

Interview with the Rector Major, Fr. Fabio Attard

*We had an exclusive interview with the Rector Major of the Salesians, Fr. Fabio Attard, looking back over the key stages of his vocation and his human and spiritual journey. His vocation began in the oratory and was consolidated through a rich formative journey that took him from Ireland to Tunisia, Malta, and Rome. From 2008 to 2020, he was General Councillor for Youth Ministry, a role he carried out with a multicultural vision acquired through experiences in different contexts. His central message is **holiness** as the foundation of Salesian educational action: 'I would like to see a holier Congregation,' he says, emphasising that professional efficiency must be rooted in consecrated identity.*

What is your vocation story?

I was born in Gozo, Malta, on 23 March 1959, the fifth of seven children. At the time of my birth, my father was a pharmacist in a hospital, while my mother had started a small fabric and dressmaking shop, which over time grew into a small chain of five shops. She was a very hard-working woman, but the business always remained a family affair.

I attended local primary and secondary schools. A very beautiful and special part of my childhood was that my father was a lay catechist at the oratory, which until 1965 had been run by the Salesians. As a young man, he had attended that oratory and had remained there as the only lay catechist. When I started attending at the age of six, the Salesians had just left. A young priest (who is still alive) took over and continued the activities of the oratory in the same Salesian spirit, having himself lived there as a seminarian.

We continued with catechism, daily Benediction of the Eucharistic, football, theatre, choir, trips, parties... everything you normally experience in an oratory. There were

many children and young people, and I grew up in that environment. In practice, my life took place between my family and the oratory. I was also an altar boy in my parish. So, after finishing high school, I turned towards the priesthood, because I had had this desire in my heart since I was a child.

Today I realise how much I was influenced by that young priest, whom I looked up to with admiration. He was always there with us in the courtyard, in the activities of the oratory. However, at that time the Salesians were no longer there. So, I entered the seminary, where at that time there were two years of preparatory studies as an intern. During the third year – which corresponded to the first year of philosophy – I met a family friend about 35 years old, an adult vocation, who had entered as a Salesian aspirant (he is still alive today and is a coadjutor). When he took this step, a fire was lit inside me. And with the help of my spiritual director, I began a vocational discernment. It was an important but also demanding journey. I was 19 years old, but that spiritual guide helped me to seek God's will, and not simply my own. So, in my last year – the fourth year of philosophy – instead of following him to the seminary, I lived as a Salesian aspirant, completing the required two years of philosophy.

My family environment was strongly marked by faith. We attended Mass every day, recited the Rosary at home, and were very close-knit. Even today, although our parents are in Heaven, we maintain that same unity among brothers and sisters.

Another family experience marked me deeply, although I only realised it over time. My brother, the second in the family, died at the age of 25 from kidney failure. Today, with advances in medicine, he would still be alive thanks to dialysis and transplants, but back then there weren't many options. I was by his side during the last three years of his life. We shared the same room and I often helped him at night.

He was a peaceful, cheerful young man who lived his fragility with extraordinary joy.

I was 16 when he died. Fifty years have passed, but when I think back to that time and that daily experience of closeness made up of small gestures, I realise how much it has marked my life.

I was born into a family where there was faith, a sense of work and shared responsibility. My parents are two extraordinary examples for me. They lived their cross with great faith and serenity, without ever burdening anyone, and at the same time, they knew how to convey the joy of family life. I can say that I had a very happy childhood. We were neither rich nor poor, but always modest and discreet. They taught us to work, to manage resources well, not to waste, to live with dignity, elegance, and above all, with attention to the poor and the sick.

How did your family react when you made the decision to follow your vocation as a religious?

The time had come when, together with my spiritual director, we had made it clear that my path was that of the Salesians. I also had to tell my parents. I remember it was a quiet evening; we were eating together, just the three of us. At one point I said, "I want to tell you something. I have made my discernment and I have decided to join the Salesians."

My father was delighted. He replied immediately, "May the Lord bless you." My mother, on the other hand, began to cry, as all mothers do. She asked me, "So you're leaving?" But my father intervened gently and firmly, "Whether he leaves or not, this is his path."

