

STRENNA 2009



"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all the seeds but when it has grown it is the biggest shrub of all and becomes a tree so that the birds of the air come and shelter in its branches"
(Mt 13, 31-32)

150th anniversary of the foundation of the Salesian Congregation.

**The Salesian Family yesterday and today:
the seed has become a tree and the tree a wood**

Two events coming together

There are two events that explain the choice of the topic for the Strenna for 2009: the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Salesian Congregation and the preparation for the bicentenary of the birth of Don Bosco (1815-2015). With the remembrance of the 150th anniversary of the Salesian Congregation we are beginning the preparation for the bicentenary of the birth of Don Bosco. This celebration will mean renewed fidelity to Don Bosco, to his spirituality, to his mission; it will be a "Salesian" Holy Year."

1. The Salesian Family yesterday

The 150th anniversary of the Salesian Congregation is an occasion to reflect on Don Bosco's original idea about the "Salesian movement," with the foundation of the first groups: the Salesians of Don Bosco, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, the Salesians-Cooperators and the Association of the Clients of Mary Help of Christians. Taking as my starting point the parable used by Jesus to explain the dynamism/vitality of the Kingdom of God, I dare to say that the seed planted by Don Bosco has grown so as to become a strong tree rich in foliage.

The charismatic seed

The spirit, his way of thinking and his pastoral experience led Don Bosco to come to some firm convictions:

- the *Church's universal mission of salvation*, to be taken up in a spirit of solidarity, with the specific characteristic of a preferential option for the young, the poor, those peoples not yet evangelised;
- the urgent and compelling need to become united *spiritually* and *to form associations working together*;
- the possibility of the Salesian spirit being lived in *different states of life* and therefore through the coming together of "good people" to contribute to the great mission of the Church;
- the *foundation of the first groups*, formed around the experience of the oratory, with different kinds of links, with different degrees of close connection, with different requirements for belonging;

- the *historical role of the SDB, FMA, Salesians-Cooperators.*

Silent growth

These intuitions of Don Bosco have gradually materialised up to the present day.

- In various continents *other groups* have arisen, founded by Salesians; among these the group of the Volunteers of Don Bosco are certainly to be numbered.
- The changes introduced by the Second Vatican Council have led to the discovery and the identification of the character of the *charismatic family* and to the formulation of practical guidelines for its development.
- The new mentality, nonetheless, has still to pass in each group *from the page to life*, so that the Salesian Family might be lived as a vocational dimension (cf. CGS 20 SDB n. 151).

The tree and the wood

Some facts have accompanied and sustained the development of the Family:

- The fact of *belonging* on the part of the groups that have arisen after the death of Don Bosco has been formally requested and publicly recognised. Today there are twenty three such groups.
- Some *new groups* have been formed which are waiting to be recognised as members of the Salesian Family; in the meantime, the ground is being cultivated in which other groups could still emerge.
- The Salesian Family has reflected on its own *identity* (cf. AGC n.358), on the elements that regard its consistency and unity, on its organisation for communication.
- *Each group* has tried to strengthen itself, providing itself with Statutes or Regulations of life.
- A common effort has been made to deepen the ways of expressing *communion among them all*; in this the Common Identity Card has made a contribution and still needs to be further diffused, studied and put into practice.

2. In the third millennium: today and tomorrow

On the road of communion

The Church has entered into a new phase of communion, marked by the Synods, by ecumenical dialogue, by the inter-religious movement, by globalised solidarity, by a commitment to reconciliation. Even though ours is a Family that is prevalently apostolic, it has its roots in the mystery of the Trinity. Contemplating God who is Love, we understand what for us the mission “to be signs and bearers of the love of God,” the spirituality of communion, being a family mean.

Communion in and for the mission

“At this point communion begets communion essentially it is likened to a mission on behalf of communion (Chl 32). Now our task is that of expressing, in a clear way, communion in the mission, bearing in mind the following criteria:

- according to the *basic principles at the beginning* and in the development of the Salesian Family:

we have preserved, as a precious heritage, a passion for education, in particular that of the poorest young people; “Da mihi animas” is Don Bosco’s motto that we make our own; we look to the young and we want to concern ourselves with them in order to awaken in them the vocation to be children of God;

- in conformity with the *conditions of the world of today*.

the world offers a new climate: complexity, the transversal nature of many “causes”, the possibility of networks. The Salesian Family working together will try to make its presence and activity count: there is the problem of youth, life to be safeguarded, poverty to be tackled, peace to be promoted; there are human rights to be respected; there is Jesus to be made known;

- as the *fruit of the more recent Strennas*:

the recent Strennas have highlighted the educational emergency, efforts on behalf of the family, the promotion of life, a preferential option for the poor, globalised solidarity, the new evangelisation; this new phase of the Salesian Family will be marked by Don Bosco’s own ardent and tireless charity.

