

# PROVINCIAL CIRCULAR

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

JS – 34/2020

1 April 2020

*My Dear Confreres,*

Greetings from Valdocco, Turin!

I feel happy to have written this circular from Valdocco, where Don Bosco's charism took flesh and gave birth to the Society of St Francis de Sales which today has spread across 134 countries of the globe, divided into 7 regions of the world, 90 Provinces, with 14,486 Salesians including the Bishops and the novices, and has linked 32 Salesian family groups.

## **VALDOCCO – BECKONING EVERY SDB TO PERSONAL SANCTIFICATION**

In the *“Minutes of the Act of Foundation of the Salesian Congregation”* Turin, 18 December 1859, Don Bosco wrote, “The Gathered group then decided to form a society or congregation with the aim of promoting the glory of God and the salvation of souls, especially of those most in need of instruction and education, while providing the members with mutual help toward their own sanctification. The project met with unanimous approval”. Sanctification or helping one another in the society (community) to become Saints is therefore the primary purpose of our congregation.

Valdocco, one of the most beautiful localities of the city of Turin is our CASA MADRE (Mother house). It is as beautiful as our own mothers are.

In one of the front gates of the house of Valdocco, there is a welcome note which reads, SALESIANI DON BOSCO – CASA MADRE. This is the place of his dreams (visions), the first one being in his own village, Becchi at the impressionable age of 9. Here at Valdocco, he started his mission for the poorest of the poor, after making a careful discernment, in consultation with his spiritual director, Fr Joseph Cafasso. Here he faced misunderstandings, gossips, oppositions, desertions, branding as “gone out of his mind” etc but held on, trusting in God because he knew that if he gave up, his boys would have no future. Where difficulties and hardships abounded, consolations and encouragements were also experienced in the perceptible transformation, not only of the grassy lands into homes but also of the rustic boys into prayerful, spiritual, moral and disciplined youth, creating



much family spirit, spontaneity and joy. The transformation was phenomenal and was not too slow. He had several collaborators who stood by him including his own mother.

### **WHAT KIND OF SALESIANS FOR THE YOUTH OF TODAY – GC 28**



Our 28th General Chapter took off on a high note on 16 February 2020 to deliberate on the pertinent theme “What kind of Salesians for the youth of today?” Little did we know then that the pandemic COVID-19 was already in the offing in Italy, after it first erupted in the Wuhan region of central China. It rapidly swept across Asia and made its outbreak in Europe and the United States. Italy faced the brunt of the pandemic as the number of deaths and infected people overtook China soon.

On 19 February 2020, the first of the so-called the Spirituality day, we had a lectio divina on the theme, **THE PRIORITY OF THE SALESIAN MISSION AMONG THE YOUTH TODAY** by Fr Rossano Sala sdb.

On 20th February, the second spirituality day was on the **PROFILE OF TODAY’S SALESIAN** - What kind of Salesians for young people today? by Fr Eunan McDonnell.

On the final day, i.e., 21st February, we reflected on the theme, “Together with the laity in mission and formation” by Fr Koldo Gutiérrez.

These animations helped the Chapter members to deepen further their understanding of the theme and prepared them to participate actively in the commission meetings which are but deeper study, sharing and reflection of the theme, taking into consideration the

inputs from the Provincial chapters across the Salesian world and the suggestions of the Preparatory commission.

The formal inauguration of the Chapter was graced by Cardinal Joao Braz De Aviz, Prefect, Department for Consecrated Life and Rev. Sr Yvonne Reungoat FMA, Mother General of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Their messages gave insights into what the Church and others perceive and expect of the Salesians today. The Rector Major presented the message of Pope Francis. As he conveyed the Holy Father's greetings, he also informed that the Pope had to cancel his visit to us due to the corona virus.

Fr Pier Luigi Nava, SMM, Secretary General, Congregation for Institute of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL), Rome, led the Chapter members into "Discernment in an Ecclesial Perspective". He gave an in-depth reflection on discerning God's will for choosing the leaders of religious societies, as envisaged by the Church. The Chapter members spent lots of time in personal prayer and silence before the elections. The biodata of the Chapter members was made available in the chapter website for personal study and consultation before the elections.

