

# **acts**

**of the XXI General Chapter  
of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians**

## **Living communion on paths of Gospel citizenship**

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**PRESENTATION**

Dear Sisters,

I know that you are waiting for the Chapter Document, which will summarise the discussions and guidelines that took shape in the Assembly. It will also give you a glimpse of the wealth of sharing of experiences that took place in the work of the commissions and in the informal moments enjoyed by the Chapter community.

This brief document focuses on the unifying element, the new dynamism, which is capable of transforming us from within and moving us to action.

The theme of the Chapter, *Our renewed Covenant commits us to active citizenship*, continues the themes dealt with in previous Chapters. In General Chapter XIX, we reflected on the education of the young woman, as the specific contribution of the Salesian Sisters to the New Evangelisation, and in General Chapter XX our attention was turned to the importance of being communities of women rooted in Christ for an inculturated educational mission. The present Chapter has again reflected, with different nuances, on our basic unifying motivation: being rooted in the Covenant, the source of our vocational dynamism and of our commitment to the mission of educating ourselves and others to Gospel citizenship.

The unifying thread that runs through the different themes is integration of life<sup>1</sup>, as gift and as challenge, lived in the ever more diversified and pluralistic situations of our times.

We are called to launch out into the deep and open sea of the often new challenges that will be a feature of this third millennium. We are called to grasp whatever opportunities it offers us by looking at the present *in the light of the future*, that is, from the perspective of what is possible and of hope.

In this light, we took a fresh look at our need for a renewed experience of God, for communion and for education, expressed in the Provincial Chapters and gathered together in the Working Document and in the Six-Year Report on the Life of the Institute (1996-2002). We synthesised, in three *convictions*, the driving forces on which we must focus in order to live the meaning and gift of the Salesian vocation to the full, today. This means rooting our lives in the experience of the Triune God, living the spirituality of communion and choosing education as the way to Gospel citizenship. We named the unifying element of these three convictions as a *vision* and identified it as communion, the dream of God and the cry of our world today, which urgently challenges our communities.

But how are we to decipher the requirements of communion in the midst of the contradictions which abound in our world today? How do we recognise the signs of the Spirit? How can we present the face of the God of the Beatitudes?

The Chapter Assembly identified discernment as the fundamental *strategy* that will enable us to listen as believers to the reality of today and will become a power for transformation. It is a gift of the Spirit and, at the same time, a commitment to search and to journey towards communion and active citizenship in a typically Salesian way. The way forward for our Institute was identified in this light and has been formulated as *guidelines*, with their corresponding commitments to *action*.

Therefore, I entrust to each one of you, dear Sisters and to your educating communities this brief but challenging document. It is not a detailed and complete development of the Chapter theme, but simply the basic inspiration, the foundations, which we shared in the Chapter and which have become essential guidelines for our journey of communion. They are an invitation to seek paths of inculturation, in which Gospel citizenship can be concretely expressed.

The Chapter Document, along with the Deliberation, the modifications and guidelines that refer to the Constitutions and Regulations, and the other decisions reached during the Chapter make up the essential part of the Acts.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The term used in Italian is "unità vocazionale", which literally translates as "vocational unity". There are different ways of expressing the meaning contained in this phrase in various English-speaking areas. During the Chapter we decided to use the term "integration of life" in the Acts of the Chapter [ETG note]

<sup>2</sup> This corresponds to the first volume in the English edition. What Mother Antonia refers to in the next paragraph as the second part, corresponds to the second volume in English [ETG note].

The second part will bring together the homily of the Rector Major, the official addresses from the opening of the Chapter, Mother Antonia's greetings and the Message of John Paul II on the occasion of the special audience of November 8, the homily of the Rector Major at the concelebration for the closing of the Chapter and Mother Antonia's concluding words.

A list of the participants will conclude the Acts of the Chapter.

I am certain that each one of us will commit ourselves to owning these documents and will continue to reflect on them, with a view to planning specific and effective ways of putting them into practice. A convinced acceptance of the guidelines offered, enlightened and sustained by the Spirit, will become the leaven that will infuse new hope into our efforts towards solidarity, justice and peace. It will reawaken the passion of the *da mihi animas*, challenging us to translate it into a commitment to educating young people to be good Christians and honest citizens, according to the charism of Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello.

May Mary Immaculate, our Help, lead us to look into the face of her Son, so that we may *start afresh from Him*, living the Beatitudes, which will enable us to bring about that change of perspective, in the Gospel sense, that we all desire. In this way, we will proclaim the primacy of God, without compromise, and we will become witnesses to hope for the younger generations, especially those who suffer discrimination or are marginalised by society, aware that holiness is the greatest contribution that we can offer to the new evangelisation.<sup>3</sup>

Rome, December 8, 2002

Your affectionate Mother

Sr. Antonia Colombo

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. John Paul II at the audience for the Chapter Members, November 8, 2002, n. 2.

## **THEME OF GENERAL CHAPTER XXI**

Our renewed Covenant  
commits us to active citizenship

In this document  
our Chapter Assembly  
focuses on the issues vital to the Institute,  
in order that we may “witness to hope  
on the many frontiers of the modern world  
and proclaim the primacy of God,  
who always listens to the cry of the oppressed  
and the afflicted”.<sup>4</sup>

We now entrust these pages to all the Salesian Sisters,  
to the young people and to the large family  
with whom we share, in the Church,  
our life and our educative mission  
and who, like Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello,  
still have the courage to dream.

The document does not represent a point of arrival:  
it is a stage in a process  
that will become a reality in the life  
of the local communities,  
committed to paths of citizenship and communion.

