

<b>COMMON MISSION STATEMENT OF THE SALESIAN FAMILY</b>
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**Presentation****TO THE CENTRAL COUNCILS  
OF THE GROUPS OF THE SALESIAN FAMILY**

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Recently we celebrated 125 years of missionary expeditions in the Congregation and the Family of Don Bosco.

Together with gratitude to God for all the help he has given us, I want to express once again my thanks to the missionaries leaving for the various areas of salesian work, and to all who directly or indirectly prepared the meeting at Turin.

We have been strengthened also by the words of the Pope who, in the letter he wrote to the Rector Major for the occasion, recalled the significant experience of the “salesian missions” in the whole world.

Being missionaries always implies two places for activity: **here** and **there**.

At Turin our thoughts were directed to the requirements for living “there”, i.e. in the mission territories. Going to the missions is a living part of Don Bosco’s charism and of the salesian life. We should not be faithful to the gift of the Spirit if our missionary generosity ever waned.

The present text, “**the common mission statement of the Salesian Family**”, brings us back “here”, to our daily life interwoven with communion, apostolic commitment, sharing of plans, of joint responsibility for the spreading of God’s Kingdom, and of salesian spirituality.

It is a particular, but not a secondary, manner of realizing the dream of Don Bosco, educator and evangelizer, especially of the young.

In entrusting the Common Missionary Statement today to you who are **responsible at central level** for the Groups of the Salesian Family, I recall once again the richness of the meeting of the members of the General Councils which took place at this Generalate last June.

I remember with joy the high attendance, the active participation of every Group, the desire expressed for a deeper and more fraternal mutual knowledge, and the will to move forward in communion of spirit and sharing of commitments.

All of you therefore, each within the setting of the particular Group concerned, are promoters of the meeting of Rome and of its most important result, represented today by the Common Mission Statement.

It is the result of the work of many people.

It does not claim to be a doctrinal text nor to present innovations. What it aims at doing is portraying in some detail the orientation and sensitivity of the Groups of the Salesian Family as regards the apostolic mission.

We can rightly call it an **inspirational text**. It calls on each member of the Groups of the Family for a commitment that is characterized as salesian: for the choice of those to whom the mission is directed, for the proposals of advancement and evangelization that it suggests, for the desire to go more deeply into the great intuitions of the Preventive System, for its involvement of the laity, and for its expression in culture and context of the salesian charism.

Those responsible for the Groups at local, national, international and world level have the primary task of making known the criteria and guidelines contained in the present text.

Some **words** return with a certain frequency: mission, communion, apostolate, salesianity, young people, challenges, education, advancement, evangelization, Preventive System, Spirit and spirituality.

Some **criteria** seem already accepted, but need continual clarification and application at the practical level: autonomy and shared responsibility, communion and uniqueness.

Each of these realities I have mentioned would need an **adequate commentary**, but it is not my function, in presenting the Common Mission Statement, to provide this. It is rather the main function of those responsible at different levels for the life of the individual Groups.

We are in the process of preparation for the feast of the Immaculate Conception, always so dear to Don Bosco. Mary Immaculate has placed her seal on many stages of the life and expansion of the salesian charism. Let us pray to her with this intention.

May she be the Mother and Helper of all of us.

I wish you success in your work.

**Fr Juan E. Vecchi**  
Rector Major

Rome, 25 November 2000

## **PRELIMINARY**

The Salesian Family knows that it has been willed and sent by God for the salvation of the young and of working class people.

To respond to the requirements of the various times and settings which are continually changing, the Groups which refer back to Don Bosco pay heed to the Word of God, and place themselves at the service of their brothers and sisters in need.

The mission carried out by the Family is a concrete response to the Holy Spirit and to his gifts, to the power which operates through the sacrament of Confirmation and to the Church which sends us.

United in an assembly of communion around the Rector Major, successor of Don Bosco, 1 – 5 June 2000, the Groups of the Salesian Family decided to collect together the fundamental inspirations of the common mission.

The text THE COMMON MISSION STATEMENT OF THE SALESIAN FAMILY must be read in the light of the process of convergence between all Groups and the originality of each of them for a more effective apostolic presence in the situation of the present day.

It is therefore entrusted to the General Councils of the individual Groups to apply it suitably to the different contexts of life.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **THE SALESIAN FAMILY IN THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH**

#### **1.** **The Church for a new evangelization.**

The Church has been missionary from its very foundation. The dwelling place of the Holy Spirit and enriched by his gifts it lives in the world to give life and give it abundantly.

The Church is living a particularly missionary period, called "new evangelization". This is a mobilization of all ecclesial forces to give effect to the Lord's word: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28, 19-20).

Believers who are conscious of being a living part of the Church place themselves at the service of its mission, offering a particular contribution according to the gifts they have received.

It is in this vast ecclesial and apostolic movement that the Salesian Family finds its place.

#### **2.** **The action of God's Spirit.**

The Holy Spirit gave to Don Bosco a penetrating insight into the world of the young, their needs, their expectations and the urgent requirements of youngsters who are "poor and at risk".

In the Church and society of Turin he began a vast movement of persons who work in various ways for the salvation of the young, a movement which soon spread to other cities.

The same Spirit gathers today in an apostolic project, priests and laity, religious and consecrated persons, men and women, people of various social backgrounds: all responsible for the realization of a dream which began on the hill of the Becchi, became a living experience in the Oratory of Valdocco, and spread through the world by force of a unique spirituality which took its inspiration from St Francis de Sales.

