

YOUTH AND ITS CONDITION

Evangelization presupposes an adequate knowledge of the young

Work of education if it is to be concrete and offer a useful service cannot limit itself to general principles and vague guidelines. It must be precise as to content and method so that young people being educated may be shown that attention and respect taught us by the pedagogy of God who loves every individual, "calls each one by name,"¹ and makes him a protagonist of the Good News. It must take account of age, circumstances, culture and sex.

Evangelization proceeds therefore, and of ever increasing necessity, by way of an analysis of life-situations that influence the youthful personality. The models presented by the surroundings, the aspirations, the tensions and vindications which they induce, often find a ready reception in the mind of youth. They give rise to various emotions and attitudes, often at a subconscious level, which can prejudice or favor the educative process and the very understanding and acceptance of the gospel.

The object of this part of the document is to give a general account of the "youth situation," so as to prompt salesians, individually and as communities, to lend a willing ear to the voice of the world of the young and to keep it in mind in the educative and pastoral dialog of evangelization.

The situation

The Constitutions display a lively knowledge of the world of youth² and bid us be solid with them, to appreciate their values, to turn their

¹ ASGC 34; cf n. 44, 47, 52, 54.

² Const 9.

positive qualities to good account³ so as “to discover the gospel value” they already possess.⁴ The ASGC describe in broad outline the condition of youth⁵ starting from some of the signs of the present time.⁶

The revision which preceded the GC21 brings us back in fact to a realistic analysis of the youth situation. It confirms that the announcement of the gospel must be adequately embodied in the complex context of the present day. And in this connection it emphasizes the considerable difficulties experienced by some salesians in accepting and understanding the young, in tuning in to their wavelength when discussing their problems, in getting into educative dialog with them.

All this has an influence on the choice of those for whom we should be working.

It is disturbing to note in many of our works a diminution in the number of this preferential group, and that we seem to be choosing others who have less claim to our attention.

- 22 The reasons underlying these facts are obviously complex and at times vary with the place in which the Congregation is called upon to carry out its evangelizing activity.

We list some of them:

- 23 The *socio-cultural scene* has undergone rapid change in many countries; in others the same kind of change is imminent. The effect is to increase the level of confrontation and rupture between the young and adult generations. Particularly disconcerting are the heightened conflicts appearing in some aspects of society, which the young deeply resent:

- the glorification and exploitation of the individual;
- the call for freedom, and its simultaneous repression in many instances;
- the aspiration to higher values, and the challenge to values of any kind;
- the desire for solidarity and at the same time the crisis of belonging; the growing drift towards anonymity and indifference;

³ Const 16.

⁴ Const 14.

⁵ ASGC 34-44.

⁶ ASGC 31-33.

- the rapidity of communications and diffusion of information, and the slowness of cultural and social reform;
- the search for unity and world peace, and the persistent conflicts in political, social, racial, religious and economic sectors;
- the exaltation of everything concerned with youth, and at the same time a cleavage at times between youth and whatever concerns work, involvement or responsibility.

The present *socio-economic situation* emarginates entire countries and even in the most developed nations isolates vast areas of collective poverty. One notes the great hardship of many young people of the poor classes, cut off from the society to which they should belong, deprived of economic and cultural benefits and of the full exercise of their responsibility. They are prevented from becoming fully men.

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The Church reflects this deep and rapid cultural change. Internally a profound and wide revision of traditional culture has impaired the elaboration of human and christian values;⁷« faith has undergone a vast process of secularization, which calls in question the ways in which christian teaching has been formulated and its credibility.⁸ Local christian communities find it difficult to communicate with youth, which feels itself different, occupied with new interests but wanting to share responsibility.

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Externally in the meantime, new visions of man are being elaborated which are difficult to reconcile with, or completely opposed to, the christian view. The ideology is so strongly presented as to claim for itself the total meaning of existence, taking the place of the christian teaching.

In a salesian setting the lack at times of a systematic and positive study of the reality of youth in process of change, and at other times and insufficiently updated re-elaboration of the values inherent in the salesian educative heritage, put a break on impulse and initiative, and sometimes lead to a prejudicial lack of understanding.

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The fundamental aspect for evangelization

Very many young people, immersed in this vast process to the growth of which they themselves in part contribute, are striving to

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⁷ Cf GC 54.

⁸ Cf EN 20, 63; GS 53.

find their bearings and pick out clearly the details of the picture of human and christian values for the purpose of their own maturation. They are like people who have gone astray and got lost. These are the ones to whom we dedicate ourselves with salesian generosity.

Nevertheless positive and promising signs are not lacking in the young and in youth groups, which if properly educated can in turn serve as leaven for the masses. In response to the invitation of the Council, they can "become the first and immediate apostles of the young."⁹

In line with the recent reflection of the Church, we hold that the decisive point is to encourage the deep and healthy aspirations of these young people by bringing to maturity their solidarity, explicit or implicit, with the gospel.

Youth has become conscious of itself and of its condition, and young people are maturing in their awareness of sharing and coresponsibility; not only because they are in a numerical majority — by the year 2000 they will form two thirds of humanity — but because they are "harbingers of the future";¹⁰ because the problems they pose, even though in a confused, clumsy and disconcerting manner, "will probably be tomorrow the problems of all";¹¹ and because they tend to become the active subjects of evangelization.¹²

- 28** They are sometimes openly critical of the institution itself and dissatisfied with the actual practice and religious experience they find in the ecclesial community. But they also make themselves sincerely available for research and comparison, with a marked propensity towards personal communication and dialog.¹³ They go back to the purity and root value of the gospel, and for this reason they question vigorously and sometimes inordinately the whole ecclesial community.¹⁴

Recently there has been noted a reawakening to the inner values of prayer, of contemplation, and of interest for the word of God¹⁵ which urges them on to action to improve the world. They are resolute in

⁹ AA 12; EN 72.

¹⁰ Syn 1974. 1977, n. 3.

¹¹ Syn 1974.

¹² Cf AA 3. Syn 1974.

¹³ Cf Syn 1974.

¹⁴ Cf Syn 1974.

¹⁵ Cf Syn 1974.

affirming an undeniable solidarity between faith and life;¹⁶ they are particularly sensitive about justice in the world; they demand a "christian industry in the formation of history";¹⁷ they carry the practice of the faith even into concrete action in the social and political fields.¹⁸

The salesian attitude

The recent study of the Church and its appeals, and the reflection made by the salesian family based on the sane and serene realism of Don Bosco, oblige the salesian community to reveal and evaluate the expectations of youth, to promote their human and christian maturation and avoid the risk of a common levelling down. One must keep in mind their specific needs and their link with the world of study or factory, of agriculture or employment. Special care will be given to those boys and young men who live in a context of economic under-development and marginalization. We work for them on the basis of a fundamental solidarity in continuity with the novelty of the Good News, which is salvation offered to all men "as a gift of God's grace and mercy."¹⁹

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Practical directives

a) The gravity of the youth situation of our time and the insistent appeal of the Church and society obliges our Congregation, because of its specific mission, to mobilize the confreres in the next six years around the problems of the youth reality, and to make of them the primary objective of its renewal and its various activities.

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b) As a premise to every educational and pastoral program, salesians need to be more sensitive to the *youth condition*, understood in its expectations which are most in line with the gospel, through an adequate and serious analysis and by means also of direct contact with the young.

c) At a provincial and local level an *organic project* is to be developed, capable of orienting the work of the whole community to the task of evangelization; it needs to be periodically evaluated and revised.

¹⁶ Cf GE 1; PP 21.

¹⁷ Syn 1974.

¹⁸ RdC 138.

¹⁹ EN 27.

SALESIANS, BEARERS OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

Introduction

- 31 The task of announcing the gospel derives from "Jesus himself, the Good News of God, the very first and greatest evangelizer."¹ It flows from "the Holy Spirit, who is the principal agent"² of evangelization. It was rooted historically and is realized now by the witness and announcement of *messengers of the gospel*. Through them the Church "seeks to convert both the personal and collective consciences"³ of people of various cultures and introduces them to the gospel, "proclaimed above all by witness."⁴

A study of evangelization therefore requires us to look at the persons whose labors bear witness to the gospel message.

