

*In profound harmony with the Synod on the young*

Dearest Sisters,

We are ending the *summer* Plenum meetings and I come to you to thank you above all for the prayers with which you have accompanied this time of special sharing and discernment. We also felt your presence during the week of the Spiritual Exercises of June 17-23, lived at Guarcino (Frosinone) amid the green forests and much silence. The contemplation of creation, listening to the Word of God, and a more intense prayer allowed us to re-trace with awe and gratitude our ‘love story’ with Jesus and revive the *da mihi animas cetera tolle* carrying in our heart the young entrusted to us on the five continents, and of course, all of you committed to proclaiming Gospel joy.

We also thank you for the prayers with which you accompanied the rich experience of the Triennial Verificas, some already celebrated and others that will be done shortly. We thank the Lord and Mary Help of Christians who continue to bless the journey of pastoral conversion that is being done in the whole Institute to live the entrustment of General Chapter XXIII and to project ourselves with new hope toward the future.

Each Verifica celebrates the communion that unites us and the beauty of our charism that we live with the young and the laity who share the mission with us and together we question ourselves on how to live it more courageously in today’s history in contact with unique challenges and opportunities. While we are grateful for the Verificas already completed, we ask you to continue to pray for those that will be held in July and August in Brazil, Ecuador, and Costa Rica for all the American Provinces. May they mark for the participants and for all those who will hear their resonance, a new stage of the journey of renewal and fidelity to the Gospel and the charism.

**From General Chapter XXIII to the Synod**

We are amazed to see how the provident hand of the Lord guides and accompanies the life of the Institute. We feel confirmed in the goodness of the choices assumed by GC XXIII and strengthened by the gift that Pope Francis offers us in this intense preparation for the Synod on the young. We are also stimulated by the methodology of involvement chosen. In the heart of the Church we perceive the great evangelizing passion that animates it: a passion that we too expressed in GC XXIII and that is contained in the title of the *Acts: Broaden Your Vision! With the Young, Missionaries of Hope and Joy*.

From the preparation of GC XXIII, we chose the biblical icon of Emmaus and we let ourselves be accompanied, illumined, transformed by the encounter with Jesus who walks with us. Now the Church itself invites us to be in harmony with God’s gaze on reality and to look to accompaniment as the prerequisite to be able to proclaim the Gospel together with the young.

The Working Document in preparation for the Synod: *The Young, the faith, and Vocational Discernment* (cf. *Instrumentum Laboris: IL*), a unitary and synthetic gathering of the themes that will be taken up in the Synod Assembly, offers rich and ample material that presents what the ecclesial communities have contributed with the active participation of many young people, from our houses as well. In fact, the Document does not only express the voice of the Bishops’ Conferences, but gives above all, space and word to the young as active protagonists. The Synod is for all of us a renewed appeal to listen to the young, to their rich world of aspirations and of dreams, but also full of challenges, and sometimes, of disappointments.

As Institute, we feel strongly questioned by the call to pastoral conversion. It requires a change of mentality, new styles of action in comparison to what we have done until now. Illumined by GC XXIII, and now also by the Synod, we continue to choose to cultivate a positive attitude toward every person and reality, to feel we are journeying with the young, immersed in the fabric of daily life, to seek together new paths and assume discernment as a life style (Cf. GC XXIII, 33-35). The Synod itself proposes the discernment process as a method and a life style, an habitual way of proceeding by listening to the Holy Spirit in every circumstance of personal and community life, and of the mission. (cf. *IL*, 111.139).

As Church, we continue to consider pastoral conversion as the horizon that motivates the concrete processes of renewal. The Guidelines proposed by the *Working Document* support and illumine even the fundamental choices assumed by the Institute. In fact, we find ourselves in deep harmony with the option of going out toward the peripheries, of remaining with the young and being present and active there where they live their life: of sharing the educative mission with them and inhabiting the digital world. Together with them and for them, we want to be open and welcoming communities that favor the personal encounter with Jesus and share fraternity and mission (cf. *CG XXIII*, 55.58). Listening to the needs of the young, we renew the choice of the prophecy of fraternity, care for relationships of closeness in all our environments, where we can breathe joy, welcome, and spiritual depth and where apostolic zeal and passion are nourished. The young dream of a Church that is close to the people: a true family with a strong educative sensitivity that helps them to mature and to taste the faith as a personal relationship with Jesus, and open themselves to the free gift of self (cf. *IL*, 178.184.194).