## INTRODUCTION

The Chapter  
Assembly

1. General Chapter XXI, “an exceptionally important time for reflection, assessment and guidance in a common search for God’s will”<sup>5</sup>, committed itself to truly being “a

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<sup>4</sup> POPE JOHN PAUL II’s address to the Chapter Members, November 8, 2002, n. 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Constitutions* 135

representative assembly of the whole Institute, [...] a means and expression of unity".<sup>6</sup>

which was multicultural

2. The Assembly was made up of 194 members, coming from 52 countries: 12 from Africa, 68 from America, 29 from Asia, 82 from Europe and 3 from Oceania. They represented the approximately 15,300 Sisters who live and work in 89 countries on the 5 continents.

experienced being intercultural

3. The Assembly, which was multicultural in origin, language and mentality, found in this experience of being intercultural a challenge to recognise and to value cultural diversity, and a gift which comes from living a communion of differences. Learning to dialogue with differences was not easy and never will be.

It means recognising that the dignity of the person is strengthened by respect for their otherness. It presupposes the capacity for authentic interpersonal dialogue, which is made possible by genuine listening that allows us to go beyond words to understand and appreciate the whole person.

And discovered that it is an everyday reality

4. We cannot ignore the fact that our communities, too, in the variety of situations in which we live, are marked by plurality of culture, mentality, ways of living and experiences.

We are convinced that it is no longer enough merely to recognise and appreciate different cultures. We need to develop attitudes and assume ways of understanding and acting that will enable us to overcome the rigid thinking that we belong to just one culture and one place.

The process of developing an intercultural mentality will make us aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit in every person and culture. The Spirit will teach us to become "active centres of welcome, of communion and solidarity and to question the situations in which we live, in a critical and constructive way"<sup>7</sup>.

The international dimension of the Institute helps us to recognise the fact that all cultures, though they may be limited and in need of the leaven of the Gospel, are bearers of authentic values.

The experience and the awareness of being intercultural accompanied us in all of our discussions.

In-depth reflection on the Chapter theme

5. Through the sharing of life and experience offered by the communities in their pre-Chapter work, we have been able to reflect in depth on the Chapter theme:

*Our renewed Covenant  
commits us to active citizenship*

In personal reflection, work in commissions and sharing in the Assembly, with the help of the Spirit, we have identified some lines of action that are both faithful to the charism and new. These will help us to bring about change and to make the decisive choices that are necessary to our life and mission.

Our renewed Covenant commits us to active citizenship

6. Constant attentive listening to the present helped us to look at our times from the perspective of the 'future', of what is possible, of that confidence which is born of faith. This led us to recognise the need to renew our awareness of our identity as Salesian Sisters. For us, being and doing are not distinct from each other but,

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<sup>6</sup> *Idem*

<sup>7</sup> Cf. COLOMBO Antonia, *Relazione sulla vita dell'Istituto nel sessennio 1996-2002*, Roma, Istituto Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice, 2002, n. 66

rather, one great movement of response to God, which finds its deepest expression in the daily integration of our life.

became a new  
missionary call

7. Our Chapter experience was enriched by the celebration of the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our first missionary expedition. We experienced a renewal of the missionary passion that has characterised our Institute from birth and which is told in the hundreds of stories of extraordinary love lived out in unknown and far-away places.

Our educative charism has crossed the oceans. It has put down roots, matured and produced fruits of holiness among many different peoples and cultures. It belongs to the Church and continues to bring about great involvement on the part of many people and institutions, who commit themselves to live the Gospel, in a way that is in accordance with our Salesian spirituality. We feel an urgent need to deepen our understanding of it and to express the dynamism and newness it contains. This will enable us to continue that gift of predilection for young people, especially the poorest, which transformed the lives of Don Bosco, Maria Domenica Mazzarello and many of our Sisters, who were pioneers of holiness.

and an invitation  
to rekindle the  
fire

8. The work of the Chapter is not finished. It is now entrusted to each community, that we may continue to deepen and live it with the young people and with all those who walk with us.

*Something new is being born.*<sup>8</sup> We feel that this is both a desire and a promise, a foretaste of the gift of the Spirit who will send us out, once again, to the nations to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus, who makes all those who believe in Him happy and blessed.

“Now is the best time to rekindle that fire”,<sup>9</sup> in order to proclaim, in every language, what we have been enabled to understand and share in a new way.

9. Mary, woman of listening, accompanied us in our preparation for the Chapter. She has been our Mother and Helper in this time of reflection.

She, who was present in the Church at Pentecost, will also be present with each of us and in the lives of our communities as we commit ourselves to our post-Chapter journey as the way to conversion and renewal.

## KEY REFLECTIONS

The process  
of reflection  
on the theme

10. The *Working Document* and the *Six-Year Report* tell us of the process carried out by our communities on the Chapter theme. They highlight the fact that we have rediscovered the Covenant as the love story of God for his people, which has Jesus at its centre and which continues in his disciples throughout the ages. Our commitment to mission springs from fidelity to this Covenant.

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Isaiah* 43,19.

<sup>9</sup> Letter of Maria Domenica Mazzarello to Sr. Angela Vallese, in M.E. POSADA, A. COSTA, P. CAVAGLIÀ, *I will never forget you, Letters of Maria Domenica Mazzarello*, Rome, Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, 2000, L. 27,8

Our educational vocation, lived in community, expresses the Covenant when it takes on a commitment to citizenship founded on the Beatitudes, which carry within them the renewing power of the Kingdom.

The Family Spirit itself is enriched by the values contained in the Beatitudes: a simple lifestyle, sincerity and coherence, availability and fidelity, joy and hope, gentleness and peace.

Mary accompanied us on our journey of preparation for the Chapter. She was our teacher in this time of reflection. May she, the woman of the Covenant, Disciple of the Word, who was the first to live the Beatitudes in depth, continue to guide us in our fidelity to God's plan and to the Covenant established with Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello.

input from expert

11. The input we received from various experts during the Chapter enriched our reflection on Gospel citizenship. We realised more clearly that accepting what the Beatitudes propose means overturning our criteria for choosing, reversing the world's way of thinking and often changing our image of God.

Only faith, in fact, can allow us to understand and accept the message of the Beatitudes. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus asks us to make His experience of the Father our own, to believe that where we would least expect to find signs of blessedness, God comes to promise joy and to make it possible.

Therefore, in order to become educators to joy, we are called to nourish it as a daily way of life, according to the Gospel, walking alongside young people who are searching for happiness.

