

**INSTITUTE OF THE DAUGHTERS OF MARY HELP OF
CHRISTIANS**

THAT THEY MAY HAVE LIFE AND HAVE IT TO THE FULL
Guidelines for the educational mission of the FMA

Dedication

*To the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians
To the lay women and men,
who live Salesian Spirituality
with fidelity and love,
To the young people
and to all who love life.*

At the age of nine, young John Bosco had a dream that was stamped on his mind and heart.

He saw a vast playground where a large number of boys had gathered. They were not just playing, but also cursing. He threw himself among them, trying to silence them by force. Suddenly a majestic man appeared beside him, his face radiant with light, and said to him:

«You must win over these friends of yours not with blows but with gentleness and kindness...»

Confused and afraid, John replied that he was only a poor boy and asked how he could educate them. The mysterious person replied:

«I will give you a Teacher under whose guidance you will be able to become wise and without whom all wisdom is foolishness».

The dream came true and inspired the mission of Don Bosco and of all those who follow his spirituality and method.

(Cf. John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales from 1815 to 1855*, 18-19)

From her teens Maria Domenica Mazzarello cultivated a burning desire to give herself to others. A mysterious voice shaped her whole life: *«I entrust them to you»*.

This entrustment became an educational mission among poor and abandoned girls.

(Cf. *Cronistoria of the Institute I*, 90)

PRESENTATION

I am happy to present to every Daughter of Mary Help of Christians and to our educating communities, the *Guidelines for our Educational Mission*. They follow the same lines chosen by the Congregation in recent General Chapters and in our Formation Plan, *Rooted in the Covenant*.

The title: *That they may have life and have it to the full* expresses our intention of focusing on what young people are searching for, at times without even knowing it.

In an era marked by challenges and delusions, but also by strong signs of hope, a clear and passionate conviction is emerging in the Institute, that the charism of Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello can still respond to young people's search for meaning.

The Church, home and school of communion, challenges us to live and proclaim the Gospel of hope and of life in a new way. Together with all those who share the mission of education with us, we want to re-express the joy and enthusiasm of proclaiming Jesus.

Faithful to the *da mihi animas cetera tolle*, we live our passion for Christ and for humanity as a commitment to be signs of the foreseeing love of God among young people, while promoting the human qualities of peace and justice.

The text offers essential *guidelines* that will have to be translated into appropriate programmes for the concrete situations of age, family and social environment, culture and religion.

These *guidelines* are meant to accompany the process of inculturation of the charism in various contexts, acting as points of reference that will guide our mission and offer inspiration, motivation and criteria.

Certain fundamental considerations have guided the formulation of this text:

The Gospel vision of life as gift and task aims at emphasising the intrinsic vocational dimension of the educating mission, re-affirms the choice of being at the service of life, where a culture of death often prevails, and invites us insistently to become witnesses to the fullness of humanity that Jesus manifested in his life.

Our anthropological frame of reference is rooted in the mystery of the redemptive Incarnation of Christ. He assumed human reality and brought it to fulfilment, making us all sons and daughters of God. Our mission finds its justification in this unified vision of the person and of their growth process even in multifaith and multicultural contexts.

Wherever we work in a genuine Salesian spirit, education and evangelisation, pedagogy and pastoral work are harmonised within the Preventive System, in which the aspects of *culture, Gospel, society* and *communication* converge.

The *Guidelines* identify some strategies that are priorities if we are to respond satisfactorily to the challenges of our times: formation of FMA and laity together, accompaniment of young people, the Salesian Youth Movement, volunteering and co-ordination for communion.

The educating community, animated by the family spirit, is an effective way to educate when it mirrors the criteria that characterise a Salesian environment. Faithful to the charism of our Founders, the educating community is capable of discovering seeds of hope even in challenges and commits itself to a journey of self-formation.

The multicultural and multifaith context, which was rare at the time of the publication of the *Unified Youth Pastoral Project (1985)*, is the cultural background against which these *guidelines* were written. It challenges our educational presence in various countries because it calls for a new kind of youth ministry.

The direct proclamation of Jesus, a central reality of the text, emerges not as one experience among many to be proposed to the young people, but as the fundamental experience that gives

meaning to human life. The intended goal of every educational intervention is to facilitate meeting Christ in everyday life so that his presence may be a leaven that transforms society.

Mary of Nazareth is seen as mother and educator who contributes to developing the image of Christ present in each person since creation. As mother of life and virgin of the *magnificat*, she inspires our pastoral action and calls us to enter into solidarity with those who live in poverty and difficulty and are marginalised and without hope.

The guidelines call us to revitalise the Salesian spirituality and educational style inspired by the Christian humanism of St. Francis of Sales. This spirituality leads us to live in an attitude of love given and received in everyday life, to witness to optimism in our vision of reality, to welcome differences, to trust in interpersonal relationships and to be open to dialogue and co-responsibility. Aware that in listening to each other we can discover paths to unity that respect diversity of culture and spiritual traditions, we want to create the parable of communion together – young people, FMA and laity – allowing ourselves to be led by the Spirit.

During these years young people, FMA and lay people, together with competent persons from different continents who are involved in education in various ways, have all shared in the reflection of the General Council and the Youth Ministry Sector.

We offer all of them our deepest gratitude for the contribution they have given to the preparation of these *guidelines*, which now need to be reflected on, enriched and inculturated in the diverse settings.

My wish for all those who will be inspired in their educational action by this text is that it will strengthen their confidence in the younger generations and enhance the possibilities of education.

Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello were convinced that whoever loves young people also loves to see them joyful, and that one cannot live without joy. Cheerfulness - Maria Domenica reminds us – is the sign of a heart that loves the Lord very much (cf. *Letter* 60, 5).

Rome, December 8th 2005

Sr. Antonia Colombo
Superior General

INTRODUCTION

Faithful to the Gospel

1. From the beginning, the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (FMA) has been characterised by a strong commitment to communicate the Gospel to the younger generations. It has involved the educating communities¹ with whom it shares its educating project in this commitment. FMA and lay people have witnessed to the love of Christ for the poorest young people², expressing the same passion for evangelisation.

It has never given up and, like the Church, we feel that it is even more urgent today. The dynamic force of educational love urges us to reflect on the quality of our presence and of what we offer, in the light of the effect the present changing situation is having on people, families and institutions.

Reasons for searching for guidelines

2. Twenty years have passed since the publication of the *Youth-Centred Pastoral Project*³ and we are living in very different conditions, due to the huge changes resulting from globalisation and technological development.

The changes that are taking place are so great that we are called to discern how to listen and what kind of practical interventions to make in the world of youth.

Another motive that leads us to search for adequate guidelines for youth ministry today comes from the repeated requests of Sisters from all over the world. These were taken up by the XXI General Chapter,⁴ which identified the preparation of these guidelines as the responsibility of the General Council in collaboration with all the FMA.

This is therefore a new research to give fresh enthusiasm to our life, to that of the educating communities, to the settings in which we work and to the lives of young people.

The educational mission

3. In the educational experience of Don Bosco, of Maria Domenica Mazzarello and of the Congregation the gift of the charism is expressed in a style of life that bears the «stamp of a strong missionary impulse».⁵

Our mission gives a privileged place to the education of those who are poor and at risk. For this reason it involves all those who are committed to promoting integral formation. It assumes a specific form which, following the example of Mary, becomes a presence that collaborates with the Holy Spirit to help Christ grow in the hearts of the young people.⁶

Youth Ministry

4. The youth ministry of the Congregation of the FMA is the practical realisation of its educational mission. It is our typical way of expressing the Church's care for the younger generations, realised in time and space. It aims at the holistic growth of the person and educates to commitment as active citizens. It is a way of working that relates education to evangelisation

¹ In the text we have chosen to use the term educating community, in keeping with the *FMA Constitutions*. This choice does not exclude the use of the term *educative community* if it is considered more suitable to one's cultural context.

² The term young people is used in a global sense to refer to all those for whom we work, as was stated in the *Youth-Centred Pastoral Project* (cf. p. 8); cf. C 65.

³ Cf. FMA INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR YOUTH PASTORAL (Editors), *Youth-Centred Pastoral Project*, Rome, Istituto Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice, 1985.

⁴ Cf. In communion on paths of Gospel Citizenship. Acts of the XXI General Chapter of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Roma, Istituto FMA 2002, 53.

⁵ *Constitutions and Regulations*, Roma, Istituto FMA 1982, art.1 From now on we will use the abbreviation C followed by the number of the article.

⁶ Cf. C 7.

because it sees Christ as the basic reference point for building personality and for discerning the human and cultural values of the environment.

The *Guidelines for our educational mission* are inspired by a youth ministry that is attentive to the process of inculturation, in tune with life and open to hope.

Recipients and objectives of the text

5. The objective of these guidelines, which we have tried to write together, is to guide the operative choices of the FMA, members of the educating communities and young leaders. The aim is to keep alive the missionary drive, as well as confidence in being able to enter into communication, as a Salesian Family, with the younger generations in every context and situation. We want to give new enthusiasm to our educational mission and to our explicit proclamation of Jesus, by living the religious-laity relationship as an opportunity to show the signs of the Spirit present in reality and in the places of our everyday life. We make ourselves responsible for these signs and give witness to the fact that the Gospel gives fullness to human life

In dialogue with the contemporary situation

6. New opportunities and new difficulties challenge us to rethink the evangelical quality of our educational process. Education is not neutral. We are aware that it always needs to be seen in the light of the Gospel and within today's context, in order to provide adequate responses to the challenges:

- of life, ever more threatened from its inception to its natural completion;
- of the family, that fundamental human resource which, today, is subject to a multiplicity of problems and tensions and in need of support in its irreplaceable educational role;
- of poverty, with the dramatic reality of hundreds of millions of human beings who suffer because they lack the means for survival;
- of freedom, which, especially in a climate of relativism, highlights the need to be educated to choose responsibly;
- of peace that calls us to be active and convinced instruments of non-violence.⁷

Relativism: obstacle to education

7. Sharing in the journey of the Church in the new world context, we are called by the multifaith, multicultural and media dominated reality, and challenged to engage in intelligent and constructive dialogue. These phenomena, which are everywhere more and more evident, call for efforts in inculturation, in creativity and in re-thinking our educational programmes.

One particularly insidious obstacle to education is the massive presence of relativism in society and in culture. It does not recognise anything as definitive and makes self, with all its whims, the ultimate criterion for every choice.⁸

In this setting what suffers most are the dignity of the human person, the meaning and value of the family, proper relations between man and woman and everyday life.

Love of life and the desire that it be full and abundant for all urge us to identify priority strategies.

Directions for the continuation of our journey

Forming ourselves together

8. To fulfil our educating mission in the Salesian style today, in a unified and planned way, we feel that it is essential to continue the choices made in the *Plan of Formation of the FMA*. For this reason we adopt certain pastoral strategies that characterise the present *guidelines*.

⁷ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Discourse to the Diplomatic Corps, January 10th, 2005*, in *L'Osservatore Romano [Ital.]*, 10-11 gennaio 2005, 4-6.

⁸ Cf. J. RATZINGER, *Homily for the beginning of the Conclave, April 18th, 2005*, in *L'Osservatore Romano [Ital.]*, 19 aprile 2005, 6-7.

We have long given priority to identifying educational programmes for children, adolescents and young people. Now, without taking from the value of such programmes, we believe that it is urgently necessary to give priority to the *formation of the educators*. In this way we propose to create an environment of serious research, communication of intentions and educational passion. We believe, in fact, that forming ourselves together, sharing faith and mission within the *educating community* and networking with other members of the Salesian Family, helps growing people to participate actively in their own development and in the search for the common good.

Accompaniment, SYM, volunteering

9. Another choice is to place ourselves within the broad ecclesial horizon of *new evangelisation*, which is based on the direct proclamation of Christ, the foundation of our hope. Meeting Him sheds new light on the mystery of human life as gift and task, a call of love and a response to a vocation to love.

For this reason we believe that youth ministry is *vocational by nature* since it is by nature directed towards discerning God's plan of love for each one's life and history.⁹ We therefore give priority to the personal accompaniment of young people, to the Salesian Youth Movement (SYM) and to volunteering as genuine places of vocational growth and responsible commitment to Gospel citizenship.

Keeping God's plan for each person always to the fore in our minds leads us to learn from Mary who, as Mother, is called to bring Christian identity to birth in each one of her children.¹⁰

Co-ordination for communion

10. To fulfil our educational mission we adopt *co-ordination for communion* as our style of animation. In this way we seek unity around charismatic choices, while we value pluralism in pastoral methods. This style of co-ordination for communion presupposes the quality of our educational presence in the various situations. It gives priority to the involvement of people, the exchange of resources and co-responsible animation by FMA, young people and lay people who share our educational mission with us.

Translation into different contexts

11. The guidelines presented in this text are intentionally general and broad. They are meant to be inspirational. They re-propose the criteria of the *Youth-Centred Pastoral Project* and re-express them in the light of the present-day interpretation of the Preventive System. They lie somewhere between a declaration of principles and a pastoral plan and, while being in continuity with what has been expressed in other documents (*FMA Constitutions, Plan of Formation, Acts of General Chapters*), they re-launch these principles today from a pastoral point of view. For this reason they will need to be translated at the level of provincial and inter-provincial planning.

The guidelines offer elements for re-thinking our youth ministry in an organic and planned way, according to the Salesian style, with the characteristics of Mornese, of which we are trying to be ever more conscious interpreters.

Don Bosco's educational system was born in a limited geographic and historic setting yet it has succeeded in adapting to a variety of cultures. This is due to the creativity of the educational intervention of those who lived it. Today, too, we are called to inculturate the charism effectively in our environment.

*Panoramic view of the text*¹². The text opens with a reflection on the challenges that the *youth situation* poses for our educating communities in the context of globalisation. The parameters that specify our mission, at the beginning of this new millennium, require discernment that has as its

⁹ Cf. INSTITUTE OF THE DAUGHTERS OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS, *Rooted in the Covenant. Formation Plan of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*, Don Bosco Press, Inc., Philippines, 2000, 44.

¹⁰ Cf. *ivi* 36.

basic point of reference *the gift of preferential love for young people* in fidelity to the charism of don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello.

In keeping with the Incarnation, the educating community aims at the development of all the dimensions of the person, linking together *educational aspects* that are closely integrated: the cultural, evangelising, social and communications aspects.

In dialogue with the local culture and area, the educating community draws up an educational plan and adopts some *strategies*, within the framework of Christian humanism, that aim to build a just, peaceful, democratic society, in which differences are harmonised.

By offering the young people a variety of experiences, it encourages their ability to interpret everyday life and form relationships inspired by the Gospel.

Guiding the younger generations to *encounter Jesus*, by creating an *educational environment* rooted in the Preventive System, is the challenge to be faced in order to communicate the gospel of life.

Chapter 1

LIVING CONDITIONS IN A CHANGING WORLD

Education modelled on the style of Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello is capable of discovering enormous potential for good in young people and of guiding them towards goals of communion and sharing. It starts from a realistic awareness of the worldwide problems of growing impoverishment and of the domination of a media culture.

Therefore, reflecting on the educational process means taking into account the context in which one is called to live.

For this reason, it is important to have a framework for a critical reading of the world of youth in which, with few exceptions, we find the following characteristics: a multicultural society, parallel lives, a virtual world, plurality of belonging, fragility and the search for spirituality.

All these elements affect the educating community and embody one of the main challenges for the educational presence of adults, who are called to help young people to discover the path that leads to human and Christian maturity and to the identification.

The challenges of the contemporary world

Complex reality

13. We are living through a time of an all-pervasive and disturbing revolution, not just at a technological level or in some countries. Due to the enormous development of the biological sciences and genetic engineering, as well as the amazing power of technology, new possibilities and responsibilities are opening up.

These changes influence the content of our thoughts and the experience of everyday life. Political systems, convictions, moral attitudes and the choice of a life plan are all affected.

The human person is being put in question in a deeper way, on the biological level as well as in his/her self-awareness. The possibilities of science intervening in human life are disquieting. We see a dangerous imbalance between technology and ethical awareness.