### **Rector Major and the General Councillors of SDB (2020-26)**

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|-------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|
| • Rector Major          | – Fr Angel Fernandez ARTIME | (Argentina)   |
| • Vicar of Rector Major | – Fr Stefano MARTOGLIO      | (Italy)       |
| • Formation             | – Fr Ivo Nicholas COELHO    | (India)       |
| • Youth Pastoral        | – Fr Miguel GARCIA          | (Spain)       |
| • Social Commission     | – Fr Gildasio SANTOS        | (Brazil)      |
| • Mission               | – Fr Alfred MARAVILLA       | (Philippines) |
| • Economer General      | – Br Jean Paul MULLER       | (Luxembourg)  |

### **Regional Councillors:**

- |                                      |                                      |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| • Africa-Madagascar                  | : Fr Alphonse Owoudou (ATE)          |
| • America South Cone                 | : Fr Gabriel Romero (ARN)            |
| • South Asia region                  | : Fr Biju Michael Pulianmackal (ING) |
| • East Asia region                   | : Fr Joseph Nguyen Thinh Phuoc (VIE) |
| • Central and Northern Europe region | : Fr Roman Jachimowicz (PLN)         |
| • Interamerica region                | : Fr Hugo Orozco Sánchez (MEG)       |
| • Mediterranean region               | : Fr Juan Carlos Pérez Godoy (SSM)   |

### **FR BIJU MICHAEL PULIANMACKAL, NEW REGIONAL OF SOUTH ASIA**

In the name of all the confreres and the members of the Salesian family of our Province, I extend our sincere and hearty CONGRATULATIONS to Fr Biju Michael Pulianmackal, on his election as the new Regional of South Asia. It is indeed a proud and happy moment for our Province because he is the first confrere from the Province and the North East to

be appointed to this exalted post. Fr Biju had shown his loyalty, focus, calibre and performance in all the past assignments and I am sure, the region can look forward to his dynamic leadership and keep the vibrancy and growth soaring high.

Fr Biju Michael was born on 19th March 1970 at Moolamattam in Kerala, India. He belonged to the first batch of aspirants to be formed at the newly constructed aspirantate of the Province at Bosco Mount, Rongkhon. He was ordained a priest on January 5, 1999. He holds a doctorate in Moral Theology and Masters in English and in Bioethics. Until now he was holding the post of Registrar at Assam Don Bosco University and was a Councillor of the Province. He was the President of the Jerusalem Campus (Ratisbonne) of the Salesian Pontifical University. He is an internationally published author. His books include: *Integrity the Core of Leadership* (Oklahoma, USA), *Educating Leaders for Social Transformation* (ed.) (Munich, Germany), *Jesus' Ways to Success* (New York, USA), *Youth Vision* (ed.) (Guwahati, India), *Virtues* (Jerusalem, Israel), *Mary of Nazareth: Through Poems and Pictures from the Holy Land* (Jerusalem, Israel).



We assure Fr Biju our prayers and best wishes as he plays the leadership role of animation in the South Asia region of the congregation.

As we welcome and congratulate Fr Biju, we also would like to express our sincere and heartfelt gratitude to the outgoing regional, Fr Maria Arokiam Kanaga, who animated the region for the past 12 years. We remember him to be someone who is fatherly, intelligent, a creative thinker and writer, close to the Provincials and the confreres and deeply spiritual. May the Lord continue to bless him in his future ministry.!

The Province will get opportunity to felicitate both Fr Biju and Fr Maria on different occasions. The confreres and communities will receive the information on time.

## CONCLUSION OF THE CHAPTER

The Rector Major (President) and the Moderator of the Chapter made all efforts to keep the chapter make headway and accomplish much till it became impossible to proceed, as the Government became strict with lockdown, social distancing and assembly of people etc. to prevent casualties of COVID-19. As religious leaders and educators, the best option was to close the Chapter and show our solidarity and cooperation with the Government in combatting the deadly virus.