#### **3.** **The Groups of the Salesian Family involved in the ecclesial mission.**

From the apostolic spirituality, typical in Don Bosco, each Group of the Salesian Family assumes and defines in an original manner its own commitment in the Church.

Living at present in the Salesian Family there are groups of priests, united in religious communities or working in dioceses.

There are also groups of the laity, men and women, belonging to lay associations or secular Institutes, officially recognized by the Church and the Rector Major.

And finally there are also numerous female institutes of religious life, which have arisen to respond to new requirements of the Church's mission, in different places and circumstances.

Individuals and the various groups who listen with docility in their search for God, receive the light and strength necessary to fulfil their particular vocation in the world and in the Church.

The Holy Spirit spreads his gifts in the world in novel and diverse forms. The various charisms are all tailored to human and historical situations, in view of the development of God's Kingdom.

4.

#### **Aspects of the apostolic commitment of the Family of Don Bosco.**

The Salesian Family reaffirms in the context of the contemporary world, fidelity to the prophetic richness of Don Bosco, as a response of fidelity to God's design.

There are three settings in which it operates:

- human advancement,
- education,
- evangelization.

Addressing itself primarily to the young who are poor and to ordinary people, the members of the Salesian Family work, in the first place, to create conditions for fostering personal dignity.

In this way many activities arise for involvement in situations of poverty.

For **advancement** initiatives the presence of lay people is particularly necessary.

**Education**, of both young and adults, is a force which is indispensable for an effective process of growth.

Many are the expressions of formal education in the Salesian Family, and equally numerous are those of informal education.

Collaboration between the different Groups of the Family in the field of education is both essential and significant.

Many Groups are committed to direct **evangelization**: either by insertion in local Churches and therefore participation in diocesan projects; or by giving life to concrete and particular programs for meeting the needs of certain categories of people and problems of daily life.

The presence of Groups with a clear Christian identity leads to evangelization even in contexts where direct evangelization is neither easy nor even permitted.

5.

#### **A mission particularly suited to lay people.**

The vast extent of apostolic commitment asked by Don Bosco of his collaborators carries with it the need to multiply human resources and the forces available.

Don Bosco had recourse to the help and support of laymen and women, as well as of ecclesiastics and religious.

Numerous are the men and women educators, social workers, catechists, professional people, politicians favourable towards salesian initiatives, young people with animating talents, who find in the works of Don Bosco a concrete opportunity for expressing a professional approach, charisms and prophecies.

In certain circumstances we are witnessing in salesian activities a real mobilization of the laity, not necessarily practising believers, dictated more by the need for manpower than by the choice of ideals or theological considerations.

In this way begins a vast movement of persons which becomes organized and coordinated and shares a project for the salvation of the young and of people in general.

The movement exceeds the strict limits of the Salesian Family, but the latter carries responsibility with respect to all the friends of Don Bosco.

6.

### **The Preventive System.**

Don Bosco lived the gift of the Founder of a spiritual Family, starting up some groups as a concrete expression of his dream of salvation for all.

He left the Preventive System to all of us as a rich legacy.

It represents, in the experience of the Salesian Family,

- the manner of commitment to human advancement,
- the choice of content of educative and apostolic activity,
- the apostolic spirituality of action, taking inspiration from Francis de Sales.

## CHAPTER 2 THE MISSION OF THE SALESIAN FAMILY IN THE NEW RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

7.

### **Apostolic commitment challenges the Salesian Family.**

The Church of the Second Vatican Council, through the magisterium of the Pope, of the Synods of Bishops and the Great Jubilee of the Redemption, has prompted communities of believers to take up with enthusiasm fresh initiatives for the proclamation of salvation to all the world.

The Salesian Family in the process of renewal and communion of all its constituent forces, offers its members some fundamental choices for the efficacious living of its missionary and apostolic commitment.

This begins from some typical **intuitions** of the experience of Don Bosco.

8.

### **Upright citizen and good Christian.**

This expression, used frequently by Don Bosco to define the aim of his work in the Church and in society, has spread beyond the confines of his own time and experience at Valdocco.

“Upright citizen and good Christian” is a phrase with **contents both traditional and new**. It refers to the desire to collaborate in the new order of society which has been coming into being in recent years, by becoming inserted in the processes of change of permanent values in moral life and action.

It **recognizes**, almost empathetically, the value of the new order being expressed by society.

It recognizes the rich values of the new culture which is coming to birth and the efforts being made to give to humanity a wider and more secure well-being.

It recognizes the force contained in the religious movement which is being renewed in the light of the problems and expectations of the people, particularly those in greatest need.

And so it **represents** a synthetic statement of the educative manifesto of our Father.

The synthesis is not to be sought only in brevity of expression, but also and primarily in the ability to avoid dividing what in daily life is united.

We are all, at one and the same time, both citizens and believers.

Don Bosco’s intuition was to show that these two concepts are interdependent.

The upright character of the citizen leads to fidelity in respect of evangelical values.

The life of a good Christian is the foundation for the social rectitude of the citizen.

9.

### **Salesian humanism.**

The immediate content perceivable in the words of Don Bosco is the acceptance of everything that is integrally human.

**In the first place**, to aim at being an upright citizen and good Christian is to stress the dignity of the human person.

The Second Vatican Council in the pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World states very clearly: "According to the almost unanimous opinion of believers and unbelievers alike, all things on earth should be related to man as their centre and crown" (GS 12).

Educators and apostles have the task of awakening and mobilizing all the potentialities of the young: the faculties of knowledge and of reason; the diversified affective inheritance; the fortified will for freedom.

