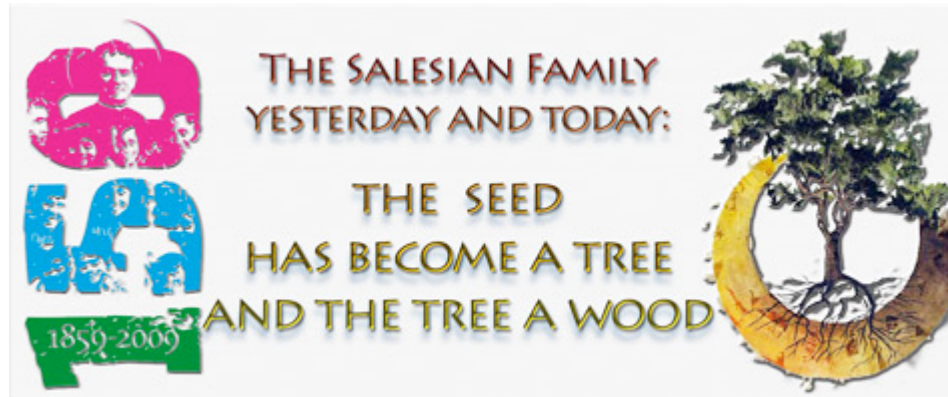


150th anniversary of the Foundation of the Salesian Congregation



“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all the seeds but when it has grown it is the biggest shrub of all and becomes a tree so that the birds of the air come and shelter in its branches” (Matt 13:31-32)

My Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Salesian Family,

I greet you with the heart of Don Bosco, from whose zeal and pastoral charity was born our spiritual and apostolic family. We are the most beautiful and rich fruit of his total giving of himself to God and of his passion to see young people – especially those who were the poorest, the most needy and at risk – achieve the fullness of life in Christ.

After the strennas of the last three years, so propositive and demanding, here I am once again to offer you one even more urgent, demanding, and promising. It has all to do with our identity and our mission. In fact, it is on that that our more visible presence in the Church and in society depends, and our more effective activity in facing up to the great challenges of today’s world.

2009 ought to help us to make ever more actual Don Bosco’s conviction that the education of the young requires a large network of people dedicated to them and a determined synergy in the efforts made to reach the goals that the young expect and that are significant for society.

Therefore in Don Bosco’s name I ask you:

**Let us commit ourselves to making the Salesian Family
a vast movement of persons for the salvation of the young.**

Two events coming together

There are two events which justify the choice of this theme for the 2009 Strenna: the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Salesian Society and the preparations for the bicentennial of the birth of Don Bosco (1815-2015). With the celebration of the first we begin the preparations

for the second. We do so recalling the words of John Paul II for the Jubilee of the year 2000: “Every religious family will live the Jubilee well by returning with purity of heart to the spirit of the Founder!”

For us, therefore, this jubilee celebration indicates our renewed and creative fidelity to Don Bosco, to his spirituality, to his mission. There will be a “Salesian Holy Year,” during which we are called to relive with clarity and communicate with enthusiasm the life experiences, the ways of doing things, the features of the spirit which guided Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello, the first among many others, to holiness.

In this, we cannot fail to remember what was Don Bosco’s experience. First of all, he consecrated himself personally, body and soul, to the salvation of the young people he saw wandering in the streets; then he invited some people to share in his apostolic work, giving rise to a kind of first form of the “Salesian Family.” But, after having seen that many left him entirely on his own, or almost so, he gathered around him a group of young men and educated them to form with him a religious family: and so the Salesians were born; afterwards other groups followed, organized on different levels but with the same apostolic purpose. This brief “historical” survey throws light on what the Salesian Family is and on its relationship with the fundamental nucleus, the consecrated persons – SDBs and FMAs – whose heart and driving force, as for that matter that of the whole Salesian Family, is the passion of “Da mihi animas, cetera tolle.” This sums up the spirit that ought to characterize all the members and groups of the Salesian Family.

It seems natural to me that the more complete the consecration, the greater the responsibility for animation. This conviction was confirmed for us by the Holy Father, Benedict XVI, in his address at the audience given to the general chapter members on March 31, 2008: “Don Bosco wanted the choice of consecrated life to guarantee the continuity of his charism in the Church. Today, too, the Salesian movement can grow in fidelity to its charism only if a strong and vital nucleus of consecrated people continues to form its core.”

