

acts

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

Living communion on paths of Gospel citizenship

Opening of General Chapter XXI – Meeting with
Pope John Paul II – Closing of General Chapter XXI

OPENING OF GENERAL CHAPTER XXI

HOMILY OF THE RECTOR MAJOR, FR PASCUAL CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA,
AT THE MASS FOR THE OPENING OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER

18 September 2002

The Beatitudes, the *Magna Carta* for those who want to introduce a new civilisation into the world

Today marks the start of a historic event for the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians: the beginning of General Chapter XXI, which has as its theme Our renewed Covenant commits us to active citizenship. According to Art. 135 of your Constitutions, the Chapter is the “representative assembly of the whole Institute, both a means and an expression of unity”, an “exceptionally important time for reflection, assessment and guidance in a common search for God’s will”. You have rightly decided that the best way to begin and then continue to live it, is through the Eucharist. It brings together the mystery of the new Covenant, sealed by the blood shed by Christ, communion brought to its highest degree that enables us to eat at God’s table and our mission to introduce the civilisation of love into the world. In this way your assembly is enlightened and completely oriented towards rooting your Institute firmly in the experience of God (covenant), which gives rise to communion as a style of life (community), and so becomes an educative and pastoral program (mission). All this is undertaken with a typically Salesian approach, i.e. “the commitment to educate ourselves to undertake the educative mission with renewed responsibility today, together with our educating communities and the Salesian Family” (Working Document, 65).

From the outset you wanted to begin from the Word and to find in it the criteria for discerning community and apostolic reality. At the same time you want it to be the energy and wisdom that will enable every Sister to act “as Jesus did in every situation and in every encounter, making the person capable of a contemplative approach” (Working Document, 10). To put it more practically, you have taken the Beatitudes as the Magna Carta of evangelical citizenship (Working Document 70-77). The words of the Pope on his return from World Youth Day at Toronto confirm what you had already written. “On the Mount of Galilee”, said the Holy Father, “Jesus defined the identity of the citizens of the Kingdom in the form of congratulations: the Beatitudes”. They are, he said, “the Magna Carta of those who want to introduce a new civilisation into the world” (Angelus address, Castelgandolfo, 4 August 2002).

I would like to go a little more deeply into the Beatitudes, which have been proclaimed to us today, so that this part of the Gospel text may become “the ideal of Gospel living”, “the response to the thirst for God and for happiness”, “the way to reach that goal”, and “the mentality of the Kingdom”.

All generations of Christians, and religious communities in particular, have considered the Beatitudes as the best synthesis of Christ’s Gospel, and its most apt proclamation. Jesus presents his Gospel as a program for happiness, and through it offers us our complete fulfilment in God. But this is a

message that can be perceived and understood only by faith. It implies a deep change in our value system, a transformation of our hierarchy of values, an overturning of the mentality of the world, and ultimately a change in our image of God.

These words of Jesus seem so utopian that it is very difficult to take them seriously. Who really believes that the poor and suffering, the hungry and the persecuted are happy? Let us ask them! Or do the meek really possess the land? There is no doubt that after the 11th of September last year the world has become much more dangerous! What good is there in us trying to become more sincere in heart, or more merciful? You need only think of the vast numbers who are on the verge of starvation, while others accumulate unlimited goods and property. Our own daily experience seems at times to be an open contradiction of what Jesus says. And yet this was the first promise made by Jesus of Nazareth when he began to speak of God and of his reign.

It is interesting to note that both Luke and Matthew place the Beatitudes as a preamble and framework for the discourse in which Jesus sets out his program ("Sermon on the plain" in Luke, "Sermon on the Mount" in Matthew). The intention is clear: for the citizen of the Kingdom joy is imperative, the happiness of God comes before the intrinsic demands of the Kingdom. For Jesus, only being firmly rooted in God's Kingdom can bring happiness and true joy to this earth, beset by poverty, suffering and death, and give it a firm foundation in the human heart. Actually, this happiness can be lived in any human circumstances, no matter how wretched. Precisely in those situations where there would seem to be no reason for joy, God comes to promise happiness and to make it possible.

And a first consequence of this, my dear Sisters, is that a firm belief in God's promise means becoming a citizen of his Kingdom and an attentive listener to what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. God begins to reign where persons begin to live the promised happiness. We are called therefore to make happiness our program of life, to practice joy as our daily way of life. Is this not fully in line with the most authentic Salesian tradition: "We make holiness consist in always being happy"?

On the lips of Jesus the Beatitudes were a proclamation of the Kingdom, addressed in the first place to the poor, to those deprived of this world's goods, to the oppressed. And even today, in a world that is becoming ever more secularised, a world that has decided to ignore God, it will be those who count for nothing in the world who are best able to look forward to God and his reign. Their happiness depends on God, because it is God himself who is their true happiness.

This, dear Sisters, should be our Gospel, the good news to be lived and passed on to others. And here we have the second consequence:

God comes close to those who need him. His Kingdom comes only and exclusively to those who are awaiting it. The Gospel is meant for the poor, those afflicted by any kind of poverty, old or new. When one relies on a God committed to the happiness of those who are his own, all other expectations are superfluous as is the effort to seek them. True happiness is like the wholesome bread that God "provides for his beloved as they sleep" (Ps 127: 2b). "Set your hearts on his Kingdom, and these other things will be given you as well" (Lk 12: 31).

The happiness promised by Jesus is not a matter of words alone. He made the Beatitudes his program of life during his public ministry. His living of the joy he proclaimed was the distinguishing trait of his messianic mission (cf. Mt 11: 2-6). He had come to proclaim this messianic joy and he did so by living it. In this way he was able to manifest his own intimate religious experience. Jesus was able to speak of God because of his lived experience of God: a God who makes anyone who believes in him happy.

And that, dear Sisters, brings us to the third consequence: we must proclaim what we live; we must communicate to others our experience of God by the way we live, like Jesus who, in the Beatitudes, revealed his own experience of God. He lived what he preached and, because he believed in what he was preaching, he put what he proclaimed into practice: "Go and tell John what you hear and see; the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at

me” (Mt 11: 4-6). Like Jesus, we are called to go about doing good (cf. Acts 10: 38), making everyone happy and introducing a new civilisation into the world.

Jesus interpreted and made clear the logic of God’s Kingdom by living in it. All his life, from his humble birth to his tragic death, was a living out of the attitudes of the Beatitudes. He was poor (2 Cor 8: 9), he was meek and humble of heart (Mt 11: 29), he suffered the pangs of hunger (Mt 4: 2) and thirst (Jn 4: 7; 19: 28), he was persecuted for the Kingdom (Mt 10: 16-24). The Beatitudes were his way of life before being words on his lips. Jesus himself is the living interpretation of the Beatitudes! Without him they would be simply a paradox, a word game, a mad utopian ideal without either realism or guarantee of truth. For this reason the Beatitudes imply the need to know Jesus. If the mind and heart were not completely centred on him it would be impossible to grasp the secret of his Beatitudes. They are not an abstract ideal. Rather, they reflect the human experience of Jesus as a believer. He knew who and what he was talking about when he proclaimed them.

And so we come to a fourth consequence: to understand the deep roots of Jesus’ joy we must discover what motivated his life: God and his Kingdom.

In the Beatitudes, Jesus shows us how he views the world, the person and especially God. He is not imposing a new law on us, nor is he exhorting us to particular ways of behaving. He is just bringing us face to face with fundamental attitudes that give rise to powerful forces, prompting surprising forms of behaviour and revealing new goals. With the Beatitudes, as a prologue to the proclamation of God’s Kingdom, Jesus is showing us a way to make his experience of God our own. He calls us to live in need, without on that account losing the joy of having God as our God; to rely on God when we count for very little in the world; to face up to our own limitations and death itself, without renouncing the happiness of having him as our God. This is how we can make, the experience of Jesus our own.

It is not difficult to understand what a high price Jesus had to pay for breaking away from the prevailing image of God: death on the cross. In reality the Beatitudes and the whole of the Sermon on the Mount make sense and can be understood only in the light of Jesus’ death. On the cross Jesus shows himself as the one who is truly meek of heart, who suffers for the sake of justice, who is truly poor and in solidarity with everyone, who loved us to the end and gave his life that we might have more abundant life. For this reason, adopting the logic of the Beatitudes means adopting the logic of the Kingdom, which is the logic of the cross. And so we reach a final consequence, that of willingly becoming a citizen of the Kingdom.

Betrayal, rejection, abandonment and death do not have the last word for those who believe in God. The Beatitudes proclaimed by Christ continue to be valid, because he experienced the fidelity of the Father, who did not allow him to be “abandoned to Hades, and [his] body did not see corruption” (Acts 2: 31). Rather, “God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (1 Phil 2: 9-11). In the cross we get a glimpse of the true face of God who is committed to our happiness, and light is shed on the paradox of his Kingdom. In the cross of Jesus, dear Sisters, lies the reason for our joy. The cross of Christ defends our happiness from any temptation to purchase it cheaply. The resurrection was, and continues to be, God’s response to men and women who are determined to live according to the Beatitudes of the Gospel.

May Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello be your models and inspiration. And may Mary, the first among all believers and citizens of the Kingdom, Mother of the Church, accompany you and be your guide in this spiritual and pastoral enterprise.

INAUGURAL ADDRESS OF CARDINAL EDUARDO MARTÍNEZ SOMALO
PREFECT OF THE CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE
AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE

September 18, 2002

Greetings

I am happy to be here with you.

Allow me to recall that just six years ago, on September 18, 1996, I found myself in this same room with the Sister Chapter Members of that time, ready to open the Twentieth General Chapter of the Salesian Sisters. They were already looking to the future “as women rooted in Christ and called to an inculturated educational mission in the third millennium”.

These six years have passed quickly. They were rich in unforgettable events, first among which was that gift of the Holy Spirit, the Great Jubilee of the year 2000. It confirmed the Church in that perennial youthfulness that characterises it and which continually needs to be purified, fortified and made aware of the authentic needs of humankind and of the requirements of God’s message. This is necessary so that we may all be ready to “remember the past with gratitude, to live the present with enthusiasm and look forward to the future with confidence: ‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever’ (Heb 13: 8)” (NMI 1).

It is in this attitude of hope that I desire to greet all here present, the Lord Cardinals and Bishops, and in particular, the Mother General of the Salesian Sisters, Mother Antonia Colombo, the Rector Major of the Salesians, Father Pascual Chávez Villanueva, the Presidents of the Cooperators and Past Pupils, and all the members who, under different titles, participate in this most significant moment for the Salesian Family. To all, I express my esteem and my admiration for what you are and for all that you so generously do in the Church, for the Church and for the world.

The relevance of General Chapter XXI

The reality on which General Chapter XXI reflects: “*Our renewed Covenant commits us to active citizenship*” admirably emphasises the spirit and the fundamental message of the recent Jubilee. I will attempt to express it as follows, to capture this harmony. *Starting afresh from Christ, to live the Covenant with God in total belonging to Him as consecrated persons and as Institute, with renewed enthusiasm and a new awareness of his love, so as to be a leaven of newness of life in the troubled society in which we live. Jesus is our guarantee in our weakness: “I am with you always!”* (Mt 28: 20).

The exhortation “*Starting afresh from Christ*”, recently published by our Department, presents an efficacious synthesis and development of the teachings of the Post-Synodal Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* and of the Apostolic Letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*. It affirms that “A life transformed by the evangelical counsels becomes a prophetic and silent witness and at the same time an eloquent protest against an inhuman world” (RC 33).

Starting afresh from Christ, therefore, to reveal to the world the love of the Father and to witness to that spirituality of communion that John Paul II defined as “the heart’s contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us and whose light we must also be able to see shining in the faces of the brothers and sisters around us”. We must feel that each person is one of “those who are a part of me” (NMI 43), someone for whose happiness I, too, am responsible.

This mission, so strongly emphasised during the Jubilee in the great challenge “To make the Church the home and school of communion (NMI 43), requires a continual and profound inner striving and demands a service of charity that breaks with the arid schemes of habit. It generates a healthy

restlessness in seeking authentic responses to be offered today to young people, to families, to those who suffer because of the injustice of society or for their own mistakes, and to the laity with whom we share our pastoral commitment.

John Paul II explained to the young people that “The spirit of the world offers many illusions and many parodies of happiness. Perhaps there is no greater darkness than that which insinuates itself into the soul of the young people when false prophets extinguish in them the light of faith, of hope and of love. The greatest deception, the greatest source of unhappiness is the illusion of finding life by doing without God, and of reaching freedom by excluding moral truth and personal responsibility” (John Paul II – Toronto, *XVII World Youth Day 2002 – Homily of July 28*).

A radical change of mentality is, therefore, necessary: from the individualism and pragmatism that characterise our century and which, perhaps unconsciously, have also penetrated our Christian communities, to that solidarity from which “no one can be excluded [...] since ‘through his Incarnation the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every person” (NMI 49).

Certainly, the active citizenship to which you refer in your Chapter reflection has a very wide horizon. However, it goes without saying that, no matter what commitment it requires, it always and only comes from a relationship with God who empowers and matures personal life and that of the community. It is God who gives us the strength to reject, through charitable gestures that can be clearly understood, the easy morality of our times.

First of all, live the Covenant

“The new creative charity” (NMI 50), as the Holy Father so efficaciously expresses it, called for by the will that allows itself to be educated by the Holy Spirit today, demands that consecrated life be a reflective way of living and a dedication that is ever more committed and courageous (cf. RC 27). This is strengthened by an obedience that reaffirms our availability to God in the multiple situations in which religious are called to live. It is imperative that we give renewed vigour to community witness where every person is co-responsible in giving his/her own contribution of human and spiritual richness. We need to be purified by daily life that inevitably requires patience, mutual trust, constancy in bearing one another’s burdens and the ability to take risks when dialogue requires us to take the first step. This must take place in an atmosphere of humility that breaks with every security, except that which Jesus gives us: “I am with you always” (Mt 28: 20). This asceticism is “indispensable if consecrated persons are to remain faithful to their own vocation and follow Jesus on the way of the Cross” (VC 38).

