

SALESIANS OF DON BOSCO

GENERAL CHAPTER XXVIII

WHAT KIND OF SALESIANS FOR THE YOUTH OF TODAY?

WORKING DOCUMENT ABOUT THE THEME



20 SEPTEMBER 2019

INTRODUCTION

A JOURNEY GUIDED BY THE SPIRIT

1. The 28th GENERAL CHAPTER AS A PROCESS OF DISCERNMENT

The Rector Major through his circular letter of 24 May 2018 (Cf. AGC 427), convoked the 28th General Chapter with the theme: "What kind of Salesians for the Youth of Today?" The fundamental aim is identified as helping:

the whole Congregation to closely examine, as far as is possible ,what is and what ought to be *the profile of the Salesian capable of responding to today's youth*, to all young people especially the poorest and most in need, those excluded and rejected the weakest and those deprived of their basic rights. And this *in a world ever more complex and going through rapid changes* (AGC 427, p. 6).

This single intention has been expressed from the very beginning in a threefold manner that seeks to bring together the various challenges that emerged in the initial phase of discernment:

- *Priority of the Salesian mission among today's young people*
- *Profile of the Salesian for the youth of today*
- *Together with lay people in the mission and in formation*

Starting from and in conformity with the *Letter convoking* the Chapter and with the subsequent *Guidelines and Directives* the Provincial Chapters were held which we can identify as the first stage in the process of discernment.

Between 9 and 20 September 2019 the *Precapitular Commission* carefully analysed the contributions that have arrived from the various Provinces, from groups of confreres and from individuals and also the contributions of the young people. The fruit of the work of this Commission is the present *Working Document* drawn up with the specific intention of its being the basis of the discernment to be carried out by those taking part in the Chapter. The General Chapter which will take place in Valdocco between 16 February and 4 April 2020 is the second stage of discernment.

It will be the task of the General Chapter, as the supreme authority over the whole Congregation (Cf. *Salesian Constitutions* n. 120) to bring the discernment to a conclusion by approving a *Final Document* that will be the fruit of the Chapter.

Clearly there will also be a third stage: that of the reception and the implementation of the directives coming from the 28th General Chapter on the part of the General Council, of the Regions, of the Provinces, of the religious and the educative pastoral communities and of the individual confreres.

2. THE METHOD OF WORK

Now let us try to understand this *Working Document*. It has been drawn up according to the *method of discernment* that the Church considered appropriate and fruitful for the Synod on Youth and that the Congregation had also used in previous Chapters. Both the *Working Document* and the *Final Document* of the Synod follow this method. As a background to our work on the Chapter it seemed very fortunate to have the three years' work of the Universal Church regarding young people: the assimilation of this process by our Congregation is the appropriate premise to make fruitful our General Chapter, which finds its own place within the Church's journey.

On 3 October 2018, the first day of the Synod on the young, with regard to this method Pope Francis declared:

To speak frankly and listen openly are fundamental if the Synod is to be a process of discernment. Discernment is not an advertising slogan, it is not an organizational technique, or a fad of this pontificate, but an *interior attitude* rooted in *an act of faith*. Discernment is the method and at the same time the goal we set ourselves: it is based on the conviction that God is at work in world history, in life's events, in the people I meet and who speak to me. For this reason, we are called to listen to what the Spirit suggests to us, with methods and in paths that are often unpredictable.

Considering his action, we are led to open ourselves to the new, to have the courage to come out of ourselves, to resist the temptation to reduce the new to what we already know. Discernment is rooted in an act of faith in God, who is the Lord of history and guides it with the mysterious and live-giving presence of his Spirit.

Discernment therefore is above all listening to God and to his word, to young people and to their appeals, to the experience of the Church and of the Congregation. Finally, also to the deep desire for goodness, for fulness and for joy that each one has within themselves. In the tradition inherited from St Francis of Sales – the fourth centenary of whose death (1622-2022) we are preparing to celebrate – listening to the inspirations and the motions of the heart is an essential element in the search for the will of God.

Through sincere listening and sharing the contribution each one makes, the dynamic of discernment leads us deep down to look for the reasons for and the roots of what we are actually experiencing in life. This enables us to verify our criteria, examining our habitual attitudes so as to be creatively faithful to the one and only mission that has always been entrusted to the Congregation, that of accompanying young people to an encounter with the Lord, experiencing his love and responding to his call.

Thus discernment becomes a pastoral instrument, capable of identifying *the routes to be followed*, proposing to the young people of today possible *paths and avenues to pursue*, offering suitable guidelines and suggestions for the mission which is not preconceived at the drawing board but the result of a process open to following the Spirit. A pathway drawn up in this way is an invitation to openness, not closure, that raises questions and makes demands without suggesting preconceived answers so as to propose alternatives and to investigate possibilities.

3. STRUCTURE OF THE TEXT

From this point of view, it is clear that the General Chapter needs to be presented with the proper dispositions suited to a process of discernment. For this reason, this Working Document is constructed in three parts which recalls the form of the discernment process indicated in *Evangelii Gaudium* 51 (recognizing, interpreting, and choosing). They are not three separate independent parts but a single process: each stage leading the way to the next which will be the starting point for the subsequent one.

Recognizing

The first step is that of looking and listening. With regard to the topic of each of the three “nuclei” we are called above all to make our own the first stage of the discernment process, that of the Provincial Chapters. It is a matter of understanding not only intellectually but above all with a heart capable of evangelical compassion, of listening with empathy and a merciful gaze (Cf. *Lk* 7, 13; 10,33;15,20; *Mt* 9,36).

This first step requires that we pay serious attention to the situation of young people today in the variety of conditions and contexts in which they are living. It requires humility and proximity so that we can be on their wavelength and recognise their joys and their hopes their anxieties and their sorrows. Their voices, collected together in the provinces and in the regions, echo in our hearts. The same looking and listening full of concern and

attention also needs to be addressed/turned to the lived experience of our Salesian communities and of the educative pastoral communities.

Interpreting

The second step is further reflection on what has been recognized using criteria of interpretation and evaluation. The *Precapitular Commission* has tried to identify the key issues to be dealt with and which need a real effort capable of reaching deep down.

It is a matter of seeking the causes with truth and honesty and giving the reasons for what we have found. To formulate balanced judgements, it will be important to avoid an attitude of idealism or fault-finding. This is a delicate stage which will challenge the members of the Chapter in a special way because they will have to interpret in the light of the Spirit what reality presents to them. At this stage the *Working Document* provides for each “nucleus” three “issues to be dealt with” and presents many questions, even provocative ones, to enliven the discussion and make it productive, and to help the members to draw out the main challenges on which we will be called to make decisions.

Choosing

Only by allowing ourselves to be enlightened by the vocation which we accepted is it possible to understand to what practical steps the Spirit is calling us, and in what direction, and to actually respond to his call. At this stage, discernment means putting the means towards the end, starting from the decision as to what are the most appropriate. For this purpose, it is necessary to examine attitudes, procedures and structures and to cultivate that inner freedom needed to choose those that will enable us to follow the Spirit and to abandon those that can be seen as less able to achieve the proposed objectives. This process will lead to identifying where reform is needed, a change in our pastoral practices to prevent the risk of them becoming fossilized.

The *Precapitular Commission* has chosen to present this stage of work on two levels: the first referring to the first stage of discernment (that of the *Provincial Chapters*) and lists the main and most agreed operating principles; the second level (that of the *General Chapter*), on the other hand, is simply prepared with some suggestions and questions capable of triggering dialogue and choices. Through this twofold presentation the discernment process of the General Chapter is not being predetermined by the contributions of the Provinces but will be called upon to bring to maturity a process that has involved the whole Congregation.

4 TOWARDS A NEW PENTECOST

In these epoch-changing times, the Spirit is moving the Church towards a new youth culture. The synodal process during the last three years has aroused enthusiasm, renewed trust/confidence and opened new paths for the education and the evangelization of the young.