Citizenship, lived according to the Beatitudes, expresses itself in openness, in loving care for every person and for all peoples and thus becomes a commitment and a way of life. It demands that we allow ourselves to be challenged by the many situations of poverty, especially among young people, so that we may understand the vanity of consumer attractions and easy self-exaltation, and allow our hearts to be evangelised. The journey towards the poor is not new for religious life. What is new is our decision, which springs from the Beatitudes, to make different choices, aimed not at offering services but at establishing mutual relationships, accompanying the poor, especially the young, as they face their problems, so that they can be the protagonists in the journey towards their own development.

from the needs  
expressed in the  
pre-Chapter work

12. From this perspective, we shared on the three broad areas that emerged from the pre-Chapter work, which were expressed as:

- \* The need for a renewed experience of God
- \* The need for communion
- \* The need for education.

These bring together the challenges to our life<sup>10</sup> that arise from a clearer awareness of our responsibility to be Gospel citizens in a world that thirsts for spiritual goods, for solidarity and for communion, through sharing with the young people the joy of meeting Jesus.

From these there emerged some convictions that bring together the driving forces that will allow us to 'weave unity' in our wonderful but challenging world of today.

13. There is an emerging need to educate ourselves and others to reflective living, listening and silence, thus strengthening the contemplative dimension of our lives. Bringing our life into prayer and our prayer into life is the most urgent and deeply

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. INSTITUTE OF THE DAUGHTERS OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS, *Working Document of General Chapter XXI*, Rome, Istituto FMA, n. 81-102.

felt need, if we are to bring about a synthesis between the primacy of God and the gift of self and between mutual relationships and the passion for education.<sup>11</sup>

We reaffirmed the conviction that:

to the convictions *We, Salesian Sisters, believe  
that our lives are rooted  
in the experience of the Triune God,  
felt, touched and contemplated  
in the face of Christ,  
recognised in the faces of our brothers and sisters  
and welcomed in the events of every day.*

14. We move towards a style of animation and leadership that favours participation, co-responsibility, freedom and trust, personal unification and community consensus,<sup>12</sup> vocational growth and commitment to evangelisation. We experience the urgency of a return to our roots, of a passionate growth in our sense of belonging, of reclaiming the dynamism of the charism in every moment of life and of rediscovering the Family Spirit as a specific way of living the spirituality of communion.<sup>13</sup>

We reaffirmed the conviction that:

*We, Salesian Sisters, believe  
that the spirituality of communion  
is the energy which regenerates the Family Spirit.  
It is a participation  
in the welcoming and compassionate  
love of God, who calls us to make our lives  
and our relationships more humane.  
Lived in generosity and joy,  
it is both prophecy and passion for the Kingdom.*

15. We became aware of the need to re-read the Preventive System from the point of view of “a new creative charity”,<sup>14</sup> which leads us to seek new responses to the educational requirements of children, young people and women. The need has emerged to live, with greater courage, the closeness to our neighbour witnessed to by Jesus and to allow ourselves to be evangelised by the poor, so that by means of practical choices, we may experience and share the problems, limitations and consequences that come from poverty<sup>15</sup> especially as it effects young people.

We reaffirmed the conviction that:

*We, Salesian Sisters, believe that, today,  
our missionary passion is expressed  
in a conscious option for education  
as the way to Gospel citizenship.  
This requires that we be present to and in solidarity*

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. *Working Document*, n. 14.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Rooted in the Covenant. Plan of Formation of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*, Don Bosco Press, Inc. Philippines 2000, p. 155.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Working Document*, n. 61-88

<sup>14</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, January 6, 2001, n. 50

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Working Document*, n. 37-43

*with the young and the poor.  
It challenges us to courageously serve the cause of justice and peace  
and to bring about a more humane society,  
one that respects the dignity of each person.*

## **A VISION: COMMUNION**

16. Re-reading the convictions from the perspective of the God of the Covenant allowed us to discern the unifying element, which we recognised as an undeniable appeal to us as Salesian Sisters in our journey in this new millennium. We defined it as a 'vision' because it carries within it the power of the convictions, as well as the dream of what is possible and enthusiasm for the future.

a *vision* full of  
hope for the  
future

COMMUNION,  
THE DREAM OF GOD  
AND THE CRY OF OUR WORLD TODAY,  
URGENTLY CHALLENGES  
OUR COMMUNITIES

We have heard this urgent call resounding through our Chapter Assembly and we also recognised it in the pre-Chapter work of the various communities. It was re-confirmed for us by the guidelines of the Church, as the great challenge, “if we wish to be faithful to God’s plan and respond to the world’s deepest yearnings”.<sup>16</sup>

We undertake, with responsibility and awareness, the task that the Church entrusts to religious communities, of helping to develop a spirituality of communion in our educational environments, in the Church community itself and even beyond its bounds. We do this by “opening or continuing a dialogue in charity, especially where today’s world is torn apart by ethnic hate and senseless violence”.<sup>17</sup>

This commitment requires “spiritual persons, interiorly shaped by God, by loving and merciful communion and by mature communities where the spirituality of communion is the rule of life”.<sup>18</sup>

The spirituality of communion, which is “the heart’s contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us, and whose light we must also be able to see shining on the face of the brothers and sisters around us”,<sup>19</sup> also threw light on our reflection on the world of today.

## IN THE WORLD OF TODAY

The great challenges that face us:

17. In an atmosphere of listening and filled with hope, we reflected on this new historic era in which we are called to live. Ours was not a sociological reading or interpretation of the situation. Rather, it was an in-depth dialogue, which will need to be continued in our educating communities as an option for self-formation and as a reaffirmation of our commitment to education. It is a trustful listening: we know that grace continues to act in an invisible way in the heart of every person and opens paths of universal brother/sisterhood, even in the midst of contradictory signs.

globalisation

18. Our times are complex and filled with contradiction, marked by the phenomena that define our era. We became more aware of the reality of globalisation, which is not just an economic phenomenon, but is also social and political. This is seen in the fact that cultural and religious models have become universal, as have the problems that affect the whole of our planet.

