

1. LETTER OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

THE SALESIAN FAMILY IS TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OLD

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Rome, 1 January 1997

Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God

My dear confreres,

I am writing to you at the beginning of the year 1997, and I pray that it may be a happy and fruitful one in the presence of the Lord experienced in community life and in pastoral obligations.

I like to think of you as being intensely committed to the application of the GC24, which represents for all of us our programme of work for the next six years. This is the impression I get from the news reaching me from the Provinces.

We too in the General Council have tried to concentrate our attention on certain points which we consider the essential parts of the Chapter's guidelines.

The first is the *new relationship* to be established, in an organic manner, *between Salesians and laity*, based on convictions we have made our own and translated into practice.

This reflection gave me the idea, which we discussed in Council, of taking up with you once again the theme of the *Salesian Family*. It is the environment in which the rapport between Salesians and laity acquires greater significance. From the depth of such rapport in fact the Family depends, in all its richness and multiplicity.

I am also prompted in the same direction by a singular anniversary: the project of the Salesian Family, in the form we know it today, is *twenty-five years old*. It was proposed, in fact, by the SGC20, of which the documents were consigned to the Congregation in January of 1972. We may therefore look back on it synthetically, see how it began, follow its development, observe its present state, and together discern its potentials which are still hidden, the new openings to be explored, the new expressions to be created.

I was also encouraged by the initiative of the FMA in their General Chapter to institute a role for the Salesian Family. This "new" presence of communal responsibility in the scenario of the Family will not only give to the latter a quantitative development but will also add that extra quality which they bring with them as women who are both salesian and consecrated.

This is precisely the time therefore for a pause for reflection and for a new beginning, with a broader perspective and more general involvement.

To this, on the other hand, we are prompted by the GC24 itself when it outlines a broader subject responsible for the salesian mission, which it is up to us to convoke, make aware and follow up.

And so by putting forward once again the topic of the Salesian Family I am not taking up a 'particular' theme of the GC24, but rather suggesting a perspective of synthesis which can be a key to its adequate understanding. The Salesian Family is going to be our main theatre of operations just as, in times past, was the salesian community or the field of education.

A history open to the future

The idea and fact of the Salesian Family go back to Don Bosco himself and form part of his charism. For this reason it will be of help to look at his spirituality, which has in the mission its source and most expressive manifestation.

It is striking to read over again the description of the life of the Oratory in its first years. Don Bosco is alone with a mass of youngsters. His collaborators, scared by the amount of work involved and still more by the kind of lad who was the object of his pastoral charity, abandon him. But his will to gather around him youngsters and adults never diminishes. He sees the importance of gathering forces for the mission entrusted to him. Rather than give up in the face of difficulties he makes fresh efforts. In the work of the Oratories he involves other persons from different ways of life, moved by a common desire to meet the problems of young people at risk. They include men and women, professional persons and others of modest means, politicians and ecclesiastics, catechists and even those who could help with domestic chores.

With the foundation of three groups, Salesians, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and Cooperators - he gave substance to his original intuition in line with what the Church and civil society seemed to be calling for in those days.

The Congregation has carefully preserved Don Bosco's intuition and developed its realizations. One need do no more than recall the periodic 'renewal' and extension of the Cooperators, the consolidation and wider range of the Past-pupils Association, and the birth of the Institute of the Don Bosco Volunteers.

Around the initial nucleus there grew new expressions of the salesian spirit, and the rapport between the groups varied to some extent without detriment to the single spiritual association.

And so we reached the era of Vatican II. Called upon to review its own origins in the light of the renewal asked for by the Church, the Salesian Congregation set about acquiring a new awareness that "present-day needs cause the problem of unity and communion to be posed in fresh terms among the groups which look to Don Bosco as their founder"

I consider the statements of the SGC indispensable for an understanding of the history and continuation of the undertaking, and so I quote in its entirety the text to which I am referring, so as to offer some guidelines based on the principles mentioned and which now must be updated. We are dealing with an "act of refounding", almost a constitutive decree listing and linking the facts at the foundation of the Salesian Family.

"The background to the activity of the Salesian Family today and of which its members should be aware, consists in this:

- the Salesian Family is an *ecclesial reality* which becomes a sign and witness of the vocation of its members through their special mission according to the spirit of Don Bosco;

- in line with the Church's teaching about herself, the Salesian Family is an *expression of communion* consisting of different ways of serving the people of God and integrating various vocations, so as to show forth the richness of the Founder's charism;

- the Salesian Family develops an *original spirituality*, charismatic by nature, which enriches the whole body of the Church and becomes a particular model of Christian pedagogy.

The 'Salesian Family' therefore, viewed within the mystery of the Church, must define its identity, its mission and its form, in the light of the essential dimensions of the Church. This requires that we speak of vocation, mission, witness, communion, historicity and permanent renewal as being fundamental components of this family.

The extraordinary extent and complexity of *youth problems today* stimulate our zeal to accentuate the *redistribution* of the forces at work in this sector, and to improve their mutual *collaboration*. This is not simply a question of a 'strategy of action' at a human level, but of building the future together in the light of the Gospel, in the dynamism of Christian hope under the impulse of the action of God who is constructing his Kingdom in human history".

The adoption of such an attitude gave rise to a project, and the efforts to realize it have marked the story of recent decades. The groups have been surveyed; those already linked with us have been renewed, consolidated and extended, while other groups have made formal application for membership, and still others have come into being in the fruitful period which has followed the Council. The combination has begun to function with new forms of communication: more frequent, more organic, more substantial and concerted,

more desired and sought after. And so the reality of the Salesian Family has entered the awareness of the Congregation and of the groups linked with it, and has acquired greater visibility. Evidence of this are a vast literature and many initiatives at provincial and world level.

Gradually too have been renewed other aspects of our life, with the Family emerging more clearly, and with greater responsibility and new possibilities. In this way the educative and pastoral project (GC21) took it for granted and called on it for a wider and more efficacious action for the evangelization of the young. And for the journey of faith of these same young people The GC23 considered it indispensable that the Salesians dedicate themselves to the animation of the Salesian Family together with the educative community.

Initially we may have felt almost uncomfortable when we speaking of the Salesian Family, but with the passing of the years, the deeper examination of the idea and positive experience have made it familiar to us, and today in fact we cannot do without it.

But we need to pass on from declarations of intent and rich doctrinal assertions to a practical commitment which is more open and creative. Fruitful questions have in fact emerged and unexpected perspectives have been opened up regarding the development of the Salesian Family. They arise from the lived experience of recent years, from accumulated reflection and particularly from the discussions in the last General Chapter.

