

Youth and Family Ministry - International Congress  
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**THE FAMILY  
IN SALESIAN PASTORAL CONTEXT**  
An educative and evangelizing perspective

In the family, faith accompanies every age of life, beginning with childhood: children learn to trust in the love of their parents.

This is why it is so important that within their families parents encourage shared expressions of faith, which can help children gradually to mature in their own faith.

Young people in particular, who are going through a period in their lives, which is so complex, rich and important for their faith, ought to feel the constant closeness and support of their families and the Church in their journey of faith.

(FRANCESCO, *Lumen fidei*, n. 53)

## INTRODUCTION

We are in the midst of a beautiful moment in the life of the Church, where two important themes have come together in a life-giving way: the family, and youth. This is reason for great joy. Indeed, we are living a powerful, albeit unplanned series of important synods of the universal Church: the “double Synod” on the family, which culminated in the post-synodal Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, and the upcoming Synod in October 2018 dealing with “Young people, the faith and vocational discernment”.

All of this speaks to the timeliness of the theme of this international congress – “Youth and Family Ministry”. Youth and Family are at the heart of the Church’s concern as we begin the third millennium. It is also timely because it assures us that the Salesian congregation is in harmony with the Church’s current spiritual itinerary when it says that “family ministry is an emerging apostolic front, which we have begun to address more carefully, not only in the context of parish or young adult formation, but also in close connection to youth ministry”.<sup>1</sup>

What follows in my presentation is developed specifically in terms of the Salesian charism.

From the outset, it is important to insist that our charism is and always will be inextricably linked to young people. For this reason, we speak about the family as an integral dimension of youth ministry and of “youth vocation ministry”. This aligns us perfectly with the perspective of the upcoming Synod. In taking up this theme, we are dealing with the basic truth of every Christian family, because at the heart of the family we find the Son, and with him, every son and daughter.

Christianity, even enormous as was its revolution, did not alter [the] ancient and savage sanctity [of the family]; it merely reversed it. It did not deny the trinity of father, mother, and child. It merely read it backwards, making it run child, mother, father. This it called, not the family, but the Holy Family, for many things are made holy by being turned upside down.<sup>2</sup>

My presentation is developed in three parts which are connected and interdependent.

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<sup>1</sup> CAPITOLO GENERALE 27, n. 20.

<sup>2</sup> G.K. CHESTERTON, *Eretici*, Lindau, Torino 2010, 145.

The first part will demonstrate how “Salesian family spirit”, both historically and pastorally, is the original source of the Salesian charism as well as the guarantor of its educative and evangelizing efficacy.

The second part deals with the family as the *object* of explicit pastoral care in the Salesian charism and therefore will suggest how our spirit might address the vocational needs of youth, how it might implement a methodology for family ministry, and address family needs from our charismatic framework.

The third and final part of this presentation addresses the family as a *subject* in its own right within salesian youth ministry. It will demonstrate how the family could become an effective protagonist, working in communion with other individuals in the church, for the education and evangelization of the young, because of the privileged role reserved for the family within the salesian charism.

## 1. A FAMILY CHARISM

From the historical and pastoral perspective, it is clear and incontestable that from the beginning, Don Bosco’s home was a “family for young people without a family” and a “parish for young people without a parish”. At the founding of Valdocco, Don Bosco’s priority was to create a family atmosphere and an authentic experience of Church. In our salesian tradition, every thought and action which is true to our charism flows from our “family spirit”, and finds its roots in Don Bosco and the origins of his work in Valdocco<sup>3</sup>. This “family spirit” is not a compartmentalized priority reserved for a part of the work or to particular moments of the day; it is a style of life that permeates every aspect of the very existence and concrete manner of carrying out the daily reality of the entire Salesian work. “Family spirit”, therefore, is not an optional element of our style of education; it is a dimension that weaves transversally across every aspect of Salesian youth ministry.

Our charismatic identity as Salesians remains clear: we are “signs and bearers of the love of God for the young” and our houses are places where we offer an experience of family to all the young who come to us and to all of our collaborators.

### 1.1. *The founding experience: “family spirit”*

At the birth of the salesians charism was the “family spirit”, experienced as an atmosphere of affection that was shared interactively, intergenerationally, and with co-responsibility. In fact, the Oratory of Valdocco was a

veritable “workshop” where Don Bosco, together with other priests, adult laymen, youngsters and some women, with Mamma Margaret as the first among them, lived the preventive system, that original and compelling style of predilection for the young. This system, lived first at Valdocco and then at Mornese and elsewhere, became a true spirituality that united educators and pupils in a shared movement towards holiness. [...] As we revisit the beginnings of Valdocco, we appreciate not only Don Bosco’s pastoral heart but also his ability to involve others. The contribution of clergy and lay people brought into being a church, living quarters and playgrounds.<sup>4</sup>

The model, therefore, which inspires our salesian “family spirit, is the life of the Oratory in Valdocco, where Don Bosco lived in the midst of his boys and his collaborators, just as a father or mother lives surrounded by their own children. In the *Biographical Memoires* we find this noteworthy description of this reality:

In those days, the Oratory was a real family. [...] Don Bosco managed and directed the Oratory just like a father would run his own household, and the young ones who went there felt as though it was just like their own home. [...] At the Oratory, no one lived in fear, but in peace and joy. Everyone breathed the air of a happy family. Don Bosco gave the young ones every possible freedom as long as it posed no threat to

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<sup>3</sup> Cfr. A.J. LENTI, *Don Bosco: storia e spirito. 1. Dai Becchi alla casa dell'Oratorio (1815-1858)*, LAS, Roma 2017, 530-540.

<sup>4</sup> CAPITOLO GENERALE 24, n. 3.87.

discipline or morals.<sup>5</sup>

This was the style which imbued every houses established by Don Bosco, including his religious community, because his family spirit touched every aspect of the life and mission of the salesians.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, we can affirm that the family style was the golden rule of the oratory, because “ [...] when Don Bosco started a hospice at the Oratory he laid down *no rules other than those which regulate mutual relations in the family* [emphasis added]. He drafted the first house rules for each dormitory five years later. These dealt specifically with the moral and religious conduct of the pupils, as well as with the work habits that were expected of them”.<sup>7</sup>

This characteristic family spirit of the original experience of Valdocco provides the blueprint and the foundation for three essential aspects of mission, all of which can rightly be seen as fruits of the spirit: the Educative Pastoral Community (EPC), the Salesian Congregation itself, and the Salesian Family, *in that order*. The ordering presented here is bold, but it is deliberately so, because I believe it is accurate not only chronologically, but also, and more importantly, qualitatively: Family Spirit → EPC → Salesian Congregation → Salesian Family!

If we are not convinced of this, we do well to reread Constitution 16:

Don Bosco's desire was that in all of his houses everyone would feel “at home”. The Salesian house becomes a family when there is mutual affection among its members, and all, confreres and youth alike, feel welcome and responsible for the common good. In an atmosphere of mutual trust and daily forgiveness one experiences the need and the joy of sharing everything and relationships are governed not so much by recourse to the law, but by the movement of the heart and of faith. This kind of witness will inspire in the young the desire to know and to follow the salesian vocation

Against this description of the “salesian house” we can measure the extent to which Don Bosco's family spirit has permeated our communities at every level: local, provincial, and worldwide.