As he guided the synodal experience, we are sure that the Lord Jesus will also guide the journey of the Congregation towards new horizons of the mission. Also, the 150th anniversary of the first missionary expedition (1875-2025) is urging us to renew the apostolic courage of Don Bosco, able to embrace the whole world. If we are docile to the breath of the Spirit, we shall discover that it will take us far beyond our expectations and our plans. In effect, as the Synod Fathers declared “It is not about creating a new Church for the young, but rather rediscovering with them the youthfulness of the Church, opening ourselves to the grace of a new Pentecost.” (*Final Document of the Synod* n. 60).

We also believe that God lives and works in the hearts of the young, because “in each of them, including those who do not know Christ, the Creator Spirit acts so as to lead them to beauty, goodness and truth.” (*Final Document of the Synod* n. 59).

On the day of Pentecost, while the apostles were gathered together with Mary awaiting the gift promised by Jesus, the old prophecy of Joel was fulfilled: “I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams” (*Acts 2,17*; Cf. *Joel 2,28*). We, too, together with the young in the steps of our beloved father Don Bosco want to have dreams inspired by the Spirit, prophecies about the future, visions of holiness. The spiritual, educative, pastoral and ecclesial experience of Valdocco began in this way: with the wisdom of the elderly and the enthusiasm of the young. We can therefore set out on the adventure of the Chapter making our own the image with which a young man from the Islands of Samoa spoke about the Church. It is like

a canoe, in which the elderly help to keep on course by judging the position of the stars, while the young keep rowing, imagining what waits for them ahead. Let us steer clear of young people who think that adults represent a meaningless past, and those adults who always think they know how young people should act. Instead, let us all climb aboard the same canoe and together seek a better world, with the constantly renewed momentum of the Holy Spirit (*Christus vivit*, n. 201).

*20th September 2019
The Precapitular Commission*

FIRST NUCLEUS

PRIORITY OF THE SALESIAN MISSION AMONG TODAY'S YOUTH

In this nucleus a summary is presented of the reflections of the Provincial Chapters, the contributions of confreres and the response of young people. This nucleus aims at indicating «the priority of the Salesian mission with the youth of today in order to be like Don Bosco “signs and bearers of the love of God for young people especially those who are poor” (C. 2)» (AGC 427 p. 11).

Not all aspects of the mission are found here but only the priorities that emerged with greater insistence from this phase of preparation for GC28.

RECOGNIZING

1. The world of youth and the current situation of the Salesian mission

In most countries in the world young people constitute a significantly high number in society. In some places with a high birth-rate they represent a significant and growing proportion of the population, but they do not always have available to them suitable educational structures and genuine opportunities for their growth and development. On the other hand, in other countries there is marked decline in number which reduces the impact of the young in society.

Many young people in the world are living in conditions of poverty and destitution because of conditions of social inequality and of iniquitous policies of exploitation. There are many children and young people forced to leave their own countries and many refugees and evacuees. Many such as young native people are living in disadvantaged situations even within their own cultures, running the risk of experiencing exploitation and exclusion. On the other hand, in other contexts we find young people economically and socially well-off who are often increasingly unsettled in their personal lives for many reasons including family breakdowns and the absence in their lives of significant adults. In the world generally the young are excluded from the adult world where decisions are made and which does not involve them even in decisions about them. Very often the young people themselves say that we Salesians do not know their world and they invite us to be more open to it: "Sometimes you get away from us young people. You don't understand us and you think you already know everything."

Dealing with youth poverty, in *Evangelii gaudium* Pope Francis declares: "I want to say, with regret, that the worst discrimination which the poor suffer is the lack of spiritual care. The great majority of the poor have a special openness to the faith; they need God and we must not fail to offer them his friendship, his blessing, his word, the celebration of the sacraments and a journey of growth and maturity in the faith. Our preferential option for the poor must mainly translate into a privileged and preferential religious care" (n. 200). As we look at this world situation, we feel ourselves challenged by the words of the Gospel: "He saw a great throng and he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd" (*Mk. 6,34*).

2. Features of youth culture

The digital environment provides the setting for the contemporary world and for many young people it is already their natural habitat, which determines the way they learn things, establish relationships and perceive reality. For us Salesians it is a new mission territory.

The Web and social media are a reality with two faces: the place of meeting and communication, but also of isolation and manipulation. They demand a global educational pact/agreement as Pope Francis has said.

Strong and widespread is the sensitivity to ecological issues and protection of the environment. In this field as in other social issues (justice, solidarity, active citizenship) the young often show themselves capable of commitment. Beside the young people who are disillusioned and disinterested, there are others very much more open to serving others and to voluntary service.

Another emerging feature of youth culture is in the area of the body, affectivity and sexuality. The transformations in affective culture raise new questions in the field of anthropology, ethics and education that we cannot underestimate. Young people are particularly sensitive to women's role in the Church and in society.

3. Young people and faith

The relationship of young people to religion is profoundly influenced by the cultural, social and religious context. In some countries the Christian faith is a lively shared experience which the young people easily assume from infancy. In other settings religious indifference and secularization lead to a lack of significance and relevance of the faith. Also the negative effect of the scandals increases the distance between the young and the Church, making a credible proclamation more difficult. In these regions many educators are experiencing a notable sense of disorientation and they do not feel prepared to face up to previously unheard-of challenges to communicating the faith. Nor should those regions be forgotten where young Christians are a small minority, sometimes facing discrimination and persecution. In any case contact with the young shows that in them is alive – even though not always evident – the search for the meaning of life and an interest in spirituality to which we do not always know how to respond. In this regard one Provincial Chapter writes: "The young people in search of God often do not find the spaces and the people capable of guiding them in this experience."

4. The expectations of the young

Young people demonstrate in many ways the desire for significant adults, who do not exploit them and in no way exclude them from life and from society in its many expressions (political, religious etc.). From us Salesians they ask that we return to live with them more; to go out to meet them where they are (playground, social media etc.), to let them once again come into our houses and into the things we are doing.

The young want Salesians to be more spiritual guides and less managers of works and to help them wisely to respond to the deepest questions that they have in their hearts: "In many ways, the young people of today are saying to us: "We wish to see Jesus" (*Jn 12:21*), thus manifesting the healthy restlessness that characterizes the heart of every human being: "the restlessness of spiritual seeking, the restlessness of the encounter with God, the restlessness of love". (*Final Document of the Synod n. 50*)

They want us to be close to them and welcoming, open and without prejudices, ready to form genuine relationships of friendship and able to spread joy and optimism. From this point of view the dimension of consistency and of personal and community witness to life becomes particularly important.

5. Accompaniment and the involvement of the young

There are Salesians dedicated to accompaniment, even though much energy is taken by managerial commitments that take them away from daily contact with the young. The young people in a Province, while appreciating the generosity of so many confreres write: "The first concern arises from seeing them always too busy. Managing an Oratory or a School is difficult, and there are always so many things to do as we are well aware.

However, all these commitments end up taking attention away from personal accompaniment which is fundamental for the development of us young people." Some confreres recognize that they are not trained for the spiritual accompaniment and vocational discernment which require both care of their own spiritual lives and the acquisition of special skills. Further causes of difficulty in many Provinces come from the fall in the number of Salesians and from the generation gap.

In our works there are so many activities "for" the young but not always "with" the young. However, they are telling us in so many ways that they want to be protagonists and not just those for whom things are done when it comes to animation, to reflection, to discernment, and to decision making processes that concern them directly or indirectly. For these reasons, sometimes our pastoral work is not really significant because at times it does create processes but is reduced to organizing activities and events.

6. The presence and the involvement of families

The profound changes affecting families and the renewed attention of the Church on their role in education and the handing on of the faith also involve us. On the one hand the family is going through a period of crisis which is having a decisive impact on the world of the young, and on the other it remains an essential point of reference in development. Beside the families who consciously collaborate with us, there are others who are going through difficult times and ask for our help. In some cases, there are also families which do not concern themselves with the education of the children and neglect them. The presence of wounded families and the institution of the family itself being questioned are challenges for us raising questions that we are not always ready to answer. The educative pastoral community is the context within which to live out our relationship with families and their involvement; but that requires a renewal in mentality and in attitudes and a rethinking of educative pastoral projects.