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<sup>16</sup> *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 43

<sup>17</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synod Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, Rome, March 25, 1996, n. 51.

<sup>18</sup> CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, *Starting afresh from Christ. A renewed commitment to Religious Life in the third millennium*, Rome, May 19, 2002, n. 28.

<sup>19</sup> *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 43

The situations of environmental imbalance, the globalisation of markets and resources, competitiveness and the weakening of the more fragile national economies, the growing gap between rich and poor countries, the emergence of new forms of economic poverty and exploitation of young people, are the major challenges that we have to face daily.

Globalisation is endorsing models of life and culture, people's aspirations and behaviour and, at the same time, creating divisions and injustice for entire peoples.

the genetic  
revolution

We live in an era of genetic revolution: science is penetrating the secrets of life, opening up extraordinary possibilities and perspectives, which are accompanied by serious risks that offer new ethical challenges and pose serious questions for education.

the  
impoverishment  
of the planet

19. The impoverishment of our planet, resulting mainly from economic models rooted in a neo-liberal vision is creating a situation that, ever more frequently, causes the poor to become nomads, forced to take to the roads of human mobility. The phenomenon of migration has become a focal point for our mission and it challenges us as educators of the young.

20. Globalisation often means violence, exclusion, poverty and war. But it also means easier communication, recognition of human rights, sensitivity to nuclear disarmament, the spread of a new feminine awareness, growing social responsibility, opening up of the boundaries of nations and world citizenship. Amidst this reality of contrasts we see the multiplication of Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), trans-national powers, groups who work for the promotion of justice, peace, alternative information and a sustainable development that respects the environment and society. These are organisations that oppose cultural imperialism as well as enslaving and sinful structures.

the Church  
in dialogue

21. In this era of change the Church is renewing itself by following its call to be universal, pluralist, culturally diversified, a sacrament of unity. It lives the richness of a multifaceted theology, a more pluricultural pastoral action, a Gospel spirituality that is more meaningfully open to the wisdom of other peoples and religions. Notwithstanding limitations and contradictions, dialogue and collaboration in the shared concern for human life, in commitment to justice, peace and the safeguarding of creation are the key paths which the Church travels in order to bring about communion with other faiths. We too are being challenged by the urgent need to educate ourselves to ecumenical and interfaith dialogue.

the family:  
change and  
continuity

22. The family, too, is affected by great changes. There are changes in patterns of behaviour, in the division of roles and in relationships. The crisis in relationships and numerous separations explain the growing number of single-parent families. In the majority of cases the head of the family is a woman, which can lead to the many problems resulting from poverty. However, young people especially still see the family as an essential value and goal. We as educators are becoming increasingly aware of the need for a more effective collaboration with the family.

young people:  
sentinels  
of the dawn

23. Young people, in particular, are affected by the consequences of the impoverishment of the earth and of globalisation. The media and advertising subject them to a barrage of consumer and hedonistic suggestions. This makes them more vulnerable, more inclined to seek what is immediate and to exploit opportunities, and leaves them ill prepared for long-term and definitive commitments. But many young people still possess the dynamism of newness, of openness to authentic values, to life, freedom and hope.

The desire to build with and for others, to live as volunteers, to take part, as protagonists, in the processes that are transforming their lives and society, can help them to be, as the Pope defined them, the “sentinels of the dawn”<sup>20</sup> for a new millennium.

## IN THE INSTITUTE TODAY

New times for the  
Salesian Sisters,  
too

24. We Salesian Sisters are people of our era. We share the *new times*, the great changes that represent both newness and challenge.

Our communities express a thirst for God, for belonging, for solidarity, for depth of life, for renewal of our educational passion.

We have become familiar with the Word and we want to open ourselves more fully to its enlightenment in the practical choices of our lives and mission.

We feel an urgent need to return to our charismatic roots in order to renew our ownership of the Family Spirit, so as to transform our communities into *homes* where no one is a stranger, where communion takes the form of acceptance, simplicity, a more caring style of relationships and of faith-sharing. We wish to create houses that are youth-friendly, where dreams of justice and peace and working for a future that is open to hope, find an echo in the hearts of educators, who are not just dedicated *to* but also *with* young people in friendliness and in clarity of vision.

25. Some communities have opted for mutual accompaniment: they are seeking to create the conditions for a style of life supported by all, one which takes account of the differences in age, talents and culture in the light of the charism.

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<sup>20</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Message to Young People on the occasion of the Jubilee 2000* (Rome Torvergata, Prayer Vigil of August 19-20, 2000).

We accept the risk, that still exists, of allowing work to take precedence over being, the smooth running of works over persons, organisation over relationships, as both a limitation and a challenge.

diversity in a worldwide Institute	<p>The worldwide spread of our Institute presents us with a varied picture. In some areas vocations have diminished and the average age is increasing. Processes of re-vitalisation and re-structuring have been undertaken, in order that we may consolidate our presence and be better able to carry out our characteristic educative mission. In other areas new works are thriving, intercultural communities are increasing and providing a leaven of newness and opportunity. In recent years some Sisters have left the Institute, which raises questions about the nature of our vocational accompaniment.</p>
the need for formation	<p>26. There is a growing need for a solid human, professional, religious, cultural and socio-political formation that will give credibility, as persons and as communities, to our critical stand with regard to consumerism and exclusion. The need is also felt for a more solid formation in the area of communication, so as to be able to intervene more incisively in education and to promote channels of alternative information in the areas in which we live, which are ever more influenced by the media.</p>
Collaboration with the laity	<p>The presence of many lay collaborators in our educational work is generally considered as a resource for dialogue and an opportunity for mutual enrichment in the sharing of charismatic values.<sup>21</sup> Sometimes however, it is seen more as a necessity, because of the falling numbers of Sisters, than as a responsible and shared choice. There is a growing option for formation together with the laity, aimed at effective collaboration in the mission, in order to educate ourselves and others to Gospel citizenship.</p>
new commitment to education	<p>27. Our passion for education creates new responses: the commitment to re-planning community life starting from the needs of the mission among the young people, the choice of a simple lifestyle, the acceptance of uncertainty and the renunciation of privileges.</p> <p>Our way of looking at poverty is changing. Following the thinking of the Beatitudes, we recognise the gift of simplicity, joy and life, of which the poor are often bearers. We want to be a friendly presence, to live in solidarity among them and walk with them in their journey of appreciating and developing their own resources.</p>
Communion of goods	<p>The challenges that come to us from an economy of solidarity reinforce our Institute's tradition of sharing goods. This leads us to seek new ways of guaranteeing more effective solidarity, which will allow us to overcome individualism and help us to live the Family Spirit and communion at an international level.</p>
in the heart of the Church	<p>28. We live in the heart of the Church. Together with the whole Salesian Family, we welcome the mandate given to us by the Holy Father. "By creating a climate of loving kindness as Don Bosco did, you must learn to communicate to the younger generations, the Gospel message that is summed up in the proclamation of the love of the merciful Father, ready to embrace every person in Christ".<sup>22</sup></p> <p>The Chapter Assembly asks, therefore, how we are to decipher the signs of the Spirit, in the midst of the contradictions of our times, and how we are to interpret the signs of the times. "The Lord himself must be our travelling companion and grant</p>