### 1.2. *Bringing it to life: the “Salesian Family”*

Today, the “Salesian family” refers to a vast movement in the church whose purpose is to help the young live life abundantly and to the full. The very word “family” confirms the spirit and style which unites the various groups who are called to share our founder's charism.

It is beyond the scope of this presentation to reread in its entirety the “Common Identity Card of the Salesian Family of Don Bosco”, promulgated on January 31, 2012. For our present purposes, Article 5 of this document will suffice:

The term *family* is used in salesian tradition to indicate in a generic manner the bonds existing between the various groups and is applied in different ways according to the nature of the relationship. This bond or relationship cannot be reduced to mere friendly rapport. It is rather the external expression of an internal and charismatic communion. It helps therefore to understand the different titles to membership of the Salesian Family.

Membership is fostered by a common spirit, which leads to a vast and complementary mission to the young

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<sup>5</sup> Cfr. *Memorie biografiche di don Bosco* III,353.360-361; IV,679; VI,592.

<sup>6</sup> Il tema appare trasversalmente lungo tutte le Costituzioni salesiane: lo spirito di famiglia nella comunità educativa (Cost. 37.38.47), nella comunità religiosa (Cost. 49.51.53.56), nella pratica dei consigli evangelici (Cost. 61), nell'autorità e nell'obbedienza (Cost. 65), nella vita di castità (Cost. 83) e nella comunità formatrice (Cost. 103).

<sup>7</sup> Cfr. *Memorie biografiche di don Bosco* IV,542.

and the common people; and by certain specific and original characteristics which justify official recognition, which is given through a specific title.

This family exists because its members share the apostolic passion of Don Bosco: the passion of preparing young people to make choices that are conducive to full and abundant life. This passion is expressed through three interwoven dimensions:

1. *A Mission to the young.* It was Don Bosco's explicit intention that all the member groups of the Family he founded be dedicated to youth who are poor, abandoned, at risk or, in modern terms, young males and females who are most in need because of the various situations of poverty they face: economic, affective, cultural or spiritual.

2. *A Mission to common people.* Under the guidance of the Spirit, Don Bosco was also concerned for adults, always showing preference for the poor and humble, for the working class, for immigrants and those on the margins, in short, for all who stand in need of material and spiritual assistance. [...] *He gave particular attention to the family* because he saw it as the primary place to educate the young to love and to be receptive to the gift of life. The family was the first school of solidarity between persons and peoples. Every effort was made to protect the dignity and strength of the family so that it might always be more obviously a small "domestic church".

3. *A Missionary apostolate ad gentes.* Don Bosco cultivated missionary zeal and participated concretely in the missionary work of the Church. He wanted the Salesian Society and the Institute of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, to devote themselves to the missions; and indeed, this is what both congregations have been doing since their earliest days, which explains the extraordinary expansion of their presence on every continent.<sup>8</sup>

Ours is a family which lives its mission in a spirit of communion and collaboration because

In all his activity as an educator, pastor and founder, Don Bosco showed a great ability for dialogue and for sharing responsibility with even the youngest of his collaborators; for harmonizing in apostolic and missionary work the talents of the most widely differing persons for the good of the whole enterprise; for finding each individual a work suited to his character, his skills and his formation, in such a way that each one felt happy in what he was doing.

Communion between the member groups of the Salesian Family *in and for the mission* has become increasingly necessary as we try to meet the missionary and educative tasks before us. We are already seeing an urgent need to network the various interveners, to propose new models of Christian life, and to develop collaborative ministries. If we work more collaboratively, our witness value will be stronger, our proclamation of the Gospel will be more convincing, our pastoral charity will be intensified, and the characteristic identity of both the Salesian Family and each of its groups will be clearer.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, then, our family members work co-responsibly in pursuit of commonly shared objectives. These objectives are: passion for and educational attentiveness to the specific historical context where we find ourselves; the methodology of the Preventive System, which is a spiritual and educative experience that finds its efficacy in the rich interplay of reason, religion and loving kindness; and the sharing of Salesian spirit.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Cfr. *Carta d'identità carismatica della Famiglia Salesiana*, art. 16.

<sup>9</sup> *Ivi*, art. 19.

<sup>10</sup> Cfr. *ivi*, art. 21.

Certainly, there will be times when it will be difficult to keep the Salesian Family alive, vibrant and desirable. But the creative tension which the family offers, and our desire to live and to work together in this vast and varied movement that was desired and created by Don Bosco himself, must always be safeguarded. Our founder was deeply convinced that in order to educate properly it was necessary to coordinate the energies of many like-minded people who are committed to sharing common apostolic objectives.

### **1.3. Lost and found: the nature of the Church as family**

One of the most interesting observations that has emerged from the Church's recent focus on the theme of the family has been the rediscovery of a long-neglected aspect of the Church, namely, its family style. The Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, n. 87, offers this definition of the Church:

The Church is a family of families, constantly enriched by the lives of all those domestic churches. "In virtue of the sacrament of matrimony, every family becomes, in effect, a good for the Church. From this standpoint, reflecting on the interplay between the family and the Church will prove a precious gift for the Church in our time. The Church is good for the family, and the family is good for the Church. The safeguarding of the Lord's gift in the sacrament of matrimony is a concern not only of individual families but of the entire Christian community".

This passage expresses the unity, the reciprocity, and the complementarity of family and Church which, if considered independently, would lose essential aspects of their intimate relationship: on the one hand, the family without the Church risks becoming a closed community defined by "self-referentialism", without any openness to, or enrichment from, the vast horizons offered by the Church; on the other hand, the Church without families risks becoming a dispenser of "religious services", a cold bureaucracy incapable of inspiring confidence, offering hospitality or affection, and stripped of its generative and maternal capacity.

With regards to parishes - which are the living cells of the Church, capable of bringing new members to life in the faith - the Exhortation offers this insight:

The main contribution to the pastoral care of families is offered by the parish, which is the family of families, where small communities, ecclesial movements and associations live in harmony. Along with a pastoral outreach aimed specifically at families, this shows the need for "a more adequate formation... of priests, deacons, men and women religious, catechists and other pastoral workers". In the replies given to the worldwide consultation, it became clear that ordained ministers often lack the training needed to deal with the complex problems currently facing families. The experience of the broad oriental tradition of a married clergy could also be drawn upon<sup>11</sup>.

To acknowledge that the Church and the parish are "a family of families" is a powerful, programmatic affirmation of the style of relationships we need to nurture, the models of formation we need to develop, the educational itineraries we need to navigate, and the types of liturgical celebrations we need to experience!

**Relational styles.** First and foremost, the family as such provides the pattern for an experience of Church. This was the experience of Jesus himself. His preparation for public ministry took place within the family of Nazareth into which he was born, where he was raised, and where he stayed until he was ready to bring his proclamation of the Good News to the world, one family at a time.