Transformation of time and space

14. The great electronic network transforms the planet, and spreads the positive and negative elements of globalisation. Most of all, it reduces distance and reorganises time. The human categories of time and space have been modified. We speak of a fluid, liquid environment. This change produces an unprecedented break with the past and the future.

The divide between those who can use the new technologies and those who are excluded grows ever deeper, and contributes to making the poor ever poorer.

Today, more than ever, one cannot think of an educational pathway without taking account of the context in which one is called to live. So it is only by starting from this reality, from these challenges, that together with the young people, we can formulate programmes that are adequate for their life plan.

Framework for a critical reading of today

Parameters of the youth world

15. In a time of great complexity and of anthropological crisis, it is not possible to describe youth culture without making undue generalisations. It is not even possible to think of young people as a homogeneous age group. They can actually be very different, for a variety of reasons: individual, family, economic, cultural and religious.

However, being young at this time is marked by certain characteristics that influence, and at times determine, life. To be realistic and attentive educators, faithful to the charismatic ideas of Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello, it is necessary to know and reflect on these characteristics, because it is in the present situation that we live out our commitment to accompany the younger generations.

There is a world context, with its dynamism and its uncertainties, its possibilities and its risks, in which a powerful desire for peace and justice is emerging. There is a more immediate environment of everyday life, with its opportunities and its contradictions, its openness and its restrictions. In a climate of rapid change, interaction between the various levels and contexts becomes problematic, making each person's journey more uncertain. Accompanying young people means not only knowing their potential, their weaknesses and the contexts in which they live, but accepting to change with them. The following are some of the common aspects that are emerging.

The need for involvement

16. *Parallel lives*: a new and different way of organising time is one of the elements that characterise a large part of the world of youth. Daily life is marked by the prevalence of time spent outside institutions, outside the walls of the family, the school and places of worship.

Outside of study, work and religious experience, in many socio-cultural settings the best energies, creativity and expressions of life are lived in times and places other than the traditional, such as clubs, commercial centres, the streets, concerts. These are the new arenas that express the strong creativity of young people, their exuberant resources and the thirst for happiness that is ever present in the human heart, but which in every age, asks different questions in different situations. This type of parallel life takes place predominantly at night, where young people express their freedom, search for pleasure, amusement and company, away from the adult world.

We certainly cannot forget the children and adolescents in many countries, for whom the streets is their only home and who are forced to live on their wits, at risk of exploitation and violence of every kind, especially during the night. Time, in a life spent on the streets, is marked by the law of survival, by managing to get what one needs even through theft or deceit.

There are situations where young men and women experience time as nothing other than life without any occupation and without resources. This happens in the sprawling suburbs of big cities or, in a different way, in isolated villages, far from urban areas. Here, the younger generations are somehow reached by the media and find it more difficult to integrate the experiences of their own lives.

Those who want to educate, and who observe history with eyes of wisdom, see these signs as a call, an encouragement to go ahead, like Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello, and to offer attractive and valid proposals that involve the whole person whatever the environmental or cultural situation in which they find themselves.

From multicultural to intercultural relations

17. *Multicultural society*: the world has become a new type of system of interactions, with a new intensity that makes it very different from that of the past in which cultural exchanges were limited in time and place.

We all notice the phenomenon of widespread mobility. The great migrations within and outside various countries, meeting with people belonging to other cultures or religions in everyday situations, can prepare young people for a greater openness with regard to differences and lead to tolerance. The cultural, relational, territorial and community environment, in which the growth process is taking place, is the fruit of these movements and the cultural transformations they produce.

For this reason, an educational programme that helps to move from a multicultural situation to intercultural relations is a winning educational formula for positive integration, for the development of a culture of peace, for mutual enrichment and for responding to the educational needs of immigrant children and young people.

In some countries, most of the youth mobility is caused by the necessity to survive, to escape from war or poverty. In others, it is for study or for holidays and leads to knowledge, exchange of ideas, sharing, a more conscious openness to solidarity, facilitated by the phenomenon of the interdependence of various peoples.

A new kind of communication

18. *The virtual world*: people speak, ever more frequently, of *non-places* to indicate the environments where young people live. The massive presence of the electronic media, even in poor countries, the mobile phone, the radio, the TV, music, the playstation, magazines and comics are like an ocean in which young people navigate with ever-greater frequency.

In it they can absent themselves from reality, or they can use new ways of communicating that allow them to live in new situations, be involved in a multitude of encounters and experience intense emotions. The virtual communities that can develop in these *non-places* allow them to move out of solitude, to build different relationships. This is an extremely fast growing phenomenon that requires in-depth study. We cannot yet foresee the effect of these revolutionary changes on the lives of the younger generations, but in the area of education, the rise of this new form of communication and of contact with reality certainly has to be taken into account.

Resources and limits of multi-belonging

19. *Multi-belonging*: globalisation and localisation fuse in all parts of the world. This changes how citizens belong to their state. In particular, young people live a multiplicity of modes of socialisation, experience different forms of belonging and build their identity with many points of reference. They can be students and part-time workers. They can live away from home and maintain daily interaction with the family. They can attend the parish, the disco and the sports club at the same time.

The way in which young people participate in associations and in organised groups is characterised by fluidity. They move in and out with a certain ease. One notes discontinuity in attendance and their belonging does not always mean involvement. This is the case also in volunteer organisations which can become ways of exploring, and having many experiences, before making choices that define ones life in a binding, if not irreversible way.

Multi-belonging however can represent an antidote to egoistic closure within the family or friendship group and signal openness to different situations. Besides, the changes in the world of work today require people who are flexible, who have human gifts and competencies that can be used in every profession.

Uncertainty in choices

20. *Uncertainty regarding the future*: this is the common denominator present in every environment where people live and work. The growth of young people is marked by difficulty in planning the future. The relationship between study and work is precarious. Professional success, social recognition and economic stability are all uncertain. All this uncertainty affects feelings and decisions.

The factors that produce stability in individual and social life (work and family) are put in crisis by factors of social exclusion. This results in uncertainty in the face of definitive choices. It is difficult to think of any kind of settling down without economic security and without stable employment. Feelings also suffer when it is impossible to define a secure path for one's life.

Professional training, reached after much effort and commitment, is often of little use as soon as it has been acquired. This is true, not only in the West, where uncertainty is seen in the difficulty in entering the labour market, but there is even greater instability in countries where poverty prevents people even thinking of a viable future.

The situation in rural communities and of those who live in rundown suburbs leads an ever-growing number of boys and girls to leave their families and seek their fortune. Many undertake a journey where hope and uncertainty alternate constantly and little by little turn to disillusionment and broken dreams that make it difficult to cope with life.

This widespread sense of uncertainty can develop into ethical relativism, exasperated subjectivism that leads to a lack of planning, being locked into the present, fragmentation of identity and an unreal experience of time and space.

However there are some positive aspects to precariousness, which can become a resource. It can stimulate research, the desire to put one's qualities and capacity for adaptation to the test, the need to change the environment and the opportunity for useful encounters, for building relationships with various people and for greater flexibility.

Uncertainty in choices

21. *The search for spirituality*: precisely because of this uncertainty there is a need, especially among the younger generations, to put their hope in a more stable and meaningful reality.

The religious search is no longer hidden, as it was at one time, but is admitted and spoken of in groups. It is not yet a request for faith, but openness to the desire for God, often identified with beauty, happiness, love, solidarity.

This search, of itself very positive, can lead to the risk of putting everything on the same level. This results in a spiritual nomadism that leads to the undifferentiated acceptance of radical and

fundamentalist forms of religion, New Age and Christianity, Islam and Buddhism, esoteric doctrines and sects.

New ways of looking at God are developing that are far from the vision revealed by Jesus. The image of God that is becoming established is often pantheistic.

These different kinds of image and of search for the sacred challenge adults and the Christian community to proclaim the Christian message in an understandable way, in harmony with the expectations of young people. They need to seek language and symbols that can mediate the sacred and in particular the proclamation of the Gospel.

What kind of Education?

A humble and shared search

22. In a culture characterised by a profound anthropological crisis, it is not easy to understand what steps are necessary to provide a quality proposal of life especially for Christians, so they can meet Jesus, the author of life. An attitude of humble searching is needed, aware that the experience of human limitation can condition and at the same time stimulate every existential project, aimed at reaching happiness. Proclaiming the Lord Jesus is not the work of specialists but of the whole community.

Christian life, in fact, has deep community roots, and the spirituality of communion, which John Paul II put at the centre of the Church's teaching, simply refers us back to these roots that have their foundation in God, who lovingly reveals himself in human history as Father, Son and Breath of Life.¹

Presence of adults and the creation of the environment

23. The great challenge that the present youth and cultural situation poses for educators is to renew our understanding of the presence of the adult as educator and as capable of working in harmony with others.

This is needed to respond to a serious difficulty that young people express, that is the feeling of being abandoned, left to themselves, of not having credible reference points, guides who encourage and support them, adults ready to «waste time» with them. Even in families, at times, silence and indifference prevails, responsibility is left to others and this can increase the aggressiveness of children and adolescents.

In a society in which family relationships are in crisis and the phenomenon of street children is increasing, the Salesian community, animated by a profound sense of Church, feels it a duty to provide a home for the homeless. They commit themselves to creating an educational environment in which one can experience the family spirit, characterised by acceptance, trust and co-responsibility.

As Christians, we have the treasure of the Gospel message and the task of translating it into today's language.

The art of listening and communication

24. Listening is the first attitude required in order to enter into contact with young people. Knowing how to listen to their questions, even when not spoken, means creating the possibility of a common journey in search of a response that will never be categorical or definitive, but always open and capable of deeper understanding. Proclamation and accompaniment begin with this silent and loving attention to unexpressed needs.

Linked to listening, is the need for communication. Young people express their desire for contact and for dialogue, through every channel, whether face to face or through the news media. These have the advantage of eliminating distance and of reaching even the *non-places* where the majority of young people live, beyond the oratories, youth centres, schools, etc.

¹ Cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte* 42.

Through listening and communicating we can guarantee continuity in time, we can be present in the favoured times of the youth world and we can enter the different 'spaces' in their lives, that would, otherwise, be impossible to reach.

Search for meaning

25. According to the Salesian tradition, the heart of education is the passion for young people, the art of showing them trust, of loving what they love, of accompanying them in their search for meaning. Today this search has become particularly complex, given the emphasis on subjectivism. Everyone tends to search only within themselves for the meaning of their existence. Instead of facing a reality that represents the ultimate goal of human life, they choose to base their lives on an individualistic perception, born of the experience of the here and now.

This very situation of existential relativism often gives rise to the need to seek a base that is open to wider horizons. It is the task of education to accompany this deep search, in order to build that profound sense of reality that leads to fullness of life.

26. Faced with this requirement, one sees the necessity for the solid formation of educators, based on the Preventive System as a spirituality and method: preparation together in mutual enrichment between religious, lay people and the young people themselves.

A complex society requires the critical elaboration of events and messages to identify the causes of political and socio-religious phenomena. We cannot reduce ourselves to simple observers in this area.

Networking

Together for active citizenship

27. No one can climb a mountain alone. The roped party of mountaineers was an image dear to Don Bosco. He involved every kind of person in his educational work: from the cobbler to the baker, to the minister. Today networking has become the only way to operate on all levels, especially in education.

However, it is notable that while multinationals, political parties and banks look for alliances for economic gain or power, it is harder to find networking and exchange of ideas and experiences between educational agencies. Sometimes they prefer to work alone rather than share and go ahead together. They choose to follow their own insights rather than accept delays and changes of direction that could give new assurance to their journey.

For some time now, in our Congregation, we have been encouraged to work in dialogue and in communion with Church communities, different groups of the Salesian Family, civil society and, above all, with those involved in education. We believe in the community dimension of youth ministry.

We are aware that working together - with an open sense of mission - leads us to respond to the concrete demands of young people and to plan new forms of service. We also believe that this way of thinking and acting influences the capacity for involvement of the laity and young people, especially those most sensitive and ready to become evangelisers of their peers.

Action is a hope-filled verb: a dynamic virtue that is capable of planning and moving towards new horizons for the future.

Working together, besides being enriching, is certainly positive because, with everyone's contribution, it favours the integral dimension of education to which we have been continually called by our Founders.

Chapter 2

THE GIFT OF A PREFERENTIAL LOVE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

The massive changes through which we are living require discernment regarding our type of presence among young people and the poor.

The point of reference for this is our charismatic memory, a source from which we can draw clarity and convergence of meaning, acquire a passion for education and make operative decisions. It is characterised by the gift of a preferential love for poor and abandoned young people, and marked by a missionary thrust that embraces all cultures.

The criterion of the Incarnation leads us to place our educational mission in the context of the vision of Christian salvation, as the integral salvation of the whole person and of every person. This criterion is the foundation of education according to the Preventive System, both as an educational method and a spirituality. It is an open system that is capable of taking root in different cultural contexts.

In the light of the Incarnation of Christ, FMA youth ministry places the growing person at the centre, that they may have life to the full, that is, may develop in all the dimensions that go to make up the person. This goal is reached by developing a number of closely linked aspects. The cultural aspect leads one to read and interpret reality in a way that promotes a culture of, and for, life. The evangelising aspect promotes a harmonious and fruitful integration of faith and everyday experience. The social aspect is directed towards promoting active citizenship and solidarity among young people. The communications aspect is important to qualify mutual and intergenerational relationships and to deal adequately with the cultural change caused by the new technologies and news media.

28. As FMA, the source of our preferential love for young people is the love of Jesus Christ, who moved Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello to give a practical response to the deepest aspirations of the poorest young people. In the Church, in communion with the other groups of the Salesian Family and with the members of the educating communities, we rejoice in and feel responsible for keeping our gaze always fixed on this source.

THE CHARISMATIC SOURCE OF OUR EDUCATIONAL MISSION

Mary our inspirer and teacher

29. One certainty that directs and accompanies every FMA and every educating community is that Mary, Mother of Jesus the Good Shepherd, is at the origin of our Institute. She guided the lives of Maria Domenica Mazzarello and of Don Bosco and continues to be the inspirer of every initiative in favour of young people.¹

For Don Bosco, as for us, the dream at nine years is a precious mandate. Jesus gave us his Mother as helper, and as teacher of an educational method. Sure of the educative presence of Mary and docile to her invitation to «do whatever he tells you» (Jn. 2:5), we allow her to take us by the hand so that, day by day, we may learn her educational method, which is capable of transforming our life and that of the young people.

Borgoalto: a mandate that guided a life

30. The mysterious voice that Maria Domenica heard in the vision on Borgoalto: «I entrust them to you» has the power of a lasting mandate. That inner voice was, for Maria Domenica, an inspiration that nourished her dream of total dedication to young people, urging her to follow new paths in order to realise an educational vocation, which within a short time attracted other young people to become involved in the same project. What Maria Domenica shared with her friend Petronilla is a simple and clear synthesis of what she intended to do: «keep them from harm, make them good, and teach them especially to know and love God».² She was choosing evangelising education as a charismatic task.³

Don Bosco's Preventive System

31. Like Maria Domenica Mazzarello, we share the charism of Don Bosco, expressed in educating according to the Preventive System, in a feminine way. This is both an educational method and a spirituality. It is a truly open system, capable of taking root in the most diverse cultural contexts and of gaining support even among those who do not belong to the Christian faith.

The Preventive System is formulated as reason, religion and loving kindness, principles that indicate a harmonious vision of the person, gifted with reason, affectivity, will and openness to the transcendent. In this sense, the Preventive System is an example of Christian educational humanism, where the centrality of the faith is indissolubly united to an appreciation of the values present in history.

At a methodological level, our educational project aims at guiding young people towards choosing the good and orientating their affective resources towards the gift of self, helping them to gradually overcome adolescent self-centredness and accompanying them towards a transforming encounter with God in Christ.

Holiness: An everyday journey

32. The Preventive System, as an original synthesis of education and evangelisation, directs young people towards becoming «good Christians and honest citizens». This goal is sought within a

¹ C 4.

² Cf. *Cronistoria, Chronicles of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christian*, edited by Sr. Giselda Capetti, Don Bosco Publications, New Rochelle, New York, 1981, Vol. I, 91-92.