**In addition**, salesian humanism looks at all daily realities, from work to culture; from the joy of friendship to civil commitment; from the nature in which we are immersed to personal and social education; from professional skill to moral honesty in deeds and options; all the realities which constitute life, as values which must be defended and helped to grow in universal experience.

The commitment to human advancement attaches great weight in salesian history to the small realities which build up personal experience.

**Moreover**, salesian humanism functions in the perspective of giving meaning to everyday living.

**Education**, through the reason, religion and loving kindness of Don Bosco aims at filling personal experience with hope for the future.

The salesian apostolic commitment of all Groups of the Family is defined by education as the content of its particular mission, of the manner of making effective interventions, and of the spiritual options of the operators.

**Finally**, salesian humanism aims at helping everyone to find their right place in society and in the Church.

The vocation of each one is the most important thing in life.

We are placed in the world not for ourselves but for others, committed to a specific mission as a service to our neighbour.

The reminder is of the urgency to work always and in everything with evangelical **charity**. Believers, young and old, consecrated or lay, men and women, will have a thousand different ways of expressing the gift of charity: some through alms-giving, others through educative activity, still others by commitment to **evangelization**, even to the extent of missionary self-donation.

10.

**Commitment for the human person at the present day.**

The objective of the mission of the Salesian Family, in the simplicity of its formulation "upright citizen and good Christian", has become complex and difficult in today's social and religious context.

Historical, cultural and religious motives do not make apostolic activities easy.



John Paul II's encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*, responds to many questions which arise in the mind of an apostle.

Hence the need for the Salesian Family living in different parts of the world to read carefully and study more deeply the various situations envisaged in the ecclesial document.

Don Bosco reminded his collaborators to work with a charity practised "according to the needs of the time".

These, in fact, are the requirements which give concreteness to the mission's objectives.

Let us try to indicate some possibilities.

11.

### **Effectiveness in the local area.**

The primary yardstick for the assessment of the "upright citizen and good Christian" is an **effective** presence in the local area.

This implies an effective involvement in the life situations of ordinary people and of the young in particular.

One becomes effective either through the **witness** to sharing which is given, or by the practical proposals put forward as responses to the questions that arise when human development is sought.

There are problems of relationships, of small or wider import, with individuals and with institutions; questions of human and moral values to be recalled and promoted, in respect of different and contrasting positions, and in harmony with one's conscience; new solutions to be found based on past experiences and future prospects; rights to be defended, particularly of those who are weaker and more exposed to danger; an effective presence in areas of politics where educational strategies are drawn up and the convergence of forces to foster a public opinion nourished by evangelical and salesian values.

The criterion of effectiveness has applications which are different in different geographical contexts and cultural areas.

It cannot demand the same things in different places.

It cannot indicate the same process to different peoples.

12.

### **Progressive seeking of the overall objective.**

"The upright citizen and good Christian" is a phrase which expresses a maturity already achieved: i.e. openness to the whole of **truth**, and to responsible personal **freedom**.

The Salesian of whatever Group of the Family is at one and the same time attentive to educative processes, and ready to animate and follow up the process towards the objective.

This requires that the process be a **gradual** one.

The Constitutions of the Salesians of Don Bosco express this need very clearly:

"Imitating God's patience, we encounter the young at their present stage of freedom. We then accompany them, so that they may develop solid convictions and gradually assume the responsibility for the delicate process of their growth in humanity and faith".

The Church has made some specific declarations, which it may be useful to recall in the present context.

*Catechesi tradendae* reminds us:

- of the **integrity** of the content to be passed on “with all its inflexibility and force”;
- of the **balance** needed in organizing the contents to be presented;
- of the **organic relationship** between the various parts, giving to each the emphasis it needs;
- of the **hierarchical correlation** between certain contents and others, which makes them fundamental and conditioning;
- of the **language** to be used, inspired only by the concern to make the richness of the content better understood.

The correct application of the Preventive System meets the demands of evangelical proclamation, because it is complete, clear and efficacious.

13.

### **Complementarity in the convergence of forces.**

The "upright citizen and good Christian" presents a richness of content continually being more fully discovered.

Through the experience of education it becomes clear that to realize its objectives the **synergy** of many activities is indispensable, especially at the present day.

The simultaneous presence of many reference points concerning the same problems of life; the diversity of the view of the human person in today's culture; the endless number of messages which reach the same subject, through a communication now become polycentric; these are all factors demanding a wider and rigorous **planning** of the educational process.

Many forces are involved, and they must be coordinated for the attainment of the common objective.

The Salesian Family with its various component Groups can ensure in the best possible manner the covering of the various educative sectors, starting from the identity of the Groups and the specific ways in which they carry out the mission.

In such a setting the richness and effectiveness of the **differences** is preserved within a deeper and more substantial communion.

14.

### **Educating by evangelizing, evangelizing by educating.**

This is a second formulation of the apostolic commitment of Don Bosco's Salesian Family. We shall reflect on it later, in the chapter presenting the salesian spirituality in apostolic activity.

Mention of it serves to emphasize a further new element.

The unity of the salesian mission, complex as it is in its components, needs missionaries who live an interior unity.

In other words, they are able to open education, especially of the young, to evangelization.

You cannot claim to have educated if you stop halfway, either with respect to the content of what you put forward, or to the responsibility to which you want to give rise in the pupil, or to the substance of education and evangelization, reducing them to private and individual benefits.

Apostles must know how to open evangelization to the demands of education, recognizing the importance of providing a reply to real problems, so as not to make a proclamation remote from daily life.