1. The Salesian Family yesterday

The 150th anniversary of the founding of the Salesian Society is a special occasion on which to reflect on Don Bosco’s original idea and on the concrete founding of the first groups, raised up and cultivated by him: the Salesians of Don Bosco, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, the Association of the Salesian Cooperators, the Association of Mary Help of Christians.

Well then, taking my cue from the parable Jesus used to explain the kingdom of heaven and its dynamics, I would dare to say that the seed sown by Don Bosco has grown and become a tree strong and rich in foliage, a real gift from God to the Church and to the world. In fact, the Salesian Family has experienced a veritable spring time. United now with the original groups, under the impulse of the Holy Spirit there are other groups who with their specific vocations have enriched the communion and extended the Salesian mission.

Today everyone can see how the Salesian Family has grown, how the work completed and that we dream about have multiplied; the field of activity on behalf of so many young people and

adults has spread without limits. For this we are grateful to the Lord and we accept our greater responsibility, precisely because, like every other vocation, this of the Salesian Family is at the service of the mission, in our case the salvation of youth, especially the poor, the abandoned, those in danger.

1.1 The “seed” of the charism

Don Bosco’s spirit, mentality, pastoral experience, and view of the world and the Church guided him toward some convictions and some corresponding initiatives:

- *the universal mission of the Church*, to be taken up in a spirit of solidarity, to save the whole of the human person and all humanity. Within this mission his sons and followers need to be characterized by a preference for the young, the poor, peoples not yet evangelized;
- the usefulness, or rather the urgent impelling need to *become united spiritually* and to *form associations working together* in enterprises to achieve this end;
- the possibility that the spirit given to him could be lived in *different states of life* and, therefore, through the coming together of “good people” could contribute to the great mission of the Church, taking their place within it with Salesian “priorities”;
- *the founding of the first groups*: spiritually united around the experience of the Oratory as their mission, their style, their method, and their spirit:
 1. with different kinds of links with the Salesian Congregation (the original nucleus),
 2. with different forms of association,
 3. with different levels of public “Christian” commitment as the requirement for belonging.
- The *historic role* of the SDBs, the FMAs, the Cooperators.

1.2 The seed under the snow: silent growth

These intuitions have developed according to the understanding of them that the followers of Don Bosco were able to have in the context of a certain view of the Church and its life. This development can be seen:

- in the permanence and expansion of the groups founded by Don Bosco;
- in the updating and periodic revision of the organizational and spiritual elements;
- in the sense of the vital relationships that these groups maintain among themselves.

In the meantime other groups have arisen in the different continents with analogous characteristics, because they were founded by Salesians.

Among these is certainly to be numbered the Don Bosco Volunteers, the translation of the Salesian spirit into consecrated secularity, which was also a novelty in the Church.

The new conditions created by the Second Vatican Council (the Church as communion, the renewal of institutes of consecrated life, a return to the original charism, emergence of the role of the laity) led to the discovery and identification of the character of the charismatic “family”: the

constellation of the groups that arise could have, and also to the *formulation* of practical guidelines in this regard: communication between the groups, expressions of communion, the animating role of the Salesians, the Rector Major as the central point of reference, common elements of spirituality.

This new way of thinking, however, still needs to pass *from theory to the lived practice* of each group and each individual member of the groups, so that the Salesian Family may be lived as a dimension of their vocation. “Without you we are no longer ourselves!”

1.3 The tree and the forest: a luxuriant growth

Some facts have accompanied and sustained the development of the Family:

- Formal recognition of their *belonging* has been requested and publicly granted to groups that have arisen since Don Bosco’s death. Today, altogether there are 23 groups officially recognized:
- Society of St. Francis de Sales (Salesians of Don Bosco)
- Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians
- Salesian Cooperators Association
- Mary Help of Christians Association
- Past Pupils of Don Bosco Association
- Past Pupils of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians Association
- Institute of the Don Bosco Volunteers
- Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary
- Salesian Oblates of the Sacred Heart of Jesus
- Apostles of the Holy Family
- Sisters of Charity of Miyazaki
- Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians
- Daughters of the Divine Savior
- Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary
- Sisters of Jesus the Adolescent
- Damas Salesianas Association (Salesian Women)
- Volunteers with Don Bosco (male secular institute)
- Sister Catechists of Mary Immaculate and Help of Christians
- Daughters of the Queenship of Mary
- Witnesses of the Resurrection 2000
- Congregation of St. Michael the Archangel
- Sisters of the Resurrection
- Sister Announcers of the Lord

- There are also *other groups* which are waiting for the conditions to be fulfilled for them to be formally recognized as members of the Salesian Family; in the meantime the soil is being cultivated in which other groups could also emerge.
- The Salesian Family has reflected a great deal on its own *identity* (cf. AGC 358), on those elements which regard its real nature and unity, on its organization in terms of communication (cf. *Common Identity Card* and *Common Mission Statement*).