The new ecclesial sensitivity

The journey made by the Salesian Family is inserted in that of the Church itself and reflects it. To understand what we are asked for at the present day and what lies ahead of us in the near future, we must look at the great orientations which are emerging in the Church. I will recall only those most relevant to our theme and I do so rapidly just so that you may have them in mind.

John Paul II is leading the whole ecclesial community to the frontier of the *new evangelization*. A careful reading of his teaching reveals its content and more urgent aspects. The new evangelization implies a presence of believers, able to bear witness to certain indispensable values which are especially at risk in today's world: the spiritual dimension, ethics, life, love, the sense of God; it is an integral commitment of the Christian community to

the proclamation of Christ, to human advancement and to the inculturation of the Gospel.

The Bishops' Synods and the various Episcopal Conferences have emphasized the urgent need for a more responsible involvement of the laity in this project of evangelization and in the animation of Christian communities; it is a need which in fact arose spontaneously in the Church's conscience, but has been given a more complete presentation in the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*. This takes us back to some concerns already present in our educative and pastoral project, which have become more pressing today precisely for the greater involvement of the laity in the salesian mission.

I refer, for example, to the exchange that must be fostered among the different vocations; to the urgent need for formation in face of cultural challenges; to the dialogue to be developed between those of different Christian denominations or different religions; to the role of women and their contribution to the work of education, to spirituality and to social life. The GC24 dealt at length with these things, and communities need only to go back and read carefully what it said.

A final reality that I want to bring to your attention is the genesis and spreading of *movements of spirituality*. This is a spontaneous development that cannot be overlooked and which makes us think of the power and ways of the Holy Spirit. Such movements respond to demands of sense, of interior conviction and spiritual life, which spring up powerfully in our secular and technological context. They correspond to the ways of the new evangelization and the emergency of the laity.

A number of these movements are linked with Institutes of consecrated life on whose spirituality they are nourished, or from which they take their origin as an expression of radicality and service, a point recognized by the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*: "The laity are therefore invited to share more intensely in the spirituality and mission of these Institutes. We may say that in the light of certain historical experiences, such as those of the Secular or Third Orders, a new chapter rich in hope has begun in the history of relations between consecrated persons and the laity".

These and other tendencies should be examined and integrated into our personal and community experience, not as merely casual and separated facts but as a unified sign of a process the Church is inviting us to make.

Starting again from the Constitutions

And so we meet once again within the ecclesial life, so rich in models and incentives, as the Family of Don Bosco to endorse some key points and exploit certain gifts which are an integral part of our vocation.

We feel glad that we inserted in our Constitutions some articles of which the observance has placed us on the crest of the Church's wave, so to speak. They preserve the freshness of such harmony and convince us of the urgent need to realize certain projects so as to respond to the new requirements of the young all over the world.

The Constitutions provide an internal linkage between mission and Family. About our mission they say that:

- we intend "to be in the Church signs and bearers of the love of God for young people, especially those who are poor";

- "the salesian vocation places us at the heart of the Church and puts us entirely at the service of her mission";

- "open to the cultural values of the lands in which we work, we try to understand them and make them our own, so as to incarnate in them the message of the Gospel".

The breadth of the perspective of the mission is quite striking, as also is the depth of its meaning. To it corresponds another original idea of Don Bosco: the combination of forces to be gathered together to realize such a mission in all its extension and in a characteristic spirit. This is expressed in art.5 of the Constitutions, which is one of those texts which, once we have meditated on it, should remain permanently engraved in our memory.

"Don Bosco inspired the start of a vast movement of persons who in different ways work for the salvation of the young.

He himself founded not only the Society of St Francis de Sales but also the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the Association of Salesian Cooperators. These live in communion with each other, share the same spirit and, with specifically distinct vocations, continue the mission he began. Together with these groups and with others born later we make up the Salesian Family.

Within this family, by the will of the Founder, we have particular responsibilities: to preserve unity of spirit and to foster dialogue and fraternal collaboration for our mutual enrichment and greater apostolic effectiveness.

Our past pupils are also members by reason of the education they have received, and the bonds are closer when they commit themselves to take an active part in the salesian mission in the world".

Having taken part in the research on the Salesian Family which preceded the drafting of the text we now have in our hands, I remember this inspiration which emerged in the SGC as a gift from God for the renewal of the Congregation. It was expressed by the Rector Major, Fr Luigi Ricceri, in presenting the Acts of that Chapter:

"And here we face another great signpost on the road to renewal in the years immediately ahead.

It is a matter of urgency to give back to our communities the sense of their being a nucleus powerful enough to animate and invigorate other spiritual and apostolic forces, and these in their turn will enrich us with great spiritual and apostolic advantages. This was one of the characteristics of the pastoral charity of Don Bosco"

On these foundations reflection developed in the years following the Special Chapter and was accompanied by progress in practice. The circular letters of Fr Egidio Viganò on the Salesian Family as a whole and on its different Groups gave it support and backing. They constitute a patrimony on which one can draw and a point of reference for further developments.

The Salesian Family: constitutive principles

In my meetings with confreres and communities I am often asked questions about the nature of the Salesian Family: *what is it, what does it include, what are the criteria for broadening or restricting it?* The past twenty-five years have provided us with clarifications and certainty in this regard.

But new questions continually arise as the Congregation meets new situations in its work to extend Don Bosco's charism to new fields of activity and to new territories. We must reply to them in response to the principle of creative fidelity.

By now the conviction exists that Don Bosco, led by the Holy Spirit, intended to give rise not only to certain Congregations but also to a spiritual

Family, in which new members and relationships could be expected in the future. His ecclesial figure is that of the Founder of a vast spiritual and apostolic movement.

The Family which aims to follow him has an identity, and hence criteria or principles which determine its constitution. Let me recall them briefly.

1. It is a single entity

By the Salesian Family we mean the *sum-total* of the ecclesial groups founded by Don Bosco and those subsequently recognized by the Rector Major as bearers with them of Don Bosco's charism.

This does not imply a higher 'organization' with powers and duties superior to those of the components themselves. What it denotes is that among the latter there is a bond, a relationship, a convergence, a desire for free collaboration; in other words *an ample space for communion* which includes all the groups concerned.

But it is not a matter of indifference to define it as a *single entity* and insist on the significance of the term.

On the one hand the statement recognizes in Don Bosco a fertility which goes beyond the Salesian Congregation. We are not the only ones to approach Don Bosco as our Father. In doing so we are joined by others with whom we must consider ourselves mutually as brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, all of us together.