What personal echoes has a careful reading of the text produced in us? In what aspects of this summary do we best recognise ourselves? Which need to be emphasised the more and which taken on board?

What differences at the level of the Regions appear most significant?

INTERPRETING

In this stage of discernment, we are being called to understand the deep reasons behind what we have recognized and the criteria needed to arrive at the appropriate choices. In each paragraph there is a series of questions that can help us to get to the heart of the matter.

Let us above all be inspired by the passages from the Gospel in which Jesus meets young people and the quotations from the Memoirs of the Oratory in which Don Bosco, when beginning his work, identifies the priorities of the mission.

7. Apostolic spirit and community witness

The social and cultural changes surrounding us make a deep impact on our life and on our mission. When they are not interpreted with a prophetic spirit, they finish by being treated as obstacles that slow down the mission and as situations that obscure the witness. From this there can come a weakening of the apostolic spirit and a retreat into one's own privacy where one does not want to be disturbed: this is the spiritual and apostolic superficiality that so many Rectors Major have warned us against. The confreres of one Province recognize: "The emphasis on personal comfort zones and on modern social media make Salesians close in on themselves." On the other hand, a prophetic interpretation of one's

own times leads to taking the changes as challenges that require a renewed spirituality and a creative pastoral approach.

APOSTOLIC SPIRIT. For what reason do we sometimes struggle to read with a prophetic spirit the socio-cultural changes and fall back into a pastoral approach of maintenance and conservation? Do we know how to respond to the young who are seeking an experience of genuine faith and looking for high quality spiritual proposals? How do we draw close to young people who no longer ask anything from the Church? How do we face up to the challenge of religious indifference?

COMMUNITY WITNESS. What are the reasons that lead us to live in personal “comfort zones” that create dependence, closure, compensations and suffocate the healthy apprehension of *Da mihi animas*? What changes are needed to our lifestyles and to the form of the religious community so as not to fall into spiritual and apostolic superficiality? What mentalities need to be changed so that our works are not simply service agencies but real homes for the young, in which there is a climate of fraternity and a family style of life?

8. Accompaniment and the involvement of the young

The recent Synod on the young identified in accompaniment and involvement two fundamental pivots of the mission of the Church and issued an invitation for their development in vocational terms: “only in the vocational dimension does all pastoral ministry find a unifying principle.” (*Final Document of the Synod* n. 139). Many Provincial Chapters confirmed that these were two vital elements for the Salesian charism.

When we talk about accompaniment we want to say that we are not limiting ourselves to organizing activities and managing structures for the young but we are really sharing in their daily lives, building personal relationships and helping them in their all-round growth, to face up to their weaknesses, to heal their wounds and to walk along the path of holiness. On the other hand, one Provincial Chapter recognizes: “The absence of accompaniment on the part of the Salesians is the result of too many commitments, the small numbers in the communities, and the generation gap. Sometimes because of the lack of adequate preparation and a mentality that does not recognize its importance.” Moreover, the importance of vocational guidance for the development of the Salesian charism needs to be re-emphasized.

Then, the word involvement reminds us that we do not consider the young people only as those for whom our projects and activities are organised, and that we want to make them participants in the Salesian mission and co-responsible for it and fostering their leading roles in the Church and in society. They themselves are asking from us a style of Church that is more participative and co-responsible.

ACCOMPANIMENT OF THE YOUNG. Why do we struggle so much to take on the accompaniment of the young in vocational terms as a real priority in the mission? How can we make it the pivotal point of our proposals and the element on which to judge the value of our works? What implications does this have for our organizational and structural plan? How can we integrate in a balanced way accompaniment of the surroundings, of the group and of individuals? How can we make accompaniment transparent so that it does not descend into forms of paternalism, manipulation, possessiveness and abuse? How can we really appreciate the Salesian tradition of loving kindness as a means of boosting a “pedagogy of affection”?

INVOLVEMENT OF THE YOUNG. What are the reasons for the young often feeling that they are merely those for whom we work and not the protagonists within our centres? What changes in mentality and organization are needed so that the participation of

the young is something real and effective? Are we aware of any examples of good practice in the involvement of the young? How are we preparing the young people to become active subjects and coherent witnesses in the Church and in society? What elements in Salesian Youth Spirituality are we being called to rethink and reflect on further – not without the help of the young people?

9. Care of the family and affective education

The need for the effective involvement of families in pastoral work and in the educative pastoral community emerges very clearly. To do this, it is necessary to find ways of getting to know the family background of the young people, aware that families need to become part of a community network of relationships, and that they have a unique contribution to make to the life of the Church and of society. *Amoris laetitia* reminds us that: “the family itself introduces fraternity into the world” (n. 194). There is also need, at this time in history, to offer to many families support in their weakness, providing specific means of accompaniment in view of the education of their children. This means that we need to work to acquire new skills.

The specific nature of the contribution that we are being called to offer to the Church in caring for families is that of approaching them through our educational charism with the help of those families that have made their own the Salesian mission. This happens through their involvement in the life of a Salesian work, the formation of parents, belonging to family groups inspired by the Salesian charism, the preparation of young people for marriage and the accompaniment of young couples. It is in this context also that the delicate question of affective and sex education needs to be dealt with. This is an element of primary importance in the current climate and requires very carefully prepared material.

CARING FOR THE FAMILY. How can we better develop the relationship between youth and family ministry? What experiences that have been well developed in these years seem more promising? In what way can we better involve families in the educative pastoral community, so as to make them active participants and protagonists in the educative plan? How can we accompany parents in their task of educators? In what way can we encourage the creation of family groups inspired by the Salesian charism and promote in them the apostolic spirit?

AFFECTIVE EDUCATION. How can we integrate in our pastoral work attention to the physical dimension, that of affectivity and of sexuality? How can we develop proposals of affective and sex education in a Salesian style that are not limited to the sporadic and occasional? How can we create a climate conducive to relationship capable of educating relationships and affections?

CHOOSING

10. Summary of the first stage of discernment

Below are the proposals which in the first phase of discernment, conducted in the Provincial Chapters, were most widely shared. We retain the original wording, even though as a result the list might not be very homogeneous.

Apostolic spirit and community witness

- a) The YM Department should take on board the synod proposal which presents vocation as “the hinge around which all dimensions of the person are integrated” (*Final Document of the Synod*, 139) and offer guidelines for a youth ministry “from a vocational perspective” (*Final Document of the Synod*, nn. 138-143).

- b) The Regions and the Provinces should check how far the organisation of youth ministry responds to the criteria of maintenance and conservation or rather is marked by a real missionary impulse. (Cf. *Evangelii gaudium* n. 27)
- c) The Provinces and the communities assess their own lifestyle, so as to recognize the signs of withdrawing and closing in on themselves which creates a distancing from the young

Accompaniment and the involvement of the young

- d) The Regions and the Provinces should draw up formation courses for Salesians and lay people on personal and *environment* accompaniment, according to the Salesian style.
- e) The Departments for Formation and Youth Ministry should offer appropriate advice and guidelines to make the culture of educational and spiritual accompaniment expand in the Congregation.
- f) The Provinces and the communities should review the Salesian Educative Pastoral Plan on the basis of making accompaniment central.
- g) The Provinces and the communities should involve the young people more in the planning, programming, animation and assessment of pastoral activities, taking into account the maturity of each one.
- h) The Provinces and the communities should provide the young with opportunities to share life, taking up the proposal formulated by the Synod of “a time destined for the maturation of adult Christian life”, to be lived in our houses with a specific programme of sharing of life, fraternity, apostolate and spirituality. (Cf. *Final Document of the Synod* n. 161)
- i) In harmony with the Frame of Reference for Salesian Youth Ministry, the Provinces and the communities should put into effect the presence and the participation of young people in the places of discernment and decision making of the work.
- j) In an appropriate way the Provinces should train Salesians and young people in the new technologies, so that they can be an opportunity for growth in knowledge and a context in which to involve the young in pastoral initiatives and activities.
- k) In the re-shaping of the presences, the Provinces should provide houses which can welcome migrants, youngsters and young people to give them the opportunity to study, receive technical training and education and find their place in the work force.

