

SALESIANS OF DON BOSCO

GENERAL CHAPTER XXIX

PASSIONATE ABOUT JESUS CHRIST, DEDICATED TO YOUNG PEOPLE

*Living our Salesian vocation
faithfully and prophetically*

*“And he appointed twelve, to be with him,
and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons” (Mk 3:14-15)*

INSTRUMENTUM LABORIS



TURIN - VALDOCCO, 16 FEBRUARY - 12 APRIL 2025



INTRODUCTION

The 29th General Chapter represents a crucial moment of reflection, discernment, and renewal for the Salesian Congregation. The theme, “Passionate about Jesus Christ, dedicated to young people” is an invitation for us to undertake a profound examination of our identity and mission in the contemporary context characterised by rapid social, pastoral, cultural and technological changes. Our mission among young people, especially those who are the poorest and most marginalised, demands that we be courageous and creative, remaining ever faithful to the charism of Don Bosco.

Complexity and richness of the theme

The complexity and richness of the GC29 theme, as also the way the core areas have been structured and developed, reflect the multifaceted reality of our Salesian vocation. In order to facilitate a comprehensive and integrated understanding, we have chosen to structure the document in such a way as to present each core area in a continuous flow, from listening to interpretation to the proposal of certain choices. This approach is aimed at offering a coherent and complete perspective of each aspect of our reflection.

The working document has sought to bring together and sum up all the material that has arrived from the provinces in the most faithful way possible, while maintaining the same scheme used for gathering contributions. This means that there are inevitably some repetitions and redundancies in the text. The Chapter Assembly can decide to organise topics differently in order to make the discourse more concise, coherent and effective.

The three core areas

Core area 1. Animation and care of the real life of each Salesian: this core area focuses on the spiritual and vocational renewal of every Salesian and every local community. It explores how to nurture a deep inner life, strengthen consecrated identity and authentically live the evangelical counsels in the contemporary context.

Core area 2. Salesians, Salesian Family and lay people “with” and “for” young people: this topic deals with the challenge of the shared mission by examining how Salesians, Salesian Family members and lay people can collaborate more effectively in the education and evangelisation of the young.

It reflects on joint formation, on shared responsibility and on new forms of Salesian presence.

Core area 3. Review and renewal of the Congregation’s governing structures: this core area considers the effectiveness of the current governing structures and proposes ways to make them more responsive to the needs of the Salesian mission in today’s world. It includes reflections on leadership, resource management and adapting structures to local contexts.

Diversity and synodality in the Congregation

The process of preparing this working document has highlighted the extraordinary diversity of our Congregation. This diversity, reflected in the contributions from all continents and the particular

experiences of each province, represents an inestimable wealth and a source of apostolic creativity, while posing the challenge of an authentic synodal journey in harmony with the whole Church.

The drafting of the text is the result of a synthesis of the numerous contributions received, which express both a high level of consensus on the issues and prophetic demands for the future of the Congregation. This synthesis, while unable to reflect every single contribution, has sought to maintain the essence of the reflections and proposals that emerged, giving voice to the Congregation in all its articulated and specific expressions.

The diversity of our places and situations requires a constant commitment to inculturation and contextualisation of the Salesian charism, in order to be the kinds of Salesians and the kind of educative and pastoral community that young people today are waiting for (GC28). Let us give thanks for the richness and complexity of the Congregation, which challenge us to be creative and faithful to Don Bosco's charism in the contemporary world.

The dream at nine years of age and our mission today

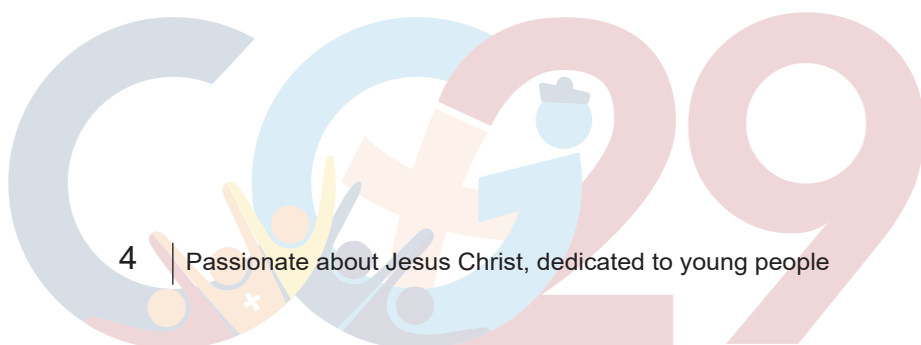
The dream Don Bosco had when he was nine years old, and which was put to us once more by the Rector Major's Strenna 2024, continues to offer a powerful image of transformation and reconciliation. Meditating on this dream has rekindled zeal for the mission in us and the will to live it with the attitudes of gospel gentleness and charismatic vigour that the Risen Lord pointed out to our Founder. We are convinced that today, too, the grace of the Lord is at work so that wolves are transformed into lambs, becoming a sign of conversion and of a much desired peace that we want to build with all our strength so that it may become a reality as soon as possible.

Care, reconciliation and hope

The Salesian mission is based on the example of Jesus, who tells us in the Gospel, "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me" (Mt 18:5). This sentence reminds us that every child, every young person is an "image" of Christ himself.

With courage, prophetic spirit and deep gratitude, we are called to live three fundamental dimensions of our vocation: the care of our own call and that of others, the courage to walk together – Salesians, lay people, members of the Salesian Family – with young people and the updating of our service of authority. These dimensions are concretely manifested in the care of creation, in attention to the digital world particularly frequented by children and young people, in making ourselves close to others through qualified personal accompaniment, and in the service of authority according to the model of Christ the Good Shepherd, in the footsteps of Don Bosco.

May Mary, Mother of Hope, support us along every phase of the Chapter journey, trusting that the Holy Spirit will guide us in the discernment and choices that we will be called to make for the good of the Congregation and the young people to whom we are sent.



CORE AREA 1

ANIMATION AND CARE OF THE REAL LIFE OF EACH SALESIAN

“If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me!” (Mt 19:21)



As Salesians we are called to centre our life and mission on Jesus Christ, the source of our consecration and joy. This core area highlights the importance of deepening our relationship with Christ, fostering strong fraternal bonds and maintaining a balance between our personal spiritual growth and apostolic service. By reflecting on these aspects and making thoughtful, faith-filled choices, we can rediscover the joy of our charism and bring new vitality to our mission, especially in serving the young and those who are most vulnerable. We are presented with an opportunity for our personal and community renewal, urging us to embrace courage, hope, and a renewed dedication to our vocation.

1.1. The importance of Salesian consecrated life centred on Jesus Christ

«I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing» (Jn 15:5)

With a sense of humble gratitude we thank the Father for all that the Society of St Francis de Sales has experienced and achieved in these years following GC28. We know that it has not been our work alone, but a gift of the Holy Spirit that has accompanied us and allowed the provincial chapters to recognise the present and matured fruits in Salesian life.

Listening

There is a greater awareness of the **centrality of the Eucharist** and many Salesians live in an intense personal relationship with the Lord through his Word and the sacraments. When the Salesian life is centred on God, the confreres experience a deep joy in living their consecration and even amidst the challenges of contemporary society they bear witness to a Light that enlightens people, especially the young people they meet.

Such joy is nourished by **participation in the paschal mystery** which is celebrated in the daily Eucharist, prolonged in the Liturgy of the Hours, purified in the sacrament of Reconciliation and contemplated in the mysteries of the Rosary. These forms of community and personal prayer, reinforced through monthly recollections and the annual retreat, encourage unity and spiritual growth, and result in the beauty of consecrated life shining forth. Following the obedient, poor and chaste Christ, many Salesians are faithful and willing to take on the commitments of the mission, becoming pastorally fruitful.

In addition to these gifts to thank God for, the provinces recognise that **there is a lack of coherence in religious life** in some Salesians or in some communities, with a concerning absence from prayer, the abandonment of dialogue with the rector, the inappropriate use of goods, the lack of participation and involvement in community meetings.

Added to that is a **lack of depth** in the personal relationship with Christ that shifts attention to the tasks to be carried out and the success of pastoral activities, thus generating sterile activism and emptying apostolic consecration of its meaning. Prayer becomes a habit rather than a genuine commitment, the evangelical counsels lose their effectiveness, personal testimony is lacking, and secularism and spiritual worldliness make their way into the heart of the Salesian.

The **lack of vocations** in various provinces, especially in the Western world, sees communities becoming increasingly smaller and older, with the attendant difficulty of living fraternal life and the

life of prayer, and the consequent inability to give witness in a society which is increasingly far from the values of the gospel.

Interpretation

The strength of Salesian consecrated life is founded on the **personal relationship with Jesus Christ** lived in the Eucharist and in prayer. When Jesus is at the centre of his life, the Salesian radiates the joy (C17) of living the evangelical counsels, thus becoming a sign and bearer of the love of God for young people (C2). This living bond with the Lord Jesus makes it possible to resist the challenges of secular culture and distractions.

When the life of faith and personal relationship with Christ weaken, fatigue and disorientation emerge. Without **the strength of the Spirit**, our educative and pastoral activity risks being reduced to the mere provision of social services. A life that is not centred on Christ loses its beating heart, seeking confirmation in a form devoid of authentic spiritual fruit.

The causes of a **consecrated life that is not centred in Christ** can be both external and internal. Spiritual superficiality, an individualistic culture, excessive amounts of work, “spiritual worldliness” (EG93) and the excessive use of social media weaken the spiritual life from the outside and often lead to identity crises. The internal causes, on the other hand, can be traced back to individual responsibility: the lack of personal and community commitment to prayer that generates spiritual fatigue, and the imbalance between action and contemplation that risks making the Salesian a social worker (GC27, 38).

In addition, the decline in vocations and ageing, the reduced number of Salesians, combined with heavy responsibilities, leads to isolation, burnout and the weakening of the prophetic witness of the individual and the community.¹

Choices

1. During the canonical visitation, the Provincial shall ensure that each Salesian community and each confrere lives out their personal and community prayer well; and, as appropriate, he shall promote a “time of personal spiritual renewal” among the confreres.
2. The Rector shall evaluate the workload of each confrere and promote rhythms of community life where faith sharing, participation in prayer, the deepening of Salesian spirituality and knowledge of the challenges of the contemporary world are guaranteed.
3. The local Salesian community renews its fraternal life and mission starting from the centrality of the Eucharist (C88), caring for planning community life by reserving appropriate times and spaces that guarantee the rhythms of common daily prayer, the weekly community day, monthly recollections, annual retreat, formation and rest for each confrere.

¹ Cf. FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME, A. The Rector Major’s Action Programme for the Salesian Congregation After General Chapter 28. *Salesians of Don Bosco forever. Six years for growth in Salesian identity*, in AGC 433.

4. The Salesian shall keep Jesus alive in himself with the awareness that without him he can do nothing, cultivating union with God (C12) through the means offered in the Salesian tradition: daily Eucharist, the visit to the Blessed Sacrament and adoration, meditation on the Word of God, personal prayer, devotion to Mary, confession, examination of conscience.

1.2. Caring for our own vocation and that of others

“Follow me and I will make you fish for people” (Mk 1:17)

Listening

Care for our vocation is exemplary in many elderly and young people and manifests the **strength of Salesian consecrated life**. This is expressed through care for the life of prayer (Eucharistic adoration, Lectio divina...) and through spiritual accompaniment. Community assemblies, life sharing, planned times for relaxation when planning community life, are the sign of a healthy ongoing formation in the ordinary life of a Salesian community that nourishes fidelity to its Lord.

The care shown for our vocation is evident in the support the confreres offer each other, especially in life's tougher moments. This kind of help does not come about all of a sudden, but is the result of dialogue, fraternal correction, seeking shared solutions, all human elements that strengthen the ties within community. Many Salesians through their exemplary life encourage one another to live in fidelity and to better understand their vocation through fruitful inter-generational exchange in which the wisdom of the elderly confreres nourishes the younger members (C25).

Respectful and fraternal relationships with lay people who share the mission also strengthen the authenticity of our vocation and make it a credible witness to the charism. Naturally, what emerges for these elements to be held in unity is the role of the rector in listening, accompanying and supporting the confreres in living a high standard of Salesian life. These local elements are accompanied by a range of proposals at province level such as recollection days, retreats, courses and seminars which cultivate and renew our vocation.

In contrast to such valuable things as these, unfortunately there are also **individualistic tendencies** that place personal needs above community care and an overloaded activism that leads to an imbalance between apostolic activities and community life. The risk of “functionalism” overshadows the profound value of the Salesian vocation, reducing it to tasks to be carried out.

At times, ongoing formation does not offer the tools to prevent and address the confreres' moments of crisis and vulnerability. Communities do not always manage to be a supportive environment; opportunities for fraternal correction and regular prayer and vocational accompaniment are lacking. In addition, we note the weakness of the figure of the rector.

Finally, it should not be forgotten that generational and cultural differences in some communities create conflicting visions of consecrated life, making it difficult to promote a truly cohesive community in solidarity.

Interpretation

The care of one's vocation that is expressed in being passionate about Christ, already to be found in the lives of many Salesians, stems from the passion of Jesus himself who sustains the vitality of their spiritual journey.

On the other hand, the lack of care for vocation is generated by both external and internal reasons. On the one hand **today's society promotes an exaggerated autonomy**, urging self-fulfilment rather than community and synodal dynamics (GC27, 9). Therefore, being immersed in today's cultural climate without spiritually fighting against it, leads to activism and individualism with fragmented apostolic efforts and the loss of a sense of unity.

On the other hand, the lack of personal responsibility, a lack of balance between prayer and work times, neglect of the Word of God, the insufficiency of ongoing formation weaken the personal commitment to follow Jesus². To these personal causes we can add the **lack of a structure community life** regarding times of prayer and rest, the lack of care for fraternal life in the community and in the EPC and a difficulty in interpreting the role of the rector who appears more as a manager than as a father: all elements that weaken one's own Salesian vocation and that of others (GC27, 51).

Choices

1. The Provincial with his Council shall strive to be sensitive to situations of personal fragility of the confreres, shall establish spaces for sharing and fraternal listening, accompany them fraternally, also making use of the help of specialists. Specific formation opportunities for formators and rectors will also be planned, in particular on the topics of accompaniment, vocational discernment and human maturity.
2. The Rector of each Salesian community shall plan regular friendly talks to offer each confrere an appropriate time for listening. These meetings shall pay particular attention to moments of difficulty and crisis, promoting fraternal correction in an atmosphere of openness and trust.
3. In its planning of community life the Salesian community should establish regular times for dialogue and sharing regarding our consecrated life and the mission entrusted to the community.
4. The Salesian shall fight whatever he discovers in himself to be contrary to community life (C52); he shall value the opportunities that renew the desire for conversion such as the monthly recollection and the annual retreat (C91).

1.3. Fidelity to God and fraternity in community

"For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (Mt 18:20)

Listening

The witness of **Salesians who are deeply committed and faithful** to the project of consecrated life is the most precious gift we can offer to young people (C25). The action of the Spirit is for us a permanent source of grace that, through daily efforts, supports our intimacy with God and the desire to create more fraternal communities. It is a source of joy to note that in all the provinces

² Cf. CHÁVEZ, P. *Vocation and Formation: gift and task*, in AGC 416.

of the world we see many Salesian communities with a strong family atmosphere, a sense of fraternity and fidelity to God: this is the family spirit that manifests itself in moments of prayer and informal moments, in work-related meetings and meals, in outings and experiences of shared faith. Moments of encounter like these, be they at local or province level, are experienced as a sharing of responsibilities and an opportunity for transparent communication.

However, we cannot fail to mention certain ills that seriously endanger fidelity and fraternity. In the first instance, at personal level the **weakening of spiritual life**, including due to the overload of work, does not make the primacy of God evident either in personal or in fraternal life, and its consequence is a lack of harmonious integration between the Salesian's being and doing.

Unfortunately materialism, individualism, activism in some confreres, as well as the desire for comfort, have taken root and are a constant threat to fraternal life. The habit of a life of community prayer becomes a formal act of fulfilment rather than an experience of faith and joy. Then at a community level, fraternal life seems to be superficial because it is based on outward practices, while at other times it even becomes a counter-witness due to **conflicting and tense relationships among the confreres**. There are cases of division and isolation, lack of transparency in relationships, a sectoral approach to pastoral work, neglect of community responsibilities in favour of personal interests, cultural and ethnic prejudices, factions and regional divisions, fragmentation within some communities.

