

Rethinking salesian youth ministry

**Document for reflection
in communities and provinces**

*Youth Ministry Department
2011*



DIREZIONE GENERALE
OPERE DON BOSCO
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The Rector Major

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**To the Rectors and Confreres
of Salesian local Communities
and of the Provinces**

Subject: Rethinking Salesian Youth Ministry

Dear Confreres,

With my greetings and the sincere hope that there may be an ever closer union among us.

The reason I am writing to you is to begin to implement one of the commitments made at our 26th General Chapter. The Congregation is undertaking a process of *rethinking how to carry out Youth Ministry in the Church*. In force of “Da mihi animas, cetera tolle” and in view of a more explicit commitment to evangelisation, we are being called to strengthen the relationship between evangelisation and education, in a context of changed and varied cultural conditions (cf. GC26 45).

1. Rethinking ministry will help us to give better focus to the evangelising nature of our Educative Pastoral Plan. There are some features of our pastoral praxis which are not fully implemented. For this reason it

is necessary to consider the witness of the Educative Pastoral Community (EPC) as part of our contribution to the transformation of culture according to the Gospel of Jesus.

As GC26 states: “Our initiatives are not always clearly directed to education to the faith. Processes of catechesis are weak and in many cases do not engender in young people a convinced and regular sacramental life, a true sense of belonging to the Church and courageous apostolic involvement. The lack of structure and continuity, the result of insufficient reflection and study, has sometimes led to a ministry more of initiatives and events than of processes. In other cases what we have offered has not been sufficiently part of the programmes of the local Church.” (GC26 28).

At the same time, education is required by society more and more. Yet we recognise that there is a crisis regarding the understanding of what “education” and “educational” really mean. The words are often used in an ambiguous, very limited or ideological manner. For us Salesians this question is relevant, since ours is an educational pastoral charism, and we maintain that the quality of our educational service is necessarily linked to its effectiveness in terms of evangelisation.

In this situation we are faced with many questions: what choices to make in what we do? where to start from in order to have a ministry of processes with faith journeys and not isolated events? how to help the young become Christians in the culture in which we are living? what proposals can we offer, bearing in mind the young people who are not Christians and who belong to other religions?

In rethinking our ministry we want to encourage processes of wholesale reflection on local educational pastoral praxis, well aware that the contexts in which we carry out our mission are different and complex, as are the challenges we meet.

2. So as to have a pastoral ministry which is more and more inspired by the Preventive System of Don Bosco (cf. GC26 41), I am asking you to offer *your contribution* to the process of rethinking the pastoral praxis

of your Community, in order to be able to develop further the fundamental procedures for Salesian ministry and also to see what impact they are having on your daily praxis.

As you see, through this process of reflection and evaluation, we want to involve everyone: the individual Salesian, each Salesian Community and EPC, and the lay people co-responsible for the mission, every institution of formation, every organisation/body for animation and government at local and province level.

The process was began by the Rector Major with his Council in the month of July 2009. A team of experts drew up a first working document which then benefited from reflections from the various Study Centres and Regional Youth Ministry Centres. These contributions were presented in a Seminar held at the Pisana on 4 - 6 February 2011.

Now I am inviting also you to take part in this *second phase*. The scheme of reflection which follows, addressed to the individual communities, asks questions which encourage you to examine your pastoral praxis, with the hope that this will lead to a deeper reflection within the communities.

Your contributions will help us to undertake a revision and updating of the book “Salesian Youth Ministry. A basic frame of reference” (Rome, 1998, 2000). It will also be an appropriate preparation for the approaching Bicentenary of the Birth of Saint John Bosco.

I thank you for your commitment and the generosity with which you live your religious consecration in the service of the young. This process will also be a sign of our desire to be ever more of service to them in a generous and effective way in their encounter with Jesus.

Cordially in Don Bosco,


Fr Pascual Chávez Villanueva
Rector Major



Document for reflection in communities and provinces

Responding to culture and the world of the young

The last few decades have witnessed a profound transformation in many of our societies, and the cultures on which they are built. It is precisely in the centrality of culture that the most characteristic element of our times is to be found. We find ourselves faced with a cocktail of cultures, with a stratified situation in which different concepts of the person and forms of living side by side are to be found. As we approach the world of the young we notice in addition that there is not just "one" single identifiable independent youth culture. What especially concerns us is the tragic situation of being excluded which many of our young people experience in society and from an educational point of view, and who deserve our full pastoral attention. We recognise that there are different ways in which young people live the faith in various **educational and social context**: as un-believers, being indifferent, those at a distance, with a traditional faith or whose faith journey is under threat.