Delivering his presidential talk at the concluding ceremony, the Rector Major appreciated the life of communion and family spirit that prevailed in GC 28 and wanted everyone to



see this turn of events as in the plan of God. Adequate reflections on the theme had been made at the local, provincial, regional and international levels. The moment is here to start living what we have professed, radically. We need to return to Don Bosco. We need to deepen our knowledge of him and be passionate about God and the young, like our father. Our Constitutions is clear when it says, “We study and imitate him” (C 21). After knowing him, we must emulate and be like him, a mystic. Valdocco is the most appropriate place to re-visit our profile and identity.

I am attaching here the text of the concluding talk of the Rector Major. It is a very important document of this, so called the “Corona Chapter” as he outlined the future course of action. I request the Rectors/ Leaders of communities to read it meditatively during the spiritual reading or in the assembly of confreres. It is very encouraging to see how in some communities, the Rector/leader prints out the circular of the Provincial and gives one copy each to every member of the community. At times, I hear, and hope it is only a joke, that there are confreres who do not pay any attention to the circulars and the documents that come from the Church, the Generalate and the Province. This attitude blocks the grace of God flowing into us and shows our lack of maturity as regards the ongoing formation and growth.

## POST CHAPTER DAYS AND EVENTS

The concluding days of the Chapter were both emotional and meaningful. The Rector Major presided over the concluding Holy Eucharist, concelebrated by the newly elected Councillors and regionals around him in the sanctuary. After the Mass, we consecrated



the whole world to the Blessed Virgin Mary, after which we gathered around the tomb of St John Bosco and prayed in silence, bringing the fruits of the chapter to him and entrusting the congregation, the confreres and the Salesian family to his fatherly care. In the previous evening, during the special prayer service, the Rector Major presented a special missionary cross to each chapter member in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians.

Soon after the conclusion of the Chapter, those who were able to return to their communities and countries hurried back to be there.

The Rector Major initiated the extraordinary novena to Mary Help of Christians from 15th to 23rd March 2020 in order to obtain deliverance of the whole world from this epidemic. It included

a special prayer for deliverance and the consecration of the whole world to Mary Help of Christians on 24th March.

On 25th March, on the feast of the Annunciation, we joined the Holy Father and the Catholics over the world in praying the OUR FATHER entrusting the whole world to the mercy of God. The Pope had exhorted the Catholics to pray the “Our Father” several times a day but at 4.30 pm (IST) to pray it altogether all over the world.

We had two days of Eucharistic adoration in the Pinardi Shed Chapel, with the intention of asking the Lord to save humanity from this pandemic that the world is facing.

On 27th March, at 10.30 pm (IST), the Holy Father presided over the Benediction service at the *sagrata* of St Peter’s Basilica, offering up our prayers and supplication to the Lord. The Holy Father said, “I invite everyone to participate spiritually through the means of communication. We will listen to the Word of God, we will lift up our supplication, we will adore the Blessed Sacrament, with which at the end, I will give the *Urbi et Orbi* blessing, to which will be connected the possibility of receiving the plenary indulgence.” I thank our confreres of the province who participated in it and shared their joy especially at receiving the *Urbi et Orbi* blessing. (*Urbi et Orbi*, the Latin phrase, means “to the City (of Rome) and to the World”. It is a Papal address and Apostolic Blessing given to the City of Rome and to the entire world on specific occasions).

Together with prayers, the Salesian family of China has volunteered to assist the Salesian family of Italy in rendering assistance to COVID-19 victims, through proper channels especially through the Rector Major.

Br. Juan Paul Muller, Economer General and Fr Ivo Coelho, Councillor for Formation had sent animation notes and instructions on the need of Salesians and the Salesian family to respond to and assist the needs of the world during these perilous days. They are available in the ING Province whatsapp.

Fr Benny Alex Plathottathil, Economer and Fr Jayaprakash, Executive Director of Bosco Reach Out (BRO) have rendered assistance to the needy in the slums, in close collaboration and understanding with the District Administration. The Do’s and Don’ts of lockdown were printed in the local language and circulated. Sanitary kits and food packages were also distributed. The BRO team will also visit the remote areas of Kokrajhar, Karbi Anglong and Nagaon to sensitize the rural people about the precautions and do food distribution.

