 Reading time: 4 min.

From 1 to 7 August 2024 a Conference on Communication, entitled “Shaping Tomorrow”, will be held at the Pontifical Salesian University (UPS) in Rome. The organisers are the Salesian Congregation’s Communication Sector and the Faculty of Social Communication Sciences of the Pontifical Salesian University. The aim is to point out new ways in social communication, to ‘shape tomorrow’. We present the organisers’ vision.

“When you pray for rain, mud is to be reckoned with”. So said Denzel Washington, recalling his father’s words. In the context of media and communication, the rain is represented by the new technological tools and opportunities of the 21st century, such as artificial intelligence, high-speed Internet, social media, computers, laptops, smartphones and tablets. The mud is represented by fake news, cyberbullying and hate speech, the disappearance of social and communication skills, filters and information bubbles, digital exclusion, among others.

Shaping Tomorrow is the slogan of the Communication 2024 conference, which will be held in Rome from 1 to 7 August 2024. In social communication, it is not a protective umbrella against the downpour; after all, we wait for rain, just as we wish for good communication. Rather, it is about building roads, pavements, manholes and bridges, avoiding and reducing mud in the city called social communication, the Internet or social media. In the context of new forms of communication, this means developing the technological possibilities while being aware of the downsides and challenges.

Shaping Tomorrow, as the age of communication changes, is like opening the right door without being naive about the fact that there is someone waiting behind every door. Naivety in the world of modern technology is like sharing your emotions with artificial intelligence and believing that it will show boundless empathy. A modern smartphone is not human, a laptop is not human, a server is not human. Yet we sometimes behave naively, as if hardware and software replace our mother, our father, our family, our community and the emotions we experience, the desires we want to fulfil and the needs we need to satisfy. We look for a human being where there is none. What we get instead is a caricatured substitute for humanity, interpersonal relationships and the much desired love: the need to love

others and the need to be loved by others. Shaping Tomorrow, on the other hand, means building communication based on a sound Christian anthropology – without a caricature of humanity and with respect for human dignity.

The development of communication technology in recent decades has made our society a global village, where information travels at the speed of light. Sometimes the power of a small piece of news is equal to that of a hurricane that the whole world talks about. In a world where communication is becoming not only about transmitting information, but also about building relationships and influencing society, Shaping Tomorrow is an invitation to actively participate in shaping the world yet to come. It places the human being and his dignity at the centre, in line with the personalist norm of John Paul II.

Shaping Tomorrow

– we understand it as a call to shape the future of Salesian communication through responsible and effective communication;

– it means putting the human being and human dignity at the centre;

– it is to promote the Church's teaching on social communication;

– is about ethics in social communication based on a sound anthropology;

– it seeks to generate and promote solutions in the field of communication, conducting research and providing analysis, especially from a Salesian perspective;

– is to gather expertise and information to generate new ideas, results and recommendations in the field of social communication;

– in the midst of the digital revolution this requires the formation of media professionals.

– it is to actively participate in the public debate and seek solutions to the problems of social communication;

– it is to act internationally and influence decision-making processes by providing recommendations and solutions.

Topics that will be covered at the conference

1. Epochal change: digital culture and Artificial Intelligence – Fabio Pasqualetti, sdb
2. Epochal changes in communication – Fabio Bolzetta
3. Creators of new languages and paradigms for evangelisation, especially in the digital environment – Sr. Xiskya Valladares
4. Communication with migrants and refugees – Maurizio di Schino

5. Good practices of evangelisation on social media – Sr. Xiskya Valladares
6. The Church in the digital world and the approach to new technologies in Church communication – Fabio Bolzetta
7. Communication with the new generations, in particular with Generation Z and Alpha. How does communication with the new generations look like in the 21st century, both face-to-face and in the digital environment? – Mark McCrindle
8. Internal and external communication in the Church – the three popes – Valentina Alazraki
9. Crisis communication – Valentina Alazraki
10. Engaging young audiences – 10 tips for addressing Gen Z audiences – Laura Wagner-Meyer
11. Mobile journalism – Simone Ferretti
12. Content creators – Simone Ferretti
13. Migrants and refugees – in the context of communicating with the younger generation through social media – Laura Wagner-Meyer
14. How can the work of the Catholic Church better understand the digital transformations taking place in the modern world? – Andy Stalman
15. How can brand strategy change Salesian work in the world for the better? – Andy Stalman
16. Communication with migrants and refugees – Donatella Parisi

Details of the conference on the dedicated website,
https://www.shapingtomorrowsdb.org