Finally, there are two obstacles that are ultimately a source of concern in some provinces. Firstly, the decrease in the number of community members with the rise of the average age that progressively shifts the burden of responsibility to only a few and makes communities weaker. Secondly, the inappropriate use of technology that interferes with fraternal relationships and tends to create invisible barriers between confreres.

Interpretation

Fidelity to God is based on God's fidelity: he shows his unconditional love and mercy by remaining faithful to his promises (Heb 10:23). God sends us to be signs and bearers of his love to young people (C2), by living and working together as brothers (C49). Fraternity becomes prophecy with the grace of God, listening, dialogue and care³.

When we are faithful to God, fraternity shines out and we live the Salesian charism in an authentic and attractive way, because we live in the spirit of Don Bosco from the early years of Valdocco where home, parish, school and playground (C40) became an enveloping and familiar experience for young people. Instead, when a community is not built around the Eucharist ("Each day this is the central act of every Salesian community", C88), personal relationships become superficial and relationships between confreres become functional. **Community life also becomes habitual**, centred on the fulfilment of roles and tasks with little attention to the person of the confrere (GC27,42). This situation creates disaffection, coldness in the attitudes of some confreres and extinguishes the prophecy of fraternity (Ps 133).

³ Cf. FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME, A. *Belonging more to God, more to the confreres, more to young people*, in AGC 419.

Even the ageing process, which is not exclusive to consecrated life, generates physical, psychological and consequently also spiritual ills. Other kinds of resistance cause difficulty in community life: immaturity, feelings of resentment, fears, different needs for attention, etc.

Choices

1. The Provincial shall ensure the “consistency of communities in number and quality” (GC25,75-77) to allow the confreres to experience the joy of fraternal life in a more meaningful way through listening and mutual acceptance, solidarity and support in moments of fragility and personal crisis, authentic communication, the care of sick and elderly confreres.
2. The Salesian community shall plan the “community day” by seeing to fraternal life together, including times for prayer, valuing cultural and generational diversity.
3. The Salesian shall rekindle the gift of consecrated chastity as a “sign and stimulus of love”, live the Christian sense of personal relationships, cultivate true friendships and contribute to making the community a family (C83).

1.4. Accompaniment and formation

*“When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, ‘What are you looking for?’
They said to him, ‘Rabbi’ (which translated means Teacher), ‘where are you staying?’
He said to them, ‘Come and see.’” (Jn 1:38-39)*

Listening

Important steps have been taken over recent years in accompaniment and formation in both the initial phase and in ongoing formation. Initial formation has been well qualified thanks to good preparation and competence of formators and teachers. Ongoing formation has been enriched with quality proposals at both local and province level, involving Salesians and lay people. In particular, the School of Salesian Accompaniment promoted by the Formation Sector and various inter-provincial initiatives carried out both in the regions and in various conferences have contributed to this. The action of the different study centres and the IUS with their cultural and academic proposal should not be forgotten.

Some essential tools have been fundamental for the development of these two aspects: the care and regular practice of the friendly talk with the rector, the spiritual accompaniment received and practised with people available and prepared for this service, the coordination of formation initiatives carried out by the Province Formation Delegate and the Province Formation Commission, the decisive value of the community plan that promotes and implements ongoing formation for personal and community renewal.

There are still **serious challenges** that emerge and which need to be tackled perseveringly. First of all, seeing to continuity between the initial formation phase and ongoing formation: there is a considerable distance between initial formation communities and the other communities. Secondly, the systematic coordination of ongoing formation cannot be weak or left to the goodwill of individuals alone.

If these two challenges are not addressed, the gap between principles and daily pastoral practice will not be bridged. Added to this are increasing difficulties in accompaniment due to the lack of

trained staff for spiritual direction and community leadership, which weakens the support system within formation programmes. The consequences of these shortcomings can be seen from the fact that the friendly talk with the rector and spiritual accompaniment have not been habitually adopted by Salesians for their vocational growth and discernment.

The lack of qualified confessors and people who can offer accompaniment shows up not only in our service to the confreres but also to young people. In fact there are not many confreres who dedicate their time to the ministry of listening and accompaniment, preferring services of management rather than encounter with individuals.

Another very delicate element that provinces are facing in terms of awareness, accompaniment and formation, are the painful cases of sexual abuse, developing preventive measures and a reflection in the formation area about the causes, so that any recurrence of this drama is prevented.

Interpretation

The **lack of a systematic formation programme** does not create continuity between initial formation and ongoing formation. Attention to matters such as the personalisation of the formation process and personal responsibility in initial formation would be a help for people to mature and be receptive to the ongoing formation process. This process should include practical aspects that help the confreres to experience profound relationships in the community and the EPCs and to be ready to face the mission in today's cultural context.

The various proposals for ongoing formation found in the provinces do not always produce significant life changes because they are either not ones of quality or are experienced in a habitual and formal manner.

Personal accompaniment arises from the need for God and the perception of one's own fragility that opens up to entrusting oneself to someone who accompanies them. Accompaniment as a transformational experience of God's love allows us to face the new challenges of religious life caused by new cultural contexts, the rapid changes in social media, and the lack of role models. The text known as "Young Salesians and Accompaniment" has highlighted that among the causes linked to the difficulty Salesians have in letting themselves be accompanied there is sometimes a not always positive experience during initial formation, sometimes due to a lack of confidentiality, and the difficulty in finding prepared guides.

Finally, some issues related to emotional (affective) development and, specifically, the **drama of** conscience, spiritual, and even sexual abuse have as causes, among other things, the lack of education and formation received about communicating one's emotional and affective experiences.

Choices

1. The Provincial shall take to heart the composition of communities and formation teams in the houses of initial formation capable of meeting the challenge of interculturalism, intergenerational

exchange, and emotional maturity, including through the presence of well-prepared and suitable female figures⁴.

2. The Provincial with his Council shall establish in each province a range of measures aimed at preventing and responding adequately when faced with potential situations of abuse. In particular:
 - he will establish a rigorous protocol of prevention and response to abuses in all Salesian works, with obligatory formation for all EPC members.
 - he will offer psychological and spiritual support for victims of abuse.
 - he will establish a process of accompaniment and discernment for confreres accused or guilty of abuse, which includes the corresponding canonical procedures.
 - he will promote a culture of transparency and accountability within the province, encouraging prevention and investigation of suspicious or inappropriate behaviour.
3. The Salesian community shall value the proposals coming from the province or from other educational or religious institutions for the formation of Salesians and lay people in the EPC in order to grow in discerning the signs of the times and better understand the youth world and the challenges of new cultural contexts and social media.
4. The Salesian shall commit himself to being accompanied in order to offer spiritual accompaniment to young people. When necessary he shall also value other kinds of accompaniment with the help of specialists for the integration of all human dimensions: psychic, relational, intercultural, medical...

1.5. Commitment to evangelical fraternity and openness to the excluded

“Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. but we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found’ (Lk 15:31b-32)

Listening

Evangelical fraternity is experienced very well in some communities according to the **family spirit** with which we build communion of persons (C51). Indeed, in many Salesian communities there is a profound sense of multicultural and inter-generational collaboration and the values of the gospel are witnessed to: sensitivity, commitment, dedication, closeness and fraternal charity, communion between Salesians, employees and lay volunteers, members of the Salesian Family and young people.

A point that is strongly recognised by the Church and civil society is the **commitment with and for young people** who are experiencing new forms of poverty (refugees, migrants, street children,

⁴ “What would have become of Valdocco without the presence of Mamma Margaret? Would your houses have been possible without this woman of faith? Without a real, effective and affective presence of women, your works would lack the courage and the ability to transform presence into hospitality, into a home. Faced with the rigour that excludes, we must learn to generate the new life of the Gospel. I invite you to implement approaches in which the female voice, her outlook and her actions – appreciated for her individuality – finds an echo in making decisions; not simply as a helper but as someone fully involved in your presences.” *Message of His Holiness Pope Francis to the members of GC28*, in ACG 433.

youth in conflict with the law, ethnic and indigenous minorities, marginalised individuals, people with different sexual orientations, people with physical or mental disabilities) and to whom opportunities are provided both to address immediate needs and to ensure long-term responses through education, vocational training, and pastoral care. The playground and assistance continue to be central Salesian categories in our pedagogy as a free and informal meeting place.

At the same time, however, there are **wounds in fraternity** and **lack of attention** to the excluded. There are communities where the confreres feel excluded or are avoided due to interpersonal differences, thus risking isolation.

Concentration on personal mission at the expense of community mission and, at times, abuse of *social media* weakens the sense of unity. This way of living, which weakens fraternity among the confreres, is also reflected within the EPC, with little commitment to the animation of the laity and the Salesian Family. Moreover, without genuine sharing of the commitments entrusted to the community, care for the excluded is often entrusted to individual confreres; unity and coherence of the proposal are lacking, pastoral action is not integrated into a provincial plan resulting in a lack of continuity over time. An **urgent challenge** emerges at this point: balancing fidelity to the Salesian charism with a prophetic openness to the signs of the times, that is, maintaining our specific identity by adapting to new social realities.

Interpretation

When a community listens to the Word, experiences fraternal union, breaks bread and prays (Acts 2:42), the fraternity of the community extends to all, especially the excluded and marginalised in society, and becomes a prophetic sign for young people. On the other hand, when **openness to the poor** is lived **without the primacy of God**, education becomes functional, efficiency is the only criterion of mission, excessive work rhythms lead to dispersion and in the end the poorest are no longer considered a priority (GC27, 55).

To overcome a pastoral care of sporadic events and attention to the poor entrusted only to individual confreres (or individual lay people), the proper functioning of the EPC council is an important resource and a place in which to experience sharing because it strengthens family spirit, seeks overall, shared solutions, guarantees continuity in processes. A community approach accompanies every phase of formation and is essential for the care of poor, at risk and abandoned young people (C26).

Choices

1. The General Chapter shall assess the opportunity for adding an article to the General Regulations specifically dedicated to Social Works.
2. The Rector Major, with his Council, shall promote a reflection at the level of the Congregation on the revitalisation of the oratory experience in the contemporary context for an educational presence in the “digital courtyard” and in channels of youth influence. Likewise, he will reflect on the establishment of “frontier communities” in areas of conflict or extreme poverty.

3. The General Councillor for Youth Ministry will study the establishment of a “Salesian network for migrants” that connects Salesian works in the countries of origin, transit and destination of migratory flows.
4. The provinces shall study the possibility of establishing “peace communities” in conflict zones, where Salesians of different nationalities live together as a witness of reconciliation and intercultural dialogue.
5. The Salesian community, depending on the context and environment in which it is located, shall make its facilities accessible and available to the poorest and most marginalised young people in the neighbourhood, recovering the Oratory spirit to foster an environment for free and welcoming encounter.
6. Initial formation houses shall regularly organise a meaningful pastoral experience in contexts of poverty or mission, accompanying the confreres on a personal and community level to ensure that the experience is internalised, including the practice of “mentoring” between young and old.
7. The EPC council will revise its Educative and Pastoral Plan to include concrete initiatives of reception and integration for poor young people, migrants and refugees, networking with the other educational agencies in the area.



CORE AREA 2

**SALESIANS, SALESIAN FAMILY AND LAY PEOPLE
TOGETHER “WITH” AND “FOR” YOUNG PEOPLE**

“One heart and soul” (Acts 4:32)



We are called to embrace our shared mission with a deep sense of responsibility and collaboration with our lay collaborators and with the Salesian Family, striving to effectively serve young people. The topics presented here prompt us to evaluate and improve our spiritual and apostolic lives, ensuring that our efforts are grounded in faith and a passionate commitment to our mission. It is essential to adapt to the evolving needs of young people by creatively exploring new methods to address contemporary challenges. In this context, supporting our resources and structures for the mission to the poorest becomes a priority and is crucial. United as one heart and with one goal, we move forward in harmony with the Spirit, making choices that will shape a future of hope for our ministry with and for young people.

2.1. Completing the reflection undertaken by GC28 on the shared mission

*“So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything,
but only God who gives the growth.
The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose,
and each will receive wages according to the labour of each.
For we are God’s servants, working together;
you are God’s field, God’s building.” (1 Cor 3:7-9)*

Listening

In many provinces it has become a common heritage that the **animating nucleus** is not made up only of the religious community, but of the entire EPC council⁵. In fact, many lay people share in responsibility for the mission, being involved in leadership roles and in the planning and animation of our works. Lay people belonging to Salesian Family Groups have worked alongside the Salesians, proud to take part in the mission of Don Bosco. Awareness of the common baptismal vocation has also grown, which has meant that the formation of the laity has not only been carried out from a professional point of view, but also from a spiritual and charismatic point of view.

Some Salesians resist and struggle to share leadership with the laity due to the persistence of a clerical mentality and the fear of losing spaces of power. Additionally, many communities fail to fully encourage participation and responsibility within collaborative frameworks, preventing them from embracing the ethos of the EPC working with a SEPP that is the result of a collective effort of analysis and selection of the best options (GC27,13).

The formation of lay collaborators in the Salesian charism is still insufficient, because it is almost exclusively understood as the delegation of certain tasks and functions.

It is not always clear to whom the term “lay” refers: whether to a member of the Christian community with a specific baptismal vocation, to a collaborator or an employee working in a Salesian work or to someone who shares responsibility for the Salesian mission or to a member of the Salesian Family. Finally, we have not always been able to know, promote and plan the activity of the Salesian Family effectively.

⁵ Cf. Salesian Youth Ministry Frame of Reference. 1.3. *A specific animation service the animating nucleus.*

Interpretation

The Church is on a journey towards **synodality**, a path that implies collaboration and sharing in decisions among all the baptised and requires a more participatory approach to mission. The mission shared between Salesians and lay people is inherent in the same baptismal vocation and is at the same time also a charismatic imperative, not only linked to a need for numbers. In fact, we know that lay people make an original and essential contribution to our mission, enriching it with their experience and lifestyle (C47).

However, there is no convergence on the identity of the beneficiaries of the Congregation's interventions when it comes to shared mission and joint Salesian-lay formation, because the term "lay" is very broad and needs clarification. If formation processes do not take into account the "profile of the layperson" to offer a charismatic formation that is gradual and appropriate to each personal situation, according to the task, skills and life experiences, we will continue in ambiguity.

The difficulties in collaboration between Salesians and lay people stem in part from an inadequate definition of responsibilities, the resistance of some confreres and the lack of mutual trust. On the one hand, it is necessary to overcome attitudes of clericalism and, on the other hand, to develop a strategic plan that activates processes to prepare people who assume responsibilities in top positions with the necessary change in the structural organisation of the provinces.

"Common formation to the shared mission is an absolute priority and must be addressed above all to the members of the animating nucleus"⁶. Insufficient formation of the laity in the Salesian charism and the lack of a joint formation plan hinder progress in the shared mission. This requires a renewed commitment to the charismatic formation of the laity.

Choices

1. The Rector, together with his Council, shall promote the establishment and/or strengthening of the EPC council, clearly defining the responsibilities, roles and tasks of Salesians and laity.
2. The Delegate for formation and the Delegate for Youth Ministry in each province shall prepare a curriculum (a set of processes) for joint and ongoing formation among Salesians and lay people, focused on the shared mission and charismatic identity.
3. The Province shall prepare a systematic qualification plan in Salesian identity starting from the profile of the laity that takes into account the starting point of the laity, to whom it should be 'addressed' and the levels of competence in pedagogy and Salesian spirituality that they want to acquire.
4. The Province shall undertake a revision of the traditional organisation structures to make possible a professional and charismatic accompaniment of the laity with top roles and with responsibility in the financial, educational or pastoral management of the work.

⁶ Cf. FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME, A. The Rector Major's Action Programme for the Salesian Congregation After General Chapter 28. *Together with the Laity in Mission and Formation*, in AGC 433.

2.2. Fostering spiritual and apostolic life

“Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; continue in these things, for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers.” (1 Tim 4:16).

Listening

Many EPCs enjoy a good spiritual and apostolic vitality: collaboration with the laity is fruitful, formation proposals encourage paths of growth in the faith for both lay people who share responsibility and young people. Such vitality is based on the charismatic roots that guide the apostolic mission of the confreres. They are able to guarantee the balance between prayer and action in the Salesian community through retreats, the care of sacramental life, and spiritual readings. These are occasions spent together with the laity and this benefits the entire EPC.

In some EPCs, however, there is a **decline in spiritual vitality**, with attention given to external works to the detriment of the life of prayer, reducing apostolic energy. Lay people are sometimes seen as substitutes rather than as collaborators, creating distance between Salesians and our beneficiaries, and limiting deeper spiritual engagement. It is also difficult to establish “outgoing” communities and there is a tendency towards a “conservation” style of pastoral care, with little or nothing new, repeating the usual patterns.

