Bosco always believed.

The Salesian Family is a treasure to be valued, the fruit of Don Bosco's vision! Encourage the participation and shared responsibility of each member, recognising the value and specific contribution of each one. Let us promote shared formation and mission among the various groups, creating a network of fraternal relationships that help us realise the Salesian Educational Project, as Don Bosco dreamed. The Province Salesian Family Advisory Council is the ideal place to meet, share experiences and plan interventions together that respond to the challenges of the territory, inspired by Don Bosco's practical and concrete approach.

Review and Update the Structures of Animation and Governance

Do not fear change, but welcome it like Don Bosco!

This core area invites you to look courageously at your animation and governance structures, with the aim of making them more effective and responsive to the challenges of the present. This is not a criticism of the past, but an opportunity to renew your leadership methods and to make courageous decisions, always for the good of the Congregation and its mission, as Don Bosco always did by adapting his method to the times.

Evaluation and updating are signs of a Congregation that is dynamic and open to the future, faithful to the spirit of Don Bosco that always drives us forward. Open your facilities to participation, as Don Bosco opened the doors of his oratory! Actively involve the laity and members of the Salesian Family in the process of revision and updating, valuing their skills and experience. Foster an atmosphere of transparency, responsibility and participation, creating a space for dialogue and collaboration where everyone feels they are protagonists of change, just as Don Bosco created a family environment in Valdocco.

General Chapter 29 calls you to an extraordinary journey, a unique opportunity: this is the moment to rediscover your consecrated identity, to strengthen your mission and to walk together towards a future of hope, with and for young people, following the example of Don Bosco.

Accept this challenge confidently and boldly, and with an open heart and an enlightened mind, ready to build a future in which the love of God and the passion for young people are at the centre of all your actions, inspired by the heart of Don Bosco.

Together, as a Salesian Family, we can make a difference by continuing the work of Don Bosco!

May Mary Help of Christians be a companion on this journey. Good luck in your work,

Mr. Antonio Boccia
*World Coordinator
 Association of Salesian Cooperators*

**Declaration of the Mornese World Confederation
of FMA Past Pupils**

29th General Chapter of the Salesians of Don Bosco
**“Passionate about Jesus Christ, dedicated to young people.
Living our Salesian vocation
faithfully and prophetically.”**

Dear Vicar of the Rector Major,,
Members of the Chapter and Salesian Family,

On behalf of the Mornese World Confederation of Past Pupils of the FMA, we extend our most sincere greetings and prayers as you gather for the 29th General Chapter of the Salesians of Don Bosco.

The theme chosen, “Passionate about Jesus Christ, dedicated to young people. Living our Salesian vocation faithfully and prophetically” resonates deeply with the essence of our shared mission. It calls us all to renew our commitment to the charism of St John Bosco, enkindling in our hearts a passion for Christ and an unwavering dedication to the service of young people, especially those most in need.

As past pupils we are living witnesses to the transformative power of the Salesian vocation. We have personally experienced the revolutionary impact of being accompanied with love, understanding and a prophetic vision that inspires us to be active participants in the Church and in society. This Chapter invites us to reflect on how we too can live our mission faithfully and prophetically, rooted in the values of our charism.

In the final document of the Synod on Young People (2024), young people offered us their vision, their dreams and a path they felt was necessary for their encounter with God, their holiness. Young people imagine a transformative community where they are supported, listened to and guided to realise their potential in faith, family and society, actively

contributing to a hopeful and inclusive future. Two of the priorities that I found very significant and in tune with the theme of the General Chapter are the search for a connection with God and faith, a deeper personal relationship that inspires hope and direction, and an anchor that will help their lives in faith, prayer and the sacraments - a guide in discovering their vocation and in the life of holiness. The second is Authentic Relationships and Role Models. It is here that today's leaders must cultivate and examine our holiness. We cannot serve on empty promises or ideas; we must offer our young people credible accompaniment, empathetic guidance and ears that listen without judgement. That relationship fosters mutual trust and understanding.

We pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit during this Chapter so that it may be a time of fruitful discernment, courageous decisions and a renewed commitment to Don Bosco's vision. May your discussions and reflections strengthen the unity of the Salesian Family and inspire innovative ways to evangelise and accompany young people in the challenges of today's world

Be assured of our prayers and support as you embark on this significant journey. Together, let us continue to walk in fidelity to Christ and with a prophetic spirit, promoting a culture of encounter, hope and transformation for young people and the world.

With warm regards and prayers,

Maria Carmen Castillon

President

Mornese World Confederation of FMA Past Pupils

Goodnight by Fr Fabio Attard – Rector Major
25.03.2025

Dear Confreres,

At this so intensely human moment I would like to share three reflections with you that arise from a feeling of deep gratitude and awareness. The personal dimension, although real and touching, is only a fragment of a much broader reality: today, the focus is not on me personally, but on the Salesian Congregation. This is the true protagonist, and with the gesture made today it bears witness not only to vitality, but also to the desire for this vitality to continue over time.

We are part of a larger dynamic than ourselves, in which men and women are called, for a time, to serve where others will follow, taking on the same mandate. In this profoundly human story, the Spirit of God continues to speak, create, redeem and sanctify. It is a story inhabited by the Triune God who challenges us, the Salesians of Don Bosco, to remain open to his saving action which has its beginning and fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

This morning, reflecting on what could happen – and then what did happen – I asked myself, “What is the Lord saying with all this?” Like many confreres around the world, I followed the path of this General Chapter, recognising a genuine desire to listen to the Spirit. From the beginning, Fr Pascual Chávez’ reflections helped me a lot; they resonated deeply in me, in continuity with what Fr Ángel confided to me in September 2023, when the Chapter theme was announced: “Passionate about Jesus Christ, dedicated to young people, living our Salesian vocation prophetically”.

I remember that moment well: we were in the school of accompaniment with Brother Raymond Callo, engaged in an exceptional work of the *Salesian School of Spiritual Accompaniment*, and Fr Ángel came to greet the participants. I took the opportunity to thank him. In my opinion, that title was

– and is – profoundly apt: it summarises what we are experiencing, listening to, searching for. It is interesting to note how the last three General Chapters have addressed, in different ways, the question of the identity of the Salesian. Since 2014 with *“Mystics, Prophets and Servants”*, then going through the complex period of the pandemic, we came to reflect on “What kind of Salesian for today's young people?”

We need to interpret the choice of the General Chapter not so much as an expression of a personal preference – albeit legitimate – but as adherence to a shared call which challenges each of us. It is not so much who is chosen that is relevant, but the way in which this service is taken up, the spirit with which one makes oneself available, the desire that animates those who are called. Whether it is Fabio or another confrere, the substance does not change: the Congregation is greater than its Rector Major, although it remains true that the Rector Major has a significant role.

Fr Pascual has repeatedly stressed how today, we Salesians are called to live the charism in an authentic way, avoiding the risk of being “pastoral photocopies” Pope Francis reminds us that simply repeating what has always been done is no longer enough. The greatest danger, however, is not in ignoring this awareness, but in getting stuck at a theoretical level. Knowing things intellectually, sociologically, analytically, is not equivalent to living them in a prophetic and faithful way. And it is precisely in this tension that my thoughts for us today lie.

Together – and I say “together” as Don Bosco would have said – we are called to rediscover, first of all, a passion for God. Without this, the passion for the human being also disappears. And since nature does not tolerate a vacuum, when passion for God is lacking, selfishness inevitably takes over. Other than being servants: we become people who make use of their role.

Hence the second point of my reflection, connected to the Word that has been proclaimed to us: *“We are the last called to serve”*.

For years, every Saturday evening, during the celebration of Evening Prayer, I have meditated on the canticle of the Letter to the Philippians: the mystery of kenosis, the emptying of the Son of God, who takes the form of a servant in order to serve, to identify with us, to become incarnate. This morning, providentially, the short reading at Morning Prayer brought us back to this same mystery on the feast of the Annunciation: we do not celebrate a divine spectacle that breaks into history, but we contemplate with humility and intelligence the mystery of the Incarnation, which involves us deeply, personally.

God became flesh so that, in my flesh, in my history, I could live and act with that same power of love. Today, in the epochal change which Pope Francis speaks of, we are called to share this love. This is where our educative and pastoral service plays out: in which direction are we moving? Vertically, as if we were benefactors, masters, service providers? Or in the evangelical sense as authentic servants?

I remember with gratitude some words of Fr Viganò in one of his letters: he spoke of the need to combine *pastoral charity with pedagogical intelligence*. It is a combination that guides us, a *grace of unity* that keeps us faithful to our Salesian vocation.

In this particular moment that the Chapter is experiencing, we are immersed in the very heart of the charism. It is good to see, even from those who are following from afar, how much the work of communication is making visible what is being built here. It is a very positive sign. Now, the real question that challenges us is: will we be able to bring all this back to the Provinces? Will we be able to embody this call in a radically new context?

If these are new times, the thirst for meaning that runs through them is not. It is ancient, constitutive of humanity. And those who, like us, have had the gift of knowing the world, know that today young people really live in a “global village”. The questions I heard in Vietnam are the same ones I picked up in Brazil. The same issues, the same questions that I heard last year

in Madrid, in the Province of St James the Greater, I found a few months later in Bangalore.

Young Christians, young Catholics, but also young people of other religions or without religious affiliation, who nevertheless enter into a relationship with us: we recognise that everyone carries a thirst in their heart. The question we have to ask ourselves is: are we really able to hear this question? The answer is yes, only if we agree to be servants. Only then will we be able to seize upon that thirst and consequently create those conditions – people, places, proposals – so that it is recognised, accepted, and possibly even quenched, at least with “a glass of water that breaks the thirst.

The change of era, then, is not a threat, but an extraordinary opportunity. During some visits to contexts where Christians are a minority – Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu and agnostic countries – I saw firsthand an extraordinary sympathy for Don Bosco. A sympathy that is not superficial or emotional but deep, intelligent, emotionally healthy. It stems from an authentic search for the true, the beautiful and the good.

This is the novelty of our times. Forward then! We cannot miss this opportunity!! The measure of our passion for Christ will indicate the degree of our dedication to young people. Our fidelity will be the backbone of our prophecy. There are no other ways.

During the last Provincial Visitation I made, I had the gift of spending time with Father Thomas Uzhunnalil, who was held hostage for 557 days. His serenity, his spiritual depth, his life of prayer are living testimony. They are people you need to kneel before.

We have, thanks be to God, many Salesians like Father Thomas: confreres who have not abandoned lands marked by violence and suffering. They have remained, to testify that for Jesus Christ it is worth being Don Bosco for young people today.

How could we forget the tormented Ukraine, Palestine, Israel, Lebanon, Myanmar, Sudan, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Congo? These brothers and sisters need our spiritual closeness. They are the martyrs of our time, silent and faithful witnesses of Christian hope.

This morning, when Fr Stefano put the decisive question to me, everything seemed to open up like an unpredictable story, almost an adventure. I've messed up all your schedules, forget about what you had prepared for half past ten! But that's okay. I was deeply moved, not so much by the personal esteem – which also honours me – but by the trust that the Congregation wanted to express. A trust that does not arise from an abstract idea, but from a shared journey. I say it freely: I do not deserve it. But this is our Congregation.

And this is the very spirit we would like to allow ourselves to be accompanied in the coming days. Serving means first of all **living** what is announced. It must be visible, credible. And this all starts with us, the General Council. We are called to be a sign of synodality, of communion, of fraternity. We are called to be fathers. We are here to **serve**. Nothing else.

Today, we are Don Bosco. Today, Don Bosco tells us once more: *courage!*

Over these days I was reading some pages from the second volume by Fr Pietro Braidò, dedicated to the year 1875 – a year that we celebrate today on the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the missions. Don Bosco, at that time, had many fronts open: the consolidation of the Constitutions, the foundation of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, the Cooperators, the missions, the opening in France, the difficulties with Gastaldi... Yet he went on, and on.

This is Don Bosco. And this is who we are today.

I ask you only one thing: **pray for me**. You have entrusted me with a burden. I was talking about it this morning with my

spiritual director. He said, “*Keep going. The Lord is asking this of you. Go.*” *And go I will, but I am asking you: accompany me with prayer.* This is no human endeavour.

Pray also for those you will elect to the General Council: so that we be a community, so that we be brothers, so that we can really serve each other, listen to each other, dream together, enter that sacred space where sandals are not needed, to be free in listening and ready to carry out the project of the General Chapter with joy and optimism.

Long live Don Bosco!



SOCIETY OF SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES
SALESIAN HEADQUARTERS

Via Marsala, 42 – 00185 Rome

The Rector Major

FINAL ADDRESS

Dear confreres,

We have come to the end of this experience of the 29th General Chapter with hearts filled with joy and gratitude for all that we have been able to experience, share and plan. The gift of the presence of the Spirit of God that we have prayed for daily in morning prayer as well as during our work through conversation in the Spirit, has been the central strength of the General Chapter experience. We asked that the Spirit play a leading role, and this has been given to us abundantly.

The celebration of any General Chapter is like a milestone in the life of every religious congregation. This also applies to us, to our beloved Salesian Congregation. It is a moment that gives continuity to the journey from Valdocco that continues to be experienced with commitment and carried forward with zeal and determination in various parts of the world.

We come to the end of this General Chapter with the approval of a Final Document that will serve as our roadmap for the next six years – 2025-2031. We will see and feel the value of this Final Document to the extent that we are able to maintain the same dedication to listening and the same eagerness to let ourselves be accompanied by the Holy Spirit that have marked these weeks after the conclusion of this Salesian Pentecost experience.

From the beginning, when the Rector Major Fr Angel Fernández Artime made the *Letter of Convocation of the 29th General Chapter* public on 24 September 2023, in AGC 441, the motivations that were to guide the Pre-Chapter work were clear and subsequently, the work of the General Chapter itself. The Rector Major wrote that,

The chosen theme is the result of a rich and profound reflection that we have carried out in the General Council on the basis of the answers received from the Provinces and the vision that we have of the Congregation at this time. We were pleasantly surprised by the great convergence and harmony we found in the many contributions from the Provinces, which had a lot to do with the reality we see in the Congregation, with the path of fidelity that exists in many sectors and also with present challenges. (AGC 441)

The process of listening to the provinces that led to the identification of the theme for this General Chapter is already a clear indication of a listening methodology. In the light of what we have experienced in recent weeks, the value of the listening process is confirmed. The way in which we first identified and then interpreted the challenges that the Congregation is determined to face has highlighted our typical Salesian atmosphere, a family spirit which does not seek to avoid challenges, which does not try to standardise thinking, but which does everything possible to arrive at a spirit of communion where each of us can recognise the way to be Don Bosco today.

The focal point of the challenges identified has to do with the fact that “it refers to the centrality of God (as Trinity) and Jesus Christ as Lord of our lives, without ever forgetting young people and our commitment to them” (AGC 441). The way that the General Chapter developed is testimony not only to the fact that we have the ability to identify challenges but that we have also found ways to bring out harmony and unity, recognising and treasuring the fact that we are in different continents and contexts, different cultures and languages. What is more, this atmosphere confirms that when we look at reality with the eyes and heart of Don Bosco today; when we are truly passionate

about Christ and dedicated to young people, then we discover that this diversity becomes a wealth, that journeying together is beautiful even if it is tiring, that we can face the challenges together.

In a world fragmented by war, conflict and depersonalising ideologies; in a world marked by economic and political thinking and models that remove the active role that young people can play, our presence is a sign, a “sacrament” of hope. Young people, regardless of skin colour, religious or ethnic affiliation, ask us to put forward proposals and promote places of hope. They are the sons and daughters of God who expect us to be humble servants.

A second point that was confirmed and reaffirmed by this General Chapter is the shared conviction that “if fidelity and prophecy were lacking in our Congregation, we would be like the light that does not shine and the salt that does not give flavour” (AGC 441). The point here is not so much whether we want to be more authentic or not, but the very fact that this is the only path we have and it is the one that has been strongly reiterated here over these weeks: to grow in authenticity!

The courage shown during some moments of the General Chapter is an excellent premise for the courage that will be asked of us in the future on other issues that came out of this General Chapter. I am sure that this courage here has found fertile ground, a healthy and promising ecosystem that holds great promise for the future. Having courage means not letting fear have the last word. The parable of the talents clearly teaches us this. The Lord has given us but one talent: the Salesian charism, concentrated in the Preventive System. Each of us will be asked what we have done with this talent. Together, we are called to make it bear fruit in challenging, new and unprecedented contexts. We have no reason to bury it. We have so many reasons, so many cries from young people who urge us to “go out”, to sow hope. Don Bosco already took this courageous step, filled with

conviction, in his time, and today he asks us to take it as he did and with him.

I would like to comment on some points that are already found in the **Final Document** and which I believe can serve as pointers to encourage us on the journey over the next six years.

1. Personal conversion

Our journey as a Salesian Congregation depends on the personal, intimate and profound choices that each of us decides to make. Broadening the background against which we need to reflect on the theme of personal conversion, it is important to remember how, over these years after the Second Vatican Council, the Congregation has embarked on a journey of spiritual, charismatic and pastoral reflection that has been masterfully commented on by Fr Pascual in his weekly talks. This interpretation and contribution further enriches the important reflection that the Rector Major, Fr Egidio Viganó, left us in his last letter to the Congregation: *Reading the Founder's Charism at the Present Day* (AGC 352, 1995). If today we talk about a “change of era”, Fr Viganó wrote in 1995:

The reinterpretation of our Founder's charism has kept us busy for the last thirty years, And in our task we have been helped by two great beacons of light: the first is the Second Vatican Council, and the second the epoch-making acceleration of history at the present time (AGC 352, 1995).