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Working Document*, n. 112

<sup>22</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Audience with the Chapter Members*, November 8, 2002, n. 1

us his Spirit. Only the Lord, present among us, can help us to fully understand and carry out his word, he can enlighten minds and warm hearts".<sup>23</sup>

## A STRATEGY: DISCERNMENT

Called  
to renewal

29. We are called by the Spirit to renew our way of being and working so as to express the face of the God of the Beatitudes through our communion and to live as Gospel citizens.

The present situation in our communities urges us to adopt an Exodus mentality, to take the focus off ourselves, to accept the lack of guarantees and the mentality of a minority. We need to be more decisively rooted in the Word, to grow in the integration of our lives, as a commitment to living the prophecy of the Beatitudes, open to the needs and perspectives of the Kingdom of God. For this reason:

WE CHOOSE DISCERNMENT  
AS THE WAY TO AND THE POWER FOR  
TRANSFORMATION

discernment

30. The theme of discernment is not new. Other General Chapters emphasised it and proposed that the provinces and communities should reflect on it. It is also a constituent element of our history as Salesian Sisters. Maria Domenica Mazzarello was a woman of discernment:<sup>24</sup> as guide and formator, she strengthened our first

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<sup>23</sup> *Starting afresh from Christ*, n. 2

<sup>24</sup> From the fullness of this contact with God, from a convinced spirit of faith, which finds concrete expression in constant adherence to the Church and her Teaching, you will draw the deepest motivations for your Salesian joy and also the capacity of discernment of situations, and above all, of the hearts of the young, an intelligent and supernatural discernment that has characterised beyond doubt the educative ministry of Don

Sisters in their fidelity, as they faced the challenge of the inculturation of the charism in their world.

Today, discernment is re-proposed to us as a strategy, the way to and the power for transformation in this time of pluralism, of rapid change, of superficiality and fragmentation, which calls for clear vision and flexibility in the search for new paths for evangelisation through education.

Discernment is, therefore, an opportunity and a challenge for all Salesian Sisters. We are called to make it our constant practice, so that we may become reflective women, capable of moving beyond immediate needs in order to go to the heart of things with a Gospel mentality and to encourage the involvement of the educating communities.

Mary, who listened to the Word and put it into practice, is for all, the educator and secure guide on the path of discernment.

As Chapter members, we reflected in depth on the meaning of discernment. We recognised it as a gift of the Spirit for communion, as the assurance that the Spirit is in history and becomes present to those who search in humility and faith. We understand ever more clearly that discernment is a personal relationship with God, who purifies us, frees us and opens our hearts to his surprises.

Discernment means praying the Word of God, making the sentiments of Jesus our own through constant listening to the signs of the times, to life, to history, to the young and to our sisters and brothers.

Discernment is also a constant personal and community process of searching for the will of God and making choices in our life and mission that are deeply imbued with the charismatic power of the *da mihi animas cetera tolle*.

In an atmosphere  
of listening

31. An essential part of discernment is listening, which involves constant openness to conversion and humility.

The heart is the place of listening. It is there that we experience being accepted and loved by God and learn to accept, love and care for others. It is there that we live the unifying dimension of faith.

Discernment starts us on a journey. It is a strategy that is entrusted to each individual, to our communities and to the educating communities as an opportunity for growth in our relationship with God and with others. It calls us to a Gospel inspired responsibility in our fundamental life commitments and in our decisions regarding our educational mission among young people.

It is a commitment that we desire should characterise our way of being and acting, one that we want to share with the young people and the laity.

By choosing this strategy we show that we have the courage to believe in the transforming and life-giving power of leaven.

## GUIDELINES FOR ACTION

Priority choices

32. In the light of discernment, we looked at our present situation and possible future directions. We identified three lines of action, which we looked at from the point of view of the spirituality of communion that can “become a strong and solid spirituality of disciples and apostles”.<sup>25</sup> They will help us to make choices on the basis of priorities rather than immediate needs.

It will be up to the Provinces and the communities to specify and develop these lines of action in ways and means suited to local situations and needs.

33. \* **Train ourselves to wise listening and to faith-filled reading of reality through our experience of God in everyday life through our practice of discernment**

listening/  
discernment

We believe that listening/discernment is a gift to be welcomed and an art to be learned. It is made possible by a community rich in warmth, faith, genuine communion, sense of belonging and coherence. It requires effort and formation, commitment to on-going personal integration through constant reflection on life in the light of the Word of God, the teaching of the Church, the Constitutions, the experience of our Saints and the times in which we live.