On the other hand, as far as individuals are concerned the expression means that by realizing Don Bosco's charism as part of a group, one becomes a living part of the whole Family. When, as a Salesian, I make my religious profession I become incorporated in the Congregation and, at one and the same time, in force of this membership I become embodied also in Don Bosco's Salesian Family. And what is valid for us Salesians holds good also for all the other groups.

2. An ensemble of groups

Another consequence of its title is that the Salesian Family is an *ensemble of groups*. The affirmation expresses a condition of an institutional type, but first (and more substantially) it presents a charismatic characteristic

which has original manifestations in the experience of life and work of the Salesians.

It is in fact a typically salesian method to work on a 'group' basis as regards environments and communities, and not only with individuals or in developing interpersonal relationships. It is a style linked with the family spirit, with our way of 'living the Church' and with the social dimension of the mission.

The Constitutions, in describing the content of our "educative and pastoral service", strongly endorse this charismatic option, which applies not only to our work with the young but to all our interventions: "We introduce the young to the experience of ecclesial life by bringing them into a faith community and helping them to take part in it. To this end we promote and encourage groups and movements to form the members to social and apostolic action. In these the young people grow in the awareness of their own responsibilities and learn to give their irreplaceable contribution to the transformation of the world and to the life of the Church, and so become themselves the first apostles of the young, in direct contact with them".

As applied to the Salesian Family this means that we must work to form committed groups and not merely to have available persons who are individually involved. We need to verify to what extent there is in us the will to "gather people together" which led Don Bosco to start up so many associations of both young people and adults: the Happy Society, the Sodalities, the Society for mutual help, the Clients of Mary Help of Christians, and various other groups in addition to the better known ones.

Each group operates with autonomy. It becomes the natural environment for the growth of its individual members; it more easily ensures continuity of style and in the projects to be realized. Through the group passes the formative and apostolic content which characterizes us.

From an institutional standpoint, the statement "the Salesian Family of Don Bosco is made up of groups" means that entry into the Family is necessarily linked with membership of a group. The immediate insertion of individuals is not possible. The Salesian Family is not just a matter of friendship, of admiration, of affinity of ideas, of occasional collaboration between individuals. The personal option, the will to share something with others, the desire for membership must mature through lived experiences of spiritual and operative shared responsibility.

Here we find a reply to a whole series of questions that can arise between confreres and lay people: "Why do our collaborators not form part of the Salesian Family?" Or again: "Why do teachers not automatically belong to the Salesian Family?" And finally: "Why are the parents of our youngsters not considered part of the Salesian Family?".

The reply is always the same: "Let them begin to form groups. Let them form associations which guarantee continuity. Let them verify that at the basis of their identity and aggregation there is the salesian 'vocation' (of teacher, collaborator, parent-educator), as we shall say later".

It is not difficult to see that all this, rather than imposing limitations, is a condition for development and a stimulus for a "new associative period" to be made to flourish among us.

3. A necessary element: ecclesiality

For the purpose of the clarification we are trying to make there is another element we must explain.

I said earlier: By the Salesian Family we mean the sum-total of the ecclesial groups founded by Don Bosco and those subsequently recognized by the Rector Major as bearers of Don Bosco's charism; and I have commented on the *need for being together* and of the *group*.

But it is not sufficient that there be just any kind of group. For membership of Don Bosco's Family *ecclesial recognition* is needed, i.e. the group must enjoy citizenship in the Church in which it lives and works, and offer to it something congenial to the spirit of Don Bosco in terms of communion and apostolic work.

That could sound like a somewhat discriminatory statement, reductive of the potency of the Salesian Family. But it is a necessary declaration of identity to overcome confusion and avoid current misunderstandings. Certainly it means a limitation of the field of work, the values to be cultivated, and the requirements to be maintained. It must be kept in mind therefore in connection with those who have a tendency to broaden the work indiscriminately, or groups of non-Catholics when the latter ask for full membership of Don Bosco's Family.

But this must be linked up with other considerations, equally important, for the realization of a proper balance.

Firstly: membership is real even when it is still in its early stages. There are groups which are passing through a phase of numerical consolidation, of identity and of organization with a view to ecclesial recognition. They are in this condition with regard to the Salesian Family which accompanies them with interest and supports them.

Secondly: membership does indeed depend on recognition by the Rector Major, but it is also a reality lived by the groups before any formal declaration takes place. The two conditions - lived reality and public recognition - are necessary to avoid membership degenerating into a mere formal fact without even any private desire.

And there is also a third consideration: within the groups and associations recognized by the Church there can be, and in fact there does exist, the presence of persons of different denominations and religions, with consequently a certain ecumenical exchange, with inter-religious collaboration and meetings. This is the case with the association of the past-pupils, and it could arise in other similar aggregations.

4. A requirement: formally constituted groups.

The experience of Salesians from a variety of contexts, the reflections of General Chapters, the indications of Rector Majors, which have always filled a role of orientation and definition in the Salesian Family, have supported the requirement that the groups be formally 'instituted', i.e. recognized by the Rector Major by an appropriate declaration.

The Common Identity Card of Don Bosco's Salesian Family declares in art.9: "The Rector Major is the successor of Don Bosco; an unbroken bond links him to the Founder's person and so renders him the fit and proper person to represent him in a living manner at the present day.

He is the centre of unity of the whole family. He provides, in fact, the example and teaching which ensure fidelity to the spirit and elicits participation in the salesian charism. His function is one of animation and advancement which forges unity in the variety of the specific vocations, fidelity to the spirit and the coordination of initiatives. His is not a task of government, but rather one of vital service of animation.

The Rector Major is the father of all who collaborate in Don Bosco's mission. He extends the compass of his fatherliness which is for him, as it was for Don Bosco, an essential characteristic. Fatherliness demands

kindness, a sense of responsibility with regard to the growth of each one, guidance in fidelity to the charism, and commitment to the growth of the salesian vocation in all its expressions. 'Your Rector will take care of you and of your eternal salvation', wrote Don Bosco".

It is not my intention to delay here on a presentation of the practical consequences of these statements. Further indications can be given in future issues of the Acts of the General Council, to enable us to take up and put forward once again the criteria for recognition of membership of the Salesian Family on the part of groups who may request it.

I feel that the task of helping the Salesian Family to grow in numbers and quality is one entrusted to me by Don Bosco. I am fully convinced (my salesian faith!) of the relevance and fruitfulness of the educative and spiritual experience of our Father and Founder, and of the indispensable function in it of the congruence of talents and forces represented by the Family.

The explicit recognition of the groups, of which I am speaking, helps to the recognition of a Family which is conscious of being one and united, with the same characteristics all over the world. There cannot be different Families of Don Bosco set up according to the criteria of individuals. There will be, and I would say fortunately, many groups which will belong to it. All will declare their assuming of a bond, with the relative consequences, which will ensure unity, convergence, shared responsibility, and missionary commitment in Don Bosco's style.