*Transformation
of the culture
and the
world
of the
young*

The social and cultural challenges of this complex situation urge us on, convinced as we are that our Congregation has much to offer to the young, to their families and to the cultures to which they belong. We believe that Jesus Christ and his Gospel continue to offer the best way of living, and we are very happy to have the mission of offering it.

*Looking
at young
people
through
the eyes
of Jesus*

For this reason, as Salesians, we make the voice of God heard within the varied situations in which the young are living. They are children of their time and culture. They are not a problem but an opportunity! We are present in 132 countries, looking at the young through the eyes of Jesus. In the encounters the Lord has with the young the first

thing he does "is walk up to them," "look at them", "love them", "know them" (cf. Mt 4, 18ss) one by one, he hears their questions, listens to their concerns. Using his words and his imagery (shepherd, vinedresser, fisherman, etc.) he calls them to proclaim the Gospel and entrusts his mission to them.

Today too we need him to lend us his eyes to see them in the light of his Gospel, to lend us his heart to love them a great deal more with a new kind of love, to teach us to awaken them to the faith.

*Attentive
listening
and
intelligent
under-
standing*

It is vital that the Gospel and its values put down roots in the hearts of the new generations. We are living in times when there is an attempt to tone down the voice of God in some societies, while in others the new generations are deprived of the humanising treasures of the Gospel. A challenge of such dimensions requires from all of us, lay people and Salesians, **an attentive listening to the Spirit** since He will be the one to guide our discernment, indicate our path, and make possible for us an **intelligent understanding** which can face up to the challenges of the enormous cultural change. In this regard it is sufficient to call to mind the enormous toil of our father Don Bosco in founding the Oratory of Saint Francis of Sales in Valdocco.

*Renewing
pastoral
charity
so as
to face
the
challenges
and seize
the
opportunities*

The new contexts in which the Congregation takes its place bring **new opportunities and new obstacles** to the carrying out of our Salesian mission. There are new challenges to our fidelity and creativity; there are new opportunities for listening, for discovering new needs and new forms of poverty, for living, learning and proposing the Gospel with joy. The new social and cultural dynamics touch the lives of the young and question our ability to educate and evangelise, especially among the poor and ordinary working class people.

We are becoming ever more aware that a great openness in pastoral thinking and reflection is indispensable in order to overcome any **dis-connection between our pastoral approach and the ever changing contexts**. Our "apostolic learning process" needs to be undertaken with a pedagogy and a methodology which lead to our being real witnesses

capable of interpreting the questions of the young, sometimes in societies full of possibilities but lacking hope. The central issue in education to the faith is to find new procedures so that the Gospel can be brought into contact with culture and with the world of the young. In this area, the Congregation is working with a pastoral ministry which is more organised and well-structured, which has a sense of continuity, which identifies the starting point and also the point of arrival.

This situation is a challenge for the educator-evangeliser and his ability to understand, to become involved and to work in a significant manner.

For reflection

- 1.1 *What attitudes are provoked within us through the new poverty, changes and transformations that are present in the society and culture in which we find ourselves?*

- 1.2 *Do we feel prepared to identify, understand and interpret the new signs of the times in this situation?*

- 1.3 *Do we really grasp the value of the educative-evangelising proposal of which we are the bearers for the young and the people of our time and put our trust in it?*

- 1.4 *Do we believe that our present activities really respond to the needs, the expectations and the challenges of the young and of the people in the place where the Lord had called us to be present?*



Evangelising by educating in the culture of our time

The first and foremost among all the tasks is Evangelisation. It is what youth ministry is all about: to evangelise the young and to announce the Good News of Jesus Christ to them (Eph 3,8), to proclaim the Kingdom that he revealed and brought close (Mt 12,28). It is the goal of all our efforts. But we know that in order to be effective, evangelisation has to reach the innermost depths. So that the Gospel can put down roots it has to be at the heart of any personal search which the young undertake not only outside themselves but also within. In that search for meaning, **the centrality of Christ** can be accepted, and can make a significant impact. Faith in the Lord Jesus ought to integrate life, becoming the centre around which the personality is built up. This is the only possible meeting point between what the young are asking for and what our pastoral ministry offers. Finally it is a matter of being faithful to our origins and to the *raison d'être* of our works.