Caring for the family and affective education

- l) The Department for Youth Ministry should indicate the criteria for our activities with families.
- m) The Provinces and the communities should promote family groups inspired by Salesian spirituality and encourage their apostolic activities.
- n) The Provinces and the communities should accompany the formation of families and their active involvement in the educative pastoral communities.
- o) The Provinces should organise periodic meetings for families.
- p) The Department for Youth Ministry should draw up appropriate material for affective and sex education which is not restricted to occasional and sporadic presentations.
- q) The Departments for Youth Ministry and Formation should see to the formation of Salesians and lay people so that they know how to accompany the young in affective and sex education.

11. The second stage of discernment

After having looked at the proposals of the Provincial Chapters, the General Chapter is now called upon to identify the major choices for the next six-year period.

What priority choices can we realistically make in order to face up to the challenges that have emerged at the level of the Congregation, the Regions, the Provinces?

So that the choices be made in God, it is necessary that we, like Don Bosco, allow ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit. This requires an interior attitude based on silence, listening, prayer, fraternal sharing and mutual respect. In the presence of God and the expectations of the young, with courage we try to identify the good to be done: "In those things that are for the benefit of young people in danger or which serve to win souls for God I push ahead even to the extent of recklessness." (Cf. C. 19).

To complete this process an appropriate methodology is also necessary, that should at least provide for:

- a) a period of inspirational Biblical or Salesian reading
- b) a first sharing of ideas
- c) a period of silence and personal prayer
- d) the identification of priorities that normally arise from a convergence of views (Cf. C. 66)
- e) the detailed presentation of the priorities identified

Finally, it should be remembered that every decision of a General Chapter has many implications. In particular, it is necessary to be precise regarding:

- a) the attitudes and mentality that need to be changed
- b) the procedures to be set in motion
- c) the structural conditions to be ensured
- d) the responsibilities to be assigned
- e) the people to be involved

Such complexities would suggest that the choices should not be multiplied but that the real priorities should be identified and the proposals be expressed with realism and farsightedness.

SECOND NUCLEUS

PROFILE OF THE SALESIAN TODAY

In this second nucleus we find those elements, fruit of the reflections of the Provincial Chapters and the contribution of confreres, in which is seen the awareness that the “profile of the Salesian” comes from a consecrated vocation to which he must correspond day by day, in view of a mission carried out in a communitarian manner. All this requires a suitable and continuous formation (Cf. AGC 427 pp. 16-17)

Not to be found here are all the elements regarding formation, but only the priorities that emerged with some particular insistence in the phase of preparation for GC28.

RECOGNIZING

12. Formation and Salesian spirit

GC27 firmly recalled the profile of the Salesian as a mystic in the spirit, prophet of fraternity and servant of the young, promoting a fresh awareness of our identity.

Interest in Don Bosco, his spirituality and his educational system is very strong among the confreres and often among the lay people who are sharing the mission. Many communities have expressed the need to study the holiness of Don Bosco more deeply, throwing more light on his particular experience of God and the grace of unity that denotes our charism. One Provincial Chapter states: “There is a lack of depth in the understanding and the theological-spiritual interpretation of the charism.” Sometimes knowledge of the history, the pedagogy and the spirituality of Don Bosco is still at an elementary level and it is an effort to prepare Salesians to be qualified in “Salesianity”. Sometimes, little familiarity with Salesian sources and the Constitutions is noted.

The inculcation of the charism in some places is still at the early stages and remains a real challenge. The fact of not having available the main Salesian sources translated into local languages increases this difficulty.

Some confreres do not have a clear perception of Salesian consecrated identity and demonstrate an inclination towards clericalism or to a secularized style of life. The not isolated cases of confreres who ask to become diocesan clergy are raising questions about the assimilation of Salesian charismatic identity.

13. Formation and the real situation

“Realities are more important than ideas” (*Evangelii gaudium*, nn. 231-233). We recognize that in formation processes this principle needs to be better incarnated, because sometimes some formation structures run the risk of being isolated from the real situation of a people’s social economic and political world.

Generally speaking, the formation process is considered good. In some places the “boarding style” of initial formation, in addition to not appreciating the value of the candidates’ earlier preparation and the personalization of formation plans, runs the risk of encouraging an immature attitude and creating a separation from the ordinary life of communities and families. The formation community teams are sometimes too few in number. In addition to their academic preparation, the formation staff have not always had the sufficient pastoral experience that could add weight to their formative activity. The pastoral experiences themselves are sometimes not very significant and, rather than being of a community nature are often individual in form. At other times, a separation between studies and pastoral experiences is to be noted. The danger is that of having an initial

formation that is disconnected from reality, spiritually formal and one that does not prepare for life and for work in the educative pastoral communities.

It is said that in some confreres there is a “disordered dedication”: they are very generous and enterprising, but lacking discipline in their management of time, looking after their health and with regard to the mission. At present, we are not sufficiently prepared to accompany Salesians in times of difficulty and crisis (burnout, anxiety, loneliness, spiritual superficiality, a tendency to seek an easy life).

14. Formation and mission

The interconnection between formation ad mission is well identified by a group of young confreres: «The mission is the “reason” for formation: we are being formed in view of the mission and within it. The urgent need to give quality to the mission is noted, and therefore to ensure greater quality to formation». At the same time, the mission presupposes a journey of vocational growth in maturity, which cannot be reduced to the mere acquisition of theoretical and practical skills, but which touches the depths of a person’s identity.

Living for and with young people who are poor, abandoned and in danger is a priority of our charism. Nevertheless, there is a lack of sensitivity and of suitable formation to work with them in the mission, especially with certain specific groups (natives, migrants, unaccompanied minors, disadvantaged young people) and to accompany young adults and families. The *missio ad gentes* is a constitutive element of our charism, as pointed out by many Provinces and requires a specific formation. For this reason, it is necessary to form ourselves “in the mission” in order to form ourselves “for the mission”.

Sometimes there is noted a lack of balance between work, study and prayer, as also an insufficient intercultural openness. Side by side with some splendid examples, there are some confreres who have neglected the formation dimension in their lives. There is a fall of interest in ongoing formation which leads to a certain “mental retirement” in confreres who are struggling to keep alight the fire of their own vocational call. An important aspect of ongoing formation “in the mission” is the discernment process that takes place in community meetings, in the house council, in the educative pastoral community council: on these occasions, confreres and lay people can interpret the signs of the times and the pastoral challenges.

15. Formation, Salesian community and the educative pastoral community

We recognize that the subject of the Salesian mission is not the individual but the community: the educative pastoral community is the experience of Church that we are being called upon to live and to bring about together. This has clear implications and consequences in the area of formation: we are forming ourselves in order to work together and we find in the intertwining of the different vocations the context for our specific role.

In different ways individualism comes into the life of the Salesian community. Sometimes, confreres cannot bring themselves to enjoy the success of others, they give up working together preferring individual commitments, murmuring destroys the atmosphere of trust and family. The quality of fraternal life is an important factor of formation, in which various elements play their part: life witness, sharing the word of God, an exchange of experiences. For this reason, we ask ourselves what is the relevance and effectiveness of the annual retreat, of the days of recollection, community assemblies and other occasions. Community life gives support, inspires hope, becomes an opportunity for purification and constant conversion; it is also a school of many virtues and attitudes such as patience and forgiveness, sacrifice and humility. Nevertheless, as one Provincial Chapter declares: “many Salesians see community practices as formalities and not as moments for reflection and change. Community times of prayer and formation are easily neglected so as to dedicate oneself to apostolic activities which are more urgent and satisfying.”