We need to live a more profound experience of God!

Work is not enough to guarantee the spiritual influence of religious life on society and neither does it guarantee the radical choice for God that each one of us, freely, made in our religious profession. When work habitually becomes so important that it does not allow us to set aside the necessary space dedicated to God in the midst of multiple commitments, we need to review our priorities and also the quality of our work. Certain rhythms of tension, even in the most holy things, create a lack of sensitivity, a void that erodes our relationship of intimacy and of confidence with God. We then build a god to suit our problems and our situations. Substantially, we run the risk of forgetting Jesus’ warning: “apart from me you can do nothing!” (Jn 15: 5).

The document “Starting afresh from Christ”, in emphasising the centrality of the Eucharistic celebration in the life of the Christian and with greater reason in that of consecrated persons, brings out its qualifying influence in the heart of the life of the Church and of every community. It “fashions from within the renewed offering of one’s very existence, the project of community life and the apostolic mission. We all need the daily viaticum of encounter with the Lord in order to bring everyday life into sacred time which is made present in the celebration of the Lord’s Memorial” (RC 26).

The Witnesses

However, since every General Chapter has as its priority goal to give glory to God through fidelity to the charism handed on by the Founders, the legitimate guarantors of God's plan, let us look to Don Bosco and to Mother Mazzarello. What great union with God they had!

You could teach me through innumerable episodes. I must admit that when I read the life of Don Bosco I was struck by the fact that, in most difficult situations, his prayer and peace were more intense and trusting, while his filial confidence in the love of God urged him on to new paths and helped him to be ahead of his times. Fr. Ceria, an attentive and demanding biographer of Don Bosco, has offered us a good synthesis of his experience of contemplation in the title of his book, which is fundamental for anyone wanting to know the interior life of the Saint: *Don Bosco with God*.

And what about your Co-foundress, Mother Maria Mazzarello? Certainly, the beginning of the new Institute was not without its problems, but she always knew how to find a balance that avoided reducing the day simply to moving from one task to another. She wanted frequent, even if brief, encounters with God to give light and meaning to every activity. Her profound spirituality helped all to see every work as an occasion for living and reaffirming moments of personal and community prayer.

Constant union with God, she repeated to the Sisters of Mornese, consists in doing everything without delay, with all possible commitment and only for love of God.

This is how the Saints simplified life!

The foundation of your charism

In the General Chapter, you are called along with your Sisters to consider how best to serve the great gift that the Holy Spirit and the Church have entrusted to your Institute: to make known to the young people that the Father loves them as His children". In substance, this means educating them as persons destined to live their own Christian vocation in today's world. At the service of this fundamental reality, we place all those interventions that help persons to develop their human and spiritual fullness, their capacity to relate with others, to collaborate in the transformation of society, etc. At the base, however, there must always be that fundamental idea that opens to hope, gives strength in difficulty, helps to resist evil and, in short, is like oxygen that helps one to live: God loves me.

If the etymology of the word "to educate", is "to draw out", those who educate must commit themselves to bring to fruition in the young people all that will help them to be themselves, just as your Saints did. They must lead them to understand the marvellous goal of living as children of God. However, the force of logic is not sufficient to transmit a conviction. Life witness is necessary. The first message every person transmits to the young people is communicated through the way in which they live their own role and by the educational environment that the community succeeds in creating. Herein lies the importance of the family spirit in the houses of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello: it is the palpable expression of the love of God towards his children.

St. Paul sums up the idea of our being children of God very well: "When the fullness of time came, God sent His son, born of a woman, born under the law, so that we might receive the adoption of children" (Gal 4: 4-8). This is the great gift.

The educative charism that characterises you has the great task of making people aware of the parenthood of God, of which the educator is the mediator. It must help young people to correspond to this love by which the Son of God wanted to assume the fullness of the human condition (born of a woman, born under the law).

The renewed Covenant with God, on which you have reflected in the Chapter preparations, was first lived by Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello. They did this by giving themselves without measure, united to God the Father and trusting in his love, learning from Jesus total availability to God and to young people. Attentive to the Spirit, they gave an efficacious response to the needs of their times,

well aware that every omission on the part of the individual or of the community inevitably impoverishes themselves, the Church and the young people whom God sends them. With the passing of times and persons, God has desired that you should witness His faithful love more and more to the young people.

The guardian of the family spirit

It is not my intention to leave Mary last, but I would like to set her as a seal on the great mission that the Father has entrusted to you. Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello always felt her to be an attentive guardian and sure help in their work for young people.

Let us not forget that Mary is the great Mediator of the love of God. In the passage from St. Paul we read of Jesus that he was “born of a woman”.

Mary, Mother of God.

His Teacher.

She whom Jesus wanted close to him always, in joy and in sorrow, to the moment of His death on the cross.

Jesus deprived himself of everyone and everything, but not of his Mother! Your Founders had a tender filial love for her. In the Oratory of Valdocco, the young people saw her as a Mother.

Who, better than her, can preserve and nurture the Family Spirit, which is characteristic of your charism? The woman expresses tenderness, but she has also given a human face to Love, generating the Son of God who, for love, wanted to fully assume our human condition.

To Mary Our Help we entrust the commitment to active citizenship that you want to reflect on in this General Chapter and to which you intend to dedicate yourselves during the next six years. Today's society at times leaves people lost because of the confusion of values and of life through which it is passing. It seems that the young people are indifferent, devoid of any enthusiasm, closed up in their own world (and yet, John Paul attracts crowds of young people and speaks to them not only of the love of God, but also of the demanding love of the Crucified!). You, too, seek to do the same.

Do not fear difficulties. Always trust in God, in the Church and in the charism that Don Bosco received from the Holy Spirit and that Mother Mazzarello has so faithfully transmitted to you.

I leave you with a thought that the Holy Father gave to the young people in Toronto. May it be a motive of trusting realism for you and for the young people who come to your houses and whom your yourselves go out to meet.

“Young people are our hope” the Holy Father emphasises.

“Do not let this hope die!

Be willing to stake your life for it!”

And he reminds them and us of a fundamental reality:

“We are not the sum total of our weakness and our failures;

on the contrary, we are the sum total of the love of the Father for ourselves and our actual capacity to become

the image of His Son!” (John Paul II Homily of July 28, 2002 in Toronto).

ADDRESS OF THE RECTOR MAJOR PASCUAL CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA
TO THE CHAPTER MEMBERS

September 18, 2002

*Most Eminent Lord Cardinals
Reverend Mother General
Brothers and Sisters of the Salesian Family
Dearest Chapter members*

First of all I bring you greetings from all the Salesians, who are supporting this important gathering in prayer trusting that from it may spring stimulating ideas and efficacious guidelines for the future life and mission of the Salesian Sisters throughout the world.

If it is true that without the other groups of the Salesian Family we Salesians would not be what we should be, this is true in a particular way with reference to the Salesian Sisters. We share the same Father and Founder, the same charism lived as men and women, a spirit that makes us feel that we are members of the same family. Our spirituality flows from the shared Preventive System and is expressed in the *Da Mihi Animas*, one mission urging us to collaboration and communion. It is natural, therefore, that we would follow this General Chapter XXI of your Institute as you did our GC 25. We are convinced that the conclusions you will draw and the direction you will take will always enrich our shared vocation, as well as being a stimulus for the renewal of your religious communities and of the educating communities.

This is your first General Chapter of the new millennium, and therefore it is to be viewed and lived within the social and ecclesial context in which we are living. Your Working Document, when considering the reality of our times, refers to the globalisation and modernism (Working Document 82.87) that are clearly dominant in our world. But it also makes reference to the pastoral plan of the Church and to the spirituality of communion as described in *Novo millennio Ineunte* (Working Document 87).

As with all General Chapters, your General Chapter XXI is a Pentecostal event, a visit of the Holy Spirit who has the power to renew the face of the earth, to create the new heavens and the new earth so long awaited.

As successor to Don Bosco, I wish to share with you a few reflections that came to me as I studied your Working Document.

1. *The context and the evangelical response to it*

One of the first things to strike me was the vision of reality presented in the Working Document, which clearly illustrates the context in which your General Chapter XXI is taking place, and which I would condense into two broad areas, one social and one ecclesial. The first could be identified with neoliberalism and secularism expressed through materialism, consumerism, permissiveness and ethical relativism (cf. Working Document 7). The second is drawn from the pastoral program for the Church in the third millennium traced out by John Paul II in *Novo millennio Ineunte*.

Context plays a very important role in an assembly such as this. It is in this reality that we live, that the Christian faith develops, that we live our religious life and that our pastoral action is carried out. From the moment of the Incarnation, the whole of creation is called to be gathered up into the mystery of Redemption, as Irenaeus would have said. The context is the setting, but it also challenges us, and we cannot reflect on life and make decisions if they are not based on reality.

I am pleased that the Institute has such a strong awareness of the “problems inherent in the globalisation that distinguishes our society today...and of the injustice that is at the root of the unequal distribution of goods, of the exclusion of the weak and of the violation of human rights. These become a challenge in the contexts in which [the educating communities] work” (Working Document

31). A fundamental characteristic of the Salesian charism is that of being “present in those situations in which the young people, especially those of the working classes, have difficulty in expressing the best in themselves... [We need to] live the closeness to our neighbour witnessed to by Jesus, and to allow ourselves to be evangelised by the poor” (Working Document 37).

It seems to me that the Holy Father described this in a masterly way during his homily at the Mass of Beatification in Krakow on August 18: “The Twentieth Century, notwithstanding undeniable success in many fields, was marked in a particular way by the mystery of evil. We have entered into this new millennium with this legacy of good and evil. There opens before humanity new perspectives of development and previously unknown dangers. Frequently, people live as though God did not exist, and even set themselves in the place of God. They appropriate the right of the Creator to intervene in the mystery of human life. They want to interfere, through genetic manipulation, with human life and to determine the time of death. Rejecting the divine law and moral principles, they openly attack the family as an institution. In various ways, they attempt to silence the voice of God in the hearts of people. They want to make of God the great absence in the culture and in the awareness of peoples. The mystery of evil continues to leave its mark in the world. Experiencing this mystery, people live in fear of the future, of emptiness, of suffering and of annihilation... We need to re-echo the message of merciful love with new vigour. The world needs this love” (OR 19-20.08.02, pag. 8).

This is none other than the message of *Novo millennio ineunte*, which, in response to these situations, states that the salvation offered to the world comes from the death and resurrection of Jesus, and therefore from his Gospel, from the spirit of the Beatitudes (cf. Working Document 79).

Indeed, there is a great need for a new international order and we cannot help but seek to give our contribution as disciples of Jesus and as religious, by creating little microcosms where life can develop, flower and bear fruit.

2. *Chapter Theme and the grace of centring our lives in God*

My second reflection centres on the Chapter theme: Our renewed Covenant commits us to active citizenship. It strikes me as a very interesting choice, first of all because it is a synthesis of your religious life, starting from the experience of God (Covenant), from which originates a new form of the life of communion (community), and leading to an educational-pastoral program (mission) in “Gospel citizenship”. In this way, our life becomes a mystery of love and of communion, a participation in the life of the Trinity which, by its nature, shares its being with others and expresses itself in community and social life. This is manifested, made credible, in the loving kindness that characterises the Preventive System. This, in fact, is not merely an educational method, but is the essence of our relationship with God and of our interpersonal relationships in community and mission, because it makes us feel loved and demands a powerful response of love from us. Thus, as you so beautifully express it, “the breadth of our horizons will be proportionate to the depth of our being rooted in God” (Working Document 79).

In effect, from communion – participation in the life of the three Divine Persons – comes the urge to work for the freedom of every person, of society, of the Church and of the poor. The human person is called to overcome every form of egoism and to live a life of communion. A society that is founded on inequality is an affront to the Trinity. One “cannot build the new society on the suffering and poverty of others” (John Paul II, in his address on his arrival in Poland, August 16, 02). Society honours the Trinity when it favours the communion and participation of all, thus generating justice and equality. The more the Church overcomes division among Christians the more it values and lives unity of faith in the diversity of cultures, thus becoming ever more the sacrament of Trinitarian communion. The poor, finally, find in the communion of the Trinity the model of a human society which, starting from individual differences, succeeds in forming a fraternal, open, just society, where solidarity is experienced and where all have access to those goods that render life on earth more humane.

The Trinitarian God is not an incomprehensible mystery about which it is better not to speak. No! Its mystery is the mystery of Love, in which all can understand one another and feel ourselves loved. God is Love (1 Jn 4: 8.12). It is precisely in this love of God, that we find the inspiration and foundation of the Preventive System, “that looks upon every creature with its providence, accompanies them with its presence and saves them by giving its own life” (SDB Const. 20). It is that liberating love that expresses itself through the education of the whole person, which must be the aim of our pastoral action, thus becoming a sign of the presence of God’s Kingdom.

Undoubtedly the theme you have chosen for General Chapter XXI is totally centred on the primacy of God, on finding in Him the grace of unity, that helps us to overcome the fragmentation of life and spiritual superficiality (cf. Working Document 77.84). But at the same time, it emphasises the practical consequences for our life in community (Working Document 88-95) and for our educative action (Working Document 97-102). God does not solve our problems, but when we turn to Him we rediscover the way to make life more humane and regain the courage to follow that way. We would move in the direction of a just solution to many of our problems today if we were to abandon ourselves to a God who loves us and who desires peace, justice, development and solidarity for every person. He would unmask our harmful idols and offer alternative ways of reweaving the community and social fabric.

3. *Evangelical citizenship and commitment to education*

A third and last element of my reflection is the theme of evangelical citizenship, which you have taken as your program, with the consequent commitment to an education inspired by the Beatitudes.