³ Cf. *Acts of General Chapter XXI*, 37

community where all participate, though with different roles and areas of competence, in a journey of holiness marked by joy, sharing and everyday effort, and nourished by the Eucharist and by trust in Mary our Help.

Mornese as an “educational workshop”

33. The educational tradition started in Mornese by Maria Domenica Mazzarello and the first FMA was a genuine «mystagogy», the art of leading people in the ways of the Spirit towards configuration with Christ. This tradition is for every FMA and for the educating communities an important and ever relevant way of living and inculturating the Preventive System.

The first community of Mornese was stamped with a simple, serene, family atmosphere. This favours the building of authentic relationships, attracts young people and predisposes them to listening. Every educator lives in mutual relationship with young people, giving the best of herself and of her human and professional competence. Valuing the contribution of each one facilitates unity of educational practices, which aim at facilitating the development of young people as Christians and citizens.

Beyond the boundaries

34. The gift of preferential love for young people is marked by a missionary thrust that was present from the beginning. Through it the charism is capable of spreading into the various cultures with which it comes in contact. A few years after the foundation of the Congregation, the FMA crossed the borders of Piedmont and Italy to go to Uruguay, Tierra del Fuego and Patagonia (Argentina). Even though they had still not completely mastered Italian, they set about learning other languages. In a climate in which illiteracy among women fostered discrimination, the educational passion acquired in Mornese urged them to work for the integral promotion of young women, especially the poorest.

Witnesses to love

35. The missionaries were aware of having received a charism which demanded to be lived and inculturated with the creativity and power of love. Guided by the criteria for public instruction and for professional formation, they started boarding schools and festive oratories, they adopted a style of life marked by poverty, charity and joy that made them witnesses of patient love, of a spirit of sacrifice and which displayed strong community involvement.

The criterion of the Incarnation

Jesus of Nazareth: God with a human face

36. The educational project proper to the preventive System is a «spiritual inheritance inspired by the charity of the Good Shepherd»⁴ contemplated in the event of the Incarnation.⁵ This mystery shows forth God communicating himself through a profound sharing in the human experience that expresses radical solidarity.⁶

The Incarnation of Christ, «culminating in the Paschal Mystery and the gift of the Spirit, is the pulsating heart of time, the mysterious hour in which the Kingdom of God came to us»⁷ and he freely revealed himself as communion, Lord of life and of history. Jesus Christ introduces us to the reality of the Trinity and reveals God’s plan of salvation for humanity.

Everyday life: the place of encounter with God

⁴ C 1

⁵ Cf. *A youth-centred pastoral project*, 23

⁶ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 32ff.

⁷ *Novo Millennio Ineunte* 5.

37. In the face and in the word of Jesus the transcendent and mysterious God became close and understandable. The grace of his humanity gives meaning to our existence and makes daily life the place of meeting with God. From this comes the importance of the everyday, which must always be kept in mind in educational interventions. It is there that life is lived in concrete, in the reality of every moment. If it is lived with love, everyday life becomes the linchpin of the design of salvation dreamed for each one from all eternity.

The incarnation of the Word of God made man, his human experience, his closeness to every person, teach us to be attentive to every young person in the reality of their life situation, their relationships and the environment and culture that characterise them. The young people challenge us to qualify ourselves to face the challenges of cultural change and to be a significant presence in the various contexts.

Life in the Spirit

38. The Incarnation calls us, besides, to be mediations of the dignity and vocation of the person, admitted to the intimacy of the life of the Trinity,⁸ and redeemed from sin. Thus each one can freely accept his/her own vocation and develop it, bringing it to fullness through the fruitful action of the Holy Spirit.

All of this sheds light on the Christian vision of salvation as the unique and integral salvation of the whole person and of all of humanity, the intimate link that exists between evangelisation and human promotion.⁹

Credible witnesses of the Church

39. As part of the Church, we feel that we are called in the world and for the world, with the task of being salt and leaven. We are the assembly of solidarity and of sharing, whose characteristic is to become neighbours to young people and to all peoples. We want to be credible witnesses of a welcoming and friendly Christian community, in dialogue with everyone who celebrates the mystery of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, through liturgies that make communion present and express it through signs. We commit ourselves to express the concrete face of a Church that values youthful enthusiasm as a resource to be helped bear fruit for a new humanity.¹⁰

A presence that operates between the «now» and the «not yet»

40. Entering history, the Son of God took on the human story and synthesised it in himself.¹¹ He is therefore the bearer of a unique plan of salvation which is gradually being accomplished. In Jesus of Nazareth, the union between God and humanity at the end of history will be perfect and definitive. This certainty gives our presence among young people a broad vision and a perspective of hope. It supports our work, giving it the characteristics of trust in young people, of courage, of everyday service of life without discouragement or fear because of delays and of waiting patiently.

Educational frames of reference

An holistic vision

41. From the perspective of the Incarnation, youth ministry puts the education of children, adolescents and young people, especially the poorest, at the centre, so that they can have life to the full; that is, so that they can develop every dimension of their personality according to the plan of God in Christ and in docility to the Holy Spirit.

⁸ Cf *ivi* 23.

⁹ Cf *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 31.

¹⁰ Cf *Novo Millennio Ineunte* 40.

¹¹ Cf *Gaudium et Spes* 38.

This vision motivates the action of the communities, inspires the development of the educational plan, orients the process, strategies and style of relationships lived in the educating communities and makes the most of socio-cultural exchanges.

Faced with the advances offered by science today, which is capable of «building» the human person, so that men and women are no longer seen as gifts from the Creator but as a product of genetic engineering, it reaffirms the vision of the dignity and inviolability of the human person as the image of God, created by love and for love.

According to the criterion of the Incarnation

42. The criterion of the Incarnation helps us to understand the mystery of God and of the human person in their unity and mutuality. In the educational area this means recognising that the process of our youth ministry must embrace all of human reality.

The fullness of this relationship requires that we keep in mind some educational perspectives that will allow for the holistic development of the person according to the specific educational plan of the Preventive System. We reach this goal by linking together aspects that are closely integrated: the aspects of culture, evangelisation, social formation and communications. They are partial points of view that allow us to keep present the complexity and totality of human reality.

From a preventive point of view

43. The preoccupation with prevention runs through all the educational processes and the strategies used, and is the criterion of choice, judgement and evaluation of every action. It aims at forming «good Christians and honest citizens». It reflects on and reinterprets that goal in the light of present day complexity and pluralism in a multicultural and multi-faith situation.

The Cultural Aspect

Christian humanism

44. The complexity of the sociocultural context in which we live requires not just strong faith and living by Gospel values, but also an intelligent development of the concepts that allow us to interpret and give meaning to reality in relation to promoting a culture of life.

The methodological dimension of reason that characterises the Preventive System directs cultural programmes towards the discovery of the deep needs of the young people and their questions, so as to awaken a reasonable consent. It also leads us to focus on the importance of culture, of critical thought and of the search for truth through dialogue.

This pathway highlights a concept of the person and of society inspired by Gospel values that enters into a respectful and constructive dialogue with other ways of looking at life. The frame of reference for our vision is the Christian humanism of St. Francis of Sales, translated onto an educational level by Don Bosco and developed in a vital way by Maria Domenica Mazzarello.¹²

The cultural viewpoint as an educational pathway

45. This aspect takes the form of an educational pathway that leads to self-knowledge and respect, developing personal autonomy and critical skill, learning to choose in different and contrasting situations, accepting self-responsibility and developing an open and flexible mentality that is ready for life-long formation.

Educating by promoting culture means investing heavily in prevention at all levels. This requires a qualified awareness of the Preventive System that helps to promote the formation of men and women of convinced adult faith, capable of giving witness in the Church and in society. For all, even young people belonging to other faiths, our way of educating can help to read reality and the media culture in a critical way. It can encourage young women especially to participate

¹² Cf. *Plan of Formation* 30

responsibly in social and political life and to offer their specific contribution at a cultural and professional level.¹³

The Evangelisation Aspect

Education and evangelisation

46. The originality of Salesian youth ministry is well expressed in the formula: «evangelise through education and educate through evangelisation».¹⁴ It aims at developing the whole young person through education, and its ultimate goal is salvation in Christ.¹⁵ We are convinced that such a process is possible whether the proclamation can be made directly or is offered as an important value on the human level, as happens in those countries in which education takes place in a multi-faith environment.

The experience of the love of Christ

47. Evangelisation depends to a great extent, on a good cultural foundation that ensures the presentation of the Christian message in a way that can be understood. This means a proclamation that is capable of helping people, especially the younger generations, to open themselves to experience the love of Christ, so that they can gradually get to know him as the meaning of life. In the three elements of the Preventive System, Don Bosco saw religion, not only as the main aim and content but also as the way to happiness. We must certainly not forget that evangelisation is closely linked to the witness of adults and also of peers. For young people the most effective and easily understood language is the life of their educators.

Offering meaning and the message of faith

48. While respecting the individual conscience, we offer a proposal that provokes questions regarding the meaning of life and leads people to accept life as a vocation, accompanying young people in the discovery-acceptance-responsible fulfilment of a life plan.

The direct proclamation of the faith emphasises the elements that characterise Salesian Spirituality: the merciful Fatherhood of God; the power of sacramental grace; the sense of Church and the caring and motherly presence of Mary; missionary zeal. Everyday life is seen as the privileged place of meeting with God, of living out Gospel values, of vocational growth, of sharing joy and celebration.¹⁶

Missionary spirit and dialogue

49. In an ever-more multicultural and multi-faith setting, evangelisation invites us to renew our passion for the initial proclamation of the Gospel and for catechesis, for the mission ad gentes. We need to start from the Gospel, from the Church as a human community that is a sign and a tool of the Kingdom of God, and from dialogue with other cultures and religions.

Evangelisation promotes educational interventions in keeping with the characteristics of Christianity in dialogue,¹⁷ its commitment to search for peace, the defence of life and of human rights and its work for justice and harmony in society.

The Social Aspect

¹³ Cf *Working Document for General Chapter XXI*, Roma, Istituto FMA 2002, 67.

¹⁴ Cf VIGANÒ Egidio, *Il progetto educativo salesiano*, in *Atti del Consiglio Superiore* 59 (1978) n° 290, 26-28.

¹⁵ Cf C 69.

¹⁶ Cf YOUTH MINISTRY DEPARTMENTS, FMA – SDB, *Salesian Youth Spirituality. The Spirit's gift to the Salesian Family, a gift for all who believe and hope in life*, Roma, Tipografia SGS 1996, 31-51.

¹⁷ Cf *Ecclesiam Suam* 60-123.

Resources of the Preventive System

50. The educational resources of the Preventive System help young people to mature as responsible citizens. It is through educational relationships rich in loving kindness, expressed by educators who know the art of caring, that we contribute to their growth and encourage openness to a loving solidarity.

The Preventive System considers networking as the most suitable and useful way to influence social situations. It allows for co-ordination of strengths, exchange of values and the development of a mentality of communion. It changes the situation, beginning with the most disadvantaged classes, by highlighting their situations and engendering a more powerful social impact.

Active citizenship for a society of solidarity

51. The educating community is the main protagonist in this social openness and is called to give its contribution towards the transformation of unjust structures in society. From this perspective, we educate young people to be active, critical people, builders of a renewal that promotes justice, love, truth and freedom.¹⁸

For this reason, we commit ourselves to defend the absolute value of the person and their inviolability in all phases and conditions of life, above material goods and every social or political institution. We contribute to the building of a society marked by respect for differences and, with renewed awareness, we choose to be in solidarity with the poorest.

By means of programmes for an economy of solidarity we help people to understand the causes of poverty, to go beyond a handout mentality, to a fairer sharing of goods, of personal and environmental resources, and the strengthening of the co-operative movement also through micro-credit. We put into action forms of self-help in line with micro-economy, the promotion of ethical banks and solidarity funds.¹⁹

Socio-political education

52. The younger generations distrust public institutions and show a growing disinterest in politics. In view of this, our educational commitment, inspired by the social teaching of the Church, is translated into programmes of formation to peace, democracy and political participation that promotes the common good. We educate to respect for life and for the natural environment, to intercultural relations and to a real professional competence that allows for active and responsible involvement in the world of work.

The Communications Aspect

Educational communication

53. Educating is communicating. This conviction has an important place in the Preventive System. Educational communication takes place through relationships and through stimulating, reasonable and kindly processes that listen to the response from the recipient.

In Salesian practice, educational communication consists in creating open and deep reciprocal and intergenerational relationships, within the broader context of social, cultural, institutional and economic forces. It responds to such needs as knowledge, interaction with diversity, sharing and collaboration. It possesses the power of solidarity because it leads to initiatives that reach beyond the 'I-you' relationship to the group, to the educating community and out to the broader social reality. According to the logic of communication, every educational environment should be like an ecosystem in which it is possible to find a suitable space for one's growth.

¹⁸ Cf *Pacem in terris* 18.

¹⁹ Cf ISTITUTO FIGLIE DI MARIA AUSILIATRICE, *Economia solidale. Percorsi comuni tra Nord e Sud del mondo per uno sviluppo umano sostenibile*, Atti del Seminario Internazionale, Cachoeira do Campo, Brasile 7-13 agosto 2001 = Serie "Strumenti", Bologna, EMI 2002, 289.

Importance of the various aspects of communication

54. The communications aspect is particularly important in nurturing relationships and encounters; in helping to overcome interpersonal barriers and conflicts. It is therefore necessary to pay attention to young people's need to communicate, and to educate them to interpersonal dialogue and openness to others that respects their originality, and to group life as a place where authentic relations are learned. They need to be helped to rediscover the family, to share in a community of faith, to make positive use of the social communications media and to value theatre, music and art.

Communication, today, must above all take account of the new technologies, which cannot be reduced simply to the instruments, but take into account their influence on mentalities and everyday life. Places of encounter and sharing are ever more frequently media places: from the TV screen, that serves as a meeting place, to Internet sites, in which people play at taking on different roles. Our relations with others, our experience of reality and of ourselves are in large measure influenced by the means of social communication.

Educommunication

55. In its commitment to promote educational communication, the XXI General Chapter accepted educommunication as a practice that runs through our whole mission and the practice of our charism.²⁰

To understand the term «educommunication»²¹ we need to put on new glasses to look at today's reality. The image of the two lenses in a single pair of glasses, both united and equally necessary for good vision, reminds us of the need to keep the two poles of education and communication linked in order to bring about a good formation through a new science: educommunication.

Making use of the new languages

56. It leads the educating communities to adopt the communicative aspects of the Preventive System with greater awareness, and to enter intelligently and competently into the new digital culture, in order to offer a meaningful contribution with regard to the quality of communication. The new technological languages require educators capable of grasping their potential for humanisation and at the same time capable of pointing out their vulnerable points, in order to help the young people to use them in a critical and creative way.

*Communicating the faith*²²

57. The task of communication is of decisive importance in the direct proclamation of Christ. The cultural context in which we find ourselves calls for a strong faith, a convinced adherence to the Gospel, but also a special capacity for communication.

Claiming to be educators while neglecting the ways in which society expresses itself today, how people elaborate their judgements on reality, the existential elements that make up everyday life, can leave us unable to bring out the full beauty of the very message that we want to communicate, that is, the Gospel.

²⁰ Cf. *Acts of General Chapter XXI* 38.

²¹ Educommunication is a theory that supports the relationship between communication and education. This relationship is understood as a field of dialogue between the two disciplines, an area of critical and creative knowledge, a place in which to live and express citizenship and solidarity. It is an interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary space, a process of communication and education based on new concepts of subject, space and time; on a new system of thought and action. It is the totality of choices, policies and actions that an educating community plans, puts into operation and, finally, evaluates so that the planned processes, the chosen strategies and the productions organised all tend towards the creation and reinforcement of ecosystems of communication in all environments, whether they be 'actual' or 'virtual presences' (cf. EQUIPO DE COMUNICACIÓN SOCIAL DE LAS HIJAS DE MARÍA AUXILIADORA EN AMÉRICA, *Propuesta de Educomunicación para la Familia Salesiana*, Caracas, Publicaciones Monfort 2002).

Chapter 3

THE EDUCATING COMMUNITY

In a context of growing globalisation and multiculturalism the presence of an educating community that monitors with care the convergence of educational interventions is essential, to ensure that educational frames of reference are translated into practical responses to the deeper needs of the younger generations.