**Models of formation.** Our formation cannot be based on business models that pursue efficiency and productivity at all cost. Our models strive for spiritual formation by touching the affect and converting hearts, drawing on the

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<sup>11</sup> FRANCESCO, *Amoris laetitia*, n. 202.

resources that flow from our covenant relationship with the God of love.

**Educative itineraries.** We are not so much interested in “courses” as we are in “processes”. Therefore, we need to engage in the difficult but energizing art of accompanying the younger generations and families as such, because they need travel companions on their journey of faith, who are capable of guiding them and who are ready to share their joys and struggles.

**Types of liturgical celebrations we need to experience.** Liturgy has its own strategic contribution to make because in and through the liturgy, the Church – convoked by God to be a family – communicates a manner of relating. This contribution cannot be taken for granted. Through sacred spaces and architecture, through the quality of the music and singing, through the dignity with which the celebration unfolds, so many possibilities lie before us!

#### *Important benchmarks*

a) The family as an educative *context*: because the family is intergenerational and matures through the co-responsibility of its members, it is a matrix for living the salesian charism and a paradigm for all the ways our charism becomes incarnate in time and in history.

b) The Church as a *subject* in education: communion between the various states of life in the Church (lay, family, religious, clerical) can rightly be considered as the most adequate subject of education

c) Family spirit and youth ministry: it is imperative that we rethink youth ministry from the starting point of family spirit, because this spirit provides the necessary *atmosphere* for education and evangelization.

## **2. SALESIAN YOUTH MINISTRY FOR THE FAMILY**

As Salesians, we do not want a “family ministry” that is separate from “youth ministry”. We are not asking, as a follow up to this international Salesian congress, that every province create a new department dedicated to family ministry that runs parallel to, or worse yet, in competition with, youth ministry.

What we do want is for family spirit to be the hallmark of our works, for vocational attentiveness to be directed to all young people, for deliberate attention to be dedicated to the fragility of family life today, and finally, that these three aspects be present transversally in all of the ways we implement our educative and pastoral processes.

### **2.1. The Educative-Pastoral Community: the embodiment of “family spirit”**

From the outset, it is necessary to speak about the EPC and its animating nucleus, because *we want to minister to families first of all by presenting ourselves as a model of family and by making it obvious that we live and work together as a family* in our educative and pastoral works.

As a large family dedicated to the education and evangelization of youth in a particular territory, the EPC is the embodiment today of that family spirit that was so characteristic at the birth of our charism. In the latest Frame of Reference for Youth Ministry, the EPC is defined as follows:

*Community*: because it involves young people and adults, parents and educators in a family atmosphere. The thing that unites us is not work or efficiency, but a set of values of life (educational, spiritual, Salesian...) that form a shared identity willingly accepted by all;

*Educative*: because it gives first place, in all its projects, relationships and organisations, to concern for the integral development of young people. By this we mean the development of their potential in all aspects: physical, psychological, cultural, professional, social, religious and spiritual;

*Pastoral*: because it is open to evangelisation, it walks with young people on their journey to encounter Christ and creates an experience of church where young people experience human and Christian values in communion with God and with others<sup>12</sup>.

In summary, the EPC is our way of being Church and of living a concrete experience of the Salesian charism: to be and to live as one large family where sharing, communion, and co-responsibility express our passion for the education and evangelization of the younger generations is expressed through.

The decisive factor which brought us to this point is “the new season which the Church is experiencing. There is a keen awareness of the Church as being in communion with God and with all people; this communion is the primary means for bringing about the salvation of humankind”<sup>13</sup>. The importance of this affirmation cannot be overstated, because it reverses the traditional priority between *what* we do and *how* we do it; top priority now goes to our *how we do what we do*, because the way one walks already indicates the destination one hopes to reach:

It has not been a short walk. The pre-conciliar groundwork, the reflections of the Council, all the effort to rejuvenate ecclesial and pastoral life following the Council, the doctrinal synthesis and the praxis that evolved in the years approaching the new millennium, the Synods on the laity, on ordained ministers and on consecrated life and the subsequent Apostolic Exhortations [on the family] have shed much light on how the *different vocations are complementary, mutually enriching and interdependent*; in fact, they have no unique identity of their own if not their mutual reinforcement within the ecclesial community<sup>14</sup>.

We can go deeper still. If the EPC is the body which unites all those who bring the salesian reality to life, it is imperative to define, so to speak, the family nucleus which animates this huge family. We speak of the “animating nucleus”, that is, of a small group of people who are tasked with the responsibility of gathering, motivating and involving all the members of the EPC. This nucleus is the driving force of the entire project, and has been described as follows:

All components of the EPC, Salesians and lay people, participate in its animation but some have the specific task of promoting the contribution of all and the responsibility of the largest possible number of members, taking care of the quality and coordination of the animation and paying particular attention to levels more immediately concerned with the salesian identity and quality of education and evangelisation. With their charismatic witness, these people constitute the “animating nucleus” of the EPC.

The human heart is a small organ compared to the rest of the body but it is capable of getting blood, and therefore life, to all parts of the body, though only if all the “valves are working in harmony to achieve this end. Similarly, the animating nucleus is a group of people composed of Salesians and lay people who identify themselves with the mission, the educational system and salesian spirituality and together assume the task of convening, motivating and engaging all who are involved in the work, in order to form with them the educational community and to realise together the plan of evangelisation and education of the young<sup>15</sup>.

What flows from all this is a pastoral trajectory that clearly assumes communion among EPC members as the

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<sup>12</sup> DICASTERO PER LA PASTORALE GIOVANILE, *Quadro di riferimento della Pastorale Giovanile Salesiana*, Roma, <sup>3</sup>2014, 118.

<sup>13</sup> ATTI DEL CONSIGLIO GENERALE 363 (1998), I.3.

<sup>14</sup> *Ivi*.

<sup>15</sup> *Quadro di riferimento della pastorale giovanile salesiana*, 125-126.

foundation for the mission, and builds everything around the hub of “the prophecy of fraternity” which remains the true vehicle for education and evangelization.

## 2.2. “Youth vocation ministry”: family ministry from a preventive perspective

What follows is the heart of my presentation.

We collaborate primarily in family ministry, *through the charismatic Salesian approach, offering youth ministry in a way that is sound, coherent, and farsighted*. We are convinced that good youth ministry will contribute to the formation of young people who are strong, who stand in solidarity with others, and who are capable of love. Our goal is to lay the necessary foundations for future families that are solid, faithful, and happy.

The *Preparatory Document* for the upcoming Synod speaks in many instances of “youth vocation ministry” and asserts that vocational discernment is an age-appropriate task of youth<sup>16</sup>. Therefore, what the Church expects of us is youth ministry that is *conducive to vocational discernment* and that *expands* the scope of vocation animation to embrace the vocation of family life as well.