Interpretation

The decrease in the spiritual and apostolic vitality of the Salesians, a crucial element for their mission, reflects the “identity crisis” of consecrated life and pastoral workers mentioned in *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG78). This concerning phenomenon highlights a fundamental challenge that the Congregation is called to face in order to keep the charism alive in the contemporary world.

The diminishing forces, the decreasing number of confreres, the growing commitment to the management of the structures and ageing cause the detachment of the Salesian community from the work and the decline in spiritual life. This is not overcome through sterile activism and **functionalism** that lead to the **fragmentation** of life, but through the recovery of a poor life and sacrifice for others (*cetera tolle*), sharing with the laity. These are all elements that restore vigour to the mission, making it possible to see young people with the very eyes and compassion of Jesus the Good Shepherd (*da mihi animas*). The challenge is to find effective ways to nourish the spiritual and apostolic life of all EPC members, respecting the diversity of faith and promoting a shared Salesian spirituality.

Choices

1. The Province, inspired by the beginnings of Valdocco where young people lived with Don Bosco and priests and lay people participated with him in the mission, shall boldly plan experiences of life with young people in suitable communities: Salesians, lay people and young people can live together in the same house experimenting with new forms of shared life, spirituality, joint formation and sharing the mission.

2. The Province shall organise annual refresher courses on Salesian spirituality and pedagogy for both confreres and lay collaborators. It will ensure that all Salesian spiritual and animation material, as well as pedagogical literature, is made accessible to every community and confrere, and that the Rector regularly animates the community on Salesian topics.
3. The EPC council shall help to rediscover spirituality and the Salesian charism, as indicated in the Constitutions (C10-21), to maintain the balance between action and contemplation.

2.3. Educating and evangelising

*“All scripture is inspired by God
and is useful for teaching, for reproof,
for correction, and for training in righteousness,
so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient,
equipped for every good work”
(2 Tim 3:16-17)*

Listening

Faithful to the Preventive System which combines the educational and evangelising dimensions in a unified proposal of formation, qualified initiatives shall continue to be developed to accompany young people in education to the faith, seeking increasingly appropriate ways for the proclamation of Christ and for the integral growth of the human person.

In the Salesian proposal, several specific formation projects have been developed in the ethical (conscience formation), affective-sexual, ecological, socio-political, digital, artistic, sports dimensions, etc., with the aim of primarily reaching out to young people who are in situations of difficulty related to the crisis of the family, feelings of loneliness and generational distrust, various forms of addiction, psychological distress, or as a result of the de-Christianised environment.

The developing social context, which includes migration, human trafficking and the LGBTQI+, presents further **obstacles**. Finding the balance between education and evangelisation remains a key challenge, particularly in addressing special needs and socio-political changes that require a broader collaboration of educational forces and serious study of and adaptability to the modern context.

This cultural climate leads some educators (Salesians and lay people) to be fearful in the proclamation of Christ, especially in overly secularised or predominantly non-Christian contexts. Our response for young people who seek depth, spirituality, interiority in our houses is often poor and insignificant, and sees us engaged more in “secular” than properly evangelising initiatives. Rarely do we arrive at offering explicit proposals of vocational commitment to young people and the laity, by giving them room to play an active role.

Interpretation

The **Valdocco Oratory** continues to be a **permanent criterion** for us Salesians (C40). On the Valdocco option and on the charism of presence, Pope Francis reminds us that “Even before things

that need to be done, the Salesian is a living reminder of a presence in which availability, listening, joy and dedication are the essential features which give rise to processes”⁷.

This approach calls for educators capable of embodying Salesian values in multicultural and inter-religious contexts. The impact of secularisation and de-Christianisation in many of our cultural contexts means that many educators, consecrated and lay, find certain charismatic proposals of our educative and pastoral project inadequate and even obsolete , in particular those related to the spiritual life.

The increasingly intense demands on the quality of educational and pastoral service generate a **feeling of tiredness or things become a drag**, which can lead to choices being given up on from the point of view of both educational and vocational commitment.

Sensitive to the **signs of the times**, with initiative and continuous flexibility, we are evaluating, renewing and creating new activities (C41). This underlines our flexibility and adaptability in the face of socio-political challenges, but also indicates the continued need for collaboration and growth to address modern challenges, such as migration, human trafficking, and issues related to gender identity and sexual orientation.

Choices

1. The General Chapter shall evaluate the appropriateness of adapting the vision and language of the new evangelisation in harmony with the Church’s Magisterium by integrating and revising Articles 6 and 30 of the Constitutions.
2. The General Councillor for Youth Ministry and the General Councillor for Social Communication shall study plans for a “global Salesian digital platform” for education and evangelisation which can also involve young people in remote areas or in situations of difficulty.
3. The Province shall organise preparation and updating programmes involving experts in fields such as the digital world, social and political contexts and multicultural environments to equip Salesians and lay collaborators to face the ever-changing challenges in this field.
4. The Province shall study the opportunity for establishing “listening and psychological support centres” offering professional help to young people and adults in difficulty and to develop appropriate formation programmes.
5. The EPC council shall ensure the drawing up of the SEPP for the work by wisely combining the proposals related to education with those that are typically about evangelising, without neglecting either of the two dimensions of the Salesian mission.
6. The Rector, the EPC councils and those responsible for different areas of the work shall promote a commitment in the EPC to networking with the public and private sector to offer qualified and relevant programs for young people, addressing contemporary issues such as migration, multiculturalism and secularisation, while promoting flexibility and adaptability as indicated by Salesian values.
7. Every Salesian educator, consecrated and lay, shall renew the commitment to assistance, seeing to their presence in the midst of young people

⁷ Cf. FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME, A. The Rector Major’s Action Programme for the Salesian Congregation After General Chapter 28. *Living the “Salesian sacrament of presence”*, in AGC 433.

2.4. Looking for new models of presence and new expressions of the Salesian charism

“Thus I make it my ambition to proclaim the good news, not where Christ has already been named, so that I do not build on someone else’s foundation” (Rom 15:20)

Listening

As Salesians we continue to have **the ability to engage with marginalised and vulnerable youth**, such as migrants, street children, and those facing gender inequalities, social discrimination, or mental health issues. Collaboration with government and non-government organisation aims at shaping policies in favour of young people, while taking advantage of new technologies to connect with them in the digital world.

Without questioning the relevance of traditional responses, many provinces have committed themselves to starting new models of service to young people, supported by the collaboration of many lay people and the young people themselves.

There is also a growing commitment, together with the Salesian Family, to the socio-political formation of young people, despite the worrying trend towards political disengagement. In addition, some steps are being taken in the world of art, music, communication, recognising the possibilities offered in this field for education and evangelisation.

Signs of growing religious and political fundamentalism in several countries around the world are also of concern. It is important to consider these and other social phenomena and the need to increase collaboration with lay people to respond to the needs of socially isolated, dependent or marginalised young people.

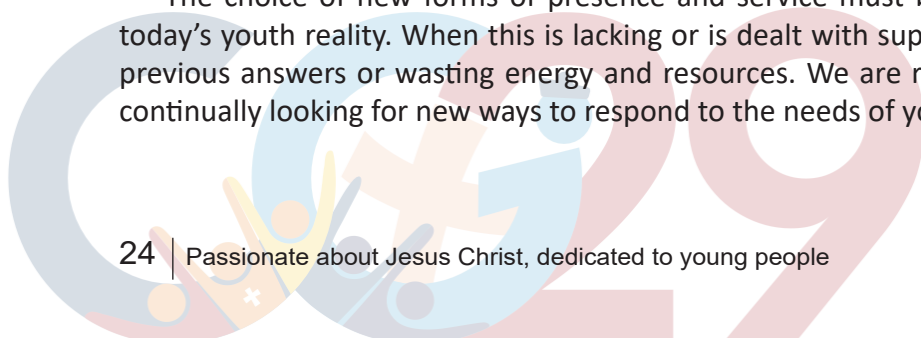
There is a **resistance in many confreres to leaving some structures** where we feel safer, in order to venture into new projects.

There is a lack of specific formation for new ways of Salesian apostolate where good will is not enough, but adequate and specific preparation for the new demands is required.

Interpretation

The new models of Salesian presence require a **creative pedagogical mentality** and qualified human resources. We must be attentive to the “signs of the times” to be able to respond effectively to new youth challenges (C19). However, the lack of preparation and financial means often hinders this innovation, risking making our presence ineffective in the contemporary context.

The choice of new forms of presence and service must be preceded by a serious analysis of today’s youth reality. When this is lacking or is dealt with superficially, we end up reproducing the previous answers or wasting energy and resources. We are required to be flexible and proactive, continually looking for new ways to respond to the needs of young people.



Choices

1. The Province shall promote a commitment among the Salesians, the Salesian Family and lay collaborators to a continuous and active presence among the young, giving priority to accompaniment in their physical and digital environments.
2. The Province shall plan for the specialisation of some confreres in areas of service which reveal new expressions of the Salesian charism: migrants, refugees, unaccompanied minors, LGBTQI+ groups.

2.5. Communion with the young and formation to integral ecology and in digital culture

“I write to you, children, because you are strong and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one” (1 Jn 2:14)

Listening

In many works, the community is open to **welcoming young people** to sharing prayer, meals and moments of reflection on the Salesian mission with them. In some provinces there is great sensitivity to what children and young people are suffering because of the consequences of wars and conflicts, political crises including those due to expressions of nationalism, anti-Semitism, racism and other forms of social exclusion.

Awareness has grown in the provinces, promoting **ecological initiatives** with concrete actions towards the protection of creation that have involved young people in actions in tune with the Magisterium of Pope Francis.

In many provinces, awareness of the importance of **digitalisation processes** that are influencing especially young “digital natives” is growing. There are provinces in which “the digital continent” is recognised as the “new courtyard or playground” for encountering young people. In various provinces the Salesians are successfully using digital platforms for evangelisation, youth ministry and education, offering digital literacy programs and creating content that accords with the gospel and Salesian spirituality.

There is some **inconsistency** in the integration of ecological practices in many communities that do not promote systematic education and formation in integral ecology. In many provinces the urgency of the ecological crisis is not taken seriously: the evident threat to the existence of flora and fauna and even to humankind itself is considered a fad or linked to the programs of movements and some political parties. Initiatives in ecology often remain isolated or are limited to works in which educators are more sensitive to this reality. There are almost no “province policies” capable of promoting the development of this dimension by showing the intimate relationship between spirituality and ecology.

There is a lack of a comprehensive strategy to address issues related to emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and social media, so as to align with the goals of evangelisation and education. The discomfort of some confreres in addressing issues related to the digital world and

ecology, combined with the insufficient institutional integration of “ecological spirituality”, calls for a more solid and systematic approach to these vital areas.

The objective of Salesian pedagogy is to form “upright citizens” (C31). This includes political education, education for peace, education for democracy and the promotion of human and children’s rights according to the tradition of Don Bosco and the urgings of the Council and the magisterium of the Congregation⁸.

Interpretation

Predilection for young people is at the heart of the Salesian mission (C14). The presence among young people, especially in a time of crisis and conflict like ours, requires a renewed commitment to understanding and responding to the challenges that young people face.

Integral ecology, as outlined in *Laudato Si’*, is not an optional choice but an imperative for the contemporary Salesian mission. Pope Francis says, “We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature” (LS139). The lack of a coherent “province policy” in this area reflects the disconnect between Salesian spirituality and urgent environmental challenges.

Digital culture represents a new Salesian “courtyard or playground”, as indicated by Pope Francis: the digital environment is a square, a meeting place where one can caress or hurt, have a fruitful discussion or a moral lynching (ChV88). The absence of a comprehensive strategy to address the challenges of emerging technologies risks making the Salesian mission less relevant and effective for “digital natives” (GC27, 62).

The formation of “upright citizens”, a key element of Salesian pedagogy, has been neglected despite its growing importance in the current global context. As we are reminded by the Rector major, “The upright citizen of the third millennium is a person who not only does not steal and does not deceive, but who lives his citizenship as a service to others and to society”⁹. To effectively address these challenges, an integrated approach is needed that recognises the interconnection between spirituality, ecology and digital culture. This requires not only an adaptation of practices, but a real “ecological and digital conversion” that permeates all aspects of the Salesian mission, forming young people as “prophets” of the care of our “common home” and responsible citizens in the world in all its forms.

Choices

1. The General Councillors for Youth Ministry and Social Communication, and the Salesian Universities (IUS) shall promote studies on the challenges of digitalisation: social media, artificial intelligence, addictions.

⁸ FERNANDEZ ARTIME, A. *Good Christians and upright citizens. Strenna 2020*. In AGC 431.

⁹ Cf. FERNANDEZ ARTIME, A. *Good Christians and upright citizens. Strenna 2020*. In AGC 431.

2. The Provincial shall establish a commission for integral ecology that has the task of studying, developing proposals, preparing confreres and lay people, which promotes concrete steps of “ecological conversion”.
3. The Province shall consider promoting a “Salesian youth movement for the climate”, mobilising young people for concrete actions in favour of the environment and turning all Salesian works into “eco-communities”.
4. The Provincial Delegate for Youth Ministry, in collaboration with the Delegate for Social Communication, shall draw up a formation plan on integral ecology and digital culture for Salesians, lay people and young people, integrating these topics into pastoral planning at all levels.
5. The Provincial Delegate for Youth Ministry, together with the local coordinators, shall draw up a plan to entrust young people with concrete responsibilities for animation in the works, promoting their leading role.
6. The Rector of each community, in collaboration with the council of the EPC, shall identify and reserve some areas in the house for the reception of young people, encouraging their participation in the daily life of the Salesian community.
7. The Salesian community shall prepare plans to reach the 100 per cent renewable energy target.
8. Each community shall set in motion and complete an energy audit, in order to explore the best options for renewable energy sources¹⁰.

2.6. Seeking, together with the laity, financial sustainability of Salesian presences without ever excluding the poor.

“How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?” (1 Jn 3:17)

Listening

Awareness of the importance of economic sustainability for the mission has grown, especially with regard to assistance to the poor. Province Planning and Development Offices (PDO) and the involvement of lay professionals ensure transparent and efficient management of resources. Compliance with government legislation in many provinces has led to professionalisation in the field of financial management, resulting in increased transparency and accountability.

The collaboration of competent lay people, especially in financial management, has been essential. This collaboration, along with the establishment of development offices and foundations, has helped mobilise resources through sponsorships, projects, and income-generating activities. The **solidarity** among provinces has manifested itself in interventions by the financially stronger provinces that have provided aid in times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

Despite recent financial challenges, the Congregation has maintained its **commitment to the poor** and the vulnerable. Some works have developed commendable strategies to support families and young people in economic hardship. These efforts underscore the mission of the Congregation to serve those in need, while seeking to self-finance and prudently use resources.

¹⁰ Cf. FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME, A. The Rector Major’s Action Programme for the Salesian Congregation After General Chapter 28. *Accompanying the young towards a sustainable future*, in AGC 433.

In many situations, there is still some **difficulty in involving the laity** in self-financing strategies. Moreover, some confreres fail or do not want to plan solutions with a view to self-sustainability. Misunderstandings, together with unsustainable tax increases in some countries, further weaken initiatives to support our works.

In some provinces, financial transparency is lacking, especially where management responsibilities are entrusted to people without the necessary professional skills. All this frequently leads to wrong decisions and consequent financial losses. The economic sustainability of Salesian works is often not considered a priority in the EPC councils, within which there is a lack of sharing on these issues. In addition, the decrease in local resources due to the growing number of retired confreres and the low remuneration of staff create problems of turnover and instability.

Some provinces remain heavily dependent on state funding and external aid, which in crisis situations risk not being disbursed.

The absence of solid and reliable fundraising structures in several provinces further jeopardises the future of their educational and pastoral projects. Exacerbating this challenge is the strong competition with other NGOs and the growing distrust in the Church, which has led long-standing benefactors to withdraw their support. The emergence of nationalist policies calls into question development aid and adds uncertainty to the financial future of our works.