In an educating community that educates itself and others, the animating core group is one that shares faith in the God of Jesus Christ, lives in communion and commits itself to explicitly promoting evangelisation in the Salesian style and in an attitude of openness and respect for every form of diversity. The educating community lives for and with young people, seeking the signs of the presence of God in everyday life and trying to formulate an educational plan in dialogue with the area.

It fulfils its mission by valuing everyone's contribution and, in an attitude of co-responsibility and participation, favours the creation of the «family spirit».

At the heart of the relationship between the FMA, the laity and young people is the choice of living authentically their common human identity and educational vocation and, in Christian contexts, their Baptismal vocation according to the style and characteristics of the Salesian Charism.

Value of the educating community

58. In a context of growing globalisation and multiculturalism, the presence of an educating community is the basic element that ensures effective educational action and responds in a practical way to the questions and needs of the younger generations. Convergence and continuity of interventions are sought in a way that involves young people, educators and parents in a Christian educational project according to the style of the Salesian charism.¹

59. Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello, in their apostolic experience, laid great emphasis on the value of the community as the privileged place of education. The community dimension, deeply rooted in our charism, is a need of the human person and of the educational process itself. It implies encounter, collaboration and reciprocity.

The members of the educating community

Different members

60. In different contexts, the educating community is made up of the FMA community, men and women educators, young people, parents and other members of the Salesian Family. At various levels, they share a common mission through different and complementary roles. The members of the educating community have different roles and share at different levels in the educational plan. These vary from an initial consent regarding human values to an acceptance of explicitly Christian values.

The animating core group

61. The educating community is a complex reality that constantly grows and develops. In it there is an *animating core group*, which is made up of the religious community, Christian parents, educators and young people who seek, in their lives, to witness to values inspired by the Gospel.²

The FMA community

62. In the educating community, *the FMA community* is committed to promoting the Salesian identity and spirit and the style of the Preventive System. In a dynamic and respectful way, it aims at increasing the core group that owns and shares the evangelising goal of the educational plan. Its intention is to create a *Christian community of reference* that guarantees the Salesian identity of the educational setting even when it welcomes young people who are not believers or who belong to other religions.

Young people

63. *The young people* are an integral part of the educating community to which they bring their original and creative contribution, according to their age and level of maturity. They are at the centre of the educational mission and are called to be protagonists in the growth and life of the community. Thanks to their commitment and the various ways in which they animate their peers, the Salesian Youth Movement continues to grow stronger.

Lay educators

64. *Lay men and women educators* offer the educating community the specific contribution of the lay state of life lived in the family, in the professions and in the socio-political field. Each one, in different and convergent ways, contributes to the inculturation and development of the charism. With their professional competence they co-responsibly make the educational plan their own and dedicate themselves to preparing the younger generations to become part of the world of work, of society and of the Church in an adequate way.

¹ Cf C 68.

² Cf VECCHI Juan Edmundo, *Esperti, testimoni e artefici di comunione. La comunità salesiana – nucleo animatore*, Lettera del Rettor Maggiore, 25 marzo 1998, in *Atti del Consiglio Generale* 80 (1998) n° 363, 3-42.

Parents/guardians

65. *Parents are the first and principal persons responsible for the education of their children.*

This responsibility is manifested in the sharing of the educative plan, which is the terrain for dialogue, sharing and collaboration. As members of the educating community, they participate in research into the formation needs of the young and in the carrying out of the educative plans.

The challenge of dialogue

66. In the present day context, the members of the educating community are called to live the family spirit, loving kindness and joy, which are typical elements of the charism. They make the Salesian educational style accepted and loved by cultures and peoples of every continent.

The challenge of intercultural and interfaith dialogue is experienced in educating communities where young people, lay persons and families of different cultures and religions are present. Daily sharing educates to meeting others and mutually accepting each one's contribution. Thus they experience a rich exchange of values that allows for a more humane way of living, where conflicts are resolved in a peaceful and democratic way.

The commitment to educate ourselves and others

A community that educates itself and others

67. The educating community is a place where people, who are called together by a common mission, meet and play complementary roles. As an educating community it is called to an attitude of constant growth, which leads each one, starting from their own role, not only to educate others, but above all to educate themselves.

A community that *educates itself and others* is therefore attentive to discover the signs of the presence of God in everyday life. It believes in the positive energies of the younger generations and of adults and is capable of moving out of its own security to welcome the fragility and precariousness experienced by young people, to enter into dialogue and rethink human and religious experience with them.

Towards holistic formation

68. A community that wants to *educate itself and others* develops, in dialogue with the area and the culture, an educational plan and strategies that aim at the holistic formation of the person within the context of Christian humanism. This formation renders people capable of actively involving themselves in the promotion of justice and therefore in social transformation to build a more democratic and peaceful way of life.

69. From this point of view, the educating community is attentive to establishing a critical and constructive dialogue with all people who want to improve the situation of women and of young people, especially the most disadvantaged. They want to build networks of solidarity with all those who believe in education, especially with the other groups of the Salesian Family who are involved in the mission of the Church.

The style of life of the animating core group

70. In a community that educates itself and others, the *animating core group* is made up of persons who share faith in the God of Jesus Christ, who live communion and openly offer evangelisation in the Salesian style, respectful towards every cultural and religious diversity. The core group is an active part of the local Church and commits itself to make the message it proclaims credible by the witness of its life.

The animating core group establishes a style of life centred on

- *The word of God*, transforming power and source of true and sincere human relationships

- *The Eucharist*, bond of unity and communion, source of growth for the community, and on the sacrament of *Reconciliation*, which contributes constantly to weaving and re-weaving relationships broken by human fragility
- *The eyes of faith* that are capable of recognising what the Holy Spirit is doing in the history of people, society and nations
- *The dynamism of communion* that is realised in solidarity with the poorest, with those excluded from social opportunities.

Mary as guide

71. In the process of human growth and in the experience of faith, the members of the *animating core group* allow themselves to be guided by the figure of Mary of Nazareth. From her Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello drew their inspiration for a style of education that helps people to grow.

Mary is educator because she was educated by the Spirit, and she is the indispensable point of reference for Christian educators today. She, in fact, collaborated in the human growth of her Son in the areas of socialisation, inculturation and adaptation. On the other hand, Jesus promoted his mother's growth in faith.

The person of Mary, woman of her people and guide to mystery, also offers the possibility of dialogue with people belonging to other religious traditions.

The educating community is called to bring about reciprocity between adults and young people. In its educational commitment, it can draw on the experience of Mary, an attentive mother who accompanied her son in accepting and fulfilling the will of the Father for the salvation of the world.

Together, for the education of young people

Active involvement in the common mission

72. Reflection on co-responsibility between FMA and laity in our educational mission is ongoing in all contexts but with different expressions in relation to the diversity of culture and religion. We, however, notice a certain difficulty in recognising the place due to the laity.

The involvement of lay women and men in youth ministry is a reality that needs to move from simple acceptance to valuing their contribution so as to reach co-responsibility. This is expressed in teamwork, shared planning, organising structures and bodies that are adequate for the holistic education of the young people.

The exercise of co-responsibility demands the patient, daily reinforcement of the journey from 'I' to 'we'. Community-communion lives, grows and is consolidated around a common project in the measure in which a climate of mutual trust and dialogue, of wise organisation and distribution of tasks and responsibilities is strengthened.

Awareness that the future of our mission requires the active participation of the FMA community, educators, parents and young people, leads us to own, share and evaluate the educational plan appreciating the contribution of every member of the educating community.

Co-responsibility

73. Living co-responsibility means experiencing the richness of the family spirit, charismatic expression of the spirituality of communion for a holistic education of young people.³ Don Bosco wanted his collaborators to be capable of initiative and creativity in the search for the greater good of young people.

Sharing in the spirit of Mornese and the Salesian mission means feeling involved in the choice of educating women and the poorest young people.

³ Cf. *Six-year Programme 2003-2008*, 12.

Models of adult life

74. The heart of the relationship between the FMA and lay people is the commitment to live their common human identity and the educational vocation and, in Christian contexts, the baptismal vocation according to the style and the characteristics of the charism.

In the educating community, the role of the adult is indispensable and therefore it is very important to ask ourselves what model of adult life is being presented to young people. Both Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello offered a genuine pedagogy of happiness and love, witnessing to the joy of a life characterised by faith, optimism and hope, in spite of suffering.

Adults, who want to be a significant presence, cultivate in themselves a trusting and positive outlook towards the growing person. They love and they make that love felt. They want to love in a mature way. They encourage involvement and authentic growth; they do not stop at appearances, but are capable of going beyond them to allow other people to reveal themselves, little by little, for what they are. They help them to express their best selves according to God's plan.

Growing in humanity

75. The challenge, for those who want to communicate love for life and hope in a better future, is to commit themselves personally and constantly to grow in humanity, authenticity and service to young people.

It is by living *with* and *among* young people that adults become capable of learning from experience, reflecting on their actions, organising and modifying their ideas and behaviour with the changing events, the different periods of life and the rise of new developmental needs.

Past Pupils Salesians Co-operators

76. In the educating community the presence of past pupils, as members of a lay association that is united in a special way to the Congregation and participate in the educational mission of the FMA, is particularly significant.

The Past Pupils Association represents a genuine place of growth as human persons and of attention to the sacredness and inviolability of life.⁴ It commits itself to work alongside the FMA for promotion and education especially of women, the defence of the family, of human rights and of peace. It acts as an awareness raising movement with regard to sociocultural issues, making use of the processes of social communication. It cultivates and encourages intercultural and interfaith dialogue.

Another enriching and valuable presence for the educating community is the Salesian Co-operators. As the lay branch of the Salesian Congregation,⁵ the Association commits itself to the mission to young people and working people. It works in fidelity to the Gospel and the teachings of the social doctrine of the Church.

Beyond the structures and works

77. Thanks to the commitment of many lay men and women, the Salesian charism, in its feminine tradition, is spreading beyond our structures and works. It comes into contact with life, especially with children, young people and women in disadvantaged situations. It enters into dialogue with the cultures and traditions of peoples.

Experience confirms that FMA and lay people fulfil their specific vocation authentically together by placing themselves humbly and attentively at the service of humanity, especially of those who suffer most.

⁴ Cf. WORLD CONFEDERATION OF PAST PUPILS OF THE DAUGHTERS OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS, *Statutes*. Approved by the 3rd Confederal Assembly - August 28th, 2003, n. 1. 4.

⁵ Cf. ASSOCIATION OF SALESIAN CO-OPERATORS, *Plan of Apostolic Life*, Draft reviewed by the World Council, February 10th – 13th and approved by the Rector Major on September 1st, 2005.

Chapter 4

MEETING JESUS IN THE EXPERIENCES OF LIFE

The primary goal of the youth ministry of the FMA is to lead young people to meet Jesus of Nazareth.

The humanity of Jesus is the point of reference for every interpersonal relationship. In him we see a shining example of relationships rich in interiority, mutuality and closeness that draw on the sources of his divine sonship.

The human person, created in the image of God, grows and matures in all its dimensions through the experience of relating. This helps to unify one's cognitive, motivational and social potential around important values.

By offering diversified experiences we give the young people the possibility of interpreting everyday life, bringing it into focus and gradually acquiring a Gospel style of relating modelled on that of Jesus.

Starting from the everyday search for meaning we offer the criteria for interpreting life and making it the place where salvation is manifest. It becomes an opportunity for growth in love and self-giving, in interiority and prayer, in the celebration of the Word and the Sacraments and in mission, as we model ourselves on Mary, educator and travelling companion.

Encountering Christ

78. The educational mission of the FMA is realised through an inculturated youth ministry inspired by the Preventive System, lived as a spirituality that is rooted in the love of Christ and in the maternal care of Mary.¹ Its primary goal is to lead people to encounter Jesus of Nazareth. From this follows the commitment to gradually fix our eyes on the mystery of the Son of God made man, on him who reveals the face of the Father, and enables everyone to participate in his life of sonship through the gift of the Spirit (cf. Jn. 1: 1-18).

Good news for all

79. The evangelising dimension of youth ministry, in order to be stimulating and missionary, requires planning that gives pride of place to the proclamation of the Gospel as good news for the life of every young person, not just those who frequent our educational environments. Our proposal, therefore, needs to offer individualised programmes capable of responding to the different situations of the young people: those who still have to hear the Gospel for the first time or need help to begin living as Christians again, those who have already been socialised from a religious point of view or those who are marginalised and disadvantaged. In this process, we commit ourselves to cultivate a planning mentality and to identify ways of reaching young people where they are, to educate them to the search for meaning. We commit ourselves to a ministry of presence that guides young people to mature gradually in their confession of faith in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Jesus of Nazareth witness to authentic relationships

Jesus: source of a new humanism

80. To lead young people to meet Jesus, it is necessary to present him in his real life and in his message, as it was passed on to us by the Apostles and the first Christian community.² He, the Son of God, the human face of the Father, is the perfect man who “worked with human hands, thought with a human mind, acted with a human will and loved with a human heart”.³ He allowed himself to be guided constantly by the Spirit, who led him to live in intense communion with the Father and with a passionate dedication to the cause of the Kingdom of God (*Mt* 3: 13; 4: 1).

Jesus inaugurates a new way of living the fundamental relationships that mark human life. In fact he turns to God calling him *Abba*. He never seems to be egoistically turned in on himself. He lives his relations with others in a fraternal and welcoming way, to the point of giving his life. He appreciates the things of the world and those created by human intelligence in the measure in which they contribute to the good of people. He considers nature as God’s gift.

From Jesus and from his fundamental relations with his Father, with himself, with others and with creation, we can draw criteria to help young people to build positive relations that give quality to their lives.

A Filial relationship

81. Jesus of Nazareth shows us that *our relationship with God* is a filial experience. He proclaims that God is a Father who loves each one of his children intensely and unconditionally and that he has a plan of love for each one.

Thinking of the relationship with God as filial and as one of trustful abandonment to him, has radical consequences for the way faith is lived. It leads us to love God with our whole heart, with our whole soul and with our whole mind (cf. *Lk.* 10: 27) as a response of love; it enables us to overcome religious subjectivism that considers spiritual commitment as a way of controlling God.

¹ Cf. C 7.

² Cf. *Rinnovamento della Catechesi* 59.

³ *Gaudium et Spes* 22.

Relationships rich in interiority

82. Being children of God opens us to a positive and serene relationship with self, capable of encouraging us to accept life as a gift and a task. It disposes us to listen to the Spirit and to discover our unique vocation. This experience requires a pastoral approach that educates to interiority, to silence, to living in depth, to enjoying our own dignity with a sense of wonder.

Relating as neighbours

83. From the mystery of divine sonship comes the reality that we are all one family and this cannot be broken by any diversity of race, culture or religion. It leads us to consider everyone as neighbour, that is, one whose good we have at heart and for whom we must care.

The Teacher from Nazareth points out the golden rule for *relating with others* “Love your neighbour as yourself” (cf. *Lk* 10: 29-37) to the point of loving even one’s enemies (*Mt* 5: 44; *Lk* 6: 27,35).

Critical approach to relationships

84. In the context of relationships, it is important to emphasise Jesus’ freedom in the face of political and religious powers. While respecting the institutions and structures in force among his people, he showed himself critical, capable of distancing himself from the laws of legal purity and the Sabbath rest when these were interpreted in a way that harmed people.

The phenomenon of growing globalisation in the world leads us to consider relationships with others also from a structural point of view. It is through economic, political and cultural structures that we can live in solidarity with the poor and build a more human world. Education to democratic participation and to the defence of human rights is today a greater challenge than ever. In the Social Doctrine of the Church we find an authoritative guide to forming the correct attitude towards law and contemporary culture.