As the pre-Chapter document says so well, the community is “the place where Gospel citizenship is built” (Working Document 18). Community is not merely a support that makes fidelity and religious life easier and more effective. It is in itself an evangelising element, rich in the power to make life more humane and capable of modelling alternative forms of social organisation (cf. Acts 2: 42-47; 4: 32-35). The community, therefore, is the real recipient of our mission, which does not consist in doing things, even very remarkable ones, nor in managing works, even if they are very grandiose and complex, but in being signs and bearers of the love of God, or better still, of the God who is Love, God who is Trinity.

For this reason, the most suitable method is the Salesian one, i.e., education that favours the growth of persons and trains them to face life with meaning, with success, with a sure goal. This kind of education gradually changes the culture of a people, with particular attention to the woman, in the conviction that “If we educate a woman, we educate a people” (Working Document 40). A similar choice does not exclude, but rather demands, “networking with the members of the Salesian Family, ecclesial organisations, government and civic institutions, non-governmental organisations and with all those who are interested in education and work to collaborate in the construction of a new society” (Working Document 38). It also requires a “critical and constructive contribution in the places where youth policies are developed, in the defence of human rights through actions aimed at restoring dignity to the poorest among us” (Working Document 39).

In this line, are the proposals directed toward strengthening our need to “educate ourselves to economic solidarity, to a simple lifestyle, to a critical conscience with regard to the impoverishment of the planet, to assume a new vision of poverty and of its consequences; to struggle against the idea of consumerism and exclusion, to support those movements that promote honesty in public power and respect for fundamental human rights” (Working Document 43). In this line, too, is the promotion of socio-political education in the light of the social doctrine of the Church (Working Document 51), in the spirit of the beatitudes and in fidelity to the charism.

It is evident that such a perspective requires a new kind of Salesian Sister, and this is the task of formation (cf. Working Document 59.61). In this regard, I can tell you that I thought you were clear-sighted and very courageous to recognise the fact that "it is urgent that we re-centre the formation journey on Jesus and His message... [this] is needed by the complexity of today's world (Working Document 103).

My wish for you is that you may be able to find, in God's Word and in the Salesian spiritual patrimony, given to us by Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello, the inspiration and the energy to successfully embrace the theme and to direct the whole Institute towards a renewed Covenant, lived in commitment to evangelical citizenship. You can count on our prayer and friendship. We will accompany you especially with prayer, and by assimilating the information that we will receive during this spiritual adventure, which you begin today in the name of the Lord.

May Mary, the woman of the new Covenant, guide you on this journey and help you to manifest your evangelical citizenship in communion among yourselves and in your commitment to caring for young people, sharing, like her, the lot of the poor and little ones.

ADDRESS OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL MOTHER ANTONIA COLOMBO
AT THE OPENING OF GENERAL CHAPTER XXI

Rome, September 18, 2002

*My Lord Cardinal Eduardo Martinez Somalo
Cardinals Alfons Maria Stickler and Antonio María Javierre
Monsignor Tarcisio Bertone, Archbishop Secretary
of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith
Father Pascual Chávez and members
of the General Council of the Salesians*

*Representatives of the various groups of the Salesian Family,
Young people and friends gathered here,*

Your presence at the opening of General Chapter XXI of the Salesian Sisters is both an honour and an encouragement. It enables us to experience a strong sense of Church, the mystery of communion which proclaims Christ the Saviour and makes him present, in these times that are both challenging and full of promise because of the witness to holiness of so many of our contemporaries.

I thank the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life, whose authoritative words and friendly approach make us ever more aware of the needs of the mission that God has entrusted to us in the Church. It calls us to collaborate in the new evangelisation through the education of young people, especially young women, adapting to the present day the Salesian Spirituality of the Preventive System of Don Bosco, and the spirit of Mornese as lived by Mother Maria Domenica Mazzarello and our first Sisters.

Your presence, my Lord Cardinal, along with that of the other Cardinals and Bishops who accepted our invitation or who sent their good wishes, gives us the opportunity to express and confirm our commitment of fidelity to the Holy Father and to his magisterium, our desire to live and work in full communion with the local Bishops and to collaborate in the one mission of salvation in faithfulness to our own Salesian charism.

We offer a word of gratitude to the Rector Major of the Salesian Congregation, Fr. Pascual Chavez, ninth successor of Don Bosco. His care and interest, manifested so often during the brief time since his election, and the challenging message he has addressed to us today, confirm our call to communion in the Salesian Family and our desire to draw from our evangelical and our charismatic roots, in order that together we may realise our shared mission.

I thank the members of the Salesian Family who have relayed their good wishes to us and those who are here present today, representing their respective groups. We are convinced that our relationship of reciprocal appreciation, while reinforcing the sharing of the same charism, awakens new energies and stimulates us to undertake new journeys in the service of our educative mission, offering to society an original and constructive way of living unity in diversity.

How can we neglect to mention, in particular, the presence of the young people, giving voice to the good wishes and the expectations of thousands of other young people? Don Bosco and Mother Maria Domenica Mazzarello gave their lives for the boys and girls of their time, offering them a dignified and happy future rooted in the love of God the Father, who loves all His sons and daughters. Forming good Christians and honest citizens was their life's passion, the dream nurtured and passed on from generation to generation.

Following in the footsteps of the generations of Salesian Sisters that have preceded us, we today re-live this dream, seeking to incorporate it into the cultural reality of our times. The theme of this General Chapter XXI, Our renewed Covenant commits us to active citizenship, takes up once more the entrustment of our founders, and invites us to reflect on the conditions necessary to be, and to educate others to become, active citizens today, in the light of the Gospel.

The process that led to formulation of the theme began in the triennial evaluations of the previous Chapter, carried out in the Interprovincial Conferences of the different continents. From these evaluations, there emerged certain points that demanded deeper consideration. Various topics were identified, resulting from reflection on the challenges of today in the light of our specific charism.

The request for a topic that would be a strong challenge for our life and mission in this era of globalisation and cyberspace was unanimous. We listened to the questions that the times in which we live posed to the evangelising mission of the Church and, consequently, to our religious life so that, today, it may still express its prophetic responsibility. To educate through evangelisation at the

beginning of this third millennium, characterised by phenomena that demand a greater awareness of their causes and the courage to seek and to suggest alternative responses to those that actually dominate, implies a radical living of the demands of the Covenant understood as God's pact of love with His people and the foundation of our educative mission. Fidelity to God, in fact, demands fidelity to the human person, and the defence of God's rights requires the defence of the rights of His sons and daughters.

In this light, the Chapter theme calls for a renewed awareness:

- of our personal response to the Covenant as Salesian Sisters, and of the contemplative roots of our life
- of the responsibility to present community witness to the Covenant
- of the need to educate ourselves and others to Gospel citizenship in an era of globalisation

Active citizenship, as we envisage it, therefore becomes Gospel citizenship. We are convinced that being citizens of the Kingdom, proclaimed and witnessed to by Jesus, requires that we live as He lived, making His lifestyle our own, adhering to the charter of the Beatitudes proclaimed on the mount, which identifies the rights and duties of Christian citizens. It means looking to Mary, Ark of the Covenant and first citizen of the Kingdom, a responsible woman, in solidarity with her people, attentive to history, capable of entering deeply into events because she was faithful to the Word which she treasured and lived with love and fidelity.

During the time of preparation for the Chapter, the communities prayed and reflected. Above all they allowed themselves to be challenged by the theme, reflecting on it in its unity and fullness, as well as on its contemplative foundation that justifies social action and makes it fruitful.

The efficacy of the Chapter Assembly will derive from our shared conviction that the Covenant with God, as communion with the whole of humanity, also implies a renewed call for solidarity among ourselves. It is a call to assume responsibility for the vocational growth of the persons who are called to be community, with a mission educate to the common good and to a culture of peace.

Openness and docility to the Spirit will strengthen us in our commitment to finding, together with the whole Salesian Family, the educating community and the wider ecclesial community, new and efficacious ways to realise today the educative aim of our founders: to form good Christians and honest citizens.

We are surprised and happy to find authoritative confirmation of our reflections in the proposals of the Church and its various institutions, and even in civil society.

The recent publication, *Starting Afresh From Christ*, drawn from the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consacrata* and from the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, is for us a bright beacon that will shed light on the work of the Chapter.

I believe that I can affirm, with gratitude to God and to the Salesian Sisters of every continent, that during the six years since the last Chapter, faithful to the heritage of our founders, our religious Family has followed the way marked out for us by the See of Peter, as outlined in the various continental Synods. For this reason, we feel strongly challenged by the *Duc in altum* that John Paul II launched as a mandate to the Church in the third millennium.

We, together with all the members of the Salesian Family, welcome it, remembering with deep emotion the eighth successor of Don Bosco, Juan Edmundo Vecchi. He developed it for us in his last *Strenna*, highlighting a dimension that should characterise us as Salesians. This consists in launching out into the open sea, into the deep, toward the depths of sanctity of life in community and in our educative mission, which has been so decisively outlined by the ninth successor of Don Bosco, Pascual Chávez.

We are aware of the difficult, but unavoidable, task of promoting through formal and informal education a different globalisation from that which now predominates, one that does not put the profit

of the few first, but rather the right to life of every person and culture. We wish to promote a globalisation that assumes responsibility for ensuring adequate living conditions for all, identifying and collaborating in sustainable development on our Planet.

Drawing from the contemplation of God's plan revealed to us by Jesus, who taught us to pray to Him as Our Father, in dialogue with many in the Church and others outside its structures and, while seeking the common good with a sincere heart, we allow ourselves to be challenged to purify our vision and the very image of our identity. We want to be ready to recognise the presence of the Spirit in history and to dare the unexpected through the charism that God entrusts to us.

We have just finished the Retreat at Mornese. We listened to the Holy Spirit. We conversed with Maria Domenica Mazzarello, whose mortal remains returned to her homeland to celebrate the four-hundredth anniversary of the parish. We commemorated the 125th Anniversary of the first missionary expedition of the Salesian Sisters.

Now we have come here from the five continents, representing the 84 provinces in which the Salesian Sisters live and work. Among the 192 members of the Chapter Assembly, 107 are participating for the first time, others for the second, third, fourth, fifth and one, Mother Marinella Castagno, Superior General Emeritus, for the seventh time. We all come prepared to listen to each other, as equal members of a Chapter, the supreme organisation of the collegial government of the Institute, for the time of its duration.

The Assembly gathered here is an expression of the unity of the Institute within the diversity of cultures in which it has taken root. It is important that we live in an environment of discernment, so that we may identify the ways in which, today, we are called to express the Beatitudes of the Kingdom ever more radically, in communion with all our Sisters, educating young people to evangelical citizenship.

The specific task of the Chapter is the election of the Superior General and her Council. I am certain that we are preparing ourselves to carry out this task responsibly, invoking the light of the Spirit and allowing it to purge our hearts of every form of personal or group interest, rendering ourselves available to be faithful mediators of the will of the Father.

Mary, with her hymn of the *Magnificat*, precedes us on this journey and encourages us to believe, to hope and to be witnesses to God, who is the communion of love. In daily awareness of her presence, in prayer and in every personal encounter, we learn how to love as followers of Jesus. And patiently, as did the saints who preceded us, including those of the Salesian Family recently recognised by the Church, let us work together to educate the younger generations in the demands of true love. In this way we will contribute toward changing immoral structures. We can seek together the best way to respond to the global problems relative to life, to the family, to the dignity of children and of women, to the right of self-determination of people and to the integrity of planet Earth, with micro-solutions that are specific to each place and local community, but all inter-connected by a network of creative dreams of love thus following in the footsteps of our Founders.

May Don Bosco, Mother Maria Domenica Mazzarello, the blessed of our religious Family: Carmen Moreno and Amparo Carbonell, martyrs, Maddalena Morano, Maria Romero and the young Laura Vicuña intercede for us, for the gifts of hope and courage.

THANK YOU

Greetings

REETING OF THE COOPERATORS TO GENERAL CHAPTER XXI OF THE SALESIAN SISTERS

September 18, 2002

Reverend Mothers, Dear Sisters,

In offering you the greetings of our Association, I thought it useful not to limit myself to the ritual wishes for successful work, but to offer a few considerations on the theme of Gospel citizenship. I hope that they may provide a lay person's contribution to your reflection, as well as indicating our expectations relative to your General Chapter XXI.

“If you want to do something good”, said Don Bosco, “educate young people, if you want to do something holy, educate young people, if you want to do something divine, educate young people”.

Education, this is our shared mission. And educating the young people to Gospel citizenship is a task that assumes a fundamental value in any intervention of a socio-pedagogical or educational-preventive character that takes place in the different contexts and initiatives where the members of the Salesian family work among the young people of our times.

We are called to educate these young people to become aware of their dignity as children of God, accompanying them in a practical way in their spiritual and human growth, so that we too may grow together with them. We are called to accompany them with a vigorous faith, persevering hope and untiring love, to draw them out of this type of indifference to meaning that is becoming their life. This is the case especially in the wealthy and developed western society, whose soul appears to be ever more suffocated by egoism and well being, and is obsessed with the need to consume, consume everything, even their very youth, affections and life.

It was the Lord who instituted evangelical citizenship. Establishing the characteristic traits of the citizen of this new world – his disciples – he wanted them to be pure of heart, humble and poor and he first gave them his own example. When Peter attempted to stop Him from washing his feet, Jesus spoke to him with firmness: “If you do not allow me now to wash your feet, you one day will refuse to do so for your neighbour”.

Jesus invites us to see that the norms that regulate life in this citadel of God, which we are called help in building, conform to Love, which is its constitutional law. And if Christ wanted His Church to be poor, Gospel poverty (which we well know is not identified either with misery or with material need) must be the true wealth to be dispensed and administered wisely in this new city.

As Salesians, as true disciples of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello, we must be the first to give the example of how to live Gospel citizenship in everyday life and how to witness to it with pride and courage. And we must do this within our religious family so that our young people may imitate us.