This ministerial vision proceeds from the foundational conviction that marriage (like all the other Christian vocations) is an authentic and unique *vocation* in the church, and as such it has something particular and unique to offer that the other vocational calls in the Church do not have:

Marriage is a vocation, inasmuch as it is a response to a *specific call to experience conjugal love as an imperfect sign of the love between Christ and the Church* [emphasis added]. Consequently, the decision to marry and to have a family ought to be the fruit of a process of vocational discernment. [...] Both short-term and long-term marriage preparation should ensure that the couple do not view the wedding ceremony as the end of the road, but instead *embark upon marriage as a life-long calling* [emphasis added] based on a firm and realistic decision to face all trials and difficult moments together<sup>17</sup>.

In recent years, one of the Church’s strongest messages has been this rediscovered appreciation of marriage as an authentic vocation that brings a unique value to - and enriches - the other states of Christian life. There is no turning back from this conviction. In the prolonged discussions on the vocation of marriage at the last two Synods on the Family, much was said about preparation for marriage - remote preparation, proximate preparation and immediate preparation - affirming that

the three stages indicated in *Familiaris Consortio* (cf. 66) need to be borne in mind: remote preparation, which treats the transmission of the faith and Christian values within the family; proximate preparation, which coincides with the various programmes of catechesis and the formative experiences lived within the ecclesial community; and immediate preparation for marriage, which is part of a broader programme, characterized by the vocation to marriage itself<sup>18</sup>.

It is very interesting to consider the three areas of attention identified here: “remote” preparation seems to focus on the family of origin; “proximate” preparation would appear connected to the Christian community and therefore to the processes offered in youth ministry; finally, “immediate” preparation is concerned with helping young adults who are preparing for sacramental marriage to deepen their appreciation of marriage as a “vocational” choice, recognizing the fact that “Christian marriage cannot be reduced to a cultural tradition or to a simple juridical arrangement: Christian marriage is a genuine call from God which demands careful discernment, constant prayer

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<sup>16</sup> Cfr. R. SALA, *Pastorale giovanile vocazionale. L’invito sinodale a qualificare vocazionalmente il nostro impegno educativo-pastorale in «Note di pastorale giovanile»* 3 (2017) 2-4.

<sup>17</sup> FRANCESCO, *Amoris laetitia*, n. 72.211.

<sup>18</sup> SINODO SULLA FAMIGLIA, *Relazione finale approvata dai padri sinodali*, n. 57.



and adequate growth and development<sup>19</sup>.

In fact, the connection between these three moments (remote, proximate and immediate) provides the point of intersection, so to speak, of three distinct but necessary and related areas of pastoral care: family ministry, youth ministry and vocational ministry. All three are at the service of the person maturing through the different phases of human developmental (infancy, childhood, adolescence, youth, adulthood). Too often, however, we treat these like three separate fields of ministry, whereas in reality they are grafted onto each other; they are either mutually reinforcing or mutually disempowering, growing or diminishing in direct proportion one to the other. Work done well in one area is the best guarantee of success in the other two as well.

With respect to *remote* preparation,

[t]he Synod unanimously restated that the primary school of formation is the family and that the Christian community is engaged in the support and integration of this irreplaceable formative role. Places and times for families to meet need to be determined to encourage the training of parents and the sharing of experiences among families. Parents, as the first teachers and witnesses of faith for their children, need to be actively involved in their preparation for the Sacraments of Christian Initiation<sup>20</sup>.

With regards to *proximate* preparation, it is unthinkable for youth ministry to be so turned in on itself as to be disconnected from family ministry, or concerned with plans and formative processes independently of those being considered and implemented in family ministry.

There is no denying that youth ministry is a specific field of ministry, but, in addition to incorporating vocational ministry specific to the priesthood or consecrated life, it must also take into account family ministry. This is so for two reasons: because every young person comes from a family of origin, and furthermore because many of them in the future will establish new families of their own. Unfortunately, an exaggerated specialization has led us to develop “two worlds” – one of the young, and the other of the family. Unity here must be restored<sup>21</sup>.

Finally, with regards to *immediate* preparation, we must ask: what role and what tasks do we assign to youth and family ministry if the desired outcome is to have young people explore more deeply the vocational dimension of their Christian life? A prerequisite for this exploration is an initial openness to the vocational call, followed by a discernment experience and finally a commitment to pursue the preparation process for whatever Christian vocation was discerned: priesthood, consecrated life or marriage.

Pre-matrimonial programmes seem to require additional topics to better form people in faith and love in the general process of Christian initiation. In this regard, the importance of the virtues needs to be recalled, especially chastity, which is invaluable in the genuine growth of love between persons. The formation programme should assume the structure of a journey towards vocational discernment for both the individual person and the couple, *ensuring a better synergy between the various pastoral areas* [emphasis added]. The pre-marital programme might also be given by married couples who are capable of accompanying engaged couples before their marriage and in the initial years of marriage, thereby showing the value of the ministry of married couples. Giving value to interpersonal relationships in the Church's pastoral activity will encourage the gradual opening of minds and hearts to the fullness of God's plan<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> *Ivi*.

<sup>20</sup> *Ivi*, n. 67.

<sup>21</sup> DUARTE DA CUHNA (Segretario Generale del Consiglio delle Conferenze Episcopali Europee), *La pastorale giovanile in Europa in un momento di nuova evangelizzazione*, relazione al XII Convegno Nazionale di Pastorale Giovanile della CEI, Roma, 10-13 ottobre 2011 (cfr. <http://giovani.chiesacattolica.it>).

<sup>22</sup> SINODO SULLA FAMIGLIA, *Relazione finale approvata dai padri sinodali*, 58.

*Marriage preparation* is an area in which many aspects must be brought together in synergy. It includes both vocation ministry - the scope of which must be broader than simply promoting the consecrated vocations- and youth ministry - which cannot be limited to gathering large groups of youths without providing adequate attention to the specific vocational decision each young person must make as they mature out of our pastoral itineraries.

In this sense, the pastoral processes we offer in marriage preparation need to pass through three different levels of depth. We have offered courses at the first level, *competency*, where the primary interveners are lawyers, psychologists, clergy, doctors, counselors. We have also moved to the second level, courses that focus on *relationships*, centred on the couple's intimacy, family networks, ancestry, conflict management and child raising. However, we have yet to offer formation at the deepest level, which is *vocational*. Here the focus would be on the call as gift, the necessity of faith and the sacraments, love, and responsibility.

What emerges as fundamental and nonnegotiable is the recognition that any pastoral "reboot" must have a strong connection with the family, both as its *point of departure* and as its *goal*. As its *point of departure* because youth ministry deals not only with youth in the strict sense, but also with infants, children and adolescents. When dealing with infants and children, the primary, if not absolute protagonist is their family and others who are in primary relationships with the youngster. With adolescence begins the period of rebellion and breaking away from family life. The family, therefore, must also be a *goal* of youth ministry because those who complete the rite of passage from youth to adulthood are generally called to live their Christian vocation by establishing a family of their own. Therefore, it stands to reason that one of the fundamental objectives of youth ministry must be to prepare young people to embrace adult responsibilities, with family responsibilities holding pride of place. This is why the question of vocation animation is so pertinent to our reflection.