I am referring to this journey of the Congregation with its riches and heritage because the matter of personal conversion is the space where this journey of the Congregation finds its confirmation and further impetus. Personal conversion is not an intimate, self-referential affair. This is not a call that only touches me in a way that is detached from everything and everyone. Personal conversion is that special experience from which a renewed pastoral care will emerge. We can see the Congregation's journey because it finds its starting point in the heart of each one of us. It is from here that we can notice the continuous and

convinced pastoral renewal. Pope Francis condenses this urgent cry in a single sentence: “The Church’s closeness to Jesus is part of a common journey; ‘ communion and mission are profoundly interconnected’”¹ (*Evangelii Gaudium* 23).

This leads us to discover that when we are insisting on personal conversion we must be careful on the one hand not to fall into an intimist interpretation of spiritual experience, and on the other hand, not underestimate what is the foundation of every pastoral journey.

In this call to renewed passion for Jesus, I invite every Salesian and every community to take seriously the concrete choices and commitments that we as a General Chapter have deemed urgent for a more authentic educational and pastoral witness. We believe that we cannot grow pastorally without this attitude of listening to the Word of God. We recognise that the various pastoral commitments we have, the ever-increasing needs that confront us and that testify to unceasing poverty, risk taking away the necessary time to “be with him.” We already find this challenge at the very beginning of our Congregation. It is about having clear priorities that strengthen our spiritual and charismatic backbone that gives soul and credibility to our mission.

Fr Alberto Caviglia, when commenting on the topic of “Salesian Spirituality” in his *Conferences on the Salesian Spirit* writes:

What was most astonishing for those who studied Don Bosco during the canonisation process was the discovery of his incredible work of building the inner man.

Cardinal Salotti... in reference to the study he was then engaged in, told the Holy Father that “in studying the voluminous Turin processes, more than the external grandeur of his colossal work, [he] was struck by the inner life of the spirit, from which the whole prodigious apostolate of Ven. Don Bosco originated and was nourished.

Many are only familiar with the external work that seems so

¹ *Christifideles laici* no.32

impressive, but are largely ignorant of the wise, sublime edifice of Christian perfection that he had patiently erected in his soul by practising the virtue of his state every day, every hour.

Dear brothers, here we have our Don Bosco. It is this Don Bosco that we are called to discover today:

We study and imitate him, admiring in him a splendid blending of nature and grace. He was deeply human, rich in the qualities of his people, open to the realities of this earth; and he was just as deeply the man of God, filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit and living “as though he saw him who is invisible.”

These two aspects combined to create a closely-knit life project, the service of the young. He realized his aim with firmness, constancy and the sensitivity of a generous heart, in the midst of difficulties and fatigue. “He took no step, he said no word, he took up no task that was not directed to the saving of the young... Truly the only concern of his heart was for souls” (C 21).

I would like to recall here an invitation from Mother Teresa to her sisters a few years before her death. Her dedication and that of her sisters to the poor is known to everyone. However, it is good for us to hear these words of hers written to her sisters:

Until you can hear Jesus in the silence of your heart, you will not be able to hear him say “I am thirsty” in the hearts of the poor. Never give up this intimate and daily contact with Jesus as a living and real person, not just as an idea.²

Only by listening in the depths of our hearts to the one who calls us to follow him, Jesus Christ, can we truly listen with an authentic heart to those who call us to serve them. If the radical motivation of our being servants does not find its roots in the person of Christ, the alternative is that our motivations are nourished by the soil of our ego. And the consequence, then, is that our pastoral action ends up inflating the same ego. The urgency of recovering the mystical

² “Until you can hear Jesus in the silence of your own heart, you will not be able to hear Him saying, “I thirst” in the hearts of the poor. Never give up this daily intimate contact with Jesus as the real living person – not just the idea”, in <https://catholiceducation.org/en/religion-and-philosophy/the-fulfillment-jesus-wants-for-us.html>

space, the sacred ground of the encounter with God, a ground in which we have to take off the sandals of our certainties and our ways of interpreting reality with its challenges over these weeks, has been repeated many times and in various ways.

Dear brothers, here we have the first step. Here we prove if we really want to be authentic sons of Don Bosco. Here we prove if we really love and imitate Don Bosco.

2. Getting to know Don Bosco not only loving Don Bosco

We are aware that one of the central challenges we have as Salesians is to communicate the good news through our witness and our educative and pastoral proposals in a culture that is undergoing radical change. While in the West we talk about indifference to religious proposal that is the result of the challenge of secularisation, we notice how the challenge takes other forms in other continents, first of all in the shift towards a globalised culture that radically shifts the scale of values and lifestyles. In a fluid and hyper-connected world, what we knew yesterday has radically changed today: in short, we are dealing here with the oft-mentioned question of the change of epoch.

Given that this change has had widespread effects, it is positive to see how the Congregation, from the SCG (192) onwards, has been on a continuous journey until today, rethinking and reflecting on its educative and pastoral proposal. It is a process that responds to the question “What would Don Bosco do today, in a secularised and globalised culture like ours?”

Throughout this process we recognise how, from its very origins, the beauty and strength of the Salesian charism lies precisely in its inner capacity to dialogue with the history of the young people we are called to encounter in every age. What we have been contemplating at Valdocco, in this Salesian holy land, is the breath of the Spirit that guided Don Bosco and that we recognise as continuing to guide us today. The *Constitutions* begin precisely with this foundational and fundamental certainty:

Through the motherly intervention of Mary, the Holy Spirit raised up St John Bosco to contribute to the salvation of youth ...

The Spirit formed within him the heart of a father and teacher, capable of total self-giving. “I have promised God that until my dying breath I would dedicate myself entirely to my poor boys.

To ensure the continuation of this mission, the Spirit inspired him to initiate various apostolic endeavours, first among them our Society.

The Church has acknowledged God’s hand in this, especially by approving our Constitutions and by proclaiming our Founder a saint.

From this active presence of the Holy Spirit we draw strength for our fidelity and support for our hope. (C 1).

The Salesian charism contains an innate invitation to place ourselves before young people in the same way that Don Bosco placed himself before Bartholomew Garelli... “his friend”!

In reality, it hides within itself an urgent invitation to us, the sons of Don Bosco, so that in today’s history, wherever we find ourselves, we may propose the Salesian charism in an adequate and meaningful way. However, there is an essential condition that allows us to undertake this journey: a true and profound knowledge of Don Bosco. We cannot say that we truly “love” Don Bosco if we are not seriously committed to “knowing” Don Bosco.

Often, the risk is to settle with a knowledge of Don Bosco that fails to connect with current challenges. With a superficial knowledge of Don Bosco we are really poor in the charismatic heritage that makes us his authentic sons. Without knowing Don Bosco we cannot and do not end up embodying Don Bosco in the cultures where we are. All our efforts in this poverty of charismatic knowledge result only in charismatic cosmetic operations which ultimately are a betrayal of Don Bosco’s very legacy.

If we want the Salesian charism to be capable of engaging in dialogue with today’s culture, today’s cultures, we must continually deepen our understanding of it, both in itself and in light of the ever-changing conditions in which we live. The foundation we received at the beginning of our initial formation,

if not seriously deepened today, is not sufficient – it is simply useless if not downright harmful.

The Congregation has made, and continues to make, a tremendous effort in this direction to reread the life of Don Bosco and the Salesian charism in the light of the current social and cultural conditions throughout the world. It is a legacy we have, but we run the risk of not knowing it because we fail to study it as it deserves. The loss of memory risks not only making us lose touch with the treasure we have, but also risks making us believe that this treasure does not exist. And this would be really tragic not so much and only for us Salesians, but for those crowds of young people who are waiting for us.

The urgency of this deeper understanding is not merely intellectual in nature but responds to the thirst that exists for a serious charismatic formation of the laity in our Educative and Pastoral Communities (EPCs). The Final Document deals with this issue often and systematically. The lay people who share in the Salesian mission with us today are individuals eager for a clearer and more meaningful Salesian formation proposal. We cannot truly experience these spaces of educational and pastoral convergence if our language and the way we communicate the charism lack the depth of understanding and the proper preparation needed to spark curiosity and capture the attention of those who share the Salesian mission with us.

It is not enough to say that we love Don Bosco. True “love” for Don Bosco implies the commitment to know and study him, not only in the light of his time, but also in the light of the great potential of his great potential for today, in the light of our time. The Rector Major, Fr Pascual Chávez, made an invitation to the entire Congregation and the Salesian Family for the three years that preceded the “Bicentenary of the birth of Don Bosco 1815-2013”.³

³ (Fr Pascual Chávez, *Srrenna* 2012, “*Let us make the young our life’s mission by coming to know and imitate Don Bosco*” [AGC 412])

It is an invitation that is more relevant than ever. This General Chapter is a call and an opportunity to strengthen the historical, pedagogical, and spiritual knowledge of our Father and Teacher.

We recognise, dear brothers, that at this point this issue connects with the previous one – personal conversion. If we do not know Don Bosco and if we do not study him, we cannot understand the dynamics and efforts of his spiritual journey and consequently the roots of his pastoral choices. We end up loving him only superficially, without the true ability to imitate him as a profoundly holy man. Above all, it will be impossible to inculturate his charism today in different contexts and situations. Only by strengthening our charismatic identity will we be able to offer the Church and Society a credible witness and a meaningful and relevant educative and pastoral proposal to young people.

3. The journey continues

In this third part, I would like to encourage the entire Congregation to keep alive the focus on certain areas where, through the various *Resolutions* and concrete commitments, we have sought to give a sign of continuity.

The area of animation and coordination of marginalisation and youth distress has been an area in which the Congregation has been very committed over recent decades. I believe that the response by the provinces to growing poverty is a prophetic sign that sets us apart and finds all of us determined to continue to strengthen the Salesian response for the poorest.

The provinces' efforts in the area of **promoting safe environments** continue to find a growing and professional response in the provinces. The effort in this area is a testimony that this is the right direction to affirm the commitment to the dignity of all, especially the most vulnerable.

The area of **integral ecology** emerges as a call for greater educative and pastoral work. The growth of attention in educative and pastoral communities to environmental issues

requires a systematic commitment to promote a change in mentality.

The various proposals for formation in this area found in the Congregation should be acknowledged and accompanied.

There are also two areas that I would like to invite the Congregation to consider carefully for the coming years. They are part of a broader perspective of the Congregation's efforts. I believe these are two areas will have substantial consequences for our educative and pastoral processes.

I. Artificial intelligence – a real mission in an artificial world

As Salesians of Don Bosco, we are called to walk with young people in every environment in which they live and grow, even in the vast and complex digital world. Today, Artificial Intelligence (AI) presents itself as a revolutionary innovation that can shape the way people learn, communicate and build relationships. However, as revolutionary as it may be, AI remains exactly that: artificial. Our ministry, rooted in authentic human connection and guided by the Preventive System, is profoundly *real*. Artificial intelligence can assist us, but it cannot love like we do. It can organise, analyse and teach in new ways, but it can never replace the relational and pastoral touch that defines our Salesian mission.

Don Bosco was a visionary who was not afraid of innovation, both at the ecclesial level and at the educational, cultural and social levels. When this innovation served the good of young people, Don Bosco went ahead with astonishing speed. He took advantage of the press, new educational methods and workshops to lift young people up and prepare them for life. If he were among us today, he would undoubtedly look at AI with a critical and creative eye. He would see it not as an end but as a means, a tool to amplify pastoral effectiveness without losing sight of the human person at the centre.

Artificial Intelligence is not just a tool: it is part of our mission

as Salesians living in the digital age. The virtual world is no longer a separate space but an integral part of young people's daily lives. AI can help us respond to their needs more efficiently and creatively, offering personalised learning paths, virtual mentorship, and platforms that foster meaningful connections.

In this sense, artificial intelligence becomes both a *tool* and a *mission*, as it helps us reach young people where they are, often immersed in the digital world. While embracing AI, we need to recognise that it is just one aspect of a larger reality that encompasses social media, virtual communities, digital storytelling, and much more. Together, these elements form a new pastoral frontier that challenges us to be present and proactive. Our mission is not simply to use technology, but to *evangelise the digital world*, bringing the gospel into spaces where it might otherwise be absent.

Our response to AI and digital challenges must be rooted in the Salesian spirit of optimism and proactive engagement. Let us continue to walk with young people, even in the vast digital world, with hearts full of love because they are passionate about Christ and rooted in the charism of Don Bosco. The future is bright when technology is at the service of humanity and when the digital presence is full of authentic Salesian warmth and pastoral commitment. Let us embrace this new challenge, confident that the spirit of Don Bosco will guide us in every new opportunity.

II. The Pontifical Salesian University

The Pontifical Salesian University (UPS) is the University of the Salesian Congregation, of all of us. It is a structure of great and strategic importance for the Congregation. Its mission is to bring the charism into dialogue with culture, the energy of Don Bosco's educative and pastoral experience with academic research, so as to develop a high-profile formation proposal at the service of the Congregation, the Church and society.

From the outset, our University has played an irreplaceable

role in the formation of many confreres for roles of animation and government and still performs this valuable task. In an era characterised by widespread disorientation about the grammar of the human being and the meaning of existence, by the disintegration of the social bond and the fragmentation of religious experience, by international crises and migratory phenomena, a Congregation like ours is urgently called to face the educative and pastoral mission by making use of the solid intellectual resources that are developed within a university.

As Rector Major and as Grand Chancellor of UPS, I would like to reiterate that the two fundamental priorities for the University of the Congregation are *the formation of educators and pastors, Salesians and laity, at the service of young people* and the cultural – historical, pedagogical and theological – deepening of the charism. Around these two pillars, which require interdisciplinary dialogue and intercultural attention, the UPS is called upon to develop its commitment to research, teaching and the passing on of knowledge. I am therefore pleased that in view of the 150th anniversary of Don Bosco's text on the Preventive System, a serious research project has been launched in collaboration with the FMA's "Auxilium" Faculty to focus on the original inspiration of Don Bosco's educational practice and to examine how it inspires pedagogical and pastoral practices today in different contexts and cultures.

The governance and animation of the Congregation and the Salesian Family will certainly benefit from the cultural work of the University, just as academic study will receive valuable nourishment by maintaining a close connection with the life of the Congregation and its daily service to the poorest youth around the world.

III. 150 years – the journey continues

We are called to give thanks and praise to God in this jubilee year of hope because during this year we remember the missionary commitment of Don Bosco which arrived at a very

significant moment of development in 1875. The reflection that the Vicar of the Rector Major, Fr Stefano Martoglio, offered us in *Strenna 2025* reminds us of the central theme of the 150th anniversary of Don Bosco's first missionary expedition: **recognising, rethinking and relaunching**.

In the light of the 29th General Chapter that we are concluding, it helps us to place this invitation in the six-year period ahead of us. We are called to **recognise** gratefully because "it makes the fatherly nature of every beautiful accomplishment evident. Without recognition, gratitude, there is no capacity to accept."

To this recognition and gratitude we add the duty to **rethink** our fidelity, because "fidelity involves the ability to change", in obedience towards a vision that comes from God and from interpreting the 'signs of the times... Rethinking, then, becomes a generative act in which faith and life come together; a moment in which to ask ourselves: what do you want to tell us Lord?"

Finally, the courage to **re-launch**, to start over again every day. As we are doing in these days, we look far ahead, "welcoming new challenges, relaunching the mission with hope. (Because the) Mission is to bring the hope of Christ with clear and conscious awareness, linked to faith."

CONCLUSION

At the end of this concluding address I would like to present a reflection by Tomas HALIK, taken from his book *The Afternoon of Christianity*. The author, in the last chapter of the book entitled "The Society of the Way", presents **four ecclesiological concepts**.

I believe that these **four ecclesiological concepts can help us to positively interpret the great pastoral opportunities that await us**. I offer this reflection with the understanding that what the author proposes is intimately related to the heart of Salesian charism. It is striking and

surprising that the more we venture into a charismatic, pastoral as well as pedagogical and cultural interpretation of the current reality, the more the conviction is confirmed that our charism provides us with a solid basis so that the various processes that we are accompanying find their rightful place in a world where young people are waiting for hope, joy and optimism to be offered to them. It is good that we recognise with great humility but at the same time with a great sense of responsibility how Don Bosco's charism continues to provide guidelines today, not only for us, but for the whole Church.

- I. *Church as the people of God on pilgrimage through history. This image outlines a Church on the move and grappling with incessant change. God moulds the Church throughout history, reveals himself to her through history, and imparts his teachings to her through historical events. God is in history.*⁴

Our call to be educators and pastors consists precisely in walking with the flock in this history, in this constantly changing society. Our presence in the various “courtyards of people's lives” is the sacramental presence of a God who wants to meet those who seek him without knowing it. In this context, “The sacrament of presence” acquires an inestimable value for us because it is intertwined with the historical events of our young people and of all those who turn to us in the various expressions of the Salesian mission – the COURTYARD or playground.

- II. *The ‘school’ is the second vision of the Church – school of life and school of wisdom. We live in an era in which, in the public space of many European countries, neither a traditional religion nor atheism dominates, but rather agnosticism, apathy and religious illiteracy prevail... In this era it is urgently necessary that Christian society is transformed into a ‘school’ following the original ideal of medieval universities, which arose as a community of teachers and pupils, a community of life, prayer and teaching.*⁵

⁴ HALÍK, Tomáš, *Afternoon of Christianity*. (p. 229).

⁵ HALÍK, Tomáš, *Afternoon of Christianity*. (pp. 231-232).

Retracing Don Bosco's educative and pastoral project from its origins, we discover how this second proposal directly touches the experience we currently offer to our young people: **school and vocational training**. They are educational paths which are an essential tool for giving life to an integral process where culture and faith meet. For us today, this space is an excellent opportunity where we can witness to the good news in the human and fraternal, educational and pastoral encounter with so many people and, above all, with so many children and young people who feel they are accompanied toward a dignified future. The educational experience for us pastors is a lifestyle that communicates wisdom and values in a context that encounters and goes beyond resistance and that dissolves indifference through empathy and closeness. Walking together promotes a space of integral growth inspired by the wisdom and values of the Gospel – the **SCHOOL**.