Certainly, we are called to witness to the faith in a decidedly hostile reality, on an economic, social and cultural level. The new world order appears to be lacking an authentic plan for solidarity, capable of allowing all truly to participate in the great ongoing process of transformation. While the power of the great technological synergies, the vast financial concentrations, the great economic powers is being consolidated, the gap between the Northern and Southern parts of the world grows wider. A super-ideology is becoming dangerously consolidated, one that recognises only one economic vision and sees the total victory of the market economy as the final goal of history. Every voice of open dissent, especially today when religious fanaticism encourages and arms the terrorists, risks being criminalised or ridiculed. One has only to think of the recent accusations directed toward the Holy Father for having called for greater commitment to interfaith dialogue and to the Christian duty of forgiving one's enemies.

Educating young people to ideal models of reference different from those in vogue, those proposed today by the media and in the first place by television, seems to be an arduous undertaking. Educational proposals inspired by the values of the Gospel appear to be out of place, out of fashion (today we would say that they do not attract an audience). But precisely for this reason I hold that it is necessary to have more courage, to trustingly open wide the doors of our heart to Christ. We need to say to all firmly, but also with great serenity, that it is not obligatory to be Christians, that the quality of the leaven is more important than its quantity. We must say that the Lord leaves us free if we do not want to follow Him on the tortuous road that leads to salvation. I dare, then, to hope that since the price of our redemption has already been paid, in his infinite mercy, the Father will one day open wide his arms and welcome all the living. In the meantime, we must remind ourselves first of all that we cannot serve two masters. We cannot claim the rights of Gospel citizenship if we put the market in first place, if we consider money the measure of all things, if we do not have the courage to forgive our enemies, in order to build a humane social order, based on solidarity and tolerance.

What the Cooperators expect from this Chapter

The Association is committed today especially to the revision of the Regulation for Apostolic Life, a revision that seems to be necessary in the light of the profound changes that have come about since the seventies and that affect society, the Church and the Salesian Family itself.

We want to ask the Salesian Sisters:

- To help us to give a new quality to our formative, cultural, supportive and pastoral services to young people, making them more adequate to the new social, spiritual and human needs of the world of youth, which are emerging in the areas where we work.
- To feel more united, as individual Sisters and as Communities, to our Association, so as to transform each Salesian Family group, understood in the broadest sense of the word (Priests, Sisters, Cooperators, Past Pupils, etc.), into a true school of communion and spirituality.
- To live unity in a practical way, along with missionary communion with the laity, starting with moments of prayer and spiritual enrichment, involving the Cooperators who work with you, collaborate and frequent the houses of the Salesian Sisters.

To strengthen the bond of union that already binds us together, it would be necessary:

- *to revitalise* relationships and to review the roles established in our Regulation for Apostolic Life, at the various levels: world, province and local
- *to review* the agreements between the Salesians of Don Bosco and the Salesian Sisters regarding the animation of the Cooperators (not excluding the possibility of a trilateral convention that sees the Cooperators being directly involved)
- *to provide* for moments of encounter and exchange with all the Sisters of the local community, going beyond the official relationship with the delegate, in order to live the unity and communion of the Salesian charism and mission to the full in its genuine family dimension.

It is really a question of renewing our approach to the problems of the world of young people, starting from an attentive awareness of the change in their needs in terms of formation, culture, social life and also of the practical perspectives for their insertion into the world of work.

And to better meet the needs of the young people, a greater involvement of the many Cooperators and Past Pupils who have taken degrees or trained in specific fields would be necessary. These persons who grew up in our Institutes, oratories, schools and professional centres could start new projects and initiatives or be involved in the management of projects already established. Adequately assisted by those of us (lay and religious) who have the capacity and possibility of following and assisting them, they could become true protagonists in the renewal of the Salesian presence in the world, both because of their specific competence and of their natural enthusiasm.

These young people of ours represent, in essence, the practical expression of the living presence of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello in the midst of the poor and little ones of the third millennium.

Let us work together courageously to serve them because in doing so, we will be truly serving Jesus. May Mary Our Help constantly illumine your way, and may Saint Maria Domenica Mazzarello, with Don Bosco, be your companions on the journey, always.

Good luck with your work!

Rosario Maiorano
General Co-ordinator of the Salesian Cooperators

REETING OF THE PAST PUPILS TO GENERAL CHAPTER XXI OF THE SALESIAN SISTERS

September 18, 2002

*Dearest Mother Antonia
Dear General Councillors and Chapter Members,*

I am happy and honoured to be able to extend to you my personal greetings and those of all your past pupils at the opening of General Chapter XXI of your Institute.

We come to you to tell you that we are with you and will accompany you with our prayer. We thank you for all you are and all you do throughout the world, but especially for what you have done for us during the time of our education and continue to do with passion, enthusiasm and affection.

Educational continuity means maintaining the relationship of friendship and of help towards continued inner growth, which in turn brings about the desire to remain in the family and to become collaborators in a shared mission.

A Salesian Sister can never neglect the challenge of education!

Nothing or no one can interrupt this rich dialogue of faith and of humanity that continues to accompany us along the path of life, involves us and stimulates us to do good.

At this time, when the entire congregation is called by the Spirit to evaluate its life and to reflect, so as to find educational responses to the pressing needs of our time, your past pupils want to offer you their message regarding formation, the commitment to live active citizenship and the relationship between the Institute and the Association.

Formation

The Institute gives much attention to formation and for this reason it has developed the new Plan of Formation for Salesian Sisters of every age.

We were very pleased and honoured when you, Mother, asked us also to give our contribution to this document that is so important for the entire Institute.

We know that a Salesian Sister is a woman who is well aware of her own femininity and who lives it to the full in a joyful manner. In our time with you, we have known and still know consecrated women who have expressed and continue to express, splendidly, in their personality great gifts as educators that get those around them involved too.

May this identity continue to be deepened and revitalised so that it may bring about a perfect unity between the nature of the woman and the religious vocation.

It is a formative commitment that stimulates us to re-think and re-actualise our own identity.

Moving towards formative reciprocity signifies being a feminine, Salesian voice, together in the Salesian Family, in the Church and in the world, assuring the genuine growth of the charism that unites us and living Gospel citizenship.

You, Mother, recently emphasised the value of having "an Association of adult women with whom to share our search, our dreams for the future and the possibilities for carrying them out in a world

undergoing rapid change” (from the letter to the provincials on the occasion of the change of Association’s headquarters). For us, this trust is important. It urges us onward and makes us responsible for participating in the mission according to our style as laywomen and men.

Commitment for an active citizenship

In n. 3 of *Christifideles laici* we read:

“A new state of affairs today both in the Church and in social, economic, political and cultural life, calls with a particular urgency for the action of the lay faithful. If lack of commitment is always unacceptable, the present time renders it even more so”.

The Church asks us, the laity, to be in the front line in building a more just and humane world.

It is the underlying message that I, as a lay person, read between the lines of your beautiful Working document for this Chapter.

Who is the Christian citizen, the Christian man or woman?

Don Bosco’s idea was to show how the two concepts are interdependent: fidelity to Gospel values leads to honesty as a citizen and vice versa.

They are people who speak of God in the language of works, making themselves credible witnesses.

They have a passion for the world and know how to care for it.

They are men and women of peace who, animated by the desire to be peacemakers, know how to build bridges, bonds and dialogue.

They have a taste for things done well, beginning with their own duty.

They live the dignified courage of civil resistance and know how to speak words and perform deeds that go against the current.

With the theme of active citizenship the Institute faces a great challenge: to mobilise its own energies and resources in order to educate others and itself to Gospel citizenship.

It is time to come together as citizens of the world!

We past pupils, men and women, put our experience as lay people at your disposal, our vocation of knowing how “to seek the Kingdom of God, by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God” (LG 31).

We ask you to nourish us at the source of the charism, to infect us with your apostolic passion, to be courageous in making radical proposals of faith to us.

Don’t be afraid! Follow the example of John Paul II who even proposes the cross to young people, and they follow him!

May Mornese, our shared home, continue to be a school of citizenship for you and for us.

There, as you, Mother, invite us, we want to discover and to learn our lay spirituality in order to live it in an original way.

It is the wealth of the charism that makes you into consecrated Salesian women and us into lay people who are committed in the world in a Salesian manner.

Relationship between the Institute and the Association

There is, therefore, a vital bond that unites the Institute and the Association, a golden thread, as Fr. Egidio Viganò called it, a profound and precious value that is to be cultivated and defended.

We feel strongly the need to return to the origins of that relationship between the Institute and the Association in which the past pupils were taken to heart by the entire community.

Who are we today and what do we mean for the Salesian Sisters?

We cannot cultivate merely relationships of cordial friendship but, starting from these, we want to create a relationship among adults that will allow us to work co-responsibly, each respecting the other's specific charism.

We want to be:

- a practical and visual evidence of an educational mission that gives life
- a lay expression of the charism that characterises your religious vocation
- a lay force on which the Institute can always depend, both in the educational mission and in civil commitment where the past pupils can contribute toward affirming the values that they carry because of the education they received.

I conclude in the words of Mother Mazzarello who recommended to the Sisters: in time of prayer "we lit the fire in our hearts, but if we do not rake the ashes from time to time and put on some wood, it will go out" (L 27).

I am convinced that, in this sense, we are always offered opportunities to rake those ashes and put new wood to burn, and that is our wish for General Chapter XXI. To this we unite the hope that living the prophecy of togetherness may become a new way to revive that fire that continues to warm our hearts as Mornese Salesians.

With affection, we wish you success in your work!

Gabriella Eramo,
President of the Confederation

GREETINGS OF THE PAST PUPILS OF DON BOSCO AT THE OPENING OF GENERAL CHAPTER XXI

September 18, 2002

*Authorities, Your Excellencies
Most Esteemed Sisters,
Ladies and Gentlemen here present,*

This could possibly be the least creative message in this solemn and official Assembly of General Chapter XXI. It is without any pretensions. I ask your pardon.

However, this message is intended as a true expression of the most authentic, cordial and fraternal friendship. It is accompanied by the interest of the Family to which we, too, the Past Pupils of Don Bosco, belong.

Therefore, in a family best wishes are offered on every occasion for celebration and the success of one of the members always involves all the others.

With you we live an "important moment in the journey of the Institute that brings together the representatives of the Salesian Sisters to study and pray for an ever more dynamic and lively response to the urgent pastoral needs of today, in fidelity to the educational charism of Don Bosco" (from the letter of invitation of Mother Antonia, May 24, 2002). I would like my participation to be

interpreted as a promise from all the Past Pupils of Don Bosco, whom I humbly represent. With their aspirations, their expectations, their strong enthusiasm and their desire for constant fidelity to Don Bosco, they share your commitment of being, in today's society, a strong evangelical leaven. They want to be apostles who are attentive to the appeals of history for an efficacious new evangelisation of young people, especially the most disadvantaged (as Mother Antonia Colombo's letter-invitation states).

The theme chosen by the Twenty-first General Chapter the opening of which we celebrate today is: Our renewed Covenant commits us to active citizenship.

Dear Mother, dear Salesian Sisters, the civil society of today in which we lay people are inserted, presents such challenges that we all feel called to conjugate the verbs to promote in order to renew in the first person plural. No one who wants to do good can ever do so alone. A sociologist-economist author recently wrote, "There is no success without collaboration". So, we want to assure you of the collaboration of the Past Pupils as you live your commitment to active citizenship, rooted in the Covenant. This collaboration consists in helping you to deepen the social doctrine of the Church, in together promoting practical social justice by making solidarity more humane and in socialising globalisation, aware that there is no peace without justice. With you, we are convinced, today more than ever, of the need to educate to true values of life, non-violence and peace. We want to witness to active citizenship by sharing in the mission in the spirit of the *Da mihi animas* which is still capable of forming saints today, because charity toward our brothers and sisters is a continuation and an expression of the love of God.

Commitment in the area of active citizenship, acknowledging the role of civil society in the harmonious development of the person and of groups also means involving us, the laity, who live immersed in the demanding and challenging contemporary reality so as to be able, together, to offer adequate responses. The presence and witness of the different vocations of the Salesian Family will help us to persevere, strong in faith, filled with hope and steadfast in love.

In our turn, we ask you to promote our intervention as lay people in such a way as to permit that, together with our autonomous organisations of Past Pupils, which are becoming more active, a new form of collaborative action may be realised. May we recognise each other's capacity for interdependence and for protagonism, especially in those places where the presence of the FMA and SDB require working together in harmony, being on the same ship. Ours is the ship of Peter, between the two columns of the dream, not only to protect ourselves from the storm, but also to go further, to launch out into the deep: *Duc in altum!*

In the darkness of the night, together with you, we look to Mary, *Stella Maris*.

She is the Ark of the Covenant. With her wisdom, in the light of the maternal gaze of Mary Our Help, under the patronage of Mother Mazzarello and of all the Saints of the Salesian Family, we offer our best wishes for your General Chapter.

We accompany you closely in the name of Don Bosco.

Thank you for your attention.

Antonio G. Pires,
President of the world-wide Confederation of Past Pupils of Don Bosco

GREETING OF THE VOLUNTEERS OF DON BOSCO
ON THE OCCASION OF GENERAL CHAPTER XXI

Rome, September 18, 2002

Dearest Sisters,

it is a joy to be able to be with you during this important moment for your Congregation.

It is beautiful to share with you in this way, as in a family, the hopes, expectations and efforts to grow on the journey of authenticity in one's own vocation. And we truly feel that we are a family because our stories are linked together. You were close to us at our beginning, and we feel that you still are.

The theme that you have chosen involves us fully. We live active citizenship in our everyday life because it is the essence of the secular state.

