

□ Reading time: 4 min.

“You will complete the work I am starting; I will make the sketch, you will add the colors” (Don Bosco)

Dear friends and readers, members of the Salesian Family, in this month’s greeting in the Salesian Bulletin, I will focus on a very important event that the Salesian Congregation is experiencing: the 29th General Chapter. Every six years, this assembly takes place in the journey of the Salesian Congregation, the most important that the Congregation can experience.

Many things are a part of our lives, and this Jubilee year is giving us many important events. However, I want to focus on this because, even if it seems far from us, it concerns us all.

Don Bosco, our Founder, was aware that not everything would end with him, but that his would surely be just the beginning of a long journey to be undertaken. At the age of sixty, one day in 1875, he said to Don Giulio Barberis, one of his closest collaborators: “You will complete the work I am starting; I am making the sketch, you will add the colors [...] I will make a rough copy of the Congregation and I will leave to those who come after me the task of making it beautiful.”

With this happy and prophetic expression, Don Bosco was outlining the path that we are all called to take; and the General Chapter of Don Bosco’s Salesians is fulfilling this in these times to its fullest in Valdocco.

The prophecy of the candy

Today’s world is not that of Don Bosco, but there is a common characteristic. It is a time of profound changes. Complete, balanced, and responsible humanisation in its material and spiritual components was the true goal of Don Bosco. He was concerned with filling the “inner space” of the boys, forming “well-formed minds,” “honest citizens.” Today, this is more relevant than ever. Today’s world needs Don Bosco.

In the beginning, there was a very simple question for everyone: “Do you want an ordinary life or do you want to change the world?” Can we still talk of goals and ideals today? When the river stops flowing, it becomes a swamp. The same is so with human beings.

Don Bosco never stopped moving forward. Today he does so with our feet.

He had a conviction regarding young people: “This most delicate and precious portion of human society, upon which the hopes of a happy future are founded, is

not innately perverse... because if it sometimes happens that they are already corrupted at that age, it is rather due to thoughtlessness than to consummate malice. These young people truly need a helping hand that takes care of them, nurtures them, guides them..."

In 1882, in a conference to the Cooperators in Genoa: "By removing, instructing, and educating young people in danger, it is good for the whole of civil society. If young people are well educated, we will have a better generation over time." It is like saying: only education can change the world.

Don Bosco had an almost frightening capacity for vision. He never says "until now," but always, "from now on."

Guy Avanzini, an eminent university professor, continues to repeat: "The pedagogy of the twenty-first century will be Salesian, or it will not be."

One evening in 1851, from a first-floor window, Don Bosco threw a handful of candies among the boys. There was an outburst of joy, and a boy, seeing him smile from the window, shouted: "Oh Don Bosco, if only you could see all the parts of the world, and in each of them so many oratories!"

Don Bosco fixed his serene gaze in the air and replied: "Who knows if the day will come when the children of the oratory will truly be scattered all over the world."

Looking afar

What is a General Chapter? Why take up room with these lines on a topic that is specifically for the Salesian Congregation?

In the constitutions of life of Don Bosco's Salesians, in article 146, the General Chapter is defined as follows:

"The General Chapter is the principal sign of the Congregation's unity in diversity. It is the fraternal meeting in which Salesians carry out a communal reflection to keep themselves faithful to the Gospel and to their Founder's charism, and sensitive to the needs of time and place.

Through the General Chapter, the entire Society, opening itself to the guidance of the Spirit of the Lord, seeks to discern God's will at a specific moment in history for the purpose of rendering the Church better service."

The General Chapter is therefore not a private matter for the consecrated Salesians, but a very important assembly that concerns all of us, that touches the entire Salesian Family and those who have Don Bosco within them, because at the centre are the people, the mission, the Charism of Don Bosco, the Church, and each one of us, of you.

At the centre is faithfulness to God and to Don Bosco, in the ability to see the signs of the times and the different places. It is a faithfulness that is a continuous

movement, renewal, ability to look afar and, at the same time, keep our feet firmly planted on the ground.

For this reason, about 250 Salesian brothers have gathered from all over the world to pray, think, discuss, and look afar... in faithfulness to Don Bosco.

Also, from the construction of this vision, the new Rector Major, the successor of Don Bosco and his General Council, will be elected.

This is not something outside your life, dear friend who is reading, but within your existence and in your "affection" for Don Bosco. Why do I tell you this? So that you accompany all this with your prayer: the prayer to the Holy Spirit to help all the capitulars to know the will of God for a better service to the Church.

I believe that the GC29, I am sure, will be all this. It will be an experience of God to clean up other parts of the sketch that Don Bosco left us, as has always been done in all the General Chapters in the history of the Congregation, always faithful to his design.

Confident that even today we can continue to be enlightened to be faithful to the Lord Jesus in fidelity to the original charism, with the faces, music, and colours of today.

We are not alone in this mission, and we know and feel that Mary, Mother Help of Christians, the Helper of the Church, a model of fidelity, will support the steps of each one of us.