Some demands

- Looking further into *possible areas of common concern*; this means looking, reflecting discussing, studying and praying together in order to find the best way forward in a spirit of communion.
- Putting *spirituality firmly at the centre* as an encouragement for communion and for the mission; holiness is the source of the energy by which Don Bosco "inspired the start of a vast movement of persons who in different ways work for the salvation of the young " (C. 5): the Salesian Family.
- Ensuring the groups possess the *autonomous capacity* for their own development, the formation of their members, their apostolic initiatives.
- Experimenting with *simple forms of collaboration*: “thinking globally, acting locally.”
- Examining further the Salesian experience in *lay terms*.

3. Lines for the future

The fruit of this Strenna, therefore, ought to be a combined effort that is more visible and also more practical in the area of the mission. We have as terms of reference the *Common Identity Card* and the *Common Mission Statement of the Salesian Family*; while the first of these indicates the elements that characterise our charismatic identity, the second is a declaration of intent and of aims. The objective is that of giving rise to “a culture of the Salesian Family.”

Synergy in the mission

The reference to the *Common Identity Card* and the *Common Mission Statement* provides us with the opportunity to reflect on possible forms of synergy in the mission. We already have a common mission and we are carrying it out. It is the mission inspired by the Holy Spirit in different services and initiatives. The first thing required in order to create synergy is certainly that each group carries out its own mission.

The times we are living in, however, permit and indeed demand new expressions of the common mission. Nowadays as we have emphasised in the Strennas in recent years, there are transversal causes such as the family, life, education children's rights, peace, the question of women, safeguarding the nature environment, global solidarity that can see us involved in together.

Resources

What are the resources we need to concentrate on? In the first place on the formation of people and the strengthening of the communities of groups. However, we also need to develop and to acquire a shared charismatic culture or mentality in which the *Common Identity Card* and the *Common Mission Statement* ought to play their part. The support provided by an organisation is certainly useful, but it has only a secondary value and needs to be adapted to the needs and to practical circumstances. We continue to believe that the Salesian Family, first of all is something charismatic, whose greatest resources are the Spirit and creativity. We need to be co-responsible for the mission. However, it is necessary to bear in mind that the mission refers to concrete areas of commitment; it does not imply the involvement of everyone in each single initiative or in each individual location. In the individual activities it will be seen what sort of collaboration is appropriate – from two or three sources, without limiting oneself before hand to any single global structure.

Areas for the common mission

Some fields or areas in which we are already collaborating need some words of comment.

The young

We are all trying to work with the largest number of young people in various enterprises. Among the young themselves youth groups are being formed; from them come the leaders who are also called animators, educators, etc. The Salesian Youth Movement is being consolidated in which the youth groups with origins in the Salesian Family who want to take part converge. This is one of the possibilities offered to all. So far there has been close collaboration between the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. I hope that in the future the involvement of the Salesians-Cooperators and the Past Pupils will be greater. Therefore there are examples of synergy already existing and the possibility for further openings for the Salesian Family in the Salesian Youth Movement, which already feels that it has a world-wide view.

Vocation promotion

Linked to the question of the SYM there is that of vocation promotion. We know that Don Bosco, who had a great esteem for lay people, rejoiced when he was able to give priests and consecrated persons to the Church. If, in fact, it is true that all have an equal dignity, and all have an equal call to holiness, it is also true that there are vocations that have specific tasks in the church community. It is important then that we are a united also in this. Providing for our groups or for our young people a process of human and Christian formation we propose to them a variety of vocations, pointing out the greater commitment of the "sequela" that some vocations represent.

The Missions

A third area in which we are already collaborating is that of the missions. In the more recent missionary expeditions the presence of lay people had become more evident. It is a beautiful thing to see how within the Salesian Family there are groups that include the missionary dimension even in their name. Nevertheless, a missionary spirit has different forms of expressions and of initiatives. There is the possibility of a personal presence, of twinning arrangements and of long-distance support. Considering the needs in different parts of the world I think what a good thing it would be if there were to be a network of twinning arrangements able to channel resources to respond to the various needs and if, where there are personnel available, there were to be the possibility of temporary or also long-term collaboration.