GC XXIII stimulates us to treat the vocational culture with greater determination, the formation of vocational communities, activating adequate and inculturated systematic journeys, placing attention on vocational discernment and accompaniment of the young (cf. *CG XXIII*, 61,8). At the heart of the Synod there is this dream: a renewed and shared understanding of the vocational culture, to collaborate in the true joy of the young, joy that is experienced in realizing the project of God in one's life (cf. *IL*, second parte).

### **Attention to young people to rejuvenate the face of the Church and the Institute**

At the end of Vatican Council II, the Council Fathers addressed a message to the young, indicating that the Council had sought to 'rejuvenate' the face of the Church to better respond to Jesus Christ, eternally young; to question itself on how to better correspond to the call to be light and hope for the world.

The first goal of the Synod is that of making the whole Church aware of its important task of accompanying every young person, no one excluded, toward the joy of love. This is certainly not new in the Church, but it gives continuity and importance to the great conciliar intuition: cultivate a gaze of trust toward the young generations. The young can, with their presence and their word, help the Church to rejuvenate its face (cf. *IL*,1), because it is typical of the young to believe in great dreams, and work for an ideal with freshness and newness.

The methodology chosen by the Synod is participative: instead of speaking about the young, they are given the word. Pope Francis in all his interventions at the Indiction of the Synod always invited the young to speak 'without filters', with openness and in full freedom. Who can best speak of the young if not the young people themselves? Listening to the young happened at various levels and using different modalities, because we need to understand better what God is asking of us through the signs of the times. "Young people, who are the watchmen and seismographs of every age, perceive them as a source of new opportunities and unprecedented threats more than others do." (*IL*, 51). We recall that in "many moments in the history of the Church, as well as in numerous biblical episodes, God wanted to speak through the youngest" (Pope Francis at the Pre-Synod Meeting).

Listening to the young comes in diverse ways, but nothing can substitute the face to face encounter and this implies remaining with them in the fabric of daily life. The *Working Document* specifies the places where we can meet them: school, university, work world, political engagement, digital environment, music, sports, friendship, situations of marginalization and of fragility.

However, it is not enough to listen to the young people. They wait for explicit invitations and proposals. Even if they seem sure of themselves, in reality they hide fragility and insecurity, and thus, expect that we adults be interested in them and offer them a clear proposal of commitment. Accompaniment is therefore, aimed at involving the young in the mission, but not as ‘executors’ of what has already been decided and planned, but rather as active and indispensable protagonists. This means listening to their ideas, entrusting them with responsibilities and commitments, and lastly, evaluating with them.

A favorable opportunity for the accompaniment of the young is the Salesian Youth Movement. This year we celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its birth as a world movement. We ask ourselves: does SYM offer the young an intense fraternal life, challenging spiritual journeys, meaningful service experiences, spaces for appropriate accompaniment, and competent people for discernment?

The *Working Document*, in reference to anthropological and cultural challenges, touches themes that are part of the daily conversation of the young, and are also ‘exercise conditions’ for the ecclesial mission today: the new understanding of the body, affectivity and sexuality, new cognitive paradigms that convey a different approach to truth, the digital world, institutional disappointment in the civil and ecclesial fields, decisional paralysis, nostalgia, and spiritual search (Cf. *IL*, cap. IV of Part I).

It is a call for us to a more qualified preparation to address these issues and to engage in dialogue with young people in an attitude of openness and critical intelligence. Is this not what the young people asked us during the GC XXIII, that is, to promote a real "pastoral care of intelligence"?

Some passages of the *Working Document* recall the aspect of the promotion of the woman, especially within the Church. The young people ask the Church in particular, to understand and value the role of the lay or consecrated woman and to help them to understand ever more clearly the implications at the family, social, and ecclesial levels of the ‘feminine genius’, that has a specific place of expression in consecrated life (cf. *IL*, 201).