III. *The Church as a field hospital...for too long, face to face with the diseases of society, the Church has limited itself to morality; now it is faced with the task of rediscovering and applying the therapeutic potential of faith. The diagnostic mission should be carried out by the discipline which I have suggested be called kairology – the art of reading and interpreting the signs of the times, the theological hermeneutics of the facts of society and culture. Kairology should devote its attention to times of crisis and changing cultural paradigms. It should see them as part of a 'pedagogy of God', as the opportune time to deepen the reflection on the faith and renew its practice. In a certain sense, kairology develops the method of spiritual discernment, which is an important component of the spirituality of Saint Ignatius and his disciples; it applies this method when it delves into and evaluates the current state of the world and our tasks within it.*⁶

This third ecclesiological criterion goes to the heart of the Salesian approach. We are not present in the lives of children and young people to condemn them. **We make ourselves available to offer them a healthy space of (ecclesial) communion,**

⁶ HALÍK, Tomáš, *Afternoon of Christianity*. (pp. 233-234).

enlightened by the presence of a merciful God who places no conditions on anyone. We develop and communicate our various pastoral proposals precisely with this perspective of facilitating the encounter of young people with a spiritual proposal capable of enlightening the times in which they live, of offering them hope for the future. The proposal of the person of Jesus Christ is not the result of sterile confessionalism or blind proselytism, but the discovery of a relationship with a person who offers unconditional love to all. Our testimony, and that of all those who live the educational and pastoral experience as **community**, is the most eloquent sign and the most credible message of the values we wish to communicate in order to share them – the **CHURCH**.

IV. *The fourth model of the Church... it is necessary that the Church establish spiritual centres, places of adoration and contemplation, but also of encounter and dialogue, where it is possible to share the experience of faith. Many Christians are concerned that in a large number of countries the network of parishes, which was formed a few centuries ago in a completely different socio-cultural and pastoral situation and within a different interpretation of the Church's self, is fraying.*⁷

The fourth concept is that of a “**home**” capable of communicating **welcome, listening and accompaniment**. A “home” in which the human dimension of each individual’s story is recognised and, at the same time, the possibility is offered to allow this humanity to reach its maturity. Don Bosco rightly calls “home” the place where the community lives its call because, by welcoming our children and young people, it is able to ensure the conditions and pastoral proposals necessary for this humanity to grow in an integral way. Each of our communities, each “house” or home is called to be a witness to the originality of the Valdocco experience: a “home” that intersects with the history of our young people, offering them a dignified future – the **HOME**.

⁷ HALÍK, Tomáš, *Afternoon of Christianity*. (pp. 236-237).

In our Constitutions, Article 40 *we find the synthesis of all these “four ecclesiological concepts”*. It is a synthesis that serves as an invitation and also as an encouragement for the present and the future of our educative and pastoral communities, of our provinces, of our beloved Salesian Congregation:

Don Bosco’s Oratory a permanent criterion

Don Bosco lived a pastoral experience in his first Oratory which serves as a model; it was for the youngsters a home that welcomed, a parish that evangelized, a school that prepared them for life, and a playground where friends could meet and enjoy themselves.

As we carry out our mission today, the Valdocco experience is still the lasting criterion for discernment and renewal in all our activities and works.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS IN GC29

| Name and Surname | Role | Province |
|---------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| Attard Fabio | Rector Major - New Elected | RMG - Headquarters |
| Stefano Martoglio | Vicar of the RM - President | RMG - Headquarters |
| Alphonse Owoudou | Moderator | RMG - Headquarters |
| Roggia Silvio | Councillor for formation - Newly Elected | RMG - Headquarters |
| Ivo Nicholas Coelho | Councillor for formation | RMG - Headquarters |
| Bejarano Rafael | Councillor for Youth Ministry - Newly elected | RMG - Headquarters |
| Miguel Angel García Morcuende | Councillor for Youth Ministry | RMG - Headquarters |
| Jorge Mario Crisafulli | Councillor for the Missions - Newly Elected | RMG - Headquarters |
| Alfred Maravilla | Councillor for the Missions | RMG - Headquarters |
| Fidel Maria[Daza] Orendain | Councillor for Social Communication - Newly Elected | RMG - Headquarters |
| Gildásio Mendes Dos Santos | Councillor for Social Communication | RMG - Headquarters |
| Stawowy Gabriel | Economer General - New | RMG - Headquarters |
| Jean Paul Muller | Councillor Economer General | RMG - Headquarters |
| Innocent Bizimana | Regional Councillor for East and Southern Africa | RMG - Headquarters |
| Juan Carlos Pérez Godoy | Regional Councillor for the Mediterranean | RMG - Headquarters |
| Hugo Orozco Sánchez | Regional Councillor for Interamerica | RMG - Headquarters |
| Roman Jachimowicz | Regional Councillor for Central and North Europe | RMG - Headquarters |
| Héctor Gabriel Romero | Regional Councillor for America South Cone | RMG - Headquarters |
| Matthews William | Regional Councillor for East Asia Oceania - Newly Elected | RMG - Headquarters |
| Thanh Phuoc Nguyen | Regional Councillor for East Asia Oceania | RMG - Headquarters |
| Biju Michael | Regional Councillor for South Asia | RMG - Headquarters |
| Guido Garino | Secretary General | RMG - Headquarters |
| Pier Fausto Frisoli | Procurator General | RMG - Headquarters |
| Pascual Chávez Villanueva | Rector Major Emeritus | ICC - ITALY Central Circumscrip. |
| | | |
| Aurelien Mwanangoy Mukangwa | Provincial | ACC - AFRICA Congo Congo |
| Sylvain Woto Bope | Delegate | ACC - AFRICA Congo Congo |
| Tedros Berhe Hawku | Delegate | AET - AFRICA Ethiopia - Eritrea |
| Hailemariam Medhin Tesfay | Provincial | AET - AFRICA Ethiopia - Eritrea |
| Gauthier Tshibangu Ilunga | Delegate | AFC – AFRICA Central |
| Tryphon Kalimira Cizihira | Delegate | AFC – AFRICA Central |
| Guillermo Luis Basaños | Provincial | AFC – AFRICA Central |
| George Tharaniyiil | Provincial | AFE – AFRICA East |
| Ngigi (John) Njuguna | Delegate | AFE – AFRICA East |
| Mojela Ntsane Colern Fihlo | Observer | AFM - AFRICA Southern |
| Bonginkosi Timothy Nhleko | Delegate | AFM - AFRICA Southern |
| Václav Klement | Provincial | AFM - AFRICA Southern |
| Gabriel Ngendakuriyo | Provincial | AGL – AFRICA Great Lakes |
| Servilien Ufitamahoro | Delegate | AGL – AFRICA Great Lakes |
| José Kussama Mayengue (Mayembe) | Delegate | ANG - ANGOLA |
| Luis Victor Sequeira Gutiérrez | Provincial | ANG - ANGOLA |
| Oriafo James Ailen | Delegate | ANN – AFRICA Nigeria Niger |

| Name and Surname | Role | Province |
|----------------------------------|------------|--|
| Jésus Benoît Badji | Provincial | AON – AFRICA North West |
| Appolinaire Franck Kakpo Ametepe | Delegate | AON – AFRICA North West |
| Kpossi Koffi Didier Eklou | Delegate | AOS – AFRICA South West |
| Kolotcholoma Denis Soro | Provincial | AOS – AFRICA South West |
| Eleuterio Evita Role | Delegate | ATE – AFRICA Tropical Equatorial |
| Roland Mintsa | Provincial | ATE – AFRICA Tropical Equatorial |
| Donat Jean Fabien Rakotovao | Delegate | MDG – MADAGASCAR |
| Adolfo De Jesus Sarmento | Provincial | MOZ – MOZAMBIQUE |
| Pedro Alexandre Meia | Delegate | MOZ – MOZAMBIQUE |
| Emilius Aloyce Salema | Provincial | TZA – TANZANIA |
| Augustine [Sellam] Jacob | Delegate | TZA – TANZANIA |
| Joseph Samson Nyondo | Delegate | ZMB – ZAMBIA – Malawi – Zimbabwe - Namibia |
| Michael Kazembe Mbandama | Provincial | ZMB – ZAMBIA – Malawi – Zimbabwe - Namibia |
| Lucas Mario Mautino | Delegate | ARN – ARGENTINA North |
| Horacio Fabián Barbieri | Provincial | ARN – ARGENTINA North |
| José Alberto García Arias | Delegate | ARS – ARGENTINA South |
| Ramón Darío Perera | Provincial | ARS – ARGENTINA South |
| Márcio José Marçal Montandon | Delegate | BBH – BRAZIL Belo Horizonte |
| Natale Vitali | Provincial | BBH – BRAZIL Belo Horizonte |
| Ricardo Carlos | Provincial | BCG – BRAZIL Campo Grande |
| Adalberto Alves De Jesus | Delegate | BCG – BRAZIL Campo Grande |
| João da Silva Mendonça Filho | Delegate | BMA – BRAZIL Manaus |
| Philippe Bauzière | Provincial | BMA – BRAZIL Manaus |
| Ademir Ricardo Cwendrych | Provincial | BPA – BRAZIL Porto Alegre |
| Sérgio Ramos de Souza | Delegate | BPA – BRAZIL Porto Alegre |
| Francisco Inácio Vieira Junior | Provincial | BRE – BRAZIL Recife |
| José Lopes Lima Júnior | Delegate | BRE – BRAZIL Recife |
| Ronaldo Zacharias | Delegate | BSP – BRAZIL São Paulo |
| Alexandre Luis De Oliveira | Provincial | BSP – BRAZIL São Paulo |
| Claudio Esteban Cartes Andrades | Delegate | CIL – CHILE |
| Nelson Javier Moreno Ruiz | Provincial | CIL – CHILE |
| Néstor Alejandro Ledesma Peralta | Provincial | PAR – PARAGUAY |
| Dionisio Medina Ovelar | Delegate | PAR – PARAGUAY |
| Francisco Lezama | Provincial | URU – URUGUAY |
| Raúl Esteban García Aparicio | Delegate | URU – URUGUAY |
| Pietro (Peter) Hoang Kim Huy | Provincial | AUL – AUSTRALIA PACIFIC |
| Philip Donald Gleeson | Delegate | AUL – AUSTRALIA PACIFIC |
| Antonio Leung Wai-Choi | Delegate | CIN – CHINA |
| Teng Kok (Domingos) Leong | Provincial | CIN – CHINA |
| Gerardo [Naguit] Martin | Provincial | FIN – PHILIPPINES North |
| Alexander (Locsin) Garces | Delegate | FIN – PHILIPPINES North |
| Rooney John (Gustilo) Undar | Delegate | FIS – PHILIPPINES South |

| Name and Surname | Role | Province |
|-------------------------------------|------------|--|
| Joseph Shoichiro Nakada | Delegate | GIA - JAPAN |
| Atsushi Francesco Hamasaki | Provincial | GIA - JAPAN |
| Vincentius Prastowo | Provincial | INA – INDONESIA |
| Silverius Andang Kencana Aji | Delegate | INA – INDONESIA |
| Marcello (Kwang Hyun) Baek | Provincial | KOR - KOREA |
| Peter (Sang Yun) Kim | Delegate | KOR - KOREA |
| Timothy Won Chol Choi | Observer | KOR - KOREA |
| Leo Neng Khan Mang | Delegate | MYM - MYANMAR |
| (Bosco) Zaya Aung | Provincial | MYM - MYANMAR |
| Pedro Sachitula (Satchitula) | Delegate | PGS - Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands |
| Gregorio Jr. (Encina) Bicomong | Provincial | PGS - Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands |
| Thanad (John Baptist) Anan | Delegate | THA - THAILAND |
| Boonlert Paneetattayasai | Provincial | THA - THAILAND |
| Plácido Teófilo Freitas | Delegate | TLS – TIMOR Leste |
| Anacleto Pires Guterres | Provincial | TLS – TIMOR Leste |
| An Phong Le | Provincial | VIE - VIETNAM |
| Hoang Phi (Sr) Nguyen | Delegate | VIE - VIETNAM |
| Ngoc Vinh Nguyen | Delegate | VIE - VIETNAM |
| Van Luan Bui | Observer | VIE - VIETNAM |
| Ashley Miranda | Delegate | INB – INDIA Bombay |
| Michael Fernandes | Delegate | INB – INDIA Bombay |
| Savio Raj Silveira | Provincial | INB – INDIA Bombay |
| Sunil Kerketta | Delegate | INC - INDIA Calcutta |
| Tomy Augustine Kumplankal | Delegate | INC - INDIA Calcutta |
| Joseph Pauria | Provincial | INC - INDIA Calcutta |
| Joseph Pampackal | Provincial | IND – INDIA Dimapur |
| Devasia Anthony Rajeeesh Payampally | Delegate | IND – INDIA Dimapur |
| Deli Kapani | Delegate | IND – INDIA Dimapur |
| Nicodim (Nicodem) Aind | Delegate | ING - INDIA Guwahati |
| Sebastian Kuricheal | Provincial | ING - INDIA Guwahati |
| Joy Kachappilly | Delegate | ING - INDIA Guwahati |
| Rajesh Salagala | Delegate | INH - INDIA Hyderabad |
| Thomas Rajkumar Santiagu | Provincial | INH - INDIA Hyderabad |
| Joe Tony Previnth | Delegate | INK – INDIA Bangalore |
| George Thannickal Chacko | Delegate | INK – INDIA Bangalore |
| Jose Thomas Koyickal | Provincial | INK – INDIA Bangalore |
| John Alexander Michael | Delegate | INM – INDIA Madras |
| Don Bosco Lourdusamy | Provincial | INM – INDIA Madras |
| Stanislaus Swamikannu | Delegate | INM – INDIA Madras |
| Augustine Albert Toppo | Delegate | INN – INDIA New Delhi |
| Davis Maniparamben John | Provincial | INN – INDIA New Delhi |
| Vijay Soy | Delegate | INN – INDIA New Delhi |
| Banzelao Julio Teixeira | Delegate | INP – INDIA Panjim |

| Name and Surname | Role | Province |
|---------------------------------|---------------|-------------------------------|
| Clive Justin Telles | Provincial | INP – INDIA Panjim |
| Anthony Kharkongor | Delegate/Supp | INS - INDIA Shillong |
| John Zosiama | Provincial | INS - INDIA Shillong |
| Jose Vettath | Delegate | INS - INDIA Shillong |
| Agilan Sarprasadam | Provincial | INT – INDIA Tiruchy |
| Robert Simon David | Delegate | INT – INDIA Tiruchy |
| Amaladoss Sanjone | Delegate | INT – INDIA Tiruchy |
| Angelo Sylvester Roshan Miranda | Provincial | LKC – SRI LANKA |
| Oratious Sajeewaka Paul | Delegate | LKC – SRI LANKA |
| Peter Johannes Rinderer | Delegate | AUS - AUSTRIA |
| Siegfried Kettner | Provincial | AUS - AUSTRIA |
| Dieter Verpoest | Delegate | BEN – BELGIUM NORTH - HOLLAND |
| Bart Decancq | Provincial | BEN – BELGIUM NORTH - HOLLAND |
| Martin Hobza | Provincial | CEP – CZECH REPUBLIC |
| Libor Všetula | Delegate | CEP – CZECH REPUBLIC |
| Mihovil Kurkut | Delegate | CRO - CROATIA |
| Milan Ivančević | Provincial | CRO - CROATIA |
| Daniel Federspiel | Provincial | FRB – FRANCE – BELGIUM SOUTH |
| Xavier De Verchère | Delegate | FRB – FRANCE – BELGIUM SOUTH |
| James Robert Gardner | Delegate | GBR – GREAT BRITAIN |
| James Gerard Briody | Provincial | GBR – GREAT BRITAIN |
| Simon Leonhard Härting | Delegate | GER - GERMANY |
| Reinhard Gesing | Provincial | GER - GERMANY |
| Eunan McDonnell | Provincial | IRL - IRELAND |
| Cyril Aigbadon Odia | Delegate | IRL - IRELAND |
| Savio Vella | Delegate | MLT – MALTA |
| Eric Cachia | Provincial | MLT – MALTA |
| Tadeusz Jarecki | Provincial | PLE - POLAND EAST |
| Dariusz Stanisław Mikołajczyk | Delegate | PLE - POLAND EAST |
| Jacek Zdzieborski | Delegate | PLE - POLAND EAST |
| Łukasz Pawłowski | Delegate | PLN – POLAND NORTH |
| Szymon Kasprzak | Delegate | PLN – POLAND NORTH |
| Tadeusz Itrych | Provincial | PLN – POLAND NORTH |
| Bartłomiej Polanski | Provincial | PLO – POLAND WEST |
| Tomasz Hawrylewicz | Delegate | PLO – POLAND WEST |
| Dariusz Bartocha | Delegate | PLS - POLAND SOUTH |
| Marcin Kaznowski | Provincial | PLS - POLAND SOUTH |
| Peter Jacko | Delegate | SLK - SLOVAKIA |
| Peter Timko | Provincial | SLK - SLOVAKIA |
| Peter Končan | Provincial | SLO - SLOVENIA |
| Klemen Balažič | Delegate | SLO - SLOVENIA |
| Andrii Platosh | Delegate | UKR - UKRAINE |
| Mykhaylo Chaban | Provincial | UKR - UKRAINE |