The life of the Salesian Family

In the first place the Salesian Family must not be considered as a juridical fact. It has its organizational dimension which cannot be disregarded, but it is a *spiritual reality* and must be lived as such. Reflection on this aspect is complementary to the preceding one. It gives to the Family its characteristic features, and it serves also to reply in a comprehensive manner to the questions which the community feel in the work of animation.

How this spiritual dimension is to be configured can be understood from a consideration of some of its particular traits.

1. Vocational participation in Don Bosco's charism

Those belonging to Don Bosco's Family feel and realize a *vocation*, which is precisely the *salesian vocation*.

In some cases the expression may give rise to perplexity and doubts, to the idea perhaps that it is no more than an association of simply Christian vocations.

It should be made clear therefore that the salesian vocation is not superimposed on and does not take the place of the Christian vocation: quite the contrary. It gives to it a particular tone and intensity. We are salesian to the extent that we are Christian. Our Constitutions say: "We, the Salesians of Don Bosco (SDB), form a community of the baptized. Submissive to the bidding of the Spirit we are resolved to carry out the Founder's apostolic plan...".

We could perhaps give more ardour to the expression if we paraphrased it: "We, the Salesian Family of Don Bosco, form a community of the baptized, gathered together in distinct groups and linked by a common response to the bidding of the Spirit to live in the Church an original spirituality and realize an apostolic plan for the salvation of young people at risk".

The Special General Chapter had introduced us to similar reflections. I quote the relevant text, even though it be difficult to read today, because it ties in with the line of thinking of the GC24 and serves as a bridge over the intervening 25 years and highlights the homogeneous development experienced by the Salesian Family: "In the mind and heart of Don Bosco the Salesian Family is *one!* The original unity of this Family has its root in the existence of a common spirit and mission of total service to the young and to working-class people. Thus it shows itself to be at the higher level a real community in which all the members are integrated according to their proper qualities and specific functions and in the different forms of life possible in the Church. This means, and we must acknowledge it with all clarity, that the salesian vocation is 'salesian' before it is 'religious'. It also means that the salesian charism extends beyond the confines of our Congregation...

This is the reality that can bring about renewal, and we have to think seriously about it if we are to have any hope for a really true and stimulating rebirth...".

How are we to interpret that word "before", so evident in the above text, in connection with the foundation of the Salesian Family?

It seems to imply in the first place that from a historical standpoint the salesian vocation was manifested in an ensemble of persons before the "Salesian Congregation" was instituted.

It brings to mind also that at the present day salesian experiences are of great variety: consecrated life, the lay state, secular consecration, the male and female condition; but at the base of it all there is a common element. The salesian vocation therefore is more extensive than any one of its individual specifications.

Finally it can indicate for us Salesians an orientation of our service: to dedicate our attention to the Family and work for its growth, and not limit ourselves to looking at the possibilities of the Congregation alone.

How much work there still remains to be done to make salesian communities aware of a perspective so interesting and demanding! How much work of formation must be undertaken to ensure that the different groups, which already form part of the Salesian Family or will do so tomorrow, live an authentically salesian vocation!

The solicitude required today of the salesian community as an animating nucleus consists in helping those who are close to us to discover their own vocation, including their salesian vocation. This means overcoming a certain diffidence in suggesting to our lay collaborators the commitment to spend their lives with Don Bosco.

Here finds a place the reminder frequently expressed in various documents and meetings, and repeated also in the GC24, of common action for the promoting of salesian vocations. Each individual, after the necessary discernment, will choose his place in the Church of God and how to live out his baptism. But we cannot exclude a priori that under the inspiration of the Spirit he or she may opt for one of the expressions of the salesian vocation: to become an SDB or FMA, make the Cooperator's promise, choose a secular consecrated life, or some other kind of existence in the groups of the Family.

No group, on the other hand, can consider as lost to itself a member who, after due discernment, asks to join an association different from the one in which he has matured through frequent association with it or through education.

2. Diversified sharing in the salesian spirit and spirituality

The vocation as a personal fact always refers back to a spirit and a spirituality which shape existence. The salesian vocation must refer back to the salesian spirit and spirituality.

I am not going to enter into a theoretical discussion about the difference between spirit and spirituality. We are all aware of the difficulties met with in trying to define it in a precise manner and delimit the two areas.

The Special General Chapter chose to use both terms indifferently. Its commentary on the chapter of the Constitutions dealing with "Salesian spirit" opens with a declaration that for our own practical purposes the two terms are interchangeable.

It endorsed the efforts we are still making. "It must be made clear", it said, "that this document does not intend to give an absolute and definitive presentation of the salesian spirit. It is only an attempt to reply to the request made by all our Congregation. Experience and study will help us to complete our work".

The spirit, of its nature, is shared in different ways by groups and individuals, because each one perceives it and embraces it in line with his or her own specific vocation. Moreover personal history must be considered: how each one brings to fruition the gifts he has received and what he is acquiring by his own efforts. This applies already to the Christian vocation which is one and only, but is lived in different ways by those who remain celibate and those who marry, by those who become ordained ministers and those who are consecrated in the religious life, and so on.

When referring to the salesian vocation as shared in by all those who belong to the Salesian Family, one can refer to SDBs as Salesians, to FMAs as Salesians, to Cooperators as Salesians, to the Don Bosco Volunteers and all the other possible realizations as Salesians. This is how the diversity of the groups in the same Salesian Family is configured: it is a diversity which gives rise to no privileges but at the same time it exclude the kind of levelling down which would consider equal and uniform everything done under the name salesian.

But through the diversities we share the same salesian spirit. An expression of the Special General Chapter reminds us: "The special character of the 'salesian spirit', while it is the foundation of unity, is also the soul of post-conciliar renewal, and not only that of Salesians but of all the members of the 'Salesian Family'"

The Constitutions or Statutes of the Groups of the Salesian Family present a convergence on the salesian spirit which is striking for its clarity and depth. Evidence of this is the reference to the preventive system. Reason, religion and loving kindness are given as many original touches as are the groups which express them.

Recognition of this fact is essential, because it transforms affinity into mutual willing acceptance, into shared research, into the desire for exchange, into gifts and offerings. Don Bosco's spirit and salesian spirituality thus become the element which cements communion in the Family. They are at the beginning, the end and at every intermediate stage of its organization.

The most important task of animation which we can carry out as Salesians of Don Bosco is precisely that of communicating his spirit and deepening the spirituality which derives from St Francis de Sales.