Interpretation

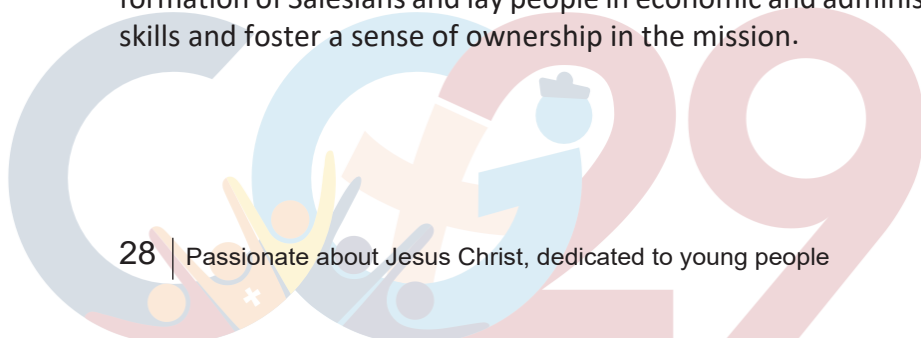
The need to involve lay professionals in financial management is increasingly recognised. This collaboration favours transparency and the effective use of resources. Prepared lay people offer their own skills that enhance financial sustainability, ensuring continuity of the mission.

The commitment of the Congregation to youth and the poor remains central. Solidarity among Salesian communities and partnerships with local past pupils and donors reinforce resource mobilisation efforts. These kinds of collaboration foster resilience, ensuring financial sustainability without compromising the preferential option for the poor.

Living a simple lifestyle, in accordance with the evangelical counsel of poverty, helps to manage resources responsibly. Our credibility attracts the support of external benefactors and foundations, making us known as the Congregation for the poor (GC27,55).

The reluctance to involve the laity in financial management, due to trust issues and lack of transparency, hampers sustainability efforts. It is essential to overcome the paternalistic mentality that undermines trust in the involvement of the laity.

The lack of professional management, long-term planning and resource management policies creates inefficiencies, leading to dependence on foreign aid. Financial transparency and joint formation of Salesians and lay people in economic and administrative matters are necessary to build skills and foster a sense of ownership in the mission.



In some cases, the economic sustainability of Salesian works is not sufficiently prioritised in decision-making councils (EPCs). Some structures require many financial and personnel resources that are not in step with the youth mission. Greater reliance on expert advice and innovation is needed to diversify funding sources and reduce dependence on external benefactors alone.

Choices

1. The Province shall renew trust in Divine Providence and shall identify concrete and up-to-date ways of seeking and accompanying benefactors to help us support works dedicated to the poorest.
2. The Province, also availing itself of experienced lay professionals, shall set up a team to search for and implement self-sustainable financial solutions for the works, without excluding the poor, and form a finance commission made up of Salesians and qualified lay people to face the economic challenges of getting young people into work.
3. The Rector with his Council shall promote a culture of simplicity, financial transparency and active involvement of the laity in financial management, seeking new and diversified sources of funding.
4. The Salesian community shall regularly assess its resources, including land, buildings and personal lifestyle, aligning sustainable income goals with religious discipline, also involving experts, especially from the Salesian Family and past pupils, to prepare sustainability plans that reduce dependency on external aid.
5. The EPC council shall be responsible for the drafting, monitoring and evaluation of the annual financial statements and the financial health of the works, with the guidance of Salesian or lay administrators and external consultants, ensuring transparency and accountability.



CORE AREA 3

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

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



The third core area fits harmoniously into the discernment path of the General Chapter, following the theme and structure indicated in the letter of convocation of the Rector Major and the work sheet sent to all the provincial chapters. Similar to the first two, the third core area also incorporates the contribution of the 92 provincial chapters.

This core area, however, has a peculiarity: in addition to the issues ordinarily discussed, it also includes a series of juridical issues that arise from the previous General Chapter and that require confirmation or revision for their validation. These issues were carefully examined by the Pre-Chapter Juridical Commission, which prepared special forms to facilitate the in-depth work and to enable a clear and informed vote by the Chapter assembly.

In compliance with the methodology adopted for Chapter work, we have integrated these juridical issues within the third core area, trying to ensure a fluid and comprehensive discussion.

Finally, it is important to recall that there are other important issues that, while suggesting amendments to the Constitutions, have not been included in this section. These issues will be discussed directly in the Assembly if deemed appropriate by the members of the GC29. These materials, sent in by individuals and groups of confreres, are available to all Chapter members for further study and contribution.

3.1. Organisation of the General Council

Listening

Some provinces appreciate the current **structure of the General Council** which they recognise as effective for the animation and governance of the Congregation with a complementarity between Sector Councillors and Regional Councillors: the former are more across-the-board and the latter become the “eyes and ears” of the General Council in a particular geographical area.

The intercultural nature of the General Council also offers a diversified perspective that is also highlighted thanks to the highly appreciated visits of the Rector Major and the members of the Council to strengthen ties with the Provinces and promote communion.

Other provinces say that the General Council is composed of **too many members**. It would be necessary to have a more agile and, consequently, more effective structure, also to avoid an accumulation of appointments, which compromises the quality of animation and governance that appears too focused on efficiency and management processes rather than on fostering relationships and personal commitment.

There is a lack of coordination and communication between the Sector Councillors and the Regional Councillors, as well as a kind of juxtaposition between the Sectors themselves, which send too many proposals to the provinces, making it difficult to take them on.

The **overlap** of roles within the Council, in particular the General Councillor for Youth Ministry and the General Councillor for Social Communication, leads to duplication of efforts with limited impact.

The role of the Delegate of the Salesian **Family** Secretariat remains unclear.

Interpretation

The tension between efficiency and communion in the General Council reflects the challenge of balancing effectiveness in governance, and family spirit. Too many responsibilities lead to challenges in coordinating across Sectors and Regions. Moreover, the current way of electing General Councillors does not always provide the basis for effective coordination and teamwork in the Council itself.

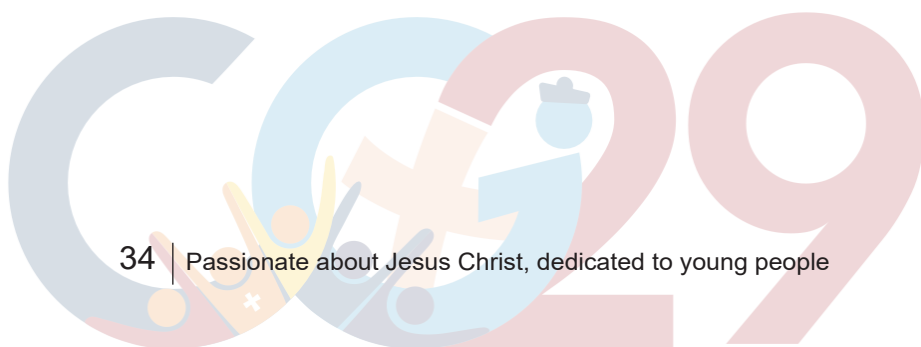
The lack of clarity of roles and tasks within the General Council is due to the lack of a vision that integrates the Salesian mission and the governance structure of the Congregation, avoiding overlapping responsibilities.

The establishment of secretariats (R108) may be a solution with a view to easing the commitments of individual councillors, resulting in a **reduction** of the number of **Council members**.

The poor or unrecognised effectiveness of the animation of the Salesian Family depends on the lack of knowledge of the functions of the secretariat.

Choices

1. The General Chapter shall decide on the composition of the General Council as indicated in **Form 1**.
2. The General Chapter shall study the advisability of setting up specific secretariats to assist the animation and governance of the Congregation as indicated in **Form 2**.
3. The Rector Major shall establish a Central Office including the spokesperson, ANS, the Salesian Bulletin, the website and other communication networks, to improve the coherence and effectiveness of communication worldwide.
4. The General Council shall implement a plan to improve coordination and communication between Sector Councillors and Regional Councillors in order to reduce overlapping initiatives and facilitate their implementation in the provinces.
5. The General Council shall develop and implement a system of periodic evaluation of Sectors and secretariats to promote greater synergy, avoid dispersion of interventions and improve the overall effectiveness of central government.



Form 1

Composition of the General Council (C133)

Contributions received

- 17 Provincial Chapters propose not to amend C. 133;
- 48 Chapters propose changes, of which 20 Provincial Chapters propose changes related to the Social Communication Sector, 24 related to the Missions Sector. There are 6 proposals related to the Salesian Family and one proposal related to the establishment of a Sector for the laity.

Rationale for non-amendment:

- the number of councillors is reasonable and sufficient;
- the current composition of the General Council is optimal, is well structured for animation and governance, functions well, and allows for good representation of regions and cultures;
- a reduction of Sectors in favour of very large Sectors does not facilitate coordination.

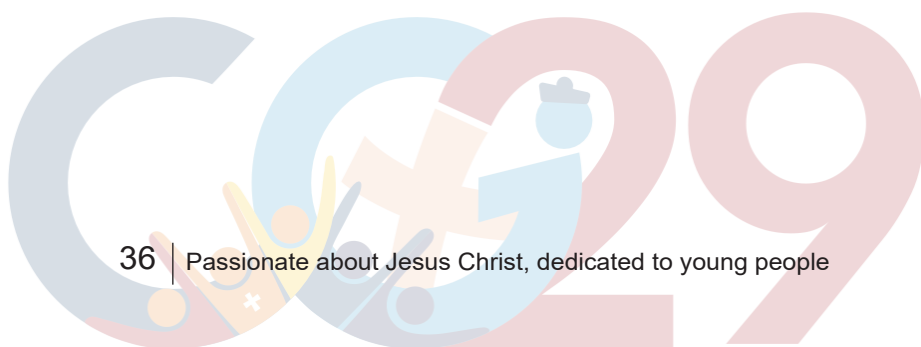
Proposed changes and rationale:

- a) Establish a Councillor for the Salesian Family and laity to ensure more meaningful representation within the General Council;
- b) Increase the number of General Councillors by two: one Councillor for the Salesian Family and a second Councillor for Africa-Madagascar, because, the Salesian Family represents a crucial aspect of our mission and the Africa-Madagascar region is too large;
- c) Reduce Sector Councillors to three: Youth Ministry, Formation, Economy, in order to foster more effective and direct governance. It is advisable to create secretariats for Social Communication, Salesian Family, Missions, Education, in order to make the work of the General Council more streamlined and unified;
- d) A single sector integrating Youth Ministry, Missions and Social Communication, in order to avoid the risk that an excessive operational specialisation of the different areas could compromise an overall vision;
- e) The General Council be composed of: Rector Major, Vicar, Councillor for Youth Ministry, Councillor for Formation, and Economist General, in order to ensure more agile governance. Let the Regionals not be part of the Council, but be Extraordinary Visitors dependent on the Vicar;
- f) All Sectors be eliminated, replacing them with secretariats or technical bodies, leaving only the Regionals, in order to allow for greater coordination of the Council and more effective accompaniment of the provinces;
- g) Establish an additional Sector for works run by lay people;
- h) Transform the Sectors of Social Communication and Missions into secretariats dependent directly on the Rector Major to articulate the world government into three concentric circles: sectors, regions and secretariats, which fosters synodal work;

- i) The Economer General, a member of the Council, be appointed by the Rector Major with the consent of his Council for 6 years.

Suggestions that do not require constitutional changes:

- j) Strengthen Sector teams, including through the post of a coordinator;
- k) Maintain and improve coordination of Regions with the participation of provincial delegates and periodic animation meetings;
- l) Establish secretariats to help the General Council;
- m) consolidate and stabilise the action of the central secretariats (R. 108) by giving them formal authority to make ordinary decisions, and of the offices serving the sectors (R. 107) to accompany the Councillors in their animation;
- n) Appoint a Salesian as executive secretary with professional administrative skills to promote the efficiency of the Council;
- o) entrusting the responsibility for the supervision of the Salesian Historical Institute to the Councillor for Formation, rather than to the Vicar of the Rector Major.



Form 2

Secretariats - possibility of establishment (R108)

Contributions received

- 34 Provincial Chapters propose the possibility of establishing new secretariats;
- 3 Provincial Chapters suggest no changes.

Rationale for no-changes:

- There is no need to establish additional secretariats, the current conformation being sufficient.

Proposed changes and rationale:

- a) Establish a secretariat encompassing school education, vocational training and universities to better coordinate these areas considered fundamental to the Congregation's mission. The majority of provincial chapters place such a secretariat within the area of Youth Ministry, amending R. 108. A minority proposes that it be under the direct dependence of the Rector Major;
- b) Establish a secretariat for the Salesian Family and lay people who share responsibility for the mission to offer them special charismatic care;
- c) Establish a secretariat for the laity which shares responsibility for the mission with the purpose of developing formation paths for the laity themselves and offering guidelines for lay-run works under the responsibility of the Province;
- d) Establish a secretariat for ecology issues with the aim of raising awareness throughout the Congregation;
- e) Establish an executive secretariat with the task of coordinating all other secretariats.

Suggestions that do not require constitutional changes:

- f) none.

3.2. Organisation of the Congregation's Regions

Listening

The regional structure has strengthened ties between the provinces and the central leadership. Regular visits by Regional Councillors foster understanding, cooperation and unified planning through Provincial Conferences (14,15).

The current configuration of regions allows for **networking**, and regional Provincial Conferences have proven useful.

The creation of regional commissions with provincial delegates from each sector (formation, youth ministry, social communication, missions) allowed for better coordination of the Region's journey.

Other provinces point out the difficulty for Regional Councillors to achieve in-depth knowledge of individual provinces and accompany them. Some Regional Councillors have no way to visit all the provinces in the six-year period due to overload of commitments and extension of the regions.

In the more dynamically developing regions, more effective coordination is needed, for example, the **Africa and Madagascar Region** turns out to be too large (41 nations) to be a single region; while the two regions of Europe struggle to dialogue in view of a much-needed reflection on the whole continent.

In addition, there is a significant disparity in financial resources and Salesian personnel among different Regions, which would require a spirit of greater solidarity in the Congregation.

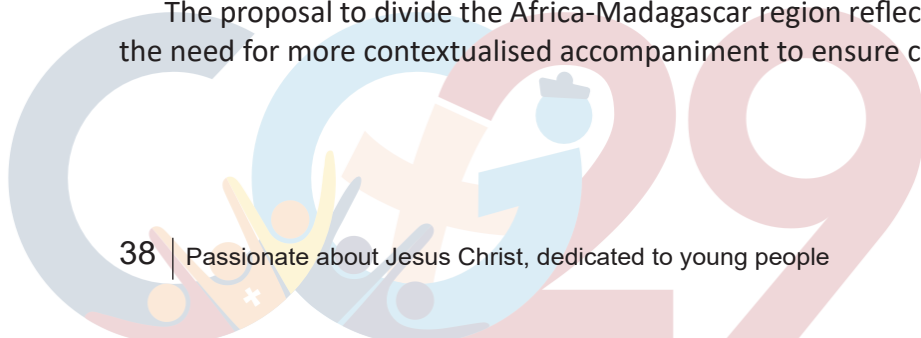
Some provinces argue that the current mode for electing the Regional Councillor is not the most appropriate and that, at the end of the Extraordinary Visitations, the voice of the Regional does not always represent the richness of a province.

Interpretation

The Regional Councillors' difficulty in getting to know the provinces thoroughly is due to the difficulty of harmonising their duties in the central government as members of the General Council with the need for more frequent accompaniment in the Region's provinces.

In addition, strengthening coordination within the General Council to seek a shared way of conducting Extraordinary Visitations and in accompanying provincials would help to act with similar procedures and avoid subjective approaches.

The proposal to divide the Africa-Madagascar region reflects not only numerical growth but also the need for more contextualised accompaniment to ensure charismatic identity.



Choices

1. The General Chapter to comment on the proposal in **Form 3** to divide Africa-Madagascar into two regions to address the challenges of leadership and growth.
2. The Rector Major, especially in the larger regions, should choose a confrere to help the Regional Councillor with Extraordinary Visitations or to collaborate with him in the animation of the Region (R104).
3. Let the General Council review the duties of the Regional Councillor as expressed in Article 140 of the Constitutions and confirmed in Resolution 6 of GC27, so that what is contained therein can be realised (GC27, 81).
4. Regional Councillors could strengthen Provincial Conferences with a view to fostering more effective synergy among provinces in the conference.
5. Regional Councillors and provincials in the Region to promote effective solidarity among provinces by sharing Salesian personnel for common initiatives in the region.

Form 3

Configuration of Regions

Contributions received

- 11 Provincial Chapters propose no change to the current structure of the regions;
- 64 Provincial Chapters propose changes (62 propose the subdivision of the Africa-Madagascar region).

Rationale for non-amendment:

- to study the possibility of a new region in Africa, if the Council and provinces see the need;
- the current organisation of Regions is sufficient for a more synodal experience;
- maintain the current structure, even with the flexibility for possible reconfiguration of Regions to fit contexts and language for better animation.