Within the wider and more structured educative pastoral community, confreres sometimes find it difficult to find their identity and their specific role. When on the other hand they express to the full their specific character as consecrated persons and evangelizers of the young, they are appreciated and sought not only by the young but also by the lay people who are co-responsible. These latter request the special presence of Salesians as prophets and witnesses of communion and of fidelity to the charism.

All of this invites us to develop to the full relational and collaborative virtues. We are aware that their absence creates in pastoral work and in community leadership great difficulties in the carrying out of the Salesian mission.

16. Formation and study

Various Provinces have noted the insufficient cultivation of study and reflection on the part of the confreres. One Provincial Chapter states that “they read little and spend too much time on social media” It is sufficient to look at the state of the libraries in some communities to see the point.

Not only the young but we adults are suffering from the pervasive influence of the digital culture which prefers the image to the word, the emotional impact to reasoning, the rapid circulation of news to the slow building up of knowledge. This runs the risk of creating superficiality, feeding intellectual laziness and weakening the critical faculty. However, the digital world does offer opportunities for formation that still need to be better valued.

Projects for theological and pedagogical updating promoted at various levels are not sufficiently appreciated. Finally, the difficulty in stopping and reflecting on educational and pastoral praxis has been observed, in the translating of experience and work into a formative opportunity. Very often what is missing is any real depth of pastoral and pedagogical reflection to accompany the planning and the assessment of the activities.

17. The organizational and governing model of formation

Formation is an aspect that cuts across the whole of Salesian life and takes place through a structured process of growing in maturity. For this reason, it involves from the very first stages, various groups of people and many levels of responsibility. In the history of the Congregation, there have been a variety of models in the accompaniment of the formation journey of the confreres but the Rectors Major have always pointed out “that formation is the responsibility of the Congregation, which entrusts to the Provinces the duty of implementing it, ensuring the necessary conditions regarding personnel, structures and resources that make it possible.” (AGC 416, p. 9)

The setting up of a good quality formation team that is sufficiently stable remains an ongoing challenge: it is not always easy to have properly qualified confreres who are prepared and sent to the houses of formation and study centres. This is an impoverishment of the cultural quality of the Congregation and therefore of its ability to face up to the challenges of our day in an adequate and convincing manner.

Faced with the complexity of our formation structure, a Provincial Chapter points out: “We observe that our formation structure seems to be congested with many institutional references for which the levels of responsibility are not clearly defined and by sets of regulations the meaning of which are not always clear. Therefore, we ask the General Chapter to courageously face this complex issue, indicating more clearly the tasks of the formation Department and of the Councillor, the coordinating structures and roles of responsibility”.

What personal echoes has an attentive reading of the text produced in us?

In what features of this summary do we most recognize ourselves? Which need to be more emphasized and which integrated?

What differences appear more significant at Regional level?

INTERPRETING

In this stage of discernment, we are being called to understand the serious reasons for what we have recognized and the inspired criteria to arrive at the appropriate choices. In each paragraph there is a series of questions which will help us to enter the heart of the subject matter.

Let us allow ourselves to be inspired above all by the vocation stories of great biblical characters and by the dreams of Don Bosco in which the profile of the Salesian emerge and the demands of the ‘sequela’

18. Consecrated identity and formation in the charism

Consecrated life was invited by Vatican Council II to a profound process of renewal, that was launched but which had not yet achieved satisfactory results. The meaning of consecration has not always been understood in the Church community and its originality appreciated. Even in the hearts of some confreres the meaning of our religious life seems to have been suffocated. And while Pope Francis has recalled the prophetic and eschatological nature of consecrated life, asking religious “to wake up the world” clericalism and secularism sometimes threaten to obscure our identity. Within consecrated life, clericalism arises when the ordained ministry is not seen as existing within consecration but takes its place, being reduced to the seeking of power, prestige, self-affirmation, rather than as a sacramental sign of Christ the pastor and servant. Secularism arises from an emptying of the sense of identity which does not recognize the specific implications of the “sequela Christi” according to the evangelical counsels, giving way to compromise with worldly ways of thinking. Mary, who guided Don Bosco in the founding of the Congregation remains an essential point of reference in understanding and living our consecrated vocation to the full.

Many young people are looking for Salesians as men of God: The young people of one Province wrote: “the Salesian we are looking for in our dreams is a Salesian who knows how to bear witness with courage and conviction to his own consecration, to his belonging to Christ and to his love for prayer.”

If the real significance of apostolic consecration is not adequately presented and lived out, any formation processes become generic and therefore it is difficult for them to reach the heart of a confrere in any depth. In fact, the charism is the burning nucleus around which are gathered the various features of the formation process and the grace that enables each confrere to give unity to his whole life. If this does not happen, formation is reduced to a formalistic assumption of external attitudes and does not lead to the individual really reaching maturity in any depth.

CONSECRATED IDENTITY. What are the reasons why clericalism and secularism eat into the identity of some confreres? How should these threats be resisted? In our Provinces does an awareness of the specific nature of consecrate life exist? In what way, at community and personal level, is the prophetic and eschatological significance of our witness expressed?

FORMATION TO THE CHARISM. For what reasons does formation not always reach the minds and hearts of confreres? How are formalism and conformity to be avoided? Under what conditions does the charism really become accepted as the nucleus of the process of vocational development?

19. The link between mission and formation and discernment in a Salesian style

One of the decisive key issues for the General Chapter is the clarification of the proper relationship between mission and formation. Pope Francis with insistence asks for a real missionary conversion of the Church at all levels: formation too is affected by this necessary and irreversible process.

Identifying the actual situation as a real and proper “cathedra” (i.e. source of learning), it becomes clear that formation takes place in mission, in those places in which there are not only masters of the spirit but also of pastoral life who help to weigh up the authenticity of the Salesian vocation. It is the mission, especially among the least, that sets the tone in practical terms for our whole life, and therefore also for formation. The young people themselves, «as the “theological arenas” in which the Lord tells us some of his expectations and challenges for building tomorrow» (cf. *Final Document of the Synod n. 64*), help us by their presence, their words and also their criticism, to form ourselves and also reform ourselves for the mission. For this reason, a serious re-examination of times, contents, places and structures is necessary so that formation may have a close contact with the real situation.

However, it is not enough to become familiar with the real situation, it is necessary to do so in the right way, in other words with the heart and the eyes of God, requesting the gift of the “grace of unity” and making a real effort to cultivate an “apostolic inner being”. To do this, it is necessary to enter into the rhythm of a “pastoral discernment” capable of identifying precisely God’s call and responding to it with apostolic zeal certain that the Salesian mission is a genuine participation in the action of God in the history of humanity. In our own time, characterized by an epochal change which is as unexpected as it is radical, learning to discern in a Salesian style is an absolutely urgent matter.

LINKS BETWEEN MISSION AND FORMATION. What are the immediate causes and the deep roots of a certain separation between mission and formation that the Congregation is experiencing? How much is the insistence of Pope Francis on the missionary transformation of the Church the subject of serious and profound examination and discussion in our formation and pastoral centres? In what way are the young, and in particular the poorest and most abandoned of them, for us a “theological arena”?

DISCERNMENT IN SALESIAN STYLE. How can we overcome a certain pastoral activism, that mistakenly identifies the mission with work? How can we re-motivate the confreres who have lost apostolic zeal? Where does the difficulty come from in reflecting in a critical manner on our pastoral activity in order to make it a formative experience? What ought to be the elements and the method of a spiritual and pastoral discernment “in a Salesian style”? How can we prepare the confreres and the educative pastoral communities to put this discernment into practice in ordinary life?

20. The subjects, processes and structures of formation

Starting from the large number of people involved in formation both at the level of government (central, regional, inter-provincial, provincial, local) and of leadership (department, provincial delegates, *Curatoria*, rectors, formation teams spiritual guides, confessors, teachers) it would seem necessary to foster greater order in formation, starting from a search for the remote and proximate causes for a certain confusion that is perceived at various levels. Fruitful co-responsibility requires a clear awareness of one’s own responsibilities. For this to happen, it will be necessary to accept with conviction a methodology of working that is open to listening and to appreciating the various levels of leadership and of government.