### **2.3. Salesian pastoral care of the family: a sign of the times**

From the perspective of the Salesian charism, it is necessary to keep a specific focus on the family because our young people, in addition to managing many types of poverty (material, cultural, moral, spiritual), are also living serious forms of "family poverty". Even on this front, our charism, and specifically the preventive system, has an important contribution to make towards a true, proper and specific "family ministry", because "today, more important than the pastoral care of failures is the pastoral effort to strengthen marriages and thus to prevent their breakdown"<sup>23</sup>.

Pope Benedict XVI shed much light on this topic. During his audience with the members of GC26 on March 31, 2008, he shared this deep insight on the importance of family ministry in our Salesian mission:

In the education of youth it is extremely important that the family play an active role. Families frequently have difficulty in facing the challenges of education; they are often unable to make their own contribution or are absent. *The special tenderness and commitment to young people that are characteristic of Don Bosco's charism must be expressed in an equal commitment to the involvement and formation of families. Your youth ministry, therefore, must be decisively open to family ministry* [emphasis added]. Caring for families does not mean taking people away from work for young people; on the contrary, it means making it more permanent and effective [GC26, p. 127].

In the final GC26 document, one of the three "new frontiers" which the Congregation adopted for privileged attention was the family. Listed between "poor young people" and seeking "new models for managing our works", family ministry is a top priority for the Congregation going forward<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> *Amoris laetitia*, n. 307.

<sup>24</sup> Anche se sulla famiglia la prima parte del n. 99 (chiamata di Dio) e del n. 122 (situazione) offrivano più una direzione di marcia che delle proposte concrete.

It is a fact that on the whole, *the Church has recognized the need to focus more attention on the question of the family than on youth*. This is a valid and even dutiful choice, because in doing so, the Church is not overlooking youth but rather is trying to create the conditions that are most conducive to a lasting and robust education to serve as the foundation for a renewal of society on the whole. The Church remains convinced of this, notwithstanding the difficulties facing family life today:

The family in modern culture is experiencing a profound crisis, as are all communities and social bonds. In the case of the family, the weakening of these bonds is particularly serious because the family is the fundamental cell of society, where we learn to live with others despite our differences and to belong to one another; it is also the place where parents pass on the faith to their children. [...] The individualism of our postmodern and globalized era favours a lifestyle which weakens the development and stability of personal relationships and distorts family bonds. Pastoral activity needs to bring out more clearly the fact that our relationship with the Father demands and encourages a communion which heals, promotes and reinforces interpersonal bonds.<sup>25</sup>

The essential reason for so much focus on the family is this: the family as such is particularly fragile and undergoing serious trials and therefore needs greater attention and pastoral care.

One of the distinguishing aspects of our charism is its missionary dimension: we are called to greater awareness that “[n]owadays, pastoral care for families has to be fundamentally missionary, going out to where people are. We can no longer be like a factory, churning out courses that for the most part are poorly attended”<sup>26</sup>. For us, “going out to where people are” means meeting families in their real life situations, seeking to accompany them with patience and prudence along the many twists and turns, ups and downs of their journey, being an intelligent and wise presence in key moments of discernment and assuring them of our accompaniment especially in their struggles and sorrows.

It is therefore necessary, in every aspect of our mission, to keep a privileged and attentive gaze on the family. This means that in those typically charismatic moments when we are directly involved with the young, we are called to offer particular care to their families of origin by creating meaningful occasions of encounter, formation, accompaniment and support. Fidelity to our charism also requires us to implement pastoral activities which have a broad outreach, especially in parishes entrusted to the Congregation. This would include, for example, offering accompaniment and support to young married couples and to individuals in difficulty. These are all specific areas of pastoral care which we must not neglect.

#### *Important benchmarks*

- a) The Educative Pastoral Community: living and working together in a manner inspired by communion, sharing and co-responsibility is a concrete expression “prophets of fraternity” in action;
- b) Youth vocational ministry: including a broad vocational dimension in youth ministry is no longer an option. It is a historical, ecclesial and charismatic imperative.
- c) Family ministry: “the poverty of family life” which directly confronts many of today’s youth demands a family ministry inspired by the preventive system and guided by “reason, religion and kindness”.

### **3. THE FAMILY IS CO-RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SALESIAN MISSION**

The Church’s post-Conciliar journey emphasises Christian baptism as the point of access to all missionary and evangelizing initiatives. Consequently, the family, as the founding nucleus and authentic expression of the Church,

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<sup>25</sup> FRANCESCO, *Amoris laetitia*, n. 230.

<sup>26</sup> *Ivi*, n. 89.

must be intentionally included in this logic, as an active and enthusiastic subject in the process of spreading the Good News.

At the risk of stating the obvious, the family does not – and neither should any of the other states of Christian life – exist in isolation. The family is an integral part of the church’s educative mission to which it brings its unique contribution in a spirit of co-responsibility.

It stands to reason, therefore, that within the Salesian charism the family holds pride of place as a *subject* of the educative and evangelizing mission to the younger generations.

### **3.1. What is proper to the family?**

As a point of departure, we can ask ourselves: what is proper to the family? Wherein lies its originality? What unique role does the family play in relation to other civic and ecclesial subjects?

In response to these questions, let us revisit some aspects of *Amoris laetitia* and consider three important affirmations which summarize the document’s three most programmatic chapters regarding the specific vocation of the family: chapters four, five, and seven.

The first unique characteristic of the family is its *vocation to love*. Chapter four clearly states that the family has the specific task of demonstrating what love is and how it can be lived in everyday life.

*Amoris laetitia* uses St. Paul’s hymn to love from 1 Cor 13 – which Don Bosco always used to express the essence of his educative system! – as a rich expression of what love is in concrete terms. Added to the canticle are the attitudes which people who love need to nurture daily. These pages of the Exhortation encourage us to ask our Heavenly Father not only for our daily *bread*, but also our daily *love*. If we are to understand the gospel of the family, we must first take time to speak of love.

All that has been said so far would be insufficient to express the Gospel of marriage and the family, were we not also to *speak of love*. For we cannot encourage a path of fidelity and mutual self-giving without encouraging the growth, strengthening and deepening of conjugal and family love. Indeed, the grace of the sacrament of marriage is intended before all else “to perfect to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing” (1 Cor 13:2-3). The word “love”, however, is commonly used and often misused<sup>27</sup>.

The second characteristic of the family is its *vocation to generativity*. Chapter five is entirely dedicated to this topic, and acts as a continuation of the preceding chapter, because love and generativity derive from the same verb inasmuch as “love always gives life”<sup>28</sup>. Love is always and absolutely fertile and generative: the very biological configuration of man and woman declares that the default position for humans is to be life-giving.

No other vocation in the Church is generative in the way a family is. Other forms of generativity, such as spiritual paternity or maternity, find in the family their privileged reference point. In Mary we see the perfect embodiment of this unity: in her, conceiving in faith and conceiving in the flesh, is one and the same.