### **Dream with the Young People ‘Relaunching holiness’**

The *Working Document* concludes with ‘relaunching’ holiness, recalling the splendid Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* that contributes to making us savor the beauty of the universal vocation to holiness as the path to happiness and human and Christian fulfillment in the vital encounter with Jesus and in the free gift of ourselves (cf. *IL*, 212-214). Holiness is the unique and unifying vocation for all of humanity because no one is potentially excluded from this goal of life. Even youth, as at other ages of life, is a favorable time for holiness.

The Church is rich in a host of young saints who indicate the best way to live that enthusiastic age of life that is youth. Even in the Salesian Family, among all the Saints, Blesseds, and Venerables, about fifty of them are young people under thirty years of age, and among them there is Laura Vicuña who reached holiness at 13 years of age!

This reality is a strong appeal to all of us to involve the members of the educating communities and to fearlessly re-propose youth sanctity indicating a journey that aims at the high measure of Christian life. The whole educative process involves the commitment to help the young people to open themselves to absolute values and to interpret life and history according to the depths and the riches of the Mystery of God who dwells in us.

Holiness is the most precious gift that we can offer to the young people. It is the contribution that the Church and the world expect from us. Convinced that “holiness is the most beautiful face of the Church” (*GE* 9), in proposing holiness to the young we are called to live it ourselves first of all as witnesses of a pleasant community, attractive, contagious, deeply rooted in Christ. Only by starting from this coherence will we be able to accompany the young in the discovery of the vocation to holiness to which God calls every person and all of us together. Sanctity, in fact, is a community journey where we mirror in a paradigmatic way the beauty of Trinitarian communion (cf. *IL*, 143). The community is the ‘theological space’ where we encounter the presence of the Risen Lord (cf. *IL*, 142), where we express apostolic zeal, we share preoccupations, hopes, prayer, and the aims of educative action.

The charismatic experience as FMA and the Synod on the young help us to cultivate the hope that holiness is always possible. Together with the young who seek the face of God, we consider it as an horizon of meaning accessible to all and achievable in daily life.

### **A proposal for the educating communities**

As Institute through the Formation Sector, we listened to the Temporary Professed and the formation communities to qualify accompaniment more and more in the vocational journey (*Guidelines for the Stage of Temporary Profession, 2017*)

Now, in harmony with the Synod, we propose involving the educating communities to *reflect on the vocational experience*, understanding vocation in the broad sense, intrinsically connected to the baptismal vocation and to the missionary spirit of the Church. The various vocations are concrete expressions of the reality of human life as a gift and as a task, called by God to go out of ourselves to be a gift of love for the world, each of us with our own unique contribution.

The multiple vocations are all necessary, like the body composed of many members. “Only harmonious unity of all makes the body alive and harmonious” (*IL*, 98).

In this way, we could give a response to what the young expressed in the final document of the pre-synod meeting: “We are looking for a Church that helps us to find our vocation, in all its meanings”. (*IL*, 85).

For our communities, this request is a strong appeal to question ourselves seriously: “*How can we accompany the process of growth in the faith and in the vocational discernment of the young people?*” We invite you to creatively actualize this proposal adapting it to the various contexts and involving, above all, our youngest sisters. Then you can share the news through the Website of the Institute. Thus it will be a gift for everyone and a meaningful way to enhance the vocational culture in every environment.

In the imminence of the feast of the Institute, inspired by the Holy Spirit as a gift to the Church and to the young generations on August 5, 1872, we wish you a joyful and grateful celebration for the beauty of our FMA vocation and of the responsibility we have to live it fully and to witness it with joy and fidelity.

Looking to Mary, “a young woman who with her ‘yes’ made the incarnation of the Son possible and consequently, created the conditions so that every other ecclesial vocation could be generated” (*IL*, 96), we entrust to her the life of young people, no one excluded, of each of us, and of the educating communities. She makes us bold to walk courageously the path of holiness with them.

God bless you!

Roma, 16 July 2018

*Mother and the Sisters of the Council*