They blessed me and encouraged me. Those moments will remain etched in my memory forever.

I particularly remember what happened towards the end of my parents' lives. My father died in 1997, and six months later my mother was diagnosed with terminal cancer.

At that time, my superiors had asked me to go and teach at the

Pontifical Salesian University (UPS), but I didn't know what to do. My mother was not well and was nearing the end of her life. Talking to my brothers, they said to me, "Do what your superiors ask you to do."

I was at home and talked to her about it. "Mom, my superiors are asking me to go to Rome."

With the clarity of a true mother, she replied, "Listen, my son, if it were up to me, I would ask you to stay here, because I have no one else and I don't want to be a burden on your brothers. But..." – and here she said something that I carry in my heart – "You are not mine; you belong to God. Do what your superiors tell you."

That sentence, spoken a year before her death, is a treasure for me, a precious legacy. My mother was an intelligent, wise, and perceptive woman. She knew that her illness would lead to her death, but at that moment she was able to be free inside. Free to say words that confirmed once again the gift she herself had given to God: offering a son to the consecrated life.

My family's reaction, from the beginning to the end, was always marked by deep respect and great support. And even today, my brothers and sisters continue to carry on this spirit.

What has been your formative journey from novitiate to today?

It has been a very rich and varied journey. I began my pre-novitiate in Malta, then I did my novitiate in Dublin, Ireland. It was a truly beautiful experience.

After the novitiate, my companions moved to Maynooth to study philosophy at the university, but I had already completed my studies. For this reason, my superiors asked me to remain at the novitiate for another year, where I taught Italian and Latin. After that, I returned to Malta for two years of internship, which were very beautiful and enriching.

I was then sent to Rome to study theology at the Pontifical Salesian University, where I spent three extraordinary years.

Those years gave me great open-mindedness. We lived in the student residence with forty brothers from twenty different countries: Asia, Europe, Latin America... even the teaching staff was international. It was the mid-1980s, about twenty years after the Second Vatican Council, and there was still a lot of enthusiasm in the air. There were lively theological debates, liberation theology, and interest in method and practice. Those studies taught me to read faith not only as intellectual content, but as a choice of life.

After those three years, I continued with two more years of specialisation in moral theology at the Alfonsian Academy with the Redemptorist fathers. There, too, I met significant figures, such as the famous Bernhard Häring, with whom I formed a personal friendship and went to talk to him regularly every month. It was a total of five years – between my bachelor's and licentiate degrees – that deeply formed me from a theological point of view.

Afterwards, I volunteered for the missions, and my superiors sent me to Tunisia, together with another Salesian, to re-establish the Salesian presence in the Country. We took over a school run by a female congregation which, having no more vocations, was about to close. It was a school with 700 students, so we had to learn French and also Arabic. To prepare ourselves, we spent a few months in Lyon, France, and then devoted ourselves to studying Arabic.

I stayed there for three years. It was another great experience because we found ourselves living the Salesian faith and charism in a context where we could not speak explicitly about Jesus. However, it was possible to build educational programmes based on human values: respect, availability, truth. Our witness was silent but eloquent. In that environment, I learned to know and love the Muslim world. Everyone – students, teachers, and families – were Muslims, and they welcomed us with great warmth. They made us feel part of their family. I returned to Tunisia several times and

always found the same respect and appreciation, regardless of our religious affiliation.

After that experience, I returned to Malta and worked for five years in the social field. In particular, I worked in a Salesian house that welcomes young people in need of more attentive educational support, including residential care.

After these eight years of pastoral work (between Tunisia and Malta), I was offered the opportunity to complete my doctorate. I chose to return to Ireland because the subject was related to conscience according to the thinking of Cardinal John Henry Newman, now a saint. After completing my doctorate, the Rector Major at the time, Fr. Juan Edmundo Vecchi – of blessed memory – asked me to join the Pontifical Salesian University as a professor of moral theology.