### CHAPTER 3 FRONTIERS FOR THE EDUCATIVE AND PASTORAL MISSION OF THE SALESIAN FAMILY

15.

**Heart of the salesian mission: *da mihi animas, coetera tolle*.**

We start once again from the centre of salesian reality, by considering the story of Don Bosco, and by examining the experience of his apostolic Family.

*Da mihi animas* is like a milestone, with certain consequences.

In it is enshrined the whole of the salesian spirit. It is our salesian badge par excellence.

It highlights the demands of the mission.

It expresses the impetuous eagerness of the apostle.

It is apostolic charity, ready to lose everything in order to save all.

In the constitutional documents it is said, with reference to Don Bosco's words "*da mihi animas*", that we are "signs and bearers of the love of God".

In a more immediate form we could say: "*Everything, everything, even to giving our life for Christ and for the young*".<sup>1</sup>

16.

**Accepting the challenges of life.**

The ability to reach the heart of the life and daily experience of those to whom our mission is addressed means that we must enter into their reality, nowadays particularly contradictory and conflicting, to accompany them, share with them and help them.

The most pressing problems regarding the activity of believers arise from contemporary culture, and involve among other things:

- **the challenge of complexity.**

It concerns all of life's settings, including that of religious experience.

Many religions exist simultaneously in the same territory.

In this way the mission involves a relationship and encounter with movements and vital inspirations that are many and varied.

Young people are ever more frequently tempted to indifference and opposition to religion, with the risk of reducing faith to a private matter irrelevant to choices that must be made.

This leads to a moral disorientation which is a challenge to the salesian charism, committed in the Church to the education of young people to the life they must accept and to interpersonal relationships.

17.

- **social frailty of the family institution.**

Today's social and cultural context does nothing to foster the development of the natural family.

The Church reminds believers of some fundamental truths:

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<sup>1</sup> Card. Anastasio Ballestrero, Don Bosco prete per i giovani, Editrice ELLE DI CI, 1987, pag. 37.

- the development of society and of the Church itself depends on the family;
- the family is a workshop, the first place for human development and true solidarity;
- in God's design the family is a great gift, unique and blessed from its beginning, the cradle of life and love.

All who take their inspiration from Don Bosco feel challenged by the present situation, because they recognize in the family an educative function, the setting for preparing young people for love and the welcoming of life, the first school of solidarity between persons and peoples.

The members of the Salesian Family, lay and consecrated, assume a specific commitment for giving dignity and solidity to the family, so that it becomes in an ever more evident manner "a small Church, a domestic Church".

This is where we reach the new kinds of problem concerning the dynamics of procreation, the development of human life, and the manipulation of the human being.

"The enormous development of biological and medical science, united to an amazing power in technology, today provides possibilities on the very frontier of human life which imply new responsibilities".<sup>2</sup>

18.

- **a new awareness of the role of women in the Church and in society.**

The experience of salesian life came into being and is enriched by the significant and efficacious contribution of many women.

Don Bosco would not have been able to devise the Preventive System had it not been for the formation he received from Mamma Margaret.

Mary Mazzarello was able to put a feminine gloss on Don Bosco's experience.

The first Don Bosco Volunteers around Fr Philip Rinaldi inaugurated female consecrated secularity in the Salesian Family.

Today women belonging to the Salesian Family in its various constituent Groups are committed to the sharing of their natural feminine talent with their brothers.

Particular changes taking place in our world demand clarity concerning woman's dignity and her vocation. We may repeat here a statement of Vatican II in its conclusion:<sup>3</sup>

*"At this moment when the human race is undergoing so deep a transformation, women impregnated with the spirit of the Gospel can do so much to aid mankind in not falling".*

19.

- **the challenge of social communication.**

Technical instruments and means of information now immediately make public all that at one time was considered private.

Overcoming all physical barriers, communication and its contents, consumer models and proposals, invade the whole of life.

The new situation of the culture of communication, on the other hand, offers previously unknown possibilities for education and evangelization.

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<sup>2</sup> John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, n.38.

<sup>3</sup> *Messaggio alle Donne*, 8 dicembre 1965

Today social communication is the obligatory pathway for the spreading of culture and life models.

It is a significant part of the experience of youth.

Don Bosco had an intuitive understanding of its efficacy and left as a legacy to his spiritual family the task of exploiting social communication as a means of personal and communal growth, and at the same time a defence of the faith among the working classes.

20.

- **the new forms of solidarity.**

Interdependence between persons and peoples is a system which determines relationships in the contemporary world. It reaches the financial, cultural, political and religious fields.

The response to interdependence can be twofold and it creates two opposing attitudes: a seeking of dominion over others or evangelical service.

The latter is what we call solidarity.

“This is not a vague feeling of compassion or superficial tenderheartedness for the evils suffered by so many persons near or far.

On the contrary it is a firm and persevering determination to work for the common good: i.e. for the good of each and all, because all are truly responsible for everyone else”.

Solidarity is shown through:

- **salesian assistance**, when it is understood and carried out in line with the many attitudes linked with it.

Today it can also be called the “*ethics of being neighbourly*”; it commits one to making personal contacts, friendly and trusting relationships, for meeting the deepest expectations of young people , especially among the poor and lowly.

- **the civil, social and missionary volunteer movement**, now widespread among the young and adults.

It constitutes for the individual a possible significant vocation of commitment.

Understood as willingness to devote time to the advancement of promotional, educative and pastoral initiatives, it leads persons to the sharing of responsibility.

- **social and political commitment.**

This is a theme that needs a good deal of further explanation.