- *Each group* has sought to strengthen itself with statutes or regulations of life, guidelines for the formation of the members, a synthesis of its own specific Salesian spirituality, and committing itself to improve its organization and find ways or opportunities for growth and development.
- *A common effort* has been made to examine further possibilities and define the forms of communion among them all; clear reference has been made, first to the *Common Identity Card* and then to the *Common Mission Statement*, which need to continue to be distributed, studied, and put into practice.

2. In the third millennium: today and tomorrow

2.1 On the path of communion

The Church has entered a *new phase of communion*, marked by the continental synods and those of the whole Church, ecumenical dialogue, the interreligious movement, global solidarity, and the commitment to reconciliation. Characteristics of this communion are:

- a return to basics,
- a greater expansion,
- a better understanding of its requirements,
- greater visibility,
- greater apostolic and missionary activity,
- its reference to the mission: “communion begets communion: essentially it is likened to a mission on behalf of communion” (*Christifideles Laici* 32).

Even though our Family is a prevalently apostolic one, as a family it necessarily has its roots in the mystery of the Trinity, the origin, model, and goal of every family. Contemplating God-Love, God-Communion, God-Family, we understand what for us is the meaning of the mission (“to be signs and bearers of the love of God”), of the spirituality of communion, of being family.

The *Father* asks us to open our hearts wide so that, as members and groups of the Salesian Family, we welcome and recognize one another as brothers and sisters, men and women loved by Him: personally called by Him to work in His field for the same reason. The pettiness of the human heart may put up barriers, create distance, and separate – as among the Apostles – seek the first place, to the detriment of the Kingdom. Sometimes it is our fears or reservations about unity with others that produce similar effects. The heart, like that of the Father, means a real and deep affection for the young and those who spend their lives for them. It is expressed in cordiality, appreciation of each and every one, gratitude for what each one can do and manages to do.

The *Holy Spirit* shows us a second attitude which is required to build up a family: the grateful and joyful acceptance of diversity. Manifestations of the Spirit are the many languages, the different charisms, the various members of the one body. There are hundreds of millions of men and women, each one formed individually as a child of God. The Spirit does not repeat Himself; He does not produce a series.

Don Bosco was a master in making unity flower from a diversity of different types and temperaments, of conditions and capabilities. In his day this sensitivity was less common. Nowadays, on the other hand, diversity presents an educational and pastoral challenge to people living together, to the witness of the Church, and to the Salesian Family.

Diversity means an abundance of relationships, a variety of strengths, a wealth of opportunities, and therefore unlimited fruitfulness. What an incomparable possibility this offers for dialogue, for sharing spiritual and educational experiences in the Salesian Family for consecrated men and women and for lay people in their particular state of husband, wife, child, young adult, elderly, worker, professional, or student, people from a variety of races and cultures, healthy or sick, saints and sinners!

Certainly, unity in diversity is not in itself natural; but precisely so that we might have the strength to overcome the instinct for self-affirmation, Jesus prayed: "That they may be one!" (cf. John 17:11).

Jesus, the Lord, the Son who made himself our traveling companion, who reconciles all things, those in heaven and those on earth (cf. Col 1:20), recapitulating them in God, indicates to us a third attitude: the willingness to walk together toward a shared goal, to stand side by side in a place that is anything but ethereal, the Kingdom; to form a recognizable community of disciples who together respond to his command: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15).

Here, then, the three indispensable attitudes in order to grow in communion: breadth of heart, acceptance of diversity, willingness to walk together toward a shared goal.

2.2 Communion in and for the mission

"Communion begets communion: essentially it is likened to a mission on behalf of communion" (CL 32). Now, in the third millennium, our main aim is to express in a more evident way *communion in the mission*, taking into account the following criteria:

- According to the *basic principles of the beginning* and of the development of the Salesian Family:

One thing has been a constant, as a precious heritage: a passion for education, in particular that of the poorest young people, whom we help to become aware of their own dignity as individuals, of the value and the potential their lives have for God and the world.