Our 85-year experience as an Institute, along with our 5th General Assembly has led us to a conclusion: in order to be able to live citizenship to the full, it is necessary to have a strong life in the Spirit. When we look at the themes of our General Assembly and of your Chapter, it would seem that by some trick of the Spirit we have exchanged roles. Instead, it is a challenge, a deepening of the different aspects that we have in common in our vocation and which we are called to live in different ways.

In order to renew our commitment to live the consecrated life during the third millennium, the Church invites us to "start afresh from Christ". In its document, the Church specifies that placing Christ at the centre will guarantee a renewed harmony of life and apostolate to all consecrated life, and will show clearly how it is placed right at the heart of the life and holiness of the Church.

We are not called to holiness merely for ourselves, but, as Christ came to save all, we are called to participate in this salvation and to bring the world to Christ. We will thus promote a prophetic citizenship for the building up of the Kingdom. We must be in close communion with the world without, however, losing sight of the centre of our life. We must always have Christ at the centre of our heart to bring Him to the centre of the world.

On this journey of holiness, formation is a priority and, perhaps, we could consider the possibility of reflecting together on some themes and experiment with methods that would enable our presence in the world to become more incisive. We need to begin to reflect on ways that will help to bring us together.

We thank you for your courage in facing this theme in depth and certainly the results will also be a source of inspiration for us.

We wish you success in your work, much openness to the Spirit who will speak in the diversity of your reality and a profound unity in Christ.

As your true Sisters, we pray for this.

Anita Mertens,
Central Leader Volunteers of Don Bosco

GREETING OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE

September 18, 2002

We are Giordano and Ilaria,
We are, respectively, a member of VIDES and animator at the Oratory of Tor Bella Monaca, Rome,
and animator at the Oratory of Testaccio, Rome.

Ilaria: We are here to greet you and bring you the voice of all the young people of the world. We know that Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello, today, entrust us young people of the third millennium to you.

We are here to speak to you of ourselves, of our dreams, of our deepest, most authentic desires, of our expectations. We want to tell you about our lives, so that you can help us make sense of them and give them meaning.

Giordano: A few weeks ago in Toronto the Holy Father entrusted an important task to us. We are to be salt of the earth and light of the world, to give flavour to a world, which at times seems to have lost its taste for life and to shed light on history that frequently seems oriented towards darkness and lack of meaning.

Ilaria: The invitation of the Holy Father left us enthusiastic, because we carry within, at times without even knowing it, a great desire for good and for peace. We have an irresistible longing for a different world: a world in which everyone can be happy, without distinction of race, religion, culture or social condition, in which each person feels respected and appreciated.

Giordano: We ourselves, at times, do not know that we have these desires in our hearts, or perhaps we are not able to recognise and express them. We are blinded by false models, by short term projects and the easy consumerism that society offers us. We are disoriented and discouraged by the prospect of an uncertain future, without stable points of reference. We are wounded within by a world in which violence, arrogance and egoism seem to have the upper hand. And so it is that frequently we give up following our dreams. Thus, we abandon the highest goals because the journey they indicate is arduous and demanding and, alone, we do not have the courage to undertake it.

Ilaria: Today, in the name of all the young people of the whole world, we ask you to take our lives to heart, to help us to discover our most authentic and deepest desires. We ask you to make them your own, not in words, but with your lives, to encourage us to dream great dreams, even when the path is all uphill, to launch out into the deep, to look up towards infinite horizons.

Giordano: Teach us how to spread goodness, to make peace a reality. Show us with your lives:

- that it is possible to love and to hope for a different future
- that it is possible to be happy
- that it is possible to become the salt of the earth and the light of the world

Ilaria: You who have met Jesus and who have chosen to follow him, tell us that he alone can make us happy, that it is he whom we are seeking, perhaps even without knowing it. Tell us over and over again, even when it seems that our lives are very far from these horizons, when we want to explore new and untried paths that are dead ends, as did the prodigal son of the Gospel. Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello would speak to us in this way today.

Giordano: And then, in the most difficult moments of our lives, do not grow weary of reminding us that Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello have entrusted us to Mary Our Help, Teacher and Mother, she who was the first to experience the joy of meeting Jesus.

Giordano and Ilaria,

MEETING WITH JOHN PAUL II at the Audience of November 8, 2002

ADDRESS OF MOTHER GENERAL, SR. ANTONIA COLOMBO, TO THE HOLY FATHER

Most Holy Father,

With grateful hearts we, the Salesian Sisters, have gathered here to represent our 84 provinces that live and work in 89 nations. Our thanks for the gift of this special audience is, therefore, world-wide just as the spread of the Salesian charism in the five continents is world-wide.

We thank you for the gift of your magisterium, for the daring with which you launch the Church into the third millennium, aware of the ever new challenges that it must face, but strong in the word of Jesus who invites us to launch out into the deep and assures us: "I am with you always" (Mt 28: 20). Thank you for being an untiring witness to peace and solidarity in your journeys round the world. Your latest gift, the apostolic letter on the Rosary, invites us to rediscover this prayer as an immersion in contemplation of the mystery of Christ, our peace (Eph 2: 14), and to feel that we are involved in a definite commitment to the service of peace (cf. n. 6).

The in depth study of the theme of our General Chapter XXI, centred on Gospel citizenship for a culture of solidarity and peace, has constantly brought us back to the source of this citizenship, Jesus himself, and his style of life that embodies the Gospel of the Beatitudes. The Chapter reflection is still going on, but we have quickly identified the focal point from which to start and toward which to aim, that is, communion: the dream of the Father and the cry of humanity. This is the urgent need that challenges our communities to live a more profound experience of the mystery of God who is

communion of love. It is the contemplation of the face of Christ, recognised in the faces of our brothers and sisters and in today's history. It is the dynamism that revitalises the family spirit, our typical charismatic way of living the spirituality of communion. It is daring, once again, to propose education as the way to Gospel citizenship. This calls for presence and solidarity with the poorest, especially young people and women, formation to a culture of solidarity and peace, courageous commitment to justice in order to contribute to a more humane way of life together, one that is respectful of the dignity of all. From this comes our commitment to strengthen our presence on the new frontiers of emigration.

In the multicultural and multiethnic reality that characterises much of our presence throughout the world, we want to work towards becoming true intercultural communities, where, through the action of the Spirit that animates us, the existence of diversity may enrich and give value to our life together for our shared mission.

For the first time, even the General Council is intercultural in composition. In fact, it is made up of Sisters who are natives of the five continents.

Don Bosco wanted our family to be a living monument to Mary Our Help. Mary, the Mother, presides over our communion, cements the varied and multicoloured stones that make up this edifice. Our Founder gave her to us as our teacher in education and as our way to Jesus. You, Holy Father, once again propose her to us in this same role, because although the Spirit is the true inner teacher who leads us to the full truth of Christ, no other human being knows Jesus better than Mary and no one can introduce us to a deep awareness of his mystery as she can (cf. RVM n. 14).

To her, therefore, we entrust ourselves. We look to her as the person in whom the deepest experience of the solidarity of God with humanity took place. In her Son, the Word Incarnate, every man and woman of every time and place are called to become the family of God, fellow citizens of the saints (cf. Eph 2: 19).

With Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello, in the footsteps of the saints and blessed of the Salesian Family, we want to adhere to the plan of God the Father who, in Christ Jesus, calls us to holiness. We want to boldly propose it to young people through an educational accompaniment that will help them to discover their authentic vocation and to look hopefully toward the future. It is a commitment that we assume in reciprocity with the different vocations in the Church, particularly with the groups of the Salesian Family represented here by the Rector Major, Fr. Pascual Chávez, who is its father and centre of unity.

Holy Father, may your apostolic blessing and the words which you will now address to us as a gift, be light and comfort for our future journey. THANK YOU!

MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE CHAPTER MEMBERS

November 8, 2002

Dearest Salesian Sisters!

1. I am happy to be able to meet with you on the occasion of the General Chapter of your Institute and I welcome you most cordially. I greet your Superior General, Sr. Antonia Colombo, reconfirmed in office, and I thank her for the kind words with which she has interpreted your sentiments. My wish for her is that along with the new General Council, she may know how to guide your religious Family in keeping with the teachings of Saint John Bosco and Saint Maria Domenica Mazzarello. I extend my

cordial greetings to the Rector Major, Fr. Pascual Chávez Villanueva, who has chosen to be present at this meeting.

During these days of intense work, you have chosen to focus your attention on the theme “Our renewed Covenant commits us to active citizenship” keeping in mind the program of your Founders “To form good Christians and honest citizens”. This is very relevant in the present multicultural social context, marked by tensions and challenges which are, at times, dramatic. This program calls you, dear Salesian Sisters, to witness to hope on many frontiers of the modern world, knowing how to identify, with missionary daring, new paths of evangelisation and human advancement, especially in the service of the younger generations. By creating a climate of loving-kindness as Don Bosco did, you must learn to communicate to the new 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.

2. To bring this arduous mission to completion, it is necessary, first of all, to be in constant communion with Jesus, contemplating his face incessantly in prayer, so as to be able then to serve Him with all your energy in the person of your brothers and sisters.

I desire, therefore, to address to you also the evangelical exhortation, *Duc in altum!* (Lk 5: 4), which I addressed to all Christian people in the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*. Yes! Launch out into the deep, dearest Sisters, and trustingly cast your nets in the name of the Redeemer. In an era marked by a preoccupying culture of emptiness and of “lack of meaning”, proclaim without compromise the primacy of God who always listens to the cry of the oppressed and the afflicted. The foundation of every apostolic commitment and the antidote to any dangerous inner fragmentation is personal holiness, in docile listening to the Spirit who frees and transforms hearts.

Holiness constitutes your essential, priority task, dear Salesian Sisters. It is the best contribution that you can give to the new evangelisation and the guarantee of authentic Gospel service in favour of the most needy.

3. Your religious Family already boasts a long history, written by courageous witnesses to Christ, some of whom sealed their fidelity to the Gospel by martyrdom. You are called to continue to walk these same paths today, in environments that, at times, are marked by tensions and fear, by opposition and divisions, by extremism and violence, which are even capable of overshadowing hope. However, unheard of apostolic opportunities and timely Gospel-inspired forms of renewal are not lacking. You, like all religious women and men, are called to live to the full the radical choice of the Beatitudes, learning at the school of Jesus, like Mary, to listen to the Word of God and put it into practice. The Beatitudes, as I recalled at Toronto in the encounter with young people from all over the world, describe the face of Jesus, and, at the same time, that of the Christian. They are like the portrait of the authentic disciple who seeks to live in perfect harmony with his/her divine Teacher.

Animated by this spiritual fervour, you will not hesitate to go ahead, with prophetic freedom and wise discernment, along daring apostolic paths and missionary frontiers, fostering close collaboration with Bishops and other members of the ecclesial community. The vast horizons of evangelisation and the urgent need to witness to the Gospel message for all without distinction constitute the field of your apostolate. There are many still waiting to know Jesus, the only redeemer of all, and not a few situations of injustice and of moral and material hardship that challenge believers.

4. Such an urgent mission requires constant personal and community conversion. Only hearts that are totally open to the action of Grace are capable of interpreting the signs of the times and of accepting the appeals of humanity in need of justice and peace. You will be able to meet the needs of people if you preserve intact the spirit of St. John Bosco and St. Maria Domenica Mazzarello. They lived with their eyes turned towards heaven and with a cheerful heart, even when the following of Christ brought with it obstacles and difficulties and, at times, even apparent failure.

Dear Sisters, may your faithful adhesion to Christ and his Gospel shine forth in the various fields of your ecclesial service.

May the Most Holy Virgin, whom you venerate under the beautiful title of Mary Our Help, protect you, help you and be the sure guide of your religious Family, so that it may bring every good project to fulfilment.

With this wish, while I assure you of an affectionate remembrance in my prayer for each of you and for those whom you encounter in your daily apostolate, I bless you with all my heart.

From the Vatican, November 8, 2002.

John Paul II

CLOSING OF GENERAL CHAPTER XXI and messages from the Chapter members

HOMILY OF THE RECTOR MAJOR PASCUAL CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA
DURING THE CLOSING EUCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

November 16, 2002

**More blessed still are those who hear
the word of God and keep it.**

Sir 51: 18-24. 27-30; Ps 18; Lk 11: 27-28

At the closing of this General Chapter XXI, which for you dear Sisters, has been a Pentecostal event, we experience an overflowing sense of gratitude to God, our Father, for all the graces that have been bestowed on you and on the whole Institute. As with vessels that are linked together, these graces have overflowed onto us, Salesians and onto the whole Salesian Family.

First of all there was the grace, right at the beginning of the retreat in Mornese where you went to draw inspiration, retracing the footsteps of Maria Domenica Mazzarello. Then there were the many graces received at different stages of the Chapter: above all, the analysis of the state of your Institute, which highlighted its resources and the trends and challenges it faces. There was also the development of the Chapter theme: Our renewed covenant commits us to active citizenship. Yet another grace was the election of Mother Antonia and her council, who have the task of guiding the Institute in this moment of history. You were also blessed with an audience with the Holy Father, an expression of your love for the Church in the person of the successor of St. Peter, and with the message that he conveyed to you. Finally, there was the approval of the Chapter document. These are all the reasons that urge us to celebrate the Eucharist, entrusting to the Lord, through the intercession of Mary Our Help, the ownership and the implementation of General Chapter XXI by the entire Institute.

You can be sure that for our part the document will be welcomed so that we can make use of the valuable insights that you offer us.

You have chosen the theme of Mary, the disciple of the Lord, for this Eucharistic liturgy, because you see in her a most significant icon of that discernment which, during the Chapter, you lived out as an attitude and as a process. It is a genuine strategy for changing your life, one that will generate courageous Gospel-inspired choices.

Today's biblical texts (Sir 51: 18-24,27-30; Lk 11: 27-28) help us to understand that wisdom, which is the search for God and God's will in the ordinariness of daily life, is the fruit of prayer – since it is a gift of God – and of conversion of heart. We learn this wisdom at the school of the Master, by living the disposition of Mary of Bethany who, seated at the feet of the Lord, listened to all he said. Thus we will learn to observe the Word of God faithfully, centring our life on the teaching of the Spirit.