Proposed changes and rationale:

- a) Leave discernment to the General Council in dialogue with the provinces concerned even if the numerical figure of Salesians in Africa justifies the creation of a second Region (amending C. 154);
- b) Divide the Africa-Madagascar Region into two regions. We note the vastness of the region, increasing number of confreres, emergence of new circumscriptions, excessive load for one Regional Councillor to animate 44 countries;
- c) Revise the current Regions and create a new one in Africa, but keeping only one Regional Councillor to facilitate better accompaniment of the confreres in the regions;
- d) A radical redesign of the Regions is required for more effective animation of the provinces in the same Region;
- e) Revise the configuration of the Central and North Europe Region, transferring France, South Belgium, Croatia, Slovenia and Malta to the Mediterranean region for greater cultural homogeneity and a better composition of the Congregation's World panorama; initial formation to be carried out in Mediterranean formation houses;
- f) Revise the composition of the regions of the European continent for better dialogue between the Mediterranean and Central and North European Regions and better animation of the provinces;
- g) Divide East Asia-Oceania into two regions to better follow up provinces;
- h) UPS to be part of the Mediterranean region because the time has come for a radical reform that takes into account its peculiarities of service to the Congregation.

Suggestions that do not require constitutional changes:

- i) Create two interprovincial conferences in Africa ad experimentum with a view to further possibility of dividing the Region into two;

- j)** Regions should not simply be agglomerations of neighbouring provinces, but should be made up of provinces that are more related in culture and history, following a respectful dialogue with the provinces themselves;
- k)** Identify the criteria, not only linguistic, for the division of Regions;
- l)** Listen to the views of the provincials and the Regional about the method to be applied in the subdivision of the Africa-Madagascar Region.

3.3. Interprovincial bodies

Listening

Interprovincial bodies (conferences, commissions) are a **good opportunity for coordination and sharing** among provinces also taking advantage of the opportunities offered by new technologies.

Some “best practices” and collaborative experiences among provinces such as regional networks have provided good service to provinces.

Some provinces point out the few concrete effects dependent on the decisions of provincial conferences.

A considerable number of provinces indicate that there is little clarity on authority figures in interprovincial bodies. There is a need to clarify the responsibilities of governance and animation in **interprovincial initial formation houses** (*role of Curatorium, Regional, and Formation sector*).

Interprovincial bodies sometimes have autonomous or disconnected lines of work from the government of individual provinces.

Finally, the confreres in local communities are often unaware of the operation of interprovincial structures.

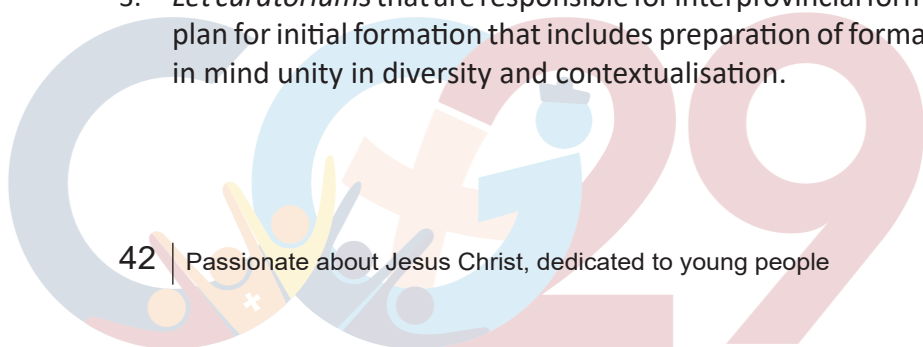
Interpretation

The lack of clarity in interprovincial authority structures reflects the increasing complexity of Salesian organisation and the need for more effective *governance*. The lack of attention to coordination and application of the principle of subsidiarity in the selection of the formation team produces negative consequences in Salesian youth.

When the autonomy of each individual province prevails over the collegial dynamic of reflection and guidance – as established by the provincial conference – there is an impoverishment.

Choices

1. Let the General Council clearly define the statutes and levels of responsibility in the *curatoriums*.
2. Regional Councillors to see that the interprovincial bodies in their Region serve as centres of animation and support for the various projects at the regional level, for the exchange of resources, skills and best practices among the provinces.
3. *Let curatoriums* that are responsible for interprovincial formation houses create an interprovincial plan for initial formation that includes preparation of formators and sharing of personnel keeping in mind unity in diversity and contextualisation.



3.4. Extraordinary Visitations

Listening

Extraordinary Visitations are well planned and carried out and are a time of fraternal sharing. They allow the General Council to get to know the provinces better and to make the Rector Major feel the closeness of the confreres.

In such Visitations, the Regional has the opportunity to personally meet the confreres in depth with **significant impact** on their lives and those of the works.

When the Extraordinary Visitation is conducted by a person other than the Regional Councillor, there is an opportunity for an additional point of view that helps the General Council get to know the provinces better.

Sometimes Extraordinary Visitations are found to be ineffective, especially when conducted at the beginning of the six-year term of the provincial. This seems to be due both to the way the Visitation is conducted and to the fact that it is at the beginning of a term.

Another difficulty depends on the availability of time of the Regional Councillors, which is not always sufficient to know the individual realities in depth and accompany the confreres and communities to implement the recommendations highlighted during the Visitation.

Some confreres believe that the Extraordinary Visitation is simply a “formality” and therefore has no crucial effect on the life of the province. When the Visitation is not carried out by a member of the General Council there is a risk of limiting its effectiveness to the Rector Major’s conclusions alone.

Interpretation

The vastness of some Regions and the number of confreres and communities to be encountered seems to limit the proximity of the Rector Major and the General Council to the life of the provinces and prevents them from embodying the family spirit demanded by Don Bosco.

The perception that the recommendations of Extraordinary Visitations are not always implemented indicates a possible disconnect between the Visitation and ongoing accompaniment. The challenge is to develop effective ways to follow up on the recommendations of the Rector Major while keeping alive the spirit of renewal sparked by the Visitation.

Choices

1. The Provincial and the Provincial Council shall study, in agreement with the Extraordinary Visitor, the way to conduct the Extraordinary Visitation so that local councils, EPC councils and individual confreres can be involved and made participants in the whole process and implement, then, the guidelines sent by the Rector Major.
2. The Provincial with his council prior to the visit will also present to the Extraordinary Visitor the socio-political and religious reality in the area covered by the Province so that a more complete knowledge of the context in which the confreres and laity are working can be had.

3. The Regional Councillor and Provincials study the modalities of the Extraordinary Visitations and consider measures to make them even more fruitful and effective.

3.5. Team Visits

Listening

Team Visits have become **privileged moments of communion** and unity in the animation and governance of the Congregation. They are a valuable tool that offers the opportunity to directly experience moments of fraternity and reflection with the Rector Major and some General Councillors. They help to clearly understand the vision of the General Council and are very useful in evaluating and providing guidance to the provinces of the Region.

Accompaniment for the implementation of decisions following the Visit is lacking. The spillover of the conclusions of the Team Visit to the provinces does not seem to be particularly significant. The evaluation and verification system also appears weak.

The Team Visit program is often too dense. This limits or reduces time for necessary insights. Visits should feature more time devoted to listening and discussion and not just a series of lectures.

The General Councillors offered many substantial teaching contributions, but they did not always grasp in depth the reality of individual provinces. The style of communication was also strongly characterised by the General Councillors' presentations and passive listening to the provincial councils, rather than mutual and fraternal exchange and learning.

The confreres – except those who attend – know very little about it.

Interpretation

The concern of several provinces **about the overly dense schedule** of the Team Visits indicates the tension between the desire to address many issues and the need for deep and thoughtful discernment. This reflects the complexity of regional challenges and the difficulty of balancing efficiency with depth of reflection, as highlighted in the Constitutions (C124) regarding the need to adapt structures to mission needs.

Team Visits should evolve from a one-way communication model to one of mutual exchange and mutual learning. This change would better reflect the spirit of family and the call to shared responsibility expressed in the Constitutions (C123). The challenge is to transform these meetings into true synodical experiences that promote effective collaboration and authentic renewal at the regional level.

Choices

1. Let the Rector Major and the General Council continue to promote Team Visits, with greater participation of the confreres in the preparation phase and in the implementation phase of the decisions made together with the Rector Major, through appropriate communications, also using the meetings of the provincial conferences for verification.

2. The General Council shall study the most suitable way to develop a more synodal style in the Visits together (exchange of experiences, listening, collaborative steps) preceded by good preparation.
3. Let the Regional Councillor, in organising the Team Visit, be careful to give adequate space to spiritual elements, to listen to Provincials and Provincial Councillors, and to propose reflections on urgent issues.

3.6. Organisation of animation in the provinces

Listening

The figure of the Youth Ministry Delegate and the full-time Formation Delegate has been a choice of many provinces.

The creation of commissions for specific areas has facilitated coordination of activities and fellowship thanks in part to frequent and well-planned meetings.

Animation visits by the Provincial and other councillors helps to create a good bond and unity between the Provincial and councillors with the communities.

The role of the Vice-Provincial is unclear and his functions are not well defined.

Because of the many tasks and challenges, the animation of the province sometimes becomes tiring. Provincials are often busier solving problems of the confreres than animating the province: there are many provincial tasks for few confreres. In addition, the provincial's difficulty in delegating some animation tasks reduces the effectiveness of the mission.

Various provinces are requesting to reduce the **frequency of Provincial Chapters** and to replace a Chapter with a Provincial assembly. The Provincial Chapter, convened every three years, serves to prepare for the General Chapter or implement its resolutions/deliberations. However, the time between Chapters seems to be short for implementing the resolutions of the General and Provincial Chapters.

One wonders how the many lay people in our EPCs can be made to truly share responsibility in the Salesian mission.

Interpretation

The lack of clarity in the **role of the Vice-Provincial** reflects the need for better definition of leadership roles (C168). This ambiguity can undermine the effectiveness of provincial animation and requires a revision of the Constitutions to clarify the functions and responsibilities of the Vice-Provincial, ensuring more effective and collaborative leadership.

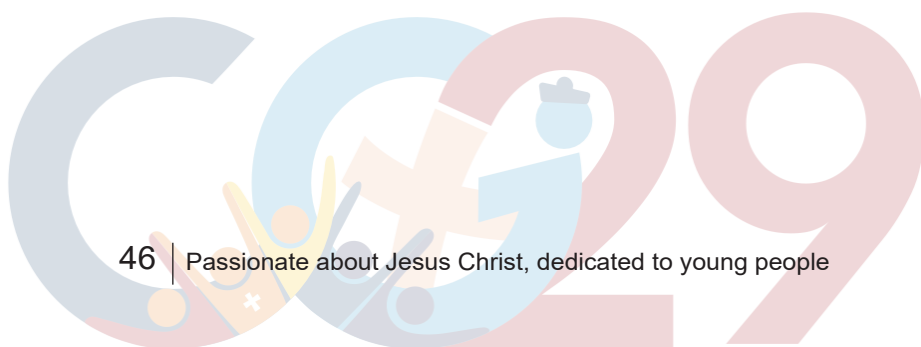
The emphasis that provincials and superiors are busier solving problems than animating reflects the tension between management and leadership – a recurring theme in contemporary religious leadership literature. This situation highlights the need to rethink the role of the superior, better balancing management responsibilities with those of charismatic animation, as outlined in the

Constitutions (C161-162). The challenge is to find a balance that allows superiors to be true animators of Salesian life, without neglecting the practical needs of province management.

Effective animation depends on the teamwork of the Provincial, Councillors and committees. In fact, good coordination helps to focus mission and improve pastoral responses.

Choices

1. The General Chapter shall study the proposed duties of the Vice-Provincial (See **Form 4**).
2. The General Chapter shall study the proposal to incorporate the provincial delegates for Formation and Youth Ministry into the Provincial Council, aligning with the general objectives of the Congregation (See **Form 5**)
3. The General Chapter shall decide on **Forms 6 and 7**.
4. The Provincial and his council shall make visits to all communities and works. In addition, the provincial delegates should work together in harmony to ensure a cohesive and unified animation of the province.
5. The Provincial shall promote that each Province have a Commission for the Protection and Safeguarding of Minors and Vulnerable Persons to ensure that at the provincial and institutional level there is a safety policy for the protection of minors and vulnerable persons in compliance with civil and ecclesiastical laws.



Form 4

Tasks of the Vice-Provincial

Contributions received

- 18 Provincial Chapters propose no change to Article 168 of the Constitutions.
- 16 Chapters propose changes.

Rationale for non-amendment:

- the duties of the Vice-Provincial are sufficiently defined and can always be further specified by the Provincial.

Proposed changes and rationale

- a) entrust the Vice-Provincial with responsibility for religious discipline, similar to the Vicar of the Rector Major;
- b) the Vice-Provincial be the Provincial delegate for Formation;
- c) the Vice-Provincial be the delegate for Youth Ministry.

Suggestions that do not require constitutional changes

- d) the Vice-Provincial not be entrusted with any other duties other than those established by Article 168 of the Constitutions;
- e) the Vice-Provincial not be entrusted with the coordination of too many Province commissions;
- f) the confreres of the province be informed about the meaning of ordinary vicarious power.

Form 5

Composition of the Provincial Council

Contributions received

- 9 Provincial chapters propose no change to Article 164 of the Constitutions.
- 56 Chapters propose changes.

Rationale for no-change:

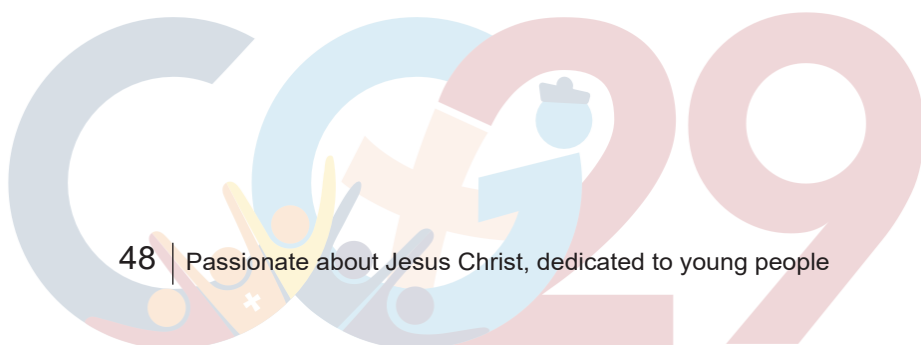
- the Provincial should be free to choose the members he deems most suitable for the Council by not tying himself purely to the roles people hold as the delegate for an animation Sector;
- including the Youth Ministry Delegate and the Formation Delegate as ex officio members in the Provincial Council limits the Provincial's choice of members too much;
- it is not believed that the Formation Delegate should be an ex officio member on the council.

Proposed changes and rationale:

- a) the Youth Ministry Delegate be an ex officio member of the Provincial Council since Youth Ministry is the core of the Salesian mission;
- b) The Formation Delegate be an ex officio member of the Provincial Council for the accompaniment of the confreres in initial and ongoing formation. In addition, the composition of the Provincial Council should reflect that of the General Council;
- c) the Salesian Family Delegate be an ex officio member of the Provincial Council;
- d) there be at least one lay person with voting rights in the Provincial Council for greater shared responsibility of the laity;
- e) Councillors be elected by the confreres.

Suggestions that do not require constitutional changes:

- f) Youth Ministry and Formation Delegates be appointed full-time and reside at provincial headquarters;
- g) The specific duties of Youth Ministry and Formation Delegates need to be clarified.



Form 6

Offices, secretariats, province commissions

Contributions received

- 12 Provincial Chapters propose no change to Article 164 of the Constitutions.
- 7 Chapters propose changes.

Rationale for no-change:

- The current legislation is sufficiently adequate;
- each province can organise things according to its own pastoral needs;

Proposed changes and rationale:

- a) the Youth Ministry Commission and the Formation Commission (as required by the Ratio) be made mandatory in each province as they are strategic for the animation of the province;
- b) each committee have its own Directory approved by the Rector Major;
- c) create a secretariat to coordinate Youth Ministry, Social Communication and Missions;
- d) each province establish a commission to monitor the implementation of the General Chapter's deliberations;
- e) each Province have a Commission for Religious Discipline, charged with the protection of minors and vulnerable people;

Suggestions that do not require constitutional changes:

- f) those responsible for Commissions be appointed for 3 years;
- g) clarify the role of the Formation Delegate given the current trend of the Congregation promoting the joint formation of Salesians and lay people;
- h) form people capable of animating the Salesian Family and lay people who share responsibility with us.