"*Da mihi animas*"! It is Don Bosco's motto that we make our own! We look at the young and their spiritual dimension, and we want to concern ourselves with them in order to reawaken in them the vocation to be children of God and to help them achieve this following the Preventive System; that is, through reason, religion, and loving kindness. This implies a detachment from all that could take us away from our commitment to God and the young. This is the meaning of "*cetera tolle*," which is the second part of our motto.

- In conformity with the conditions of the *world of today*:

The world, unified by communication, characterized by complexity, the transversal nature of many “causes,” the possibility of networks, offers a new setting for the Christian, promotional, educational, youth mission.

The Salesian Family together will try to give weight to its presence in society and make its educational activity count: there is the youth problem; there is life to be safeguarded; there is poverty in its various forms to be tackled; there is peace to be promoted; there are human rights that are declared to be but not put into effect; there is Jesus to be made known.

- *As the fruit of the more recent strennas*:

The strennas of these last few years have highlighted the educational emergency, efforts on behalf of the family, the promotion of life, a preferential option for the poor, globalized solidarity, the new evangelization.

This new phase of the Salesian Family will be marked by an ardent and tireless charity, full of imagination and generosity: what made Don Bosco an image of Jesus the Good Shepherd, recognized by the young and the humble people of his time. We, the Salesian Family, are being called today, in the 21st century, to model our hearts, poor and sometimes sinful, on that of Jesus, in whom God showed Himself to the world as the One who gives life, so that men and women may be happy and have life abundantly (cf. John 10:10).

2.3 Some requirements to continue the journey

Immediately some requirements emerge for continuing the process of growth and reaching the goal of communion in the mission that we have set ourselves:

- Examine further so as to understand better the *possible common field* and the working characteristics of the mission.
- All of this means looking, reflecting, discussing, studying, and praying together so as to find the path to follow in a spirit of communion. It is the expression of love which the young are waiting for and of which they will certainly feel the effects and benefit.
- Restoring *spirituality to the center* as the stimulus to communion for the mission, in conformity with current Church thinking and reflecting today’s religious experience; from this follows the urgent need for the formation of the members and the involvement of others.
- Holiness: this is the source and the power which “inspired the start of a vast movement of persons who in different ways work for the salvation of the young” (SDB Const. 5): the Salesian Family. One cannot possibly think that this is the result of organization, however perfect, or of subtle techniques for bringing people together. The Holy Spirit raised it up, and it continues to live in the Spirit.
- To this Family I make a pressing appeal to acquire a new way of thinking, to consider themselves and always to act as a Movement, with an intense spirit of communion (harmony), with a convinced desire for synergy (unity of intent), with a mature capacity

for networking (unity in planning). In the Regulations of the Salesian Cooperators Don Bosco wrote: “At all times it was considered that union among good people was necessary in order to help one another to do good and to keep far away from evil.... Weak forces when they are united become strong, and if a piece of string is taken by itself it is easily broken, but when three pieces are joined together it is more difficult to break: *Vis unita fortior, funiculus triplex difficile rumpitur.*” We must never forget that we have been founded by a saint of social charity, Don Bosco (cf. *Deus Caritas Est* n. 40), who was aware, however, that education and pastoral work need to be cooperative forms of charity, for which the Holy Spirit raises up charisms.

- Ensuring that the groups are *able to be autonomous* in their own development, in the formation of their members, in their apostolic initiatives.
- Understanding and experimenting with *flexible forms of collaboration*: “thinking globally, acting locally.”
- Examining further the Salesian experience as expressed *in lay terms*.

3. Lines for the future

The fruit of this strenna, therefore, ought to be a more evidently combined effort and one that is more practical as regards the mission.

There are many ideas to be weighed up, taking into account the way life develops and certain priorities. The *Common Identity Card* and the *Common Mission Statement* of the Salesian Family are points of reference for this. Whereas the first carefully indicates our shared DNA, that is, those elements which are the characteristics of our Salesian charismatic identity, the second represents a declaration of intent and guidelines. The purpose of each is, in the first place, to create an awareness, to form a way of thinking, to give rise to a “culture of the Salesian Family.” Both of them should lead each member of the different groups to feel that without the others they would not be what they ought to be, and consequently should produce synergies which are varied, multiple, and not all merely formal. I hope that one fruit of this strenna may be a *charter of spirituality*, which I have several times spoken about. Spirituality is the fundamental motivation and the most powerful driving force of every member of the Salesian Family, what can ensure greater effectiveness and impact in educational and evangelizing activity.