| Name and Surname | Role | Province |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|--------------------------------------|
| Sándor Kovács | Delegate/Supp | UNG - HUNGARY |
| Gábor Vitális | Provincial | UNG - HUNGARY |
| José Pastor Ramírez Fernández | Provincial | ANT - ANTILLES |
| Jorge Antonio Santiago Cartagena | Delegate | ANT - ANTILLES |
| Líder Justiniano Flores | Provincial | BOL - BOLIVIA |
| Luis Adolfo Torrez Sanjines | Delegate | BOL - BOLIVIA |
| Juan Gabriel Romero López | Delegate | CAM – CENTRAL AMERICA |
| Julio Andrés Navarro Mora | Provincial | CAM – CENTRAL AMERICA |
| Rubén Dario Jaramillo Duque | Provincial | COB - COLOMBIA Bogotá |
| Rafael Andrés Lasso Castelblanco | Delegate | COB - COLOMBIA Bogotá |
| José Ariel Guerrero Castro | Provincial | COM - COLOMBIA Medellín |
| José Luis Jiménez Martínez | Delegate | COM - COLOMBIA Medellín |
| Luis Alberto Mosquera Herrera | Delegate | ECU - ECUADOR |
| Marcelo Alfonso Farfán Pacheco | Provincial | ECU - ECUADOR |
| Morachel Bonhomme | Delegate | HAI - HAITI |
| Marc-Antoine Justable | Delegate | HAI - HAITI |
| Filiberto González Plasencia | Provincial | MEG - MEXICO Guadalajara |
| Eduardo Lara Perez | Delegate | MEG - MEXICO Guadalajara |
| Juan Aaron Cerezo Huerta | Provincial | MEM - MEXICO Mexico |
| Hugo Herrera Rosales | Delegate | MEM - MEXICO Mexico |
| Uriel Iván Jáuregui Casas | Delegate | PER - PERU |
| Juan Pablo Alcas Michilot | Provincial | PER - PERU |
| Travis Gunther | Delegate | SUE – UNITED STATES EAST |
| Danh Cong Dominic Tran | Provincial | SUE – UNITED STATES EAST |
| Kristian Kris Laygo | Delegate | SUO – UNITED STATES WEST |
| Melchor Trinidad | Provincial | SUO – UNITED STATES WEST |
| John Thomas Mass | Observer | SUO – UNITED STATES WEST |
| José Liborio Escalona Uzcategui | Delegate | VEN - VENEZUELA |
| Rafael Bernardo Montenegro Latouche | Provincial | VEN - VENEZUELA |
| Domenico Paternò | Provincial | CNA – North Africa Circumscription |
| Albert Ramadan | Observer | CNA – North Africa Circumscription |
| Roberto Colameo | Provincial | ICC - ITALY Central Circumscription |
| Daniele Merlini | Delegate | ICC - ITALY Central Circumscription |
| Michelangelo Dessì | Delegate | ICC - ITALY Central Circumscription |
| Fabiano Gheller | Delegate | ICP - ITALY Piedmont Circumscription |
| Claudio Belfiore | Delegate | ICP - ITALY Piedmont Circumscription |
| Leonardo Mancini | Provincial | ICP - ITALY Piedmont Circumscription |
| Edoardo Gnocchini | Delegate | ILE - ITALY Lombard Emilian |
| Roberto Dal Molin | Provincial | ILE - ITALY Lombard Emilian |
| Claudio Beretta | Delegate | ILE - ITALY Lombard Emilian |
| Giuseppe Russo (Tardio) | Delegate | IME - ITALY Southern |
| Gianpaolo Roma | Provincial | IME - ITALY Southern |

| Name and Surname | Role | Province |
|------------------------------------|------------|--------------------------------------|
| Lorenzo Teston | Delegate | INE - ITALY North-East |
| Michele Bortolato | Delegate | INE - ITALY North-East |
| Silvio Zanchetta | Provincial | INE - ITALY North-East |
| Domenico Saraniti | Provincial | ISI - ITALY Sicily |
| Arnaldo Riggi | Delegate | ISI - ITALY Sicily |
| Pier Jabloyan | Delegate | MOR – MIDDLE EAST |
| Simon Zakerian | Provincial | MOR – MIDDLE EAST |
| João Mendes Chaves | Delegate | POR - PORTUGAL |
| Tarcízio Antônio Morais De Castro | Provincial | POR - PORTUGAL |
| José Luis Navarro Santotomás | Delegate | SMX – SPAIN Seville |
| Jordi Lleixà Jané | Delegate | SMX – SPAIN Seville |
| Fernando Miranda Ustero | Provincial | SMX – SPAIN Seville |
| Xabier Camino Sáez | Delegate | SSM - SPAIN Madrid |
| Luis Fernando Gutiérrez Cuesta | Delegate | SSM - SPAIN Madrid |
| Óscar Bartolomé Fernández | Delegate | SSM - SPAIN Madrid |
| Manuel Fernando García Sánchez | Provincial | SSM - SPAIN Madrid |
| Andrea Bozzolo | Delegate | UPS - Pontifical Salesian University |
| José Aníbal Milhais Mendonça Pinto | Provincial | UPS - Pontifical Salesian University |
| Francesco Marcoccio | Delegate | RMG - Headquarters |
| Joan Lluís Playà Morera | Observer | RMG - Headquarters |
| Luca Barone | Observer | RMG - Headquarters |

CHRONICLE OF THE WORK OF GC29 BY FR PASCUAL CHAVEZ

Taking stock (1)

The point of reference for everything we are doing is Article 146 of the Constitutions, which defines the nature, objective of the General Chapter.

146. The General Chapter is the principal sign of the unity of the Congregation in its diversity. It is the fraternal meeting in which the Salesians carry out a community reflection in order to remain faithful to the Gospel and the Founder's charism and sensitive to the needs of times and places. Through the General Chapter the entire Society, letting itself be guided by the Spirit of the Lord, seeks to know, at a given moment in history, the will of God for a better service to the Church.¹ (1 cf. CIC, can. 631).

2. In the opening prayer in the courtyard, presided over by the Archbishop of this Diocese of Turin, Card. Roberto Repole, taking his cue from Sunday's 2nd reading (1Cor 15 on the Resurrection of Christ, the core of our faith), began by reminding us that we have been summoned by God to celebrate our faith, revive our hope and inflame our charity. Then in the Eucharist, commenting on the Beatitudes in a parallel between the more spiritual ones of Matthew's Gospel and the more social ones of Luke's Gospel, he noted that these reflect very well the dramatic situation we are experiencing today and invited us to have, like Jesus, a loving gaze towards the poor and a prophetic gaze towards those who put all their trust in man: power, money, greed, etc. And to react as Ps 1 says by putting all our trust in God.

3. At the opening ceremony in the theatre, the mayor not only thanked the Salesian Congregation for the opportunity to greet us and wished us a beautiful assembly, but also shared his

perplexity at the social and political situation in the world, and urged that, as the fruit of our Chapter, we can renew our commitment to young people through education and promote their future.

4. It is interesting to note how both religious and civil authorities have reminded us of the social and political scenario of our world today, precisely so that we do not experience this event as a ‘soap bubble’, but as a true interlocutor. We must never lose sight of the fact that God speaks with a polyphonic voice, through nature and the ecological crisis, through history especially through the cry of the poor in all its expressions, through the Word of God, through the Magisterium of the Church and the Congregation, through our own voice...

5. For his part, Fr Stefano gave an enlightening outline of GC29, whose theme – formulated by RM Fr Àngel Fernández *“Passionate about Jesus Christ, dedicated to young people”* – was the fruit of the responses of all the Provinces and discernment within the Council, which led to the definition of the theme and the nuclei into which it was declined, with a clear call “for a renewed charismatic identity, fruit of the experience of God, in view of a faithful and prophetic Salesian life”.

6. In her address, Sr Simona Brambilla, Prefect for the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, sharing her experience of the Synod “for a synodal path’ took the icon of the Disciples of Emmaus to illustrate spiritual dialogue in its double vertex, on a human level, of what passes through our minds and hearts, and on a spiritual level, of what happens when inflamed by the Word and enlightened by the Spirit we seek God’s will, with the hope that this will happen in the development of our General Chapter.

Finally, Mother Chiara and Antonio Boccia, representatives not only of the FMA and Salesian Cooperators, but of the entire Salesian Family, wished us a fruitful Chapter experience, precisely because this is an event that has to do with the entire Salesian Family, and assured us of their prayers.

7. The Spiritual Exercises were intended to create the spiritual atmosphere in which to live this “Salesian Pentecost” and, at the same time, to deepen the criterion of reference with which to illuminate reality, the state of the Congregation, the challenges emerging and the priorities to be taken. The homilies by Fr Eunan, Fr Fernando García and Fr Jorge Crisafulli offered, from different perspectives, cues for a fruitful living of the GC so that the choices to be made respond to what God expects of the Congregation.

8. The pilgrimage to Colle Don Bosco, the cradle of our father and of his vocation and mission received in the “dream at 9 years of age”, and to Chieri, the place where he lived the ten years that profoundly marked his life and where he discerned his priestly vocation, was an opportunity to *give thanks* for the gift that Don Bosco meant and means, to *recall* his story beginning with his origins and that of the dream and all that came from it, and finally to *find inspiration* to respond to the challenges of the new generations of young people, being attentive to them, to their expectations, to their needs, without fossilising the charism by identifying it with works, programmes and projects.

9. After the days of spirituality, work began with the Chapter’s ordinary timetable. The information on the functioning of the tablet in such a way as to facilitate the work and participation of all, the presentation by Fr Stefano as President of the CG29 of its three secretaries, Fr Daniele Merlini, Fr Fabiano Gehler and Fr Bortolato, the reading of the Regulations, concluded with the *sanatio* of the procedures of some provincial chapters, and the constitution of the Commissions, enabled us to approve the Regulations with the changes requested by the Assembly and to receive the presentation of the Working Document for the GC29, with the consequent sharing and voting.

10. The second week, on the other hand, was all about the presentation of the State of the Congregation, through the Report of the RM, the Vicar, the Sectorial Councillors and the

Regional Councillors, and the Statistics with their corresponding reading, especially through the interpretation of it all by Fr John Dalpiaz.

11. This very important part concluded with an intervention by Fr Stephen in which he reiterated to the Chapter members that the reports presented to us on the state of the Congregation are a word with which God speaks to us and that it is up to us in personal and commission study to identify the challenges and priorities for the future. The readiness of the Sector Councillors and the Vicar to answer the questions sent in by the Chapter members is always aimed at a better knowledge of the state of the Congregation as a whole and in its dimensions and regions, creating more and more of a sense of belonging and responsibility. The information provided is not to satisfy curiosity but to make us more co-responsible for this inheritance of Don Bosco in our hands today, so that we can pass it on faithfully to the following generations. We can well imagine the importance of this work, the result of which practically becomes the RM government programme for the next six years.

12. From this point of view, the work in commissions was very fruitful and, above all, helped to create communion, and encouraged participation, all in view of the mission. And so, almost naturally, we entered into the synodal spirit and methodology.

At this point, it is clear that GC29 will mark a turning point in the Congregation that has become increasingly multicultural and in need of moving from the inculturation of the charism in all cultures to interculturalism, which means a unity of the Congregation made up of the diversity of expressions of the same charism, a very big challenge, not easy, but decisive for the future of the Congregation. We find ourselves with a new configuration of the Consecrated Life, also in our Congregation, as shown by the different progression of vocations, the culture of the new generations of religious, also of our Salesians, the change of emphasis from the management of works to the educative,

evangelising mission, and the new pastoral subject formed by Salesians and Laity sharing not only work but also Salesian charism, spirit and mission. We hope that the implementation of the work programme will be accompanied by taking this change seriously, which touches on the theme of unity and decentralisation, in such a way that perfectly inculturating the charism in the different cultures becomes an enrichment for the whole Salesian charism. The Holy Spirit is the source of diversity, He is the creator of harmony. Let us allow ourselves to be inhabited and guided by Him. May Mary the expert of the Spirit teach us the fundamental attitudes: listening - docility - collaboration.

Taking stock - 2

1. This time the week I am taking stock of began last Saturday when Fr Andrea Bozzolo and Fr Eunan presented and proposed to the Assembly what “*conversation in the Spirit*” is, something that saw excellent results in the *Synod for a synodal path of the Church*, illustrated then by testimonies of experiences made by three Chapter members, Fr Luis Gutiérrez (Koldo), Fr Daniel Federspiel and Fr Gian Paolo Roma.

2. On Monday the 3rd, after personal and commission reflection on the method, a vote was taken in the assembly hall and it was approved. And it was immediately put into practice through a spiritual introduction by Eunan on the first core area of the Working Document, starting with meditation on the text of Mk 3:13-16 in prayer. The rest of the day’s work was devoted to personal study and in commissions on Core area 1 in its first part, that of Listening. The day ended with the Evening Prayer and the Goodnight given by the Provincial of Argentina South, Fr Dario Perera, inspired by the 150th anniversary of the first Salesian missionary expedition.

3. Tuesday the 4th, was a day of work in commissions still on the first core area in the following two parts: Interpretation and

Choices. It ended with Evening Prayer and the Goodnight given by Fr John Zosiama, Provincial of Guwahati, who introduced us to the Salesian presence in north-east India. At dinner there was a bit of a carnival celebration.

4. On Wednesday the 5th, after the morning prayer in language groups, the work in commissions on the theme A “Centrality of Jesus Christ and Care for Vocation” continued sharing what the groups had done.. At the end of the morning, in the Basilica, we had the celebration of the Eucharist for Ash Wednesday presided over by Fr Beppe Roggia, who in his homily, starting from the symbolic image of the ashes used also to regenerate the fields, invited us to make this liturgical season a life-giving and flourishing one, like and with the Risen Christ. In the afternoon, work in commissions on Theme B “Fraternity and Attention to the Poor” and then on Theme C “Formation of the Salesian” until the study of Core area 1 was completed. We ended in the hall with Evening Prayer and the Goodnight offered by Bishop Saro Vella, Bishop from Madagascar, and his proposal for the creation of an association of Salesian bishops.

5. On Thursday the 6th, the first part of the morning spent was in commissions studying the summary of Core area 1, at the end of which the vote was taken. After the break there was personal study on some aspects of Core area 3.

In the afternoon, in the hall the minutes were read out and approved in, after which the President took the floor to thank people for the work done in the commissions and justified the decision to already move on to Core area 3, which contains legal aspects that could end with changes to some constitutional articles. In that case, it would be necessary to send the changes to the Holy See requesting approval, before the week of the General Council elections.

And immediately Core area 3 began with a meditation on the Word led by Fr Eunan starting with the text from Rom 12:2; then Fr Chávez offered information requested of him on the

Structures of animation and government of the Congregation, followed by Fr Pier Fausto Frisoli who illustrated from a juridical point of view the three issues on which the Chapter will have to decide: The Organization of the Regions, the Composition of the General Council and the General Secretariats, and the Priesthood Requirement to be Rector, Provincial and Rector Major, because in the case of changes touching the Constitutions the approval of the Holy See must be sought as already mentioned by the Chapter President, Fr Stefano Martoglio. Finally, the Moderator presented the outline of work on 6 points. After the break, we return to the commissions for the work on Listening, Interpretation and Choices on these. Again the Assembly gathered for Evening Prayer and the Goodnight offered by Fr Vaclav Klement, Superior of AFM.

6. On Friday the 7th, in the morning there was work in the commissions to collect the proposals of the groups and draw up three proposals with a justification to present to the Assembly. After the break, the minutes were read out and approved in the Assembly, and the proposals of each committee presented with room for discussion in the Assembly were,. In the afternoon, the Moderator introduced item 3.1 plus sheets 1 and 2, and we moved on to the commissions. Then it was back to the Hall for the presentation of the resolutions to be voted on the following day. It ended with the Stations of the Cross.

7. A significant element, indeed, was the progressive presentation of the realities of the Congregation, especially through the homilies, such as the one from the Provincial of Ukraine, Fr Myhailov Chavan, and the Goodnights, starting with the first from Fr Guillermo Basaños on the AFC and the others already mentioned. It is not a matter of making things known to satisfy curiosity, but to create communion, a sense of belonging, to move more and more from “I” to “we” at the level of the congregation.

At this point, after a week of typical Chapter work, in the sense of being focused on the theme “Passionate about Jesus Christ and

dedicated to young people” and its three core areas, we can say that both the work done by the pre-Chapter Commission that drew up the Working Document, and the Presidency that carefully prepared all the aspects of the General Chapter in this Valdocco location, as well as the practical organisation, and the choice made to take up and use the “Conversation in the Spirit” have all proved to be very apt and valid components.

Today, after three weeks, the intercultural fraternal atmosphere we are experiencing is now visible, as well as the familiarisation with the spirituality and method of “Conversation in the Spirit”, giving way to a deeper knowledge among us, to a more open mutual acceptance, to a spiritual communion in listening to the Spirit in order to open ourselves to the Will of the Father, who wants us to be ever more faithful to Christ and to Don Bosco’s project on behalf of young people, especially the poorest and neediest.

And this is what turns the General Chapter into a true “Salesian” Pentecost.

Taking stock - 3

1. This third “Taking stock” intervention of mine begins by going back to what we experienced on Saturday the 8th, which began with a *Lectio* on “The Eucharist at the centre of life” led by Fr Guido Errico and the Province of Vietnam. In the session, the minutes were read and approved, then the President, Fr Stefano Martoglio, invited Fr Pier Fausto Frisoli to make some juridical clarifications regarding the voting on resolutions that the Chapter members would have to do in the coming weeks, after which, before going on to non-definitive voting on the resolutions, the floor was given to those who asked for some clarification, after which the vote was taken, leaving the final vote for Monday. The session ended with “Taking stock” (2) together with a part of the inner journey of the Congregation from the SGC to GC9.

