

Letter from the Rector Major after his appointment as cardinal

To my Salesian Brothers (sdb) To the Salesian Family

My dear brothers and sisters: receive my fraternal greetings full of sincere and heartfelt affection.

It was such an unexpected news (especially for me), that the Holy Father, Pope Francis, also announced my name among the 21 people he had chosen to be 'created' Cardinals of the Church at the next Consistory on September 30th. After that, thousands of people must have asked themselves: What is going to happen now? And how will the Congregation be in the near future? You can understand that I asked myself these same questions, and at the same time I presented to the Lord, in faith, this gift that Pope Francis has given us as a Salesian Congregation and as the Family of Don Bosco. We should have no doubt about how much the Pope loves us; in the same way Pope Francis knows how much we all love him and how we support him, as much as possible, through our prayer.

Within half an hour of the announcement he made at the Angelus last Sunday, July 9th, the Holy Father handed me a letter in which he asked me to go and speak to him as soon as possible, in order to agree on the necessary timing in my service as Rector Major for the good, first and foremost, of the Congregation. He himself mentioned to me in this letter about the preparation of the next General Chapter.

Yesterday afternoon I was received by Pope Francis and we entered a serene, fraternal and mutually affectionate dialogue. Now I am in a position to share with the whole Congregation and the Salesian Family of the world the concrete directives according to the will of the Holy Father.

These provisions are as follows:

- we will be able to bring forward the General Chapter by one year, i.e., that it would take place starting in February 2025;
- the Pope has seen as conducive, for the good of the Congregation, that after the Consistory of September 30th I may continue as Rector Major until July 31st, 2024, that is, until the conclusion of the summer session (in Europe) of the General Council;
- after that date I will present my resignation as Rector Major, because I have been called by the Holy Father for the service he will entrust to me. This is what he has communicated to me;
- according to article 143 of our Constitutions, by reason of the 'cessation from office of Rector Major' on being called by Pope Francis to another service, the Vicar, Fr Stefano Martoglio, will assume the government of the Congregation until the celebration of GC29;
- the 29th General Chapter will be convoked by me, at least one year before its celebration, as established in our Constitutions and Regulations (R 111), and it will be the Vicar Fr Stefano who will preside over it;
- during all this time we will continue with the programme established for the animation and government of the Congregation, but adding the efforts of all the members of the General Council and of some extraordinary visitors appointed by the Rector Major, in order to carry out all the extraordinary visitations (including those that were scheduled for the year 2025). In this way it will be possible to arrive at GC29 with a complete vision of the whole Congregation, at present;
- for all the other elements related to the General Chapter, I will provide detailed information when the official convocation of the General Chapter will take place.

Finally, it is only left for me to say what many of you may be wondering: What is the Holy Father going to entrust to me? He

has not yet told me, and I understand that, with so much time ahead of us, that is the best thing to do. I do ask all my Salesian brothers and sisters and our dear Salesian Family to continue to intensify our prayer. First of all, for Pope Francis. This was his request in his final greeting: he asked us to pray for him. And I also ask you to pray for what we will experience in this year as a Congregation and as a Salesian Family.

In truth, I ask you to pray for me too as I face the prospect of this new service in the Church which, as a son of Don Bosco, I accept in obedience, without having sought or wanted it. Our beloved Father Don Bosco is a witness of this before the Lord Jesus.

And from here, from the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, she, Our Mother, will continue to accompany us. I believe, like Don Bosco in his dream at nine – of which we will celebrate the bicentenary next year – that “in due time we will understand everything”. In the case of our Father Don Bosco this happened at the end of his life, before the altar of Mary Help of Christians in the Basilica of the ‘Sacred Heart of Jesus’ which had been consecrated the day before, on that May 16th, 1887. Let us place everything in the hands of the Lord and his Mother.

Greetings with immense affection,

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Turin, July 12th, 2023