3.1 Synergy in the mission

Reference to the *Common Identity Card* and *Common Mission Statement* offers us the opportunity to reflect on possible forms of synergy in the mission. Above all, we need to bear in mind that we already have a common mission and that we are carrying it out. It is the mission inspired and directed by the Holy Spirit in different services and initiatives, in different ways of acting, but converging in aims, content, and method, as we can read in all the constitutions, regulations, or statutes of the various groups. This has been the work of the Holy Spirit, when from the Salesian trunk He has made bud and grow a new branch with its specific characteristics. This ought to make us understand that the first requirement for communion and the common mission is that each group fulfill with the greatest possible effort its own vocation and mission, that it give them continuing vitality with fidelity and creativity. The Spirit has already arranged us into men and women, consecrated and lay, present among the young, among the sick, among

peoples to be evangelized, etc. If each group, with the spirit and the aims which are expressed in its own statutes that are in harmony with Salesian spirituality, fulfills this purpose, we already have the Salesian mission being fulfilled.

The first great help and the best way to implement the *Common Identity Card* and *Common Mission Statement* is therefore the awareness of the complementary nature of the service of a great mission, which ought to be followed, on the part of each group, by an openness and readiness to support and sustain the common mission.

The times we are living in, however, permit and indeed demand new expressions of the common mission. Nowadays, as we have emphasized in the strennas in recent years, there are transversal causes (such as the family, life, education, children's rights, the problem of peace, the question of women, safeguarding the environment) that can see us involved together. Above all, there is global solidarity, which is being expressed in various forms of cooperation, public declarations, pressure exerted on the organizations that direct the lives of nations and the world. And there are also new possibilities for networking and communication, and this leads to different forms of involvement and the activation of synergy that previously were not possible. We want to exploit the still unexplored possibilities in the Salesian mission and seize the opportunities which our own times offer us, bringing together acquired skills and innovative creativity.

I am convinced that the Salesian Family will make its presence felt in the Church in a credible manner and will be fruitful for the young pastorally, spiritually, and vocationally, if we succeed in working for them together as a real Movement. We should not forget that the Movement is characterized by some key ideas and a common spirit. More than in a statute, it is in a spirit and in a praxis that the members of the different groups in a movement are to be found and converge. It is a belonging that is more vital than formal! From this point of view, the Salesian Movement is much bigger than the Salesian Family, because it also includes the young themselves, their parents, our collaborators, the volunteers, those sympathetic to the Salesian work, the benefactors, also non-Christians, as happens in many parts of the world, especially in Asia, but not only there. It is a question of people who in some partial way share the mission or the Salesian charism. They are the "Friends of Don Bosco." It is within such a great Movement that the Salesian Family is to be found as its animating nucleus.

3.2 The resources

On what resources can we count?

- In the first place we concentrate on the formation of people and on the strengthening of the communities or groups.
- But we also need to develop and acquire a common charismatic culture or mentality, for which the *Common Identity Card* and the *Common Mission Statement* play their part.
- Organizational support is certainly useful, but it has only a subsidiary value and has to be adapted to the demands and the concrete situations.

We continue to believe, therefore, that the Salesian Family is still today, first of all, a charismatic entity whose great resources are the Spirit and its creativity; all of this resting on an adequate organizational structure.

As regards the mission, there is still another aspect to consider. We say we are co-responsible in the mission. We need to bear in mind, however, that the mission, which refers to various different fields (areas, dimensions), with common aims and spirit, does not necessarily imply co-responsibility in every single initiative or each individual place. As one gradually comes down from the vision of the great idea of the mission to its practical application, one will see whether there are two-sided or three-sided forms of collaboration without tying ourselves down *a priori* to any kind of global structure that in advance guides the whole. Having a clear aim and following the way that life and circumstances proceed is what is best, as we have repeated during the previous six-year period about thinking globally and acting locally, giving vital energy to the cells, to the essential organs, to the intermediate organs, and finally to the whole structure.