In light of the foregoing, let us consider the genetic connectedness and dynamic unity between flesh and spirit, between love and sexuality, between body and affectivity. All of these are critical, hot-button contemporary topics: suffice it to consider “gender theory”, which denies, with brazen superficiality, the connection between objective physical embodiment and subjective self-perception by appealing to a crude Cartesian view of the body

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<sup>27</sup> *Ivi*, n. 165.

<sup>28</sup> *Ivi*, n. 188.

as nothing more than *res extensa*, undifferentiated matter, which is malleable to whatever likeness and image one creates for oneself.

Contrast this with a human pregnancy, considered as the creation of a physical and spiritual space for another who wishes to live in our midst, where the female body expresses to perfection its feminine uniqueness. Or consider the reality of adoption, where a family is open to and in solidarity with a fragile life at risk and extends an invitation to trust. Or consider the reality of being a son or daughter, that basic experience of every human, about which the Apostolic Exhortation offers this reflection:

We do well to remember that each of us is a son or daughter. “Even though one becomes an adult, or an elderly person, even when one becomes a parent, or if one occupies a position of responsibility, underneath all of this is still the identity of a child. We are all sons and daughters. And this always brings us back to the fact that we did not give ourselves life but that we received it. The great gift of life is the first gift that we received”<sup>29</sup>.

The third unique aspect of the family is its *educative vocation*. This is the topic of chapter seven which affirms that the family is the privileged and primary educator of children. Neither the Church nor the state nor the school is the primary *locus* of education. The family is. While the family can rightly seek the assistance of ecclesial and civic partners in fulfilling this responsibility, it cannot delegate this task because “[t]he family is the first school of human values, where we learn the wise use of freedom”<sup>30</sup>.

The Exhortation’s goal in terms of education is to motivate parents to set aside the logic of “delegating” or “consigning” the education of their children to “educative agencies”, and to reclaim their educative responsibility with due consideration of their family dynamics.

The Synod Fathers also wished to emphasize that “one of the fundamental challenges facing families today is undoubtedly that of raising children, made all the more difficult and complex by today’s cultural reality and the powerful influence of the media”. The Church assumes a valuable role in supporting families, starting with Christian initiation, through welcoming communities. At the same time, I feel it is important to reiterate that the overall education of children is a “most serious, but an essential and inalienable right that parents are called to defend and of which no one may claim to deprive them. The State offers educational programmes in a subsidiary way, supporting the parents in their indeclinable role; parents themselves enjoy the right to choose freely the kind of education – accessible and of good quality – which they wish to give their children in accordance with their convictions. Schools do not replace parents, but complement them. This is a basic principle: “all other participants in the process of education are only able to carry out their responsibilities in the name of the parents, with their consent and, to a certain degree, with their authorization”. Still, “a rift has opened up between the family and society, between family and the school; the educational pact today has been broken and thus the educational alliance between society and the family is in crisis”<sup>31</sup>.

In these words, the Exhortation insists that the family is always the primary place for the patient, educative accompaniment of children, throughout every phase of life: infancy, childhood, preadolescence, adolescence, youth, adulthood, old age! While choosing judiciously from a variety of responses and age-appropriate techniques, the goal remains the same: tending to the diverse needs and dimensions of the maturing process, by offering ongoing moral formation through a “virtuous life that builds, strengthens and shapes freedom”<sup>32</sup>. This goal can be pursued in many ways. First, through the use of properly measured consequences, corrections and stimuli to

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<sup>29</sup> *Ivi*, n. 274.

<sup>30</sup> *Ivi*, n. 84.

<sup>31</sup> *Ivi*, n. 267.

<sup>32</sup> *Ivi*, n. 280.

achieve human development through a sound pedagogy of common sense and patient trust. Secondly, by accompanying children through a positive and prudent sex education, that “can only be seen within the broader framework of an education for love, for mutual self-giving”<sup>33</sup>. Finally, but by no means less important, assuring an authentic and committed transmission of the faith, which will always be the primary task of the Christian family, a task that ecclesial groups may help families with, but which must never replace the family in this regard.

Raising children calls for an orderly process of handing on the faith. This is made difficult by current lifestyles, work schedules and the complexity of today’s world, where many people keep up a frenetic pace just to just to survive. Even so, the home must continue to be the place where we learn to appreciate the meaning and beauty of the faith, to pray and to serve our neighbour. This begins with baptism, in which, as Saint Augustine said, mothers who bring their children “cooper- ate in the sacred birthing of growth in that new life. Faith is God’s gift, received in baptism, and not our own work, yet parents are the means that God uses for it to grow and develop”<sup>34</sup>. 33

### **3.2. What type of contributions? Some privileged possibilities**

If the deepest vocation of the family is love, then having and educating children will logically be the family’s specific and most precious contribution to the Educative Pastoral Community and its animating nucleus.

And yet, to date, we have not said much to promote this idea, nor have not done much to explore the possibility of an enriching “cross-pollination” between the salesian charism and the family.

In a nutshell, what we need to do is weave together in a wise and prudent way the four pillars of the Salesian charism which are summarized in the oratorian criteria - a home that welcomes, a parish that evangelizes, a school that educates for life, and a playground for meeting friends<sup>35</sup> 34- with the three dimensions that are proper to the family – love, generativity, and education.

Often there are married people within the animating nucleus of the Educative Pastoral Community, but rarely do we find people who are involved as a couple, that is, as a nuclear family. And yet this could be a new and precious aspect to explore at the local, provincial and world levels of Salesian animation. It would be a concrete way to give visibility to the fullness of ecclesial communion, made up of people from all the states of life that make up the Church.

The time has come to consider seriously the idea that some families are ready to enter into an apostolic commitment, through an authentic discernment around their unique role *within* the Salesian educative-pastoral charism. True, this may not be for all families, but even those few who might be called would be a small but powerful sign of the dynamic unity that connects the family and the Salesian charism. It is encouraging that in some Salesian provinces there has been, serious ongoing discernment to deepen this reflection from a theoretical and practical perspective.

Imagine the vast array of possibilities this could open up for us. Imagine if in all of our Salesian presences our pastoral work was never simply a repetition, but a new creation, the fruit of “the imagination of love” that should characterize every ecclesial project. Considering what is most “pastorally advantageous” is crucial. “Advantageous” here is used not in a business sense but in terms of what will bear most fruit: what is the best thing to do here and now so that the Salesian charism can be enriched by the concrete and visible contribution of the family and of family spirituality with its characteristic predilection for the young?

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<sup>33</sup> *Ivi*, n. 287.

<sup>34</sup> Cfr. *Quadro di riferimento della pastorale giovanile salesiana*, 126-131.

<sup>35</sup> FRANCESCO, *Amoris laetitia*, n. 220.

Among all the possible options we could explore in this regard, permit me to suggest three privileged areas of attention: affective education within youth groups and ministry groups; the presence of families as animators of other families and of educators, especially within a parish setting; the involvement of families together with consecrated men and women in moments of local and provincial vocation animation.