Caring relationships

85. Being children of God makes us aware that God is Providence. God created the world, loves and cares for each creature. Jesus teaches us that the Father clothes the lilies of the field, feeds the birds of the sky, and counts the hairs on our head (cf. *Lk* 12: 7, 24-28). He establishes a relationship with things that is characterised by respect, gratitude and care. In this area of ministry the educating community is encouraged to take on new styles of life, characterised by moderation, understood as a true social virtue. It is not just a problem of quantity and of reducing consumption, but the choice of simplicity, of balance, of going to the essential, of respecting creation and of readiness to share goods

Respectful relationship, capable of wonder

86. In creation, Jesus contemplates the beauty and goodness of the Creator, his and our Father. He guides us towards a relationship with nature and with the universe that is capable of admiring goodness, truth and beauty present in creation: “Look at the birds of the sky ... look at how the lilies of the field grow...” (*Mt* 7: 26, 28).

Creation, which bears the imprint of God’s greatness, thus becomes a point of encounter. God gives it to humanity so that it can become our word and our song, a response of gratitude to the Creator for the gift of life.

This does not happen spontaneously, especially in times when relations with nature are characterised by deep imbalances and manipulation. Young people however, are particularly attentive and sensitive to themes of ecology and respect for nature. It is necessary to make use of this openness to guide them towards a respectful and balanced relationship with creation.

Experience as a school of life

Experience: synthesis of life

87. Starting from the awareness of the fundamental relationships of the person, it is good to plan experiences that will gradually educate to a Gospel style of relating.

Experience is a reality that is lived intensely and in a global way. It is the most direct way of getting to know things and of letting oneself be moulded by what one experiences.

Experiencing something means starting a process that unifies the various forms of energy of the person: cognitive, emotional, operative, social and motivational, in order to learn to choose what is good and true with one's whole being. As an interpretation of what one has lived, it is a new synthesis, expressed through the human potential for communication.

Through experience people get to know a particular reality in a dynamic way, because by placing themselves before the world and others, they welcome them into their inner universe, thus creating a personal synthesis.

Everyday experience helps us to search for the meaning of our life. This search needs to be educated. Sometimes it needs to be encouraged, at others times, simply identified and valued by means of suggestions that allow the young people to continuously clarify the content of their Christian experience, in dialogue with their own deepest expectations and desires.

There are many experiences that can be proposed. We present a few here, leaving each local reality to develop others in order to accompany young people in their holistic development.

Growing in love

A Family environment

88. The first place in which we learn the ABC of communication and of relationships is the family because, in it, love is given and received.

Accompanying young people on the journey towards affective maturity and the ability to love is a fundamental task for the educating community. Characterised by the family spirit, it is called to value this fundamental cell of society and to help young people to become aware of their family roots and to look at their own story in a realistic way, with serenity and hope.

Group life that takes place within the different formal or informal meeting places is also a privileged place for educating people to love.

Love and freedom

89. Sexuality is a fundamental dimension of the person. A serene and balanced maturing of this aspect contributes to holistic development, because it allows people to realise their vocation to be for others and with others in a way that expresses reciprocity and solidarity.

Among the more important tasks of the educating community is that of guiding the young people to discover sexuality as a call to love, source of life, of giving and of responsibility, and to help them to establish respectful and transparent relationships. They need to be involved in a community journey, in which mature adults become models that help them to open to healthy and positive relationships.

Another delicate and important task is the ethical formation of conscience that opens the young people to understand the value of freedom and to make courageous choices, even when it means going against the current. Education of the moral conscience makes them capable of judging and discerning maturely, in order to fulfil themselves as persons and take their place in society as free and responsible citizens.

Service freely given

Education to self-giving

90. In a society that is very much centred on having, the experience of free giving and disinterested service has great educational potential.

Adolescence and youth are an ideal time to develop the immense potential for good and the creative possibilities proper to this stage of life, so that they can be used to make courageous choices that respond to their questions regarding the meaning of life.

Young people are sensitive to mutual help, compassion, solidarity, justice and peace. Often, the experience of service can be the beginning of a deeper journey towards maturity.

The present day phenomenon of human mobility provides an opportunity for young people in all contexts to share in the experience of many men and women who are uprooted from their cultural identity and who are learning to adapt and to create a new synthesis. They have an opportunity of practicing hospitality and compassion and they see the need for intercultural, ecumenical and interfaith dialogue.

In serving the poorest, young people can express their own Gospel citizenship and prepare to intervene at different levels in society as thoughtful, responsible people and promoters of justice and peace.

Interiority and prayer

Christian Prayer

91. A fundamental aspect of youth ministry is education to interiority that nourishes the filial experience expressed in prayer and in daily choices. As in the lives of Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello prayer and life harmonise in a single movement of love.

Teaching young people to pray is the best way of loving them, of helping them to live in the presence of God and of proposing an education to holiness.

Christian prayer is a dialogue of love, listening, availability and contemplation of history as the place where we meet God. Educating to prayer means, therefore, educating to make room for the Holy Spirit who lives in us, to look at our life in God's light, to offer it as a gift and to receive it back again from God. It means making oneself responsible for one's own life and accepting it in the light of God's plan of love for each one.

Youth ministry seeks to become qualified to educate people to prayer, in the conviction that prayer frees us from egoism and solitude and opens us to the mystery of communion with God and to solidarity with others.

Prayer is the breath of the person and, as such, embraces all that forms part of human life.

Everything finds its own voice in it. In fact, the breath of prayer gives energy to the awareness and to the life of the person. Prayer is a source of joy and hope, an expression of freedom and of love.

Sharing the Word

The Word listened to, shared and proclaimed

92. In the Christian experience, the Word of God is placed at the centre of life and is shared in the community of believing brothers and sisters. It echoes through the Bible stories of the first witnesses to the faith, in liturgical texts, in the writings of Tradition and in the teaching of the Church, in the symbols of the faith and in the witness of the saints. It is proclaimed and meditated on in prayer encounters. It incessantly calls together, challenges, illuminates, comforts and re-launches persons and communities on their journey of conversion and missionary courage.

Learning to use words is a component of human development. Being able to explain ourselves through words is a sign that we have reached the ability to find our way and present ourselves to the world.

It is important that young people gradually learn to express themselves in an authentic way and to look at their lives in the light of the word of God, which awakens them, urges them on, frees and heals them. Learning this dialogue between the human word and the word of God presupposes frequent and, above all, meaningful contact with the sources of the faith, proclaimed, celebrated and witnessed to by a believing community, in a context of mutual communion and commitment to systematic Christian formation.

The possibility of constant contact with the Word must be accompanied by the experience of a community that evangelises by living communion; a community that is an expression of Church, which is both home and school of communion.⁴

Experiencing the Paschal Mystery

Celebrating in spirit and truth

93. Every sacramental and liturgical celebration enriches and influences the life of the believer. They are fundamental experiences that mark the rhythm of everyday events and of important moments of life. They are an experience of the crucified and risen Lord that reaches and accompanies every person on their human journey of birth, growth, love, illness and death. They introduce believers into the experience of the paschal mystery, bring it to life and fill it with meaning.

Youth ministry is called to plan programmes of authentic liturgical formation, accompanying young people in celebrating the Christian mystery in spirit and truth.

In catechesis for Christian initiation it is necessary to undertake educational programmes aimed at rediscovering the gift of Baptism, confirming one's adherence to Christ and His Kingdom, experiencing forgiveness and mercy and sharing the Word and the Bread in memory of Jesus in the Eucharistic mystery.

It is necessary to pay particular attention to the accompaniment of young people who are not yet baptised and who ask to know Jesus. The catechumenal journey, which culminates in the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist, aims at consolidating knowledge and experience of the mysteries of faith and the practice of the Christian virtues, leading to an unconditional openness to sacramental grace that transforms us and opens us to missionary witness.

Eucharist and Reconciliation

94. In the Salesian tradition the Eucharist and Reconciliation are the pillars of a solid spiritual growth; a path of Christian life that involves the whole educating community. Young people and adults experience the sacrament of the Eucharist as the memorial of Jesus who offers himself that all "may have life and have it to the full" (Jn 10: 10) and may learn from him to give of themselves.

With the sacrament of Reconciliation they experience the mercy of the Father in Christ, recognise their own sin, receive forgiveness with gratitude, resist the temptation of self-sufficiency and form a conscience that is upright and coherent, open and merciful.

The Gospel: a light for life

95. Every day, young people face the difficulties and sufferings inherent in every human life. Life is an experience of the joy of living, growing, discovering, loving, serving and succeeding, but it is also a painful experience in which we meet with solitude, violence, failure and mourning.

⁴ Cf *Novo Millennio Ineunte* 43.

The witness of mercy and solidarity on the part of a community of faith, which is capable of interpreting the gospel of the cross in the light of Easter, is decisive in the life of every young person.

In fact a Christianity that forgets the demands of the cross leads to the loss of the sense of mystery. It is necessary, then, that young people in the reality of their situation, feel accompanied in overcoming their fragility. They need to be helped to value the fruitfulness of suffering in the light of the cross and of the resurrection of Jesus and to discover that life is always worth living.

Mary, mother and educator

The presence of Mary as Mother

96. In the journey of faith, Mary is both disciple and mother, educator and travelling companion. In her, human nature reaches the peak of perfection and beauty, showing every man and woman the goal to be reached. Experiencing Mary, therefore, means taking her into our life and allowing her to guide us towards a vital meeting with Jesus her Son.

Mary of Nazareth, the human person who was most fully conformed to Christ, teaches us to contemplate the face of her Son, to be his disciples in the pilgrimage of faith that accompanies our whole life and leads us towards the fullness of life. In Salesian tradition, Mary is especially recognised as Helper and Immaculate.

As our Helper, Mary is the one who defends the poorest and most needy young people, takes them by the hand, guides them, educates them and helps them conform their lives to Christ. She, as helper of humanity and Mother of the Church, continues to care for the brothers and sisters of her Son.⁵ The experience of encountering Mary becomes, for young people and adults alike, a practical help in their journey of faith, in the assimilation of the Gospel reality, in their growth in friendship with God and in openness to communion and solidarity.

As the Immaculate, Mary is the masterpiece of God's preventive education, the prototype of the transforming work of grace in those who open themselves in docility and faith to God's action.

The atmosphere of joy, free giving and solidarity towards all, which the educating community commits itself to live, following the example of Mary, stimulates young people to grow in hope, not to be complicit with the injustice of the world. She guides them to put themselves on the side of the God of the poor.

Making experiences meaningful

Organic programmes

97. All the above experiences need to be integrated into meaningful programmes and planned in a systematic way. Commitment to an organic youth ministry requires that we develop educational programmes which will enable the young people to assimilate the attitudes and dispositions needed to choose and act according to a Gospel mentality.

Each programme is characterised by its starting point, the goal towards which it tends and its fundamental options. This presupposes the centrality of the person, a circular movement between reflection and action, care for relationships, public relevance and effective methodology.

To have a real influence on the lives of children, adolescents and young people it is necessary to offer unified programmes that take account of certain aspects: personal identity, life as a vocation, meeting Christ, readiness to commit oneself to society and to the Church community. It is also necessary to keep in mind differences of *sex, age, situation* and *sociocultural context*.

Methods

98. The methods we choose are also important because the method has a notable influence on the efficacy of the programme. In pastoral practice three fundamental elements converge. In the first place, *experience* linked to everyday living, because it is in the everyday that we are called to live our life as the place where we encounter the God who loves us. The second is *the group* seen as

⁵ Cf *Lumen Gentium* 62.

openness to relationships, to working with others and as an opportunity for overcoming individualism and subjectivism. Finally there is the quality of the *method*. It is necessary to appeal, in a creative way, to the active involvement of the person because it is through experience that we deepen our awareness and assimilate values.

Educating to faith

99. In fidelity to Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello, we re-affirm the importance of educating to the faith in the context in which we live, because it is there that knowledge and the meaning of life are developed. It follows that the members of the animating core group of the educating community are responsible for helping the younger generations to meet Jesus. Proclaiming that Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, is the only Lord and saviour of the world, means passing on the faith of the Church and pointing out the source of life and of hope for all. It is important to train the members of the animating core group of the educating communities, so that they may assume this essential task joyfully and be capable of proposing individualised pathways to the young people, and can accompany them in their growth and in the gradual assimilation of the Christian life programme.

Vocational culture

100. All the members of the educating community are called to promote a vocational culture. Through the programmes they set up and the witness of their life, they lead others to discover that life is a gift and a project. Vocation is not just the final moment on the journey to maturity, but a reality that characterises every stage and every phase of development. From the point of view of an explicitly vocational youth ministry, educators believe that unity and patience are essential elements of the journey. The decision to give one's life entirely is a gift of the Father. The quality of the educational environment, steeped in Christian values, not only attracts the younger generations to God, but awakens in them the desire and the openness to receive this gift, and strengthens their ability to decide to respond to a vocation of total commitment to Christ. The witness of believing adults gives value to the proposal of the *sequela Christi* based on the *come and see* and offers an opportunity to look at the different vocations present in the Church.

Chapter 5

PRIORITY STRATEGIES

The gradual development of a planning mentality has allowed the educating communities to express the richness of the Preventive System in a variety of contexts. We now need to build on this by developing the logic of educational process. This requires a sequence of planned steps that are structured in harmony with the development of the person. This process is in keeping with human growth and requires critical interaction with the socio-cultural reality, and for this reason it is more suited to a complex and structured society.

Using processes leads us to identify some strategies that are suitable for today:

- *Formation and working together as an opportunity for interaction between persons with different vocations, and as a commitment to quality in the education we offer;*
- *Accompaniment of young people in a way that helps them to discover the presence of God in their lives, leads them into harmony with the Holy Spirit and moves them to respond with joyful availability to God's call;*
- *The Salesian Youth Movement as a place in which young people, SDB, FMA and other members of the Salesian Family share experiences and put the Salesian charism into action, in different contexts and ways;*
- *Volunteering as a strategy to educate to a culture of free giving and solidarity, to justice and peace, by offering their personal contribution to the transformation of society and to the realisation of a citizenship based on solidarity;*
- *Co-ordination for communion to involve people in a circular method that facilitates sharing of resources and creativity in the search for unity.*

A Project

101. The planning mentality, encouraged by *A youth-centred pastoral project (1985)* and reinforced by the guidelines of the *Plan of Formation (2000)*, has allowed us to express the richness of the Preventive System in a new way. In today's world we note the urgency of bringing about a change that will lead the educating communities to cultivate a process mentality.

according to the logic of process

102. *Processes* are vital movements of persons and communities and need to be used carefully. The idea of process implies a sequence of planned steps, organised according to a principle of graduality and in harmony with a person who is constantly developing. It is necessary to act according to organised and varied plans, with a long-term vision, respecting the phases of development and the forces of human growth, and interacting critically with the socio-cultural context.

and of adequate strategic choices

103. Interpreting reality in the light of the Gospel and the charism, and acting according to a process, leads us to identify appropriate strategies that allow for flexibility and discernment in facing the present reality.

By means of *strategies* we aim to co-ordinate the various factors in the educational process, by making the best possible use of the resources present in the context and in individual situations, in order to reach the desired goal in the best way possible.

Strategies are particularly needed today, because the society in which we live is complex and structured: therefore it is necessary to have a broad, deep vision, capable of uniting and retaining both the *macro* and the *micro* in a relationship of mutual exchange.

Strategies favour the development of an ongoing process; leading us to make focused and credible choices, aimed at reaching our goal. One who uses suitable strategies is constantly in search of information, sharing and evaluation, and is careful to modify the initial situation in an ongoing process of action-reflection-new action.

104. In the following paragraphs we indicate some strategies that we judge to be priorities: the formation of the FMA and laity, accompaniment of young people, the Salesian Youth Movement, volunteering and co-ordination. These strategies call for sharing and educational continuity. Experience teaches that it is not enough to be in agreement on what needs to be done, we also need to research together how to do it.

Form ourselves and work together

A priority

105. All educational environments feel challenged to plan formation programmes that are capable of interpreting experience, speaking to life and giving it direction. Faced with a multicultural reality and the phenomenon of globalisation, the educating communities require constant *formation*, undertaken *together* and capable of creating a common vision and promoting convergent educational action.

Forming ourselves together provides an opportunity for mutual exchange between persons with different vocations: religious, laity and young people. It also helps us to plan for the future, with confidence in the value of our identity and in the quality of the proposal we are making for a life that is rich in meaning.

The central aim of every formation programme is to strengthen the personal journey of development of the educator, in mutual interaction with the younger generations and with the environment. This helps us to better assimilate the Preventive System, within the context of present day educational parameters.

