

□ Reading time: 4 min.

*With great simplicity, quietly and in total continuity, remaining in my service as Vicar over the next few months I will support the Rector Major by leading the Congregation to a General Chapter, the 29th, in February 2025.*

Dear readers of the Salesian Bulletin, I am writing these lines with trepidation because, having been a reader of the Salesian Bulletin since I was a child in my family, I now find myself on a different page having to write the first article, the one reserved for the Rector Major.

I do so gladly, because this honour allows me to give thanks to God for our Fr Ángel, now Cardinal of the Holy Roman Church, who has just finished 10 years of valuable service to the Congregation and the Salesian Family, following his election at the 27th General Chapter in 2014.

10 years after that day, he is now fully at the service of the Holy Father for everything Pope Francis will entrust him with. We carry him in our hearts and accompany him with grateful prayer, for the good he has done for us, because time does not diminish but strengthens gratitude. His personal story is an historic event for him, but also for all of us.

His leaving, in canonical terms, for an even greater service to the Church, is a remaining always with us and among us.

### **In total continuity**

And now as a Congregation, and by extension as the Salesian Family, how do we move forward?

Very simply, quietly and in total continuity. The Vicar of the Rector Major, according to the Salesian Constitutions, also has the task of substituting for the Rector Major in case of need. And it will be thus until the next General Chapter.

The Salesian Constitutions put it in a more comprehensive and articulate way, but the fundamental concept is this: remaining in my service as Vicar in the coming months I will deputise for the Rector Major by taking the Congregation to General Chapter, the 29th in February 2025.

This is a demanding task for which I immediately ask for your prayers and invocation to the Holy Spirit to be faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ, with the heart of Don Bosco.

**My name is Stefano (Stephen)**

Before moving on to the important things, a few words to introduce myself: my name is Stefano, I was born in Turin to a family typical of our part of the world: the son of a Salesian past pupil father, who wanted to send me to the same school where he had been in his day, and of a mother, a teacher, also a past pupil of a Catholic school. From them I received life and the life of a simple and concrete faith. That is how my sister and I grew up. There are just two of us.

My parents are already in heaven, in God's hands, and they will be smiling broadly when they see the things that happen to their son... they will surely comment: *dun Bosch tenje nà man sla testa!* (Don Bosco keep a hand on his head!) Keep him steady!

In Salesian terms I have always been part of the Salesian Province of Piedmont-Valle d'Aosta, until I was asked at GC27 to coordinate the Mediterranean Region (all the Salesian places around the Mediterranean Sea, on the three continents bordering it... but also including Portugal and some areas of Eastern Europe). A wonderful Salesian experience which transformed me, making me international in the way I see and feel things. GC28 took the second step, asking me to become Vicar of the Rector Major, and here we are! 10 years at Fr Ángel's side, learning during these years to feel the heart of the world, for a Congregation that is truly spread all over the earth.

### **The near future**

The service of these coming months, until February 2025, is therefore to accompany the Congregation to the next General Chapter to be held in Turin Valdocco from 16 February 2025.

Dear friends, the General Chapter is the highest and most important moment in the life of the Congregation, when the representatives of all the Provinces of the Congregation gather together (we are talking about more than 250 confreres) essentially for three things: to get to know each other, to pray and to reflect in order to "think about the present and the future of the Congregation" and to elect the next Rector Major and his entire Council. A very important moment, therefore, which our Fr Ángel addressed in his reflection on the theme "Passionate about Jesus Christ and dedicated to the young". This theme that the Rector Major has chosen for the Congregation will be articulated in three different and complementary aspects: the centrality of Christ in our personal life, religious consecration; the dimension of our community vocation, in the fraternity and shared responsibility with the laity to whom the mission is entrusted; the institutional aspects of our Congregation, the evaluation of animation and governance in accompanying the Congregation. Three aspects for a single generative theme.

Our Congregation is in great need of this General Chapter, which comes after so many events that have touched us all. It is enough to recall that the last General Chapter was celebrated close to the Pandemic.

### **Building Hope**

To celebrate a General Chapter is to celebrate Hope, to build Hope through the institutional and personal decisions that allow Don Bosco's "dream" to continue, to give it a present and a future. Each person is called to be a dream, in the heart of God, a dream that is realised.

In the Salesian tradition there are those beautiful words that Don Bosco said to Fr Rua, called back to Valdocco to act in Don Bosco's stead:

"You were Don Bosco at Mirabello. Now you will be so here, at the Oratory."

This is what really counts: "Being Don Bosco today" and it is the greatest gift we can give to this world.