The Salesian Bulletin

Another area in which we are already collaborating regards the communication of the charism. Each group has its own means of communication. There is however, a magazine that represents everyone and that is the Salesian Bulletin. We are saying that it is a means of communication for the Salesian Family, for the Salesian Movement, and for all forms of Salesian expression in the world; it presents the point of view of the Family on the situations in which we are living, and for the outside world opens a window on the Salesian world. It is true that the Bulletin is managed by the Salesian Congregation; but in the editorial committee more room is being given to the Salesian Family and the various aspects of it are being presented. We all receive the benefit of the impression the Bulletin succeeds in creating.

Visibility in the Church of the Salesian presence as a "movement"

It would be good through the processes of synergy to be undertaken, always to act more as a movement and in this way have a visible presence in society and in the church. We have to overcome two dangers, in no way imaginary: on the one hand making too much of a clamour in what we do, and on the other without justification not making our mark. Rather than indulge in propaganda, our supportive presence ought to be visible; we need to demonstrate more our capacity to work for some common causes.

Culture of the Salesian Family

So that the Family culture, that is the idea of working together, extends to all the branches and to the whole tree, it is indispensable that all the members of the single groups become aware of belonging to a vast movement of persons, born in the apostolic heart of Don Bosco, and are ready for synergy, convergence, multiple forms of collaboration that are varied, easy and can be updated. We are not looking for a huge organisation that lays down from the top the things to be done, but a strong impulse of spirituality to give life to cells and organs, so that they may create ways of collaborating that are possible.

From this point of view the first task is to ensure that everyone reads the Common Identity Card and the *Common Mission Statement*. In them are to be found the great ideas to be transmitted and the great choices to be made.. But, in addition to the study of these documents, among the different groups there needs to be the experience of life together, spirituality, fraternity, collaboration. This will raise the level of mutual trust, appreciation of the potential that Don Bosco's charism and Family have. The aim is always that of passing from concord to a communion of intent, to collaboration and co-responsibility in common projects in the local area

4. Suggestions for making something practical of the Strenna

Some steps to be taken so that the Salesian Family may become a vast movement at the service of the salvation of the young.

- ***Collaborating together in the formation in and in the further study of the charismatic mentality of the Salesian Family.***

For this we need to make the effort:

- To make the *Common Identity Card* and the *Common Mission Statement* the subject of study and further reflection *on the* part of each group in the Salesian Family, so as to help the family culture and the sense of a movement grow in each of their members;
- To share the conclusions of this study in the local and province “Consultative Committees” of the Salesian Family, and to choose, as a conclusion, some working guidelines for sharing and synergy in the service of the Salesian mission in their own area.

- ***Promoting a shared commitment***

The various groups of the SF present in a given area to study together today’s youth situation, especially as regards the great challenges of life, of poverty in its various expressions, of evangelisation, of peace, of human rights ... and to look for:

- Ways to improve the initiatives already in progress through greater collaboration and net-working;
- New initiatives to be promoted with the specific contribution of the various groups present.

- ***An instrument of communion: the local and province consultative committee of the Salesian Family***

Giving more weight to the local and province Consultative Committee of the Salesian Family, trying to find the best way for it to work so that it is not just an opportunity to exchange ideas and experiences but above all an effective instrument

- to reflect together on the challenges of the mission in their own area and to agree on certain fundamental ways of responding that each group will try to adopt according to its own possibilities,
- to find simple and well structured ways of collaborating in educational and evangelising projects especially at the service of the young.

- ***Some opportunities for collaboration and net-working to be promoted and developed***

- *The animation of the Salesian Youth Movement,*
 - Developing within the different youth groups animated by groups of the SF a commitment to sharing in and being part of the Salesian Youth Movement,
 - Being involved in the accompaniment of groups and of young people,

- Sharing in the formation process of the groups with a programme of education to the faith which helps them to discover and to follow their own apostolic vocation in the Church and in society.
- *The animation and the promotion among the young and among adults of Salesian social and missionary Voluntary service as a Salesian response to the great challenges of today's world of youth, in particular of those poorest and at risk.*
- *The promotion of priestly, religious and lay vocations of special commitment in the service of the Church and in particular in the Salesian Family by:*
 - taking part in vocational projects organised in the local Church,
 - the witness of one's own life lives as a vocation, and the presentation of the different vocations in the Church and in society, in a special way in the Salesian Family,
 - special attention to and accompaniment of young people in the unfolding of their lives as couples with appropriate projects,
 - support for families and parents in their educative role, promoting schools for parents, groups of couples, etc

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Rome, June 3, 2008