Indispensable competence

106. If we want to develop ongoing formation and a planning mentality, the community model of life and youth ministry that the FMA and lay people share needs to develop a number of forms of competence. These must be in keeping with the aspects mentioned previously: the cultural, evangelising, social and communications aspects.

One of the most important forms of competence is the assimilation of the Salesian charism, especially the elements of the Preventive System, as they have been presented above.

One thing that stands out, in the overall frame of competence, is the capacity for *active listening* to the younger generations, together with the ability to *dialogue*, *discern* and *work together*.

These forms of competence are fundamental for educators.

Knowing how to listen, dialogue and discern is necessary for all adults, especially those who work, in whatever capacity, with growing people.

Listening, dialogue and discernment

107. *Listening* implies the ability to see things from the point of view of the child, adolescent and young person. It requires that we start from the situation, the potential and limits, the ideas and feelings that they are capable of expressing, as well as those not expressed, regarding their emotional, affective, and intellectual life and their relationships.

Dialogue is the challenge of our times. In today's multicultural context it is vitally important to learn not to ignore differences but to dialogue in spite of the differences. The presence in our educational environments of people belonging to cultures and religions different from our own teaches us that identity is strengthened by openness to difference.

To discern means to discover the many faces of need, observing closely the process of development of identity; guiding and supporting the ability to choose and to decide how to carry out one's life plan. This requires that the adult be capable of taking the focus away from self, of paying attention to and showing genuine interest in what the other says or does not say.

Promoting formative activities of research-action centred on these forms of competence constitutes one of the most important steps to be undertaken, both in the process of becoming professional as educators and of forming parents and young people.

Working together

108. *Working together* is vital if we want to develop, in all environments, a coherent plan of evangelising education, inspired by the Salesian charism. A good, shared formation, in fact, needs to become the community's way of working. This implies solidarity of intent and of interventions, effective sharing of the goals of formation, and commitment to unity in our educational action.

Working together means proposing a gradual passage from simple socialisation (exchange of information and knowledge) to integration (both psychological and affective) and finally arrives at co-operation (interaction regarding practical and productive goals) within a relationship of reciprocity.

A style of everyday life that has the characteristics of a family constitutes a good way of achieving the above results. This involves prayer, dialogue, encounter, dedicating time to weekly or monthly meetings that allow for the sharing in common of reflections and spiritual journeys as well as work commitments and viewpoints.

Encouraging self-formation

109. Developing settings for ongoing formation that generate learning and change can encourage the process of self-formation. These help to make people proactive in their own growth. In this way persons are encouraged to express their potential and creativity, so as to overcome the mentality of '*it was always done this way*' and to aim at new standards of quality.

Accompaniment of young people

Salesian sources of accompaniment

110. The practical ways in which Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello accompanied young people recall the spirituality of St. Frances of Sales, expert in guiding people towards an everyday holiness that is possible in any state of life. His method is characterised by gentleness and optimism, not rigid but flexible, based on attention to the individual and on the potential that can be developed in them.

In accompanying people in the ways of the Spirit, Francis of Sales believed that it is important first of all to establish bonds of affection, sincerity, honesty and mutual respect. His spiritual guidance is completely aimed at leading the person to walk the path of God's love and to undertake a process of discernment in their own life, starting from their everyday experience. In leading people to the perfection of love,¹ he is always interested in discovering God's plan for the individual and respecting their uniqueness and freedom. He seeks to strengthen and guide that freedom so that it may be open to love.

In the educational practice of Don Bosco and of Maria Domenica Mazzarello the Salesian method, in harmony with the pedagogy of St. Frances of Sales, expresses itself in attention to everyday life, in practical fidelity to one's commitments to study, work and prayer, in relationships characterised by trust, goodness, kindness and confidence aimed at reaching that holiness to which each one is called.

The relationship of accompaniment

Interpreting reality with young people

111. Seeking, with young people, to discover the presence of God in everyday events is one of the typical elements of Salesian spirituality. The relationship of accompaniment helps to interpret, in a positive way, the situations of one's environment, the events of one's life and society, and teaches to receive them critically and to live them with trust and with love for life.

Accompaniment that takes place in an educational environment is an important experience in the journey towards maturity. In it the action of God, the Lord of History, converges with the free response of the young persons, within the context of their life, which is often contradictory and challenging.

The community - a workshop for the development of vocations

112. Effective accompaniment cannot work without a Christian community of reference that is an icon of the different vocations in the Church.

The educating community is called to offer an environment in which various vocational proposals are evident. But it must also be a workshop in which the different vocations can find suitable soil in which to develop and mutually integrate.

At the school of the interior Master

113. Learning to act in accordance with the action of the Holy Spirit is a fundamental aspect of any relationship that aims at helping faith to mature, both in the adult and in the young person. God is ever at work in the younger generations and in those who choose to accompany them on their journey.

The formative effectiveness of the adult is linked to his/her *being in harmony with the Spirit of Jesus*, because the Spirit is the true master of interior life who renews people and builds communion. Therefore the prayer of both the person who accompanies and of the one who is accompanied are important, in order to live an authentic educational relationship in faith and to offer a positive contribution to the community.

¹ Cf. FRANCIS OF SALES, *Filotea. Introduction to the Devout life*, trans. John K Ryan, New York, Doubleday, 1982.

Conditions for accompaniment

114. The adult is called to plan times and spaces for this relationship, to be clear regarding its goal and to propose it in an attractive way. They need to put the young person at the centre and therefore take the spotlight off themselves, to have patience and to respect the individual rhythms of growth.

Besides this, it is essential that those who accompany pay attention to their own demeanour, keeping a correct distance so as not to create dependence. They must unite trust and loving kindness with the demands of a journey that can require profound changes.

The young persons must be committed and want to undertake this journey, which will call for constancy. They need the ability to accept the frustrations that are part of every growth process, together with sincerity and openness to discover the deep motivation for this choice that they want to make the foundation of their lives.

How to accompany: methodological guidelines

An essential process

115. One of the decisive applications of accompaniment is how to help young people, in particular, to develop a life plan founded on inner strength that can then be cultivated throughout the various stages of life. This implies precise and constant work on the core of the person – the heart – on values, choices and decisions.

The essential elements in the process of accompaniment are therefore: knowledge of oneself and one's story, a journey towards Christian maturity and vocational discernment.

1. Knowing oneself and one's history

Everyday experience

116. Everyday life is the starting point for accompaniment. The relationship is characterised by its reference to the concreteness of life, with its problematic and its positive aspects.

The tenor of the dialogue is derived from what the person lives in her/his day: relations with self and with the family, friendships, relations with the group, school, work, desires, and values: in synthesis, the everyday happenings and extraordinary events that go to make up life. In accompaniment, one must not just look at events and facts. It is necessary to help people to be in touch with the way in which they live their experiences and encounters, that is, to listen to the heart, to the inner echo that gives substance and energy to the actions and facts.

Often in the educational intervention the affective-emotional and spiritual dimensions remain in the shade and are therefore unavailable for integration with the other components of human motivation.

Awareness of one's interior life

117. *Naming one's feelings* is a source of serene self-knowledge, balance and the ability to start again after the weaknesses and failures that normally accompany life's journey. It is important to help people to recognise what lies in their hearts, what the young person feels and experiences.

To do this, it is essential to understand the difference between feeling and following an impulse or emotion. This is necessary to help people become aware of their inner life and motivations, in order to reinforce responsibility and compare them with the values which they claim to believe in.

Owning one's experience

118. Another important step is accompanying young people to accept and integrate *their personal and family history in the light of faith*, so that they can own their lives, their hidden wounds, all the twists and turns of their lives.

This process needs to be carried out in a practical way by allowing the person to tell their story, put it into words or writing, share it, entrust it to someone else. Putting our experience into words,

whether spoken or written, helps us to take ourselves in hand, to look painful realities in the eye, without denying or removing them.

The educator will seek to help the young person to avoid identifying with the difficulty or wound of which, thanks to the dynamics of accompaniment, they are becoming ever more aware. It is necessary, above all, with those who have suffered violence or abuse, to help the person to divert their attention from what has happened in order to move beyond and integrate the violence suffered. The presence of the educator is, therefore, very important so that self-esteem and acceptance, along with a more realistic self image, may be channelled through the appreciation and confidence of another person, in this case, an adult.

Love, freedom and responsibility

119. In the area of accompaniment, it is also necessary to help people discover the meaning and value of the body.

In contemporary culture the body is often trivialised, therefore it is necessary to help the younger generations to link sexuality with love and relationships, and freedom with responsibility. They need to order their relationships towards recognition of the value of the other; to make their talents, their time, the vitality they possess available to combat injustice and discrimination that does not recognise the dignity of those who are different.

In the delicate area of sexuality, a correct education is essential, aware that, in the context of the different cultures, the symbolism linked to sexuality takes on different shades of meaning. It is necessary to present chastity in the light of gift and the choice of a more radical love; to help correct the reductive views and false images mediated by culture, leading them to understand that sexuality is not identified with physical pleasure and, still less, with possessive attitudes. We need to support young people in becoming aware of sexuality as a path to mutual giving and a witness to a pure and self-giving love.

2. The journey towards Christian maturity

The Word of God as a point of reference

120. *Reflecting on everyday life and understanding one's personal history* require meaningful points of reference: encounter with the Word of God and listening to God's voice.

Accompaniment has the task of ensuring the integration of certain essential dimensions: listening to the Word and proclaiming it, prayer and service, action and contemplation, solitude and relationship, experience of the struggle and of the joy of following Jesus. It is therefore, essential to help the person to understand the necessity of giving an ordered rhythm to their life through times of silence, prayer and meditation in which they can enter into harmony with the Spirit of Jesus. Little by little the young person can acquire a taste for spiritual life and for joyfully responding to what God asks.

Only when the young person decides to establish some basic points as the foundation for their Christian life will it be possible to direct their whole life's journey towards Christ.

Universal values that bring personal fulfilment

121. For the young people with whom we are in contact, who belong to other religions or are far from a faith outlook, the reference point for educational and group accompaniment is the holistic vision of the person, of the dimensions that bring fulfilment and of the values of truth, justice, peace, free giving, the defence of human rights and the protection of the environment. These are fundamental values for a human life based on a culture of life and of love.

3. Vocational discernment

Choosing: an essential educational goal

122. A globalised culture tends to lower the threshold between what has value and what has not, and even reaches the point of proposing the negative as an ideal. The ability to choose correctly and autonomously is one of the essential goals of education.

The choices are made in very concrete everyday situations: some are simple and ordinary and others are very demanding. Choosing always implies a process of discernment between the different possibilities for reaching the desired goal.

When we accompany a young person in the discernment of God's plan, we always place ourselves before the mystery of life and of freedom.

As educators it is important to be aware that, in the call to life, absolute primacy goes to the love of God who precedes, sustains and accompanies the individual vocation. But it is equally important to take account of the fact, that, faced with the free gift of God, some dynamics come into play that can either facilitate or block one's response to the fullness of life.

The gift of a vocation

123. In the gradual discovery of the call of God to each person, lies the strength of the unrepeatable gift of a vocation that leads us to change and allow ourselves to be moulded by that same gift.

The adult is called to help the young person to develop a positive attitude towards the future, to manage the insecurity and anxiety that comes from what we do not know, and to contribute to the development of authentic motivation through progressive purification.

At the moment of decision to undertake the way of the evangelical counsels it is necessary to encourage the person to develop the ability to look at their history in the light of the presence of God. Helps received, experiences lived, significant encounters, difficulties are all signs on a journey that goes from remembering to gratitude. Little by little, discernment becomes the gift of oneself, a "total giving of oneself to God", the heart of the spiritual life.

To commit themselves to consecrated life or Christian marriage young people need to understand who the Lord is in their lives and what inspires their deepest desire to give themselves totally to God.

Every vocational commitment has a professional and a political dimension. We are aware that the professions and the way in which they promote life can never be neutral. This leads us to consider the Salesian Youth Movement (SYM) and volunteering as the most opportune strategies for a progressive clarification of one's personal life plan and as concrete opportunities to practice active and responsible citizenship.

The Salesian Youth Movement (SYM)

Elements of identity

124. The SYM is an educational proposal developed *by young people and for young people*, within the Salesian Family. The members of the Movement are young people and adults, religious and lay, who identify with the Salesian charism.

The elements of identity that characterise the SYM are the sharing of the Salesian Youth Spirituality (SYS) and the Preventive System. These form links between groups who share the same values and ideals and promote initiatives such as meaningful occasions of dialogue, sharing Christian formation and youthful expression.

The Movement is *youthful* in style, method of animation and involvement. In various contexts a 'consultative body' of young people has been established and functions regularly. It looks after the presence and participation of the Movement at the level of the local church.

It is *educational* because the young people and adults educate and form themselves together, drawing from the sources of spirituality. They identify with the basic values of the Salesian charism to be translated into practical life.

It is a *worldwide* Movement, a sign of communion between peoples and cultures. It offers a great opportunity to network for the dignity of the person, the promotion of the younger generations, solidarity with the poor and new evangelisation.²

Communion between all groups

125. The Movement gives visible form to communion between various groups and associations which, while maintaining their organisational autonomy, are inspired by Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello, and identify with Salesian spirituality and pedagogy. This communion is open and unites many young people: from those farthest away, for whom spirituality is a point of reference that is barely perceptible in an environment in which they feel welcomed, to those who live and share Salesian spirituality with awareness and explicitly.

We can therefore consider the SYM as structured in concentric circles with different levels of belonging. For this reason no youth group that frequents Salesian works is to be considered outside the SYM.

Constant characteristics

126. The Movement is marked by certain *characteristics*:

- ❑ The groups are characterised by a very specific ‘spirituality’ and ‘practice’, rather than by statutes
- ❑ Belonging is something alive rather than formal. It is rooted in a constantly renewed sense of belonging, without enrolments or membership cards
- ❑ It is a place where the young people occupy the leading role, a place of educational responsibility and vocational discernment
- ❑ It is a place where faith is at the centre of life, where everyday life is lived as a meaningful experience of growth. It is a place where people make a fundamental option for the Kingdom of God in the educational, social and ecclesial field.

Areas of commitment

127. Among its *areas of commitment* the SYM gives pride of place to the educative-preventive area, whether in settings where everyone is welcome or in those dedicated to systematic education. It commits itself to liturgical and catechetical animation; the animation of culture and leisure in its local area; social and political involvement in the search for the common good and educational and missionary volunteering.

The formation of the leaders is fundamental in building up and promoting the Movement and is a prerequisite for the development of the SYM in the various settings.

The places of our Salesian origins have taken on considerable importance as opportunities for living contact with the roots of the charism. In recent years they have become places for youth gatherings and for significant experiences in dialogue and Christian formation.

Living Salesian Youth Spirituality

128. Reflecting on and living SYS is a fundamental, permanent and inalienable role for all the groups. SYS is a specific programme of holiness, lived in an environment rich in values, according to the Preventive System. At the centre of this spirituality is everyday life lived in the light of the mystery of God. It is rooted in love of life and a commitment to make it “full and abundant” for all, especially the poorest. It tends towards the higher and more demanding dimensions of Christian life.³

² Cf. SDB DEPARTMENT – FMA SECTOR FOR YOUTH MINISTRY, *Signs and bearers of God’s love for the young. Acts of the World Forum of the Salesian Youth Movement*. Colle don Bosco, August 6-13 2000, Rome 2001, 130-131

³ Cf. YOUTH MINISTRY DEPARTMENTS FMA – SDB, *Salesian Youth Spirituality: The Spirit’s gift to the Salesian Family: a gift for all who believe and hope in life*, Rome 1996, 52-70.

The concrete task of every group that gradually assimilates the SYS is to witness to it not only in Salesian environments but also outside them, sharing the experience of this spirituality and the values of the Preventive System. To facilitate this transmission it is important to use language and forms of expression that are suited to the world of today's young people.

The commitment of the Salesian Family

129. The members of the different groups of the Salesian Family, young people and adults, religious and laity, are called to work together with a co-ordinated and co-responsible planning mentality for the promotion of the SYM as an expression of the educational and missionary commitment of the whole Salesian Family.

On the other hand, the various groups that belong to it are privileged places where the Movement can experience the continuity of the different vocational proposals.