Form 7

Consistency of communities in number and quality

Contributions received

- 19 Provincial Chapters call for amendment of Reg 150.
- 4 Provincial Chapters propose no amendments to Reg 150.

Rationale for no-change:

- Invest energy in the initial and ongoing formation of the confreres to promote the quality of people;
- current regulations be more strictly enforced to ensure communities that reflect Salesian fraternal life;
- it will be up to the Provincial with his council to evaluate individual situations according to targeted planning (See AGC 422, Guidelines).

Proposed changes and rationale:

- a) Amend R. 150 by allowing the number of members with perpetual vows, not in initial formation, to be, ordinarily, no fewer than three Salesians per community;
- b) Amend R. 150: communities with a minimum of four Salesians. In support of these proposals are the numerical decrease in the number of confreres, the difficulty many provinces have in establishing communities with six confreres, and the need to give juridical consistency to the small communities that now exist.

Suggestions that do not require constitutional changes:

- c) Urgent reflection is needed to seek new ways of organising communities.

Other reasons presented in GC28:

- the presence of at least four confreres in perpetual vows who are not in initial formation can sufficiently enable common life and allow the house council to function;
- communion and sharing in the spirit and mission of Don Bosco by Salesians and lay people, now established in large parts of the Congregation, involves the management of works that is different from the past and the entrusting to lay people of tasks once carried out exclusively by Salesians;
- some provinces are in the midst of numerical growth. They need to open apostolic fronts now – although they cannot ensure at least four perpetually professed in each community – since in the future it is foreseeable that the current favourable conditions will not be repeated. Given the large number of confreres in formation, it is easy to foresee that communities of three confreres today may become larger tomorrow. Such a situation can be seen as a stage in the growth of a province. R. 20 provides for “missionary residences” strictly understood to have no fewer than three confreres. The criterion could also be used in the missionary expansion stage of an Province.

3.7. Duration in office

Listening

The majority of the provinces **agree with the current deadline related to duration in office.**

Some provinces feel that some confreres remain in the role of rector for too long; however, sometimes there is also a lack of continuity of activities because a rector was replaced too quickly.

Interpretation

The debate over time in office reflects the tension between the desire for stability and continuity and the need for renewal and adaptation. This recalls the need for a balance between tradition and innovation, a central theme in contemporary religious life. The discussion highlights the complexity of finding an optimal duration that allows both effective implementation of long-term projects and generational change in leadership. The Constitutions (C 128, 142, 163, 177) have established differentiated durations for the various levels of government, seeking to balance these aspects. However, evolving pastoral and organisational challenges call for continued reflection on the appropriateness of these terms.

Choices

Let the General Chapter entrust the new General Council with the task of studying the duration of governance positions and the frequency of Provincial and General Chapters, weighing the pros and cons and presenting proposals to GC30.

3.8. Other Proposals

Listening

Various provinces are calling for changes in the Constitutions so that **coadjutor brothers can become superiors of the religious community.**

Some provinces are requesting **a revision of the rules of representation** at the General Chapter. This is to ensure greater representativeness (provinces with fewer than 50 members and those with 199 members are represented by the Provincial and a delegate. The criterion for appointing another delegate begins after the 200-member threshold).

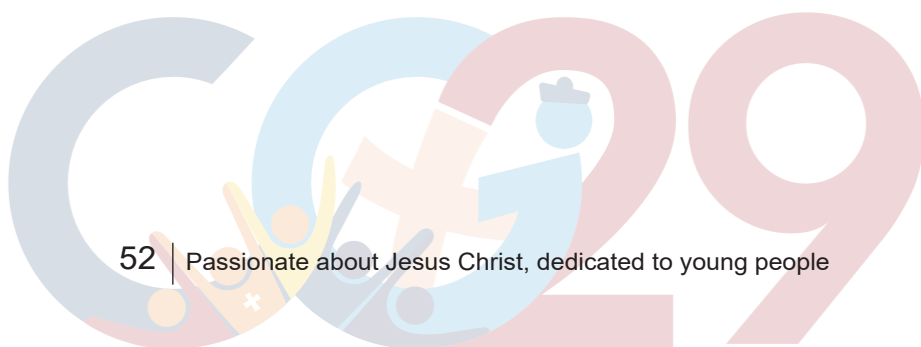
Interpretation

The decision regarding eliminating the priesthood requirement to be Rector Major, Provincial or Rector requires in-depth study because it is necessary to have clarity on the difference between community superior and ordinary before making a decision on this issue (See Rescriptum canonical evaluation).

The number of confreres required to have a delegate to the General Chapter was indicated in GC27 Deliberation 16 by amending Article 114 of the General Regulations by raising the number of delegates to be sent to the General Chapter from 250 to 200 (GC27,16).

Choices

1. The General Chapter shall make a decision on Forms 8, 9, 10.
2. The General Chapter authorise the provinces to make economic investments with a view to greater financial sustainability (See Form 11)
3. The General Chapter shall decide on Forms 12, 13, 14 and 15.
4. The General Council shall study the possibility of holding the General Chapter in other parts of the Salesian world, rather than in Italy or Europe, to encourage greater representation and participation of the different realities of the Congregation.



Form 8

Rector - priesthood requirement (C177)

Contributions received:

- 31 Provincial chapters call for change to C. 121 and 177.
- 7 Provincial Chapters call for no change to C121 and 177.

Proposed changes and rationale:

Remove the requirement of priestly ordination to become a rector, and so brothers can hold the office of local rector. This proposal seeks to implement the possibility given by Pope Francis in the Rescript of 18 May 2022, referring to can. 588 §2, CIC, considering the following reasons:

- a) value the religious consecration of all members of the Congregation, so that any member of the Congregation can be called to exercise the office of rector in the local community;
- b) better emphasise the unity and equality of Salesian vocations and strengthen fraternity in communities;
- c) foster synodality in Congregational governance and true equality among members;
- d) in appointments place the focus on the qualities of the confreres rather than clerical status;
- e) overcome clericalism, putting consecration in priority over the Sacrament of Holy Orders;
- f) Promote real inclusiveness and democracy in the church.

Rationale for no-change:

- the magisterium and charismatic tradition of the Congregation has consistently leaned toward the local rector being a priest;
- We need to listen to our tradition and ask ourselves about the consequences at the charismatic level of the fact that brothers can become Rectors.

Suggestions that do not require constitutional changes:

- g) Carry out a study from a charismatic point of view, on the intentions of the founder Don Bosco regarding the figure of the local Rector, expressed in his writings and experience;
- h) Analyse the tradition and magisterium of the Congregation and the current circumstances, on the possibility that brothers may be local superiors.

Form 9

Provincial - priesthood requirement (C163)

Contributions received:

- 14 Provincial Chapters require amendment
- 3 Provincial Chapters and 1 personal contribution do not request amendment.

Rationale for no-change:

- it is a constant fact of our tradition and Salesian magisterium that the Provincial is a priest;
- a change would touch a datum proper to our charism.

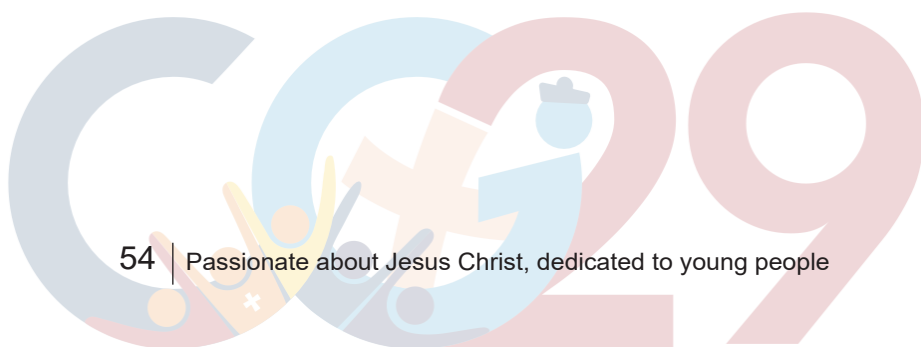
Proposed changes and rationale:

It is proposed that the brother may also be appointed as Provincial for the following reasons:

- a) lay confreres have leadership and animation skills;
- b) every brother should be able to take on governance tasks;
- c) clericalism needs to be overcome, making consecration a priority over the sacrament of order;
- d) the unity and equality of the lay and priestly religious vocation is made more evident;
- e) the legal constraint provided by the CIC for a clerical congregation has been removed;
- f) the change would allow the focus to be on the actual qualities and abilities of the brother confrere, rather than clerical status.

Suggestions that do not require constitutional changes:

- g) more time, study and prayer is needed;
- h) it is necessary to make a study from the charismatic point of view, Don Bosco's experience, tradition and current reality;
- i) conduct extensive consultation and in-depth historical study and reflection on Don Bosco's intentions.



Form 10

Rector Major - priesthood requirement (C129)

Contributions received:

- 15 Provincial Chapters request a change
- 9 Provincial Chapters do not request change

Rationale for no-change:

- the dispensation of can. 588 not be implemented in our Congregation at any level. The intention of the Founder, the charism, the ordinary office of the major superior requires Holy Orders. Refer to GC 20, GC 21 and GC 22. Brothers holding the office of superior is not a change that necessarily needs to be made;
- the magisterium and charismatic tradition of the Congregation has consistently leaned toward the Superior being a cleric.

Proposed changes and rationale:

- a) every member of the Congregation should be able to exercise positions of authority and leadership;
- b) brothers elected to the office of Rector Major may have aptitude and capacity for governance;
- c) brothers can hold any governing role: clericalism must be overcome, prioritising consecration over the sacrament of Orders;
- d) make possible the election of a brother as Rector Major to better emphasise the unity and equality of Salesian vocations and strengthen fraternity in communities;
- e) eliminate the requirement that the Rector Major must be a priest. To this end, amend Article 129 of our Constitutions by removing the phrase “must be a priest”.

Suggestions that do not require constitutional changes:

- f) the implementation of the dispensation of can. 588(2) be postponed to later consideration. All brothers be consulted on changes to the charismatic identity, life and work of the Salesian confrere with respect to their future roles as superior (rector) or major superior (Provincial or Rector Major). The will of Don Bosco, the traditions of the Congregation and the current needs of the Provinces will be studied.

Form 11

Exclusion of acquiring and holding real estate with the sole object of producing income and every other kind of permanent interest-bearing investment (C 187)

Contributions received:

- 17 Chapters propose changes to C. Article 187
- 7 Provincial chapters propose no-change C. Article 187

Rationale for non-amendment:

- C 187 is already clear and must be strictly interpreted: no interest-bearing investment that is not in view of the mission;
- from Don Bosco's Spiritual Testament: "Let it be held as a principle never to be varied not to retain any property of stable things...."

Proposed changes and rationale:

- a) It is proposed that paragraph 2 of Article 187 of the Constitutions be amended to allow the possibility of putting real estate and capital into income to secure annuities to support the communities most in need and the mission of the Province. The legality and ethical character of these transactions will have to be verified. This change is motivated by the lack of economic self-sufficiency of some of the works, particularly those with a social character. There are also problems with the economic and financial sustainability of the province as a whole, especially to meet the expenses for initial formation and the care of elderly confreres;

Suggestions that do not require constitutional changes:

- b) The General Chapter can give an authentic interpretation of how to understand the prohibition established in R Article 187, without changing it;

Rationale elaborated in Chapter 28:

- It can be expected that the flow of money so far secured by benefactors will decrease in the future;
- The disbursement of government or private entity grants can be problematic;
- There is an awareness that Providence will not fail to help, and at the same time such a situation requires us to prudently commit the resources we have in view of our mission;
- The wording used in §2 of Article 187 of the Constitutions (exclusion for the sole purpose of income and any other permanent kind of interest-bearing investment) is not immediately and unambiguously understood, since income-generating, ethically lawful activities with a clear allocation of profits have been deemed lawful both in the past and in the present, without generating scandal or constituting grounds for counter evidence of institutional poverty;

- C. 187 does not preclude provinces from promoting activities that generate income (objective profit ¹¹). Such activities by type, mode of management, and size may be contradictory to the religious identity of the entities promoting them, or they may be consistent with the Salesian mission;
- Careful discernment and weighing of choices is required, keeping in mind that such activities could be set up to generate profits to support precise and intended purposes, such as supporting social works, formation houses, homes for the elderly.

Notes of the Pre-Chapter Juridical Commission GC 28:

- C188 n. 3 permits the acceptance of inheritances, bequests or gifts for consideration, and this may entail constraints on the use of the annuities, established by the donor, such as requiring, for example, the preservation of the real estate received;
- C188 n. 4 allows the establishment of life estates, charities, foundations that must - by statute - be endowed with their own stable assets.

¹¹ Nonprofit entities engage in activities that generate profits (objective profit), but these are not divided among the members (subjective profit). Profits are used to finance the activities and purposes set forth in the entity's bylaws.

Form 12

Economer/Bursar in the local community

Contributions received:

- 5 Provincial Chapters called for changes to Art. 184;
- 2 Provincial Chapters have argued against changing Art. 184;

Rationale for no-change:

- maintain the presence of a Salesian economer/bursar in all communities, distinguishing him from the lay coordinator of the administrative management of the work;
- the local economer/bursar is always a Salesian, while lay people can be appointed as assistants to the economer/bursar;

Proposed changes and rationale:

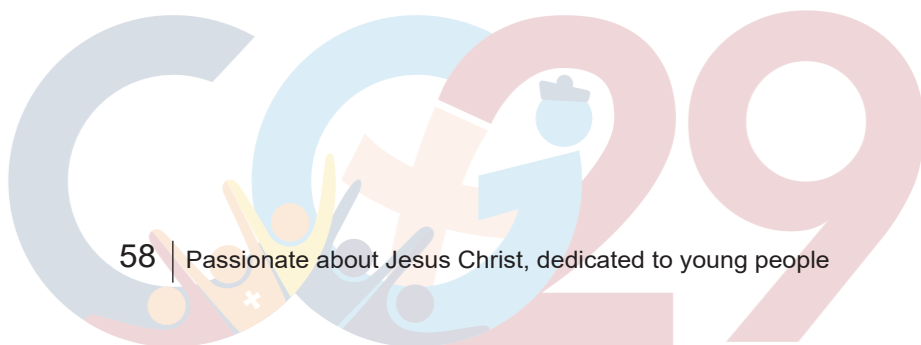
- introduce the local lay economer/bursar, giving guidelines on his role and participation in the local council, distinguishing the role of the local lay economer/bursar from that of the lay administrator of the work;
- there is no requirement for a religious economer/bursar because of the difficulty of finding Salesians and the possibility of a lay person being an administrator

Suggestions that do not require constitutional changes:

- financial and administrative centralisation has proven beneficial, relieving local economies and communities. Where possible, this solution can be implemented;
- it needs to be clarified whether a lay administrative coordinator should be a member of the house council;

Rationale elaborated in Chapter 28

- A religious community that is consistent in number and quality have a Salesian as economer/bursar, who is therefore a member by right of the house council. He may be aided by a lay expert on some technical matters. It does not seem appropriate for the finances of the religious community – linked to the requirements of the vow of poverty – to be managed by a person who is not a Salesian religious.
- Instead, the work as a whole (especially if it is a complex and articulated work) needs an “administrative management coordinator” who has specific skills, abilities, and commands the trust of the rector and the house council.



Form 13

Legitimacy of the Local Rector-Economer

Contributions received

- 12 Provincial Chapters propose not to change Article 172 of the Regulations.
- 10 Chapters propose changes.
- 20 out of 22 ask to distinguish the role of rector from that of economer/bursar.

Rationale for no-change:

- the Rector is always supported by a confrere who follows the financial aspects of the house.

Proposed changes and rationale:

- a) amend R. 172, expressly stating that the Rector is not also the community economer/bursar;
- b) amend R. 172, expressly indicating that the office of rector is not ordinarily combined with that of economer/bursar.
- c) These proposals are motivated by the need to maintain the distinction between the Rector and the economer/bursar; to authoritatively state that the Rector should not deal directly with the economic and financial administration of the community but always does so through the economer/bursar; to keep the roles distinct to ensure greater transparency and shared responsibility; and to avoid the risk of fragmentation of the Rector's duties;
- d) amend R. 172 allowing the Rector to be economer/bursar where there is a lay coordinator of the administrative management of the work, since the Rector is already, according to the Constitutions, primarily responsible for the administration of the house.
- e) Proposed amendment to R. 182: offer the possibility of associating the economer/bursar's office with that of the vice-rector.