*Faith
in Jesus
Christ
at the heart
of being
a Christian*

In other words, the aim of our Salesian Youth Ministry is that the young person succeeds in living out, in a coherent manner, the decision to follow Jesus, supported by a spirituality from which is learned a style of life and a commitment to serve others that brings happiness. We Sons of Don Bosco are custodians of that Salesian youth spirituality linked to faith experience, education and work. We read the Gospel starting from there. This is why the first proclamation is not sufficient in our youth ministry. Evangelisation is a "process" (*General Directory for Catechesis* 47-49) and, therefore requires consolidation and development, from kerygma to taking one's place in the Christian community, by means of the processes of a well-prepared catechesis. It follows that Salesian spirituality, lived by us and offered to the young, invites us to accompany them by progressive steps to maturity in the faith, ensuring a real process of **initiation in Christian religious**

*Initiation
into the
Christian
religious
experience*

experience. All the rest, from itineraries to educational programmes are nothing other than a series of means leading to this end.

*Mystagogy
and
fundamental
experiences*

Organising the evangelisation of the young is more than seeing that they possess a good all-round knowledge. The key word is initiation, **mystagogy.**

Rather than talk about a "transmission," one needs to talk about "initiation," which requires the accompaniment of young persons in their concrete circumstances until they come to full human and Christian maturity. And this is possible only when there are links with the community, with experience and with life. Growth in the Christian life ought to be presented and achieved as a real initiation into a living faith. A pastoral praxis is needed which encourages welcoming communities which offer fundamental experiences such as silence, prayer, the Word of God, commitment, the celebration of the sacraments as the source of spiritual growth, and those lived experiences through which life is seen in a completely new light. The way Michael Magone matured in the atmosphere created by Don Bosco at Valdocco is a model on which to reflect.

*Evangelisers
with
spiritual
experience
and
familiarity
with God*

Our apostolic mission in the Church is not only, nor mainly, a way of working or managing works, but should be and must be a witness to life. We incarnate the Salesian presence, making it visible and intelligible through our vocation and its most characteristic elements: consecrated-educators. Our evangelising pastoral ministry therefore dictates the way we live our Christian life, our spiritual experience and our familiarity with God which they sustain. This takes us back to **"the evangelisation of the evangelisers of the young,"** which makes it possible for us to be passionate about our own vocation. Young people are always on the watch, looking in every direction for signs of hope. The first sign they need is to see us converted and convinced, capable of drawing close to them in the name of Jesus, offering freedom, love and meaning. This is the great sign they are hoping to see.

So that the fidelity to both the message of the Gospel and to the culture of the people may be realised, it is necessary for **evangelisation to find in education its proper place and its own role**. In fact it is only education which enables us to succeed in ensuring that the faith proposal is in harmony with the life history, the background and the culture of the people we are serving. This is because education needs to start from people's practical situation, taking full account of their resources and their needs and planning a process within which to insert the Christian message. In addition, our educative-pastoral activity cannot be limited to changing the personal lives of the young but ought to be capable of changing the culture itself, remaining faithful to the wealth of the potential for change the Preventive System offers. We are called to reach to the heart of culture through education. To this end we have to be capable of forming people able to change that culture. The aim of Salesian education is to form people for others, in other words, people with professional skills, with a moral conscience and a social commitment. In our educational approach the young people are not simply on the receiving end of our efforts; they are called to carry out an active role, to be protagonists in evangelisation, active in social and cultural renewal.

*Education:
through
which
Evangelisation
takes
place*

Evangelisation, far from cancelling the **cultural identity of peoples**, seeks to give it a new structure, to sift it by a truth that is greater: the Gospel. On the other hand culture can help us as pastors in the 21st century to discover a particular way of understanding the Gospel. Precisely for this reason, when entering into dialogue with society, we need a strong dose of humility and of gospel vitality, through which our lives demonstrate a novelty which makes the best features shine out and overcomes the shadows and the limitations which are also there. For us the evangelisation of culture is carried out starting from a dialogue from inside it. It is something to which we belong and which to a greater or lesser extent defines us. To evangelise culture is to convert it, through its coming into contact with the Gospel, into an expression of personal and social life. Someone who wants to speak about God can only do so by making use of the language and the significance that one's own culture places at one's disposal.