Precisely because it is a gift of God and not the result of our intellectual efforts, the way to wisdom demands great humility and the letting go of self-centredness, so as not to reverse the roles and take the place of the Master as Martha did. She dared to tell Jesus: "Lord, do you not care that my sister is leaving me to do the serving all by myself? Please tell her to help me". Here Martha wants to teach the Master and tell him what he should do!

Wisdom is a gift to those who cultivate purity of heart; it allows them to see God who reveals the mysteries of the Kingdom to little ones and empowers them to know Christ and the logic of the cross.

This was the real greatness of Mary, not her physical maternity but her spiritual motherhood. Her greatness lay in being a true daughter of the Father, totally dedicated to fulfilling God's will, and a faithful spouse of the Spirit. She was docile to the inspiration and movement of the Spirit and an attentive listener to the Word, to the point of accepting him and making him flesh of her flesh. The greatness of Mary – as Jesus proclaimed – lay in her being a disciple, that is, in her capacity to let God be God, to know that she is a servant and to want to serve. It is also seen in her readiness to believe in him and to completely trust him with unlimited openness and without reserve, therefore she was able to change her plan in life when God's plan was revealed and to accomplish it right to the end! More blessed still are those who hear the word of God and keep it. Herein lies the beatitude of Mary!

In this Gospel scene Luke lets us discover the secret that Mary treasured in her heart: the Word that she received at the annunciation and that she accepted and incarnated. On this point St. Augustine comments, "Maria believed in God with her mind, she loved God with her heart, and she incarnated God in her womb".

Without a doubt, this scripture text recalls the scenes of the annunciation, the birth and infancy of Jesus, because of the reference to and the enthusiastic praise which the woman in the crowd gives to her motherhood. Mary, therefore, is presented:

- above all as a person who seeks the will of God in her life. This is manifested in a variety of icons that represent the annunciation showing the Archangel Gabriel appearing as the Virgin is reading and meditating on the Word of God. God's will is revealed to those who search. This is what also happens in the 'annunciations' of our life: the God of Mary comes to meet the one who searches. In the words of the psalmist we can say: It is your face, Oh Lord, that I seek.
- Mary is also presented as a person who does not hesitate to acknowledge that our resources are decidedly inferior to what God wants and therefore it is God's superabundant grace which makes up for our human limitations. Do not be afraid, the Holy Spirit will come upon you.
- Mary is a person who renounces her own plans, to accept God's project and to bring it to fulfilment, even if this means bearing with misunderstanding and suffering. Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to your word.
- Mary, very clearly, is a person who does not understand everything. On the contrary, maybe she does not understand anything, but she does not reject God's project because of this.

Rather, she treasures it in her heart in an attitude of wisdom, waiting for the moment in which God will make her understand all. And in the meantime she obeys. Mary treasured all these things and pondered on them in her heart.

- Finally Mary is represented as the true disciple who knows that it is not enough to listen but one must *ob-audire*¹ that is, it is not enough to listen, to hear but one must obey and consent.

Making discernment an attitude of life means being attentive listeners to the Word and interpreting the movements of history through which God continues to speak to us – in ways that are not always clear or conclusive. Within this choice, the *lectio divina* will make you more familiar with the Word and how it is expressed.

Your *sensus ecclesiae* will permit you to be in tune with the Church, with its guidelines, its *magisterium* and its pastoral programming.

While you were gathered together for the Chapter, the world – as always – continued its journey. Some significant events happened during these two months: the discussions on disarmament in Iraq, the conflict in the Middle East, natural disasters in many parts of the world (we think of the tragedy caused by the earthquake in San Giuliano), the Social Forum in Florence. In the life of the Church there has been the publication of the Apostolic Letter on the Rosary, which is an invitation to cultivate the heart of the disciple through the contemplation of the mystery of Christ with the eyes and the heart of Mary. Then there has been the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the opening of the II Vatican Council (11 October 1962-2002). Its call is more relevant than ever, to “enable the vivifying and perennial energies of the Gospel to touch the modern world” and to “find ways to put the ever resplendent Christ at the centre of history and life”, as Pope John XXIII said in calling the Council (28 October 1958).

We are, in fact, indebted to II Vatican Council the following:

- a new understanding of the Church and of its mission in the world
- the emergence of dialogue with the world, with other Christian Churches and with non-Christian faiths
- the recognition of freedom of religion
- the involvement of Christians in politics in the name of the Gospel
- the call to responsibility of the laity, particularly of women
- the recognition of other faiths as paths to salvation
- the fact that the Word of God has been restored to its place as the centre and foundation of all theological reflection and also of Christian life and liturgy
- the ongoing renewal of religious life

Certainly, there are new situations, new problems and new challenges that have appeared on today's horizon, like:

- the reduction in the number of clergy and of vocations
- the ageing and the decrease in the number of religious communities
- the growth of secularism and of a culture that denies God
- the challenge of modernity and of post-modernity
- the problems of bioethics and of globalisation

¹ Here the speaker was using a play on Latin words, which is clearer in Italian. He uses the word “ob-audire” = “from hearing” which is the root of the word “obey”. He has written the word “consent” which follows as “con-sentire” which also means to “hear with” [ETG note]

The validity of the II Vatican Council is reconfirmed and in the words of Cardinal Lehmann, it has entered its fourth stage. After the initial enthusiasm, which was followed by a period of delusion and then an end to the conflicts, it has reached the time for a renewal of the original inspiration and thrust.

There is no doubting the need for reflection, but above all of holiness of life among those who witness to God. This means developing a Christian identity and becoming true disciples so as to become salt that has the wonderful capacity to completely dissolve itself in water without losing its flavour and in doing so recovers its own original form. Is not this our mission, that is, to be profoundly inserted into our world, to be inculturated, to be immersed in and to liberate the world without losing our identity, but rather to live it with clarity and purity?

A reminder of this genuine identity, this holiness of life is contained also in the message that the Pope addressed to you during his audience. After recalling the theme of the Chapter, he invited you to “to witness to hope on many frontiers of the modern world, knowing how to identify, with missionary daring, new paths of evangelisation and human advancement, especially in service to the younger generations”. After he had exhorted you to make your own the evangelical exhortation *Duc in altum* (Lk 5: 4), the Holy Father explained more precisely: “The foundation of every apostolic commitment and the antidote for any dangerous inner fragmentation is personal holiness, in docile listening to the Spirit who frees and transforms hearts. Holiness constitutes your essential, priority task, dear Salesian Sisters. It is the best contribution that you can give to the new evangelisation and the guarantee of authentic Gospel service in favour of the most needy” (OR, 9 November 2002, p. 5).

The future of Christianity and, therefore, of religious life is entrusted to the witness of people who are rich in humanity, freedom, responsibility, compassion, and right relations. You have tried to define more clearly the presence of the Salesian Sisters in today’s social and ecclesial context in order to make your life more meaningful. This is the goal of your option for an active, involved and committed Gospel citizenship. Therefore your evangelical witness has to be “clear rather than great, understandable rather than sizeable, convincing rather than imposing, attractive rather than applauded, imitable rather than emphasised for its own sake” (U. Sartorio, *Dire vita consacrata oggi*, p. 34).

We will be meaningful if we are able to create new ways of being present, which respond to the emerging needs of humanity, to their problems and their searching. We need forms of presence that relieve some of the questioning, that become leaven within the social context, that stimulate choices for life, that involve others uniting all in the same aims and projects “The sign must be written into the lives of people and their works”. (Rino Cozzia CSJ, *Prendete il largo*, in *Testimoni* 18 [31 October 2002] p. 11).

May the choices you have made, because you feel they are of priority for the whole Institute today, bear the fruits that all are hoping for:

- the primacy of God
- the need for communion within and outside your communities
- the preference for education.

This urgently requires:

- living a life that is profoundly centred
- discovering new ways of animation that will renew the family spirit and the Preventive System; that, drawing on the richness of the Salesian charism, will respond to the new needs of people, to the new conditions of community life and to the new requirements of the mission
- passing from written documents and words to the practical living of every day life.

I would risk summarising the results that all are hoping for in three principles:

- a return to the Gospel simplicity of Don Bosco
- a return to the realism of Maria Domenica which was so filled with spiritual wisdom
- a return to the poorest youth, to those most in need, for these are your crowning glory.

These are the encouraging words of the Lord who, at the end of your General Chapter, gives you the figure of Mary, disciple of the Lord as your model. God offers you the means and the criteria for evaluation in your listening and putting into practice the Word of God, and promises you the same beatitude: that of being mother of God!

WORDS OF MOTHER ANTONIA COLOMBO AT THE CONCLUSION OF GC XXI

November 16, 2002

Dear Sisters,

Having reached the conclusion of General Chapter XXI, the first of the third millennium, we carry in our hearts the richness of an experience of listening and searching, of dialogue and sharing. It has been a significant moment of ongoing formation for all and, for our religious family, a journey of growth in communion through the meeting between the different cultures in which it is rooted. As happens when an important goal is reached, we can now pause to look back on the stages of our journey and project ourselves towards the future horizons to which our mission calls and where young people cry out for the presence of the Salesian Sisters.

Our eyes look outwards to embrace all of our communities and the educating communities that have journeyed with us from January 24, 2001, the date of the Letter of Convocation of General Chapter XXI, until today.

I praise God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit for our response to the invitation to allow ourselves to be challenged by the Word in our preparation for the Chapter. Our personal and community reflection on it challenged us to enter into a process of seeing life and history in the light of the Gospel Beatitudes, of listening to the often dramatic appeals from our brothers and sisters, of developing a critical conscience with regard to social phenomena.

We have seen with admiration the positive influence of this choice in the responses from the Province Chapters, in the searching and in the decisions of the Chapter Assembly. This privileged attention to the Word of God renders us, today, more aware that the future of the Church and, in it, of our family as Salesian Sisters, does not depend in the first place on human decisions and planning. Rather it depends on the action of the Spirit that raises up persons who are attentive and open to His inspirations calling, them to become involved in the mission of evangelisation through education in these, our times.

We are convinced of the urgency of starting afresh from Christ. We are aware of the conditions required for listening to the Word and to the appeals of history so as to discern how to witness to the love of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, among the children, girls and young people wherever we live and work.

Looking back at the path we have travelled during these months of the General Chapter, images alternate of places, celebrations, meetings and symbols, characterised by an intense emotional and

spiritual tone. In the background of this scene, there emerge close ups of many persons, of ourselves and of those who have accompanied us in different ways, offering us, through unforgettable gestures, the service of welcome, of friendship and of specific competence. Today we want to offer our thanks to all and we want to implore the blessing of the Lord on each one.

It is not easy to express in words the experience of this Chapter, to explain, not so much the content, which you will find in the Acts, but the process we started and which has marked our lives in the measure in which we have personally assumed it.

It is an experience that we all carry within us, that is part of us. Our way of being and of relating will be the most eloquent way of presenting the Chapter to the Sisters who await us, desiring to share in our experience.

For this reason, primarily, I address my personal thanks to each of you, dear Sisters, members of the Chapter. We helped one another to live an experience of deep faith, to support one another in the uncertainty of seeking to avoid the shortcuts of easy, reassuring declarations and the temptation of dwelling on merely new ways of saying things. We have committed ourselves, instead, to a difficult inner journey; we tried to be true to our feelings, recognising them and calling them by name. We made time and created opportunities for expressing our points of view with clarity and rectitude and we experienced, at least in part, the demanding conditions for intercultural dialogue.

The journey of following Jesus is always marked by the Paschal Mystery, a seal of authenticity that could not be lacking even in this experience of ours and which honours us, if we have accepted it, making our own the sentiments of Jesus. We need to be grateful for this seal too; it is a guarantee of Gospel fruitfulness. Jesus teaches us this, as do Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello, who lived with joy in their hearts even when their feet bled from the thorns as they walked among the roses. A glance at the crucifix was a reminder to our Cofoundress of our configuration to Jesus in the mystery of His cross and resurrection. Even today this is the path of love and of educational service that we Daughters of Mary Help of Christians are called to travel.

The experience of living in a state of discernment also brought out the joy that comes from being facilitators of communion, the need to train ourselves to accompany each other, if we want to grow in life according to the Spirit. It is He who evangelises hearts and reveals the meaning of the beatitudes. Proclaimed by Jesus during His earthly life, these constitute the only sure signposts for those who want to follow Him in every time and place in order to be citizens who participate in carrying out the Father's plan.

Allow me to highlight this characteristic of our journey as the most precious and the most promising for the future. Allowing our hearts to be evangelised each day is the way to become truly ourselves, realising the dream of God in our lives, and to enter into communication with the mystery of every person and culture. The light of the Gospel purifies us and opens us to communion, making us ready to collaborate in building up the family of people who recognise that we are all called to live in harmony and in the reciprocal appreciation of our diversity.

Returning to your province communities enriched by this experience and committed to spreading it through the relationships and situations of your everyday life, you will be a sign that invites others, in a credible and efficacious manner, to travel the same journey responsibly and joyfully.

Life is generated by life, and never alone.

This Chapter began by listening to the existential questions that emerged from the Province Chapters and continued in the search for consensus in the assembly around a few fundamental convictions. Its newness lies in having found a unifying element, recognised as an invitation for the journey of the Salesian Sisters in the new millennium, a hope that can be fulfilled.

We leave this Chapter with a shared vision: Communion, dream of God and the cry of our world today, urgently challenges our communities.

We have chosen discernment as the way to and the energy for transformation, a gift of the Spirit to be accepted in our daily life. It is a personal and community journey "of searching for God's will in order

to make choices in our life and mission that are deeply imbued with the charismatic power of the *da mihi animas, coetera tolle*" (Living communion on paths of Gospel citizenship, n. 30).