### **STRANDED YET HAPPY TO BE IN OUR FATHER’S HOUSE AT VALDOCCO**

Though stranded due to international lockdown, I am happy too, because, first we are safe and protected in our father’s house where the Basilica of Mary is prominent. We follow the rules strictly to combat the virus; Secondly, we could do many useful works at

Valdocco. We 45 of us are given Salesian hospitality. We feel the love and protection of God and especially of our Mother Mary. We are able to spend much time in prayer and in places where SANCTITY, HOLINESS and the Salesian family spirit flourished.

Here there is the Pinardi shed. Initially when Don Bosco found it, it was truly a dilapidated shed. Its size will be that of Provincial House refectory. Don Bosco transformed it into a home for boys and a place for empowerment. Sitting inside and recalling the history give you special feelings. Till today, I feel that the moment you enter it, you feel an aura of Divine Presence. It is open to everyone, especially to a large number of school students in the vicinity. The door invites everyone to maintain silence, primarily not to disturb those who are praying.



*Pinardi Shed today*

Adjacent to Pinardi shed is the Chapel of St Francis de Sales. It is the place where Don Bosco made sanctity grow. In here, our saintly founder celebrated the Holy Mass. In the oratory and in this chapel, Dominic Savio learned the beauty of holiness. He was said to have experienced ecstasy several times in this chapel. In the Chapel, there is a beautiful painting of Dominic Savio and his companions, consecrating themselves to Mary, Immaculate conception. Today stranded as we are, we have the fortune of praying the morning prayer, celebrating the Holy Eucharist, making personal adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and have our vespers and good night there.

Together with these historical monuments, the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, the monument of Love of Don Bosco to Mary stands bright and tall. He started it without a penny in the pocket but all the time proclaiming that if God wanted it, it would be done. No doubt he worked relentlessly and was able to say that everything was done by our Blessed Mother. The Basilica is truly a labour of love of Don Bosco to Jesus and especially



to the Blessed Mother, with the famous “*Hic est domus mea, Inde gloria mea*” written beautiful on the biggest dome of the Basilica.

It was from Valdocco and the Basilica that Don Bosco was able to send missionaries to different parts of the world, starting on 11th November 1875. The instructions that he gave to the first missionaries are a gem and recorded in our Constitutions. “Seek souls, not money, honours or dignities,” “Constantly promote devotion to Mary Help of Christians and to the Blessed Sacrament”, “I would like to go with you myself, but since I cannot do so these Constitutions will take my place. Keep them as you would a precious treasure” and “If you have loved me in the past, continue to love me in the future by the exact observance of our constitutions” are precious even today.



L to R: 1. Door to Pinardi Shed (Chapel) ; 2. Dominic Savio in ecstasy; 3. Church of St Francis de Sales

Here in Valdocco, we are very close to thousands who are sick, suffering and dying. In a way, we are fortunate to share the suffering of the people of Italy. May God bless us and have mercy on us, especially on the people of Italy and other countries which are badly affected by COVID-19. Let us continue to pray for the victims, those who have died especially our own confreres in Italy and Spain and all who are suffering at this moment.



## **CORONA VIRUS or COVID – 19 and ITS IMPACT AND PRE-CAUTIONS**

It started in China, in the industrial city of Wuhan, presumably towards the end of 2019. It has decimated lives and the Governments are struggling to withstand its lethal onslaught and terminate it.

The Church under the leadership of Pope Francis, Holy Father, has responded well and collaborated with the civil authorities in combating this deadly plague, even to point of organizing the Church ceremonies unconventionally and as per the need of the time.

We sympathise and pray for Bishops, priests and religious all over the world, especially in Italy and Spain who became victims of COVID-19 either due to previous illness or while serving their fellow brothers and sisters affected by it.

With much love, gratitude and admiration, we continue to pray fervently to the doctors, the nurses and the volunteers who are risking their lives and ministering to the patients. It is not an easy decision to be on duty when at any moment, they could become victims themselves, as it has already happened to many.

We remember and pray for the military and police personnel too. It is easy to develop prejudices towards them, thinking that they are rude, rough and mean. At times, it is difficult to know what they go through while on duty leaving behind their families and risking infections. In all the countries, it looks that the military and the policemen have done commendable work at this time of crisis.