Form 14

Religious Community Council and Educative and Pastoral Community Council

Contributions received:

- 7 Provincial chapters and 2 individual contributions propose no change to Art. 57 of the Constitutions, R. 5, R. 198;
- 9 Provincial Chapters propose changes.

Rationale for no-change:

- GC24 reference texts are clear.
- the scope of responsibility of each council is clearly stated in the Youth Ministry Framework.

Proposed changes and rationale:

- a) amend R. 5, indicating as the animating core of the work not only the religious community, but Salesians and lay people who share responsibility;
- b) introduce a C. 57a article on the Educative and Pastoral Community council as the animating core of the mission to bring out in the Constitutions the reflection developed in the Congregation in recent documents.

Suggestions that do not require constitutional changes:

- c) the practice, widespread in some Provinces, that members of the House Council are ex officio members of the EPC Council be maintained;
- d) the Congregation develop guidelines about the relationship between the House Council and the Council of the Work;
- e) deep reflection is required from the GC on the distinction between local house council and local council of the Work;
- f) not all areas of activity are directed by Salesians, and therefore it is necessary to indicate how to implement coordination of lay people entrusted with areas of responsibility in the House, with the local council.

Personal contributions - Education sector

- Amendment of C. Article 99 by inserting the words in boldface type
Proposal: The natural environment for vocational growth is the community, **both the religious community and the educative and pastoral community**, where the confrere fits in with confidence and cooperates with responsibility;
- Amend R. 5 by inserting the words in boldface type
Proposal: The implementation of our project requires in every setting and work the formation of the pastoral educational community. Its animating nucleus is **a group of people who identify with**

the Salesian mission, educational system and spirituality, and where the religious community is the charismatic reference point.

Rationale: The animating nucleus consists of both Salesians and lay people (GC25 70; GC28 39; AnGC 121).

The role of the Salesian community in the EPC: to be the charismatic reference point (GC25 70, 78; AnGC 121).

Form 15

Lay-run Work Council

under Provincial responsibility

Contributions received

- 8 Provincial Chapters propose no change in legislation
- 3 Provincial Chapters propose a change

Rationale for no-change:

- A study is needed on the provisions of GC24, numbers 180-182.
- in some regions of the Congregation there are no lay-run works under provincial responsibility.

Proposed changes and rationale:

- a) the Provincial appoint an Educative and Pastoral Community Council to ensure the animation of the work in the Salesian style;
- b) the board of directors of the lay-run work be established where the Lay Director of the work meets periodically with the Provincial, the Provincial's Delegate for that presence, and any other Councillors to ensure the sense of belonging of the work to the Province;
- c) define the role of lay people within the governance structures (local and provincial) for lay managed works.

Suggestions that do not require constitutional changes:

- d) the Congregation develop specific guidelines for lay-run works;
- e) establish a process of formation and accompaniment of the works that one chooses to entrust to lay leadership.

Other reasons presented in GC28:

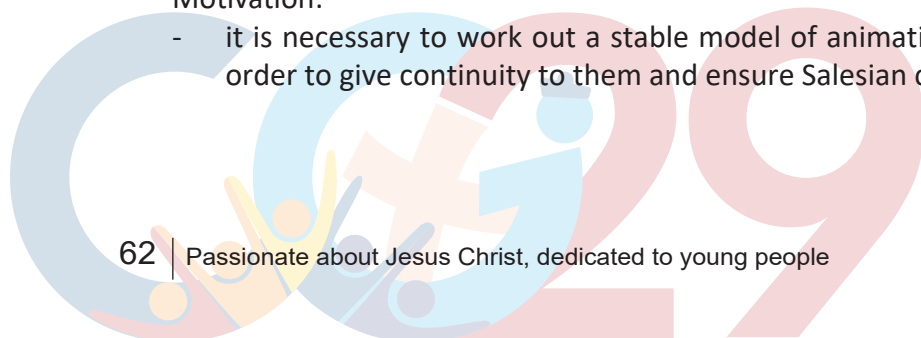
- The Rector Major and the Youth Ministry Sector and Economer General's Office offer guidance to the Provincials on how to develop a project for accompanying the lay-run works that remain under provincial responsibility.

Motivation:

- concrete experiences of applying the provisions of GC24, 180-181 are already in place in several provinces, such that some common guidelines can be identified;
- offer interesting perspectives of communion and sharing between Salesians and lay people in the spirit and mission of Don Bosco.
- The Provincial with his council shall develop a model of animation and governance of those works under lay management included within the provincial pastoral educational project.

Motivation:

- it is necessary to work out a stable model of animation and governance of such works in order to give continuity to them and ensure Salesian charismatic quality.





Rescript Issued by the Holy Father Francis about the Derogation from Can. 588 §2 CIC

The Holy Father Francis, during the audience of 11 February, 2022, given to the undersigned Cardinal Prefect and Archbishop-Secretary, has granted the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life the faculty to authorise, discretionally and in individual cases, the conferment of the office of Major Superior in clerical religious institutes of pontifical right and in clerical societies of apostolic life of pontifical right in the Latin Church, and dependent upon it, in derogation of can. 588 §2 CIC and the proper law of the institute of consecrated life or society of apostolic life, subject to can. 134 §1.

1. A non-clerical member of an institute of consecrated life or a clerical apostolic society of apostolic life of pontifical right shall be appointed local superior by the supreme moderator with the consent of his council.
2. A non-clerical member of an institute of consecrated life or a clerical apostolic society of apostolic life of pontifical right shall be appointed Major Superior after obtaining a written license from the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life at the request of the Supreme Moderator with the consent of his Council.
3. A non-clerical member of an institute of consecrated life or a clerical apostolic society of apostolic life of pontifical right shall be elected Supreme Moderator or Major Superior in the manner prescribed by proper law, with confirmation required—by written license—from the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.
4. In the cases provided for in can. 134 §§2-3, the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life reserves the right to evaluate individual cases and the reasons given by the Supreme Moderator or the General Chapter.

The Holy Father has also ordered the Rescript to go into effect today. It shall be published in *L'Osservatore Romano*, and subsequently in the official commentary of the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* [Acts of the Apostolic See]. From the Vatican, 18 May, 2022

João Braz Card. de Aviz
Prefetto

José Rodríguez Carballo, O.F.M.
Arcivescovo Segretario

The *Rescriptum ex audientia* of the Holy Father, Pope Francis regarding a derogation (exception) to can. 588 §2 CIC

The nature of the document

It is a “**rescript**”, in other words a special administrative act in writing by the competent authority by means of which, of its very nature, at the request of someone, a privilege, a dispensation or another favour is granted (cf. can 59 §1).

Contents of the Rescript

The contents of the rescript are the exception to can. 588 §2 which says: *“That institute is called clerical which, by reason of the purpose or design intended by the founder or by virtue of legitimate tradition, is under the direction of clerics, assumes the exercise of sacred orders, and is recognized as such by the authority of the Church”.*

Since the canon in question remains in force and is not repealed (cf. can. 20) either completely, or partially¹, it can be said – more than an exception - the legislator has granted a dispensation from the observance of the requirement of the priesthood required by can. 588 §2 CIC, to take up the government of a clerical Institute.

With this rescript, the Pope granted the DICLSAL *“the faculty of discretionally authorising and in individual cases, non-clerical members the bestowal of the office of Major Superior in clerical religious institutes of pontifical right ... by way of exception from can. 588 §2 CIC and to the proper law of the Institute of consecrated life, ... without prejudice to can. 134 §1”.*

The fact that it is a dispensation from the observance of a law and not its repeal is confirmed by the provision that this power (granted to the DICLSAL) must be used “at the discretion” and “in individual cases”.

The law for which the possibility of derogation (or exception) is provided for is either canon 588 §2 CIC, or the proper law (the Constitutions and General Regulations) of an Institute.

The exception concerns the faculty granted to DICLSAL to authorise the bestowal of the office of “Major Superior” on members of the Institute (“members”) who are not clerics.

Major Superiors are *“those who govern the entire institute, or a province of the institute, or a part of the institute equivalent to it, or a house sui iuris, and likewise their respective vicars”* (can. 620).

The exception does not touch on can. 134 §1 which identifies who are the “Ordinaries” in the Church: the Roman Pontiff, the Bishops and those who are in charge of a particular Church or a community equivalent to it, the Vicars General and Episcopal Vicars, *“and likewise, for their members, the Major Superiors of the religious institutes of clerical pontifical right... who possess at least ordinary executive power”.*

¹ V. . DE PAOLIS – A. D’AURIA, *Le norme generali*, Roma 2014, p. 172: “The repeal occurs when the law is simply annulled in its legal value; the exception instead occurs when the law is only partially annulled”.

The Dicastery for Legislative Texts responded in the negative to the question “whether the non-cleric major superior is Ordinary for his own members”

To the subsequent question about “who exercises the faculties that the Code of Canon Law attributes to the Ordinary for the non-clerical Major Superior”, the Dicastery replied that,

“ if an Institute intends to avail itself of the faculty granted by the *Rescriptum* and intends to appoint or elect a non-clerical Major Superior, it must provide in the proper law for who is competent to exercise the faculties attributed to the Major Superior/Ordinary, durante munere of the lay Major Superior (e.g., a Vicar who is a priest could be indicated). These norms, of course, will be approved in accordance with canon 587 [amendment to the Constitutions and approval by the Holy See] and 631 §1 [task of the General Chapter], unless otherwise provided by the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life”².

The Question of the Major Superior who is not an Ordinary

The reply from the Dicastery for Legislative Texts confirms that the Major Superior (the Rector Major or the Provincial, in our case, and their respective vicars) who is not a cleric, **is not an Ordinary** for its members.

In this case, the Institute must establish in its Constitutions who will exercise the faculties attributed to the Ordinary by the Code of Canon Law.

By way of example, some of the Ordinary’s faculties are indicated:

1. He may dispense from invalidating or disqualifying laws when there is doubt about the law (Canon 14)
2. He may grant a favour (can. 65 §1)
3. He may validly dispense from disciplinary laws, whether universal or particular, when recourse to the Holy See is difficult and at the same time there is danger of serious harm in waiting (Canon 87 §2)
4. He has the power of governance, also called the power of jurisdiction, proper to those who on whom holy orders are conferred (can. 129 §1)
5. He has ecclesiastical power of governance both for the external and internal forum (can. 596 §2)
6. He can restrict or completely remove from priests and deacons the faculty to preach (Canon 764)
7. He can give licence to preach to religious (Canon 765)
8. He has the power to hear the confessions of his subjects and others who live day and night in the house (968 §2)
9. He is able to confer on any priest the faculty to hear the confessions of his subjects and others living day and night in the house (can. 969 §2)
10. He can revoke the faculty of habitually hearing confessions (can. 974 §1)
11. He may grant dimissorial letters for the priesthood and diaconate to his subjects (Canon 1019 §1)
12. He may dispense from irregularities and impediments not reserved to the Holy See (Canon 1047 §4)
13. He can bless holy places (can. 1207)
14. He can initiate a preliminary investigation when he has a notitia de delicto (can. 1717 §1)

² DICASTERO PER I TESTI LEGISLATIVI, Risposta al Procuratore generale della Società di San Francesco di Sales, Città del Vaticano 10 agosto 2022 (Prot. n. 17795/2022).

15. He can decide whether a trial may be initiated to inflict the penalty or declare it and whether this is expedient (can. 1718 §1, 1-2)
16. He may impute a defendant and issue an extrajudicial decree of acquittal or conviction.

The local superior

The exception to Canon 588 §2 does not concern only the appointment (or election) of the non-clerical Major Superior, but also the appointment of the local Superior. In this case, the supreme Moderator with the consent of his Council (not, therefore, DICLSAL) may appoint a member (“*sodale*”) who is not a cleric as local Superior.

The entry into force of the Rescript

It entered into force on 18 May 2022. Institutes that wish to avail themselves of the possibility of appointing a non-clerical religious as Major Superior must identify to whom the faculties of the Major Superior Ordinary are to be attributed. This entails - as indicated by the Dicastery for Legislative Texts - an amendment to the proper law, i.e. the constitutional text.

With regard to the appointment of the local Superior, on the other hand, the rescript allows from now on the exception to both can. 588 §2 CIC, and to the proper law. And hence it comes into force immediately.

The position of individual Institutes vis-à-vis the possibility offered by the Rescript

The Rescript introduces a possibility of exception, not an obligation.

With regard to the appointment of a “non-cleric member” as local Superior, the responsibility lies with the supreme Moderator, with the consent of his Council. He may or may not avail himself of this possibility.

This requires a delicate work of discernment for each Institute, starting with the constituent elements of its “spiritual patrimony”:

This is how the Code of Canon Law defines the spiritual patrimony of an Institute:

“All must observe faithfully the mind and designs of the founders regarding the nature, purpose, spirit, and character of an institute, which have been sanctioned by competent ecclesiastical authority, and its sound traditions, all of which constitute the patrimony of the same institute” (can. 578).

Such discernment is a legitimate exercise of autonomy:

“It is recognised that individual institutes have a legitimate autonomy of life, especially of government, by which they have their own discipline in the Church and can preserve intact their patrimony mentioned in can. 578”. (can. 586 §1).

It is for the General Chapter principally: *“to protect the patrimony of the institute mentioned in can. 578, and promote suitable renewal according to that patrimony”* (canon 631 §1 CIC).



Rescriptum ex audientia of 18 May 2022

Salesian charismatic interpretation

The question of whether a non-cleric religious can be appointed as a local Superior is not new to our Congregation. It was widely reflected on in the Special General Chapter, in GC21 which had among its issues “The Salesian coadjutor”, and in GC22 which formulated art. 121 of the Constitutions. GC25 also has a reference to it.

The Rectors Major Frs Luigi Ricceri, Viganò and Juan Edmundo Vecchi spoke on the subject in particular.

1 - The 21st General Chapter (1978)

GC21 dedicated an entire Document (no. 2 to the ‘Salesian coadjutor’). within which the topic, “*The Service of the Salesian Superior and the Salesian Brother*” (nos. 199-205) is explicitly placed. Here are the main points, but the whole document deserves to be read in its entirety.

El problema

“After a century of peaceful and universal acceptance of the tradition that in our salesian communities the one who is called upon to lead and inspire the others should possess the priestly character, the question has now been raised in the Congregation, more in some regions than others, whether the brother may exercise the service of superior. [...]

It is evident that we are not dealing merely with a juridical or sociological question, nor is it a problem that arises from a consideration of religious life in general. It is question of a specific religious ecclesial problem that can be termed Salesian.” It is concerned with a particular mode of life, as found in the Salesian community as started and structured by Don Bosco, and lived and approved by the Church, with a view to the fulfilment of the concrete mission that the Holy Spirit entrusted to our Father and Founder”

The considerations and the deliberations of the SGC

This question was deeply felt by the SGC (1971), which had the assignment of reflecting on the identity of the Salesian Congregation, with a view to the revision of the Constitutions themselves. [...]

The problem of the priesthood as a condition for the office of Salesian superior was studied specifically in the treatise “Those responsible for our mission.” It was discussed in depth, because it was realized that we were touching a point that concerned the very roots of our spirit and of our Salesian life, both with regard to the internal government of the community and with regard to the pastoral method proper to our mission.

The SGC concluded its study with the decision that became part of the new text of the Constitutions: “It is our tradition that the Salesian community be 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.”

The World Conference on the Salesian Brother (1975)

“[...] In his closing address, the Rector Major Fr Luigi Ricceri, while expressing his intention to have matters of such importance studied, declared: ‘Faced with this problem I see that the conscience of the Congregation has so far responded through the pronouncements formally expressed by the SGC, where the problem has been proposed, studied and officially codified in the Constitutions’.

And he pointed out that, for any change in this matter, it would have to be clarified whether it was a ‘substantial’ element of our charism or not. To this end, he recalled three conditions that must be borne in mind when we want to shed light on this or any other point concerning the founding charism:

- the explicit and verifiable will of the Founder;
- the connection that element has with our mission;
- the formal declaration of the Church.

Given these criteria, it must be admitted that the studies carried out on the issue, especially in recent years, do not show a clear possibility for the proposed change.”

CG21

“At the beginning of the work, the Card. Secretary of State of His Holiness, in the name of Pope Paul VI, sent the Rector Major Fr Luigi Ricceri a letter of exhortation and guidance for the religious members of the Chapter. There, Card. Villot referred directly to our topic in the following words:

“Lastly, looking with confidence at the growing organisational flourishing of the Salesian Family, the Vicar of Christ hopes that the Institute will remain faithful to its constitutive design also with regard to the figure and function of the Rector, so that, strengthened by the charisms of priestly ordination, he may guide with ecclesial wisdom the various and growing ranks of those who intend to serve under the guidance and spirit of St John Bosco.” [...]