3.3 Some areas of collaboration

The Young

We are all trying to work with the largest number of young people in various enterprises. We note that among young people youth groups are being established, especially in recent times, who want to follow a process of human development and growth in the faith in conformity with the Preventive System, which – as we know – is not only a methodology but also a way of understanding the contents. In these leaders are being formed, who are called animators, guides, etc. In particular the Salesian Youth Movement (SYM) is being consolidated. In the SYM various youth groups that start and develop in the Salesian Family are coming together and want to form part of it. This is a possibility open to all. So far in the animation of the SYM there has been very good collaboration between the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. I would hope that in the future there would also be greater involvement on the part of the Salesian Cooperators and the past pupils in promoting the SYM among their own youth groups.

This, too, is something that has been agreed among the branches of the Salesian Families that are closer to each other and more to be found in the youth field. The FMAs and SDBs, in fact, already have long experience, many works and organizations for active animation over a long period of time. But participation is open to all the others. Participation comes starting from the common ground established at each meeting or event.

For the youth groups it is useful to have a common basis for human formation, for the faith journey, and for the vocational invitation, because all these reflect Don Bosco's view of education.

Therefore, there are forms of synergy already in existence with the possibility of their being opened up to others in the SYM, which already thinks of itself in worldwide terms. Going around the Congregation, I have seen how the message of the Rector Major sent every year from Turin on the occasion of the feast of Don Bosco draws together on a world scale the groups that are to

be found in the different continents. Therefore there is an opportunity when we can educate the young people, too, for future forms of synergy and future solidarity.

The success of the World Youth Days also demonstrates this, as, in spite of distance and expense, they manage to bring together young people from all parts of the world belonging to diocesan groups, groups animated by religious institutes or by movements, or simply those who identify themselves with that kind of event.

Vocations

Linked to the question of the SYM is that of vocation promotion, vocational guidance, and our witness. We know that Don Bosco, who had a great esteem for lay people, rejoiced when he was able to give to the Church priests and religious. If it is true, in fact, that all have an equal dignity and receive an equal call to holiness, it is also true that in the temporal dynamic of the Kingdom of God there are vocations that have a special role in the Church community. So it is important that we are also united in this aim. Providing for our groups or for our young people a process of human and Christian formation, we propose to them a variety of vocations, pointing out the greater commitment of the “*sequela Christi*” that some vocations represent.

The purpose of our youth groups formed by the particular branches of the Family is not a matter of rearing “chicks” for one’s own Association. Our purpose is Christian education and guidance in their lives for young people. We have to know how to bring young people to hear the voice of Christ telling them that within the various aspects of the Kingdom there are some vocations of greater commitment. We need to be able to evoke in the young the desire for formation and an openness; to be capable of guiding them toward vocations of service and of great significance (and I would include here voluntary service), all of them as part of the Kingdom.

The Missions

A third field in which we are already collaborating, a field where current solidarity and cooperation can expand, offering new possibilities, is that of mission awareness. In the last missionary expeditions the presence of lay people, individuals, couples, and even whole families has been consolidated side by side with the religious. It is a beautiful thing to see how within the Salesian Family there are groups which include the missionary dimension even in their name.

Nevertheless, a missionary spirit has different forms of expression and initiatives, especially in our own days when there is talk about globalized solidarity. There are new possibilities for missionary involvement. There is the possibility of a personal presence, of twinning arrangements, and of long-distance support in various ways. Considering the differences in different parts of the world, I think what a good thing it would be if there were to be a network of twinning arrangements able to channel resources to respond to the various needs; and if, where there are personnel available, there were to be the possibility of temporary or also long-term collaboration – this in the planning stage, and afterwards for its implementation in synergy.

The Salesian Bulletin

There is a further area, very important, where we are already collaborating: this is the field of communication in the Church and in society. Each group has its means of internal communication which it then distributes outside the group. You know, however, that there is a magazine or means which represents us all, and it is the *Salesian Bulletin*. We are saying that it is a means of communication for the Salesian Family, for the Salesian Movement, and for the worldwide Salesian outlook, which presents the point of view of the Family about the world in which we are living, and for the world opens a window on things Salesian.

It is true that the *Bulletin* is managed and kept going by the Salesian Congregation. It would be an unnecessary burden to try to create a huge, totally representative organ. More space is being given to the Salesian Family within the editorial committee and to the presentation of items about it, rather than dividing up the pages, which would not be appropriate. We all benefit from the image that the *Bulletin* manages to create.