I dare to say that the newness of this Chapter can be summed up in the decision, reached together, to give priority to life according to the Spirit. This entails helping each other in setting the conditions necessary to live it in our community, to propose it in our educational mission and to commit ourselves to persevere in the choice of the paths dictated by priorities, not by urgency.

The guidelines and actions proposed in the Document of General Chapter XXI start from and lead back to this goal, almost as a womb from which they came forth and to which they constantly return to be regenerated with new strength. In this way we will become capable of involving other persons in a vital cycle of mutual enrichment for an educational service that aims at bringing about a culture of solidarity.

In his message of November 8th, John Paul II confirmed our choices and re-launched them with his authoritative and encouraging words: "Holiness constitutes your essential, priority task. It is the best contribution that you can give to the new evangelisation". He also notes: "The foundation of every apostolic commitment and antidote for any dangerous inner fragmentation is personal holiness, in docile listening to the Spirit who frees and transforms hearts. [It is] the guarantee of authentic Gospel service in favour of the most needy... Only hearts that are totally open to the action of Grace are capable of interpreting the signs of the times and of accepting the appeals of humanity in need of justice and peace" (OR, November 9, 2002, p. 5).

By a providential coincidence, the Chapter took place at the same time as the celebration of the 125th anniversary of the first missionary expedition of the FMA. The meetings with Maria Domenica Mazzarello and the first Sisters at Mornese, Genoa, Nizza Monferrato and Turin, the special audience with John Paul II (lived by us in remembrance of the visit of our Cofoundress to the Holy Father, together with Sr. Angela Vallese and Sr. Giovanna Borgna, on November 9, 1877), the missionary vigil with the participation of so many young VIDES volunteers from different Nations and Continents and the missionary mandate entrusted to eleven Sisters on November 14th, all made our thanks to the Father re-echo strongly in our hearts. They increased our certainty that Mary continues to guide the Institute and to go before it on the paths that the Spirit opens to the mission of the Salesian Sisters in today's world.

"Now is the best time to rekindle that fire" (L 27), Mary Domenica Mazzarello repeats to us. It is the time to be available to the mission in the obedience of faith. We, too, feel called to set sail, like the first missionaries, to launch out into the deep of today's reality, especially that of young people, trusting in the word of Jesus.

I think that the events lived during this Chapter make us more convinced of the efficacy of a pedagogy of gestures which flow from a heart that loves and from choosing to concentrate on witnessing to the Gospel with our lives, which are more legible and more convincing than programmed statements. The Sisters, the young people, the members of the educating community, the persons whom we meet feel attracted by those personal relationships that express humble sincerity, availability for dialogue and a love that is capable of giving and receiving forgiveness. This type of relationship forms an environment in which it is possible to grow in inner freedom, to allow for the working of the Spirit who guides people and history in a mysterious but efficacious manner towards the goal of summing up everything in Christ. We know neither how nor when this will happen. What we do know is the way traced out by Jesus and indicated by him in the Sermon on the Mount. We want to travel it in communion with our Sisters, proclaiming Jesus as Saviour in the simple and familiar manner that Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello taught us by their lives. Our Founders were prophets for the young people of their time. Today we, too, are asked to do the same, to be women of God who give up human security and allow ourselves to be purified by fire so as to become transparent to the Light. We are called to be persons who know how to say to the young people, like the Holy Father in Toronto, "You are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world" (Mt 5: 13-14). We are asked to witness, with him, that the joy promised by the Beatitudes is the joy of Jesus. It is found in obedience

to the Father, in the gift of self to our brothers and sisters and in the Gospel response to the challenges of each day (cf. Message to the young people, July 25, 2002, n. 4).

The beatitudes are a way to happiness. But how is it possible to be happy if many children of the same Father are denied the right to life, to education and to the free expression of their culture and religion? It is often a question of immigrant boys and girls, whom the exodus, particularly of this last decade, has brought onto the streets of other Nations. This is a situation that challenges our educational mission.

We want to sow a small but vital seed of hope in this reality. With the young people, the members of the educating community and of the Salesian Family, we can become the people of the Beatitudes, accepting each day the appeal to be pure of heart, poor in spirit, merciful, peacemakers, lovers and servants of the poor (cf. Id, n. 6).

Together with them, we want to build communities that are houses and schools of communion, places where Gospel citizenship is forged, where the other person is welcomed unconditionally and therefore is not considered an outsider, but rather as someone who belongs to me and for whom I have a responsibility (cf. NMI 43), a person with whom I can have a reciprocal relationship. The apprenticeship for citizenship is nourished by mutual trust, the heart of Don Bosco's educational system, by which each person feels personally loved and matures in an attitude of responsible solidarity towards every person.

The new style of community that we want to live, involving young people and lay adults, must be seen in the choices of evangelical essentiality and transparency, of harmony with nature, of loving care for the world, of commitment to make relationships more caring. We want to collaborate with other ecclesial and civil forces to create a culture of solidarity and peace, in which the rights of each man and woman are recognised and the diverse cultures are accepted and appreciated.

Let us start afresh from Jesus. He assures us of his joy along the way, as long as we do not content ourselves with partial realities, but seek communion with him who is our all and the reason for our mission. As it was for Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello, faith in him is the reason for our joy and that joy will become the measure of our faith.

True joy presupposes poverty, which means recognising and accepting our situation as creatures. This is the precondition so that God may be able to manifest his greatness in proportion to our availability. "When I am weak, it is then that I am strong" (2 Cor 12: 10). This is also the message of the Magnificat that resounds today in our heart, making the sentiments of Mary our own.

I conclude by addressing to you the same wish that you expressed for me on October 24, in calling me to continue the mission of being a bond of communion and the centre of unity of our family. You gave me a Bible and a compass with a dedication and a promise: "Remaining anchored to the Word you will find your sure compass. You can count on us". May this be so for each one of you, for every Salesian Sister.

May Mary, the first disciple of Jesus, help us to place communion before all else. May she sustain us in our commitment to be present with feminine sensitivity at the outposts of history: among the marginalised, the excluded and the poor, (especially the young and women), in those places where educational policies are developed and where decisions are taken. May she teach us, as she did with our first missionaries, to multiply the pacts for life, to verify the genuineness of our response to the Covenant by the quality of the covenant among ourselves, with the educating communities and with each and every person. Then, without many words, we will communicate what we have heard and lived in this Chapter and we will be living communion on paths of Gospel citizenship on the five Continents.

I ask Mary Our Help to make my gratitude for Sr. Rosalba, Sr. Matilde, Sr. Georgina, Sr. Graziella, Sr. Anna Maria, Sr. Lourdes, efficacious. With them I have shared life and worked to animate our family at central level and now they leave for other missions. To them I extend the wish that they may continue to represent Mary in their lives, in the transparency of their faith and in communion. To

those who take over from them for the six-year period that is about to begin, I extend the invitation to count on her help and on the affection of the Sisters of the Council.

May Mary also sustain the hope of each one of us, of every Sister, of the members of the Salesian Family, in particular our past pupils, of the ninth successor of Don Bosco, Fr. Pascual Chávez Villanueva, who has accompanied us with fraternal dedication. May no fatigue, no difficulty or lack of success extinguish or weaken the dream of collaborating, through education, in making the co-existence of people more humane. We trust in the word of Jesus, who repeats to us once again today, *Duc in altum*.

Messages from the Chapter Members

MESSAGE TO THE SALESIAN FAMILY

Dearest brothers and sisters of the Salesian Family,

We, the Salesian Sisters, present at General Chapter XXI, are grateful for the messages, prayers and interest with which you have followed our work and for the joy you have shared during some significant events. First of all, we want to thank the father of our Family, Fr. Pascual Chávez, for his fraternal and cordial closeness.

Before concluding our General Chapter we want to share with you the strong appeal that came from profound listening to our communities, to the young people, to the contradictions of the world and to the cry of the poor and of peoples:

Communion, the dream of God and cry of our world today,
urgently challenges our communities.

The strength of this appeal, at the beginning of the third millennium, makes us want to walk with you, with greater charismatic awareness. Together, we want to choose, once again, and with renewed commitment, communion among all the groups of our Family so as to make of the family spirit the prophetic message to which we give witness in these, our times, which are so tried by war, divisions and hatred.

For this reason it is urgent that we journey with you along paths of practical citizenship, where the common good is the clear goal for all. The Beatitudes indicate the style of the journey and lead us back to Don Bosco's initial choice: "poor and abandoned youth".

Therefore, we feel the need to learn from the young people, from the poor, the afflicted and the excluded how to make solidarity the new way to live communion each day and to promote an authentic culture for a more humane future.

Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello traced out the way and are our guides.

On this path, we want to undertake, with you, the journey of holiness indicated by John Paul II and by the Rector Major and, together, we want to propose it to today's young people.

May Mary, Mother and Teacher of our Salesian Family, continue to be our companion on the journey, and help us to walk together.

The Members of General Chapter XXI

MESSAGE TO OUR MISSIONARY SISTERS

To you, dear missionary sisters,

We extend our thanks to you and a particular remembrance from this Chapter lived in the light of the 125th anniversary of the first missionary expedition.

You were with us in the presence of the many missionary sisters who were Chapter members and who made the Assembly echo with the joy, courage and enthusiasm of all of you, who are called today to proclaim and to live the Paschal message of Jesus on every continent.

The various phases of the Chapter were marked by significant moments not merely of commemoration, but also of renewed missionary commitment.

The multicultural composition of the Assembly was a great sign of missionary fruitfulness. A fruitful tree that embraces the whole world has grown from a little seed. The new General Council is an expression how all this has become a reality including, as it does, Sisters from every continent including, for the first time, one from Africa.

Dear sisters, we want to ask you to help the whole Institute to rekindle the fire in order to find in Jesus the strength and the joy of every new missionary call, whether personal or community, in sharing with many brothers, sisters and young people.

We want to reach you, wherever you are, even in the most distant and solitary parts of the world, where you share an authentic culture of solidarity in the way in which you live with and among your people, the young and the least. We want to rejoice with you for the beauty and vitality of many young people who seek dignity, education, the defence of their lives, peace and justice for their children.

On November 14, 1877, Sr. Angela Vallese and five other Sisters left for America: "by 9:30 a.m. the Sisters and Salesians were already on board ...Mother Mazzarello visited the cabins one by one... Then, as if her heart prompted her to give still more to those Daughters... she spoke to each one individually" (Cronistoria II, p. 281).

We, too, as missionaries to the young everywhere, with the whole Institute, want to listen once again to the voice of Maria Domenica, La Madre, who, in her simplicity, accompanied us and harmonised the many different voices that echoed in that "long period of listening" which was our Chapter.

Hers is a voice that encourages us all to go forward with a new missionary impetus to witness to communion, the dream of God and the cry of our world today, with Mary, Mother and Helper who always goes before us.

With gratitude and deep emotion, we embrace you one by one

Your Sisters at the Chapter

MESSAGE TO THE EDUCATING COMMUNITIES WITH WHOM WE SHARE OUR PASSION FOR EDUCATION

We know that you have followed the events of General Chapter XXI in which our Institute has faced the great challenge of living the Covenant with God in their commitment to active citizenship with affection and empathy. Each of you has given your own contribution to the preparation of this special event, therefore, the conclusions that we have reached are truly the fruit of the collaboration of all.

We thank you for your availability and precious participation. The Chapter reflection is not finished, but is now entrusted anew to all the communities, so that it may be studied and carried out with the enthusiasm and joy typical to our family spirit.

We, the Chapter members, from the five continents, have been deeply aware of the urgent need to strengthen that communion which challenges our educating communities in their commitment to form men and women capable of building bridges, forming bonds and networks of communication and of solidarity.

Each of us, according to his/her specific identity, lives the same educative passion as St. John Bosco and St. Maria Domenica Mazzarello. Together we want to live that spirit of communion, which transforms our differences into spaces for dialogue and sharing, our resources into forces that will enable us, with great faith, hope and untiring love, to accompany, in their development, the children and young people who are entrusted to us.

With new awareness we assume the commitment of listening to today's world, in an attitude of discernment, in order to make choices in favour of life, of justice and of peace. Thus together, we wish to promote family values and by our life and witness to educate young people to love.

We are convinced that by renewing the option for education we will be able to contribute towards the transformation of society and of culture and to face the future with hope and optimism.

We greet you with affection.

The FMA present at General Chapter XXI

MESSAGE TO THE YOUNG PEOPLE OF THE WHOLE WORLD

Dear young people of the whole world,

Our General Chapter XXI has just ended. A boy from one of the Oratories in Rome defined it as the Sisters' World Cup because there were 194 Salesian Sisters present from 52 nations of the five continents. Do you want to know who won?

You won, dear young people, because we carried you in our hearts at every moment of this powerful Chapter experience. It was for you that we reflected, studied, prayed and sought new ways to proclaim Christ to you.

It was for you that we renewed the commitment to make our lives a clear sign of the love of God who called us and sent us to you. We want to be a sign that you can easily read, so that you will be able to find your way onto the paths of happiness and, we dare to say, of holiness.

You won, dear young people of all of our educational environments, together with the young people whom we have never met, especially those who can no longer smile because they have so much to suffer.

John Paul II called you sentinels of the morning, people who have experienced the night but who also know how to recognise the light of morning. He called you to be people who know how to carry, once more, into the heart of the world a genuine hope, which believes that justice, peace and solidarity are possible.

You won, dear young people, because you have always been generous, enthusiastic and daring, responsible and capable of giving your life for others without too many calculations or differences. We entrust to you your friends, the younger ones, the defenceless, those whom we cannot or do not know how to reach.

On the day the Chapter opened, two young people, Ilaria and Giordano, gave us a gift in your name. No! It was not a whistle to direct the world cup, but a clown's red nose, along with the invitation to live in joy, like our saints, Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello.