In the institutional texts of the Groups of the Salesian Family, there is habitually a statement that the Groups, to the extent that they are salesian, remain outside all political parties or organization.

In many areas there is a certain skepticism or absenteeism in respect of public matters on the part of believers.

But two criteria expressed by the Church must be kept in mind:

+ “The Church praises and esteems the work of those who for the good of men devote themselves to the service of the state and take on the burdens of this office”.<sup>4</sup>

+ “The lay faithful are never to relinquish their participation in ‘public life’, that is, in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the common good”.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Vatican II, Gaudium et Spes, n. 75.

<sup>5</sup> Christifideles Laici, n. 42.

- **the new evangelization.**

The process followed by the Church in preparing for the third millennium has indicated a commitment of fidelity to the Word of the Lord and to the vocation of individuals and of Movements.

The Salesian Family, attentive to the voice of the Spirit, has heard the call to a deeper pastoral and spiritual work:

- + for a personalization of the faith of those to whom our mission is directed and of the operators, through systematic catechesis,
- + for an explicit proclamation of both the message of the Gospel in daily life, and the practical demands that arise from the mystery of the incarnation,
- + for a fraternal communion in apostolate which coordinates the many resources of the salesian charism,
- + for accompanying the young who are looking for the meaning to give to their own life, even to the acceptance of the gift of God who calls with a vocation of special consecration to his Kingdom.

## CHAPTER 4 APOSTOLIC SPIRITUALITY

21.

### **Horizons of spirituality.**

From the charism stems a spirituality.

It gives a new vision of the reality, with the ability to read not only what is apparent in it, but also the underlying factors.

It fills the believers with a strength that enables them to give themselves to others with boundless enthusiasm in practical charity.

It suggests aspects of the mystery of God which become criteria for a relationship with him, with creation and history, with brothers and sisters.

It unifies the whole of existence, giving it a soul, a centre and a motivation.

22.

### **Evangelizing by educating and educating by evangelizing.**

This is the typical formula expressing the unity of the spirituality lived in the Salesian Family.

It is a different mode of expressing the Preventive System, not only in its pedagogical and methodological dimension, but also in that of spirituality.

It helps the understanding of spirituality as a gift, in so far as it indicates unity of life and action in the apostolate, as a fruit which is born of the Spirit and leads back to him.

It demands that we be witnesses of the educative force inherent in the Gospel, and at the same time we are called upon, as spiritual sons and daughters of Don Bosco to manifest the rich evangelizing qualities of education.

For this reason we say that we are “signs and bearers of the love of God” for the young, especially those most in need, and for the working classes.

This is a challenge today for all Groups of the Family, because there is a strong tendency to simplify the apostolic mission, reducing it at times to a mere promotional perspective, and at others to explicit evangelization and nothing else.

Education, on the other hand, requires us to give expression to what it has not yet been possible to express at a human and spiritual level.

Consideration of the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist as signs of grace and instruments of education is a new way of looking at them.

23.

### **Christ the Good Shepherd.**

The image of the Good Shepherd is applicable to all believers who practise animation towards others, particularly the poor and lowly.

And it points to two important perspectives of apostolic spirituality.

The *first*: in every kind of work and commitment we believers “**enter** in the name of Jesus”.

In other words, it implies that we place at the centre of our attention, concerns and endeavours the person as the supreme value to whom we dedicate ourselves without limit.



The apostle loves, loves totally, loves without prejudice or reserve: thus did the Good Shepherd deal with the lost sheep.

The *second*: to welcome and live by the Lord Jesus as the **only one** who gives fullness and meaning to daily life.

He is the place where life is saved from instability and emptiness.

He is the guarantee of freedom, because he leaves us free to enter or leave, as John puts it.

He is the example of solidarity, and offers us safe and green pastures.

Through our salesian experience, the image of the Good Shepherd guides the content, method and projects of the spiritual life.

It presents in a new way the understanding of the Preventive System, through: reciprocal and personal **knowledge**,

**follow-up**, shown by encouragement and optimism in difficulties linked with pastoral work, and adapted to the situations and circumstances of each one,

**mutual responsibility**, by inviting all to take up attitudes of sympathy and practical help with regard to strangers and outsiders.

24.

### **Dynamic pastoral charity.**

Dynamic pastoral charity is the heart of Don Bosco's spirit, the substance of salesian life, and the force behind the apostolic commitment of the members of the Salesian Family.

The term "**charity**" means more than the strengths of the human heart, the sympathy of educators, and the joy of knowing that one is being useful. It is as well a sharing in the very heart of Christ and in the foreseeing mercy of the Father.

The dream at the age of nine already contains this requirement.

"**Pastoral**" charity therefore is the participation in the interior soul of the Lord Jesus, in his mission of salvation, in the commitment shown by the Good Shepherd for the salvation of all.

In the heart of the salesian apostle this aspect strengthens his love for the Father and his glory, and his love for his brethren, and especially the most needy of them, who have to be saved.

"**Dynamic**" pastoral charity expresses the need to live at a level above the normal, with a liveliness and even a bit of foolishness which is wiser than human wisdom.<sup>6</sup>

Salesian charity follows the innovative dynamism typical of the young: it cannot stand routine, but looks for new aspects of prophecy typical of youth.

25.

### **Spirituality of action.**

Saint **Francis de Sales** is the recognized master of a new spirituality in the Church: the ecstasy of action and of life.

In committed Christian experience, three forms of ecstasy can be realized:

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<sup>6</sup> Cfr. 1 Cor. 1,25.