The GC24 placed much insistence on the lay dimension of salesian spirituality, considering it a fundamental aspect in the relationship of shared responsibility between ourselves and lay people, in particular those of our Family. We need to give special attention to the treatment of the matter in the Chapter document, and try to put it into daily practice through the methods indicated.

In connection with spirituality particular importance has been given to the motto *Da mihi animas*. To understand its significance and implications is essential for avoiding ambiguities with respect to insistent references to spirituality. All Rector Majors who have dedicated synthetic but stimulating comments to the matter have considered it the centre of enlightenment and the driving force of the salesian spirit. It keeps our spiritual research in a proper equilibrium and locates it in the space where it can be expressed, i.e. the educative and pastoral area.

Fr Egidio Viganò has left us this comment: "It is a matter of a spiritual depth which contemplates God as in love with man: the Father of mercies, the Son who became incarnate to save humanity, the Sanctifying Spirit living among us for the transformation of history.

No sooner does the prayer and contemplation of a salesian heart focus on the Mystery, than the heart itself is moved from within its union with God to become fully available for apostolic activity. A similar fixed glance on God's countenance raises in the one who prays an insatiable movement towards pastoral charity.

This is true for consecrated persons, but it holds good too for the other members of the Family, and particularly for the Laity, who should understand and assimilate ever more deeply the originality and richness of such interior convictions. (...)

Hence the need for dedication to spiritual depth, greater sensitivity to the Mystery and more intense attention to pastoral charity"

3. Cultivation of a love of predilection for the young

Another trait which distinguishes and characterizes the life of Don Bosco's Salesian Family is participation in the mission to the young and the poor.

The formula which indicates the need to work for the integral salvation of the young, and in particular of those who are at risk, contains two references: predilection for the young, and participation in the mission to the young and the poor.

All the groups cultivate a predilection for the young, even though each group, by virtue of its own particular identity, aims at specific categories and has explicit ways of evangelization.

What this predilection is and what it implies we can illustrate with some essential indications without pretending to be exhaustive.

| The first is *to work with an 'oratorian heart'* wherever we are called to realize our own educative and pastoral task. An oratorian heart means being interested in whatever concerns the young; it means attention to those youngsters we come across in our own field of work or in life; it means seeking to make contact with them and welcome them so as to help them and communicate the faith to them; it means being concerned for the promotion and safeguarding of their human rights; it means working with others who aim at their growth for a different and better world; it means inserting ourselves at those points where the destiny of children and young people is decided, in small things or great.

Vast and numerous are the opportunities for the expression of an 'oratorian heart'. The youth problem at the present day calls for intervention in the fields of education, social and political life, at both secular and ecclesial level, for prevention, for orientation and for extrication and rescue.

| And then every group and every individual are called to *work explicitly* in one of the typical environments of the salesian mission: *human advancement, education, and evangelization*. We Salesians of Don Bosco express this in certain articles of the Constitutions: art.32 (personal development), art.33 (social and collective development), and art.34 (evangelization and catechesis). The other groups say the same thing in their own words. As animators we are called upon to make clear the collocation and the orientation for the young and the poor of the Salesian Family.

Many possibilities for intervention open up before us if we are all attentive to these perspectives of apostolic commitment. Today we become ever more aware of the impossibility of working efficaciously even in restricted environments unless we foresee a work done in unity and shared responsibility. The Salesian Family therefore must give greater importance to meeting the urgent needs and challenges put in ever increasing forms by the world of youth to adults and educators.

All the groups take up the saying of Don Bosco found in the Companion of Youth from its first edition: "That you are young is enough to make me love you very much".

The passage from words to reality requires the union of forces.

4. Titles to membership of the Salesian Family.

The various indications we have recalled (vocational participation in Don Bosco's charism - diversified sharing of the salesian spirit and spirituality - love of predilection for the young) create the sense of belonging and determine the conditions for it to become public and formal.

It cannot consist in purely interior elements, as for instance empathy, friendship or the desire to be recognized within this Family. It is indispensable to have recourse to other factors, as in fact the General Chapters have done.

Fr Egidio Viganò himself intervened several times on this very point as can be deduced from his circular letters dealing with the Salesian Family, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, the Cooperators, the Don Bosco Volunteers and the Past-pupils.

The Common Identity Card synthesizes the common feeling of the groups concerning the need and diversity of the titles to membership and the reasons for them>.

"The term *family*", we read, "is continually 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 and the common people; and by certain *specific and original characteristics* which justify official recognition, which is given through a specific title.

A first title is that of the Salesians, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and Cooperators: they are the first three central groups of which Don Bosco is the *founder* in a quite special manner. They were constituted by him as the direct heirs of his work; they are the foundation and point of reference for all the other groups in whatever concerns the spirit, the mission, and the method of pedagogical and pastoral activity.

Another title to membership is that of the various groups of consecrated life which came into existence at a later date through the creative force of the charism. They enrich the common patrimony of the Family with particular charismatic expressions.

Finally there is a third level of membership which comes under the heading *particular titles to membership*. This category is of wider extension than those of the groups previously mentioned, but is equally bound in an objective manner to the vitality and riches of the spiritual legacy of Don Bosco. The unifying energy of his charism is indispensable also at this wider level.

The juridical title to membership is indicated in the letter of the Rector Major granting official recognition in response to requests made by the various groups".

This is the point to which our reflections have led us. The panorama presented is clear but is also very open.

Various expressions are used for the titles to membership: membership in the strict sense or in the wide sense; membership in virtue of having been founded by Don Bosco himself or by other Founders drawing their inspiration from him; membership as a response to the salesian vocation as a group and

also as individuals through a specific consecration; membership through other titles.

To render this letter of mine very practical, as we consider the various titles of membership, I want to emphasize some important points which the salesian community must examine with care.

| The Salesians of Don Bosco with the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the Cooperators constitute the *central nucleus* of the Family. This what they are frequently called. It is not a privilege. First and foremost it is a task of communion. They must mutually study each other so as to unite their various gifts in a complementary whole and make themselves available for the spreading of the salesian spirit.

This was taken for granted for the SDBs and FMAs. Today the Cooperators too are recognizing in an ever more evident manner their own role in the formation of the laity who share the salesian mission.

| The communion and mission have need of structures for support and stimulus, and at the present day they must be simple and versatile.

For *communion* among all the groups of the Family I invite you to make the effort, as has already been done in many Provinces, to arrange encounters for promoting fraternity and understanding and for planning purposes. Let the Provincials be the first to manifest this will for communion by bringing together, at suitable times and with the agenda agreed in advance, representatives and those responsible for the various groups. Communion is born and develops when you find an environment and initiatives which foster it. We too at the level of the General Council will consider how we can institutionalize the annual meeting of the representatives of the Family which has taken place in recent years.

| *The mission* can derive great advantages from an understanding between all the groups, and particularly among the central groups of the Family.

At the present day education of the young needs figures of different kinds and assorted interventions. Only an ensemble can respond efficaciously to the expectations. The good of the young demands of us a further effort to plan together.

Results achieved in recent years bear witness to the fact that it is possible to work in a convergent manner. Youth pastoral work, the salesian family, social communication, the missionary commitment, concern for formation, and the financial sector, all have areas which can be shared in a responsible manner.

Service to the Salesian Family

I think that by now we have all accepted the fact that as regards the Salesian Family we have particular responsibilities, as is clearly stated in art.5 of our Constitutions.

To preserve the concrete aspect which the present letter aims at adopting, I would like to give a rapid glance at the General Regulations of the Congregation. They specify in practical terms the indications given in the Constitutions. Consequently they recall certain commitments to which we must give renewed attention at the present time. In their realization Provincials and Rectors have a decisive role to play. There are some things they must keep in mind.

1. Animation is a community commitment.

The Special General Chapter spoke of the change of mentality needed to face up with new perspectives to the work of the Salesian Family. The first and indispensable change is that the community feel itself involved in the animation of and collaboration with the various groups of the Family operating in the same neighbourhood. This is a work that cannot be delegated in its entirety to a single individual. Significant charismatic values are involved.

The community can intervene in many ways:

- by direct and explicit interest concerning the life and activities of each Group;
- by esteem and empathy, expressed especially at moments of particular events or anniversaries;
- by the fraternal welcome given to members of other groups who come to the community for various reasons, e.g. meetings or encounters arranged by different groups;
- by moral and as far as possible material support in cases of difficulty, showing in this way that we consider them as true brothers and sisters;
- by assistance and spiritual direction, as at typical moments of formation to the salesian life'
- by the offering of opportunities for forms of collaboration with shared responsibility in the educative and pastoral project the community has in hand;

- by the vocational accompaniment of all individuals so that they may be led to accept and welcome God's will.

But especially the community can integrate the care of the Salesian Family into its own communal project. It is indispensable to bring the apostolic concerns of all Salesians to the centre of the community life and to a single plan of activities. Our strength lies in living and working together. The effect of our presence is linked with the community character of our interventions. What must be avoided is a kind of delegation which implies that following up the groups is only something marginal in which the community as a whole is not greatly interested.

The active participation of the community is indispensable especially in the light of new qualities required and the new forms of collaboration. It enriches our service, corrects improvised changes in orientation, organization and life-style of the group, when a delegate finishes his period of service and another takes his place.

It therefore contributes to the history of the group and prevents accumulated riches being dispersed.

2. The work of confreres who are qualified and willing

We shall reap the harvest that awaits us from the groups of the Salesian Family, and in particular from the Cooperators, Past-pupils and DBV, in proportion to the quality and time made available by those confreres who have the duty of accompanying them.

The first concern therefore of the Provincial and his Council is the selection of the confreres who will provide this typically salesian service. Quality and competence guarantee the efficacy of their presence and facilitate relationships within the groups. There are criteria therefore which must guide the discernment of the Provincial and Council in choosing them. I will draw attention to the main ones.

| The service should be entrusted to confreres who have a great love for Don Bosco and salesian spirituality, and who want therefore to communicate such spirituality and are willing to seek new ways for the realization of the charism. They will be able to share with their own community the work they are doing.

| They should be prepared for their task. Improvisation does not produce good results. Today ecclesial associations require spiritual assistance of high

quality, and ours are no exception. The delegates will have to keep in close touch with and follow up authoritatively the progress of the various salesian realities.

The availability they are asked for implies the study of the characteristics of the group concerned, an understanding of the spiritual and pastoral objectives proper to its identity, and salesian orientation in face of the new ideas which continually emerge in daily life and activities. The result of a presence of this kind is of concern not only to the particular group concerned but to the entire Salesian Family. Encouragement should therefore be given to meetings for the formation of the delegates, who should be prepared especially for their role of spiritual animators.

| Their tasks too should be suitably clarified. They are listed in art.5 of the Constitutions: to keep alive the efforts of individuals and groups to grow in the salesian spirit; to preserve unity, encourage dialogue, foster fraternal collaboration; to stimulate mutual enrichment and apostolic creativity. These things should not be left to individual interpretations; the delegates should not get lost in secondary matters nor take on directly functions which should be provided for by the group itself.

The groups of the Salesian Family are autonomous. They have their own structures, their own internal arrangements and relationships with externals to be managed in their own manner. Our presence should not lead to interference in such things. There will be times when we need to lend a hand, especially in the case of a group beginning life in a new area. But even in these cases we must act as salesian 'assistants', placing ourselves alongside them and prompting the development of the riches which lie hidden in individual hearts and in the group as a whole.

3. A competent service from a salesian standpoint.

In the work of animation which is entrusted to us, pride of place goes to *formation*.

The diversity of the groups will suggest the contents, and the level of the members will indicate the process for an adequate Christian formation.

But *salesian formation* is the key point of our own task. It is not a question of one topic amongst others, but something concerning the form and style of growth. It does have specific contents, but becomes rather the form of the whole process. Salesian educative and pastoral tradition must be

communicated, which is the principal part of our spiritual patrimony and winning strategy in relationships with the young. Don Bosco used to tell his first missionaries that he would have liked to preach a Retreat for them on the preventive system.

One must take up and analyze more deeply, in line with the different experiences, the features of the salesian spirit. This is an effective school, of salesian daily life for both confreres and lay people. There are many perspectives, all of them enriching. Each group is called to express, as happens in the annual Week of Spirituality, how it feels and lives salesian spirituality.

Attention must be given also to *apostolic formation*. This is an internal dimension of salesian spirituality which presupposes enthusiasm, but also practical competence. We have original ideas in this field which we must not lose. They go back to some intuitions of St Francis de Sales, which Don Bosco took up, reformulated and lived in his circumstances as an educator of the young, and specifically of poor youngsters.

The groups of the Salesian Family (and we are naturally included) must be able to open themselves to the new apostolic frontiers of the Church. There are new 'areopagi' to be evangelized, innumerable youthful questions to be taken on board, and new missionary frontiers to be attended to. It is of no help to concentrate resources in certain places if there are other places which desire and need the salesian presence but are deprived of it. Some rethinking is needed about integral collaboration over the whole area, and with new needs in mind.

To succeed in this programme it is indispensable that the groups become sufficiently capable of assuming the primary responsibility for their own animation and their own apostolic initiatives. This is a maturing process that we Salesians should urge on with might and main.

In all of this there is a specific service I want to recall our *priestly* service! I consider it important and that it should be offered in a more emphatic fashion. It has been improving and many confreres could tell us of their experience of the results obtained. But there is the risk of it becoming reduced to pure 'chaplancy' work in celebrations at fixed times or fixed days and nothing more. In Don Bosco's mind and practice it is of decisive importance. He is the Father and shepherd of his Family.

All that Vatican II had to say about priestly service, the many reflections made in the Congregation on this theme, the requests we receive from the Church at the present time, all these things should find our priests attentively aware of the richness of the priestly charisma.

We have to ask ourselves, dear confreres, whether we carry out the service of the word with generosity, with interior joy, competently and in a manner adapted to times and persons. Do we dedicate ourselves to the ministry of sanctification, putting forward a spiritual process and following it up by the use of all that the Church puts at our disposal? Do we try to build up and bring to life that communion which has its origin in the vocation, its energy in the Spirit, its root in Christ, or do we sometimes remain at the level of convivial socialization?

The priestly service is one in which we can put to good use all the grace and preparation we have received.

New perspectives emerging from the GC24

1. The Friends of don Bosco

The theme we have dealt with in the preceding pages meets with another reality on which I think it may be useful to add a brief comment: the "Friends of Don Bosco".

It looks as though this reality is going to grow, and in consequence will need some further reflection to reach an agreed orientation. For the time being I will limit myself to some elements of necessary clarification.

The expression has been in use among us SDBs in a general kind of way since the Congregation's beginnings. Don Bosco made a lot of friends, and many there were who rejoiced to be able to call themselves friends of Don Bosco.

The Past-pupils have begun to use the term in a more direct way in their Confederal Statute. They write in fact: "The Association offers itself as a basis of reference and or meeting for all those who 'under various titles' feel themselves associated with the salesian apostolate, share its objectives and make up the vast movement of sympathizers and of FRIENDS OF DON BOSCO, who for a long time have been active in society".

The GC24 made a first more organic reflection when dealing with the relations between SDBs and laity.

It pointed to an *accepted fact*: "Don Bosco always had many friends, scattered all over the world and in the most varied environments. Their number has not decreased with the passing of time, nor has the bond become weaker between them and our Father and Founder". The Pope too, in his message for the beginning of the Chapter, recognized that "the Salesians can count on a great number of friends of Don Bosco scattered all over the world, with different denominations but all linked with the Saint of the young".

The same GC24 indicated a *typology* for them, emphasizing their variety, with terms like "sympathizers, admirers, benefactors, collaborators, advisers, believers and non-believers, and non-Christians".

But it brought all the types together under a common *identity* which it expressed as follows: "With different shades of meaning they present the following identity: they reveal an attitude of empathy for the figure of Don Bosco, his spirit and mission; they express a personal attachment to Don Bosco; they intend to collaborate in various ways in initiatives of good, sharing in this way in the salesian mission".

And it concluded with a definition of their reference to the Salesian Family: "It is recognized that the Friends of Don Bosco are inserted in a wider movement than the present reality of the Salesian Family. Their insertion in the spirit and mission of Don Bosco is diversified, with a variety of degrees and attitudes, after the fashion of concentric circles: for some it is a matter of direct involvement, for others of indirect participation".

These texts can provide us with some practical indications.

| We should become aware, in the first place, and exploit the fact that there are friends of Don Bosco everywhere; they are in the CEP and in salesian initiatives of various kinds, but they are also widespread in society and sometimes a long way from any physical linkage with a community of Don Bosco. They are to be found in all geographic, religious and cultural contexts. There are even *groups* called "Friends of Don Bosco". Even though they are not very numerous, they nevertheless represent a difference between members and non-associates.

| We consider it important therefore to include in our programme the cultivation of rapport with them. We entrust this commitment in particular to the Confederation of the Past-pupils, in line with what we said in the message addressed to them by the GC24: "At local and provincial level your Association should promote convocation and collaboration, expanding the salesian charism in this way into a vast movement, and creating a network of

friendship and empathy with so many 'friends' of the salesian work and of Don Bosco".

But in this case too there is no question of everything being left to a delegate alone. Every Salesian, every community, every group should extend friendship. This is a characteristic of salesian spirituality, pedagogy and pastoral activity.

| Moreover, since they form part of the salesian movement they have the right to be nourished by salesian spirituality. And so it is our duty to find ways to offer them this spirituality by creating opportunities for contacts and channels of communication.

| Finally, the special nature of the friends of Don Bosco and the fact that they are to be found everywhere, provides us Salesians with the possibility of making Don Bosco and his educative concerns known in neighbourhoods and areas where we are not present.

The whole scenario constitutes a reality which cannot leave us indifferent. Daily experience shows us that many initiatives are possible precisely because of the presence of these friends. They contribute to the material support of salesian work, they provide us with openings in political and institutional environments, they offer a significant contribution in education, they spread the name and spirit of Don Bosco in all sorts of different contexts. Many of them, men and women, support us by prayer and invincible solidarity.

There are possibilities here from which we must draw profit, and so we are open to new developments and realizations. We keep awake, as did Don Bosco, to the signs of the times, and we learn from experience how to make further progress. In the General Council we shall continue our reflections to shed further light on the question and put forward criteria for action.

2. The Salesian Movement

This was given considerable attention by the GC24, which took note of a situation already existing in which work had already begun.

In fact art.5 of the Constitutions, without any break of continuity, links the Movement to the Family as an environment without restrictions. General Chapters and Rector Majors have indicated its nature and the criteria for its development.

In the field of youth pastoral work, through a patient process of proposals, clarifications and realizations, was born and has been consolidated the Salesian Youth Movement (SYM). The GC23 took note of it, recognized its educative value, and proposed it to the whole Congregation. It appears in some contexts with a good ability for internal communication, with a strength of involvement, and with consolidated formative processes. Within its groups and animators have multiplied. Salesian Youth Spirituality (SYS) is already a factor in bringing in new groups, even though there is still much to be done to bring about its full assimilation.

This is the reason for dealing with the Salesian Movement, albeit briefly, in the present context. There will be other circumstances when we can reflect more organically and completely on everything concerning the Movement and its young components.

The GC23 declared that the SYM is "an original gift of the Spirit to the community of believers, and one of the riches of the Church and youth".

Some experiences and some comments, not always well weighed, may have created a certain diffidence towards movements, and for some confreres this has happened unconsciously in the case of the Salesian Movement, and especially the youth sector which is more organized with positive initiatives.