Volunteering

Development of different forms of volunteering

130. The remarkable development of different forms of volunteering in the Institute of the FMA shows the commitment of the local and provincial communities to developing a culture of free giving and of solidarity.

The experiences undertaken in various contexts show that volunteering allows us to reach young people who are questioning the meaning of life, even if they are not always close to the church community.

The experience of volunteering provides an opportunity to meet with young people belonging to other religions, to cultivate openness to ecumenism and interfaith dialogue.

It is a strategy that should be encouraged because it unites two fundamental aspects of the Salesian mission: young people taking on leadership roles and service to others. In fact, educational processes do not close people in on themselves, but open them to responsible participation in human affairs.

Young people serving

131. Young volunteers, through their service, live as caring people, *educate themselves* and *others* to free giving, to a culture that gives priority to *being over having*. They proclaim, through action, that human persons are more valuable for what they are than for what they possess. In this way they critically assess and oppose a society that gives first place to profit and efficiency as models for the interpretation of life.

Volunteering, which aims at *making people responsible* and encouraging *participation*, helps young people to get involved, in an ever more aware and mature way, in the life of the educating community and in its work for the weakest groups in society.

Shared planning, active participation in projects for the poorest – immigrants, victims of human trafficking – allows the young volunteers to become progressively more proactive in the ecclesial and sociocultural situation for the common good.

For those who are searching for their vocation, it is a privileged place of discernment of their life plan.

Salesian experience

132. The *educating community* is the first place of service offered to the young people. Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello gave preference to this form of youth action in which young people can prepare, in everyday life, for broader missionary perspectives. In Mornese, the boarders shared the missionary ideal of the community. In Valdocco, Dominic Savio, Michael Magone and other boys felt responsible for building an environment that facilitated the serene growth of their companions.

There has always been a lively commitment of young people, both in Salesian environments and in other areas, and this has become more intense and has adapted to changing situations.

Volunteer associations

133. The organising of volunteer associations is one of the most relevant expressions of the Salesian charism. They aim at forming responsible citizens who are inspired by Gospel values and act in society in a critical and proactive way.

Through volunteer associations one can participate actively in the process of change at social level.

While we are aware that volunteering and its values are for all, those who believe in the Gospel are challenged by the demand to live the values proclaimed by Jesus in a coherent way.

The proposal of international volunteering, which is also facilitated by the support of FMA communities who live the mission *ad gentes*, is a practical opportunity for young people to meet other cultures, peoples and religions. This helps to make them aware that mission, more than a series of activities, is a way of life for the Church and for Christians.

Formation: a challenge for the future

134. The holistic formation of young volunteers is the great challenge, so that programmes and associations, recognised at civil level, may become more and more a presence that supports the practice of solidarity and the search for the common good.

It is important therefore to focus on the motivation that leads people to choose volunteering, offering suitable formation programmes, adequately prepared and welcoming communities and well focused projects.

Co-ordination for communion

Synergy round a common process

135. A model of co-ordination, which is in line with the FMA *Plan of Formation*, involves thinking and working together, using a methodology of collaboration in a very complex situation. This choice goes beyond mere organisation and highlights more clearly the main lines or areas of convergence.

Co-ordination is a way of leading that tends to involve people in a circular manner, so as to encourage an exchange of resources and the expression of creativity in communion.⁴

There is no one way of organising our educational mission. It is entrusted to all the Sectors of Animation and requires mutual cooperation and unity. Methods of pastoral action need to be researched, experimented with and evaluated in the context in which one works, so that they may offer a response to the real needs of the people in question. Co-ordinating in a harmonious way guarantees synergy of all the resources around common international, provincial and local projects, over and above the different methods and structures of animation.⁵

Educating community

136. The educational mission is entrusted to the whole educating community and requires the convergence of many interventions in a project of global promotion. This, in turn, requires the participation of a number of interests and different levels of interaction: ecclesial, social and political. Putting the young people at the centre, the educating community is committed to weaving a network of solidarity between all those who believe in education and, in particular, with the groups of the Salesian Family.

⁴ Cf. *Plan of Formation* 151.

⁵ Cf. *ivi* 164.

The animating core group

137. In the educating community the animating core group is made up of the FMA, young people and lay people who share faith in Jesus, the Lord of life, and in the spirit of the Preventive System. They promote a Christian vision of reality and a youth-ministry project that has as its aim the holistic education of the person.⁶

Key figures of co-ordination

138. The co-ordination of youth ministry, at different levels, is entrusted to a specific *key-figure*, the *Councillor*, the *Youth Ministry Co-ordinator (FMA or lay)* or to a *Commission*, called to promote the quality of the pastoral action.

To ensure co-ordination in the local or provincial community, the Co-ordinator may be assisted by different types of groups and persons who guarantee that the ‘spirituality of communion’ is put into practice.

Their action, which integrates the basic educational reference points, takes place on two fronts: the development of culture, through research and the development of a pastoral mentality, and the promotion of the educational settings and activities according to the style of the Preventive System.⁷

A person who undertakes the service of *co-ordination* does not work alone, but moves within a rich system of interactions, in a co-responsible style.

The method and level of interaction are co-ordinated by the members of the animating core group and the local, provincial and general councils. Working in harmony, they seek ways to be an effective and significant presence among young people. Together they develop the fundamental lines of the mission, which are later inculturated into the various contexts, according to the shared guidelines coming from each General Chapter.

Different levels of co-operation

139. Other levels of co-operation can be established by the Youth Ministry Teams, by Commissions and Consultative groups of the Salesian Family or of the SYM, by the Consultants of the Sectors or by the Interprovincial Conferences. The same models do not exist at local and provincial level. But whatever model of co-ordination may be chosen, it involves collaboration between FMA and lay people and interaction between the various Sectors of animation.

The *key figures* are the fundamental hub of this dynamic, creative and flexible sharing. They co-ordinate and animate from within, paying constant attention to the objectives that have been set and facilitating links between the various levels of animation, between the various nodes of the local, provincial and international networks.

Provincial co-ordination

140. At provincial level, according to the model chosen, the Co-ordinators of the various Sectors of animation, provide encouragement, support and collaboration to the local communities so that they can translate the provincial plan into their own reality and put it into practice. They evaluate together how the cultural, evangelising, social and communications viewpoints are kept in mind in the educational processes.

The *Provincial co-ordinator for youth ministry*, in particular, looks after the specific choices and actions that regard the education of young people and works in collaboration with commissions made up of FMA and lay people. She promotes pastoral action so that in the various sectors it may faithfully reflect the Salesian educational charism, and she encourages the development of concrete programmes that support persons and groups in their journey towards encountering Christ.

International Co-ordination

⁶ Cf. C 68.

⁷ Cf. *Plan of Formation*, 156

141. Mother General and the General Councillors offer guidelines so that every province and Interprovincial Conference may build genuine educating communities that, in the spirit of the Preventive System, favour the holistic formation of women and young people, especially the poorest.

In a specific way, the General Councillor for Youth Ministry networks with the co-ordinators of the various provinces, valuing the richness that comes from sharing the experiences of a variety of situations and of educational and cultural approaches. In agreement with the Salesian Department of Youth Ministry she promotes the SYM and other initiatives.

Chapter 6

CREATING AN EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

The educational plan that characterises the Salesian environment makes it an organised place, which is rich in proposals that can help to develop life and hope in young people. The environment becomes a bridge between the values inspired by the Gospel and the sociocultural context, and a place where it is possible to experience relationships that are rich in values and characterised by trust and dialogue.

It is from the Preventive System that the educating communities draw the criteria that characterise each environment and experience as Salesian.

Our educational mission takes place in a variety of environments so that it can be adapted to different contexts and meet the needs of the young people. Each of these offers opportunities to set up different programmes of youth ministry and of involvement in the social and ecclesial contexts.

Every environment should be distinguished by the quality of its proposals, by the flexibility with which it faces emerging formative challenges and by its ability to grasp the educational needs of young people. This calls for commitment to integrating formal and non-formal education, recognising the family as the principal place in which education takes place. It requires intelligent and discreet work to facilitate the inculturation of our educational programme, being attentive to ecumenical and interfaith dialogue, and the ability to network without losing sight of the newer forms of youth poverty.

The environment as a place of education

142. According to the Salesian charism, the educational environment acts as a bridge between Gospel inspired values and the socio-cultural context. It is a space in which young people can plan their lives in an atmosphere of trust, and experience living and working as a group. It is a place in which personalised education goes hand in hand with the creation of an environment where joy, the fruit of a positive view of life, creates the conditions necessary for an atmosphere of friendship between young people and adults. In the Salesian approach, education involves, above all, creating an educational environment as a privileged way of forming to social responsibility.

where Salesian spirituality is shared

143. The Salesian environment is distinguished by a spirituality that permeates the life of young people and adults. This spirituality is characterised by faith in God, places at its centre the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ, who became incarnate, died and rose again, and the active presence of Mary most holy.

In the Salesian environment people believe in the transforming power of the Sacraments as the foundation for the mature Christian person. This results in a committed faith and is translated into daily life lived in optimism and joy, in trust that God is constantly at work in history, and asks us, as individuals and as community, to be signs of God's presence.

Criteria that characterise a Salesian environment

Criteria inspired by the Preventive System

144. In each context, the educating communities are committed to creating a climate where one can relive, today, the experience of Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello. The criteria that make an environment truly Salesian are inspired by the Preventive System.

They also guide the action of FMA who work in Church and/or state institutions¹ and of the *communities of insertion* in poorer contexts. They witness to the Salesian charism in specific forms, animating the journey of young people and adults towards authentic human growth, or towards the building of true Christian communities rooted in the Word and in the Eucharist.

Trust in young people

145. A Salesian environment is characterised by its option for young people, “the most precious portion of human society”. This attitude is inspired by Don Bosco for whom in every person, no matter what their situation in life, there exists a point that can be reached by goodness. Educators are called to discover this and to help in developing it. According to the Preventive System, believing in goodness means bringing it to birth.

The fundamental criterion for people, communities and educational environments that want to be faithful to the Salesian charism is belief in young people.

Preferential option for the poorest

146. In Valdocco and Mornese the educational mission was characterised by a preferential option for young people, who are “poor, abandoned and in danger”. The need to facilitate access to education especially for young people at risk is a commitment that leads us to avoid every form of exclusion or hand-out mentality, aware that Salesian environments evoke a proactive response and contribute to the transformation of the area in which they are situated, starting with the little ones and the poor, who are at the centre of every educational plan.

for young people searching for their vocation

¹ As the *Regulations of the FMA* (R) point out, every Sister is involved in the one local educational project, even when she gives her service to Church organisations or other forms of pastoral work outside the community to which she belongs (cf. R 55).

147. Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello gave special attention to those young people who showed a particular vocation to the service of the Church community. This criterion calls on the educating communities to accompany such young people, offering them opportunities to share more closely in the educational mission, life in the Spirit and the proclamation of the Gospel, with the aim of guiding them towards an explicit vocational journey.

for young women

148. The promotion and holistic education of young women are operative criteria that characterise the FMA educating communities. Maria Domenica Mazzarello and the first FMA inaugurated an approach that valued and cultivated women's gifts, with a view to their formation and their mission in society and in the Church. God has entrusted humankind to women and has given them a special vocation to care for and promote life at all levels.

Family Spirit

149. A community that educates is a basic requirement of the Preventive System. Each member has a specific role and task, but is also aware of and co-responsible for the work and the commitments of the others, because all share the same project. The Salesian life-style that animates the community unites the educators and young people in one and the same formative experience and presupposes a climate of participation, sharing of values, patient waiting for the rhythms of each one's personal growth, and respectful dialogue with the bearers of other cultural and religious traditions. In the community, relations are characterised by a "family spirit" that overcomes barriers, encourages confidence, brings generations closer and creates an atmosphere of trust, where people can grow in freedom and collaborate with each other in reciprocity.

Passion for education

150. Educators, both lay and religious, are persons consecrated to an educational mission to young people. This dedication goes beyond professionalism. Don Bosco, in fact, saw education as a mission entrusted by God to people called to participate, through different roles and tasks, in a formative community.

Educators cultivate human qualities that facilitate the mission entrusted to them, such as freedom, human equilibrium, upright personal motivation, affective, spiritual, ascetic and psychological stability and openness to relationships with God and with their brothers and sisters. Therefore, besides professionalism, they need to possess joy and a passion for education that urges them to stay continuously among young people, with a kindliness that witnesses to the preventive love with which God loves them.

The formation of the educator is fundamental for the effectiveness and vitality of educational environments.

Salesian assistance-presence

151. The *assistance-presence* that Don Bosco recommended so much and that Maria Domenica Mazzarello lived and taught to educators is an essential requirement of the educating community. Fidelity to this educational principle expresses trust and love, opens to dialogue at all levels, leads to participation in the local Church and area and witnesses to a joyful response to one's vocation as a path to holiness.

Adults and young people in mutual relationships

152. In a Salesian community, young people not only receive, but give their own contribution and become proactive in their own formation and in that of their peers, in the context of an ever more intercultural society. In it, young people and adults, though starting from different points, tend together towards the same goal, through interpersonal relations characterised by reciprocity.

An educational environment that is faithful to the charism facilitates in each one a gradual discovery of themselves, of their interior life where God abides, and of their human growth.

A programme of holistic education

153. Helping young people to become mature in faith and responsible citizens is the aim of Don Bosco and of all projects that are inspired by him. This educational objective expresses the synthesis of education and evangelisation, and the conviction that the renewal of society takes place through a Christian experience that leads to and gives quality to cultural and social commitment. The plan of holistic education according to the Salesian method responds to the most authentic aspirations of the person. It is a spirituality and method that guides action and permeates the life of the educators.²

Educational value of the group

154. In Salesian educational practice the group is an indispensable methodological choice because it is a response to the needs and demands of youth.

The group responds to the need to belong and to be accepted, through interpersonal relationships. In response to the need to build one's identity, the group offers experiences that promote responsibility, initiative, creativity and working together.

The free choice to belong to a group, the continuity of the journey, the presence of adults and the interaction with social and ecclesial reality make the group an effective influence in the growth of young people.

Concreteness of methodological programmes

155. A Salesian environment is characterised by the programmes and strategies adopted in practice with a view to the gradual and efficacious fulfilment of the educational project. The formula “cheerfulness-study/work-piety” synthesises the style of Christian life offered to young people. It shows Don Bosco’s grasp of their real situation in a period in which they are building their identity.

Every educational process starts from practical life and aims to help people reach human and Christian fullness to the point of directly proposing holiness.

Openness to the ecclesial and social context

156. A Salesian community, which is faithful to the spirit that animates it, is characterised by attention to the Church and the socio-cultural reality into which it is inserted.

Participation in the life of the Church through parish and diocesan communities, besides expressing fidelity to the charism, is a practical sign of communion, in an atmosphere of trust and mutual appreciation.

By working towards building relationships with the area we show our respect for local cultures and our commitment to open and proactive dialogue, which aims at developing intercultural relations and introducing the young people into the environment that surrounds them.

The challenges

Relationship between formal and non-formal education

157. In the different contexts, educative environments face numerous issues. Among these, priority is given to improving the processes of *interaction between formal and non-formal education*. In practice this means strengthening collaboration and mutual support between the school, vocational training, works for children and young people at risk, women’s promotion centres and oratory-youth centres. New and more conscious relationships can help to overcome prejudices by starting innovative and effective programmes with a view to building a society of

² Cf C 7.

solidarity and, through common action, directed towards guaranteeing a viable future for those who are disadvantaged and marginalised.

Dialogue with the family

158. Relations with the *family* are a real challenge for the educating community. In the Salesian tradition dialogue with parents becomes openness to sharing and offering them formative support in their unique role. Interaction with the family is particularly important today, when the institution of the family is strongly threatened by laws that favour new types of union, which do not respect the plan of God who created man and woman as mutually complementary. A culture of life and its promotion are at the centre of educational dialogue with the family. Faced with the growing number of children and young people without a family, this challenge leads us to continue our ongoing reflection on the relationship between the Preventive System and situations of disadvantage.