At the same time "evangelization is for no one an individual and isolated act; it is *one that is deeply ecclesial*."⁵ The gospel witness and announcement issues from the community, which while feeling within itself "a constant need of being evangelized"⁶ makes evangelization its own vocation.⁷ It stirs up, inspires and sustains diverse forms of collaboration in the one mission of evangelization.⁸

As salesians we share in the mission of the Church in the manner proper to us. We publicly confess that the Father's love has called and united us into a community for the evangelization of youth, carrying on a work of education inspired by the charism of Don Bosco and according to his Spirit: "We form a community of the

¹ EN 7.

² EN 75.

³ EN 18.

⁴ EN 21; cf 20, 41.

⁵ EN 60.

⁶ EN 15.

⁷ EN 14.

⁸ EN 15, 19 ff.

baptized. We seek to be obedient to the Spirit and strive to realize through our religious consecration the apostolic design of our Founder."⁹

Our religious life is lived in apostolic service: "the evangelical exigencies, the search for perfect love, the practice of the counsels, the common life are lived in the context of and according to the demands of the apostolic work to be accomplished and they contribute their value to it."¹⁰ We reaffirm the "vital integration" of these two elements which mutually influence and enrich each other.

The GC21 shares the conviction of the SGC that "the extent to which a community is evangelical will be the measure of its being salesian."¹¹ We have been engaged in and have been solicitous in verifying the exactitude of this measure. Hence this General Chapter wishes to indicate to the confreres some norms which in the next six years will be of help to the communities as they strive to announce and bear witness to the gospel among the young.

1. THE EVANGELIZED COMMUNITY

The very phrase, "evangelical community" well expresses the witness value that our community, open to the gift of God and to its growth from within and from without, offers to the youth of the world.

Each of our communities receive gratuitously from the Lord the gift of brotherhood, the consecrated gift of chaste love, poverty and obedience, the gift of urgent prayer for the coming of God's kingdom. Each community enjoys the fruit of the salesian charism and spirit. Each community is ready by its very life, more than by its words, to reflect the resplendent Word that it has received.

In accordance with the practical aim of the GC21, which is to verify rather than propose anew norms for community life, religious consecration, prayer, and apostolate, we are interested in drawing attention to a few problem areas that the experience of the past six years opportunely suggest for our consideration.

The emphasis which the SGC put on the community as the integrat-

⁹ Const 2.

¹⁰ ASGC 115.

¹¹ ASGC 339.

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ing element of the salesian vocation¹² shows its central importance. Hence its renewal is of primary interest.¹³ Accordingly, we will present the threefold aspects of renewal — brotherhood, religious consecration, and life of prayer — in conjunction with the theme of evangelization in and through the community.

1.1 The gift of brotherhood and evangelization

- 34 The purpose of the gospel announcement is to promote man's union with God and with his fellowmen.¹⁴ Therefore, the witness of a life of communion is a most important factor in evangelization¹⁵ because it is in a way an experience anticipating the very reality that evangelization hopes to achieve.¹⁶

In changing times when civil society and to some extent the Church itself is subject to tensions, conflicts and divisions, "it is especially necessary for religious to give witness as persons whose vital striving to attain their goal — the living God — has effectively created unity and openness in the depth and steadfastness of their life in God."¹⁷

The "new man" is born from God in the spirit of brotherhood. In this regard we salesians need only to recall the brotherly atmosphere of the first community formed by Don Bosco.¹⁸

When we speak of community we do not wish to limit the term to the local community where the personal relationships of the members with one another are more immediate. We mean also the provincial community which has the duty to foster the fraternal spirit in the local communities. In a sense the provincial community, which is much more complex than the local community, better represents the vastness of the salesian vocation and mission.¹⁹ Finally, by community we mean the whole Congregation²⁰ which shines forth in the universal Church as a distinct community of brothers.

- 35 We can safely say that in the last few years our community life has

¹² Cf Const 3.

¹³ Cf ASGC 512.

¹⁴ Cf Jn 17, 21-23.

¹⁵ Cf Jn 13, 35; 17, 21-23; At 4, 32-33; EN 77.

¹⁶ Const 80, 90.

¹⁷ ET 34.

¹⁸ Cf ASGC 496 ff.

¹⁹ Const 57; ASGC 512.

²⁰ Const 56.

undergone a maturing process in both its human and religious aspects in response to the initiatives of the SGC.

It is with satisfaction that we note from the reports of the provincial chapters that the directives concerning the community have met with positive results in the style of life and action as well as in the implementation of coresponsibility.

In many cases there has been a *growth* in mutual acceptance of one another and in cordial relationships as a result of the fruitful overcoming of tension and polarization. The development of the family spirit has often enhanced joyful occasions and serene circumstances. The family spirit has found genuine expression in significant charitable gestures, especially in regard to the care of sick confreres. The community sense has been increased by practices of coresponsibility as prescribed by our Constitutions, which have fostered communication, dialog and understanding even among confreres of different ages and cultures.

But *defects* are not lacking.

The GC21 considers it necessary to say a few words especially regarding individualism. The risk of individualism is very serious, and it is always close at hand. We can measure its seriousness by the fact that it takes confreres away from the community, from its structure and from its means of communication. In addition, it gives rise to the easy illusion of seemingly providing some confreres a style of life more appropriate for the following of Christ.

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Individualism is manifested in the following ways:

- in the difficulty of inserting and integrating the individual within the community. The community often becomes an instrument within an organization which guarantees purely external security and advantages;
- in the lack of a deep sense of belonging to the community, with a corresponding difficulty to enter into sincere dialog. One does not listen, nor speak freely in such circumstances. This is due to the fact also that some confreres are not disposed to understand the importance and religious significance of meetings in common. There is no fraternal correction, according to the rule of the gospel; and a climate of distrust and mutual prejudice is accepted with resignation;
- in the failure to assume responsibility in the pastoral and educative work of the community, since this would interfere with the

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- individual initiatives and activities arbitrarily taken up on one's own;
- in the phenomenon of "flights of affection" which deprive the community of the cordiality of brotherhood, of the typically salesian manifestations of gratitude, of the joy of festive celebrations and the like;
- in an attitude of self-sufficiency in regard to the magisterium of the Church and of the directives of the Congregation. It is an attitude that creates factions and pressure groups;
- in closing one's self off from the "communion of supernatural goods": some confreres do not take part as brothers in hearing the Word of God and in sharing their own experience of faith.

Individualism can be overcome by means of vigilance and personal determination. But the community, inspired by proper authority, can help by using means apt to develop the person of each confrere:

- by the appreciation of the talents of each one;
- by the cordial and enlightened openness with which it values the work of God in the life of the confreres;
- by the most just distribution possible of the work of the common mission;
- by the coresponsibility of all;
- by the rightful place given to human means to increase the spirit of brotherhood;
- by the redimensioning of the communities in number and in the type of work, so as to favor closer and more friendly interpersonal relationships.

Without a doubt whatever helps us grow in a humane spirit is precious in building up a fraternal union and offers an opportunity for the expression of genuine love. Nevertheless the spirit of brotherhood is definitely a gift of God; and it is God who gives it. It is an awareness of God's presence in others, in all other persons. It is the giving witness to the work of God in the hearts of men. This is the witness we are called upon to give today, particularly to youth.

1.2 The gift of religious consecration and evangelization

The openness to the gift of brotherhood gives rise to a further discovery. "Don Bosco often noted how the sincere practice of the vows strengthens the bonds of charity and unity of action. But this is not all. He observed that by the intensive living of the evangelical counsels, we free ourselves from whatever might be of hindrance in the ready practice of that pastoral charity which inspires our mission, essentially devoted to the needs of the young."²²

Consecrated chastity, poverty, and obedience in the pursuit of the Father's Will is a manifestation of the service of God in the following of Christ, bestowing upon brotherly union all its vigor. It gives besides a prophetic testimony and witness of the gospel before the world and before the young.