Coincidentally or better still providentially, this year's Strenna is "Honest Citizens and Good Christians". Very appropriately has the Rector Major chosen this theme for this year. At this moment of history, it looks that the nations are learning to come together to protect life on this planet. The Governments therefore have promulgated ordinances and rules to promote life and so it is important that each citizen cooperates with the Civil and Church authorities in the best way possible.

Hence, obey lockdown rules strictly and keep social distance.

The Rectors have a great responsibility to each member's health and prevent contagion. They have to be extra alert. The Principals must send regular and periodic messages to the teachers who in turn could be instructed to follow up the students. The students are inclined to obey the educational authorities readily. While we see many youngsters learning to follow instructions, there are adults and the young who make light of such directives and regret later. It is said that the carriers of virus to the aged and the sick in the family were often the young, who sneaked out during the lockdown and bring the virus home.

Take preventive measures, such as the medical check up, self-quarantining, maintaining social distance, washing the hands on return from outside, avoiding those infected etc as much as possible.

Avoid undue panic and encourage others too not to be.

Avoid forwarding messages especially, of those which in your scrutiny, could be fake and not useful. There are instead messages promoting mental health and carrying useful informations from the Civil and Church Authorities which could be shared.

As professed “men of God and men for others,” this darkest moment in the history of humankind needs to bring out the best in us and not the worst of insensitivity, indifference, inaction, pessimism and negativity. The Governments alone cannot carry out the philanthropic work of such magnitude successfully. However, if the citizens, the institutions and the NGOs lend a helping hand and work together, then the fatality of this crisis can reduced. Seizing the opportunity, let us make all sacrifices – personal as well as communitarian to relieve human misery within our limits. Each community therefore must do something concrete for the neighbourhood at this moment of crisis. Do it in clear understanding with the local administration. We become lifeless spiritual beings, if we are happy with our own safely alone and remain aloof from our suffering brothers and sisters in our vicinity.

Spend some amount of money to buy food, medicine, print and circulate the safety measures in the local dialect, supply some sanitary materials etc. and make them reach to the most struggling families around you. We need to identify them. If each SDB institute, school, college, university, parish etc, in the province do it, even if no acknowledgement and appreciation are telecast in the news channels, we would have contributed significantly and would have lived a life of integrity and fidelity to our name. I am grateful to all those who already have done much in this regard. One Rector wrote highly about himself and his community distributing rice, money, sanitary kits and his visit to the villages, despite lockdown to show his fatherly care to the parishioners. May God bless you all.

The Rectors, the wardens and the parish priests could spend the free time contacting the people under their care and encouraging them to remain optimistic. As stated above, the Principals could send positive messages to the teachers, parents and students and make them feel that they are thought of and prayed for at this moment. All the teachers could be encouraged to follow up their own students through the media, as often as possible. Messaging positive and encouraging messages can uplift the depressing spirits and it is always possible that some, in difficult and poor families go through such experiences.

In case, some communities are not able to do the above suggested activities, they are encouraged to contribute financially to the District administration or to the Church collections for the humanitarian services.

The lockdown could become moments to look up to God. It seems that in many ways, humanity and nations had forgotten God and nature in the midst of the relentless pursuit of supremacy for power, wealth, materialism, consumerism, unregulated pleasure, etc and so let this be a time to turn once again to God and return to nature. I thank everyone of you who has sent encouraging messages, promising your prayers for our safety and safe return.

**RIP: MOST REV. SOUNDARARAJU PERIYANAYAGAM, BISHOP OF VELLORE**

On 21st March 2020, Bishop Soundararaju Periyannayagam SDB of Vellore suffered a massive heart attack and passed away at the German Hospital, Chetpet-Chennai, where he was admitted a few days earlier to be treated for cardiac issues. He was 70 years old. We offer our condolences to the bereaved family members and confreres at the sudden passing away of the Salesian Bishop. May his soul rest in peace!

**CONCLUSION**

Thanking you for your valuable remembrance in your community and personal prayers and assuring you my fraternal prayers,

Yours affectionately in Don Bosco,



**Fr Januarius S Sangma, SDB**  
*Provincial*



**CLOSING ADDRESS OF THE RECTOR MAJOR TO GC28**

Dear Confreres,

Do you not think that God has really spoken to us and so much, in these four weeks, even though we do not have the capitular document approved by all? That is the question I ask myself. Do you not think that God has spoken to us in feeling strongly the presence of Don

Bosco our beloved father? Do you not believe that God spoke to us in the beautiful experience of fraternity?