With respect to the *first area*, I would stress the *strategic contribution families could make when it comes to educating to love*: affectivity, love and mutual self-giving. Helping the young to enter the nuptial logic of love as the giving of oneself to another is definitely a specific gift that a couple can offer to the Church and to the young.

Consider the rich interplay between masculine and feminine, which brings forth so many precious realities through the threefold dimensions of love, generativity and education. In particular, the complementarity of maternal and paternal is essential for a proper education which would be impossible without maternal accompaniment and paternal transmission. It is not difficult to see how the many transitions that characterize family life as a journey, which demands more and more self-giving, can become an educative dynamic for adolescents and youths:

This process occurs in various stages that call for generosity and sacrifice. The first powerful feelings of attraction give way to the realization that the other is now a part of my life. The pleasure of belonging to one another leads to seeing life as a common project, putting the other's happiness ahead of my own, and realizing with joy that this marriage enriches society. As love matures, it also learns to "negotiate". Far from anything selfish or calculating, such negotiation is an exercise of mutual love, an interplay of give and take, for the good of the family. At each new stage of married life, there is a need to sit down and renegotiate agreements, so that there will be no winners and losers, but rather two winners. In the home, decisions cannot be made unilaterally, since each spouse shares responsibility for the family; yet each home is unique and each marriage will find an arrangement that works best<sup>36</sup>.

I would like to emphasize, in the context of the family's specific duty, the presence and the necessity of families that welcome boys and girls, adolescents and youth. There are families that share in the Salesian mission by welcome young people into their homes: through adoption, short- or long-term foster plans, various forms of responsibility with Salesian works that take care of youth without families, as, for example, in group homes. This is a real way to share in the Salesian mission.

With regards to the *second area*, dealing with couples committed to the spiritual animation of groups of families, I would underline *the necessary liberation of family ministry from clerical control* which, as we all know, is always a two-edged sword: "clericalism" is always the fruit of those who want to stay on the front line (priests or religious), and those who are content to stay in the background and be passive recipients (lay people and families). Groups of families who constantly seek formation from ordained ministers or consecrated people risk compromising the true apostolic identity of the family by sliding into a sense of indebtedness to the clergy, which does not help anyone, neither priests, nor families. In short, *what is needed are families who are committed to families*.

For this reason, it is necessary that we step up our game, as couples, as Salesian provinces, as local Salesians: to create formative programmes to empower lay leaders for family ministry; to have couples as well as single people as educators; to encourage the growth of family groups that are responsible for their own formation in the Word and in Salesian spirituality so they can become animating nuclei of other families.

Together [with consecrated Salesians,], the presence of families could be a real gift for the formation of animators and educators: convinced that the communion shared by husband and wife is *per se* the first educative force within the family, much can be said, just with regard to spouses, about the common educative and evangelizing

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<sup>36</sup> Cfr. SINODO DEI VESCOVI – XV ASSEMBLEA GENERALE ORDINARIA, *I giovani, la fede e il discernimento vocazionale. Documento preparatorio e questionario*, II,2.

strategies that can be applied towards the integral formation of young people who in turn give themselves in service to other young people.

Finally, some thoughts on the third area which deals with *vocational discernment*. This area is connected to the experience of Salesian spirituality at the local and provincial levels, where it is important to show that youth ministry is entirely directed towards helping the young to make vocational choices. Think about how beautiful and close the ties are between family, consecrated men and women, and ordained ministers when a young person is working through a demanding vocational discernment: the coexistence of virginity for the kingdom and human fertility manifests the diverse forms of love that, far from being in competition with each other, share an authentic, albeit different type of fertility, that is both physical and spiritual.

This brings us to two problems that must be addressed. The first is thinking about youth ministry as a service that has no end, that it, without a clear and intentional vocational focus. But if it is important that youth ministry, a task inspired by the charism, have a beginning, it is even more important that it have an end. Our pastoral efforts are intended to form adults in life and in the faith. This is why we help the young to entrust themselves to people who have attained a certain level of vocational maturity in one of the various states of Christian life. The second problem deals with a style of vocational animation that is limited only to the so called “vocations of special consecration”, that is, religious life and the priesthood. No doubt these vocations have unique aspects to be carefully explored, but rather than do so in an exclusive or excluding way, it is best done within an inclusive and integrated vocational dynamic. Otherwise, vocation animation morphs into a “bonsai ministry”, rather than a destination to orient the discernment journey that every young person needs to make.

How does one live the good news of the Gospel and respond to the call which the Lord addresses to each person He encounters?: through marriage, ordained ministry, consecrated life? In what field can one’s talents be put to best use: in a profession, volunteering, service to the poorest, politics? <sup>37</sup>.

### **3.3. What kind of formation? Formative itineraries for the salesian mission**

The final point I would like to address is in some ways the most delicate, and perhaps the most fragile: if anything we have considered here in these days has any chance of being realized, it will only be through innovative processes of formation for each and every one of us.

Lack of pastoral planning is the mother of many disasters in many areas and at every level. Today, there is an ongoing need for formation that provides ongoing updating and a permanent capacity for life-long learning. Such formation applies not only to families, but also to every consecrated and ordained Salesian.

What we need in the first place is to implement a genuine renewal for all of us, a genuine conversion which calls us to *assimilate the style of communion, the dynamics of sharing, and the art of co-responsibility*. We speak a lot about these things, but we are still light years behind from where we could and ought to be in fulfilling them. Valuing all the vocations present in the Church, joyfully welcoming the unique contribution that each one has to offer for the good of the young, living the logic of an ongoing exchange of giftedness, outdoing each other in mutual appreciation are all goals that we have yet to achieve.

Today, it is of paramount importance that we live a *spirituality of communion*, or, to use a current expression of our Rector Major, *the prophecy of fraternity*: consecrated women and men, families and young people united by genuine apostolic co-responsibility. What needs to emerge is a specifically *relational style*. When I say “style” I mean something very specific: the concrete manner in which *our strengths and our structures* – personal, community and institutional – weave together to create a living unity, giving life to a truly functioning ecosystem.

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<sup>37</sup> Cfr. *Quadro di riferimento della pastorale giovanile salesiana*, 75-103



You will recall that in 1996, GC24 dealt with salesians and laypeople sharing the same salesian spirit and mission. That Chapter said something that, in my opinion, was prophetic, when it spoke about *a relational spirituality* and *family spirit* that had to be sown, cultivated and brought to maturity. Three paragraphs in particular remain of vital importance today in regard to the *necessary conditions* for the renewal of our manner of living and doing. These paragraphs shed light on all we have been speaking about:

[91] *Don Bosco, man of relationships*

The first gift Don Bosco gives to his disciples is that of a serene and welcoming human relationship. His self-control allowed him to give himself to others with extraordinary efficacy, and to give gradually to relationships a pastoral and sacramental content. The quality of educative encounters was always foremost in his mind. "Let all you speak with become your friends", he used to say, and "to be a friend of Don Bosco meant everything at Valdocco: spiritual commitment, interior happiness, collaboration in education, family joy. He was convinced that the salesian spirit "must animate and guide all we do and say". He is forthright about this in his letters to Don Cagliari and Don Costamagna in August 1885: "The preventive system must be our distinguishing characteristic. (...) Charity, patience, kindness (...) This holds for the Salesians among themselves, with the pupils and others, externs or boarders". "Study how you can make yourself loved", he murmured to Don Rua, leaving him what seemed a final message and indicating to him the secret of the art of the Good Shepherd. At the end of his life therefore, he handed on as a deep conviction and precious legacy, the intuition he had received in his dream at the age of 9 years, and in his predilection for the 'relational virtues' as the bearings for educative dialogue and practical collaboration, Don Bosco proved an excellent disciple of St Francis de Sales.