34. We commit ourselves to *action* by:

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<sup>25</sup> *Starting afresh from Christ*, n. 34

Action

- looking at our personal and community times and methods of prayer and by profound listening to God in the Word and in life
- formation in and practise of discernment (at significant moments and as a constant practice)
- reviewing our life, our daily living and events in the light of the Word and of our charism, in order to discover God's footprints and His call to continual conversion and to inner freedom
- commitment to the implementation of our personal, community and educational plan

35. \* **Give new expression to the charismatic richness of the Family Spirit  
by living a spirituality of communion  
by a co-responsible style of animation**

Our Provinces have expressed a strong demand for communion. This highlights the urgent need to build more caring communities, where there is space for every Sister, where each stage of life is recognised and appreciated. We need communities that are more welcoming and flexible, who live a style of relationships based on communion. We need communities in which the service of animation and leadership is exercised through co-ordination, which encourages co-responsibility and promotes delegation.

Recognising the need to be intercultural helps us to understand and accept differences as richness. However, it is not easy to develop an intercultural mentality and to make it a way of life in our communities. Therefore, to become women of communion and reconciliation, we are called to walk more decisively on the path of dialogue, of openness, of mutual hospitality and co-responsibility, reaffirming the primacy of *being over doing*.

Our way of evangelising through education will also start afresh from this conviction. We need to become communities that live the experience of the temporary nature of things with that Salesian joy and mutual love that frees people and involves them in the passion for the Kingdom.

36. We commit ourselves to *action* by:

- adopting a co-responsible style of animation and mutual accompaniment
- the formation and accompaniment of community animators
- formation in the accompaniment of young people, giving particular attention to the vocational dimension
- simplifying the structures of life and revising times and spaces for prayer, living in communion, work and meeting, so as to build more relevant and missionary communities
- community renewal so as to express an image that is more humane, more feminine and more co-responsible especially in mission
- in-depth reflection on the requirements and implications of being intercultural in our ways of relating and educating.

Paths  
of dialogue and  
co-responsibility

Action

37. \* **Renew our commitment to education, with the prophetic energy that comes from the Preventive System,  
through education to justice and peace  
through courageous choices in favour of life and a culture of solidarity  
through an appreciation for intercultural relationships**

Sharing  
citizenship

Our communities feel strongly challenged by our mission and committed to responding generously to the educational needs of the areas in which they live. The in-depth study of the Chapter theme has brought us new insights and confirmed our will to live for young people, to reawaken their potential for good, to guide their search for meaning towards meeting the Risen Christ. For us today, living Gospel citizenship means *taking responsible action*, individually and as communities, wherever violence and corruption exist, wherever shantytowns increase, wherever children are subjected to hard labour, women are exploited, or human rights are denied to refugees and minorities.

Education,  
a charismatic  
commitment

We feel an urgent need to reaffirm our option for an evangelising education as a charismatic commitment:

- to be Gospel citizens, today
- to be present to young people in the style of the Preventive System which dares to propose paths of holiness to them
- to live among poor young people, committed to a love that is communicated through words, actions and relationships
- to disturb our tendency to security and comfort
- to learn to interpret developments and events, to understand their roots and promote meaningful interventions that will deal with their causes
- to defend the rights of every person, especially of the young and of the weakest. To appreciate dialogue and the possibility of different cultures, ethnic groups and faiths living in communion.

38. We commit ourselves to *action* by:

Action

- providing a more explicit and courageous education to faith
- accompanying young people and offering vocational guidance through a variety of experiences
- networking, as educating communities and as Salesian Family, with other Congregations and organisations in the area and sharing our educational choices with the family
- educating to justice, to interfaith dialogue, to non-violence, to solidarity and to ecology
- being close to the poor, especially young people, as they face situations of disadvantage: employment of minors, exploitation, migration, unemployment...
- educating in communication as an educational philosophy and practice which penetrates our whole mission and our living out of the charism
- promoting an economy of solidarity expressed in a simple personal and community lifestyle, setting personal limits and transparent administration.

## CONCLUSION

39. This document does not express all the richness of life, of reflection and of sharing that characterised the Chapter period as *kairos*, God's time.

The varied and intercultural experience opened our vision to the faces of young people and children, of women and of our Sisters in every part of the world.

We set ourselves to listen:

to the cry that rises from many hearts  
in need of recognition, of education,  
of presence and solidarity, of acceptance and support

to God, the God of the Beatitudes, whom Jesus revealed to us  
as the Father of mercy and peace and  
the Spirit of life and of communion

to our call as Salesian Sisters,  
which means belonging totally to God  
in the gift of ourselves to young people.

We welcomed, as a gift of the Spirit  
in this particular moment of our history,  
the call to make communion  
an essential choice and  
to make discernment our basic strategy  
so as to bring about that renewal which we need,  
in order to walk new paths of Gospel citizenship.

We will continue to write this document  
in the various situations  
in which God calls us to collaborate  
in changing the world.  
May Mary accompany us in our daily commitment  
to live communion,  
to open up the future for many children  
and young people,  
to revive hope and to build joy.  
It is a commitment to a new mission.

Like our first missionary Sisters, 125 years ago,  
every time that we are ready to start afresh  
we will discover that Maria Domenica Mazzarello is with us, as 'mother',  
ready to speak personally to each one,<sup>26</sup>  
to encourage us, too, to have the courage to launch out into the deep,  
to reach those young people who are far away,  
abandoning ourselves totally to God who always goes before us.

## Chapter deliberation

### Modifications to some articles of the Constitutions and Regulations

### Other decisions

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Chronicles of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*, Don Bosco Publications 1981, New Rochelle, New York, vol. II, p. 281.

## CHAPTER DELIBERATION

40. In studying the proposals sent in to General Chapter XXI, the Assembly paid particular attention to those dealing with the *text of the Constitutions*.

Some Provinces suggested a *revision of the Constitutions* in keeping with the development in the Church's understanding of religious life, since the 1994 Synod, and in response to the needs of the times.

After serious reflection, the Assembly decided to engage the whole Institute in a process of renewal of life, taking into account the research into religious life taking place in the Church today, This will be done through:

- deep personal and community reflection on the present Constitutions
- assimilation of the documents of the General Chapter
- inculturation of the Plan of Formation
- developing guidelines for the educative mission of the Salesian Sisters.

The General Council will accompany this process, in such a way as to guide us in preparing for a revision of the text of the Constitutions.