*New aspect
of culture
through
the Gospel*

For reflection

- 2.1 *According to our experience as pastors and educators, what are the elements which nowadays nourish or sustain the life of faith of the young?*
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- 2.2 *How can we understand and put into practice the integration of evangelisation-education?*
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- 2.3 *Does our pastoral activity really reflect the integration of the two elements, or do we give too much emphasis to one of them?*
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- 2.4 *How do these pastoral options have an impact in your style of religious life and that of your community?*
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- 2.5 *Are there any signs which confirm that our educational-pastoral presence is actually helping to change the lives of the people around us and challenge the cultural models of our environments?*
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An integrated and coordinated youth ministry

The **Preventive System** of Don Bosco has an apostolic effect which leads to growth through personal accompaniment, the experience of community and of the Church, a broad vocational discernment. It is essential that every Educative Pastoral Community (EPC) accompanies this process, developing the ministry of welcoming and giving special attention to everyday life: knowing how to wait with the doors always open, the table set and the lamp lit. Young people nowadays are nomads. In such a context of great pluralism adolescents and young people, and others too, find in the all-round approach to formation which we present in our **educative-pastoral model** something that really makes sense.

*Apostolic
outreach
of the
Preventive
System*

At the present time we want to recover the value and the impact of the formation offered, through knowledge of the educative-pastoral model and creative renewal of praxis. We realise that to give new life to the Salesian educative-pastoral model we need **to know it, appreciate it and put it into practice**. This pastoral inheritance, reflected on and put into practice by the Congregation, represents our principal contribution to the young, to the Church and to society. The educative-pastoral know-how gathered together in this **frame of reference** is open, flexible and ecclesial. It invites us once again to create new processes, to promote creativity and pastoral dynamism.

Within societies, where generational parameters are changing rapidly, we Salesians have to make a constant effort to keep ourselves updated in all the areas indispensable for the mission. It is not sufficient to be familiar with theories, useful and necessary as they may be; formation procedures bring us face to face with practical experiences which teach us how to build personal relationships, to communicate and to work as a team: the special characteristics of a **well-structured pastoral ministry**. We know that the animation of our works cannot nor will be undertaken by everyone with the same degree of involvement. Different situations and peoples' life experiences deserve

*Structured
pastoral
ministry
and
formation*

to be treated with great respect by everyone, even though all are obliged to acquire a **human, Christian and pedagogical preparation**, in order to carry out the mission to the fullest extent possible. Formation means knowing our life, our society, our young people and our faith in order to give reason for our hope.

*The EPC
and the
SEPP*

There are some indispensable conditions for educative-pastoral activity. The first is the animation of an **educative-pastoral community (EPC)**, composed jointly of Salesians and lay people who share their life, faith and mission. The second is the drawing up of a **salesian educative-pastoral plan (SEPP)** by the EPC as a community of persons with a missionary awareness capable of working together on a project of evangelisation.

In this process, the mission of the **lay people** is not limited to collaborating in educational tasks, but it re-enforces the apostolic energies engaged in evangelisation, achieving a real form of co-responsibility. This presupposes in all of us a profound passion for evangelisation.

The EPC and the SEPP encourage us to combine our forces in order to improve results, handle new experiences and processes of reflection together, review and reorganise structures, works and services. The EPC has the purpose of becoming "a living experience of Church, and a revelation of God's plan for us" (C 47).

*Thinking
and
planning
pastoral
work*

In the Church and in the history of the Congregation, we have known people who have been able to respond in a creative manner to the great variety of situations and needs: they have readily accepted the changed cultural circumstances and have initiated a great variety of different projects in response to the spiritual and educational needs of the time. Over and above doing the right things, we need to have a consistent way of **thinking and planning pastoral processes** which foster formation itineraries, progressing step by step, which help us to work with a common planning mentality and throw light on changes of strategy. We are convinced that to the extent that we coordinate

our forces we shall contribute to the proclamation of the Kingdom in a more effective way and according to the way and with the methods the Church suggests nowadays.

For reflection

3.1 *Among the pastoral choices favoured by the Congregation, which are the ones that have provided a stimulus for our community life and for our pastoral activity? Which do we find more difficult to understand or to put into practice?*

3.2 *What kind of co-responsibility with lay people is fostered in our work?*

3.3 *Is the carrying out of all the tasks and roles on the part of the members of the Educative Pastoral Community regarding quality, competence, formation and involvement in the plan, made possible?*

3.4 *Do we feel adequately prepared to face the possibilities and the challenges which pastoral activity presents us with nowadays? What do we need as individuals and as a community to give fresh impetus to our renewal?*