2. At midday, in the Eucharist in the Basilica presided over

by the Provincial of the Myanmar Province, Fr Zaya Aung delivered a touching homily and a final word on the dramatic situation they have been experiencing for years. In the evening, Evening prayer (Vespers) in the Basilica was presided over by Fr Bonhomme Morachel, Provincial of the Province of Haiti, who gave us a good night, also talking about the difficult political and social situation that the country has been experiencing for years and where the Salesians have made the choice to be with the people and share their suffering to witness the closeness of God, his tenderness and give hope to a desperate people. These two interventions touched the hearts of all the Chapter members, strengthening the sense of Congregation and inviting solidarity in suffering with these realities, a true sympathy (*sym-pascho*) that leads to “weeping with those who weep”.

3. On Monday 10 March, in the morning we worked on commissions on core area 3.1 + sheets 1&2 until we arrived at the proposals. Subsequently, the Minutes were approved in the Hall, followed by an intervention from the President, after which the 6 commissions presented their proposals on core area 3.1. Finally, it was asked to examine the resolutions to be voted on and to prepare interventions on the proposals regarding 3.1. In the afternoon, in the Hall, all the necessary space was given to the interventions, which meant that we heard the various evaluations on the different issues concerning the composition of the Council. At this point the President took the floor, thanking people for the freedom with which those who intervened expressed themselves and, at the same time, noting the importance of the issue and what we are doing, not with a view to reaching a shared decision but creating a common vision, always with the desire to respond to the request of the RM who, in his letter of invitation to GC29, invited us to undertake a courageous evaluation of animation and government at all levels. After a pause, on return a vote was taken on the 5 resolutions concerning core area 3.2: 1) the *establishment of a second Region in Africa-Madagascar*, 2) the *request to the Rector Major with his*

Council to review the priorities and methods of implementation of the duties of the Regional Councillor in order to better implement what is required by the Constitutions and Regulations, 3) the request to the RM with his Council to guarantee the Regional Councillors adequate personnel to support their service, 4) that the St John Bosco Province of Croatia be transferred from the Central & North Europe Region to the Mediterranean Region, 5) the request to the Rector Major with his Council to develop a reflection on the common challenges that the Congregation is facing today in Europe and on the synergy between the two Regions. All 5 of these resolutions were approved with different degrees of *Placet*, *non placet* and *abstention*. Further interventions also followed on the subject, which ended with a further word from the President expressing the appreciation of what had been shared and suggesting a free exchange to capitalise on the outcome of what they had heard. The day ended with Evening prayer and a good night from the Provincial of the Warsaw Province, Poland, Fr Tadeusz Jarecki.

4. On Tuesday 11 March, we began with the reading and approval of the minutes. The President took the floor to tell us that the proposal for the new resolutions to be voted on would arrive and offered some criteria in this regard. The Moderator presented the work to be done: study of sheets 8-9-10 on the Requirement of the Priesthood to be Rector, Provincial, Rector Major, and taking into account *the Rescript of the Holy Father Pope Francis on the exception from can. 588 52 CIC, of 18.05.2022 and the "Salesian Charismatic Rereading" of this Rescript*. After these indications, we went to our commissions for personal study, reflection in groups and the subsequent proposals drawn up in the commission. In the last part of the day, in the Hall, the Drafting Commission presented the resolutions on topic 3.1. Then the 6 commissions presented their proposals on topics 8/9/10. The material presented would be read and studied the following day. It ended with Evening prayer and the goodnight given by the Provincials of Ecuador, Fr Marcelo Farfán, and of

Peru, Fr Juan Pablo Alcaz who introduced us to the extraordinary missionary figure of Fr Luigi Bolla and the Formation Centre for the Achuar people.

5. On Wednesday 12 March, all morning was spent in the Hall for the reading and approval of the Minutes, a word from the President to inform us of the conclusion of the Central Commission on the resolutions to be voted on regarding the Composition of the Council, after which Fr Luca Barone presented us with the three resolutions concerning the request to the RM and his Council to promote greater coordination between the Sector Councillors and the Regional Councillors, the transformation of Social Communication into a Secretariat, and finally, the transformation of the Missions into a Secretariat, all three with results. After this, the morning was spent listening to interventions on sheet 8 regarding the priesthood requirement for the rector. At the end of the morning I was invited to offer some enlightenment, taking my cue from the conference Don Bosco gave to the Coadjutor novice at San Benigno Canavese in 1883 and Fr Philip Rinaldi's letter commenting one by one on all the elements of that reference text. In the afternoon, we went ahead with further interventions, after which Fr Joan Lluís Playá was given the floor to present a proposal to amend Article 151 which would include among the members of the General Chapter with the right to vote the Central Delegate who is entrusted with the direct responsibility of the Secretariat for the Salesian Family in accordance with Article 108 of the General Regulations. Then there was a time for personal reflection followed by time in commission and we returned to the Hall. Upon arrival Fr Luca Barone presented us with the 4 draft resolutions on sheets 8/9/10 with two alternatives on sheet 8 concerning the priesthood requirement for the rector. After some information from the President and the Moderator, we moved on to Evening prayer led by the Province of Angola and followed by the goodnight offered by the Provincial of the Middle East, Fr Simone Zekarian.

6. On Thursday 13 March, in the Hall, after reading and

approving the minutes, we proceed to the provisional vote on sheets 8/9/10 with a positive result for the resolution on the *ad experimentum* possibility for the next 6 years of appointing Salesian Brothers as Rectors of the community. At the end of the vote, the presentation of the first core area as developed by the individual commissions began. After the break, and once again in the hall, the final vote was taken on the resolutions on core area 1 regarding “Organisation of the General Council” with the following results: 1) *ask the RM to see to greater coordination between Sector and Regional Councillors*, 2) *no change to the Article on the Councillor for Social Communication*, 3°) *and likewise for the Article on the Councillor for Missions*. After these votes we continued with the presentation of the first core area. In the afternoon, in the Hall, the presentation of the commissions on the first core area was completed and there was room for interventions in the assembly on this core area. Then proposals for resolutions 12,13,14,15 on the “*priesthood requirement*” were put to the Assembly. Manuel No. 12, concerning the request to the RM to avail himself of the Papal Rescript and to amend Article 121 of the Constitutions so as to be able to appoint, with the consent of his Council, a Salesian Brother as Rector of a community, did not reach a qualified majority (2/3 of the voters). No. 13 concerning the request to the RM to avail himself *ad experimentum* of the Papal Rescript to be able to appoint, with the consent of his Council, a Salesian Brother as the Rector of a community, reached the required absolute majority (half + 1) and was *therefore approved*. No. 14, concerning the request to the RM to avail himself of the Papal Rescript and to amend Articles 121 and 162 and to appoint, with the consent of his Council, a Salesian Brother as Provincial, and consequently to provide for the appointment of another priest confrere who is responsible for exercising the faculties attributed by Canon Law to the Ordinary for the service of authority at the provincial level, did not reach a qualified majority (2/3). No. 15 concerning the request to avail ourselves of the possibility of the Rescript to,

with discretion, authorise non-clerical confreres to be conferred with the office of Rector Major and, consequently, to amend art. 121 of the Constitutions as well as art. 127 and art. 129, and also to elect another priest confrere who can exercise the faculties attributed by Canon Law to the Ordinary for the service of authority at the worldwide level, did not reach a qualified majority (2/3).

The day ended with Evening prayer led by the AON Province, and the goodnight given by ...the Provincial, Fr Jèsus Benoit, who presented us with their situation, a strongly militarised, Islamic area, with one part where radical Islam exercises sharia, and where the confreres, with great courage and determination, continue to carry out the Salesian mission with presences and works that are truly places of hope in the midst of the critical situation in the territory.

7. Friday 14 March we read and approved the minutes and, above all, there was a beautiful meditation led by Fr Eunan, starting from the text of Mt 18:20. At the end of this, we move on to the commissions for reflection on core area 2, throughout the day, which we concluded in the Hall with the *Via Crucis*.

We have already completed 4 weeks of the General Chapter and we are at the halfway mark. Taking stock of what we have experienced and done so far, it could be summarised by saying that after the first week of spirituality and regulatory aspects, the second week placed the state of health of the Congregation before us with the presentation, study and questions of the Reports of the RM, Vicar and Councillors, and in the third we entered into core area 1 with work in commissions and assembly, then spending this fourth week studying core area 3 in commissions, around tables and in the hall on the various sheets, proposals and discussion in the hall. If the first three weeks were characterised by peaceful arguments, despite the diversity of views and positions, the fourth highlighted the great diversity of the Congregation, which explains the more polarised, more

emotional interventions, all of them as an expression of listening to the Spirit. If it is He who creates diversity, it is also He who creates harmony, not in the sense that everyone thinks in the same way, but in the fact that communion is not broken and the Spirit opens up space.

It could be said, inspired by the gospel, that *we asked and received, we searched and found, we knocked and the door was opened to us*. We asked for the Holy Spirit and he was given to us. We searched all roads for what God's will would be and we found it. And we knocked on the door and the door of the mind and heart was opened to welcome what God wants from the Congregation today! The Holy Spirit cannot be caged or even tamed, he is free as the wind says Jesus, always renewing and creating.

Meanwhile, what was passed on through homilies, the prayers in different languages, and the goodnight on the situations of the Provinces have helped us to learn more about those situations and has aroused a deep sense of Congregation in the variety of its social, political, economic and cultural contexts, greatly appreciating everything the Confreres do in such circumstances, carrying out the mission despite all the difficulties.

One thing that seems very important is not to forget that everything is at the service of the Chapter theme "*Passionate about Jesus Christ – dedicated to young people*", and therefore that the interventions, debates, resolutions, etc. all seek nothing other than to respond faithfully to God and the Young.

Taking stock - 4

1. This fifth week of the General Chapter began on Saturday 15th, with a Lectio Divina "Being in Christ" on Galatians 2:15-21 as the inspirational text. In the morning session, the minutes were read and approved and then I was invited to present "Taking stock" (3), at the end of which the commissions went on to continue reflection on core area 2. At noon we had Holy Mass in the Basilica. Fr Rafael Montenegro, Provincial of the Province of Venezuela was

main celebrant. In the evening, Evening Prayer in the Basilica was led by Fr Vaclav Klement, who finally gave the goodnight on his AFM Vice-Province, emphasising the hopeful points.

2. On Monday 17th, we began in the Assembly with the invocation of the Holy Spirit, after which the minutes were read and approved. Then the President took the floor on behalf of the Central Commission to make a renewed call to personal responsibility regarding the communication of what happens in the Chapter, informing us that there will be a meeting open to Chapter members to share on the issue of abuse, and he said that the Central Commission would present a proposal on the presentation of core area 2.

At the end of Fr Stefano's address the commissions went ahead with the study of core area 2's three topics A-B-C. There is no doubt that reflection both at the tables and in the commissions proved to be very enriching, and made us aware of what the Chapter experience really is, recovering practices and thinking of the provinces in the diversity of their situations, contexts and possibilities. In the evening there was a meeting of the President and the Moderator with the Africa Madagascar Region. The day ended in the hall with evening prayer led by confreres from India, in Hindi and other languages, and the goodnight offered by the Provincial of the ICC, Fr Roberto Colameo who presented the significant presence at Macerata, which in different ways embodies what is being proposed as open communities with SDB, FMA, volunteers, and young people carrying out the Salesian mission in works fully inserted in the territory.

3. On Tuesday 18th, from the first moment of the day we gathered in the hall to read and approve the minutes, followed by a proposal from the President on the presentation of the work of the commissions in an essential way without reading everything, a proposal that was approved, and which was followed by the presentation of the work of each commission on core area 2, followed by time for the personal reading of these reports and preparation of interventions.

After the break and once back in the hall, the discussion on core area 2 took place with enlightening and thought-provoking interventions, such as the one by Fr Reinhard Gesing on the ecological disaster we are experiencing and that should lead us to make a courageous and operational choice in this regard precisely as custodians of creation, our “common home”, and service to the mission especially of the poorest and most needy; or the one who asked for a statement from the Congregation for Peace at a time as disturbing as the one we are living; or those who asked for the need to clarify the term “lay” not only because of the different kinds of “lay people” who work with us and their roles and their identification or otherwise with the charism, but also because of the different contexts, in particular the contexts of different religions so as to properly define what degree of participation there is in the mission and in the charism; or those who feel the need to better define the degree of decision-making power of lay people in the EPC Council by redefining some articles of the Constitutions and Regulations; or those who insisted on the urgency of once more taking up the education-evangelisation binomial as two inseparable elements within their autonomy; or the one about inhabiting the digital life of young people more decisively, etc.

In the afternoon the discussion on core area 2 continued, after which the proposal for the new map for the two Regions of Africa was presented, the result of great vocational growth, multiplication of provinces and vice-provinces and growth in their territories. Therefore, it is not a division of the single Region but a multiplication by two, the South and East Region and the Centre and West Region, in order to better accompany young people. After the break, we went to the commissions to discuss the proposal for the composition of the two regions of Africa and the motion presented by Fr Playà to include the Central Delegate for the Salesian Family among the members of the General Chapter by right. The day ended in the Basilica with Evening prayer led by Fr Manuel Jiménez, Rector of the Community at Valdocco, and the

goodnight given by Fr Fernando Miranda, Provincial of the Province of Mary Help of Christians SMA.

4. Wednesday 19th, Solemnity of St Joseph. We began in the hall for the reading and approval of the minutes, which was followed by an address from the President who presented two pieces of information on behalf of the central commissions 1) on the request to send messages on behalf of the entire GC29 on different issues (peace, young people...) it was decided to leave them for the next few weeks; 2) the commissions were asked to prioritise the choices in order to facilitate the work of the drafting commission. After this information, the Drafting Commission informed the Assembly of their choices made for drafting the work and then the different members of the commission read the first draft of core area 1 presenting it on screen.

After the break, we went to commissions to discuss this draft and prepare interventions for the Assembly with the respective vote. After the afternoon break, we returned to the hall to listen to the 6 commissions on the matter of how the 2 Regions of Africa would be constituted, and on Fr Playà's motion – with discussion in the assembly. Then Fr Pier Fausto Frisoli made a presentation on the sheets and juridical matters corresponding to core area 3 to be studied this week (Interprovincial bodies; Extraordinary visitations; Team visits; Organisation of the animation of the Province; Composition of the Provincial Council; Offices, secretariats, provincial commissions; consistency of the community in number and quality; Duration of governing terms of office). The day ended with evening prayer led by the Province of Hyderabad, and the goodnight given by the Superior of the Sri Lanka Vice-province, Fr Roshan Miranda.

5. On Thursday 20th work began in the hall with the reading and approval of the minutes, after which the President took the floor, inviting the president of the Communication Commission to inform us regarding the way in which official communications will be made, including the elections, followed by discussion in the

Assembly on core area 1 with the presentation by spokespersons of the work of the commissions, and other interventions. Once this was done, the resolutions on the constitution of the two Regions of Africa and on the motion regarding the Secretary for the Salesian Family were presented and voted on. While the first reached the required number of votes, the second did not. After the break, the commissions went to work on the third core area numbers 3.3 (Interprovincial bodies); 3.4 (Extraordinary visitations); 3.5 (Team visits); 3.7 (Duration of governing terms of office). Commissions prepared and voted on the draft resolutions. In the afternoon in commissions, work continued on core area 3 number 3.6 (Offices, secretariats, provincial commissions); and sheets 4 (Vice-Provincial); 5 (Configuration of the Provincial Council); 6.7 (Consistency of the communities in number and quality). The commissions prepared and voted on the draft resolutions. The day ended in the hall with evening prayer led by the Province of Dimapur in their own language and goodnight by Fr Pierluigi Cameroni, Postulator of the Causes of Saints, who offered us an enlightening and thought-provoking presentation of Salesian holiness, which ended with a personal sharing of what this ministry has meant to him.

6. On Friday 21st we began in the hall with tests to see that tablets were working properly in view of the voting ahead. After a prayer to Our Lady of Guadalupe, the minutes were read and approved, after which the final vote was taken on the 2 Regions of Africa (EAST and SOUTH Africa Region and CENTRAL and WEST Africa Region), which reached the required votes and was approved, and on motion no. 1, which did not reach a qualified majority. After this Fr Pier Fausto Frisoli, in his role as Procurator, gave us accurate information about the progress of processes in cases of abuse. After the break, we went to the commissions to study the proposal for an Article of the Regulations on Social Works with a draft resolution. In addition, each commission completed, voted and shared the proposals on points 3.3 and 3.7. In the afternoon, we returned to the hall to

present the resolutions and proposals relating to 3.3; 3.4; 3.5; 3.6; 3.7 + sheets 4,5,6,7 , all done in commissions. After the break, the 6 commissions presented their resolutions on the article of the Regulations concerning Social Works to the Assembly. Finally, there was a presentation of the guidelines for discernment. The day ended with the Way of the Cross led by the Province of Chennai and the goodnight by Fr Andrea Bozzolo, Rector Magnificus of the UPS.

As you can see, this fifth week of the Chapter was very busy with a full agenda in the sense that on the one hand we began studying core area 2, but at the same time the first draft of core area 1 was presented with study in the commissions, and, above all, we finished dealing with almost all the topics of core area 3.

The work carried out, the result of excellent management by the Chapter and the active shared responsibility of all the Chapter members, has brought us to a good point before the important week of the elections of the Rector Major, Vicar and Councillors for Sectors and Regional Councillors.

The Holy Spirit, the true protagonist of this “Salesian Pentecost”, has guided us so far and will do so in a special way in the delicate election of those who will have the responsibility for animating and governing the Salesian Congregation in such a way that it responds to God’s dream for “young people, especially those who are poorest, abandoned and at risk”.