3.4 Visibility in the Church of the Salesian presence as a “Movement”

It would be advantageous, through all the forms of synergy to be exercised, always to act more as a *Movement* and so to have a visible presence in society and in the Church. We have to overcome two very real dangers: on the one hand, making too much of a clamor, and, on the other, being unjustifiably absent. Rather than a great effort at propaganda or self promotion, it ought to be very clear that our being present in the local Church is in close support of the bishop and the priests; we ought to show how we are capable of working for certain causes, making it clear that we are concerned not only with ourselves but with the Church community, which in its turn is concerned with the salvation of the world.

3.5 A culture of the Salesian Family

So that the Family culture, that is the approach and the way of thinking of working together, may reach all the branches and the whole tree, it is essential that all the members of the individual groups become aware of their belonging to a vast Movement of persons, brought to birth from the apostolic heart of Don Bosco, and that they are ready for synergy, for convergence, for many different forms of collaboration that are flexible and can be brought up to date. We are not looking at a huge organization that will dictate or sanction from above the things to be done, but a strong spiritual impulse that is capable of revitalizing the cells and organs so that these can create the forms of collaboration that are possible.

From this approach comes as the first task for everyone that of re-reading both the *Common Identity Card* and the *Common Mission Statement*. There will be found the main ideas to be handed on and the principle choices to be made.

Nevertheless, in addition to the study of these documents, it would be helpful for the different groups to share some experiences of being together, of spirituality, fraternity, collaboration. This will increase the levels of mutual trust, of appreciation of the possibilities that the charism and the Family of Don Bosco have. The goal to reach is always that of moving on from harmony to communion of intent, to collaboration, and to co-responsibility in shared social and church projects in the local area.

4. Suggestions to make the strenna concrete

Here are some steps to take so that the Salesian Family may really become a vast Movement at the service of the salvation of youth.

4.1 Collaborating together in the formation and the deepening of the charismatic mentality of the Salesian Family

To do this we will make efforts:

- to make the *Common Identity Card* and the *Common Mission Statement* the object of study and deeper reflection by each group of the Salesian Family, so as to make in all their members the Family culture and knowledge of the Movement grow;

- to share the conclusions of this study in the local and provincial consultative Salesian Family Commissions and to choose as a consequence some lines of action in sharing and synergy at the service of the Salesian mission in their own area.

4.2 Promoting a shared commitment

The different groups of the Salesian Family present in a given area studying together today's youth situation, especially with regard to the major challenges of life, the different forms of poverty, evangelization, peace, human rights ... and seeking:

- ways of improving the initiatives already in progress, through greater collaboration and networking;
- new initiatives to be promoted with the specific contribution of various groups present.

4.3 An instrument of communion: the local and provincial consultative Salesian Family Commission

Give more weight to the local and provincial consultative Salesian Family commissions, seeking the most appropriate way for them to operate so that they may not only provide opportunities to exchange ideas and experiences but, above all, may be platforms

- for reflecting together on the challenges of the mission in their own areas and sharing some fundamental lines for a response that each group will make the effort to follow according to their own possibilities;
- for seeking ways of collaborating that are flexible and clearly presented in educational and evangelizing projects, especially at the service of the young.

4.4 Some areas of collaboration and networking to be promoted and developed

- *The animation of the Salesian Youth Movement,*
 1. developing in the various youth groups animated by the groups of the Salesian Family a commitment to involvement and being part of the SYM;
 2. being involved in the accompaniment of groups and young people;
 3. being involved in the formation process of groups sharing a program of education to the faith that may help them to discover and follow their own apostolic vocation in the Church and in society.
- The animation and promotion among young people and adults of Salesian social and missionary volunteer service, as a Salesian response to the great challenges of the world of youth nowadays, in particular poor youths and those at risk.
- *The promotion of vocations, priestly, religious, and those of specially committed lay people, at the service of the Church and in particular in the Salesian Family,* through:
 1. taking part in the vocational initiatives organized in the local Church;
 2. the witness of one's own life lived as a vocation, and the presentation of the different vocations in the Church and society, in a special way in the Salesian Family;
 3. particular attention to and the accompaniment of young people in their lives as couples, with appropriate initiatives;
 4. the support given to families and parents in their educational role, organizing schools for parents and groups of couples, etc.