Christian Communities of reference

159. Present in all times and places is a challenge to create *Christian communities of reference*. These, as part of the Church, accompany people on the various paths of formation for adults and young people. They celebrate and witness to the faith starting with the practical commitment to building the Kingdom of God and transforming society in a way that makes our civil life together ever more characterised by justice and respect for life. Such communities must be capable of providing an environment and an atmosphere rich in human and Gospel values. This requires that they be capable of living loving kindness in educational relationships and of working in harmony with the parish, the diocese and the local area. They are communities that strengthen the sense of belonging to one's local Church or favour the building of Christian communities in those areas where they do not yet exist.

Intercultural, ecumenical and interfaith dialogue

160. In today's complexity and fragmentation, educational environments are called on to provide the younger generations with the rudiments they need to develop an intercultural, ecumenical and interfaith vision. One of the most demanding challenges of this new century is offering programmes that facilitate the passage from multiculturalism to welcoming and sharing, in order to reach mutual understanding, leading to intercultural, ecumenical and interfaith dialogue.

Networking

161. Networking with other groups of the Salesian Family, the diocese, the parish and all the other institutions that work for the defence and promotion of the rights of the person, especially of young people in difficulty, is of fundamental importance for an educational process that has its roots in the local area.

New forms of poverty

162. Responding to the new forms of poverty challenges us to plan educational programmes characterised by prevention, to welcome immigrants, to defend young women and girl-children, to combat human trafficking, to liberate ethnic and religious minorities from violence, abuse and attacks on their very lives, and to welcome those without a family or who come from frustrating family experiences.

Variety of environments

Different environments

163. The educational mission takes place in a *variety of environments*, taking into account the different contexts and the needs of the young people. In each of these it offers opportunities for varied programmes of youth ministry and of participation in the social and ecclesial reality. We recall, briefly, the fundamental characteristics of some environments, aware that in the various continents they take on different forms and styles.

It is also important to consider that the needs of today's ever-changing youth situation not only calls for constantly renewed environments, but becomes an incentive for the development of innovative works.

Oratory-Youth Centre

164. The oratory-youth centre is characterised by a formative programme rich in human and Christian values, expressed in a range of activities suited to different age-groups and areas of life: sport, leisure activities, school support, support for young people in difficulty, formation for work, literacy, promotion of volunteering and occasional or systematic catechesis.

In the various continents it provides a place that is welcoming, joyful, open to the various expressions of life of the young people and capable of educating to faith and social life.

The oratory-youth centre aims to create an authentic youth community, united around the Lord, who loves, pardons, calls to His service and to witness in the various environments in which we live. It provides an informal education programme suited even to inter-faith contexts, because it is open to all young people without exclusion because of background, religion or culture.

a variety of programmes

165. In the different geographic regions, the oratory-youth centre offers a great variety of educational programmes, activities and types of gatherings in which children, adolescents and young adults can take part, according to their interests. These include spontaneous groups, where natural leaders and immediate interests prevail, and more structured groups that offer specific formative programmes (groups for sports, culture, social commitment, deepening of the faith, vocation research, and mission awareness).

group life

166. Group life and the promotion of associations are privileged places for promoting the growth of the younger generations. Through the presence of leaders they encourage the passage from immediate to deeper interests and lead the young people to take on commitments of service in the educational environment and, progressively, in the civil and ecclesial community. The oratory-youth centre is characterised by an ever more systematic and explicitly Christian formation process that allows the young people to experience a youthful community and to look at their lives in the light of the Gospel message.

Schools and centres for vocational training

167. *The schools and centres of vocational training*³ are places where *a critical culture is developed*, through constant dialogue with the Christian vision of the person, of life and of history, and where *professionalism is developed* according to a life programme inspired by Gospel values. These environments of formal education are part of the mission of the Church and exist in order that the Church community, civil society and the family may give appropriate consideration to the education of young people.

in dialogue with educational institutions and needs

³ Cf. FMA YOUTH MINISTRY SECTOR, *Formal education: potential and perspectives for the future*, Rome, Istituto FMA 2002, 15. To enrich your vision of the situation regarding formal education cf. EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR SCHOOLS/VOCATIONAL TRAINING CENTRES, *Travel Notes on primary education*, Rome, Istituto FMA 2002.

168. The schools and training centres, in dialogue with other institutions in the area and with the needs of the growing person, promote pastoral action that strengthens the formation of responsible, active and creative people, who are committed to understanding and developing culture rather than receiving it passively. They learn to be in constant interaction with the world and with themselves, capable of relating to others and collaborating in order to know and interpret reality. They aim to fulfil their own identity, to grow in autonomy and develop forms of competence that will facilitate a positive and proactive involvement in the area in which they live. The schools and training centres also accompany the formation of educators and auxiliary personnel and support the family in its unique educational role.

preferred methods

169. At a methodological level they give preference to:

- *Experience* interpreted within a social and educational context, that is intentionally directed towards a progressive expansion of knowledge and competence;
- *Research* as a method for developing strategies, looking at situations correctly, formulating questions, modifying and enriching one's point of view, knowing the geographic and historic aspects of the environment in which one lives;
- *A life of relationships* permeated by loving kindness and reciprocity, as a specific expression of the Preventive System;
- *An interdisciplinary approach* as a way of dealing with the various areas of knowledge;
- *An intercultural approach* as the background against which we look at identity and difference, to promote the formation of an awareness that is open and capable of solidarity.

Institutes of higher studies

170. In recent years the *Institutes of higher studies* have become more firmly established as an expression of our educational mission. Some are run by the Congregation, others in collaboration with establishments directed by the Salesians, by other religious congregations or ecclesial communities. The Salesian educational method and spirituality form an explicit or implicit point of reference in these institutes, which are characterised by:

- A rigorous and scientific organisation of research, curricula and teaching material, in harmony with a Christian vision of the human person and of life;
- Interdisciplinary dialogue between the various areas of study;
- Curricular material of specifically ethical and theological character;
- A diversity of formative programmes that demonstrate real attention to the students and to their journey towards maturity;
- A specific offer of evangelisation, Christian formation, commitment to the service of others, in openness to ecumenical and interfaith dialogue;
- Concrete witness to a more human culture from a Gospel perspective.

University hostels

171. University hostels, characterised by a distinct Salesian family atmosphere, reach young people who are living an important moment in their lives. They need to have mature adult persons close to them who, with discretion and firmness, are capable of helping them to integrate the aspect of university formation into a broader life plan inspired by Christian humanism.

Schools for catechists

172. In the area of systematic formation we must also mention the commitment to the formation of catechists. In the Congregation great emphasis is given to catechesis and, in different contexts, various FMA, past pupils and other members of the Salesian Family are involved in the formation and updating of catechists in dioceses and parishes. Such programmes aim at making the catechists capable of taking the Gospel seriously in their own lives and of becoming experts in

communicating the experience of faith. They are formed to animate educational processes that help to free the expressive energy of the young people, and to be competent in the use of the languages of mass media. It is important to keep in mind the fact that the media are a resource for the communication of the Gospel of life.

Houses of spirituality for young people

173. *Houses of spirituality* offer young people the possibility of experiencing silence and a more prolonged contact with nature and with the word of God, which offers motivation and essential convictions. What distinguishes such houses is the presence of a community that helps young people to accept life as a vocation and to translate it into a plan that is at the service of life. The experience of personal and liturgical prayer, the celebration of the sacraments and personal accompaniment are characteristic elements of these places where young people are explicitly guided to know Christ, to witness to the Gospel and to deepen Salesian spirituality.

alternative dynamisms

174. In these centres certain conditions are generally used to help people to enter into a process of ongoing conversion:

- *Silence* as an alternative to the confusion and noise that prevents people from re-composing the fragments of life;
- *Care for interiority* as a conscious return to the heart, to one's centre to listen to the interior master, the Holy Spirit, who guides us to discover the plan for our life;
- *Calm* as an alternative to the tension that derives from not having a precise direction that unifies one's energies;
- *Simplicity of life* in contrast to consumerism and the egoistic exploitation of creation;
- *Free giving* as a rediscovery of God's free giving, in a world governed by gain and calculation;
- *The Family Spirit*, the creative force of the Salesian charism, which can heal deep wounds and open people to the gift of self.

In some contexts, the *houses of spirituality* welcome young people from a variety of religions and cultures. At the centre of these experiences is interfaith dialogue, recognition of the values common to the different religions and care for interiority, that facilitates meeting God, one's self, others and nature.

Works for children, adolescents and young people at risk

175. Family homes, residential communities and welcome centres are characterised by a formative programme that takes the concrete situation of its recipients and their precarious and abandoned condition as its starting point.⁴ Through a faithful and creative application of the basic principle of the Preventive System, which is unconditional belief in the possibility for change in young people, they work to lead the wounded person to freedom and maturity and seek to restore the value of the family.

This educational action is particularly directed to the diversified developmental processes of people. They aim at reconciling people in difficulty with their life's journey and developing the abilities and resources they possess to help them to enter into society in an adequate and gratifying way.

⁴ Cf AMBITO PER LA PASTORALE GIOVANILE FMA, *Amore e progettualità per risvegliare vita e speranza. Esperienze di educazione non formale*, Roma, Istituto FMA 2002. For information on non-formal education processes and experiences aimed at young people at risk cf BORSI Mara - CHINELLO Maria Antonia - MORA Ruth del Pilar - ROSANNA Enrica - SANGMA Bernadette (a cura di), *Homeward bound. The Salesian Method of Education and Young People at Risk*, Roma, LAS 1999, 215-221; BORSI Mara - MORA Ruth del Pilar - SANGMA Bernadette (a cura di), *Bambine, adolescenti e giovani a rischio in America Latina. Sistematizzazione e processi educativi*, Roma, VIDES-Cooperazione Italiana 2002.

An individualised educational plan is the most suitable way to involve children and young adults in the process of rebuilding their lives.

fundamental characteristics

176. Owning one's personal history is the crucial step for the success of any educational action. This process can even begin with the simple recognition of one's own name, of which the child or young adult is sometimes ignorant.

School support and training for work assume a decisive role in these establishments in order to promote awareness of personal dignity, autonomy and a new relationship with people and society. A caring educational relationship is centred on the dimensions of listening, acceptance, dialogue, observation and the ability to wait for the developmental rhythms of the person without the anxiety of achieving immediate positive results.

Centres for the promotion of women

177. The *Centres for the promotion of women* aim to make women aware of their dignity, rights and role as educators of the family and promoters of a more human society, in mutual relationship with men.

Generally these works are situated in contexts of great poverty and in the new missionary frontiers of the Congregation. In many cases they are animated by FMA communities involved in the mission *ad gentes*, passionate for the Gospel, attentive to the rights of minorities and in dialogue with the cultural and religious traditions present in the area in which they live and work.

areas of intervention

178. In the women's promotion centres, the most important areas of intervention are: promoting self-awareness, social participation, cultural formation, economic autonomy and health care. Regarding feminine self-awareness, the programmes aim to progressively strengthen the ability of women to become proactive agents of change. Through the formation of self-help groups, they learn to break the silence regarding exploitation, to take decisions and to exercise leadership in a mutual way.

Work, in the area of cultural formation, is characterised by flexibility of timetables, programmes for distance learning, literacy, and use of the social communications media and other technology.

a methodology of participation

179. To facilitate economic autonomy of the women, the centres opt for methods that involve participation, and will enable them to acquire entrepreneurial skills and lead to a mentality of thrift.

Generally, the women are helped to set up projects based on micro credit or rotating credit in the areas of craft work, textiles, rearing of animals and organic farming.

Action in the area of health aims at prevention through education to hygiene, to healthy diet and to the use of natural medicines.

Welcoming centres for immigrants

180. Called by the phenomenon of human mobility, the educating communities of the various continents have opened *Welcoming Centres for Immigrants*.⁵

⁵ Cf. AMBITO PER LA MISSIONE AD GENTES FMA, *Per una casa comune nella diversità dei popoli*, Roma, Istituto FMA 2002; PONTIFICIO CONSIGLIO DELLA PASTORALE PER I MIGRANTI E GLI ITINERANTI, *Istruzione Erga Migrantes caritas Christi (the charity of Christ towards migrants)*, 3 maggio 2004, Città del Vaticano, LEV 2004; CONGREGAZIONE PER GLI ISTITUTI DI VITA CONSACRATA E LE SOCIETÀ DI VITA APOSTOLICA - PONTIFICIO CONSIGLIO DELLA PASTORALE PER I MIGRANTI E GLI ITINERANTI, *Lettera Congiunta alle Superiori e ai Superiori generali degli Istituti di vita consacrata e le Società di vita apostolica. Impegno pastorale nei confronti di migranti, rifugiati e altre persone coinvolte nei drammi della mobilità umana*, Città del Vaticano, 13 maggio 2005.

Through specific projects, they facilitate the active participation of the immigrants in their own integration into the country that receives them. They give special place to the education of children, young people and women, in order to care for life and safeguard cultural traditions. They promote an educational process that makes use of pluralism and facilitates the management of fear and cultural conflict.

In the various branches of the educating communities, hands-on knowledge of the situation of the immigrants contributes to the development of such attitudes as acceptance, openness, flexibility and responsibility.

181. With this brief and incomplete description of some places of education, we want to emphasise the formative value of the environment. We cannot forget that this was one of the most genial intuitions of Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello. They offered young people an environment rich in proposals and values, where they could meet people who were in love with God and sensitive to the joys and sufferings of all and where they could express their own potential.

This is an invitation to the young people, FMA communities and lay people to commit themselves, together, to make our formal and non formal educational environments into places where life can grow and one can experience an atmosphere of hope.

CONCLUSION

Can there be a conclusion to our sharing of the guidelines for our educational mission?

At this point, we ask ourselves the same question that we asked at the end of the writing of the *Plan of Formation*.

Here, too, the response is to begin again each day to search together for the best ways in which everyone can discover God's plan for their life.

These guidelines, which we have tried to write together, need to be translated locally into educational plans.

It has been said that everyday life is the home of meaning.

Today, more than ever, we cannot undertake an educational journey without taking account of the context in which we are called to live. Therefore, it is only by starting from the challenges of the place and time we live in, which varies in spite of globalisation, that we can identify, together with the young people, the most suitable programmes for their life plan.

However, the love of predilection is still necessary for those who are taking their first steps on the road of life.

Don Bosco left this to us as his testament:

"Near or far, I am always thinking of you", he wrote to his boys from Rome. "My one desire is to see you happy in time and in eternity". And again "You are the one constant thought in my mind".

These words still move us and recall the task that was also given to Maria Domenica: "I entrust them to you". And she responded with her life, given for love, living the commandment of joy and working for the advancement of the person.

So we too are called to translate, for today's world, the signs of that educative love that makes us truly faithful to the Gospel and leads us to follow, every day, in the footsteps of Mary Our Help and of our founders.

We are aware that we need to strengthen our communion with God and our docility to the Spirit in order to really taste life to the fullest. The Spirit, present in us, can help us understand God's Word and the signs of our times. The Spirit alone can illumine our mind, warm our heart,¹ and give us joy and freedom.

The *guidelines for our educational mission* are entrusted to individuals and to educating communities as an opportunity for growth in communion, in the ability to live and give hope to all, especially the younger generations.

Aware that the Gospel is a gift to be shared and a fire to be nourished, we stake all the positive resources of the educating community on the ability of the young people, FMA and lay people to live together, with passion, the adventure of building the Kingdom of God and a different quality of life.

We re-launch the Preventive System in every context, believing in its charismatic power to regenerate society, starting from the young people, in order to identify the most fruitful way of being close to them and telling them the good news of the Gospel so that they may *have life and have it to the full*.

¹ Cf *Starting afresh from Christ 2*.

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In the context of research into the renewal of religious life in the Church, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, in these *Guidelines for our educational mission*, reaffirm the commitment of the Congregation to a form of youth ministry that finds in Christ the fundamental point of reference for the development of personality and for the building of a world of greater humanity and solidarity.

This text inspires a form of youth ministry that is open to an intercultural and interfaith context and is illuminated by the great dream of Don Bosco and of Maria Domenica Mazzarello: *to educate by evangelising and to evangelise by educating*.

The challenge to be faced in order to communicate the gospel of life is that of guiding young people *to encounter Christ by creating an educational environment*.