- the intellectual kind: it is born of admiration of God's design and work, and appears as light illuminating the path of faith;
- the affective kind: this finds its strength in the offering of one's life and talents to the Lord and his Kingdom, and is shown in the fervour and enthusiasm of love;
- that of action and of life: it has its origin in daily practical activity and is nourished by good works done with care, readiness and frequency.

For Saint Francis de Sales this latter is the highest form and is totally directed towards the perception of God's presence in the life of people and of the Church.

The Salesian Family, looking again at Don Bosco as the Founder of a spiritual family, has expressed the demands of spirituality and mysticism seen at a youthful level with a simple but demanding formulation: the **spirituality of daily life**.

26.

### **Salesian loving kindness.**

Loving kindness requires the overcoming of one's own selfishness, so as to be open to the needs of others.

It is a true exodus from oneself.

It demands a great love, a hope that is proof against all temptation, and a trust that will not give way in the face of difficulties.

The young are to be accepted at the point at which they are found, as regards human and religious experience.

We have to take them from where they are, so as to bring them to where they are called to be.

The internal forces for good, for justice and love which are in them, are looking for educators able to accept and develop them.

"The charity of Christ urges us on continually": repeat the salesian educator and pastor.

Loving kindness is a visible and human **sign** of the love of God.

It is the instrument for bringing him to birth and growth in the heart of all who are reached by Don Bosco's loving kindness.

It is the manifestation of God the loving Father, of Jesus who takes on himself the whole of human experience, of the Holy Spirit who loves and defends the poor as their friend.

Loving kindness goes hand in hand with reason, to avoid the possibility of us getting lost in mere emotion.

27.

### **Salesian prayer.**

We usually call it apostolic prayer.

Its exemplars for all of us are Saint Francis de Sales and Don Bosco.

It is not easy to judge Don Bosco by the traditional parameters of prayer.

He showed in his way of acting that he was very different from other saints: he combined extraordinary and continuous work with prayer that was deep but simple and not unduly prolonged.

In his own time many of his priestly colleagues were little edified by the kind and quantity of Don Bosco's work and the little evidence he showed of formal prayer. And yet he was encouraged by the Pope to continue in the same manner.

Three **characteristics** must be jointly considered in the story of Don Bosco as a holy and spiritual man:

- The **harmony** between the periphery and centre of his life.  
By periphery is to be understood his tireless work.  
The Centre is to be interpreted as his mystical recollection.  
Though ceaselessly concerned with so many business matters, the periphery caused no disturbance to the centre, and the centre caused no obstacles for the periphery.  
Harmony is the expression of a synthesis that has been achieved, as Francis de Sales had taught.
- the very **name** of the most significant work of his apostolic experience and as a master of the spiritual life: the Oratory.  
Don Bosco himself remarked that the word was meant to indicate very clearly the substantial purpose of the work of the oratories.  
It also expressed the foundation of his institution: prayer!
- the request made to his sons: perform well **the practices of a good Christian**.  
A right understanding of Don Bosco's words is possible in a context of God's Word.  
The practices of a good Christian cannot be reduced to only the external practices of piety.  
They provide us rather with a much broader horizon, that described by the evangelist Matthew in the judgement at the end of life.  
The practices of the good Christian are the seeking and fulfilment of God's will, and prayer and work for the building of his Kingdom.

28.

### **Mary Mother and Teacher.**

Many Groups of the Salesian Family make reference to Mary in their officially recognized title: Mary, Mary Immaculate, Mary Help of Christians, Queenship of Mary, Heart of Mary.

From his childhood, from his first dream at the age of nine, Don Bosco referred to Mary as a Mother and Teacher, because this is how she had been indicated by the Personage of the dream.

In his first educative experience, following the custom of his local Church, he attached himself to the Virgin of Consolation.

To feel themselves protected by a consoling Mother responded fully to the needs of the young who were "poor and in danger".

When he had gathered the boys stably together at Valdocco in an integral project of education and evangelization, and the universal Church was living the spiritual moment of the dogma, he proposed to them the image of Mary Immaculate.

She seemed to Don Bosco to be the most effective educator for youngsters who had to overcome the difficulties inherent in their human and Christian growth.

Finally, as the Founder of an apostolic Family, committed to the education and evangelization of the young and the poor, and after experiencing how “Mary had done everything” in his life, always giving him timely aid, he proposed and spread devotion to the Blessed Virgin under the title of Help of Christians.

Observing the picture Don Bosco wanted for the Basilica, and reading again the description he gave the painter who was to produce it, Mary Help of Christians appears in her mystery of Mother of the Church and in her role as educator and powerful help.

## CHAPTER 5 FORMATION TO THE APOSTOLIC MISSION

29.

### **Working in union.**

Communion is the first and fundamental apostolic work.

Apostles must be prepared for a mission shared with other workers.

To be alone in this environment is to court failure.

The gifts received must be cultivated, so that they will grow and multiply.

But it is indispensable to be able to adopt common projects and perspectives.

Every family becomes such when it succeeds in living in unity and becoming organized as an organic whole.

We are called together at the same time, and together we are sent.

Differences and specific characteristics are not destroyed, but are rather sustained and strengthened.

The dispersion of apostolic efforts and individualism in good works reduces gospel witness and operative efficacy.

In the Salesian Family there are working together priests and laity, religious and consecrated persons, men and women, young people and adults.

Each one must learn to recognize himself in the multiplicity of relationships, build them in fraternity and leave room for the charisms of others.

The good of the young and the working classes is something that rises above and beyond concerns about the growth and image of the individual groups.

30.

### **Formation together.**

The criterion in salesian life is that of making of experiences the content of formation.