## **MODIFICATIONS TO SOME ARTICLES OF THE CONSTITUTIONS AND REGULATIONS**

The proposals for modifications to the Constitutions and Regulations that were sent by the provinces, either as the contribution of individual Sisters or from groups, provinces or interprovincial conferences, were brought to the attention of all the Chapter members. A special commission, set up for the revision of the articles of the Constitutions and Regulations, collated them and re-presented them to the Assembly to be voted on. In keeping with art. 141 of the Constitutions, those proposals referring to articles of the Constitutions, were approved by a *quorum* of two thirds of those present.

The modifications to the Constitutions were approved *ad experimentum* by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, on November 9, 2002, with the protocol N. T. 41-1/2002.

They deal with:

- a more significant representation, at the General Chapter, of the five continents in which we work (art. 139)
- a more significant representation at Provincial Chapters (art. 159)
- the duration in office of the Provincial Secretary and of the Provincial Bursar (art. 154 & 155)
- the composition of local councils (art. 166)

## CONSTITUTIONS

Art. 139

Participation in  
the General  
Chapter

41. The following will take part in the Chapter with the right to vote:

...

- g. -the delegate from each Province  
**of not more than 300 Sisters,  
a second delegate from the Provinces  
of more than 300 Sisters**  
and the delegate of each Pre-Province,  
elected by their respective Chapters;
- h. ...

### *Motivation*

This new form of representation allows for greater participation by the numerically larger Provinces.

Art. 159

Participation in  
the Provincial  
Chapter

42. ...

- a. In every community of at least **5 Sisters**  
one Sister will be elected as delegate  
to the Provincial Chapter.
- b. **In Provinces of less than 250 Sisters**  
**a delegate will be elected in the proportion of one Sister for every 15 or  
fraction of 15.**  
**In the Provinces with more than 250 Sisters**  
**a delegate will be elected for every  
30 Sisters or fraction of 30.**

### *Motivations:*

- a. Participation in the Provincial Chapter by Sisters from the smaller communities encourages a more meaningful representation.
- b. The modification allows the Provinces with larger numbers to hold the Provincial Chapter in an easier and more meaningful way.

Art. 154

Provincial Bursar

43. The Provincial Bursar, who may also be one of the Councillors, administers the movable and immovable goods of the Province, in dependence on the Provincial and in agreement with the Council to whom she will periodically give an account of the financial state of the Province.

It is her duty to co-ordinate and check the administration of the material goods of the houses and to prepare the annual administrative report to be sent to the Bursar General. In her office let her always act with charity, prudence, loyalty and apostolic zeal, and give testimony of poverty and of trust in Divine Providence.

She is appointed by the Provincial in agreement with her Council as set down in article 152d.

**She remains in office for three years and may be nominated for a second and a third consecutive three-year period. She may remain in office for an eventual fourth three-year period in the same Province.**

Art. 155

Provincial Secretary

44. The Provincial Secretary, who may also be one of the Councillors, has the particular responsibility of drawing up the minutes of the Council meetings and the official documents of the Province; she has care of the archives, registers, the statistics and chronicles of the Province.

She will offer her collaboration to the Provincial in a spirit of co-responsibility, prudence and sisterly availability.

She is appointed by the Provincial in agreement with her Council according to the norms of article 152f.

**She remains in office for three years and may be nominated for a second and a third consecutive three-year period. She may remain in office for an eventual fourth three-year period in the same Province.**

*Motivations relative to articles 154 and 155:*

This modification takes account of the fact that the Provincial Councillors, too, have only a three-year mandate and cannot remain in office more than nine years.

The roles of Provincial Bursar and Secretary are demanding and require adequate rotation.

**Art. 166**

The service of  
animation in local  
communities

45. In every local community  
**the Superior, in her service of authority,  
will be assisted by the Vicar or by the Bursar.  
Where the number of Sisters  
and/or the complexity of the works require it,  
the Provincial with her Council,  
in agreement with the Superior,  
will set up a Council  
composed of the Vicar  
and an adequate number of Councillors  
who will collaborate co-responsibly  
in the animation and in the government.**

The Bursar, if she is not a Councillor,  
will take part in Council meetings  
without the right to vote.

*Motivation:*

The variety of situations suggests flexibility in the composition of the Council. The Provincial with her Council has the responsibility of deciding which communities need a local Council or simply a Vicar or Bursar.

## REGULATIONS

- Art. 12            46. Let each Sister appreciate all that the community provides and ask in all simplicity for whatever she needs without having recourse to relatives and other persons. She may not give presents, neither may she lend or accept the loan of anything without an understanding with her Superior.
- If, for the requirements of our work or for other needs, we are given or offered money, we will use it with a sense of responsibility and will give an account of it to the Superior.**
- This encourages the sharing of goods and dependence required by our vow of poverty.**

*Motivation:*

The term 'pocket money' has been removed. The need to live our vow of poverty as Salesian Sisters remains unchanged.

- Art. 119            47. On the date agreed with the Provincial or with the Superior of the Pre-Province the elections will take place according to the following procedure:
- a. **-In every community of at least 5 members one Sister will be elected by secret vote as delegate.**
- The one who receives an absolute majority, that is, more than half the votes, will be elected.

...

*Motivation:*

Participation in the Provincial Chapter by Sisters from the smaller communities leads to a more meaningful representation.

- Art. 122            48. On the day appointed by the Provincial or by the Superior of the Pre-Province, all the capitulars – members by right and delegates – will meet at the place chosen for the Provincial Chapter to begin its work.
- The election of the delegate **or of the delegates** to the General Chapter will be carried out according to the norms indicated in article 119 of these present Regulations for the election of the local delegates to the Provincial Chapter or Chapter of the Pre-Province.
- In the same way, the substitute **or the substitutes** will be elected.

The report of the elections will be sent to the Moderator of the Chapter together with the list of members of the Provincial or Pre-Province Chapter.  
When a community is constituted as directly dependent on the Superior General, the registration of members and participation in the General Chapter are regulated by its own statutes.

*Motivation:*

This new form of representation allows for greater participation by the numerically larger Provinces.