Conclusion

I conclude with a prayer to Don Bosco, charismatic Father of the whole Salesian Family, composed by Fr. Egidio Viganò. It seems to me to be more appropriate than ever since it is particularly focused and programmatic. And, as usual, with a story to illustrate the stenna. Saint Paul – speaking about the Church – made use of the metaphor of the body, which “is a unity although it has many parts – all the parts of the body, though many, still making up one single body” (1 Cor 12:12). In speaking about the Salesian Family I have preferred to underline together with unity, to which the image of the body refers, the vitality, the dynamism, that belong to a movement, so I have used the image of the forest, also so as to keep to the initial parable about the seed that becomes a tree and the tree that becomes a forest.

Here is the ***prayer*** of the Salesian Family:

Father and teacher of youth,
 Saint John Bosco,
 who, docile to the gifts of the Holy Spirit,
 bequeathed to the Salesian Family
 the treasure of your special love
 for “the small and the poor ones,”
 teach us to be
 each day for them
 signs and bearers of the love of God,
 cultivating in our souls
 the same sentiments of Christ
 the Good Shepherd.
 Ask for all the members of your Family
 a heart full of goodness,
 constancy in work,
 wisdom in discernment,
 courage to bear witness
 to a sense of the Church and to missionary generosity.
 Obtain for us from the Lord
 the grace to be faithful
 to the special covenant
 that the Lord has made with us,
 and help us so that, guided by Mary,
 together with the young
 we may follow with joy
 the path that leads to love.
 Amen.

And here is a ***parable***:

THE FIR TREES

The howling of the wolf ran like a shiver along the mountainside. A stag placidly grazing in the thick grass soft with dew took fright and careered off into the pine forest.

The stag's impressive antlers brushed against and shook the branches. A swollen and ripe cone detached itself from the branch of the fir tree and rolled down the ridge, bounced onto a projecting rock, and came to rest with a thud in a damp and well-placed depression.

A handful of seeds was thrown out of its comfortable abode and was scattered over the soil.

"Hurrah!" cried the seeds in unison.

"The time has come!"

"We've done it! There aren't any squirrels or mice here; we're out of danger."

Enthusiastically they started to sprout in order to begin the mission that they nurtured in their little hearts and that is the task of every tree: to keep the sky attached to the earth. For this reason the trees put roots down deep into the earth and send up knotted branches to the sky. If it were not for the trees, the sky would already have flown away.

So the seeds began to settle themselves into the soil. But they soon discovered that being so many created certain problems.

"Move over there a bit, please!"

"Watch out! You've put that shoot in my eye!"

And so on. But by pushing and shoving, all the seeds found a place where they could sprout.

All except one.

A splendid strong seed clearly made known his intentions: "You all seem to me an incompetent lot! Squeezed together as you are, you're grabbing each other's soil, and you're going to grow stilted and stunted. I don't want to have anything to do with you. On my own I can become a tall, noble, imposing tree. On my own!"

With the help of the wind the seed managed to distance himself from his brothers and, on his own, to plant his roots on the mountain ridge.

After time, thanks to the snow, the rain, and the sun he became a magnificent young fir tree which dominated the valley where his brothers had become a forest that offered shade and restful repose to travelers and the mountain animals.

Even though there was still no shortage of problems.

"Stop it with those branches! You're making my pine needles fall off."

“You’re stealing my sun! Get further over there....”

“Will you stop messing up my foliage?”

The solitary fir tree looked at them ironically and proud. He had all the sun and the space he wanted.

But one night at the end of August, the stars and the moon disappeared under a avalanche of large, threatening clouds. Whistling and whirling, the wind released a series of ever more violent gusts, until a devastating storm lashed the mountain.

The fir trees in the forest clung to each other, trembling, but protecting and supporting each other.

When the storm ceased, the fir trees were exhausted by their long struggle, but they were safe.

All except one.

Of the proud solitary fir tree, all that remained was a sad splintered stump on the ridge of the mountain.

The following spring, the rays of the sun caressed the dozens of tender shoots which the evening breeze gently stroked. Among the branches of the fir trees many birds and squirrels had found a hiding place and survived the winter, and at the foot of the strong trunks plants and flowers of a thousand colors were sprouting.

It was a gift, which, without intending to, the wind and the rain of the storm had made to the mountain.

My dear brothers and sisters, dear friends, it is my prayer that the year 2009 may be one full of graces for you, and I entrust to you the task of really making the Salesian Family a vast and generous movement of people for the salvation of the young.

Affectionately in Don Bosco,
Fr. Pascual Chavez Villanueva
Rector Major