Our self evaluation shows forth, as pointed out by the Rector Major, the effort of the vast majority of salesians, amid new circumstances and changes of the social environment, to live their consecrated chastity "with dignity and in a distinctive manner which is totally salesian." They truly wish to be the special messengers of purity in the presence of the world's youth.²³

The brotherly atmosphere and the family spirit which they engender is indeed an indispensable condition for the development of consecrated chastity and for the strengthening of determination in the face of difficulties. Mutual understanding and fraternal correction, accompanied by personal effort, prudence, and the use of psychological as well as supernatural means, all contribute towards a glorious and secure witness to the gospel and to the salesian charism.²⁴

On the other hand we have to report that "the practice and even the very understanding and image of this distinctively salesian characteristic has fallen in various parts of the Congregation, where it has been obscured or even ridiculed."²⁵ Ideas and attitudes, the permissive mentality, certain kinds of worldliness variously justified, the rejection of the ascetical norms indicated in the salesian Constitutions²⁶ and tradition have sapped at the life force of this virtue and

²² RRM 81.

²³ Ibid 82.

²⁴ Sch Precap 213.

²⁵ RRM 82.

²⁶ Const 79.

at its rich witness value both for individual persons and for the community.

Against such a background it is necessary to state again "the specific importance of the witness and proclamation of chastity for us salesians in the world of youth," especially because of the present cultural situation in this regard.²⁷

Only the love of God decisively calls one to religious chastity, and hence it requires vigilance as well. A deep spirituality is helpful in understanding and in leading a life of consecrated chastity, with a will to bind oneself to others in a purified and qualified love, as established by the charity of Christ. This is an entirely virginal or disinterested love, ready for sacrifice, free, all-embracing and inspired by mercy and hope. Our task is to respond in faith to the gift of grace received from the Father,²⁸ and to announce this love to the world of youth, who wish for unity and solidarity among men. In addition it is a proof that all spirit of brotherhood finds its source and completion in the free gift of the Father.

- 40 Regarding *salesian poverty* the evaluation notes among the confreres a positive and changed mentality in accordance with the balanced and moderate stance proposed in the Constitutions. Poverty consists not simply in an interior detachment, which permits one to be well provided while professing poverty, nor in a simple dependence in the use of material goods. Neither does it consist in a purely sociological condition where one does not have what is necessary to satisfy the basic needs of life. Poverty means a loving and practical fidelity to the primacy of the spirit and of brotherly love in a world where love of money and of success is the prevailing mood. The practice of poverty will deepen our sense of its value in an opportune way, when our lives are linked with and conditioned by the service we render to poor youth. Speaking of work and temperance, the Report of the Rector Major notes: "We observe with satisfaction that on the part of the vast majority of salesians temperance is manifest in the standard of living that characterizes them. It is certainly not below the standard level maintained in the various countries, but neither is it above the local level where they serve."²⁹

"We salesians are great workers, men in shirt sleeves who live on

²⁷ Sch Precap 213.

²⁸ Const 75.

²⁹ RRM 108.

27 RRM 81
28 Ibid 82
29 Sch Precap 213
30 RRM 82
31 Const 75

work. There is no doubt, thank God, that we have thousands of confreres, even older ones, who give marvelous examples of work, both in humble assignments and in highly responsible ones."³⁰ And in these posts they share the lot and preoccupations of the poor, often seeking to get close to them and to experience for themselves the conditions in which they live. This effort, in fact, has given rise to several very encouraging undertakings.

"In a civilization and a world marked by a prodigious movement of almost indefinite material growth... the call of God places you at the pinnacle of the christian conscience. You are to remind men that their true and complete progress consists in responding to this call to share as sons in the life of the living God, the Father of all men."³¹

But our self-study points out on the negative side the need in our own spiritual life for conversion to this value of the gospel so well expressed and emphasized in our Constitutions. It records a weakening of the salesian sense and awareness of work and temperance. There is a tendency to "fractionation" and to a bourgeois life, a frame of mind indicating a kind of economic independence and autonomous administration, which is associated with the individualism of the consumer society.³²

Considering the common effort towards poverty, we have to note deficiencies in fulfilling two objectives, even though in both instances they lie within reasonable possibility. First, there is the "scrutinium paupertatis." And secondly, article 89 of the Constitutions: "All our activities, the location of our works and their availability to those in need, must reflect our poverty."

Poverty means sharing all that we have, all that we are, and all that we do. And this is the witness that will speak loud and clear—the very witness that the world and youth expect of us. In this regard the SGC spoke also of collective and communal poverty as absolutely indispensable.³³

Speaking of *obedience*, the SGC had "called for a renewal in the practice of obedience in harmony both with its supernatural value and with the new ways of practising it, applying this to the one who commands as well as the one who obeys."³⁴

³⁰ Ibid 111.

³¹ ET 19.

³² Sch Precap 211-212.

³³ Cf Sch Precap 211.

³⁴ RRM 116.

"There is in our confreres a great availability to serve. This is true of the vast majority of salesians even in cases of at times heroic obedience... This goes to show an edifying availability born of love and of faith. I take this opportunity to express the thanks of the whole Congregation to these generous confreres. As long as there are such men in our ranks, we can look with hope and confidence to tomorrow."³⁵

There are also some deficiencies—failings and crooked lines more in practice than in theory. There is some evidence, in fact, of an insensibility to cooperation and solidarity; a growing tendency for individuals to work on their own and independently; the feeling that working within and together with the community is a restraint and impediment. We have to note also a lack of understanding in some cases of the gospel meaning of authority and its relationship to fraternal union.

To make our witness credible our life of faith must be seen as obedience to God and a personal participation in the death and life of Christ. And we must recognize our urgent need of mediation to reach him, the mediation of the Church, of men, of brotherly union. Finally, this must take place in the spirit and in the renewed ways of common life and obedience, in dialog, in coresponsibility and in mutual collaboration on all levels.

In the beginning there was some mention of superficiality. In the case of obedience, as in chastity and poverty, it is necessary that the communities deepen their experience of faith in the religious life, through which the members "find in Christ the purpose of their existence, and who regard their witness of the paschal mystery to the world as their motive for the particular service they offer to their brethren, especially poor and abandoned youth, according to the charism of Don Bosco."³⁶

1.3 The gift of prayer and evangelization

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The salesian community realizes that it exists only because it is a gift of the grace of the Holy Spirit; and by prayer it adores, praises, petitions and thanks the Lord.

It revives in this way the consciousness of its intimate and vital relation with God and renders itself more adapted to its mission.

³⁵ RRM 122.

³⁶ ASGC 511.

In this sense, prayer is "the very centre, indeed it is the true secret of the renewal of our salesian vocation today."³⁷ It "enables us to discover the living meaning of our adoption as sons of God. It is the basis of our apostolic service directed to all men... It maintains kindled in us the joy and enthusiasm of our total self-giving."³⁸ And it fosters and strengthens the witness of our brotherliness.

The renewed Constitutions and the SGC bring out the following:

- the need for personal prayer which becomes a pledge of authentic and deep union with God;
- the urgency of a greater appreciation of prayer in common;
- the necessity of a continued renewal of spirit, in content and form, in tune with the sensibilities and attitudes of the young and in close connection with pastoral tasks.

The report made by the GC21 from the material offered by the provincial chapters indicates that the salesians are showing a *growing appreciation for common and liturgical prayer* (concelebration, liturgy of the hours). They engage themselves with diligence and careful preparation for days of recollection and retreats in various forms. They promote group experiences in prayer for youth; and some take part with great fruit also in experiences of their own in various spiritual experiments.