Reflecting on the relationship between structures and processes is important because it leads to an awareness of the way they influence each other. With regard to the processes,

there are often complaints about the way our initial formation, which normally takes place in different places, is fragmented. On the other hand, it is recognized that encountering different and possibly international experiences can be a positive enrichment. Communication between the various stages of formation and the transmission of the information that are necessary for good accompaniment of the confreres are not always achieved in a satisfactory manner.

Structures can foster the formation processes but can also prove obstacles. They require a considerable investment economically and in personnel, but on the other hand they make a decisive contribution to transmitting the charism and to safeguarding its formative originality. People are not always aware that study centres can contribute to the life of the Provinces as places for pastoral thinking and cultural leadership. It would also be worthwhile to reflect on the significance for the Congregation and for the Church of the Salesian Pontifical University.

SUBJECTS OF FORMATION. What are the deeper reasons for a certain confusion that is evident with regard to the subjects of formation? In what way can we help ourselves to clarify the different responsibilities in the area of formation. What are the most appropriate methodologies to ensure that all those involved in formation procedures are fully appreciated?

PROCESSES OF FORMATION. In what way can excessive fragmentation of the formation process be avoided? How can intercultural openness be fostered in the confreres? How is communication between the stages of formation for better accompaniment to be fostered?

STRUCTURES OF FORMATION. What are the criteria and the conditions that ensure effective formation in the formation houses? In what way can formation structures contribute to the life of the Provinces? What does the Congregation expect from the UPS and the study centres?

CHOOSING

21. Summary of the first stage of discernment

Below are the proposals which in the first phase of discernment, conducted in the Provincial Chapters were most widely shared. We retain the original wording, even though as a result the list might not be very homogeneous.

Consecrated identity and formation for the charism

- a) The Salesian renews the commitments assumed at profession and indicated in the Rule of Life, developing and reviewing his own personal plan of life and making his own contribution to the plan of the Salesian community.
- b) Every Region and Province, with the assistance of the Regional Centres, prepares or revises the plan of formation in Salesian Studies, preparing qualified confreres and lay people also by means of licentiates and doctorates at the UPS and in other study centres.
- c) The Regions and the Provinces realize the value of the experience to be had at the Salesian Places.
- d) In the formation journey, confreres are to be trained to listen to the voice of the Spirit and His inspirations as the soul of discernment and the source of pastoral fruitfulness.

The link between mission and formation and discernment in a Salesian style

- e) In setting up formation teams, special care is to be taken in the choice of people with proven pastoral experience so that they may also be masters of pastoral life.

- f) Formation personnel should be given the chance to have experience of the mission in the outskirts or in the area of marginalization or of young people at risk.
- g) Young Salesians should be given the opportunity to have an experience of mission in contact with poor young people.
- h) Where possible, formation houses should be part of educative and pastoral settings that are particularly significant for the charism (native populations, the marginalized, the missions...)
- i) A serious review should be launched into the times, contents, places, structures, experiences of the study centres, so that formation can be a practical preparation directed towards the Salesian mission.
- j) Teamwork should be promoted in all communities.

Subjects, processes and structures of formation

- k) The centres of ongoing formation in the Region should offer good courses that correspond to the expectations of the confreres and the lay people associated with our mission.
- l) Each Province should draw up or revise each year the formation plan and find significant occasions for ongoing formation and for the spiritual and pastoral development of the confreres.
- m) The Province should review the proposals for ongoing formation assessing their effectiveness: the vocational accompaniment of all the confreres of all ages; monthly days of recollection, the reading of documents proposed by the Church or by the Congregation, annual retreats, formation sessions organized at local or province level, etc.
- n) Each Province should organize formation courses for those confreres with special responsibilities. For example: Rectors of communities, parish clergy, economers, local coordinators of youth ministry or social communication, those in charge of oratories or youth centres, or of homes for orphans...
- o) The communities of houses of specific formation should be characterized by their international and intercultural nature.
- p) The identity of the Salesian community should be strengthened by the drawing up and the periodic assessment of a community plan in a “synod spirit”.
- q) Evangelical witness should be fostered in community life according to the formative community features which characterize our tradition and spirituality.
- r) The attitude of young confreres in initial formation to Salesian community life should be given attention and assessed appropriately.

22. The second stage of discernment

After having looked at the proposals of Provincial Chapters, the General Chapter is now called upon to identify the main choices for the next six-year period.

What priority choices can we realistically make to face up to the challenges that have emerged at the level of the Congregation, the Regions, the Provinces?

So that the choices be made in God, it is necessary that we, like Don Bosco, allow ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit. This requires an interior attitude based on silence, listening, prayer, fraternal sharing and mutual respect. In the presence of God and the expectations of the young, with courage we try to identify the good to be done: “In those things that are for the benefit of young people in danger or which serve to win souls for God I push ahead even to the extent of recklessness.” (Cf. C. 19).

To complete this process an appropriate methodology is also necessary, that should at least provide for:

- a) a period of inspirational Biblical or Salesian reading
- b) a first sharing of ideas
- c) a period of silence and personal prayer
- d) the identification of priorities that normally arise from a convergence of views (Cf. C. 66)
- e) the detailed presentation of the priorities identified.

Finally, it should be remembered that every decision of a General Chapter has many implications. In particular, it is necessary to be precise regarding:

- a) the attitudes and mentality that need to be changed
- b) the procedures to be set in motion
- c) the structural conditions to be ensured
- d) the responsibilities to be assigned
- e) the people to be involved

Such complexities would suggest that the choices should not be multiplied but that the real priorities should be identified and the proposals be expressed with realism and farsightedness.

THIRD NUCLEUS

TOGETHER WITH LAY PEOPLE IN THE MISSION AND IN FORMATION

In this third nucleus we find those features – the fruit of the reflection of the Provincial Chapters and the contributions of confreres – which affirm that “the only way to carry out the Salesian mission in a complicated world and in the diversity of contexts” is that of sharing it with lay people (Cf. AGC 427, p. 23).

Not all the elements regarding the relationship between Salesians and lay people are to be found here, but only those priority ones which emerged with particular insistence in the phase of preparation for GC28 regarding the mission and the formation of Salesians and lay people.

RECOGNIZING

23. Successes and problems in the mission shared with lay people

The situation regarding the mission shared with lay people is very varied in the Congregation. As well as some very positive and consolidated experiences, there are others in the first stages and others again that are struggling to begin. In some Provinces, the involvement of lay people had been motivated not so much by a vision of the Church or of the Congregation as by the demands of survival. In the same way, in the Provinces in which there is a considerable number of vocations co-responsibility is still weak.

This shows that the ecclesiology of communion of the people of God proposed by Vatican II and taken up by the Congregation, especially through GC24, has not yet been assimilated in depth. On this account, the involvement of lay people not rarely is limited to the functional level. On the other hand, one has to recognize among lay people the presence of different levels of sharing in our charism.

An awareness is slowly growing of the value of a shared mission and an understanding that the positive experiences actually taking place are contributing to a change of mentality. For example, there are many young adults who are part of the Province leadership teams, as well as qualified lay people in positions of responsibility who fully share in our mission and collaborate at various levels in the drawing up and the implementation of our educative pastoral plans. There are also examples of collaboration in inter-religious contexts which have their own features.

Resistance is encountered on both sides: some confreres have a paternalistic mentality and they show little respect for lay people and struggle to share responsibility. Among lay people some have difficulty passing from a functional role to one sharing in the charism and to committing themselves on a permanent basis to becoming co-responsible for the mission.

24. Reciprocity in relationships between Salesians and lay people

Relationships between Salesians and lay people are usually marked by cordiality, respect and collaboration. They are of a positive nature, especially where there is a clear vocational identity, a structured formation plan and a shared objective in an educative pastoral community process. Where these are lacking things get worse. In general, difficulty is found in trying to establish a genuine situation of reciprocity. One Provincial Chapter states: “If all the important decisions are made by the Salesians, and if the lay partners in the mission, out of respect for the Salesians as their superiors, can never

express their disagreement, then any real agreement and the taking on of responsibility for the mission on the part of lay people are impeded.”

