

PROVINCIAL CIRCULAR

Salesian Province of Mary Help of Christians, Guwahati, Assam, India

JS – 32/2020

Valdocco, Turin, Italy
20 February 2020

My Dear Confreres,

Affectionate greetings and prayers from Valdocco, Turin!

I along with the General Chapter Delegates of our Province, namely, Fr Biju Michael Pulianmackal and Br Joby Mani, reached Valdocco on 14th February. Our journey to and arrival at Valdocco was memorable. When I personally met Fr Angel Fernandez Artime, Rector Major, and Fr Pascual Chavez Villanueva, Rector Major Emeritus, they both described our Province as “the beautiful Province of Guwahati” and welcomed me to the 28th General Chapter—it was truly both memorable and thrilling. Our journey in fact started on 10th February 2020 at Guwahati, soon after the “uplifting” funeral service of our beloved Br Aloysius Induar. May God rest his soul! The journey was indeed hassle free and the travelling companions were just extraordinary and excellent.

For me, it was not a mere journey, rather it was, is and will be a spiritual pilgrimage of lifetime wherein all along the way, we are and will be exposed to the rich Salesian history and legacy, its pedagogy, holiness, fidelity and other realities which are still alive, vibrant, relevant and memorable to see and experience. Here we have one of the best ambiances and atmospheres to re-live, learn, refresh and rejuvenate ourselves, all at the service of the mission for the poorest of the poor youth and altogether as the Sons of Don Bosco, the DREAMER, from 134 countries of the world. Valdocco is the place where the “dream” started to become a reality gradually and through relentless and indomitable human spirit, which had its focus on God and His Spirit.

The General Chapter is a loving invitation from God and St John Bosco, our Father, to every Salesian of Guwahati Province and every member of the Salesian Family in the Province of Guwahati to take time out and delve deep into examining who we are as Salesians and what we need to be for the people especially the youth who are around us. Today in the province, there is still an urgent need to radical fidelity to our consecrated life through uncompromising primacy to God, to Holiness of life, to being the prophets of fraternity especially in the community and servants/friends of the young, by listening and accompanying them competently to the fullness of life. We are called to be powerful witnesses who give our heart and soul fully and passionately to make Don Bosco’s dreams and charism ever more personal, transformative and drastically relevant for the poor youth around us.

Landing in Rome at 10.30 am (Italian time) in Alitalia, we proceeded straight to UPS, our Pontifical University and there we were given a warm welcome and a good accommodation. On the first evening itself, we attended and witnessed the defence of the PhD dissertation of one of our confreres from the Trichy province. We then went on for a sight-seeing tour of the Eternal City, basking in its glorious history which was both glorious and challenging. We were fortunate to obtain permission to attend the audience of Pope Francis, Holy Father. A huge crowd had gathered as usual, I am told, and we were able, not only to hear his voice and receive his blessing, but also look at him from a close range. We then visited many other historical places under the able guidance of Fr Biju. We also visited Fr Charles Deepen Lakra at Testaccio and was glad to know that he is doing well in his study of the Canon Law.

On 14th February, taking leave of Rome, we travelled to Turin by train. Due to an accident which occurred a few days earlier at Bologna, the train was late by an hour. Fr Saimy Ezhanikkatt came to fetch us from the train station. At Valdocco, the venue of the Chapter, three of us were assigned rooms at the posh Hotel President, a walkable distance from our house, Casa Madre. As warned earlier, the temperature is often chilly, recording at times as low as 4 degrees centigrade especially in the morning hours.

On arrival, the Provincials and the delegates were always paid attention to, the rooms allotted speedily, the laptops or mobiles loaded with applications required for effective participation in the Chapter and all the accessories of the Chapter, such as the bags, the identity cards, water bottles, master keys, etc., given out to everyone with precision.

On 16th February, at 6.30 pm, the 28th General Chapter officially took off to a colourful and devotional start with the solemn Eucharistic celebration in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, presided over by Rev. Fr Angel Fernandez Artime, Rector Major, soon after the opening ceremony. The opening ceremony consisted of the welcome address by the Rector Major, some video clippings and the Moderator explaining to the participants the rules and regulations of the Chapter, along with checking the electronic gadgets to ensure that they worked well during the simultaneous translations of all the presentations in different languages.

During the Holy Mass, Br Joby got the opportunity to proclaim the Second Reading in English and to everyone's joy and surprise, he concluded his proclamation of the Word of God with his loud and clear, PAROLA DI DIO (The Word of the Lord) in perfect Italian diction. I may be wrong, but I felt, the response of THANKS BE TO GOD in Italian was exceptionally loud.

The Church singing which was accompanied by a beautiful rendition of the pipe organ, made the celebration in the Basilica very solemn and devout. We all know that this was the Basilica that our Father Don Bosco decided to build and which he started off with no penny in his purse. He however emphatically said that if God wanted it, the construction

would certainly take place and be done. Indeed it was our Lady who pointed out to him the place and God who wanted it to be built for his poor and wandering boys of the Oratory. Today the Basilica stands tall and majestic, with the Holy Mass being celebrated on solemnities and on Sundays, at every one hour and every Mass being attended by many friends and admirers of Don Bosco. It is noteworthy to note that the FMA house is just round the corner. During the Chapter days, many of the participants have been accommodated in their campus.