Taking stock (5-6)

1. The sixth very important week of the General Chapter began on Saturday 22 March in the Hall with the Lectio on Fraternal Community starting from the text of Rom 12:9-21, led by the Province of Bombay. The minutes were read and approved at the session, after which the President took the floor on behalf of the Social Communication Commission to provide information about the way in which the elaboration and discussion of

messages and communications will proceed according to what is stated in art. 35 of the Chapter Regulations. I was then invited to offer “Taking stock - 4”, which was followed by several interventions, such as the one by Fr Eunan McDonnell on letting oneself be guided by the Spirit, or the one by Lukasz Pawlowski; the discussion on the resolutions, as usual with conflicting positions, relating to 3.3; 3.4; 3.5; 3.6; 3.7; + sheets 4, 5, 6, 7, although the majority of the interventions referred to the proposal of an article on “social works”. After the break we had the Eucharist in the Basilica presided over by P. Bonhomme Morachel, provincial of Haiti. In the evening, in the Basilica, Evening Prayer was led by Fr Rafael Montenegro, Provincial of Venezuela, who presented us with their precarious and challenging social, political and financial situation.

2. On Sunday 23rd, in the afternoon, we gathered in the Hall to begin the process of discernment in view of the elections, under the guidance of Fr Amedeo Cencini, who at first, took a look at the title/theme and the social/ecclesial context by presenting us with the theme of GC29 “Passionate about Jesus Christ – Dedicated to Young People. Living our Salesian vocation faithfully and prophetically” and presenting it in terms of hope: “A General Chapter in the Jubilee of Hope!”, precisely because everything seems to lead to resignation, pessimism, or despair. That is why a faith that becomes trust and creates prophecy and that translates into a vision of the future is indispensable, and he ended by quoting a prophetic text by Ratzinger from 1969, on the Church of the future, the one we see today!!! After the break, the reflection continued in a much more focused key on discernment with the title “Discerning is hoping – Hope is discerning” summed up in the subtitle “From contemplation to discernment”, a reflection that ended with a prayer that brought together everything we are experiencing at this moment of the General Chapter. The day ended with Evening Prayer in the Basilica led by Fr Amedeo Cencini. Starting from the parable of the fig tree in the Gospel, he returned to an invitation to hope,

taking inspiration from the trust that the Father always has in us. Then supper and Eucharistic Adoration in the Church of Saint Francis de Sales.

3. On Monday 24th we began in the Basilica with the Eucharist presided over by Fr Amedeo Cencini *who in the homily set the week of discernment in the light of the Word, a disturbing Word precisely because it spoke of the failure of a discernment* and precisely the discernment of those to whom the Lord had revealed himself in a particular way, “his own”. It is also a possibility for us when we claim to know everything about God, about Jesus, which deprives us of placing ourselves *in a state of discernment*. This is or should be the normal attitude, not just circumstantial one, that allows us to see what the Lord has already done and what he is doing, and therefore asking ourselves what he is giving us or asking, or revealing. Discernment is the normal attitude of growing in the faith and hope of the normal believer. In the Hall the minutes were read and approved, followed by another conference from Fr Amedeo Cencini in which he presented the “General Chapter as a process of discernment” indicating the conditions that make it possible (inner freedom, familiarity with discernment, *ob-audiens* sensitivity), specifying the method and offering criteria for a choice of government today (generic and specific criteria). After the interval we went into the commissions for the conversation in the Spirit on the service of the RM, asking ourselves in the light of the 2020-24 period what our expectations were and what the profile for the figure of the RM for the six-year period 2025-2031 should be. In the afternoon Chapter members were invited to go through the Hall and deposit a name in a specially prepared urn. Then work continued in the commissions to develop and vote on the summary of expectations and profile. After the break we returned to the commissions, where the president, after communicating the list of names deposited in the urn, invited us to take a secret ballot. We returned to the hall and the guide presented the summary of the expectations and profile of the

future RM, followed by a time of silence and reflection. Then he proceeded to present the 5 names that had the most votes in the commissions in alphabetical order (Attard, Basañes, Coelho, Crisafulli, Martoglio), then the Moderator carried out a test, after which a straw vote was held with the following result: (Attard 88, Martoglio 59, Crisafulli 28, Ivo 21, Basañes 17), due to which it was decided to have a second straw vote that was cancelled due to technical problems. The day ended with Evening Prayer, supper, then after supper, in the Basilica, the rosary and Eucharistic Adoration together with ADMA, being the 24th of the month, and the goodnight given by Mother, Sr Chiara Cazzuola, who expressed the joy of being in the Basilica contemplating the image of Mary and it being her living monument wanted by Don Bosco. She highlighted the importance of this moment, the election of the RM, because his figure is the centre of unity for the entire Salesian Family. Her presence, together with the councillor for the Salesian Family and the Provincial of Piedmont and Valle d'Aosta sought to be a sign of their closeness, affection, and esteem for the Salesians. She was a spokesperson for all the FMAs around the world who have written to send their greetings to the new RM.

4. Tuesday 25th, Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord. We began with the solemn Eucharist presided over by Fr Amedeo Cencini, who in the homily highlighted the happy circumstance that links this Feast with the election of the RM, because Mary embodies the response and the right attitudes that the Lord expects from all of us, especially from those who will be elected. After reading and approving the minutes in the hall, Fr Amedeo Cencini took the floor and invited us to resume the election process. The Moderator, clarifying what had happened yesterday in the second straw vote that had been invalidated due to an error, opened the process for the second straw vote on the 5 names, which gave the following result: Attard 117, Martoglio 59, Crisafulli 24, Basañes 10, Coelho 7. Attard had reached an absolute majority. So, to be in line with the Chapter's regulations,

a vote was taken on all the eligible confreres of the Congregation. And finally, after the invocation of the Holy Spirit, we went to the final vote for the election of the RM, which offered us the 11th Successor of Don Bosco in the person of Fr Fabio Attard. The President, Fr Stefano Martoglio, telephoned Fr Fabio, who was not a Chapter member, asking for his acceptance of the assignment. Fr Fabio, who was moved, answered by accepting. He was therefore invited to join us for the formal reception in the evening! After the break, work was done in the commissions for the election of the Vicar with the same task: identifying expectations and profile and arriving at a vote. And so it continued in the afternoon until the break, when the streaming began, and we gathered in the Hall for the reception of the new RM, who made his profession of faith followed by greetings and gifts from Chapter members. At the end of this moment, so rich in gestures of true familiarity both from the representatives of the Provinces who offered their homage and from Fr Fabio who remained standing, smiling, amiable with everyone, exchanging memories and jokes. The Rector Major gave us the gift of three “words” that attracted the attention of the whole Assembly, captivated by what was said and by the tone in which it was said: 1) gratitude for the trust placed in him with the election, which is an expression of attachment to Don Bosco, his charism and his mission; 2) the awareness of a new era that we are living in that requires faithfulness and *parrhesia* to be able to respond to the new needs of today’s young people in diverse contexts; 3) a ministry to be carried out with the support of all, making GC29 the programme of the Congregation for the coming years in continuity with what the Congregation has done so far. He ended by asking for prayer in order to meet the expectations placed on him. The beautiful and unforgettable evening ended with evening prayer, supper and then Eucharistic Adoration in the Church of Saint Francis de Sales.

5. What we experienced yesterday was an unforgettable day full of emotions for everyone, like those that our dear Fr Fabio is

experiencing. It was a day blessed by God and that held us all tightly, once again, to Don Bosco, with a deep sense of communion. It is the Salesian Sacred Story that walks through history, thanks to our “Here I am” such as that of Mary, Don Bosco, Fr Fabio, and of each and every one of us.

6. On Wednesday 26th, in the morning, the Eucharist in the Basilica presided over by the Rector Major, who in the homily - taking inspiration from the Word - spoke of listening as the first and fundamental attitude, listening to God, to the Spirit, which becomes obedience as acceptance of the will of God, and therefore of the word to be proclaimed, capable of illuminating the mind and touching the heart, in such a way as to leave traces, as Don Bosco was able to do. In the Hall, the minutes were read and approved. Then the RM once again thanked everyone and urged us to continue with the spiritual atmosphere. Fr Amedeo Cencini shared his emotion experienced yesterday at the sense of communion he had witnessed and offered his best wishes to Fr Fabio. Then he gave an introduction, opening the presentation of the summaries on the expectations and profile for the election of the Vicar, with the list of the prevailing candidates in alphabetical order (Mancini, Martoglio, Mendonca, Aníbal, Owoudou, Romero), after which time was allowed for the possibility of interventions and comments, and a straw vote took place on the prevailing candidates, with the following results: Martoglio 110, Mancini 33, Aníbal 31, Romero 25, Owoudou 21. After the break there was a brief moment of silence with the invocation to the Holy Spirit and we then went on to the final vote for the Vicar of the RM, with this outcome: Stefano Martoglio 147, Leonardo Mancini 33, José Aníbal, 13, Héctor Gabriel Romero 12, Alphonse Owoudou, 4, Ivo Nicholas Coelho, 3... Once the absolute majority was reached, Fr Stefano Martoglio was elected, and at the request of the RM on his availability, expressed his acceptance and made the profession of faith. Obviously it was not a mere formality, but a conscious and convinced expression of being Church, disciples and witnesses of

Christ. We then went into the commissions, this time, regional commissions where a coordinator and a secretary were chosen. In the afternoon, in the regional commissions, we worked at the table in the conversation in the Spirit on the Councillor for Formation, and in the light of 2020-2024 to identify the expectations and the profile, and personally reflected; we then shared the resonances and a vote was taken for a candidate, one within the Region and one from outside it. After the break, and still in the regional commissions, the same process for the Councillor for Youth Ministry. The day ended in the Hall with Evening Prayer led by SUE Province, the goodnight given by the Vicar, Fr Stefano Martoglio, who thanked everyone for the renewed trust on the part of the Chapter members, and shared the very demanding and difficult experience that has marked this five-year period in which all the members of the Council have done their best, and expressed his gratitude for the very fraternal environment that has been created since the beginning of this Chapter thanks to the choices made, in particular that of 'Conversation in the Spirit', which has created a great communion in diversity. He reaffirmed the fact of the grace that it means to already have a father in the person of the Rector Major, Fr Fabio Attard. After supper there was Eucharistic Adoration in the Chapel of Saint Francis de Sales.

7. On Thursday 27th, in the morning, in the Basilica, the Vicar, Fr Stefano, presided at the Eucharist. He considered the Word of God to be providential for our Chapter, inviting us to listen to the voice of the Lord and not harden our hearts, keeping an example in our Mother who left us her instructions as a testament: "Do whatever he tells you". The minutes were read and approved in the hall, after the prayer. The President took the floor and invited us to be attentive to listening to the Word, not to lose the centre of gravity in the new context we are experiencing, and to continue with the "conversation in the Spirit", emphasising that it is about docility to the Spirit. Then Fr Amedeo Cencini presented the summary of expectations and

profile for the Formation Sector and the names handed in by the presidents of the regional commissions. These are the names in alphabetical order: Biju, Callo, Chmiliwski, Ela Enam, García, Olmos, Roggia, Romero, Tesfay We went on to a straw vote, which offered the following result: Silvio Roggia 73, Biju Michael 43, Gabriel Romero 37, Mario Olmos 18, Fernando Garcia, 17, Raymond Callo, 17, Hailemariam Medhim Tesfay 7, Marek Chmiliwski 5. The same process continued with regard to the Youth Ministry Sector, with the presentation of the expectations, profile and names. The result of the straw vote was: Miguel Ángel García 53, Rafael Bejarano 49, Vijay Thatiredy 34, Alphonse Owoudou 32, Claudio Cartes 11, Luis Gutiérrez 11, Fernando García 10, Silvio Roggia 7. After the break, we went to the regional committees for the conversation in the Spirit on the General Councillor for Social Communication, identifying expectations, profile and candidates. In the afternoon, again in regional commissions, the conversation in the Spirit for the General Councillor for the Missions. And after the break the conversation in the Spirit was on the Economer General. At 6:30 p.m., at the request of some Chapter members, a second straw vote was held for the Councillor for Formation and the Councillor for Youth Ministry in order to achieve greater convergence.

The result of this vote for the election of the Formation Councillor was: Silvio Roggia 107, Biju Michael 58, Gabriel Romero 32, Mario Olmos 11, Fernando García 3, Raymond Callo 3, Marek Chmielewski, 2, Hailemarien Medhim Tesfay 1.

The result of the vote for the election of the Councillor for Youth Ministry was: Rafael Bejarano 89, Miguel Ángel García 52, Alphonse Owoudou 31, Fernando Garcia 6, Silvio Zanchetta 5, Luis Gutiérrez 3, Claudio Cartes 2... The day ended with Evening Prayer, Supper and Eucharistic Adoration in the Chapel of Saint Francis de Sales.

8. On Friday 28th, in the morning, in the Basilica, the Eucharist was presided over by Fr Ivo Coelho who, in the context of GC29, commented on the Word on the Great Commandment

of Love for God and neighbour, offering two ideas: the first commandment is not only a commandment but *the end* or purpose of everything, communion with God and with the saints; the other is that the commandment is not only the end or purpose but also *the path*, so that being free we are called to respond to God, beggars of love. In the hall we began with an invocation in English to the Holy Spirit led by the Superior of the Vice-Province of Malta and, youngsters. Immediately afterwards, the RM gave the floor to the Superior of Myanmar who informed us of the disaster of the earthquake that hit the country, already harshly tried by a cruel and inhuman dictatorship. The RM asked us to show solidarity through prayer and financial help. The minutes were then read and approved, at the end of which Fr Amedeo presented and commented on the summary on the sectors and profiles and those nominated, in alphabetical order for *Councillor for Social Communication* (Bartocha Dariusz, Díaz Fabio, Eynem Maguergue, Jacob Augustin, Mendes Gildasio, Orendain Fidel, Owoudou Alphonse, Pakkam Harris, Valiente Javier), the *Councillor for the Missions* (Amaglo, Bicomong, Biju, Crisafulli, Farfán, Jiménez Manuel, Lima, Maravilla, Sarmento, Thannickal, Jacek) and *Economer General* (Anan Thanad, Aspettati Stefano, Jachimowicz Roman, De Giorgis Giorgio, Gesing Reinhard, Moreno Ruiz, Okoro, Rodríguez Alberto, Sanjone Amaladoss, Stawowy Gabriel, Tharaniyil George), followed by the straw vote.

Outcome of the straw vote for the Councillor for SC: Orendain Fidel 81, Harris Pakkam, 43, Francisco Javier Valiente 38, Gildasio Mendez 24, Alphonse Owoudou 19, Dariusz Bartocha 7, Augustine Jacob, 2, Eynem Maguergue, 2.

Outcome of the straw vote for the Councillor for the Missions: Jorge Crisafulli 56, Biju Michael 38, Marcelo Farán 37, Alfred Maravilla 29, George Thannickal 11, Manuel Jiménez 11, Jacek 10, Adolfo de Jesús Sarmiento 8 ...)

Outcome of the straw vote for the Economer General: Gabriel Stawowy 49, Giorgio de Giorgis 41, Roman Jachimowicz 38,

Alberto Rodríguez 32, Stefano Aspettati, 24, Amaladoss 13, Nelson Moreno 6, Okoro 5, Tharanyil 4, Thanad 4, Reinhard Gesing 2.

After the break, there was a time of prayerful silence again in the hall and then the *final vote for the sector councillors* followed by the acceptance by the elected representatives.

Result of the vote for the Formation Councillor: Silvio Roggia 146, Biju Michael 42, Gabriel Romero 16, Mario Olmos 2, Andrea Bozzolo 2, Fernando García 1, Raymondo Callo 1. Silvio Roggia, who was not a member of the Chapter, was elected and responded to the RM's telephone question by accepting and was asked to reach us as soon as possible.

Result of the vote for the Councillor for Youth Ministry: Rafael Bejarano 136, Miguel Ángel García 38, Alphonse Owoudou 18, Vijaya Thathhireddy 8, Claudio Cartes 4, Fernando Garcia 3,... Rafael Bejarano was elected and answered the RM's question by accepting. At this point, Fr Amedeo proposed to taking the second straw vote for the Councillors for SC, the Missions and Economer General.

Result of the vote for the Councillor for SC: Orendain Fidel 128, Harris Pakkam 47, Francisco Javier Valiente 24, Gildasio Mendez 6, Alphonse Owoudou 10, Dariusz Bartocha 2, Augustine Jacob 2.

Result of the vote for Missions Councillor: Jorge Crisafulli 98, Biju Michael 61, Marcelo Farán 33, Alfred Maravilla 12, George Thannickal 5, Jacek Zdzieborski 5, Adolfo de Jesús Sarmiento 2...)

Result of the vote for Economer General: Gabriel Stawowy 75, Roman Jachimowicz 61, Giorgio de Giorgis 37, Stefano Aspettati 23, Alberto Rodríguez 11, Amaladoss 5, Nelson Moreno 1, Okoro 2, Tharanyil 1, Thanad Anan 3,.

In the afternoon in the hall, we began with an invocation to the Spirit and immediately afterwards we went to the *final vote for the Sector Councillors*.

Result of the final vote for the SC Councillor: Fidel Orendain

175, Harris Pakkam 20, Francisco Javier Valiente 12, Gildasio Mendez 4, Alphonse Owoudou 4, Albert Capboso 1, Dariusz Bartocha 1, Augustine Jacob 1. *Fr Fidel Orendain was elected and answered positively* to the RM's question whether he accepted or not.

Result of the final vote for the Missions Councillor: Jorge Crisafulli 142, Biju Michael 56, Marcelo Farfán 11, Alfred Maravilla 4, George Thannickal 1, Jacek Zdzieborski 4, Adolfo de Jesús Sarmiento 1 ...) *Fr Jorge Crisafulli was elected and answered positively* to the RM's question whether he accepted or not.