With some preoccupation we must note also *some negative points* in regard to the community life, which at least to some degree fails to reflect sufficiently that renewal requested by the Church and the Congregation. In varying intensity there is need of deep and continuous conversion. Here are some areas in need of improvement: regular attendance at the common practices of piety by those confreres who too easily and without due reason excuse themselves; greater care in prayer by those confreres who tend to go too fast; and appropriate preparation for liturgical celebration of various kinds. There has been the lack of initiative to promote common prayer among salesians, boys, and others connected with our mission. To some extent there has been a negligence of the sacrament of reconciliation and other personal expressions of salesian piety. The need felt for greater spontaneity and creativity in common prayer has prompted some to find outside of the community prayer expe-

³⁷ ASGC 519.

³⁸ ASGC 529.

periences considered by them to be more authentic and meaningful. Generally, no provision has been made in a satisfactory way on a provincial level, to prepare leaders and animators for spiritual and liturgical exercises, capable of helping the communities in a time of change to preserve and deepen the salesian style of prayer.

- 44 In view of all this and for a greater witness to the gospel, we make the following fundamental recommendations:

1.3.1 *To deepen the apostolic significance
of our prayer life*

In each of us and in our communities apostolic action and the spiritual life have one source: "They are the fruit of the Lord's death and resurrection"³⁹ and they are enlivened by his Word.

In the light of this paschal mystery the salesian community seeks to combine its organized rhythm of prayer with its daily routine of activities in a "liturgy of life."³⁹ It detects traces of God's presence in the world, feels called to cooperate in the divine plan of salvation through its testimony and witness, recognizes its own limitations, seeks pardon for its failings, and renews its fidelity. It adores, praises, thanks and petitions the Divine Majesty, devoting itself with greater generosity to its apostolic mission of bearing the love of God to the young. It seeks more efficacious ways of stirring up the thirst for God in them, by praying, living and celebrating liturgical and salesian festivities with them. Above all it fosters the hearing of the Word of God which continually calls to conversion, especially through the sacrament of reconciliation. It gladly takes part in youthful expressions of prayer, encouraging creativity and the lively sharing of personal and communal experiences in prayer.

1.3.2 *Planning the times for prayer*

"It is necessary always to pray." This injunction certainly includes set times for prayer which are apt means to perfect our love in the accomplishing of the will of the Father.

In this context we can appreciate the expressions of the following article of the Constitutions: the salesians "have few practices of piety, but we pray without ceasing, and after the manner of Don

³⁹ Const 58.

^{39*} Const 67.

Bosco's own union with God aspire to become contemplatives in action by praying in simple heart to heart colloquy with Christ, with the Father conscious of his presence, with Mary our helper."⁴⁰

To foster this spirit of prayer the community schedules times for prayer. In this way we visibly and concretely prove our claim that God holds first place in our life and sends us on our mission for youth.

1.3.3 *Remaining faithful to salesian devotions*

The salesian community remains faithful to those devotions which Don Bosco especially promoted: the devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and to Mary Help of Christians.

The presence of Christ in the eucharist enables us to take part in the mystery of salvation. Our Lady "holds a unique place in the history of salvation and in the life of the Church."⁴¹ In the words of Pope Paul VI she is "the Star of Evangelization" who continues to guide the community in the fulfillment of its mission.

Finally, through the devotion to our Father Don Bosco confreres will be helped in imitating his continuous union with God in the midst of their labors. They will be faithful to him in leading a life of "salesian cheerfulness".

1.3.4 *Renewal of prayer*

Christian prayer is not only a gift of God; it is also the fruit of sound instruction.

The salesians wish to give great importance to everything which can be of help in the growth and renewal of prayer life. We consider retreats particularly suited for this purpose. The retreat offers a true opportunity for contact with God.

The salesians feel more keenly the need for an openness and for a well-balanced spontaneity and creativity in prayer, whether personal or communal. This will ensure a greater authenticity and prevent the danger of routine in prayer. The riches of the liturgy and the renewal within the Church offer excellent opportunities which we can profit from. They can be blended with the salesian spirit and become a genuine expression of our own charism.

⁴⁰ Const 48.

⁴¹ Const 65.

⁴² Cf EN 82.

Let the salesians pledge themselves to personal prayer in the firm conviction of its necessity. Personal prayer should come before common prayer and is a good preparation for it. Through prayer the mutual exchange of gifts in charity will thrive among the conferrers.

1.4 Animation of the community for evangelization.

Role of the rector.

46 The experience of the ecclesial community in the recent years of renewal is that it *must develop* in an atmosphere of coresponsibility. And it finds in the services which occupy it, especially in the "service of authority," one of the strongest sources of its growth in faithfulness to God and in the service of men.

After having considered some aspects of the salesian community in the field of evangelization, it now seems necessary to give serious attention to the need of an animating spirit within the community itself for its apostolic work. Indeed, it seems certain that our communities have an impelling need for a basic and growing vigor as they seek to live according to the gospel and to carry on the work of evangelization. This is one of the points insistently made by the Congregation in its self evaluation.⁴³

We speak of "animation." In its original meaning it is contrasted with the imposition of external force. It designates the inner energy and activity of the soul, which gives life, harmony, growth and cohesion to all the parts of a living organism sharing in the life functions of the various members of the body.

By "spiritual animation" of a religious community we mean whatever promotes the initiatives, conduct, and life of the specific vocation of a particular institute. It calls for active sharing and for mature and conscientious cooperation on the part of every member of the community according to each one's respective role and personal gifts. Successful "animation" therefore is shown by the increase of coresponsibility and by the recognition by members of the community of their complementary functions. It is expressed by an adult mentality and an advanced state of maturity.

In this sense "animation" seems to be closely linked with the ability to motivate and with efficacious suggestion—in a word with per-

⁴³ Cf n. 39 of present text.

suasiveness. It opens the way for dialog, communication and discernment. It fosters willingness to listen. For us salesians it appears as part and parcel of the system of Don Bosco—reason and kindness.

The “animation” of a christian community cannot be reduced to a technique or a mere method, though these may be useful. It must be founded on docility to the Spirit, who is the first “animator” of the people of God. For a religious community it is linked to the initial project of the Founder, who was raised up by the same Spirit. Hence for us salesians such spiritual animation is at once “religious” and “pastoral”.

“We are living in the Church at a privileged moment of the Spirit.”⁴⁴ Our times therefore require us to be able to decipher the untiring initiative of God in life and in history. We need inspiration to know the proper response in this situation. If so, we will design a work of wisdom which will indeed renew the apostolic activity of the congregation according to the signs of the times and the expectations of our confreres.

1.4.1 *The situation*

In the last few years we have reason to be encouraged by several positive developments in our communities: a greater “spiritual” sensibility and attentiveness to the Word of God; an increase in the sense of coresponsibility and a greater ability to dialog; the rise of various initiatives, some spontaneous and some organized, which promote good spirit in the community; provincial and inter-provincial cooperation in the work of formation; and the difficult attempt to create in every house a formative atmosphere.

On the other hand, perhaps as a consequence of a growing spiritual need, we have to lament some negative situations and certain blindspots which concern us: the falling off in some confreres of enthusiasm for vocations; the absence of unity and of a deep spirituality at community level;⁴⁵ the lack or inadequate functioning of some roles or structures within the community;⁴⁶ and above all, a certain emptying of the figure of the rector, accompanied by a weakening of personal and pastoral dialog, of spiritual direction, and of

⁴⁴ EN 44.

⁴⁵ Sch Precap 207-208.

⁴⁶ Sch Precap 237-240.

the distracting of attention from more important duties to less vital ones, sometimes turning upside down the proper functioning of government.

- 48 This situation has occasioned the following insistent recommendations from the confreres:
- On the one hand to increase coresponsibility and the understanding of the respective roles of the individual confreres and members of the house councils in the religious and pastoral work of the community; and
 - On the other hand to prepare animators and to intensify the formative functions of the province, especially of the provincial and his council.⁴⁹
 - Finally, and above all, the confreres emphasize the necessity of clarifying the function and figure of the rector. They make reference to the manner of choosing and preparing him, to personal and communal spiritual direction, and to the simplification and the setting of priorities in regard to his duties.⁵⁰

All the points mentioned above have to do with animation and must be carefully studied. The GC21 has chosen to answer these urgent requests of many provincial chapters and individual confreres by more clearly delineating the figure and function of the rector, who is the principal animator of the Community.⁵¹

In doing this we do not intend to undervalue—but on the contrary to emphasize anew—the importance of coresponsibility. Indeed, there is an inner connection among the various roles and the various means of animating the community, which all revolve around the rector, who is their common point of reference.