The relationship with the lay people who work in our centres is influenced also by contractual arrangements. When these are not properly managed, there can be a formal and sometimes tense relationship between the employer and the employee. On the part of the Salesians there is not always clarity in planning and an ability to appreciate the different obligations. This creates reserve and resistance also in terms of relationships. On the contrary, when the councils of the educative pastoral communities are working well and local plans are well made, involvement and participation are facilitated.

Various Provinces point to the risk of collaboration that does not take into account the diversity of vocations and charisms, which quite unintentionally leads to a kind of “clericalization of the laity” and the “laicization of the consecrated persons” When this happens daily collaboration, rather than bringing out the specific nature of each one, leads to a smoothing out of identity.

25. Joint formation of Salesians and lay people

In recent years, some positive initiatives have come to fruition for the joint formation of Salesians and lay people, such as the Days of Reflection on the Strenna of the Rector Major, periodic formation meetings of the educative pastoral community, the work of drawing up and assessing the annual plan. Some of these events take place at local level, others at Province level. In the Congregation, there are also some Regional Centres that promote joint formation experiences.

In general, it is seen that while at the operational level some responsibilities have been transferred to lay people, the sharing of spirituality is weaker. In fact, a more systematic formation is lacking, one that aims to integrate all the aspects of the Salesian mission (spiritual, charismatic, pedagogical, professional.) We have not yet devised a shared plan that distinguishes the levels of formation, the contents, those to whom it is addressed and the subjects.

One sees on the part of some confreres a certain reluctance to being involved in formation with lay people, and difficulty in putting aside a certain attitude of presumed superiority. Among some lay people, there is not a great awareness of their role in the Church or a readiness to take up the formation responsibilities that derive from it.

Nor can it be denied that, especially in some countries, economic support is fundamental in encouraging the participation of the lay people in initiatives of joint formation.

26. Works with lay management under Province responsibility

In addition to works for which the responsibility is shared between a Salesian community and a group of lay people, which is the form usually taken for the carrying out of our educative and pastoral mission, there are also works with lay management under the responsibility of the Province in which the mission and responsibility for it are entrusted directly to a group of lay people with accompaniment on the part of the Province (Cf. GC24, 180-182; AGC 363,297-298). This accompaniment is carried out in different ways.

The presence of works with lay management under the responsibility of the Province is very varied in the Congregation. In some Provinces, they are numerous and already there is a well proven experience of accompaniment. In most cases, however, we are only at the beginning of the experience, or, where the number of confrere is such for them to be able to occupy all posts of responsibility, this experience is entirely absent.

In many cases, the Provinces have made a great effort in reflection and in creativity in order to face the challenge of accompaniment in this type of work. In many of these, the lay people who have taken responsibility have a good Salesian formation and a high level of professional expertise.

While recognizing the positive aspects of this experience, quite serious problems have been noted. Among these, for example, there are the difficulty the Salesians have of ensuring a systematic accompaniment, the struggle lay people have in combining the commitments demanded by these works with the duties of family life, difficulties linked to changes of the lay people, the absence of criteria and means of control, the need to institute management evaluation procedures, the need to find an appropriate juridical formula, the demands arising from a change in the culture of formation on both sides, in order to prepare better for the management of these new structures.

**What personal echoes has an attentive reading of the text produced in us?
In what features of this summary do we most recognize ourselves? Which ones
need to be more emphasized and which integrated?
What differences appear more significant at Regional level?**

INTERPRETING

In this stage of discernment, we are being called to understand the serious reasons for what we have recognized and the inspired criteria to arrive at the appropriate choices. In each paragraph there is a series of questions which will help us to enter the heart of the subject matter.

Let us allow ourselves to be inspired above all by texts from the Acts of the Apostles which present the infant Church and its lively missionary spirit, by the great Pauline images of the Church and by Salesian teaching as it developed starting from GC24.

27. Synodal Church for the mission and the specific nature of vocations

Our collaboration with lay people has its real theological and pastoral foundation in the communal nature of the Church which nowadays, in “synod-style (synodality) for the mission”, rediscovers a sign of the times to be taken up and seriously reflected on. Contemporary ecclesiology shows that the different vocations in the Church have a common baptismal root and are intended to contribute to the growth of the people of God. “All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients.” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 120)

Regarding the specific and the complementary nature of vocations, we can find in *Christifideles Laici* a clear and effective formulation: “In Church Communion the states of life by being ordered one to the other are thus bound together among themselves. They all share in a deeply basic meaning: that of being the manner of living out the commonly shared Christian dignity and the universal call to holiness in the perfection of love. They are different yet complementary, in the sense that each of them has a basic and unmistakable character which sets each apart, while at the same time each of them is seen in relation to the other and placed at each other’s service. Thus the lay state of life has its distinctive feature in its secular character. It fulfills an ecclesial service in bearing witness and, in its own way recalling for priests, women and men religious, the significance of the earthly and temporal realities in the salvific plan of God. In turn, the *ministerial priesthood* represents in different times and places, the permanent guarantee of the sacramental presence of Christ, the Redeemer. The religious state bears witness to the eschatological character of the Church, that is, the straining towards the Kingdom of God that is prefigured and in some way anticipated and experienced even now through the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience.” (n. 55)

This vision indicates that the Salesian charism is completed when the mission is lived out in the reciprocity of the various vocations. This really ought to be the profound meaning of the Salesian Family: a vast apostolic movement for the salvation of the young. If, on the part of the Salesians, a tendency to be self-focused appears and, on the part of lay people, their commitment does not express sufficiently strongly their own vocational identity, this reciprocity would be greatly diminished if not stifled entirely. This impoverishment weakens the witness and makes the mission more sterile. It would be appropriate also to undertake a reflection on lay people who work with us and are far from the Church or belong to other religions.

SYNODAL CHURCH FOR THE MISSION. What are the reasons why the guidelines of GC24 still meet with resistance and tardiness? How can we re-discover the meaning of a common baptismal vocation that makes us, as members of the people of God and beyond any particular differences, protagonists in the mission as servants of the Gospel with a special attention to the poor? What contribution to the subject of "Salesians and lay people" can the reflection of the Church on the *synod-style (synodality)* offer? If the Salesian Family wants to be a vast movement led by different vocations for the same charism on behalf of the shared mission among the young, what is preventing it from making proper use of this resource?

SPECIFIC NATURE OF VOCATIONS. How can we accompany the lay people to discover and to discern the gifts and the charisms that the Holy Spirit has given them in baptism? How can we help the Salesians to take up their own specific role in relation to lay people and from the point of view of a synodal Church? What are the points to be insisted upon in order to properly appreciate the relationship between Salesians and lay people without eliminating the specific differences linked to the vocation of each one? How to make vocation language accessible once more in strongly secularized contexts?

28. Management of the work, life of the community and animating nucleus

The management of a work and the life of the religious community have an influence on each other. The sharing of responsibility with lay people has had a significant impact on various aspects of our life; and vice versa the charismatic vitality of the religious community makes a considerable impression on the progress of the work, on the relationships with the lay people and on the atmosphere of the educative pastoral community. The animating nucleus composed of the Salesians and the lay people who in a very significant way share spirit, pedagogy and mission constitutes the strategic hub for the ordinary life of the work.

If we look at the first aspect of the theme, we recognize the need to reflect on how the development of the educative pastoral community has changed the role of the Rector, on the questions it has raised about the participation of lay people in the local house council, on the relationship between the house council and the council of the work. Even the internal organization of the religious community has experienced changes and this has necessitated a complete rethinking of the situation with care being taken to involve, as far as possible, all the confreres and to avoid leaving any on the side-lines. Finally, it is necessary to consider that the insertion of lay people in permanent established roles of responsibility may call for a change in some roles linked to religious obedience.