Result of the first final vote for the election of the Economist General: Gabriel Stawowy 119, Roman Jachimowicz 85, Giorgio de Giorgis 6, Stefano Aspettati 3, Alberto Rodríguez 1, Amaladoss 2, Thanad Anan 1. *Fr Gabriel Stawowy, who was not at the Chapter, was elected and to the question of the RM if he accepted the election he responded in the affirmative.*

9. After the elections of the Sector Councillors, the RM took the floor appreciating the spiritual atmosphere in which these elections took place, the result of listening to God that implies discernment; and as a duty of gratitude thanked the Councillors who have carried out their service so far giving their contribution in a very challenging five-year period: Fr Ivo Coeho, Fr Miguel Ángel García, Fr Gildasio Méndez, Fr Alfred Maravilla, Bro. Jean Paul Müller.

They continued what those who had preceded them had done, and others will continue it.

After the break we went to regional commissions to identify the expectations and profile for the figure of the Regional Councillor, and the voting for one within and one outside the Region. The day ended with the Via Crucis, supper and Eucharistic Adoration in the Chapel of Saint Francis de Sales.

10. Saturday 29th, the last day of elections, those of the Regional Councillors. In the morning in the Basilica the Eucharist

was presided over by Fr Joseph Nguyen Phuoc who, in the homily, taking inspiration from the two readings, that of Hosea who invited us to return to the Lord with a love that is not like that of the morning dew that fades in the evening, and that of the Gospel in which Jesus, telling the parable of the two who went up to the temple to pray, teaches us what true conversion is. In the Hall, reading and approval of the minutes, at the end of which the RM gave an official welcome to Fr Silvio Roggia. He then picked up from homily by highlighting some elements, especially that of the attitude of the Pharisee, who was not only far from God, but also distanced others from God. Instead, it called creating a positive ecology at all levels. The Moderator provided information on how the election process of the regional councillors would be carried out. Fr Amedeo introduced the process:

The first Region is Central West Africa with three candidates. Result of the first straw vote: Alphonse Owoudou 166, Roland Mintsa 38, Aurelien Mwanangoy Mukangwa 14. We then went on to the final vote with the following result: Alphonse Owoudou 190, Roland Mintsa 20, Aurelien 5... Fr Alphonse was elected and responded affirmatively to the RM's question.

The second Region is East and South Africa with 4 candidates. Result of the first straw vote: Bizimana Innocent 165, Rolandi Giovanni 23. Mbandama Michael 18, Tesfay Hailemariam 15. We went on to the final vote with the following result: Bizimana Innocent 183, Rolandi Giovanni 19, Mbandama Michael 7, Tesfay 5. Fr Innocent Bizimana was elected and responded in the affirmative to the RM's question.

The third Region is America South Cone with 2 candidates. Result of the first vote: Romero Gabriel 185, Fistarol Orestes Carlinhos 36. We went on to the final vote with the following result: Romero Gabriel 198, Fistarol Orestes 14. Gabriel Romero was elected, and responded affirmatively to the RM's question.

The fourth Region is East Asia and Oceania with 3 candidates. Result of the first straw vote: Matthews William 120,

Bicomong Gregorio 65, Marcello Baek 14, Raymond Callo 14, José Lorbeth 5, Anthony Nguyen 2. We went on to the final vote with the following result: Matthews William 150, Bicomong Gregorio 42, Marcello Baek 5, Raymond Callo 5, José Lorbeth 2, Anthony Nguyen 1. William Matthews was elected. Since he was not at the Chapter, he was reached by telephone by the RM and responded in the affirmative to the RM's question.

The fifth Region is South Asia with 3 candidates. Result of the first straw vote: Michael Biju, Lourdusamy Don Bosco, Silveira Savio Raj. We went on to the final vote with the following result: Michael Biju 170, Lourdusamy Don Bosco 39, Silveira Savio Raj 9. Si passò alla votazione definitiva con questo esito: Michael Biju 192, Lourdusamy Don Bosco 15, Anthony Kharkongor 3, Silveira Savio Raj 3. Michael Biju was elected, and responded positively to the RM's question.

The sixth Region is Central and North Europe with 4 candidates. Result of the first straw vote: Jachimowicz Roman 164, Cachia Eric 35, Gesing Reinhard 15, Pizon Jaroslaw 5. We went on to the final vote with the following result: Jachimowicz Roman 178, Cachia Eric 19, Gesing Reinhard 7, Pizon Jaroslaw 2. Jachimowicz was elected and responded in the affirmative to the RM's question.

The seventh Region is Interamerica with 3 candidates. Result of the first straw vote: Orozco Hugo 145, Farfán Marcelo 51, Bonhomme Morachel 22. We went on to the final vote with the following result: Orozco Hugo 172, Farfán Marcelo 28, Bonhomme Morachel 8. Hugo Orozco was elected, and responded in the affirmative to the RM's question.

The eighth Region is the Mediterranean with 2 candidates. Result of the final vote: Juan Carlos Pérez Godoy 183, Roberto Dal Mulin 13. Juan Carlos Perez was elected, and responded in the affirmative to the RM's question.

The RM concluded the morning and all this week of elections by appreciating the multicultural expression of the Congregation,

thanking Fr Amedeo Cencini, who was a wise guide and called us to hope and communicated to us with his word and his close, familiar attitude, his strong spiritual experience. For this reason he asked him to continue his pedagogical, charismatic, deeply “Salesian” presence. Fr Cencini responded by saying that the Holy Spirit really was the protagonist of this adventure.

In the evening, Evening Prayer in the Basilica led by the RM who offered us three goodnight thoughts as an interpretation of the parable of the merciful father: a father waiting, a father full of love, the joy of healing as the fruit of the encounter. This was followed by a dinner to congratulate the RM and the Councillors

11. On Monday 31st, we began the seventh week and the day in the hall with a hymn to Don Bosco: “Digo que Don Bosco vive” on being like him, a true Salesian. Then, as usual, the minutes were read and approved, at the end of which the President took the floor: he expressed his gratitude to God who is accompanying us, he shared the request made to Fr Cencini to say an impromptu word to the new General Council. What he said warmed the heart and was very inspiring. His intervention will be made available. Finally, he recalled what he said in the Eucharist to the Mediterranean Region about the threefold attitude of the official of whom the Gospel speaks: to seek, to find, to set out on the path. Then Fr Luca Barone, spokesperson for the drafting commission, presented resolutions 18-27 and Fr Frisoli presented the final sheets of issue 3.8. After the break, we went into commissions to formulate ways to vote on resolutions 18-27 and study the last sheets presented by Fr Frisoli. In the afternoon we continued the work in the commissions with the discussion and preparation of a resolution for each sheet to be presented to the Assembly. The commissions voted on each resolution. There was a meeting of the central commission, which was followed by the Assembly for the provisional vote on resolutions 18-27 with *Iuxta modum*. Then each spokesperson shared discernment on the final sheets. The day ended with

Evening Prayer led by the Province of Belgium-Netherlands, the goodnight in which Fr Ivo Coelho, the outgoing Formation Councillor, delivered the draft of the Ratio to the RM, then supper.

12. Tuesday, April 1st, the 91st anniversary of the canonisation of Don Bosco. In the Hall, the initial prayer was led by the Province of Belo Horizonte, Brazil starting from the memory of the canonisation of DB. Then the minutes were read and approved, the President took the floor expressing his joy at the proposal on safeguarding and his appreciation of the work of the Central Commission. Subsequently, the spokesperson of each commission shared the discernment on the last sheets 11-15, after which the Drafting Commission presented the first draft of core area 2. After the break, the Chapter members participated in the inauguration of the Piazzale Maria Ausiliatrice and the blessing of the two renewed bell towers with the double play of new bells. In the afternoon, in the Hall, we proceeded to take the final vote on resolutions 18-27 (resolutions 18,19, 20,21,24,25,26,27 were approved, resolutions 22 and 23 were not approved), then Fr Reinhard Gesing presented the proposal to the assembly to develop a text on *safeguarding* and Fr Bejarano illustrated with slides the work done in the YM Sector on protection in recent years with a view to building “a culture of protection” through a systemic approach. After taking a straw vote to find out if the Assembly accepted the proposal, the result was positive, so the committee will present the choice to be made. Different interventions followed: Ivo Coelho on the animating nucleus, Simon Härting on C 187, Fr Frisoli on the lay economer, Joan Lluís Playà, on educating and evangelising. After the break we went into commissions for discussion on draft 1 of core area 2. The commissions prepared interventions for the Assembly on the draft and voted for their intervention, at the end of which they prayed psalm from evening prayer. The day ended with supper and a cultural evening with songs and dances from the regional groups in the Great Hall, at the end of which the RM thanked everyone for showing the beauty of being a Salesian and

recalling the story of that poor child who did not give in to poverty and other negative conditioning and became a sign of love and hope for the poorest, most abandoned and vulnerable young people, our beloved father Don Bosco. The most important thing is not to lose the roots from which new life can arise.

13. Wednesday 2nd, in the hall, after a prayer written by Bishop Hélder Camera, the Minutes were read and approved. The President took the floor and expressed his thanks for the beautiful cultural evening, for the proposal on *safeguarding* and the work done in the Commission, finally, for draft 1 of core area 2. After this Fr Luca Barone presented the draft resolutions 28-34, and then the commission spokespersons presented the observations on core area 2 with time for debate. After the break, there was a panel sharing the experiences of the *safeguarding* in the provinces, with very enlightening and interesting interventions by Dominic Tran (Ministry of safeguarding), Fernando García (Reparative justice), Fidel Orendain (Crisis Communication) and Daniel Federspiel (Church Experience in France) which would be of great help to all the Provinces. After lunch, in the afternoon, commissions worked on the draft of a Declaration and the proposal of a new article for the Regulations on *safeguarding*, and each commission prepared interventions for the Assembly on the draft. After the break, in the Hall, Fr Marco Panero, Prof. at the UPS, made a brief presentation of the “Salesianum” Magazine and then Fr Leonardo Mancini offered us a book with the collection of the most beautiful Letters of Don Bosco as a tribute from the Piedmont Valle D’Aosta Province. There was a meeting of the Central Commission on verification. The day ended with Evening Prayer led by the Province of France, supper and, in the Hall, a show on the Letters of Don Bosco under the guidance of Fr Francesco Motto.

14. On Thursday 3rd, in the morning, in the Hall, reading and approval of the minutes and the President’s words: he appreciated the reflection on the discussion on core area 2, especially on the animating nucleus, saying, however, that we

run the risk of forgetting what we already have even if we have to continue the reflection. He congratulated the confreres who offered their testimony in the panel on safeguarding experiences. Here too we had many valuable interventions in this regard. He urged us to continue on this path by sharing reflection and best practices in this regard. Finally, he invited us not to abandon the conversation in the Spirit. Then the spokesperson for each commission presented the contribution on safeguarding, followed by discussion (Eric Cachia, Symon Kasprzak, Don Bosco Lourdusamy. After the break, the Vicar Fr Stefano Martoglio presided in the absence of the RM who had gone to make a planned visit to the juvenile prison, and the discussion continued (Eduardo Lara, Stanislaus Swamikannu, Claudio Cartes, James Gerard Briody, Dominic Tran, Jordi Lleixà Jané, Oscar Bartolomé, Rafael Bejarano spoke). After the 5-minute interventions, the 3-minute interventions continued: Domenico Paternò, Bart Decancq, Pier Fausto Frisoli, Fidel Orendain, Alexander Garces, George Thannickal Chacko, Fernando García, Gildásio Mendez Dos Santos took the floor. At the end of the discussion, Fr Luca Barone, spokesperson for the Drafting Commission, presented the Introduction to the Document and explained the criteria taken for the reformulation of the choices. After lunch there was a session of official photographs in front of the monument to Don Bosco in front of the Basilica, and, after the break, we returned to the Hall. We began again with the invocation to the Holy Spirit led by the Provinces of Porto Alegre and Sao Paulo. The spokesperson for the Drafting Commission read things out again with a view to the *iuxta modum* vote, and resolutions 28-34. All 7 resolutions were approved. Then the Moderator presented a summary of all the interventions of the morning on whether or not to make a statement and add an article of the Regulations around 4 main alternatives: to insert it in one of the core areas, to make a statement, a resolution, an article. A straw vote was held on the 4 options to see which way the Assembly was leaning. Option 1: 109 placet. Option 2: 31

placet. Option 3: 99 placet. Option 4: 35 placet. The President commented on the results highlighting that there are two options that have reached almost a hundred, so he proposed an insertion in the text and a resolution, a proposal that was accepted by the assembly by show of hands. The day ended with a word from the President thanking everyone for their involvement in the work and his experience of the visit to the juvenile prison, Evening Prayer led by the Province of England and the goodnight offered by the Province of Goa.

15. On Friday 4th, in the morning in the Hall we began with a prayer to Mary Help of Christians led by the Provincial of Chile, Fr Nelson. The minutes were read and approved, then the President took the floor: he reported on the Vicar's visit yesterday evening to Colle DB for a meeting with the community to communicate that Thatthi will become personal secretary to the RM; then he shared his positive impression after reading all the interventions made in the Hall regarding safeguarding; he once again thanked the Central Commission for its total dedication and also all the Chapter members. Finally, he asked for an exemption to bring forward the vote on resolution 36. The Assembly voted in favour. After this, Fr Andrea Bozzolo shared some indications on the presentation of the final document, the choices regarding the discourse and the words used in relation to safeguarding, the pastoral tone of the document, and the intended audience, namely the provinces, so that it can become a programme. After the break, there was time for personal reading of the final document. In the afternoon, in the Hall, we were introduced to the work with a song of praise and thanks, led by the Province of Paraguay. Fr Luca Barone presented resolutions 28-34 for the final vote, with the following result: all resolutions were approved. The President took the floor noting that these deliberations touched on 3 articles of the Constitutions that deal with the mission and showing the serenity with which they were made; he invited the assembly not to minimise the Salesian community when talking about the animating nucleus of the EPC; finally, with regard to the mission,

to have a broad vision. Then, for a vote *iuxta modum*, resolution 35 (safeguarding) was presented, and obtained the required absolute majority. Afterwards, a touching video, ‘The Strength of the Unseen’, was shown, about the dramatic situation in Sierra Leone as a tragic consequence of the civil war, and the typically Salesian commitment to reconstruction through the rehabilitation of young people and education, with the visionary participation of Giorgio Crisafulli. The video ‘Ecological Sustainability (Colle Don Bosco)’ was offered for personal viewing. The day ends with the Stations of the Cross led by the Hungarian Province, dinner and a concert for the members of the Chapter.

16. Dear Father Fabio,

First of all, we congratulate you on your election as the new Rector Major, the 11th Successor of Don Bosco.

It is no coincidence that this election took place on the day when the whole Church joyfully and gratefully celebrates the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord, because today, as in the past, God continues to look for collaborators with total availability, like that of Mary, to carry out his wonderful plan of salvation. And what he expected is exactly what he found in you, dear Rector Major: an unconditional “Here I am”.

You know well that when God chooses a person he enriches them with all the gifts they need to carry out the mission entrusted to him, in this case, to continue to make “God’s dream” of seeing young people happy here and in eternity come true.

You are not alone. The Lord, through the members of the Chapter, has given you the Chapter Document which marks the path of the Congregation for the next six years, and has joined you with your main collaborators, your Vicar, the Sector Councillors and the Regional Councillors, who with you, under your guidance, will continue to write the sacred history of the Congregation born here in Valdocco, where all Salesians were born.

As Rector Major you are the father of the Congregation, the centre of unity of the Salesian Family, the Successor of Don Bosco, faithful and prophetic guardian of the Salesian charism, spirit, mission and holiness.

While we renew our best wishes to you, we assure you of our prayers and, above all, our availability.

With immense affection, esteem, gratitude, united in Don Bosco,

All members of the GC29.

Valdocco,
5 April 2025

Passionate about Jesus Christ, dedicated to young people

GC29

Valdocco, 16 February – 12 April 2025

Dear confreres,

I am pleased to be able to share with you the fruit of this important moment of evaluation, reflection and planning that GC29 has been in this profound and accelerated change of era that we are experiencing and that obliges us to know how to carefully interpret all reality in the light of the gospel to know and welcome what God always expects of us in the service of the salvation of young people.

From this point of view, it seems very significant to me that, after the troubled experience of the last Chapter due to the outbreak of the COVID pandemic, it was decided to return to Valdocco to celebrate it – a place of memory and prophecy. It is here that we find the answers that Don Bosco was able to give to the challenges of the young people of the suburbs of Turin during the first industrial revolution, and it is also here that we have found the inspiration for responses to be given to the young people of the fourth industrial revolution.

– Salesians passionate about Jesus Christ and dedicated to young people

The theme that was chosen by the RM, Fr Ángel Fernández, for our Chapter touches the essence of Christian and therefore religious life, because it means being conquered by the love of Christ so as to return to placing God at the centre of our lives. In fact, the entire consecrated life is marked by love and must be lived in the name of love, so it cannot be lived except in joy, even in moments of trial and difficulty, with the conviction and enthusiasm of those who have love as the driving force of their

lives. Hence the serenity, brightness and fruitfulness of consecrated life, which make it charming and attractive for the young people to whom we are sent and to whom we are dedicated by profession.

In his message to the members of the GC29, Pope Francis comments on the subject in masterly form:

“This is a beautiful programme: being ‘passionate’ and ‘dedicated’, allowing yourself to be fully involved in love for the Lord and serving others without keeping anything for yourself, just as your Founder did in his time. Even if today, compared to then, the challenges you have to face have altered somewhat, faith and enthusiasm remain the same, enriched with new gifts such as the gift of interculturalism.”

All this necessarily leads us to the “*passion of God*” in Christ Crucified, an expression that signifies both the infinite, immeasurable love of Christ (“passion” as an *expression of great love*) and his immense suffering resulting from the betrayal by one of his own, the abandonment of all his followers, the denial of the head of the “twelve”, the rejection of the people, the condemnation of the leaders of the people, the crucifixion at the hands of the Romans and the silence of God (“passion” as *expression of suffering for love*). No wonder there is no better expression of “passion” as love and suffering than the Crucified Christ.