Dear Confreres, I think we all agree in recognizing the beauty of our fraternity, of the joy of meeting our brother as he is. These things are not the fruit of a strategy. These things are the fruit of the Spirit, the mature expression of the Congregation and of those who now have responsibility for the governance and animation of the Provinces.

I also wondered: do you not believe that God has spoken so much to us in this climate of faith and honesty with which we have made discernment and voting? I think so. Do you not believe that the Lord spoke to us with the extraordinary protection of Mary Help of Christians? I think so. He spoke to us and a great deal in this General Chapter, even though we did not arrive at a capitular document that has all the processes within it to have final approval.

Dear confreres, I ask you not to let your hearts be taken by the disappointment of returning to the Provinces without finishing the Chapter work. Do not allow yourselves to be struck by this. I think this is not the most essential thing. We have *the reflections we have shared* in these weeks and on which we have already summarized the first draft. We have all *the magisterium of the congregation to date, especially that of GC24*, especially for the shared mission between Salesians and lay people. We have the beautiful and programmatic *message of the Holy Father* to GC28. These elements broaden our gaze with serenity and with great confidence.

The second part of my reflection, which you will see will be very brief, is intended to be a look at the future. I begin by telling you that I was very impressed by a thank you that I received last night before entering the Basilica to pray. One of those present, a capitular confrere, from a nation in Eastern Europe, tells me: "Dear Rector Major, I want to thank you for two things: one because it was possible to recover these holy Salesian Places, the other is to tell you that *we need help for our identity: don't leave us alone*". I replied to this confrere saying: "On the first statement I say thank you, but much has been the fruit of the previous General Chapter with its resolution, which for many reasons we think prophetic, to renew and strengthen *the Salesian Holy Places, the heart of our charism*. It was the Chapter that deliberated this. Then some of us were able to do something to implement this resolution".

The most beautiful thing for me is this: you have to go back to the Provinces telling all the Confreres that *here is the House of all*, these places are the places of our *Charismatic Dream*, they are the places of the birth of the Charism, they are our cradle where all the Salesians of the world were born, because this is where the Charism was born. This is where everyone can turn to because they have the right to feel at least once



in their lives the emotion of being here in Valdocco. I warmly thank the Provincial of Piedmont because he has the custody of these places. I have promised and continue to promise that we will not leave them alone to take care of this beautiful heritage. This is a patrimony of the whole Congregation.

As a second thing I said to the confrere: "I promise you that we will not leave you alone in *your journey of identity*."

1. This is the first look, the first challenge we have: to grow all, in all Provinces, in all Regions in ***Charismatic Identity***, in Salesian Identity and Spirituality. We all need this, in some Provinces or Regions we need it even more. Let us be careful that having new Salesian professions is not a guarantee of a strong identity. It is not the same. Identity must be assured, more care of it must be taken. I can assure you that in recent years we have seen that sometimes small or great difficulties are so much linked to the lack of identity, as I said on the day of the initial report. I am convinced that this will be a priority in the programme of the government animation of this six-year period. To guarantee our charismatic identity in all Salesians. As I said, it is not enough to make the first profession to say "I have all the Salesian identity". It is a journey, at times it is very demanding, but it is a beautiful challenge that gives so much beauty and strength to our Congregation.
2. A second challenge for our program: **returning to Don Bosco**, as Don Pascual Chavez proposed to us in past years. We must return more and more to Don Bosco. And this means: love for the young. They asked us to be loved. And for this, as a consequence, *we are called to the presence of all the Salesians among them, among the young*. I call this the **"Salesian sacrament" of presence**. There is no need for theological disquisitions to be understood. The Salesian sacrament of presence. To make a journey with the youngsters, with the youth, to make them discover that God loves them, that God is truly love for us and also for them. To be truly *evangelizers of the young*. I think this means going back more and more to Don Bosco; today this is a task and a challenge, even if we do not start from scratch.
3. A third challenge is *to form Salesians as Don Bosco would do today*. Dear Capitular Confreres, in my opinion formation, not just any clerical formation, but **good Salesian formation** is a priority. Continuing to form formators is a priority and a guarantee. We need to take more care of the teams in our houses of formation so that they are truly Salesian and not elitist: this is a guarantee of an authentically Salesian future. *No genericism, all true Salesian spirit*. The third challenge then fully involves *the ongoing and especially the initial formation of Salesians*.