“HERE WITH YOU I FEEL GOOD: IT IS MY LIFE TO BE WITH YOU”

Here at Valdocco Don Bosco begins to transform “wolves into lambs”. A project that finds its first home in “Casa Pinardi” (Pinardi Shed), then all over the world. The wolves, after having become lambs, are transformed into “pastors”: some of his first boys become Salesians. From Valdocco the educational ideal of Don Bosco is transformed into apostolic holiness. It is the heart of the Salesian work: from the humble roof of Casa Pinardi to the building of the Basilica in the place indicated by the Madonna. In addition to Don Bosco, Dominic Savio, Michael Rua, Maria Domenica Mazzarello, the benefactors and collaborators of the Salesian work of the origins are especially remembered here.



THE FIRST THREE DAYS OF THE CHAPTER

Today, 20th February, we have completed three full days of GC28 which were tedious yet beneficial. These days were fully dedicated to listening patiently and meditatively to the well prepared report on the state of the Congregation in the last six years by the

Rector Major, the General Councillors and the Regionals. There was a simultaneous translation which was appreciably good and the hall which was/is spacious had a huge HD LED screen for projections, supported by a very good sound system, once again showing how the SDBs do things well, in style and perfection.

Yesterday and today, the Chapter members had a half day recollection which will also continue tomorrow – the third day. The recollection day consists of morning prayers and animation talk for personal reflection and meditation on the Chapter theme in the hall. After the talk, we have personal time for re-reading the animation talk personally. We then spend our time in silent prayer and meditation in the various chapels around and in the Basilica. The recollection ends with the Holy Mass in the Basilica before lunch.

Yesterday the animation talk was on “The Priority of the Salesian Mission among the Youth Today” by Fr Rosanno Sala. Today the theme was on the “Profile of Today’s Salesian – What kind of Salesians for young people today?” by Fr Eunan McDonnell.

In the afternoon and in the evening hours till the vespers and good night, we assemble together according to the regions to study the report on the state of the congregation by the General councillors and the Rector Major.

“In one of the early sessions, the Rector Major, or the one who takes his place, shall present a general report on the state of the Congregation, and this shall be the object of study and analysis by the assembly” (Regulations 119).

The Report of the Rector Major to the General Chapter is conceived as an evaluation that the Rector Major and his Council offer to the Chapter Assembly, on the journey taken by the Congregation from the last General Chapter to date.

This Report does not intend so much to offer a photograph of the Congregation, but rather to verify the commitment assumed by the Rector Major and the General Council to help the entire Congregation to appropriate the text and spirit of GC 27 and to ensure its application.

THE REPORTS THAT WERE PRESENTED ...

1. Rector Major : Fr Angel Fernandez Artime
2. Vicar General : Fr Francesco Cereda
3. Formation : Fr Ivo Coelho
4. Youth Ministry : Fr Fabio Attard
5. Communication : Fr Filiberto Gonzalez
6. Missions : Fr Guillermo Basaños
7. Region of Africa – Madagascar : Fr Américo Raúl Chaquisse
8. Region of America South : Fr Natale Vitali

9. Region of East Asia- Oceania : Fr Václav Klement
10. Region of South Asia : Fr Maria Arokiam Kanaga
11. Region of Central & North Europe : Fr Tadeusz Rozmus
12. Region of Interamerica : Fr Timothy Ploch
13. Region of Mediterranean : Fr Stefano Martoglio

The digital reports of the Rector Major and the General Councillors are being sent to you in the attachment. These could be used as Salesian reading materials. (It is best that the reports remain only with the Salesians for now.) The Chapter members are yet to discuss on their reports but I suppose they are already good materials now for serious reading, study and reflection, as they are reports of the state of the congregation, as it stands now, after the implementation of the deliberations of the GC27, held six years ago.

I have not sent the report of the Regional Councillors. If it is possible, I will try to get the digital copy of the same and send them to you, especially the report of Fr Maria Arokiam Kanaga, Regional, South Asia on the state of the region in the last six years.

On 18th February, Fr Ivo Coelho, the General Councilor for Formation presented to the assembly the New Manual for Rectors. This manual was last revised in 1986 and at the behest of the previous General Chapter 27, the manual has been revised and presented in GC28.

I hope to send you information from time to time. The rest should be available on the website of the congregation: sdb.org, as well as that of ANS: infoans.org. I thank the community of Social Communications Department under the leadership of Fr PD Johny for uploading the daily proceedings of the chapter in the province website @ donboscoquwahati.org. I request everyone to kindly make a good use of such rich animation materials that are being made available to us.

I assure you of my daily remembrance here at the cradle of our Salesian works! Please continue to pray for the speedy recovery of Br Raphael Kerketta. I thank Fr Teron, Fr Benny and Fr Bhaskar for updating me continuously about his health situation. We entrust him into the loving hands of our good Lord. Do pray for the three of us here so that we may learn well and contribute as much as possible for the good of the congregation.

Yours affectionately in Don Bosco,



Fr Januarius S. Sangma SDB
Provincial

Photo Gallery:

