

THE VICAR OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

Contribution to the Report of the Rector Major to GC 28

I. STARTING POINT

The first reference of this evaluation of the six-year period is article 134 of the Constitutions, which outlines the figure of the Vicar of the Rector Major. The second reference was the deliberation of GC27, which removed the Vicar from the task of animating the Salesian Family (cf. GC27 79): a choice that was largely positive, since it allowed the Vicar to devote attention to some less developed areas and to assume new emerging needs in the life of the Congregation. Finally, the third reference is the part of the Report of the Rector Major to GC27 referring to the Vicar, which indicated some priorities and helped to formulate the project for the six-year period.

II. COLLABORATION IN THE GOVERNMENT OF THE CONGREGATION

According to article 134 of the Constitutions, the Vicar is the first collaborator of the Rector Major in the government of the Congregation. During these six years there has been constant communication between the Rector Major and the Vicar on problems concerning the Congregation, the Provinces or individual confreres. On every decision the Vicar conferred with the Rector Major and vice versa.

II.1. The Vicar carried out the task of religious Superior in charge of the *Communities directly dependent on the Rector Major*: the Community of the Generalate, now the Central See, the "Saint Francis de Sales" Community present in the Vatican, the "Saint Callisto" Community in Rome, to which the care of the Catacombs is entrusted.

The community of the Generalate, after leaving its headquarters in Via della Pisana 1111, moved on September 30, 2017 to the "Sacred Heart" in Via Marsala 42 in Rome. Since September 1, 2019, the "St. Joseph" community has taken over the pastoral care of the Parish and Shrine of the Sacred Heart, as well as the care of the Youth Centre, where, among other things, there is a project for the reception of migrants.

The "Saint Francis de Sales" community in the Vatican has ceased, by decision of the Holy See, the task of running the printing press, the photographic service and the administrative management of "L'Osservatore Romano". For the time being, its tasks include the presence in the Department for Social Communication and in the Department for Integral Human Development, the Chaplaincy of the Directorate of Security Services and Civil Protection of Vatican City State, the Chaplaincy of the Vatican Museums, the service to the Third Lodge of the Secretariat of State.

The "San Callisto" community in the Catacombs came under the direct responsibility of the Rector Major at the beginning of the six-year period; previously it belonged to the "Sacred Heart" Circumscription of Central Italy in Rome. In these years there has been a strengthening of the Salesian personnel and a careful care of the extraordinary maintenance. The importance of this community is recognized.

Following the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the three communities of Eritrea have been added to these three communities: Asmara, Barentu and Dekemahare, constituted as a Delegation. A conclusion of the conflict is expected for the return of these communities to the Vice-Province of Ethiopia.

For these six communities the "Council of Communities directly dependent on the Rector Major" has been constituted, with the Vicar as Religious Superior and the Councillor for Formation, the Councillor for the Missions and the Economist General as Councillors. In this way problems are shared, without continually burdening the Rector Major and the General Council.

II.2. There are also some "*Services dependent on the Rector Major and General Council*", which continue to remain so, although they have now been transferred to the Vice-Province "Maria Sede della Sapienza" in Rome. These services are: the Historical Archives, the Historical Institute, the Salesian Central Library. At the moment they are being reorganized and rethought.

II.3. The Vicar is also in charge of coordinating the *recruitment of personnel*, in a particular way in favour of the communities directly dependent on the Rector Major, the Vice-Province "Maria Sede della Sapienza" of Rome and the Salesian Pontifical University. In addition to these needs of personnel, the communities of Turin Valdocco "Mary Help of Christians" and Colle Don Bosco have also been added. The demand for personnel at the service of the Rector Major and his Council has therefore increased.

The Vicar routinely found the Provinces available for the needs of the Congregation. The awareness has matured that the Congregation has commitments that go beyond the realities of the Provinces. In the search for personnel there has been a move toward greater internationalization.

The search for personnel for the headquarters was particularly facilitated by the Councillors of the sector who for the most part indicated suitable personnel. For this reason, the sectors have good teams of collaborators.

As far as the UPS is concerned, this research was facilitated by the Vicar's periodic meetings with the Councillor for Formation, the Superior of the Vice-Province and the Rector of the UPS; this also concerned the sections of Turin Crocetta and Jerusalem "Ratisbonne".

Delicate is our presence in the Vatican, where all the great religious congregations carry out a specific service. It is necessary to find valid and significant confreres who can express a professionally qualified service. The presence of a Salesian Community at the Holy See promotes, in a style of simplicity and correctness, contacts with the Vatican authorities.

For obediences linked to the service of the Rector Major and the General Council it has been confirmed that it is appropriate to regulate obediences on a temporal basis of three or six years, in such a way as to favour the availability of confreres who are requested for this service.

II.4. Problems concerning management aspects of the past, such as the situation related to the Gerini inheritance or the lease contract for Beitgemal's land, have been addressed jointly by the Rector Major, the Vicar and the Economist General. These disputes still took a long time to follow the evolution of the situation.

With regard to relations with the Holy See, the Rector Major routinely delegated the Vicar to maintain relations; at times the Rector Major and the Vicar were present jointly; at other times the Rector Major personally maintained contact.

The Vicar, at the request of the Rector Major, visited some Provinces in difficulty. Normally on these trips he met the Provincial, the Provincial Council and the Rectors. He was also present in the *regional meetings of the Provincials*, usually twice in the six-year period, and in all the Team Visits.

III. EVALUATION OF THE PATH ACCORDING TO PROJECT 2018-2020

The project of the six-year period also began with article 131 of the Constitutions regarding the figure of the Vicar of the Rector Major, to whom "the care of religious life and discipline is particularly entrusted"; this justifies the first two areas of the project, in line with the requirements of GC27.

III.1. WITNESS TO CONSECRATED LIFE

The *identity of the Salesian consecrated vocation* was the objective of this area of the project according to its three fundamental aspects, as described in Article 3 of the Constitutions and as proposed in GC27; that is, it was intended to help the confreres and the communities to be mystics of the Spirit, prophets of fraternity and servants of the young.

Consecrated identity is not always lived with awareness; it is still weak. A sign of this is the passage of the confreres from the Congregation to the dioceses. Other signs of this weakness concern activism with little appreciation of spiritual life, individualism with little participation in fraternal life, and the not always faithful practice of the evangelical counsels.

III.1.1. *Spiritual life* requires the appreciation of personal prayer and daily meditation for at least half an hour a day. This still remains a goal to be achieved. The Vicar has fostered attention to meditation and to "lectio divina" in the formation of the new provincials and in meetings of the Region and Congregation; he also emphasized the results of the seminar organized by the Councillor for Formation on the theme of meditation.

III.1.2. The *evangelical counsels* are not always considered in practical life as an integral part of consecrated identity and often do not become a reference for personal and community practice. This is a new aspect in the Vicar's attention; for the most part, only those aspects that contradicted the practice of the evangelical counsels were taken into account, i.e. the serious lack of religious discipline. There is a need to arouse new fascination and enthusiasm, and therefore witness, for the following of Jesus - obedient, poor and chaste.

III.1.3. The *quantitative and qualitative consistency* of the communities has found considerable attention in this six-year period. Already in GC19 it was pointed out that "too many works were opened in the past without sufficient numerically and qualitatively prepared personnel" and how the Congregation ran the risk of "seeing its inner strength and therefore its real effectiveness in fulfilling its mission diminished considerably" (Cf. GC19 p. 43). Subsequent General Chapters called for a real commitment in this regard, mostly with little result. Following the reflection of the General Council and then an orientation of the Vicar, published in *Acts of the General Council* n. 422, a serious action has begun; this process is still ongoing.

At first an attempt was made to bring out the "hidden" communities, the so-called "joint" communities with other communities, which in fact were works with a few confreres, one or two at

most; then criteria were given for the opening of communities with at least three confreres and for the canonical erection of communities with at least four confreres. The Secretary General, on the occasion of the publication of the Yearbook of the Congregation, monitored this process and helped the Provinces to make the communities consistent, to ask for the canonical erection of communities that are not yet canonical, to bring out the "submerged" communities because they are joined to others.

In the perspective of the life of the communities, the Vicar also offered guidance in *Acts of the General Council* n. 429 on *international communities*. The sending of missionaries and the temporary transfer of confreres to the provinces in need are two ways of achieving this goal. In the six-year period there has been a growth in cooperation and solidarity between provinces through temporary transfers of confreres to help those most in need of personnel.

III.1.4. The *reshaping of Salesian presences* was another process of great importance, which required various interventions: the indication of the Vicar on how to do this process; the elaboration of criteria in each Provincial Chapter in 2016; the study in the General Council of Provincial Chapters and the indications given to each Province for the practical realization of these criteria.

The reshaping concerned: the consistency of the communities, the pastoral roles of the Salesians and the roles of management responsibility entrusted to the laity, the lay management of some works, the redefinition of the works with priority attention to poor young people, the qualification plan of the confreres, the care of vocations, the sending and reception of missionaries, the sustainability of the works.

Some immediate effects of this process were the closure of some communities with the entrusting of the work to the neighbouring community, on condition that all the confreres lived in the same community, and the entrusting of works to lay management under provincial responsibility. The process has just begun; the beginning of the change of mentality in the provinces has been created.

III.1.5. The *way in which authority is exerted* also requires a change of mentality and practice at the various levels: central, provincial and local. Without this change, there is no renewal of consecrated life. Beginning with the Rector Major, there has been much insistence on a change in the model of exercise, not based on power, efficiency, management, but on spiritual and pastoral animation, on sharing choices with co-responsible involvement in processes, on decisions as effective actions of government. In this there is still work to be done, so that there may be a spiritual, fraternal and pastoral exercise of authority, in a style that the Church today calls "synodal".

III. 2. CARE FOR RELIGIOUS DISCIPLINE

III.2.1. The action of the Vicar in this area began with the publication in *Acts of the General Council* n. 421 of an orientation on how to link religious life and religious discipline, on the need to enhance the figure of the Provincial's Vicar, on the establishment of the Provincial Commission for Religious Life and Discipline. It then continued with the publication in the *Acts of the General Council* in number 424 of an orientation on how to "foster a renewed commitment to religious discipline". These interventions have produced some fruit in the vision of religious discipline. After this raising of awareness, some specific problems began to be addressed.

III.2.2. The first problem faced concerned the irregular situations of confreres who have not lived in community for some time due to illegitimate absence or obstinate disobedience. At the beginning of the six-year period there was a considerable number of confreres in irregular situations;

currently there is a small number of confreres that need to be regularized. Thanks to the help of the Secretary General and the Procurator General, in addition to the commitment of the Provinces, a great deal of work has been done. In the General Council attention was paid to avoiding the emergence of irregular situations by rarely granting an excommunication pardon, asking the brothers who were absent illegally to return to the community or to ask for an indult to leave the Congregation and to begin, if clerics, the process of incardination in a diocese. When there was no willingness to collaborate, the provinces began the process of dismissal from the Congregation.

III.2.3. More difficult was to deal with situations of *serious lack of religious discipline* on the part of confreres. The provincials and their vicars began to contact the Vicar of the Rector Major and the Procurator General to see how to proceed in cases of conduct contrary to the sixth precept of the Decalogue, the generation of a child, improper use or misappropriation of money, abuse of power ...

The Provinces were not prepared to conduct a canonical preliminary investigation. The Vicar published a summary orientation on this procedure in *Acts of the General Council* no. 425. The Procurator General offered detailed guidelines on this procedure and accompanied the investigators and notaries with great dedication and competence in carrying out the investigation. Advice was offered to the Provincials on the decisions to be taken after the conclusion of the preliminary investigation, identifying the most appropriate legal instruments to be used in the individual case. We see the need to prepare confreres in Canon Law or at least to have recourse to the juridical competence of the consecrated life or of the dioceses present in the territory of the province.

III.2.4. Another situation addressed refers to *complaints of violation of the sixth precept of the Decalogue with a minor or with a vulnerable person*. Sensitivity in this area has increased and the level of attention is normally high. In a few Provinces, however, the awareness has not yet been acquired that these are crimes reserved to the judgment of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (*delicta reservata*), regulated by the norms of the *Motu proprio Sacramentorum sanctitatis tutela* and the *Motu proprio Vos estis lux mundi*. This means that the judgement on the complaint received is not the responsibility of the Provincial nor of the Rector Major, but of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, to which one is obliged to transmit the acts of the preliminary investigation.

As soon as there is news of child abuse, the Provincial notifies the Vicar of the Rector Major, appoints the investigator and the notary for the canonical investigation and imposes possible precautionary measures with suspension from the public exercise of the ministry and removal from contact with minors. This practice is to be consolidated. As of February 10, 2020, there were 42 complaints sent by the Provincials to the Vicar of the Rector Major, but the canonical investigation has not yet been concluded.

Investigations are often conducted too slowly. The following are very delicate: the assistance to the alleged victims, the accompaniment of the accused confrere, the precautionary measures to be taken, the relationship with the media, the relationship with civil justice. The acts of investigation are carefully studied by the Procurator General, with the help of juridical consultants; they are then examined by the General Council and the Rector Major, who expresses his *votum*, and then they are sent to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

III.2.5. The *guidelines for the protection of minors* are the privileged way to prevent violations of the sixth precept of the Decalogue *cum minore*. The Vicar participated in the meeting promoted by the Holy See in the Vatican on the "Protection of Minors in the Church" and had the opportunity to note the Church's commitment in this field.

Some provinces have already equipped themselves with this instrument, others have yet to do this work. The starting point in the elaboration is given by the "Guidelines for Prevention" of the Episcopal Conferences, which are in a phase of change. The Vicar of the Rector Major offered guidance in this regard in *Acts of the General Council* n. 430.

For all the Provinces this process needs to be initiated or revised following the latest orientations of the Church. A precise choice has been made: not to offer a ready-made document, unique for the whole Congregation, but to ask the individual Provinces to elaborate the Provincial Guidelines, involving both Salesians and laity and taking into account the Salesian pedagogical heritage, the orientations of the Episcopal Conferences and the Conferences of Major Superiors of each country, the sensitivity of the individual contexts, ... This choice is dictated by the conviction that what increases sensitivity and attention is not the adoption of a document prepared by others, but the process that ends with the elaboration of some clear options.

III.2.6. The *preparation of the various cases* to be presented to the Rector Major and the General Council regarding various requests (indult to leave the Institute, exclaustation, dismissal, opening and closing of communities and works, ...) is becoming more accurate.

III. 3. COORDINATION OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

This area of the six-year project has fostered improvement in the life and work of the General Council. There has been growth in the spiritual life, in fraternity and in the work of the Council. The coordination of the work of the Council should take further steps in the methodology of team work, in the preparation of council meetings, in prior sharing between sector councillors and regional councillors on specific topics; these working groups were coordinated by the Vicar.

III.3.1. At the beginning of the six-year period, the General Council made the planning of the calendar for the period 2014-2020 about the plenary and intermediate sessions of the General Council, the Extraordinary Visitations and Team Visits, and the presence of the Councillors of Sectors in the Regions. Organizing the calendar of the Extraordinary Visitations was difficult because of the health or unforeseen commitments of some Councillors; this must be better planned at the beginning of the six-year period, also to give more space to the Regional Councillors in the animation of Provinces and Regions.

The preparation of the *Project of the Rector Major and of the General Council* for the six-year period 2014-2020 was good; the mid-six-year review was also effective. The guidelines for the Extraordinary Visitations were approved; they need to be revised, especially in relation to the visit of the works with lay management within the Provincial Project, to the councils of the pastoral educational communities, to listening to the laity involved with tasks of responsibility in the shared mission. The shared editing of the Council's "Vademecum" has not been completed, due to the difficulty of concentrating in a synthetic way on the operational aspects; this instrument is important, but requires another way of editing, in the style of short articles, as in the General Regulations.

III.3.2. At the *plenary session of the Council*, 3 additional weekly meeting times were introduced from the outset, for a total of 7 weekly meetings of two hours each. The six-monthly reports of the sectors were very useful for information. At the beginning of each plenary session of the Council there was always a moment of sharing on the life and work of the previous period. At each plenary session there were themes for study to be prepared for the next meeting.

The reflection of the General Council was helped by the study of salient themes, prepared with the help of the teams of the sectors, such as voluntary work, the director's manual, personal Salesian accompaniment, the Synods of Bishops on the family and youth. The Vicar was entrusted with the task of coordinating the work of the Council and establishing the daily and weekly agenda in agreement with the Rector Major. The work of the Council has been good and fruitful; it has seen great freedom of expression and exchange; it needs to grow in methodology. Free exchange in the Intermediate Council was easier.

III.3.3. At the beginning of each plenary session there was the *six-monthly meeting of the Sector Councillors and the meeting of the Regional Councillors with the Vicar*, which has always been appreciated, participated in and fruitful for the improvement of the life and work of the Council itself. This meeting was an opportunity for discussion and reflection on our way of working.

III.3.4. There was great attention to the *accompaniment of Provinces in difficulty*, with the intervention of the Regional Councillor, the Extraordinary Visitors, the Sector Councillors, the Economist General and the Vicar of the Rector Major. This attention will have to be continued with systematicity and constancy, because it has had remarkable results and great effectiveness. There has also been assiduous accompaniment of the provincials in response to their requests.

III.3.5. No step has been taken to reflect in the Council on the training of the laity, except in the case of Europe. This is an urgent task to be addressed by GC28.

III.3.6. The revision of the Provincial's Manual has not been carried out, also because more effort has been put into the *accompaniment of Provincials*. After the appointment, the new provincial is called to an interview with the Rector Major, the Sector Councillors and the Regional Councillor; at the end of the interviews the Rector Major gives him a letter indicating the salient points of his commitment for the six-year period. One year after the installation, he participates in the training meeting for the new provincials, which has seen an accurate study of the volume "Legal Elements and Administrative Practice in the Government of the Province". After three years of service the provincials are invited to Turin to live with the Rector Major and the Vicar days of spirituality and verification of the journey in the animation and government of the Province. Finally, there is a daily accompaniment, which takes place through correspondence with appropriate responses.

III.3.7. For the *life of the General Council* moments of spiritual life have been favoured, especially with the weekly Eucharist during plenary sessions, the Spiritual Exercises, the pilgrimage to the Holy Land. There were few moments of formation together.

IV. MAIN CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE JOURNEY

IV.1. The *witness of consecrated life* is a relatively new area for the action of the Vicar of the Rector Major. There is a need to reflect on the styles of life prevailing in the Provinces in order to foster an authentic consecrated life. For this reason, there is a need for shared action with the Councillor for Formation, as well as with the Rector Major. Our Salesian vocational identity must necessarily have a reference to the Constitutions. This action concerns the conditions for the spiritual life, with particular attention to meditation, personal prayer and a rethinking of the way of doing the spiritual exercises, and monthly and quarterly retreats; the ways of fostering fraternity and overcoming pastoral individualism; the awareness of the practice of the evangelical counsels.

IV.2. The *care of religious discipline* should continue to receive great attention. Self-discipline of the confreres and discipline in community life should be fostered. The various situations

of confreres against religious discipline such as irregular situations, serious lack of religious discipline, abuse of minors and vulnerable persons should be monitored, accompanied and solved.

IV.3. The figure of the *Provincial's Vicar* needs to be taken into greater consideration. A change in the Constitutions is necessary: in article 168 it should be added that he "has special care for religious life and discipline". In my opinion, he should not be the provincial delegate for youth ministry, but at most the provincial delegate for formation. With the growth of this figure the Vicar of the Rector Major will have the possibility of preparing the Vicars of the Provincial with adequate formation; it is a matter of preparing them to be instructors for canonical investigations.

IV.4. The *Procurator General* has done a great work with competence and dedication; he has been of important help to the work of the Rector Major, the Vicar and the General Council; he has received public recognition from the Superiors of the Congregations and from the Dicasteries of the Holy See with which he maintains relations; he already has external collaborators competent in canon law to advise on individual cases and has frequent contacts with the officials of the Dicasteries of the Holy See; he needs support in periods of greater influx of acts to be studied or prepared.