One must begin from the conviction that the movements represent a manifestation of the presence and action of the Spirit in the Church and in the world. This is noted in *Christifideles Laici* when it emphasizes the existence of a "new period of group endeavours" as a specific response to spiritual needs felt at the present day, and as a resource for the new evangelization.

Here we must emphasize the variegated nature of the Salesian Movement. All those form part of it who work for the good of youth, whether within or outside salesian structures, in the Church and in civil institutions, and who consciously express some feature of the salesian spirit and educative style. No membership cards are needed. It should be clearly recognized that this multiple and differentiated reality finds its unity and strength for development in the reference to Don Bosco and in the sharing of his spirituality and pedagogy in line with the contexts and the possibilities of each one.

The Movement lives therefore on the basis of certain key-ideas which guide in a convergent manner those who belong to it, either directly or indirectly. "This circulation of messages and values", says the GC23 about the youth component of the Movement, "has no need of a rigid and centralized

organization. It is based on free communication between the groups, and needs only a minimum structure for the coordination of common initiatives".

It should be emphasized that the urgency of the Movement derives from the mission to the young and the poor. The salesian community is well aware that the commitment to be "missionaries of the young" cannot be realized without a vast movement of persons working together with shared responsibility. From this requirement stems the need for the educative and pastoral community in all salesian works. From the same requirement follows the effort to gather together in the neighbourhood a network of collaborators, friends and sympathizers willing to carry out "good works". Working alone carries with it the risk not only of isolation but also of inefficacy.

We conclude therefore with the *necessity of extending and giving competence to the salesian Movement*, and for this an animation is indispensable that is suited to its nature. From this standpoint the youth component is already organized. As regards adults, the animation belongs to all the Salesian Family and in particular to the central groups.

"The commitment to broaden the involvement", writes the GC24, "is of all those who, in fact, at different levels and under various headings are already sharing the spirit and mission of Don Bosco. An entirely special responsibility attaches to the SDBs, because of their identity and the task given them by the Founder of being animators of the Movement which from him took its origins".

The FMA provide a substantial and competent contribution to the salesian Movement. In every environment where one of their communities is at work, numerous persons gather together disposed to collaborate in initiatives and open to the spirit of Don Bosco and of Mother Mazzarello.

To the Salesian Cooperators too, because of their particular situation within the Family, the GC24 gave an indication on which we should involve local Centres and the entire Association: "They must be recognized as full sharers in the responsibility for the salesian mission and points of reference for lay people in the broad salesian movement. This was the sense in which their new Regulations for Apostolic Life were approved in 1986"

We need to remember also that the salesian Movement is extending like a galaxy. Contributing to the extension are the present possibilities of social communication which can provoke adherence and collaboration without limitation of space. Moreover each of our works has broadened the network of its linkages, shared responsibility, and the number of those taking part. But

above all, around the various groups of the Family are gathering circles, clubs and other aggregations with the solidarity with which they are organized.

Perhaps at some future date it may be possible to arrange a communication process between all these constellations".

The salesian Movement represents therefore for Don Bosco's charism a field of work with an interesting future, but one that is as yet largely unexplored. Its animation has not as yet been planned in any adequate form. We need to be inventive and try something out!

We know that efficacy depends on certain conditions: animators with the necessary vision and competence,, willing to pass on the salesian spirit to others; communication channels, forms and initiatives, and if possible, spiritual and working encounters; and essential shared references which create unity.

The salesian Movement is a fertile terrain for vocations to the different expressions of the charism. We may imagine it like this around every work, and transversely across a broader area like the space where Cooperators, Past-pupils and adherents to the other branches of the Salesian Family are found and multiply.

Let us return to the young

And so in this way we have made a rapid survey of our real and potential resources. The Spirit can bring them to life through our mediation. But now let us get back to the nitty-gritty of our present field of work.

Don Bosco's mission to the young and the poor is the *raison d'être* of the Salesian Family and the motive that brings together its members and those of the salesian Movement. It puts young people at the centre of our educative and popular concerns. For its realization salesian pastoral work for the young came into being and developed, carried on especially by the SDBs, FMAs and Institutes of consecrated life dedicated to education.

In recent times some lay groups of the Salesian Family have organized their youth sections with an eye to vocational and practical objectives.

Local Churches too are getting themselves equipped with offices for youth pastoral work. In this in fact the convergence and articulation of proposals together with the coordination of sectors and workers becomes imperative, under pain of fragmentation and dispersal.

It is therefore opportune that we too should give some thought to a pastoral work for youth which is coordinated, at least in its criteria. Teams in both the sector of youth pastoral work and that of the Salesian Family must continue their work for convergence until it produces real results.

In the meantime let us hold on to some fixed and safe key-points.

| The whole Salesian Family shares responsibility for service to the young. This includes the need for involving in a project, to an ever greater extent, persons and groups who work in the same area with their own relative autonomy.

| The SYM is an eminently 'oratorian' manifestation of the mission to youth carried out by the Salesian Family. We are all called to animate it in line with the characteristics of the Movement itself, which are those of an 'educative' movement, centred on education to faith. The presence of Cooperators and Past-pupils as animators is desirable alongside those of the SDB and FMA. The same is true as regards the CEP.

| In both the SYM and the CEP all the salesian vocations are made known; the young people are helped to follow a process of maturing and discernment, encouraging them towards vocational forms which are more demanding. When the youngster has reached the point at which he is ready to make a choice, he or she is welcomed into the respective group for the immediate specific preparation for the commitment associated with the option made.

| In the present period of new evangelization the missionary spirit should be recommended. It should drive us to places and situations where no attention is yet given to youthful needs, demands or problems, rather than concentrate on youngsters who are already sufficiently cared for from an educative and religious standpoint. It was precisely this spirit that led to the birth and growth of the Salesian Family.

Conclusion

We have reached 1997: and we begin our journey towards the Jubilee of the year 2000, which reminds us that we are now living an auspicious period for the presence of "Jesus, the one Saviour of the world, yesterday, today and for ever". You feel it in the vibrations of the world and in the pulse of the Congregation.

Today, the first day of the year, we celebrate the divine motherhood of Mary. She willingly embraced the Son of God, and contributed substantially to giving him those human traits which bring him close to us and make him recognizable.

From Jesus her motherhood extends to the Church and to every individual in whom Christ gives origin to the new man, who is the Son of God. Our education of the young tends precisely to this and we cannot think of it as anything but a participation in the motherly work of Mary.

May she bless us during this year of grace and be with us as we fulfil the mission with which we have been entrusted, together with all our brothers and sisters of the Salesian Family.

Fr Juan Vecchi