[92] *A need of today's men and women*

Today people bewail a widespread absence of relationships, and loneliness gives rise to more fear than death itself, especially among the young and the aged. The human sciences describe man as a being of relationships. He is immersed in them from the time he leaves his mother's womb. A positive relationship builds him up and makes him happy; a negative one can depress and even destroy him. In any case rapport is at the heart of every educative approach, of every effort at collaboration, from family harmony to the efficacy of a pastoral and educative community. "We must be brothers to men at the same time that we want to be their pastors, fathers and teachers. The right atmosphere for dialogue is friendship, or rather service" (Paul VI, *Ecclesiam suam*).

[93] *The salesian response: loving kindness*

What we hear from the laity and from young people convinces us of the great desire there is for rapport; and that in the Congregation there are numerous experiences which provide grounds for hope that we can grow in this direction, giving full expression - together with lay people and primarily in their regard - to the rich values of salesian loving kindness and the family spirit which stems from it.

It can run the risk of being downgraded to the level of a purely technical instrument, latching on to another person, young or adult, and manipulating his personality. For this reason, it must be so filled with charity that it becomes transformed into an expression of authentic relational spirituality. Its fruit and sign is the serene chastity, so dear to Don Bosco, which governs affective balance and oblation fidelity. Strengthened and purified in this way, educative rapport is expressed in the personal encounter, builds a formative and stimulating environment, encourages group processes, and accompanies vocational maturing.

With regards to what human *competencies* that are needed, I refer to those praiseworthy attitudes that GC24 summarized in n.103 as essential elements for the building of the EPC.

We think it is important to cultivate in such processes the following attitudes:

- an attentive awareness of our manner of behaviour in relationships and communications;
- patience in listening, and willingness to give way to the other;
- the deliberate giving of trust and confidence;
- willingness to enter into the logic of exchange of gifts;
- readiness to make the first move in welcoming others with kindness;
- assumption of the daily discipline which gives value to being together;
- promptness for reconciliation.

Working together co-responsibly will demand critical pastoral conversion: from “doing for the young” to “doing with the young”; from running “disconnected events” to leading “a ministry lived in everyday life”; from “large group gatherings” to “responsible individual accompaniment”; from “we’ve always done it like this” to “thinking together according to Gospel values”; from “co-responsibility in doing” to “co-responsibility in planning”; from simply “accepting” lay people and families to “valuing” their presence and contribution.

The formation we need must enhance our sense of belonging to a “vast movement”, blessed as it is with so many rich and diverse gifts. These gifts are most visible when we all work together to face the particular demands of our educative and evangelizing charism.

No doubt, there is a great need for formation in our *educational method*, the preventive system. Characterized by reason, religion and kindness, the preventive system remains our compass for living a spiritual and educative experience in all of our presences<sup>38</sup>. We do well to recall here the great pillars of Salesian youth spirituality that were so well summarized by GC23 in 1990:

1. *Spirituality of ordinary daily life*. Daily life inspired by Jesus of Nazareth (cf. C 12) is the setting in which the youngster recognizes the presence of God who is at work, and lives out his personal realization of the fact.
2. *Spirituality of joy and optimism*. Daily life is lived in joy and optimism, without prejudice to commitment and responsibility (cf. C 17.18).
3. *Spirituality of friendship with the Lord Jesus*. Daily life is recreated by the Risen Christ (cf. C 34) who gives reasons for hope and leads to a life that finds its fullest sense in Him.
4. *Spirituality of communion in the Church*. Daily life is experienced in the Church (cf. C 13.35), as the natural setting for growth in faith through the sacraments. In the Church we find Mary (cf. C 20.34) who goes in front, accompanies and inspires.
5. *Spirituality of responsible service*. Daily life is presented to the young as a setting for service (cf. C 32), both ordinary and extraordinary<sup>39</sup>.

What we need is specific formation that gives adequate attention to our particular mission, *youth ministry*, and each of its five key components: human development, explicit proclamation of the gospel, moral formation of conscience, co-responsibility for the mission and vocational accompaniment. All five dimensions must be

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<sup>38</sup> CAPITOLO GENERALE 23, n. 161. Cfr. *Quadro di riferimento della pastorale giovanile salesiana*, 93-99.

<sup>39</sup> Mi permetto qui di rimandare a R. SALA (con A. Bozzolo, R. Carelli e P. Zini - Prefazione di G. Mari e postfazione di S. Currò), *Pastorale giovanile 1. Evangelizzazione ed educazione dei giovani. Un percorso teorico-pratico*, LAS, Roma 2017, 333-398.

deepened through solid proposals within a systematically developed project<sup>40</sup>

Finally, we need a specific formation plan for *family ministry*: formation for marriage preparation of the young, for accompaniment of newly married couples and for groups of families, for support to couples in difficult situations. For all of this, there already exists a vast array of literature and ecclesial resources in every continent, nation and diocese.

#### *Important benchmarks*

- a) What is proper to the family: we are called to recognize and be grateful for all that is specific to and characteristic of the family and the other states of Christian life.
- b) The contribution of the family: the internal demands of the Salesian charism call us to value the unique contribution which the family as such can make to the education and evangelization of the young generations.
- c) Adequate formation: the way out of improvisation and incompetence is formation offered to consecrated salesians and families together, according to our Salesian charism.

## **CONCLUSION**

As an expression of my gratitude for your attention and patience, I would like to offer you, as a practical conclusion, three simple questions that refer to each of the three parts of my presentation.

*A charism of the family.* Rediscovering family spirit is essential if we are to reclaim the pastoral atmosphere of our founding charism. In our salesian realities, how do we make “family spirit”, which is the necessary context for our style of education, a lived reality?

*Salesian youth ministry for the family.* What commitments are we making to build a genuine “vocational youth ministry” that involves all the young who come to our houses, including the necessary accompaniment to their families of origin?

*The family as co-responsible for the salesian mission.* How and in what areas of our work are we recognizing the specific contribution that families can bring so that our Salesian mission may become more effective at the local and provincial levels? What formative itineraries have we undertaken to better prepare ourselves to do this?

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<sup>40</sup> Mi permetto qui di remandare a R. SALA (con A. Bozzolo, R. Carelli e P. Zini – Prefazione di G. Mari e postfazione di S. Curro), *Pastorale giovanile1. Evangelizzazione ed educazione dei giovani. Un percorso teorico-pratico*, LAS, Roma 2017, 333-398.