Art. 125

49. In the meetings of the Local Council – announced in advance with the relative agenda – **the Superior and the Councillors, keeping in mind the views of the Sisters, in an atmosphere of prayer, of study and of discernment, will take the decisions needed, valuing everyone’s resources in order to favour the realisation of the community Plan.**

**The Superior will inform the community in an opportune way, encouraging co-responsibility and delegation.**

One of the Councillors, acting as secretary, will draw up the minutes of the meeting. These will be read and signed by the members of the Council and the Superior, and kept in the archives.

*Motivation:*

The awareness of self that is developing in the communities requires a form of animation to co-responsibility and the valuing of everyone’s resources for the common Plan.

## **PRACTICAL INTERPRETATION OF SOME ARTICLES OF THE CONSTITUTIONS**

**Art. 120**            50. The Superior General will visit the Institute either personally or through her General Councillors, or, in exceptional cases, through other Visiting Superiors chosen from outside the General Council. The visits have the aim of strengthening the bonds of charity, deepening the commitment of fidelity to the Constitutions and fostering the development of our works in response to local needs in the spirit of Don Bosco and of Mother Mazzarello. In both personal and community meetings the Superior General will encourage spontaneity and openness to facilitate constructive, sincere dialogue. She will examine the economic administration in the light of charity, justice evangelical poverty and apostolic aims.

**Art. 132**            The Councillors delegated by the Superior General to visit the Institute will in addition to the duties prescribed in article 120 of the present Constitutions – have also the task of promoting constructive and continuous communication between the Provinces and the Superior General and her Council, and of encouraging effective collaboration among the various provincial communities. Through their service they will be able to offer the General Council a better knowledge

of the Sisters and of the environments  
in which our mission is carried out,  
and thus be able to develop the apostolic work  
of the Institute,  
making the best use of the different cultures,  
in fidelity to the Church and to Don Bosco.

**General Chapter XXI, in accordance with article 171 of the Constitutions, interprets, in practical terms, articles 120 and 132 of the Constitutions in the following way:**

The Visiting Councillor, delegate of the Superior General, will visit the Provinces entrusted to her, as a Sister among Sisters, to strengthen communion in the Institute.

By attentive listening to people and openness to the different cultures, she will accompany the Provinces on their journey and in their processes with a view to encouraging integration of life, growth in the quality of their educational presence and the inculturation of the charism.

The Visiting Councillor, when possible, will get to know the situation of the Province through consultation with the Councillors for the Sectors. With the Provincial and her Council she will prepare, plan and evaluate the visit. If requested, she will consider, with them, how to ensure its continuity.

The Interprovincial Conferences, according to their needs, may ask the Superior General for one or more Visiting Councillors to visit the Provinces belonging to the Conference.

To bring about a co-ordinated and convergent form of animation, the Visiting Councillors of the same Conference may share their experiences, the issues they faced and the recurrent challenges.

In Interprovincial Conference meetings, where possible, at least one of the Visiting Councillors who have visited one or more Provinces of the Conference will be present. On request, and depending on the topic under consideration, a Councillor from one of the Sectors may also take part.

*Motivation:*

The interpretation of articles 120 and 132 adopts the choice of co-ordination for communion, expressed in the Plan of Formation.

This style of co-ordination involves the Provincial Communities, the Interprovincial Conferences and the General Council together in seeking ways of organising visits that better respond to the needs of the Institute in the different situations.

**Art. 28**

51. Religious poverty according to the Salesian spirit does not permit any form of profit-making, neither the ownership of immovable goods for the sole purpose of revenue, nor any other form of permanent, interest-bearing investment.

The Institute therefore, may retain only the ownership of the material goods necessary for the carrying out of the works.

**General Chapter XXI in accordance with article 171 of the Constitutions interprets, in practical terms, article 28 of the Constitutions in the following way:**

*In cases where the use of immobile property belonging to the Institute is no longer necessary for the functioning of the works, it is permissible to rent it out on a temporary basis.*

Such a decision, clearly motivated, may be made by the Provincial with her Council and will be communicated to the Superior General and her Council, to the Sisters and to our lay collaborators. The income received will be included in the annual Administrative Account.

*Motivation:*

At times, particular situations arise, for which the Institute is not responsible, which do not permit the sale of immobile goods no longer suited to the functioning of our works. In such cases, since it is against poverty to leave them unused and allow them to deteriorate, they can be rented out on a temporary basis.

## **OTHER DECISIONS ARISING FROM VARIOUS PROPOSALS**

The Chapter Assembly has also considered other proposals, resulting in the following decisions:

**52. The report on the community evaluation will be compiled in a way that reflects the dynamism of the community, following the guidelines below:**

- ❑ each province will draw up a provincial plan, in line with the recommendations of the General Chapter, choosing the areas most suited to its situation
- ❑ every community, in keeping with this plan, will formulate its own community plan
- ❑ periodically the community will evaluate their plan
- ❑ during her visit, the Provincial will review, with the community, how they are living the community plan
- ❑ at the end of the year, the community will compile a written evaluation and will send it to the Provincial
- ❑ the Provincial will add her comments on each community and send the evaluations to the Centre.

*Motivation:*

This format allows for community reflection and growth, which will lead to the owning of the guidelines of the General Chapter and to living the provincial and community plans more responsibly.

**53. The drawing up of the *Guidelines for the educative mission of the Salesian Sisters*, following the method of participation and involvement used in the preparation of the Plan of Formation, has been entrusted to the General Council.**

**It will make use of the material that already exists in the Youth Pastoral Sector.**

*Motivation:*

The drawing up of the “Guidelines for the educative mission of the Salesian Sisters” will allow the provinces greater freedom in drawing up a more inculturated youth pastoral plan.

**54. Confirmation of the decision taken at General Chapter XX:** leave of absence from the religious house for a temporary professed Sister may be granted by the Provincial with her Council, for a period of not more than six months.

*Motivation:*

A temporary professed Sister may need a period of absence from the religious house in order to discern her vocation or for some other legitimate reason.