4. A fourth challenge: I dream that today saying "Salesian of Don Bosco" means consecrated "madmen", that is, Salesians who love with a true **Salesian heart, perhaps even "a little crazy" oriented towards the poorest.** My dear, if we move away from the poorest this will be the death of the Congregation. Don Bosco said so when he spoke of poverty and wealth. I would like to add: *if one day we leave the children and among them the poorest, the decline of the Congregation begins and will begin.* The Congregation, thank God, now enjoys good health, beyond our frailties! Pay attention to this *authentic capitular "deliberation"*, not in the proper sense, because it is already in our Constitutions: *a radical, preferential, personal, institutional and structural option* (in short, from all points of view, with no escape) *for the neediest, poorest and most excluded children.* It is a priority and radical option *in the defense of children and young people who are exploited and victims of any kind of abuse*, even sexual abuse, but not only: violence, lack of justice, abuse of power. This fourth point is a beautiful commitment that we must carry in our hearts. A six-year period guided by this light will give us so much life.
  
5. The fifth priority. I think it is **the time for generosity within the congregation**, not only with money, but especially *with the generosity and availability of confreres*, to have new presences, because, first, they call us from everywhere, especially in the poorest places, second, also to have presences and work among the refugees, a terrible new poverty, third, to have new mission places. Dear confreres, we all belong to God and to the one Congregation, we are all Salesians of Don Bosco for the world. I think that the next six-year period will be one where this becomes even more a reality, with the availability of the confreres, with the generous response of the Provinces that have more possibilities at the service of other Provinces, sometimes with the guidance of the Rector Major and his Council, but with this look of universality. This is a moment to face with a renewed mentality that must know how to overcome frontiers: in a world where frontiers become heavier, time after time, our prophecy is also this, *showing that for us there are no frontiers. The only reality we have is God, the Gospel and the mission.*
  
6. One last challenge is this. We have spoken about the Salesian Family. In these years we have worked well beyond the tiredness of some of the delegates for the groups. We have seen that it seems there are no ripe times yet to take further steps. But **the Salesian Family**, together with the **reality of the mission shared with the laity**, will be the *point of arrival and the guarantee of the Salesian mission.* It cannot be just a camp to occupy someone's life, or to make a little friendship. *This is an essential charismatic element, much stronger today than in Don Bosco's time*, because there has been a great development in these 160 years. For

this reason, I invite you to continue truly to believe in the Salesian Family. This is not the same everywhere in the Congregation. In some parts it is a beautiful reality, in others it is still beginning.

7. Some very brief conclusions:

- a. Thanks to you all for **the gift of the new General Council**. It is a renewal *to be welcomed with a look of faith*. I think that one of the beautiful fruits of this Chapter, as it has always been, is the gift of a General Council. I am convinced that as a Council we take on a deep look of faith, the desire for a strong fidelity to the Lord and to Don Bosco, with a great capacity for planning. Everything else is something that we could do with our abilities, our relationships and with the gift of each one. With great serenity I say thank you for the new Council.
- b. I have reflected in these days and I believe that as Rector Major the first commitment for the animation of the Provinces will be to **animate the Spiritual Exercises** for Regions, or for Conferences in Regions, for the Provincials and the members of Provincial Councils, to transmit the fruit of the GC28, a very special General Chapter, to take on the great challenges that we have and that we are identifying.
- c. Thank you again for the **great communion** that exists between us.
- d. This is the great hope that we carry, and we are deeply convinced of it: we seek to enrich the Church with the gift of the Salesian Charism for the salvation of the young.

Dear Confreres, whole-heartedly, thank you!

Fr Ángel Fernández Arttime SDB  
**Rector Major**