1.4.2 *Frame of reference. Ministry of the rector.*

- 49 The rector can only function⁵² in the context of the community and of the pastoral work which it carries on in the salesian name and spirit. His function in no way implies any inequality in the common

⁴⁷ Sch Precap 227-235.

⁴⁸ Sch Precap 237-240.

⁴⁹ Sch Precap 241-244.

⁵⁰ Sch Precap 227-235.

⁵¹ Sch Precap 227-237.

⁵² Const 54, 182.

vocation but “a presiding over in charity,”⁵³ with a special obligation to service⁵⁴ for the advantage of the unity and corporate identity of the whole community.⁵⁵

“According to the will of Don Bosco and our uninterrupted tradition,” the 19th General Chapter assures us “the rector constitutes, without a shadow of doubt, the center of unity and of initiative of all salesian work whatever its type or composition either as the head of the religious community and guide of the confreres, or as the one who encourages and sustains every activity, apostolic or formative, being first among those who would educate; or as the one finally responsible for every activity whether it be economic, technical, or in the field of organization.”⁵⁶

“The concrete definition of this unifying and vitalizing activity of the rector,” in the words of the same 19th General Chapter, “must include something which cannot be substituted, namely, the co-responsibility and mutual collaboration with other superiors, in the first place with his council.”⁵⁷

The SGC also has emphasized the responsibility of the rector as the center of the community and his role as religious and pastoral guide.⁵⁸

1.4.3 *A complex role, with complementary functions.*

The office of rector is quite complex: all sections of salesian life converge upon it, at least for their final coordination. This includes the religious and spiritual, the apostolic and pastoral, the educative and cultural, the economic and organizational aspects of all activities. But there is question here of shared responsibility—apportioned and diversified according to complementary roles assigned to the different members of the community.⁵⁹ The rector must know how to respect and appreciate these responsible roles. While fostering the legitimate initiatives of the confreres, he shall take care to “keep himself free from commitments which could interfere with his fundamental duties towards the confreres.”⁶⁰

⁵³ ASGC 502.

⁵⁴ Cf Const 115.

⁵⁵ ASGC 714-716.

⁵⁶ AGC XIX, 32.

⁵⁷ Ibid 32-33.

⁵⁸ Cf ASGC 526, 678, 644-646.

⁵⁹ ASGC 647.

⁶⁰ Reg 153.

Today the vastness of some of our works, and the increased complexity of their operation on the one hand, and on the other a better understanding of the principle of subsidiarity, demand that we make the effort to define anew and, wherever possible, to simplify the difficult task of the rector.

1.4.4 *Some salesian criteria*

51 In this effort it might prove profitable to keep the following criteria in mind:

- the ecclesial and pastoral characteristics proper to a salesian community;⁶¹
- the type of community spirit explicitly wished by Don Bosco;⁶²
- the salesian tradition according to which the community is “guided in its apostolic task by a member who by his sacerdotal ordination and by his pastoral experience is able to direct it spiritually and orientate its mission”;⁶³
- the practical sense, by which an intelligent leeway is allowed to those persons holding key positions within the community.

1.4.5 *Priorities among the duties assigned to the rector by the Constitutions*

52 In the light of the Constitutions, and after a century's experience of their practice, it is not difficult to establish the following order of priorities in the duties assigned to the rector:

1st: *He is the preserver of unity and the custodian of our salesian identity*, in direct collaboration and in unity of spirit with the provincial and his council. He is “the sign of Christ uniting his followers in the service of the Father. He is at the centre of the community, a brother among brothers, who recognize his responsibility and his authority.”⁶⁴

2nd: *He is the pastoral guide of the salesian mission* in a threefold function: as teacher of the Word, as sanctifier through the ministry of the sacraments and as coordinator of apostolic activity. He holds

⁶¹ Cf ASGC 78-84, 27-30.

⁶² Cf ASGC 713-719.

⁶³ Const 35; Cf also letter of Card Villot to GC21; Aubry, *Direttore salesiano secondo la nostra tradizione*, pp. 59-124, in *Contributo di Studio allo Schema III Roma 1977*.

⁶⁴ Const 54.

principal responsibility for the mission among the young and the people entrusted to his community; he preserves and renews the fidelity of the confreres in their pastoral commitment to the "preventive system"; he cooperates with the bishop and the diocesan clergy in the combined pastoral action of the local Church.

3rd: *He directs the work of education* and of human development required of his community in the scholastic and pedagogical fields and in cultural, social and cooperative projects.⁶⁵

4th: *He bears the principal responsibility* in the overall operation of the work (finance, organization, discipline, public relations, buildings).⁶⁶

Unfortunately, in more than one instance, our houses have witnessed somersaults in regard to the priorities just mentioned. In such cases an unbridgeable gap has separated the rightful description of the rector from his actual status, to the great detriment of the salesian spirit. Hence has arisen in no small measure the crisis which the office of rector has undergone.

The GC21 therefore considers it essential to restore the priorities as outlined above. We are convinced from our salesian experience that the rector, rather than acting himself, must get others to act, stirring up the initiative of the confreres and inspiring a sharing of responsibility in every member of the community in the accomplishing of common apostolic goals. "The task of the rector is to portion out the work to be carried on, and then to see to it that it is done."⁶⁷ "The fundamental point is this—let the rector act as rector, i.e., let him know how to get others to work..."⁶⁸

Let the rector be a salesian rector, i.e., let him reflect the image, play the role, and act in the manner that Don Bosco, the supreme model of rectors, intended for him.

It is urgent to recapture this essential characteristic of the rector as the animator of the community, and as the "former" of souls who presides over the community in love.⁶⁹ Let the various tasks in the fields of organization, administration and discipline be left to others, following Don Bosco's practice with Don Rua.

⁶⁵ Reg 154.

⁶⁶ Cf Const 182; Reg 183.

⁶⁷ MB XIII 18.

⁶⁸ MB XIII 256, D. Bosco al GC1, September 1877.

⁶⁹ ASC 281, 37.

1.4.6 *Animation and its relation to authority*

- 54 For an authentic renewal of the office of rector it seems opportune to consider the role of his religious authority and the service he renders as animator of the community and of the confreres. He is in fact designated by the Constitutions as the superior of the local community, and "he governs it with the collaboration of his council."⁷⁰

The service of his authority aims at strengthening the vocation of each one as well as the sense of mission in the whole community and its single members. By his encouraging guidance he seeks to bring together under one common goal all the services which the community renders. For this purpose he undoubtedly possesses true religious authority in respect of all the confreres.⁷¹

Don Bosco remains the true model of every salesian rector. Like Don Bosco, the rector must be a father, a brother and friend, shepherd and teacher, and the center of unity. He inspires initiative and coordinates the various activities, seeking the necessary cooperation on every level, a truly prudent "superior" of a religious and apostolic community.

1.4.7 *New style of exercising his ministry*

- 55 According to this model, it seems necessary to renovate the style of exercising authority by the rector. Cultural changes require a genuine renewal in the light of the values that are emerging as signs of the times and as a result of the 2nd Vatican Council's deeper understanding of "service".

This renewed style brings about a sense of equality as brothers, rightful recognition of coresponsibility, respectful consideration of the adult conscience of each person, appreciation of the legitimate differences of mentality, sincerity and frankness in dealing with others, an atmosphere of affection and of service, ability to communicate, and some knowledge of the techniques of group dynamics. Above all, primacy must be given to "life in the Spirit" by daily striving to make Christ the center of the common life—in a word, a style of life that inspires respect for authority without being authoritarian.⁷³

⁷⁰ Const 182.

