 Reading time: 5 min.

I feel I share the 1884 affirmation of our holy Founder, “I see more and more what a glorious future is prepared for our Society, the extension it will have and the good it will be able to accomplish.”

Dear friends of the Salesian charism, may my sincere, fraternal and affectionate greeting reach each and every one of you.
It has been “suggested” to me by the Salesian Bulletin to prepare this greeting not like on other occasions recounting something significant that I have experienced, but by talking about myself, about this new situation that awaits me. And I experienced something I had studied about the person of our father Don Bosco. It was difficult for him to talk about himself and even more difficult to express his feelings. In my case, I must admit that it is a little difficult for me to speak or write about the latest events that have happened to me; but I admit that sooner or later I have to do so, and the message of the Salesian Bulletin arriving in the hands and hearts of so many friends of Don Bosco’s charism is a good way to send this personal message.
After the unexpected news (especially for me), with which the Holy Father Francis announced my name as well, among the 21 people he has chosen to be “created” Cardinals of the Church in the next Consistory on 30 September, thousands of people wondered, especially among the Salesians of Don Bosco and members of the Salesian Family around the world: and now what will happen? Who will accompany the life of the Congregation in the near future? What steps await it? You can well understand that these are the same questions that I too have been asking myself, while thanking the Lord in faith for this gift that Pope Francis has given us as a Salesian Congregation and as the Family of Don Bosco.
From a faith perspective, knowing the great things God has done and what we know through his Word, one could say that God loves surprises us. Usually, in the Bible, God says: “Go! The way will reveal itself.” One important thing we have learnt from Don Bosco: let nothing disturb us and let us trust in God’s Providence.
I feel I share the 1884 statement of our holy founder, “I see more and more what a glorious future is prepared for our Society, the extent it will have and the good it will be able to accomplish.”
I was able to speak personally with the Holy Father, Pope Francis, after the Angelus announcement, assuring him of my availability to count on me for any service. I responded as Don Bosco did when he was asked to build the Church of the Sacred

Heart in Rome, in his case an elderly and sick Don Bosco, who also felt the weight and responsibility of a fledgling Congregation: Don Bosco replied: “If this is the Pope’s order, I obey!”
With simplicity, I told the Holy Father that we Salesians have learnt from Don Bosco to always be available for the good of the Church, and in particular for whatever the Pope may ask. Therefore, while I thank God for this gift that belongs to the whole Congregation and Salesian Family, I express my gratitude to Pope Francis by assuring him, on behalf of all the members of our great Family, of a more fervent and intense prayer. Prayer which, as I said, will always be accompanied by our sincere and deep affection.

What will happen now?
I must share with you that I was deeply touched by the sensitivity of our Pope Francis in realising that my service as Rector Major was not to change immediately from one day to the next. For this reason, about half an hour after the announcement of the appointment during the Angelus prayer on Sunday 9 July, the Holy Father sent me a letter in which he spoke of the time needed to prepare myself for the General Chapter of our Congregation before taking on what he intends to entrust to me. As always, the Holy Father showed himself to be attentive, warm, a profound admirer of Don Bosco’s charism, and particularly affectionate. Feelings which, on my own behalf and on behalf of the whole Salesian Family, I have reciprocated.
I would like to share with you the arrangements that the Holy Father has communicated to me.
The Pope has decided that, for the good of our Congregation, after the Consistory of 30 September 2023 I may continue my service as Rector Major until 31 July 2024. After that date I will submit my resignation as Rector Major, as requested by our Constitutions and Regulations, in order to assume the service from the hands of the Holy Father that he will entrust to me.
This is what the Pope himself has communicated to me. We will be able to bring forward the 29th General Chapter by one year, that is, to February 2025. My Vicar, Fr Stefano Martoglio, will take over the government of the Congregation *ad interim*, as stipulated in our Constitutions, until the celebration of GC29. Finally, it remains for me to say and answer another question that many of you will have: what task will the Holy Father entrust me with? Pope Francis has not yet told me. Besides, given this wide margin of time I think it is the most appropriate.
In any case, I ask all of you, dear confreres and members of the groups of our Salesian Family to continue to intensify your prayer. Especially for Pope Francis. He

himself expressly requested this at the end of the private audience granted to me. Finally, I also ask you to pray for me, placed before the prospect of a new service in the Church which, as a son of Don Bosco, I accept in filial obedience, without having sought it because I truly believe that in the Church, the services we perform cannot and must never be sought or demanded as if it were a matter of making them a personal career. What is proper to the “world” is improper for us as servants in the name of Jesus. And we must differ (I hope greatly) from some of the world’s standards. Witness to all this is our beloved Father Don Bosco before the Lord Jesus. I thank you for the affection, the closeness expressed in these weeks with the many messages I have received from all over the world.

I feel as if the same words that Our Lady said to Don Bosco in his dream when he was nine years old (the second centenary of which will be celebrated next year) are addressed to me: “In good time you will understand everything.” And we know that for our Father this actually happened almost at the end of his life, in front of the altar of Mary Help of Christians in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which had been consecrated the day before, on 16 May 1887. From the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians I send you an affectionate and grateful greeting entrusting each and every one to Her, the Mother who will continue to accompany and support us. As always, I greet you with immense affection.