The reason is very clear: only if we know each other, only if we feel infinitely loved by the Father in Christ can we be conquered by him and be able to love others, our confreres, young people, all the people who carry out the mission with us.

It is precisely this “pathos” of God that led Paul to confess: “*I have been crucified with Christ. And it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me*” (Gal 2:19-20).

Only **conquered by the passion** (love and suffering) of Christ can we become *passionate* (capable of love and total surrender with his own love).

And because loving is the acceptance of the other without regard to self-interest, it also encompasses the power of compassion. This relationship between the “pathos of God” and his people makes human beings capable of “sympathy”, of feeling and suffering with God and with others.¹

The opposite of love is not hatred but indifference, “a-pathy”. This is a clear sign of the lack of experience of God, of God who is Love, of which instead we are called to be “signs and bearers” (C. 2).

Total dedication to the mission on behalf of young people, especially the poorest, most needy and at risk, helping them to overcome all the sufferings produced by the sin of the world (injustice, misery, ignorance, etc.) is the most concrete form in which, following Christ, we can live Christian love and achieve the Salesian mission. The greatness of Don Bosco was precisely that he allowed himself to be moved, pierced by the situation of abandonment of young people and moved to alleviate their suffering. This love will always imply self-denial, and will sometimes provoke “the hatred of the world” (Jn 15:18 ff.). This is the inseparable relationship between love (passion) and sacrifice (passion). And there are situations of persecution in different countries where our Congregation is working, as we heard in the “goodnight” from several Provincials.

I would like to share with you some reflections found at the end of the last Encyclical on the Heart of Jesus that I find in tune with our Chapter theme: “*Dilexit Nos*”, because it shows that mission is only possible to missionaries in love.

Mission, as a radiation of the love of the heart of Christ, requires missionaries who are themselves in love and who, enthralled by Christ, feel bound to share this love that has changed their lives. They are impatient when time is wasted

¹ MOLTMAN, *Cristo Crocifisso*: “In the divine *pathos* man is filled by the Spirit of God. He becomes a friend of God, feels *sympathy* with God and for God.” p. 320

discussing secondary questions or concentrating on truths and rules, because their greatest concern is to share what they have experienced. They want others to perceive the goodness and beauty of the Beloved through their efforts, however inadequate they may be. Is that not the case with any lover? We can take as an example the words with which Dante Alighieri sought to express this logic of love:

“Io dico che pensando il suo valore
 Amor sì dolce mi si fa sentire,
 che s’io allora non perdessi ardire,
 farei parlando innamorar la gente». [226] (*Dilexit Nos*)

Missionaries in love who speak from the heart to the heart

To be able to speak of Christ, by witness or by word, in such a way that others seek to love him, is the greatest desire of every missionary of souls. This dynamism of love has nothing to do with proselytism; the words of a lover do not disturb others, they do not make demands or oblige, they only lead others to marvel at such love. With immense respect for their freedom and dignity, the lover simply waits for them to inquire about the love that has filled his or her life with such great joy. (*Dilexit Nos*)

Missionaries in love recounting their encounter with Christ

Christ asks you never to be ashamed to tell others, with all due discretion and respect, about your friendship with him. He asks that you dare to tell others how good and beautiful it is that you found him. “Everyone who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven” (*Mt* 10:32). For a heart that loves, this is not a duty but an irrepressible need: “Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel!” (*1 Cor* 9:16). “Within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot” (*Jer* 20:9). (*Dilexit Nos*)

Missionaries in love with a deep sense of fraternal community

One must not think of this mission of communicating Christ

as if it were just a thing between me and him. It is lived in communion with one's own community and with the Church. If we distance ourselves from the community, we will also distance ourselves from Jesus. If we forget the community and don't worry about it, our friendship with Jesus will grow cold. This secret must never be forgotten. Love for the brothers of one's own community – religious, parish, diocesan – is like fuel that fuels our friendship with Jesus. Acts of love for our brothers in community may be the best, or sometimes the only way to express the love of Jesus Christ to others. The Lord himself said it: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35). (*Dilexit Nos*)

Missionaries in love who become servants of the poorest

This love then becomes service within the community. I never tire of repeating that Jesus told us this in the clearest terms possible: "Just as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40). He now asks you to meet him there, in every one of our brothers and sisters, and especially in the poor, the despised and the abandoned members of society. What a beautiful encounter that can be! (*Dilexit Nos*)

If we are concerned with helping others, this in no way means that we are turning away from Jesus. Rather, we are encountering him in another way. Whenever we try to help and care for another person, Jesus is at our side. We should never forget that, when he sent his disciples on mission, "the Lord worked with them" (Mk 16:20). He is always there, always at work, sharing our efforts to do good. In a mysterious way, his love becomes present through our service. He speaks to the world in a language that at times has no need of words. (*Dilexit Nos*)

Missionaries in love acting as friends of the Lord

Jesus is calling you and sending you forth to spread goodness in our world. His call is one of service, a summons to do good, perhaps as a physician, a mother, a teacher or a priest. Wherever

you may be, you can hear his call and realize that he is sending you forth to carry out that mission. He himself told us, “I am sending you out” (*Lk* 10:3). It is part of our being friends with him. For this friendship to mature, however, it is up to you to let him send you forth on a mission in this world, and to carry it out confidently, generously, freely and fearlessly. If you stay trapped in your own comfort zone, you will never really find security; doubts and fears, sorrow and anxiety will always loom on the horizon. Those who do not carry out their mission on this earth will find not happiness, but disappointment. So it is better that you let yourself be sent, that you let yourself be led by him wherever he wants. Never forget that Jesus is at your side at every step of the way. He will not cast you into the abyss, or leave you to your own devices. He will always be there to encourage and accompany you. He has promised, and he will do it: “For I am with you always, to the end of the age” (*Mt* 28:20). (*Dilexit Nos*)

Missionaries in love who can't hold back what happened to them

In your own way, you too must be a missionary, like the apostles and the first disciples of Jesus, who went forth to proclaim the love of God, to tell others that Christ is alive and worth knowing. Saint Therese experienced this as an essential part of her oblation to merciful Love: “I wanted to give my Beloved to drink and I felt myself consumed with a thirst for souls”. [227] That is your mission as well. Each of us must carry it out in his or her own way; you will come to see how you can be a missionary. Jesus deserves no less. If you accept the challenge, he will enlighten you, accompany you and strengthen you, and you will have an enriching experience that will bring you much happiness. It is not important whether you see immediate results; leave that to the Lord who works in the secret of our hearts. Keep experiencing the joy born of our efforts to share the love of Christ with others. (*Dilexit Nos*)

I hope that these reflections will help us to deepen the motto that Don Bosco lived as an experience of the Spirit and gave us

as a legacy as a life program: “*Da mihi animas, cetera tolle*”, and consequently help us to rediscover the novelty and prophecy of his motto.

His motto is a splendid synthesis of the *grace of unity*. If we break this it opens up a dangerous space for either activism or introversion, which are insidious temptations for all of us who are consecrated to the apostolic life. That is why this theme, dear Confreres, is so important, because it has to do with our *charismatic identity*.

In fact, the mission is nothing more than the historical expression of God’s saving love made concrete in the sending of the Son, in Jesus’ sending of his Spirit, in the sending of the Holy Spirit to the apostles. The awareness of being sent warns us against the temptation to want to take over the mission, its contents, its methods, its specific recipients, disposing of it instead of being available for it.

Precisely because we announce an Other and are called to offer his salvation, woe to us if we announce ourselves and our projects: we are his witnesses. This mission involves our entire existence and frees us from the risk of functionalism, activism and prometheism, risks that are not simply imaginary.

Our work as educators and pastors of young people has, among the highest tasks, to help those to whom we are sent find the meaning of life and true happiness in learning not to keep life for themselves but to be people for others, in the manner of Jesus, and educate youngsters like Don Bosco in Valdocco, precisely today which is marked by resignation, pessimism and *despair in*

John’s Gospel expresses in an incomparable way the love of God in the mission of the Son when, following his encounter with Nicodemus, Jesus affirms that “*Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him*” (Jn 3:17). For his part, Mark’s Gospel concludes the passage of the apostles’ dispute on the

problem of authority with the key to Jesus' interpretation of his human existence: *"For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many"* (Mk 10:45).

This is the mission of Jesus and also that of our Salesian consecrated life on behalf of young people, especially the poorest, abandoned and at risk. This is the gospel, this is the good news that we are called to proclaim and embody to fill the world with hope.

It is evident that, to the extent that we live your Salesian Mission to the full, we will not only make the young people feel happy, but we also live the mystique of the Mission to the full, and we can become saints and fully happy, like Don Bosco.

– On a 'synodal' path

Jesus sends his disciples out two by two, because the content of the mission is precisely this: communion, showing that they live together, walk together, work together and have a shared vision: the Kingdom of God, redeemed humanity made up of men and women who discover themselves to be sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters among themselves.

Today, at the last Synod, the Church resumed this method by listening to everyone, creating communion through participation in view of the mission. It is something that seems congenital to Don Bosco that involved everyone: his mother, Mamma Margaret, his boys, collaborators, benefactors, aware that he needed everyone to achieve God's dream for young people.

Therefore, the mission today has the entire community as its subject, and in our case the entire Salesian Family, in the diversity of its groups, consecrated, secular, lay, the Salesian Youth Movement with all its activity, and the Friends of Don Bosco, people who although belonging to other religions share with us the spirit, charism and educative and pastoral work. And we must proceed with great determination and conviction on this synodal path.

– *To give hope back to the world*

The dramatic situation we are experiencing worldwide is marked by many conflicts, wars, the process of rearmament, discrimination, scandalous inequalities, deprivations of freedom and dignity of the person, etc. These are all placing creation, and humanity itself, at risk and leaving the bitter fruit of resignation, pessimism and *despair*.

Announcing the theme of the 2025 Jubilee, “Hope does not disappoint,” in his homily on May 9, Pope Francis said:

“Brothers and sisters, may the Lord, risen from the dead and ascended into heaven, grant us the grace to **rediscover hope**, to **proclaim hope** and to **build hope**. Christian hope sustains the path of our life even when it seems tortuous and tiring; it opens before us paths of the future when resignation and pessimism would like to keep us captive; it makes us see the good possible when evil seems to prevail; Christian hope gives us serenity when our heart is weighed down by failure and sin; it makes us dream of a new humanity and gives us courage to build a fraternal and peaceful world, when it seems that it is not worth it. This is the hope, the gift that the Lord has given us with Baptism.”

And if we listen deeply to young people we see that hope also emerges from underneath irreverent jokes or shrugs; it is present even if repressed by a certain ideology or betrayed by sad life experiences. But how to awaken hope?

– *Bringing dreams to life*

This is the challenge for us educators and evangelisers who are inspired by the faith. Opening up to the future means giving birth to dreams, nourishing expectations, opening up to God’s promises, those already inscribed in the personality and history of the young person; those they have already found and those they are still looking for.

And this becomes possible if as educators and evangelisers we know how to remember the wonders of God and celebrate, in ourselves, the fidelity of God. Promising means, then, to make

one dream of that abundance of life that will never fail and will grow day after day to fullness. Only those who have the memory of faith know how to give the prophecy of hope and can take the young person away from the vertigo that could block and even paralyse them.

Don Bosco did not want to offer utopias that sounded like false promises and become bitter disappointments that would weaken the desire to live and fight; he wanted to give hope, which is based on the certain promise of God, a trust that takes root and grows by noting the signs of his fidelity (that is, by reading life in the light of faith); finally, he wanted to give the hope that is the great sign of the Lord's Passover.

As an exceptional educator, Don Bosco cultivated hope in his young people in the following five ways.

First: *courageous criticism of the dominant culture*, which tended to deny transcendence and exploit religion (Enlightenment/Masonic secularism, the Protestant threat, capitalism denying fundamental human rights); we may disagree with certain analyses made by Don Bosco, who was influenced by the culture of his time; but what stands out is the fact that Don Bosco not only did not passively accept the dominant culture, but considered it an indispensable element of his educational project. Going to school means doing culture: but which culture? Do we simply convey the dominant culture? Do we educate to the honest exercise of critical sense, to passionate love for the truth, to non-judgmental comparison with others, to listening to the Word of God, to inner synthesis in our own conscience?

Second: *offering his youngsters positive experiences in the present*; in this way, he made them fall in love with life ("it's an adventure worth having!"), led them to believe in themselves (self-esteem) and formed them to tackle difficulties according to their abilities; only by building fragments of positivity can we achieve that 'continuum' that makes life a positive experience worthy of being interpreted, planned and turned into action. This is the

truest meaning of the adjective “preventive” that characterises our educational system. Do we make every school, every oratory, every Vocational Training Centre and every social work a highly proactive environment offering ways of being, of relating, of acting that make them touch the ethical values we illustrate? And to do this, do we value the positive inclinations shown by today’s young people, or do we just live off our heritage, which is proven, yes, but also rigid and saddened by habit? Do we know how to invent positive experiences with young people and for young people?

Third: *making them dream*; for this reason, he recounted God’s dreams about life (almost as a trigger for their dreams and an invitation not to settle for less) while opening their eyes to the dreams that were possible for those times and for those ages (think of the missionary adventures or the efforts to help the disadvantaged in Turin at the time); and he did so in opposition to a realism that, in fact, revealed itself and still reveals itself today as flat pragmatism, obedience to criteria that misrecognise the dignity of the person based on self-transcendence. Do we motivate young people to express the dreams they carry inside, those of getting to know each other better, wanting to be different, planning big? Do we link their dreams (often affected by selfish individualism) to the great expectations of humanity as well as to the great dreams that God has for humanity? Here we can find a path open to vocational orientation in a broad sense and in an ecclesial sense.

Fourth: *providing them with the language of dreams*: through theatre, improvised performances, poetry competitions, bands, the invention of games, and the free expression of imagination and creativity. This is also a current problem: the youthful imagination is increasingly poor and increasingly infested by monsters, images of violence, vulgarity, banality, so much so that the truest feelings no longer find an adequate language to express themselves and therefore take root in them: they are pale dreams or sad dreams. I am thinking of the potential of the languages of literature and art, without forgetting the modern language of the web and social media ...

Fifth: *promoting group experience*, aggregation that satisfied not only the need for socialisation and friendship, but also the desire to build something together in the present, with a view to the future, thus instilling that feeling of solidarity that would later, once they became adults, take the form of models of supportive micro-societies, thus establishing a strong civic sense of collective responsibility (“good Christians and upright citizens”, as he used to say).

– *From multiculturalism to interculturalism*

After 150 years since Don Bosco’s first missionary expedition to Argentina (11 November 1875), our Congregation has reached all continents, and is now present in 137 countries of the world, with the corresponding multiculturalism of the Salesians. The face of the Congregation has changed profoundly.

This item of data involves an important and delicate challenge: the transition from multiculturalism as a sociological fact to the faithful inculturation of the gospel and the charism, an indispensable condition to achieve the interculturalism of the Congregation, the only valid response for unity in diversity.

The statistics speak eloquently: as vocations decline in Europe and the Americas, they increase in Southeast Asia and Africa. This transition from monocultural to multicultural situations has led to changes in our religious communities, calling into question traditional formation schemes, which is a source of wealth but also of tensions.

True interculturalism – says Aquilino Bocos – implies “entering into a process of exchange and mutual respect of different cultures, of histories and sensitivities, of feelings and experiences of belonging, of customs and traditions, which generates a new dynamic and greater fruitfulness for religious life and the Church.”²

² A. BOCOS, *Herencia y profecía*, Pub. Claretianas, Madrid 2006, 412.

In order for this vocational fruitfulness of Africa and Asia to become a lifeblood that revitalises and rejuvenates our Salesian life, it will be necessary to guarantee a good and solid formation on a human, spiritual, charismatic, pastoral, cultural level that reaches the hearts of people and purifies cultural elements that do not fit the gospel and our charism.

Hence the need to know one's own culture, the culture of others and the congregational culture well in order to understand and assimilate multicultural realities with an intercultural horizon, and to use some indispensable means to overcome atrophies or hypertrophies. Such as, for example, personal and community discernment, the centrality of the Word of God and the Eucharist, the urgent imperative of mission, the inevitable ongoing formation and a strong spirituality of conversion and communion.

This will be the best and most fruitful celebration of the 150th anniversary of the first missionary expedition of Don Bosco the dreamer who continues to dream through us.

– *By way of conclusion*

We have arrived in Valdocco and we start again from Valdocco, full of lived experience, with a Document that becomes a spiritual and pastoral programme for the entire six-year period, under the guidance of the father that the Lord has given us in the person of the dear Fr Fabio Attard, Rector Major and 11th Successor of Don Bosco. His addresses from the moment of his election and, above all, the Closing Address offer us the great elements of Don Bosco's charism that are most dear to him and the "Salesian spirit" with which he would like our lungs to be filled in order to be able to give ourselves unreservedly to "young people, especially the poorest, abandoned, at risk".

One aspect that I appreciate and admire in Fr Fabio, and which will be a great gift for the whole Congregation, is precisely

the centrality of God in his life, which is so necessary today, because there is enthusiasm among the confreres in their work with young people, but it is not always clear what the source of all that activity is, in the sense that it is often combined with other attitudes that raise questions about their relationship with the Lord and with prayer, so much so that we ask ourselves if we are really convinced that we are working for their salvation, with all that this implies. For Don Bosco, this was very clear and fundamental: he sought nothing other than “the glory of God and the salvation of souls”.

We entrust ourselves to Mary the Immaculate Help of Christians so that she may continue to be a mother and guide as she was for Don Bosco.

Rome.

12 April 2025

Fascual Chániz V.