⁷¹ Cf Const 125 & Decr. SCRIS, Feb 1972.

⁷² Cf Cost 94.

⁷³ Cf Const 54, 93.

In the climate of this renewed style the rector must learn the discerning of spirits by prayer and counsel. By his personal study he must be well acquainted with the teachings and directives that come from the Magisterium, from the Constitutions and Regulations, and from the legitimate Superiors. Even in his time in the confidential recommendations that Don Bosco wrote for rectors, the Saint recommended: "In matters of greater importance, before making a decision, always raise your heart to God in prayer. In hearing any report, listen attentively, but seek to weigh well all the facts before passing judgment."⁷⁴

In this way he will be enlightened and guided to judge and make decisions with prudence in the face of the delicate and complex pluralism of ideas and conduct in religious life. Above all he will help his confreres through fraternal correction so that they live a life in conformity with the vocation they have chosen.

1.4.8 *Some means of animation*

Salesian traditions, and present-day sensitivity afford the rector opportunities and time for brotherly contact which in the simplicity of our family spirit have the potential of becoming strong instruments for encouraging and sustaining the community as well as individual confreres. Suffice it to mention a few of them: the gatherings of the council and of the assembly of confreres,⁷⁵ the meetings in common for prayer, for meditation, for fraternal reunions, for the programming of activities and for the monthly day of recollection; spiritual reading, considered as an aspect of ongoing formation; the conferences;⁷⁶ the "good nights";⁷⁷ the friendly talk with the superior;⁷⁸ and the like.⁷⁹

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1.4.9 *Coreponsibility of the community in the style of animation*

On their part the confreres should clearly demonstrate their determination to be a part of the community by their cooperation, each according to his proper role, in the initiatives undertaken by the

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⁷⁴ Ricordi confidenziali ai Direttori.

⁷⁵ Reg 154-155.

⁷⁶ Reg 157.

⁷⁷ Reg 43.

⁷⁸ Const 96.

⁷⁹ Cf Document on Formation.

community, avoiding any plea to be excused and inclination to passivity. Only by the active participation and by the sharing of responsibility by all the members, in fact, can the community be assured of the lasting and effective inspiration needed for the accomplishment of the “rule of life” that all have professed.

In those cases in which, after an open and patient dialog, there remains opposition between personal points of view and the decisions of the superior, the individual confrere should accept the outcome with obedience, with the maturity of an adult in the faith, remembering the example of the obedience of Christ for the sake of the Kingdom.

In these cases the confreres should not forget that the person called to lead a community (made up of imperfect men) is himself imperfect; he too, like the other members of the community, needs support and understanding. Their sincere cooperation and esteem will make his task easier and more fruitful.

1.5 Practical directives on the “evangelized community”

58 1.5.1 To renew “*rapport*” among individuals and of individuals with the community

- a. The community should undertake annually a review of its life and activities looking to the future as well as to the past. This communal effort—which is to be considered among the most important and meaningful projects of community life—will engage the corresponsibility of all the confreres in a common plan of organization and in a needed evaluation of the common life.
- b. In order to give an impetus to fraternal union which is indispensable for our community life, let each confrere set a high value on the ‘friendly talk’ with the superior, referred to in art. 96 of the Constitutions and the new article 71(a) of the Regulations.
- c. Meetings should be arranged on a regular basis so as to foster an atmosphere of communion among the confreres. In this way there will be communication and the mutual exchange of information, making use of modern techniques.

1.5.2 To renew the sense of the *gospel-value of the religious profession*

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a. To better ensure and foster a greater sensitiveness to evangelical poverty, the provincial office should establish a periodic self-evaluation (scrutinium paupertatis), determining the time and procedure. In this examination should be included an appraisal of work as an expression of poverty.

b. To provide psychological and emotional balance for the confreres and a helpful environment for confreres in difficulty, each community should examine that way it practises the family spirit and whether it makes the proper use of "fraternal correction" as recommended in the gospel (Mt. 18, 15-17).

1.5.3 To renew the *apostolic dimension of our prayer*

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a. In the spirit of faith every local community should make a periodic examination of its life of prayer, evaluating its apostolic dimension, the forms it takes, its content and the participation in it of the confreres.

b. Times for prayer should be carefully arranged in conformity with the Constitutions and Regulations.

c. Every confrere should renew his effort to be faithful to personal prayer, to the sacrament of reconciliation, to the practices of piety in common, and to listening to the Word of God.

1.5.4 To renew the *common effort towards animation*

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The GC21 considers the above as one of the focal points of renewal and gives the following directives:

a. Every rector must seek to develop by prayer and reflection a clear understanding of his pastoral mission in the community, according to the norms of the Council.⁸⁰ Let him study personally and with his community the proper ways to fulfill his duties, with constant patience in the face of difficulties which will always arise. Let him be solicitous to establish rapport with all the confreres,⁸¹ especially by means of the "friendly talk" which has been presented, more than as a norm, as a simple and practical way of fostering brotherly union and of strengthening one's vocation.

⁸⁰ PO c II.

⁸¹ ASGC 356.

⁸² Cf Reg 71(B).

b. The provincial, as the chief animator of the province, should consider it among his principal duties to prepare an adequate number of animators for the various sectors of the province, thus providing "spiritual men" qualified to guide and enlighten consciences.

c. The provincial should seek ways and means in every community to simplify the duties of the rector according to the norms given above. Let him establish the areas of jurisdiction, as suggested above in order to clarify the complementary roles of the individual confreres, the members of the council, and of the assembly of confreres.

d. As soon as possible the Rector Major and his Council should see to the preparation of a Manual for Provincials and Rectors. This will clarify the parameters of authority, harmonize spiritual leadership with religious authority, and keep in mind the diversity of situations that might exist in different circumstances.

The Acts of the Superior Council and other special publications should offer practical directives, especially as regards the updating of spiritual direction for the confreres, taken singly and in community.

2. THE COMMUNITY AS ANIMATOR

62 According to the SGC, "the formation of true pastoral communities, based on shared responsibility and collaboration, is one of the principal objectives of our pastoral renewal."⁸³

This is first of all a valid statement for the salesian community itself, in which there must be a sharing of pastoral responsibility. In fact this holds for all true apostolic communities. "Our mission is entrusted to the community at provincial or local level."⁸⁴ "It follows that each salesian receives a part of the salesian mission to accomplish in so far as he is a member, and therefore in intimate solidarity with his confreres."⁸⁵

This is a valid statement also for the particular roles in animation which ecclesial and educative directives prescribe for different members within the community.

⁸³ ASGC 357.

⁸⁴ Const 34; ASGC 29.

⁸⁵ ASGC 29, 84.

It is our specific charism to lead and encourage the educative community. "Besides ourselves, the parents, lay workers and the young themselves are active members, *united in dialog and shared responsibility* at various levels."⁸⁶ Thus in varying environments⁸⁷ we carry on the evangelization that is required of us as educators.⁸⁸ "Responsible collaboration and a life which shares the gospel spirit are, of their very nature, a witness that not only builds up Christ in the community, but radiates him, becoming a sign for everyone."⁸⁹

The GC21 picks out three aspects of animation within the salesian community, considering them important means of implementing and deepening our evangelical mission:

- the influence the salesian community should exert on the educative and pastoral community;
- the contribution of the salesian cooperators and past pupils who have made "the gospel choice" (message of the past pupils to the GC21, A3, statutes, art 1), of taking part in the educative and pastoral work of the Salesians of Don Bosco;
- the collaboration of other laymen and laywomen.

2.1 The salesian community animator of the educative and pastoral community

2.1.1 *The situation*

Our self-evaluation gives positive indications that the seeds of renewal sown by the SGC have led to a better understanding of how much educative and pastoral action have in common with our mission. They are linked to the whole of our religious life, on the provincial and local levels.

As far as the communities themselves are concerned, there has been a real increase in the collective consciousness as well as in the awareness of the individual confreres.⁹¹ There has arisen a greater awareness of our responsibilities in the service to which we are called. Meetings and gatherings have multiplied in openness of

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⁸⁶ ASGC 357, 340, 750, 356, 395.