OK! We accept the challenge! We want, however, to be witnesses of this joy in communion with you. It is a joy that is not easily won because it requires the rejection of the often attractive call of evil and a constant journey along the demanding paths traced out by the Gospel.

True joy is the gift of the Risen Christ and we are certain that Mary, our companion and teacher on the journey of faith, will help us to increase it together.

We carry you in our hearts.

The FMA present at General Chapter XXI

List of participants at General Chapter XXI

General Council

Mother Colombo Atonia	Superior General
Sr. Perotti Rosalba	Vicar General
Sr. Nevares Matilde	Councillor for Formation
Sr. McPake Georgina	Councillor for Youth Pastoral
Sr. Contreras María de los Angeles	Councillor for the Sal. Family
Sr. Hernández Ciriaca	Councillor for the Missions
Sr. Curti Mariagrazia	Councillor for Social Communication
Sr. Aspesi Candida	Councillor for Administration
Sr. Curmi Theresa	Visiting Councillor
Sr. De Souza Wilma	" "
Sr. Mattiussi Anna Maria	" "
Sr. Musatti Emilia	" "
Sr. Pino Capote María Lourdes	" "
Sr. Reungoat Yvonne	" "
Sr. Rossi Aurelia	" "
Sr. Teruggi Giuseppina	General Secretary

Mother Castagno Marinella	Superior General Emeritus
---------------------------	---------------------------

AFRICA

Sr. Mwema Marie Dominique
Sr. Kikange Yolande

Sr. Aristizábal María Ligia
Sr. Fernandes Teresa

Sr. Sweeney Margaret
Sr. Tomasi Roberta

Sr. Tallone Vilma
Sr. Campanet Segorbe Loreto

Sr. Masson Bernadette
Sr. Boschetti Germana

Sr. Teixeira Monteiro Lucília
Sr. De Souza Maria das Graças

PROVINCE

Central Africa *O. L. of Africa*

East Africa *O.L. of Hope*

Southern Africa *O. L. of Peace*

West Africa *Mother of God*

Madagascar *Mary source of life*

Mozambique *St. John Bosco*

AMERICA

Sr. Molina Juana
Sr. Batista Cesarina

Antille St. Joseph

Sr. Rivera Carmen Elena
Sr. Riccioli Marta Liliana

Argentina St. Frances of Sales

Sr. Pella María Cristina
Sr. Zamboni Elvira María

Argentina St. Francis Xavier

Sr. Rausch María Teresita
Sr. Varas Nora Alicia

Argentina O. L. of the Rosary

Sr. Santamaría Bernarda
Sr. Moreno Adela

Bolivia O. L. of Peace

Sr. De Assis Castro Amplia
Sr. Moreira Alves Maria Helena

Brazil Mother Mazzarello

Sr. Dorilêo Gonçalves Mariluce
Sr. Goulart Lopes Ivone

Brazil O. L. of Peace

Sr. Yared Ivone
Sr. De Assis Maria José

Brazil Immaculate Help of Christians

Sr. Feitosa Lopes Rita
Sr. Anselmo Maria Mirtes

Brazil Laura Vicuña

Sr. Barreto Maria Lúcia
Sr. Conceição Maria Carmelita

Brazil St. Teresinha

Sr. Gesser Melena
Sr. Deretti Alaíde

Brazil O. L. Aparecida

Sr. Dias Pereira Francisca
Sr. De Azevedo Carvalho Dynazil

Brazil Maria Ausiliatrice

Sr. Ambrosim Teresinha
Sr. Zampiroli Maria Rita

Brazil O. L. of Penha

Sr. Maistro Lúcia
Sr. Hirata Tsuyoko Dulce Myrian

Brazil St. Catherine of Siena

Sr. Guitard Lise
Sr. Roy Alphonsine

Canada Notre-Dame du Cap

Sr. Melgar Milagro Esperanza
Sr. Yela Sandra Elizabeth

Central America North SS. Salvatore

Sr. Orozco María Elena Sr. Flores Elia María	Central America South <i>O. L. of the Angels</i>
Sr. Zura María Elena Sr. Castillo Berta Teresa	Chile <i>St. Gabriele Archangel</i>
Sr. García Ana Stella Sr. Aldana Tony Lucía	Colombia <i>O. L. of Chiquinquirá</i>
Sr. López Ana Isabel Sr. Ovalle Aura María	Colombia <i>O. L. of Snows</i>
Sr. García Gloria Elena Sr. Uribe Carmen Lucrecia	Colombia <i>Maria Ausiliatrice</i>
Sr. Mesa María Eunice Sr. Rangel Ana Dolores	Colombia <i>St. Maria Mazzarello</i>
Sr. Chamorro Judith Sr. Aguirre Janet	Ecuador <i>Sacred Heart</i>
Sr. Elie Marie Sylvita Sr. Clergé Marie Adline	Haïti <i>O. L. of Perpetual Succour</i>
Sr. Flores Teresa Sr. Zumaya María Teresa	Mexico <i>O. L. of Guadeloupe</i>
Sr. Salazar Leonor Sr. Nieto Marina	Mexico <i>Mater Ecclesiae</i>
Sr. Stodutti Nélide Sr. González Venancia	Paraguay <i>St. Rafael Archangel</i>
Sr. Bardini Lina Sr. Patiño Gloria Luz	Perú <i>St. Rose of Lima</i>
Sr. Suprys Judith Ann Sr. Terzo Mary	United States East <i>St. Phillip Apostle</i>
Sr. Neves Phyllis Sr. Neaves Sandra	United States West <i>Mary Immaculate</i>
Sr. Montaldi Elba Sr. Guisado Laura	Uruguay <i>Immaculate Conception</i>
Sr. Ojeda María Elizabeth Sr. Coelho Maria Gabriela	Venezuela <i>St. John Bosco</i>

ASIA

Sr. Tse Kam Fong Cecilia Sr. Yick Yuen Yin Rose	China <i>Maria Ausiliatrice</i>
Sr. Tacujan Celia Sr. Bacani Maria Socorro	The Philippines <i>St. Maria D. Mazzarello</i>
Sr. Kenjo Sumie Teresina Sr. Suzuki Hiroko Maria	Japan <i>Alma Mater</i>
Sr. Fernandes Caroline Sr. Castellino Teresa	India <i>St. Maria Mazzarello</i>
Sr. Prabalanathan Philomena Sr. Perumpettikunnel Lily	India <i>Maria Ausiliatrice</i>
Sr. Ozhukayil Lucy Rose Sr. Gothorp Mabel	India <i>Mater Ecclesiae</i>
Sr. Thomas Cecily Sr. Chako Alice	India <i>Sacred Heart</i>
Sr. Lazar Bernardine Sr. Pichai Mary Saroja	India <i>St. Thomas Apostle</i>
Sr. Bamon Felicita Sr. D'Cunha Juliana Celine	India <i>Immaculate Heart of Mary</i>
Sr. Pak Hae Ja Maria Domenica Sr. Choi Joo Yong Silvia	Korea <i>Stella Matutina</i>
Sr. Kassis Ibtissam Sr. Abou Naoum Lina	Middle East <i>Jesus the Adolescent</i>
Sr. Chiandotto Lina Sr. Garcia Sarah	South East Asia <i>Mary our Help</i>
Sr. Yawasang Nitaya Maria Sr. Visitsin Malai Petronilla	Thailand <i>St. Maria Mazzarello</i>

EUROPE

Sr. Mülleder Hermine Sr. Maxwald Maria	Austria <i>St. Michael Archangel</i>
Sr. Pelsser Geneviève Sr. Petrolo Maria Stella Sr. Craeynest Lutgardis Sr. Rerren Marina	Belgium South <i>Blessed Sacrament</i> Belgium North <i>Sacred Heart</i>
Sr. Fitterová Jitka	Czech Republic-Lithuania <i>Mary Immaculate</i>

Sr. Hanáková Markéta	
Sr. Aidjian Nadia Sr. Chetcuti Marie-Agnès	France <i>Our Lady of Lourdes</i>
Sr. Höll Rosa Sr. Egeling Petra	Germany <i>Maria Ausiliatrice</i>
Sr. Purcell Elizabeth Sr. Devine Patricia	Britain <i>St. Thomas of Canterbury</i>
Sr. Taylor Kathleen Sr. O'Byrne Máire	Ireland <i>O. L. Queen of Ireland</i>
Sr. Mencarini Maria Sr. Cazzuola Chiara	Emil.-Lig.-Tosc. <i>Our Lady of the Cenacle</i>
Sr. Laudi Maria Luisa Sr. Deleidi Anita	Lombardy <i>Holy Family</i>
Sr. Scarpa Gabriella Sr. Guidali Paola	Lombardy <i>Mary Immaculate</i>
Sr. Aldieri Flora Sr. Fumagalli Irma Caterina	Lombardy <i>O. L. of S. Monte</i>
Sr. Labate Rosa Sr. Cortella Anna Maria	Southern Italy <i>Teresa Valsé</i>
Sr. Fisichella Maria Sr. Masullo Anna	Naples <i>O. L. of the Rosary</i>
Sr. Filippi Nanda Sr. Gribaudo Maria Angela	Piedmont <i>St. John Bosco</i>
Sr. Castellino Carla Sr. Rasello Silvana	Piedmont <i>Maria Ausiliatrice</i>
Sr. Penna Maria Vanda Sr. Periale Maria Grazia	Piedmont <i>Mother Mazzarello</i>
Sr. Corna Celestina Sr. Razionale Anna Giovina	Rome <i>St. Agnes</i>
Sr. Scano Marinella Sr. Trotti Annamaria	Rome <i>St. Cecilia</i>
Sr. Rosso Ernesta Sr. Ventura Maria Concetta	Sicily <i>St. Joseph</i>
Sr. Barbanti Giuseppa Sr. Prestigiaco Marisa	Sicily <i>M. Maddalena Morano</i>

Sr. Franceschin Gianfranca Sr. Diana Mafalda	Venice <i>Queenship of Mary</i>
Sr. Vecchi Lucia Sr. Bazzolo Luigia	Venice <i>Guardian Angels</i>
Sr. Czekeza Teresa Sr. Kalinowska Teresa	Poland <i>Maria Ausiliatrice</i>
Sr. Bartkowska Eløbieta Sr. Pioskowik Maria	Poland <i>Our Lady of Jasna Góra</i>
Sr. Teixeira Rosa Sr. Santos Maria da Conceição	Portugal <i>O. L. of Fatima</i>
Sr. PeĖe Marija Sr. Ćimenc Marija	Slovenia-Croatia <i>O. L. of Brezje</i>
Sr. Králová Dagmar Sr. Hervayová Elvíra	Slovakia <i>St. John Bosco</i>
Sr. Catalá María Carmen Sr. Ruiz de Gauna María Lourdes	Spain <i>O. L. of Pilar</i>
Sr. Sineiro Pilar Sr. Rodríguez M. de las Mercedes	Spain <i>Virgin of the Wayside</i>
Sr. Prieto María del Pilar Sr. Sarabia Ana María	Spain <i>St. Teresa</i>
Sr. Canales Calzadilla M. Carmen Sr. Ruíz Pérez María Dolores	Spain <i>Maria Ausiliatrice</i>
Sr. De Vietro Francesca	Casa Generalizia
Sr. Buffa Giuseppina	Auxilium

OCEANIA

Sr. MacDonald Edna Mary Sr. Bentley Margaret	South Pacific Region <i>Maria Ausiliatrice</i>
---	--

Sr. Américo Rolim Maria (BBH), elected on 26/10/2002
Councillor for Formation

Sr. Cavaglià Piera (RCG), nominated on 29/10/2002
Secretary General

INVITED

Sr. Battagliola Paola Sr. Vu thi Kim Liên Rosa	South East Asia " " "
Sr. Biglietti Silvia Sr. Bovino Giovanna	Emilia-Liguria-Toscany " " "
Sr. Szewc Teresa	Eastern Europe

Members of the new General Council

called to animate the Institute at central level during the six years 2002-2008:

Mother Colombo Antonia Sr. Reungoat Yvonne	Superior General Vicar General
Sr. Américo Rolim Maria Sr. Canales Calzadilla M ^a del Carmen Sr. Contreras María de los Angeles Sr. Hernández Ciriaca Sr. Teruggi Giuseppina Sr. Aspesi Candida	Councillor for Formation Councillor for Youth Pastoral Councillor for the Sal. Family Councillor for the Missions Councillor for Commun. Councillor for Administration
Sr. Castellino Carla Sr. Curmi Theresa Sr. Deretti Alaíde Sr. De Souza Wilma Sr. Musatti Emilia Sr. Mwema Mukato Marie-Dominique Sr. Rossi Aurelia	Visiting Councillor Visiting Councillor Visiting Councillor Visiting Councillor Visiting Councillor Visiting Councillor Visiting Councillor
Sr. Cavaglià Piera	Secretary General

Contents

Opening of General Chapter XXI

Homily of the Rector Major, Fr Pascual Chávez Villanueva 2

Inaugural address of Cardinal Eduardo Martínez Somalo 5

Address of the Rector Major		9
Address of the Superior General Mother Antonia Colombo	12	
Greeting of the Cooperators		17
Greeting of the Association of Past Pupils		19
Greeting of the Past Pupils of the Salesians of Don Bosco	22	
Greeting of the Volunteers of Don Bosco		23
Greeting of the Young People		24
Meeting with John Paul II at the Audience of November 8, 2002		
Address of Mother General to the Holy Father		26
Message of John Paul II to the Chapter Members		27
Closing of General Chapter XXI and messages from the Chapter members		
Homily of the Rector Major, Fr Pascual Chávez Villanueva	29	
Words of Mother Antonia Colombo at the conclusion of GC XXI		33
Message to the Salesian Family		37
Message to our Missionary Sisters		38
Message to the Educating Communities with whom we share our passion for education		39
Message to the Young People of the Whole Word		40
List of participants at General Chapter XXI		41
Members of the new General Council		47