With regard to the second aspect of the theme, so that the involvement of lay people corresponds to the criteria of a synodal Church, and that it is not simply a gesture, a Salesian community is required that has strong charismatic vitality. A sufficient numbers of confreres with the necessary qualities, their mentality regarding lay people, the way in which the Rector exercises his role, the ability of the house council to reflect, all have an

importance that is absolutely fundamental in the progress of the work and a considerable influence on the style of relationships.

As regards the animating nucleus, experience shows that its quality and preparation continue to ensure a harmony between the different demands placed on it, the fruitfulness of the rapport between the different vocations and the ecclesial witness to communion.

In reflecting on this theme, it is necessary to take into account certain determining factors: the different levels of belonging to and sharing in the Salesian spirit and mission; the various levels on which co-responsibility is exercised; the type of work; the nature of the presence of lay people on a voluntary or on a contractual basis.

THE SALESIAN WORK. In what way does co-responsibility with lay people impact on our religious life? What benefits do we recognize? What are the risks to look out for? Are there aspects that need to be further studied and clarified? What does the retreat of some Salesians from the mission shared with lay people depend on? To what extent can people of other religions share our mission?

THE SALESIAN COMMUNITY. What criteria should be considered in rethinking and ensuring the life of prayer and fraternity of the religious community? What conditions need to be guaranteed in the religious community so that co-responsibility with lay people may be fruitful and significant? What are the main differences linked to the type of work?

THE ANIMATING NUCLEUS. What are the criteria for the composition and the rhythm of work that are advisable for the smooth functioning of the animating nucleus? To what extent have the suggestions and the proposals in this regard of the “Frame of Reference for Salesian Youth Ministry” (Cf. chapter V, 1.3) been taken on board?

29. Joint formation for the mission

The 24th General Chapter states: “ We are called to share in the Salesian Family with all the lay people not only in the carrying out of daily work but primarily in the Salesian spirit to become sharers in the responsibility for the mission in our works and beyond them.” (GC24, 88). The sharing in the Salesian spirit and the growth in co-responsibility are only possible if the Salesians and lay people share in some forms of formation experience geared towards the mission. Obviously, it is not a matter of neglecting the courses of specific formation to consecrated life and the ministry or those by which lay people acquire their professional skills. Rather it is a matter of providing varied courses by which the educative pastoral community can enjoy formation experiences that correspond to the needs of the mission.

Joint formation is impeded by the fact that, as one Provincial Chapter states: “Sometimes Salesians cannot see that they can learn something from lay people”. On the other hand, lay people are not always aware that baptism makes them disciples missionaries and that the Holy Spirit generously pours His gifts on all believers, to make the kingdom of God grow. Joint formation can therefore help everyone to understand and carry out the mission better, making them aware that it does not belong to any single category of believers but to the whole People of God, with the wide variety of vocations and charisms it contains.

Precisely for this reason the *Final Document of the Synod* on the young firmly underlines the need for the joint formation of the laity, consecrate persons and priests as a means towards true *synod-style (synodality)*. Referring to the formation of seminarians and of young consecrated persons, it courageously affirms: “It is important to keep young men and women in formation in touch with the daily life of families and communities, paying special attention to the presence of women and Christian couples, such that formation is grounded in the reality of life and marked by relationships that can be integrated into the social and cultural context.” (n. 164)

JOINT FORMATION FOR THE MISSION. What are the roots of the resistance to joint formation of Salesians and lay people? Under what conditions can the educative pastoral community be the place or location for joint formation? With what criteria (contents, those aimed at, subjects, style, structure) should such formation be planned and implemented? What official directives, at Province and Congregation level, should it have? In what way can it be proposed in the various stages of initial formation?

CHOOSING

What choices can we realistically make to face up to the challenges that have emerged in the interpretation stage at the level of the Congregation, the Regions, the Provinces?

30. Summary of the first stage of discernment

Below are the proposals which in the first phase of discernment, conducted in the Provincial Chapters, were most widely shared. We retain the original wording, even though as a result the list might not be very homogeneous

Synodal Church for the mission and the specific nature of vocations

- a) Forming in the consecrated Salesian from the beginning of initial formation an awareness of the importance and the effectiveness of sharing and of co-responsibility in the mission by specific formation material.
- b) Within the educative pastoral community, the roles of Salesians and of lay people should be clarified, a co-responsible mentality developed, and shared formation ensured.
- c) The Provincial and his Council produce a Province *Vademecum* (i.e. manual, compendium) with practices to be followed in the various sectors, with special attention being given to the charismatic aspects.
- d) The lay people who have official roles of responsibility should be involved in planning the pastoral work and in the economic management. They should have a foundation in the charism and be professionally qualified to accompany the houses not only from the technical but also from the educational and pastoral points of view.
- e) The lay people ought to be accompanied in discerning the gifts and the charisms with which the Holy Spirit has blessed them and to use them for the Salesian mission.
- f) The Salesians should commit themselves to working in the Salesian Family involving the various groups in the mission.
- g) Offering the young people in our works the possibility of having an experience of Salesian missionary volunteering.

Management of the work, community life and the animating nucleus

- h) Giving more attention to re-enforcing the centrality of the educative pastoral community according to the guidelines of the *Frame of Reference for Salesian Youth Ministry*.
- i) Ensuring the necessary conditions for the charismatic vitality of the community, guaranteeing its “quantitative and qualitative consistency” [the right number of the right kind of people needed]
- j) Taking care in the selection process of lay people, according to criteria of professional quality but also of accepting Christian principles and Salesian pedagogy.
- k) Ensuring that the lay people receive a just wage.

- I) It is proposed that a study should be undertaken at Congregation level to have examples of “good practice” in view of the drawing up of some guidelines and practical directives for the shared management of the works.
- m) Encourage the rotation of lay people in the management of the works.
- n) Examine and establish at Province level the directive roles that can be entrusted to lay people (Cf. GC24, 48-51) and the ways in which they can play their part in the governing bodies of our works, establishing criteria for the selection of lay personnel which are consistent with our charism.
- o) In the plan for the reshaping of our Salesian presences, the groups of the Salesian Family should be involved.

Joint formation for the mission

- p) The Province should ensure an all-round formation which includes the theological, ecclesial, pastoral and charismatic aspects needed to firmly sustain the mission shared by the different vocations.
- q) Point out the value of centres of ongoing formation (Bangalore, Berkeley, Nairobi, Quito) as examples of joint formation and make better use of them.
- r) The Departments for Formation and Youth Ministry should prepare a programme for joint formation with lay people. (Cf. GC26, n. 10)
- s) Joint formation of Salesians and lay people should begin from initial formation, putting into effect what is written in the *Final Document of the Synod* on the young at n. 164.

31. The second stage of discernment

After having looked at the proposals of Provincial Chapters, the General Chapter is now called upon to identify the main choices for the next six-year period.

What priority choices can we realistically make to face up to the challenges that have emerged at the level of the Congregation, the Regions, the Provinces?

So that the choices be made in God, it is necessary that we, like Don Bosco, allow ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit. This requires an interior attitude based on silence, listening, prayer, fraternal sharing and mutual respect. In the presence of God and the expectations of the young, with courage we try to identify the good to be done: “In those things that are for the benefit of young people in danger or which serve to win souls for God I push ahead even to the extent of recklessness.” (Cf. C. 19).

To complete this process an appropriate methodology is also necessary, that should at least provide for:

- a) a period of inspirational Biblical or Salesian reading
- b) a first sharing of ideas
- c) a period of silence and personal prayer
- d) the identification of priorities that normally arise from a convergence of views (Cf. C. 66)
- e) the detailed presentation of the priorities identified

Finally, it should be remembered that every decision of a General Chapter has many implications. In particular, it is necessary to be precise regarding:

- a) the attitudes and mentality that need to be changed
- b) the procedures to be set in motion
- c) the structural conditions to be ensured
- d) the responsibilities to be assigned

e) the people to be involved

Such complexities would suggest that the choices should not be multiplied but that the real priorities should be identified and the proposals be expressed with realism and farsightedness.