⁸⁷ ASGC 377, 381, 386.

⁸⁸ Const 39.

⁸⁹ SC 61.

⁹⁰ RRM 130-131.

⁹¹ Const 4, 52.

spirit and dialog, fostering the sharing of experiences and apostolic projects.⁹²

This renewal within the communities themselves has had repercussions outside, influencing also the educative community.

This is evidenced by the fact that there is a better integration of our pastoral work with that of the local Church and community. With the isolation of the past diminished or gone, there has emerged a greater share of responsibility by laymen, parents, and the young themselves, who have come to appreciate better the value and care of their own formation. Efforts have been made to clarify and construct together a *practical* program of education, establishing norms to put it into realistic execution. Thus attitudes of diffidence and distrust have been overcome, above all in cases where ideological differences have prevailed.

Finally, the need for a new kind of rapport between the various sectors of the educative community finds an echo in the deliberations of the provincial chapters which exhort the confreres to a more effective promotion of lay collaborators, especially of members of the salesian family, because "sharing responsibility with them increases our own competence and credibility."⁹³

64 Nevertheless there are *negative aspects* which prompt us to reflect and to make the necessary corrections. Besides the points made in dealing with the "community as brotherhood" we can add the following:

- at the level of the apostolic community, individualism and the spirit of independence; the lack of comprehensive planning and sufficient encouragement of pastoral activity within provinces and local communities. All this creates factions and diminishes corporate efficiency, especially when dialog is difficult and mentalities are remarkably different;
- at the level of the animating community, neglect of those human characteristics which give encouragement to the family spirit within communities.⁹⁴ This deals a destructive blow to the preventive system, with little understanding and appreciation of the consequent detrimental effects of the educational process and on the effectiveness of single factors at work within the educative

⁹² Const 53.

⁹³ Gruppo di maggio, Sch V, 14.

⁹⁴ Cf ASGC 485-486.

community. There are some who, for various reasons arising from a divergence of backgrounds, do not even understand the importance of renewal and integration. They are not ready to accept necessary changes and thus fail to contribute effectively to the whole project of salesian education.

Besides, there is some difficulty in creating authentic educative communities in works which present a variety much more complex than the traditional boarding or day school, e.g. youth centers, parishes and the like. In these cases the confreres have different timetables, work at different locations and bear diverse responsibilities. Hence living and meeting together is rendered more difficult. There are also situations where our work is hindered because of outside interference, whether social, economic, political or religious. In these cases it is extremely difficult to practise our educational system.

2.1.2 *Frame of reference*

In view of our self-evaluation and in the light of the SGC and of Church documents, emphasis must be given to the fostering and maturing of the educative community as a decisive element in the total pastoral perspective of evangelization.

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The most important contribution that salesians can make to evangelization is to *live as a genuine community*.⁹⁵ Indeed, the words of the SGC apply in the first place to the Congregation itself: "each community proclaims the catechism more by what it is than by what it says."⁹⁶

It is incumbent upon us to inspire with zeal for the salesian mission all those who are associated with us. This is the proper way for us to bear witness to the gospel and to strengthen from within the educative community.

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Article 5 of the Constitutions prescribes this for the whole salesian family.⁹⁷ As for the laity associated with us in our mission, the clear statement of Article 39 is well commented upon in the Rector Major's report "We must recognize, especially today, not just from necessity but for reasons of sound pedagogy and in faithfulness to the

⁹⁵ Cf Const 20, 28, 33; ASGC 29, 283, 288, 293, 296, 318-320, 436, 506.

⁹⁶ RdC.

⁹⁷ Reg 30-31.

Church, that we need laymen as conscientious and competent collaborators in our mission. In this way we will integrate the three aspects of our work: education, pastoral guidance, and witnessing to the gospel."⁹⁸

67 This animating role requires:

a) a lively awareness, in theory and in practice, of the *pastoral necessity of sharing responsibility in our work of education*. This requires openness, trust, and loyalty towards our co-workers. We must recognize that their circumstances of life differ from our own. We respect the roles which they must play in our work. We must seek out the multiple forms of collaboration and mutual help that their vocation and specific contribution offer us. Each salesian should be on his guard not to look upon their collaboration as an interference. They in no way hinder the various religious ties that bind the salesian to his community and to the superior.

b) a clear understanding of the *identity of purpose of our work of education and pastoral mission*. Both are to be accomplished in coresponsibility. "The different groups that make up the educative community are especially associated, according to each one's own competence, in the one project of christian education."⁹⁹ This requires the free allegiance of all those taking part in it, as well as common aims and convictions in all its members.¹⁰⁰

Fidelity in this work of education requires "a continuous self-examination and a constant return to the principles and motives that inspire it."¹⁰¹

68 c) *The awareness of the specific role of the salesian community*. "It is the duty of the whole educative and pastoral community to make sure that the distinctive characteristics of christian education do actually flourish in its midst." To achieve this "christian parents have a special responsibility."¹⁰²

But upon the rector, upon the salesian community and upon each one according to his position, falls the responsibility of leadership in preserving the salesian and pastoral identity of the educative com-

⁹⁸ ASC 279, 42.

⁹⁹ SC 70.

¹⁰⁰ SC 58.

¹⁰¹ SC 67.

¹⁰² SC 73.

munity, in faithfulness to their specific charism and mission within the Church. In achieving this the rector, after patient dialog, has the last word.

This task requires on the one hand a constant effort and a keen and increasing sensitiveness to the "world of education"; and on the other hand the presence of apostolic-minded salesian confreres, who working together give the salesian imprint and infuse zeal for the gospel into the educative community.

2.2 The participation of cooperators and of the past pupils who have made "the choice of the gospel," in working with the SDB in their pastoral and educative task

We are not concerned here with the general theme of cooperators or of the past pupils in their role in the salesian family. We are interested here only in one of the multiple areas of collaboration which are open to the initiative of the cooperators and those alumni "who have made the choice of the gospel" (Stat. Conf. art. 1). How do they fit into the educative and pastoral work of the salesians?

2.2.1 The situation

The evaluation which the GC21 conducted attests that the Congregation in general realizes the importance of the presence of these collaborators. There is a growing awareness in this regard.

The RRM speaks of "deeper relationships than in the past" and of "a much more active and effective cooperation with several of these groups."¹⁰³ One reason for this is that the cooperators and those past pupils with a deeper formation display certain basic characteristics of a salesian vocation. There are several examples of this.

One is the action taken by the young cooperators in regard to apostolic and missionary work, which right from the outset justified the hope that is being placed in them. Another is the work for education that the past pupils pledged in their message to the GC21.

In this regard the provincial chapters¹⁰⁴ insist on two things: that we entrust to lay collaborators educative responsibilities and definite works of apostolate; and that those assigned to these tasks should

¹⁰³ RRM 242.

¹⁰⁴ Cf Sch Precap 262.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid 262a.

preferably be chosen from within the salesian family.¹⁰⁶ This was also a directive of the SGC.¹⁰⁷

- 71 On the other hand, on the part of some confreres there is detectable an attitude of little interest as regards these collaborators of the salesian family. They are looked upon merely from the point of view of efficient organization. Their value as an aid in the apostolate is not given due consideration.

Apparently this happens for four reasons. First, because the unique vocation of each group has not been understood clearly and there arises the constant risk of exchanging or substituting the roles proper to each group. Second, because there is lacking a living and continuous experience of the society in which our youth lives and hence an inadvertence that lay collaboration in our work is all for the good. Third, because of the failure of "initiatives and activities undertaken without due study at the proper levels and left—especially in individual works—to the interpretation and enthusiasm of a single person."¹⁰⁸ And fourth, most importantly, because there has been either a total lack or an insufficient amount of "serious training and formation of these collaborators of ours."¹⁰⁹

2.2.2 *Frame of reference*

- 72 We are convinced that the presence of cooperators and of those past pupils who have made "the choice of the gospel"¹¹⁰ are important for our boys, for ourselves, and for our other lay collaborators.

