

SOME INDICATIONS FOR THE ANIMATION OF THE SALESIAN FAMILY AT THE PROVINCE AND LOCAL LEVELS

As a follow-up to the verification of the programming for the next six years, which was put into motion by the General Council last June, as regards the Salesian Family, it seems opportune to me to recall some elements to which we ought to pay attention at the provincial and local levels for an ever more efficacious animation thereof.

1. The Provincial Salesian Family Consulta

This communion-building body was foreseen in article 37 of the Common Identity Card (1998). It is created for the purpose of cultivating a sense of belonging to the Salesian Family, for rediscovering together Don Bosco's charisma, which is proper to all the Groups, and of reinforcing their collaboration in view of the mission to the young.

Such a Consulta, through regular encounters and in the fraternal spirit which must animate it, will be a great instrument to sensitize all the Groups of Salesian Family, and will help them grow in the knowledge of the mission, to which all are called (even if in diverse ways).

Recalling the indications of the former General Councilors for the Salesian Family, I want to remind us that it can operate:

On the formative level, according to the following points:

- To study Don Bosco, our Founder - to know, understand, and take on his foundational project and his criteria for pastoral action.
- To come to know of the positive experiences of pastoral action as a Salesian Family in the history of the Congregation, and of the Salesian Family - anniversaries (Centenaries, Golden anniversaries, etc.) are some of the most apt occasions to acquire or to deepen such knowledge.
- To acquire direct and concrete knowledge of the Groups of the Salesian Family and to give value to each one's specific identity.
- To have concrete experiences of the Salesian Family, even through common planned and verified action which has an explicit formative purpose.
- To see to it that the PEPS (the Salesian Educative Pastoral Project) truly involves the entire Salesian Family in view of a common Salesian mission, while respecting each other's autonomy and complementarity.
- To motivate the SDB to realize that they are part of the Salesian Family and are not above it, in such a way as to acquire a sense of belonging and to develop a vision of reciprocity (and not hierarchy).

On the pastoral level:

- To come to know well the pastoral challenges of the local Church in which the Salesian Family is inserted: the challenges in general, and the challenges particular to our specific Salesian mission.
- To establish rapports of reciprocal trust and of collaboration with the Bishops and with all the active forces of the Church, giving privilege to the persons, the groups, and the forces which are most in harmony with our specific mission. The local Church must consider us to be "part of the family" and not "guests" or "intruders".
- To enter into contact with and to establish rapports of collaboration with the forces in civic society which are directly or indirectly interested in the mission of the Salesian Family. The city or the region we belong to must feel the benefit of our initiatives and also be able to consider us "part of the family".
- With a lively sense of being part of the local Church, the Salesian Family should face the totality of the local pastoral social challenges with the totality of the specific tasks of the Salesian mission so as to determine what are the pastoral urgencies and to respond by taking adequate action, giving origin to a Salesian Educative Pastoral Project (PEPS) common to all branches of the Salesian Family.

I invite all the provincials to give life to the Provincial Consulta and to become its primary animator, in the spirit of Article 5 of our Constitutions. This requires reflection on the part of the Provincial Council and a specific programming which will be able to carry it to fulfillment little by little.

As we have already noted above, today we realize that our Confreres often feel little involved, and often do not take part with the rest of the Family. The Salesian Family is not "an extra" in our apostolic work. It is a particular way to live our Salesian charism, as it was at the origins, with the greatest involvement of Religious and laity.

The Provincial Delegate to the Salesian Family

Even if this is not yet a common or strong figure in all of our Provinces, it is good that every Province, or Visitatoria, have a Confrere dedicated specifically to the animation of the Salesian Family. More often than not (following the example of the organization of the present General Council), such a role is entrusted to the Vicar of the Provincial. It is his task to act as a coordinator of the various initiatives at the provincial level. He is to keep contact, in the name of the Provincial, with the various Groups and to see to it that the work of the Delegates and the Assistants of the provincial and local levels be carried out with diligence and with care, in a continual reinforcement of the individual Groups. If in your provinces you do not have someone in this post, it is time to establish who will carry out this particular task, and make note of it, even in the Elenco - at the world and provincial level.

Delegates and Assistants

Some Groups of the Salesian Family receive a particular service of animation through Delegates (Cooperators and Past Pupils) or ecclesiastical Assistants (VDB and CDB), named according to the agreements included in the texts of their Constitutions or according to agreements foreseen in the Conventions.

In nominating someone for such a ministry, I invite you to choose and to propose good Confreres who have the necessary gifts for this task of animation, and where possible, who are not too old. The animation of the Salesian Family ought not to be a "stop gap" obedience, but rather a field of apostolate through which the Salesian forces in an area take on a greater vitality and positively influence the civic and ecclesial context that they find themselves in. For all of this, we need persons who have great enthusiasm and great abilities. When naming these Confreres, I ask you to follow, even in form, what is prescribed in the individual Statutes and Conventions (information and dialogue with the leaders of the various Groups).

In the sector in charge of the Salesian Family, we note that priority needs to be given to a path of formation for the Delegates and the Assistants. For this reason, we thought of programming specific encounters in these two years at the regional level, and where possible, at the provincial level.

The Rector Major's STRENNA as the Unifying Instrument for Animation of the Salesian Family

in these last years, the Strenna of the Rector Major has come to be valued all the more by the individual Salesian provinces as an instrument for formation for the Salesian communities and as the basis for laying down pastoral paths for the young. In the same way, the world Consulta for the Salesian Family has opted to make the Strenna its point of reference for reflection for the entire Salesian Family, above all on the occasion of the Salesian Family Spirituality Days which are held in the month of January at the Salesianum in Rome.

I invite the Provincials and the Directors of the local Communities to take these indications into consideration, valuing the Strenna of the Rector Major as the unifying instrument for the animation of the Salesian Family. All of this can be concretized in moments of common reflection, in the production of various aids which are related to the theme, and in pastoral actions which intend to translate into practice what the Rector Major has indicated to us as priorities in this his annual message. Particular attention to the Strenna will strengthen in all the reality that the Rector Major, as the Successor of Don Bosco, is the Father and the Center of Unity in the Salesian Family (Constitutions 126).

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