The GC21, conscious of its responsibility, has studied at length the reality of the Salesian brother and has amply delineated the figure of the Salesian superior, to emphasise especially the latter’s role of spiritual guide of the community and the pastoral guide of our Salesian mission.

Hence ... the Chapter has decided to maintain, in accordance with the Pope’s wish the Salesian tradition codified by the SGC in art. 35 of the Constitutions: that the Salesian community be guided in its apostolic task by a member who by his priestly ordination and by his pastoral experience is able to direct it spiritually and orientate its mission.”

2 - The 22nd General Chapter and the drafting of the Constitutions (1984)

Art. 121 of the Constitutions

The long and articulate reflection initiated in 1970 by the Special General Chapter, continued specifically in GC21, flows into GC22 which formulates in an article (no. 121) a summary of this path.

The article is located in Chapter Ten of the Constitutions, which is entitled “General Principles and Criteria”. It described “The nature of the service of authority”. We read there:

“In imitation of Christ and in his name, authority in the Congregation is exercised according to the spirit of Don Bosco as a service to brothers for discerning and fulfilling the Father’s will.

This service is directed to fostering charity, coordinating the efforts of all, animating, orientating, making decisions, giving corrections, so that our mission may be accomplished.

According to our tradition, communities are guided by a member who is a priest and who by the grace of his priestly ministry and pastoral experience sustains and directs the spirit and activity of his brothers.

He is obliged to make the profession of faith prescribed by canon law.”

The guide to reading the Salesian Constitutions

The commentary on article 121 in “The Project of Life of the Salesians of Don Bosco” (pp. 806-811), gives the reasons for this choice.

“The text makes explicit an aspect of the ‘form’ of our Society, indicated by art. 4 It refers to the Salesian tradition, which dates back to Don Bosco the Founcer and has been maintained uninterruptedly to the present day, which has indeed been explicitly confirmed by the last three General Chapters, which carried out the post-Conciliar revision of the Constitutions”.

After an extensive quotation from GC21, the text continues:

“It is a fact that the Salesian community was built around Don Bosco, the first ‘director’ of the Oratory, who gave the figure of the Superior all the imprint of fatherhood, emanating from his ministry as a priest. Even after the Apostolic See imposed that the Superior of a religious community should not be the usual confessor of his confreres, Don Bosco’s Successors did not tire of pointing to the Salesian Rector as the true ‘pastor’ and ‘spiritual director’ of Salesians and young people, according to the Founder’s ‘mens’”. [...].

The Salesian Superior is not primarily an administrator, nor an organiser, the manager of a work. a builder...; he is first and foremost the guide of a community entrusted with a pastoral mission; he is, in a certain sense, the spiritual educator of the group of educators, the pastor of the group of pastors, the animator of their spirit, the one who orients the ‘missionary’ activity of his confreres, priests and laymen, seen in the totality of their aspects.

It can be seen, then, what significance it has for a priest member to take on this service and why Don Bosco wanted it that way. The Sacrament of Orders gives him the radical capacity, pastoral experience gives him the practical capacity. His model is Don Bosco himself, priest-educator, superior and pastor, spiritual director of the Valdocco community, of his confreres”.

3 - The 25th General Chapter (2002)

In reflecting on the “Salesian community today”, GC25 devotes particular attention to the “Rector, animator of the community”.

Among the guidelines (No. 64) is one that refers to the priestly character, citing the words of Fr Juan Vecchi on Salesian Spirituality:

The Rector, following the model of Don Bosco “is a paternal figure, at the same time both affectionate and authoritative... Deeply marked by the priestly character, he expresses it daily in the ministry of the word, of sanctification and of animation”.

4 - The interventions of the Rectors Major

The interventions of the Rectors Major on the subject focus above all on the period 1970-1984, which is the period within which the Constitutions are reformulated in the light of the Second Vatican Council and the post-conciliar Magisterium.

Fr Luigi Ricceri (1975)

In the concluding address of the World Congress of Salesian Brothers he stated:

“It seems to me that something constitutive, inherent to the nature of our kind of religious community is being touched on... Faced with a possible doubt as to whether a given element belongs to the same constitutive form of our Congregation, one cannot proceed to change for reasons of generic possibility alone’, because to do so, in the case of the Rector, without serious objectively probable reasons, “we would run the risk of disregarding an explicit choice of the Founder, with the consequence of impoverishing the Congregation and the whole Salesian Family of a radical guiding value; and in doing so we would make the members of our Family, and therefore the very figure of the Salesian Brother we wish to promote, less authentically Salesian” (ACMSC p. 579).

Fr Egidio Viganò. Intervention at GC21 (1978)

On 24 January 1978, he made a long speech in the Chapter Assembly on the subject of “Participation in the life and government of the Congregation” (nos. 212-239).

“Allow me to get straight to the nub of the matter. We all, I hope, more than agree on the importance of the Salesian Brother and the need for his promotion. But this is not strictly speaking the problem that keeps us a little bit in suspense: it is clearly another one, although related, in fact, to this one.

Already before the SGC the following question was posed: in line with the Salesian constitutive project, is the service of authority substantially linked to the priestly ministry or not?

At that time the question was presented as a general problem of the exercise of authority in the Congregation at all levels (Rector, Provincial, Rector Major); now, however, the scope of the problem for us has been limited to the level of the Rector. The right approach to this

topic requires direct consideration of what kind of authority should animate and serve the Salesian community. [...]

Now, it is an undeniable fact that the Rector in the Congregation has always been a “priest”, and that the figure of the Rector has been given central attention and importance in the concerns of Don Bosco of all his successors and of the General Chapters.

The issue raised therefore confronts us with the possibility of a qualitative change in the life of the Salesian community. It would be reckless to hide or underestimate this aspect: those who must proceed with a qualitative change must know with sufficient clarity and depth the values, the motivations and the consequences, with the relative advantages and disadvantages”.

In this way Fr Viganò sums up the points of view and perspectives within which the various positions on the subject are at work:

“The proposal for a possible ‘radical turn’ in this regard started from a different way of evaluating the function of authority in the Salesian community:

- For some, the pastoral charity of the Salesian community must be animated, nourished and guided by its constitutive project, by a type of authority enriched by the grace of the priestly ministry, greatly deepened and ecclesiologically renewed by the Second Vatican Council in response to the signs of the times and in view of a new historical epoch;
- for others, the style and activity of the Salesian community must know how to adapt to the signs of the times perceived in their vast process of secularisation and socialisation, illuminated also by the Council’s ecclesiology of the People of God, in which the egalitarian values of Baptism for Religious Life and the importance of the laity in the Church emerge. Therefore, the type of Salesian authority required in the new times should no longer necessarily be tied to priestly ministry.”

“Relevant issues were gathered on these two positions, already in the SGC. There are a number of them: of an ecclesiological-religious kind, of a socio-cultural kind, of a psychological kind, of a perspective kind, of a Salesian-historical kind. In the various discussion meetings following the SGC, the same arguments were repeated, more or less, without further substantial progress, and sometimes losing the serenity of dialogue”.

The perspective from which Fr Viganò sets out to shed light on the issue is closely linked to the Salesian charism. He calls it “a problem specific to the Salesians of Don Bosco”:

“By now it should be clear that we are not dealing with a ‘generic’ matter of the theology of the Priesthood or the theology of Religious Life, but with a well-identified and concrete ‘charismatic experience’: that of the Society of St Francis de Sales started by Don Bosco and that has grown in his spirit.

It is in this realm of lived reality that one must immerse oneself in order to argue validly.

What are the components of the “proper nature” of our Institute? When is it that a certain element is to be considered ‘substantially’ proper to our foundational nature?

The adverb ‘substantially’, pardon my remark, is to be understood in a ‘technical sense’ similar to that used in theology for the ‘substance’ of a sacrament, which depends on the free

determination of the will of the one who Instituted it, rather than on ideological requirements or abstract and generic arguments. We are not dealing with a doctrinal problem of metaphysical essence, but with the practical identification of a historical pedagogy which is not deduced by reasoning from the very nature of things, but from the will of the Founder who structured that particular pedagogical-pastoral project.

In Religious Life there are multiple Institutes, each with its own constitutive project, according to a truly admirable pluriformity of charisms. In fact, the religious state 'is not intermediate between the clerical and lay conditions', but comes from both as a peculiar gift for the whole Church (cf. LG 43); therefore, in Religious Life there is in fact also a wide range of types of authority, ranging from the constitutional inclusion of the priestly ministry to its non-relevance, its impossibility and even its exclusion".

Fr Viganò returned to the subject in 1982 in his letter *The Salesian Rector and Animation AGC 306*). He writes:

My dear rectors, I have been much exercised over this matter. We belong to the same family; you are my colleagues in the service of Salesian authority; and so I offer you a few thoughts that I believe to be of the utmost importance. We are dealing with a basic aspect in the Salesian superior, a dimension that belongs to our tradition: *the animation of the rector in a Salesian community must be an exercise of the priestly ministry*. [Italics as in the text]

First premise.

The first question to be settled is why Salesian tradition has always required the rector to be a priest. Such a principle must have certain practical implications.

Rectors have always been priests - in accordance with the mind of Don Bosco and throughout the history of the Congregation. This fact does not derive from ecclesial or social requirements but from the practicalities of our charism. [...]

The last two General Chapters spoke of this matter explicitly and treated it as an element of our distinctive charism; and Pope Paul VI (in a letter from his Secretary of State at the beginning of GC21)⁶ called on us to preserve this characteristic constitutional disposition of our charism, namely that "the rector, enhanced by the charisms of his priestly ordination, should guide with ecclesial wisdom the various and ever growing ranks of those who wish to lead committed lives under the guidance of Don Bosco and in accordance with his spirit."

These are not doctrinal statements for religious institutes all and sundry: they are for our own Salesian charism that was born and developed' in this particular way.

Fr Viganò develops his reflection in three points. The Rector is primarily the bearer of a full-time consecration:

Don Bosco was a priest at the altar, in the pulpit and in the confessional; in the playground and the street; in the political turmoils of his times, in his dealings with government ministers, in his use of the media and in his cultural involvements - in fact everywhere and always. The rector must learn to imitate him even though there have since been many ecclesial changes in the exercise of the priestly ministry. [...]

The first point to note is that a Salesian rector must have an explicit awareness and powerful conviction of this priority: the service he is called to render to the confreres and the mem-

bers of the local Salesian Family is that kind of priestly ministry born and nourished in the grace and pastoral charisms of the sacrament of Holy Orders.

Secondly, the Rector is a Witness to Christ, transcendent mediator:

At this point one realizes how anxious a priest should be to live to the full the pastoral and meaningful 'Da mihi animas caetera tolle' as illustrated by the whole of Don Bosco's life. The priest and rector must witness to the historical transcendence of Christ; he must be a tireless worker in his mission, caring for and promoting it in others; the pastoral aspect must rank first in his community, taking precedence over and imbuing all other human activities. He should be first and foremost a sacramental reflection of Christ the mediator and good shepherd dedicated to his brothers and especially the young.

Thirdly, the Salesian Rector is a "Sensus Ecclesiae" Specialist

Vatican II reminds us that the priest is a minister of the Church, a man of communion, a builder and leader of the community of believers; his heart beats in unison with Christ's Body, the Church, as it continues on with the Lord's mission among men. Thus it is that the soul of the priest is always vibrantly aware of the Church both universal and local.

Don Bosco's Salesian tradition has always characteristically cherished a strong awareness of the universal Church, and this 'sensus ecclesiae' takes on a pastoral vision of world-wide dimension, and a bold missionary concern. [...]

As a priest he cannot cut himself off from the ensemble of the local Church at its various levels.

Thus a rector's consecrated ordination urges him on to foster within himself and others this pastoral sensitivity and to concern himself in a practical way with the life and activities of the local Church.

This ecclesial awareness implies a whole series of close ties with the Pope, the bishops and other priests. Vatican II rightly speaks of the priest as the bishop's understanding and creative collaborator. This special aspect of 'pastoral collaboration' belongs to the very nature of Christian priesthood. It is not a mere optional extra that depends on the priest's personal generosity: it is an indispensable aspect of the priest's vocation insofar as he has been called and consecrated to carry out the true sacerdotal ministry of Christ.

Fr Viganò then identifies the characteristic ministerial commitments of the Salesian Rector:

First, the service of the Word: the perception of the values of God's Revelation and the manifestation of their saving truth.

Secondly, the service of sanctification: the liturgy, the sources of grace, overcoming sin, growth in charity.

Finally, the service of community leadership: pastoral coordination, care for communion, spiritual governance of the Community.

He then moves on to discuss each of these characteristic traits under the headings: Harbinger of truth, Master and guide in holiness, Builder of ecclesial communion.

Fr Juan Edmundo Vecchi

Preaching to the Rectors of two Italian Provinces in March 2002, he dwelt on the subject of the priesthood connected with the office of Salesian Rector. Cf. *Spiritualità salesiana*, 2000, pp. 129-131). Speaking of Don Bosco he states:

“His educative priestly fatherhood was expressed in the ability to see them born to the Salesian vocation, to help them grow in the sense of consecration, to make them more and more open to grace to the point of holiness.

The consequence of all this is the continuous and trusting use of priestly ministries in the educational process and in the leadership of the religious community: that of the word, that of sanctification, that of animation”.

The Rectors Manual

Don Bosco’s thinking, the reflections of the Rectors Major and the General Chapters converge in the two editions of the Rectors Manual, the one in 1986 and the second in 2020.

The Salesian Rector A ministry for the animation and government of the local community (1986)

Regarding the complementarity between Salesian priest and brother in the community, the Manual states in no. 67:

“Don Bosco thought of a community that lived its original communion and a pastoral guide that was enriched with the charisms of the priesthood to best ensure this communion and the achievement and completeness of the objectives of pastoral charity.

Endowed in no small measure - according to Fr Rinaldi - with ‘creative genius’, he recalled the need for the Salesian brother and Salesian priest to be present in his community with complementary functions and tasks that were all important. It is a gift of the Lord He established two forms of a single vocation with characteristic ways of being in thinking, witnessing, acting, and in influencing the religious and apostolic style of the community it self.” [...]

It is not just about fraternal communion. It is mainly a matter of mutual reference of the priestly and lay components. The one and the other interpenetrate from within, according to a harmonious dosage, to make real ‘that brilliant modernity and that common mission that constitutes the very nature of our religious congregation”.

In conversation ideally with the Salesian Rector, the Manual continues in the chapter entitled “A guide who places the function of priestly ministry at the service of the confreres” in No. 68:

“Without your ministry, the community could not be itself according to Don Bosco’s original concept of the Congregation. It exists at its best, as Salesian, when in it and for it you make Christ present sacramentally today as a life-giving leader and life-giving servant”.

Animating and Governing the Community The ministry of the Salesian Rector (2020)

34 years later, the new edition of the Rector’s Handbook devotes an entire chapter to the “Presbyteral Character of the Salesian Rector” (nos. 44-46). The text incorporates the statements of the Constitutions and General Chapters, starting with the Special General Chapter. Commenting on art. 121 of the Constitutions, the text notes:

This is neither a question of canonical category (clerical institute) nor about the distribution of competences and roles for the service of authority; much less is it a matter of classifying Salesians into categories. Reference is made, rather, to the way of life of the Salesian community originated by Don Bosco, who with his priestly fatherliness guided his sons in the common project that is at the source of our Salesian life.

Following the example left us by Don Bosco, Salesian communities have always been guided by Salesian priests. The celebration of the sacraments marked deeply the spiritual animation through which Don Bosco formed and guided his confreres, and this has become part of the charismatic heritage he handed over, followed by his successors and communities.

Recalling the fundamental texts of the reflection that our Congregation has made on the priestly identity of the local Superior, it is possible to point out some fundamental elements:

- We are faced with a very rich Salesian doctrine on the figure of the Rector. The profound continuity between the original datum (Don Bosco's intentions), Salesian tradition, the post-conciliar reinterpretation of the charism, and the interventions of the Rectors Major, flowed into the drafting of Article 121 of the Constitutions and was most recently reaffirmed in the 2020 edition of the Rector's Manual.
- The priestly character proper to the Salesian Rector does not refer to canonical or sociological issues, but to charismatic ones.
- Careful analysis over 50 years allows us to state that the priestly identity of the Salesian Rector is part of the "spiritual patrimony" of our Institute.