We point out two levels of formation together, while recognizing that there are many other possibilities.

- A theoretical level.

1° - Learn to **think together**, so as not to reduce reality to one's own point of view.

In other words:

- overcome selfishness and individualism in the organization of action;
- overcome the fear of having to discuss and compare with others;
- concentrate on the good of those to whom the work is directed, rather than on the success of the work itself;
- decentralize on yourself so as to concentrate on others.

2° - Arrange matters so that you can **work together**.

In other words:

- the various Groups of the Salesian Family should take up the commitment of a practical application of what is contained in this *Common Mission Statement*. And so they should:
- meet together;
- consider, in particular, the good of the young and of people in general;
- find a common field of action, as far as possible, for an effective apostolic and educative project.

- A practical level.

The indications that follow are only examples. Life is very much richer.

Creativity is still a precious result of fidelity to Don Bosco.

It is traditional in many places to live the following in common:

- spiritual exercises
- summer schools
- days of retreat
- courses for animators
- schools of apostolic prayer
- days of reflection ...

31.

**Be open to the personal and social contexts of the young.**

The apostolic mission is realized in the ability to reach the hearts of the individuals and the substance of their daily experience, recognizing the needs and demands of different social and cultural contexts.

*"Like what the youngsters like, so that they will learn to like what we like!"* Don Bosco would still repeat at the present day.

Love can never be considered and lived in a merely instrumental manner, as though to captivate the other person and draw him into one's own world.

It is rather the eloquent expression of the incarnation of the Lord who loves human realities, enters them as a dynamic force in the story of the individual and the world, and propels them towards complete fulfilment.

The apostle must be able to adapt.

To cast off judgements and prejudice, to overcome personal sensitivity so as to welcome all others, to share the problems, outlook and expectations of the young and people in general, is to realize the inculturation which the Church asks for today of all missionaries.

32.

**Learn a method of collaboration.**

Educative and apostolic activity has its own internal laws which must be respected, especially when many operators are called upon to intervene.

Learning how to practise these laws takes up a substantial time of the formation of the members of the different Groups.

- The first law is that of **coordination**.

Convergence of forces in view of a concrete objective is never something automatic. It needs to be foreseen and programmed.

For effective coordination, each one should know exactly

- the problem to be tackled,
  - the practical possibilities for an effective solution,
  - and should have the will to give and to receive.
- The second law is that of **reciprocity**.  
Giving and receiving are not to be considered in a one-way sense, as though some are always called to give, and others always to receive.  
Reciprocity is
    - welcoming what the other person gives,
    - recognizing the other's value,
    - collaboration offered with skill and ability.
  - The third law is that of **shared responsibility**.  
It is a consequence of the two preceding laws, and stems from the ability to accept a primary responsibility and fulfil it.

To take up an apostolic responsibility is never a form of domination.

It is always a service to be rendered to God's Kingdom.

It means recognizing the responsibility of others, leaving elbow-room for all so that they can play an active part in the common design.

33.

### **A specific role for the priest formator.**

The Second Vatican Council presents priests as guides and educators of the people of God.

It writes: "*Ceremonies however beautiful, or associations however flourishing, will be of little value if they are not directed toward the education of men to Christian maturity*".<sup>7</sup>

And it justifies the statement: "*Priests therefore, as educators in the faith, must see to it either by themselves or through others that the faithful are led individually in the Holy Spirit to a development of their own vocation according to the Gospel, to a sincere and practical charity, and to that freedom with which Christ has made us free*".<sup>8</sup>

In this way the salesian priest is called to his most significant responsibilities in the sector of formation.

The Word of God, the sacraments and particularly the Eucharist, the service of unity and charity represent the greatest treasure of the Church.

Paraphrasing some words of the Council, we may say that it is not possible to bring about the spiritual formation of an apostolic family other than by taking as its root and stem the celebration of the sacred Eucharist, which must therefore be the starting point for any education tending to form the spirit of a family.<sup>9</sup>

The Groups of the Salesian Family have always shown this need for formation, and they put it forward once again through the present document.

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<sup>7</sup> Presbyterorum Ordinis, n. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid..

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Ibid.



## CHAPTER 6 COMMUNION IN THE SALESIAN APOSTOLIC MISSION

34.

### **Horizons of pastoral communion in the Salesian Family.**

Communion is all important from a **vision** shared around two elements:

- the significance of an apostolic mission and
- the awareness of a priority within the broad apostolic field left to us by Don Bosco.

The **mission**, in the language of our Salesian Family, is **specified and determined** by a series of considerations, such as:

- those to whom our apostolic activity is addressed,
- the general and particular content of our work,
- the spirit that animates our activity and pastoral options,
- the specific and original areas programmed,
- the structures and works which express, sustain and give a concrete expression to our pastoral presence and activity,
- the educational and family atmosphere created in the activities.

Hence the mission, for us, does not consist only in material activity.

Moreover, the Salesian Family has a clear and convinced **awareness** that

- young people, especially those in greater need, and the ordinary people have a prior part in the salesian apostolic legacy,
- our educative and pastoral presence among those whom the Holy Spirit entrusts to our care is a significant part of the salesian charism.

35.

### **Communion in pastoral autonomy.**

Apostolic communion is to be understood as a strengthening of the specific characteristic and autonomy of each Group in the fraternal communion of the family.

1. We reassert the **autonomy** of the Groups.

We are speaking here of apostolic autonomy, and not only of that which is spiritual.

It is not a matter of uniformity of intervention by everyone: all doing the same thing!