A presence important for the young

— Every trained layman, in a community that educates in the faith, affords a better and more effective organization when salesians are lacking either in number or in competence. In addition such men exercise a specific role of education, diverse from but quite compatible with our own. Our Constitutions speak of "a special contribution."¹¹¹ Hence their presence, where possible and convenient, is an enrichment.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid 262b.

¹⁰⁷ ASGC 428.

¹⁰⁸ RRM 243.

¹⁰⁹ Sch Precap 263.

¹¹⁰ Message of Past Pupils to GC21.

¹¹¹ Const 39; Sch Precap 262.

— The cooperators and such past pupils fulfill this function well. The influence of the gift of their salesian vocations, together with the work carried on *in communion* with their brothers who live the religious life, demonstrates “different ways of serving the people of God, and integrating various vocations, so as to show forth the richness of the founder’s charism.” Here is “a particular model of christian pedagogy.”¹¹²

In these circumstances our boys can realize an authentic and complete human involvement. They will experience a sense of confidence, making them creative and happy persons—a sense of *mystery* that the consumer society dampens and squelches. At the same time they will feel impelled to live the values of the gospel which they see demonstrated in their very midst. Gospel values previously inexperienced, will become alive by the example of these men living in “the vast and complicated world of politics, society, and economics,” and throwing a different light on “the world of culture, of the sciences and the arts, of international life, of the mass media... the world of love, of the family, or professional work.”¹¹³

A presence important for ourselves

— When we think of the cooperators and of those past pupils who with us are efficacious agents of the wish of the Founder, availing themselves of an indispensable variety of ministries for the fulfillment of our common mission, we are led to re-think and re-discover the specific nature of our vocation as bearers of the gospel with its particular characteristics and we are moved to train these laymen who are our brothers, binding them to us to assure more effectively the salvation of youth.¹¹⁴

— But this is not all. Besides offering to us the example of their life and the joy of such an experience, there arises very useful communication in the case of those among them who are laborers or employed in any way in the workshops and undertakings of those salesians dedicated to education in our professional schools. Their presence and experience exerts an influence that spreads to others. In planning an ideal program of education, the salesians ought to take these important advantages into account.

¹¹² ASGC 159.

¹¹³ EN 70.

¹¹⁴ ASGC 151, 103b, 736.

A presence important for our other lay collaborators

- 74 These men offer a practical model of the salesian style and spirit. By bringing them into the work of training and leading other lay collaborators, according to the thought of Don Bosco himself, we have a guarantee that the preventive system will not run the risk of losing its salesian identity and its evangelical efficacy.

2.2.3 *Guidelines for renewal*

- 75 Considering all these facts, we are encouraged to be more diligent and to improve our work for formation in the following two directions:

— *Let the salesian family make provision for its structures of formation.*

Where the salesian family exists in these diverse groups, often there has been missing a "togetherness" whether in regard to communication, or formation, or operation. The SGC expressed the hope "for mutual collaboration and communication between various groups." Among other things it hoped for collaboration in "the means that will be useful for our formation and information in view of the common mission assigned to us."¹¹⁵ The Department for the Salesian Family will have to shed light on, articulate and eventually coordinate a program of cooperation toward this end.

— *Let the salesians acquire a greater awareness and responsibility in the service to which they have committed themselves.*

We recognize the wide and growing gap between need and possibility. Sometimes it is really impossible to accomplish what we wish. But in the same way we should realize that some of us, with renewed vigor and hope, must be converted to a spiritual awakening to the fact of the salesian family. In his letter of presentation of the SGC, the Rector Major called this awareness one of "the centres of convergence in the actual postconciliar endeavor."¹¹⁶

The Constitutions and the ASGC invite us to take up this challenge. We must put more impact into the work of formation of the cooperators and past pupils. We must give more attention to them in the significant events of our salesian life and in the promotion of coresponsibility in our educative and pastoral work.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ ASGC 175.

¹¹⁶ ASGC p. xiii; Cf xviii-xix.

¹¹⁷ ASGC 744b.

2.3 The collaboration of other laymen in the educative community

Here we are referring directly to those laymen and laywomen who, though not belonging to the salesian family, share with the salesians the responsibility of implementing our work of education. In the first place there are the parents, who are the first educators. In the school there are especially the teachers. In the youth center there are the leaders and promoters of the various activities. In parishes and in the missions there are those who under various titles contribute time and energy to a more complete evangelization.

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Besides those whose vocation calls them to the salesian work, we must take into account the presence of the laity not only for the meaningful service that they render to the educative community, but also because of their great number.

In some parts of the Congregation, the disproportion between their number and that of salesians is steadily increasing, due to the constant increase of the first and the declining number of the second. This is a fact that carries the risk of loss of identity of our mission and calls in any case for a new and needed apostolate. And lay people have the right to exert roles of influence and coresponsibility. For this they ought to be prepared.

2.3.1 *The situation*

When lay helpers are convinced christians, their presence affords our youth a wider array of models of the christian life. They make it possible for the salesians to give more time to spiritual guidance; and they provide the opportunity for greater dialog and updating in the face of family and professional problems.

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Nevertheless there are some negative points. Some salesians are unprepared to work with laymen. Sometimes the choice of laymen has been made with a view to professional qualifications and competence to the neglect of pastoral considerations. At times reciprocal relations have been spoiled by a laborer-employer point of view, poorly devised and badly understood.

¹¹⁸ Cf Sch Precap 262.

¹¹⁹ Cf RRM 195.

2.3.2 *Lines of renewal*

78 A new look must be taken at the figure of the laymen working with us in christian education. Our attitude must be broadened. We need a new style of more intense collaboration with the laity and a united effort with them to help the educative community grow.

In mutual understanding we will more easily find avenues of accord converging on the work of education that inspires them as well as ourselves.

To know better this work and its spirit we ought to study and research together, in a dialog of partnership rather than as masters.

In this common effort each one should take care to retain his own identity. The salesian should not play the part of a layman, neglecting his religious duties and the common life. The layman should not be expected to behave like a religious, for he has his own duties of secular, family, and political life.

The method of choosing these collaborators is important. This should not be under the pressure of the moment; the determining factors should be the preparation, quality and competence of the applicants. The ideal would be to find persons easily incorporated into our apostolic program, especially if they have a salesian background or some experience in christian youth movements. We ought not to hesitate to invite them to become salesian cooperators. In any case they should respect the nature and the "Catholic" aspect of our environment and work, even if they do not take an active part in our apostolic program. There could also be unbaptized persons as long as they are sensitive to those educational and human values that the salesian method demands.

Every educative community should set appropriate time for the ongoing formation for these lay people. There should be periodic meetings and times of reflection on the salesian method of education and on the educative work of the community in which they are involved.

2.4 Practical directives

2.4.1 *The animating salesian community*

The salesians should renew and promote the educative community in the places where they work (SGC 395), and engage the laity in pastoral corresponsibility.

2.4.2 *The involvement of cooperators and past pupils in educational and pastoral work*

a) On the provincial and local levels, provincials and rectors should restore spiritual and apostolic vigor to the communities, making them dynamic centers of activity. To accomplish this they should appoint as delegates those confreres with the adequate preparation and talent.

b) According to a plan drawn up by the respective councils (salesians, cooperators, past pupils), during the next six years the provincial should make known to the communities the measures to be taken regarding the pastoral formation and vocation of the cooperators and past pupils. Let norms be established and ways indicated in which they can share responsibly in our apostolic initiatives.

c) Let the salesians accept responsibility for the formation of animators for the salesian family, promoting from the initial stages of formation, knowledge about the family and communicating a sense of its value and importance.

2.4.3 *Collaboration of other lay persons*

a) On the provincial level a directory for lay helpers should be prepared, indicating the characteristics of our educative environment and the human, professional, christian and salesian qualities necessary for an educator within our system.

b) Updating courses on the preventive system for lay people should be provided to insure their more effective insertion into our educative communities and pastoral works.