Nor are we seeking a levelling out of differences, which would only lead to confusion and pastoral uncertainty: with everyone doing everything!

It is a matter of coordinating gifts: each inserts its own contribution harmoniously into a project. Each has its own sphere!

The Groups are not identical with one another, either as regards their internal structure, or their practical apostolic ability.

2. We consider the **originality** of each Group as important.

The rich nature of the salesian charism is manifested more completely and attractively when the characteristics of each Group are seen together.

The complexity of today's field of education and the integral growth of the young propel us towards creativity, and at the same time towards convergence.



It is the right of young people to be able to make use of a specific service of each Group.

It is a distinctive example of the rich nature of the Church.

Communion in autonomy is something to be sought after if we are to be effective in our activity and multiply the forces at work for the benefit of the young.

36.

### **Objectives of pastoral communion.**

The Groups are called upon to spread, with the values of the Gospel of Christ, the characteristic traits of the salesian charism.

The latter belongs to the entire Family.

It cannot therefore be the concern of only certain Groups.

All, and even the individual members, are personally responsible for the animation and promotion of the spiritual legacy they have received.

We all accept therefore, in the different geographical places where we work, and in the different cultural contexts in which life has placed us, the responsibility:

- of an **educative concern** in today's context.  
We help to make recognized the frailty and the strength inherent in a special manner in the education of the young;
- of the **Preventive System**.  
Reason, religion and loving kindness are still, and perhaps even more than yesterday, indispensable supports for a society that is more human and more the measure of the new generations;
- of the **salesian spirit**.  
Salesian humanism, with its respect for the person, even the simplest and lowly; with trust in his continual growth when he has an educator at hand; with the encouragement for all those who are looking for a meaning in life, is the harbinger of a new civilization of love;
- of the **salesian movement**.  
The need is well known to group together around realities which are significant for those who accomplish them and those who benefit from them.  
Don Bosco used to involve many people in his educative plans; at every level he asked them for care and attention for his boys.  
The broad salesian movement and its linkage with so many forces are offerings useful to all.

37.

### **Organization of apostolic communion**

The present document now awaits the test of experience.

The various indications in the text need to be read again locally, to study their possible practical application.

Each Group, in preparing its own program, should consider the aspect of collaboration and the possible forms of its realization.

One may think of collaboration and shared responsibility:

- between two or more Groups who share the need and demand for a common project for the poor of a certain area;
- between all the Groups living and working in the same territory, if it be seen that this would be useful and apostolically effective.

Frequent communication between the Groups should never be lacking, because it is the premise for reaching shared apostolic responsibility.

## CONCLUSION

38.

### **In praise of the Trinity.**

*“Through Christ, with Christ and in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honour is yours, almighty Father, for ever and ever”.*

Every day as conscious and committed believers, we renew in the Eucharist our faith in the Lord’s work, and offer him our praise.

The Salesian Family reconfirms its awareness of living and working in the Church, making its modest but original contribution, so that *“hallowed be your Name, your Kingdom come, your Will be done”*.

The spiritual preparation for the third millennium, wanted and guided by the Church, has shown all Christians the essence of true life: that which derives from the Father, is manifested in the Son and is sustained by the Spirit.

To go back to our Trinitarian roots is to understand the urgent need of communion and the apostolic mission for enlarging the circle of sonship and fraternity.

We believe in the love of God, and so we love to spread it.

**Rome, 15 November 2000.**

## INDEX

### PRELIMINARY

#### **Chapter 1**

##### THE SALESIAN FAMILY IN THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

1. The Church for a new evangelization
2. The action of God's Spirit.
3. The Groups of the Salesian Family committed in the ecclesial mission.
4. Dimensions of the apostolic commitment of the Family of Don Bosco.
5. A mission particularly suited to lay people.
6. The Preventive System.

#### **Chapter 2**

##### THE MISSION OF THE SALESIAN FAMILY IN THE NEW RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

7. Apostolic commitment challenges the Salesian Family.
8. Upright citizen and good Christian.
9. Salesian humanism.
10. Commitment for the human person at the present day.
11. Effectiveness in the local area.
12. Gradual seeking of the integral objective.
13. Complementarity in the convergence of forces.
14. Educating by evangelizing, evangelizing by educating.

#### **Chapter 3**

##### FRONTIERS FOR THE EDUCATIVE AND PASTORAL MISSION OF THE SALESIAN FAMILY

15. Heart of the salesian mission: da mihi animas, coetera tolle.
16. Accepting the challenges of life.
17. the challenge of complexity.
18. social frailty of the family institution.
19. a new awareness of the role of women in the Church and society.
20. the challenge of social communication.
21. the new forms of solidarity.

#### **Chapter 4**

##### APOSTOLIC SPIRITUALITY

22. Horizons of spirituality
23. Evangelizing by educating and educating by evangelizing.
24. Christ the Good Shepherd.
25. Dynamic pastoral charity.
26. Spirituality of action.
27. Salesian loving kindness.
28. Salesian prayer.
29. Mary Mother and Teacher.

## **Chapter 5**

### **FORMATION TO THE APOSTOLIC MISSION**

- 30. Working in union.
- 31. Formation together.
- 32. Be open to the personal and social contexts of the young.
- 33. Learn a method of collaboration.
- 34. A specific role for the priest formator.

## **Chapter 6**

### **COMMUNION IN THE MISSION**

- 35. Horizons of pastoral communion in the Salesian Family.
- 36. Communion in pastoral autonomy.
- 37. Objectives of pastoral communion.
- 38. Organization of apostolic communion

## **CONCLUSION**

- 39. In praise of the Trinity.