Looking back on my entire journey, from aspirant to doctorate, I can say that it has been a combination of experiences not only in terms of content but also in terms of very different cultural contexts. I thank the Lord and the Congregation for offering me the opportunity to experience such a varied and rich formation.

So, you know Maltese because it is your mother tongue, English because it is the second language in Malta, Latin because you taught it, Italian because you studied in Italy, French and Arabic because you were in Manouba, Tunisia... How many languages do you know?

Five or six languages, more or less. However, when people ask me about languages, I always say that it is a bit of a historical coincidence.

In Malta, we grow up with two languages: Maltese and English, and we study a third language at school. In my day, Italian was also taught. Then, I had a natural aptitude for languages, so I also chose Latin.

Later, when I went to Tunisia, I had to learn French and Arabic.

In Rome, living with many Spanish-speaking students, my ear got used to it, and when I was elected Councillor for Youth Ministry, I also studied Spanish a little, which is a very beautiful language.

All languages are beautiful. Of course, learning them requires commitment, study, and practice. Some people are more gifted than others; it is part of one's personal disposition. But it is neither a merit nor a fault. It is simply a gift, a natural predisposition.

From 2008 to 2020, you served two terms as General Councillor for Youth Ministry. How did your experience help you in this mission?

When the Lord entrusts us with a mission, we bring with us all the baggage of experiences we have accumulated over time.

Having lived in different cultural contexts, I did not run the risk of seeing everything through the filter of a single culture. I am European; I come from the Mediterranean, from a Country that was a British colony, but I have had the grace to live in international, multicultural communities.

My years of study at UPS also helped me a lot. We had professors who did not just impart knowledge, but taught us to synthesise and develop a method. For example, when studying Church history, we understood how essential it was to understand patristics. When studying biblical theology, we learned to connect it with sacramental theology, morality, and the history of spirituality. In short, they taught us to think organically.

This ability to synthesise, this architecture of thought, then becomes part of your personal formation. When you study theology, you learn to identify key points and connect them. The same applies to pastoral, pedagogical or philosophical proposals. When you meet people of great depth, you absorb not only what they say, but also how they say it, and this shapes your style.

Another important element is that, at the time of my election, I had already had experiences in missionary environments, where the Catholic religion was practically absent, and I had worked with marginalised and vulnerable people. I had also gained some experience in the university world and, at the same time, I had devoted myself a lot to spiritual accompaniment.

Furthermore, between 2005 and 2008 – just after my experience at the UPS – the Archdiocese of Malta asked me to found a Pastoral Formation Institute, following a diocesan synod that had recognised the need for it. The archbishop entrusted me with the task of starting it from scratch. The first thing I did was to build a team of priests, religious, and lay people – men and women. We created a new formation method, which is still used today. The institute continues to function very well, and in some ways that experience was a valuable preparation for the work I did later in youth ministry.

From the beginning, I have always believed in teamwork and collaboration with lay people. My first experience as a director was precisely in this style: a stable educative team, today we would call it a CEP (Educative-Pastoral Community), with regular, not occasional, meetings. We met every week with educators and professionals. And this approach, which over time has become a method, has remained a reference point for me.

Added to this is my academic experience: six years as a lecturer at the Salesian Pontifical University, where students came from over a hundred countries, and then as an examiner and director of doctoral theses at the Alfonsian Academy. I believe that all this has prepared me to live this responsibility with clarity and vision.

So, when the Congregation asked me to take on this role during the General Chapter of 2008, I already had a broad, multicultural vision. This helped me because bringing together

diversity was not difficult for me; it was part of normality. Of course, it wasn't simply a matter of making a 'fruit salad' of experiences; it was necessary to find the common threads, to give coherence and unity.

What I was able to experience as General Councillor was not a personal achievement. I believe that any Salesian, if he had had the same opportunities and support from the Congregation, could have had similar experiences and made his own generous contribution.

Is there a prayer, a Salesian goodnight ritual, a habit that you never fail to do?

Devotion to Mary. At home we grew up with the daily Rosary, recited as a family. It was not an obligation; it was something natural. We did it before meals, because we always ate together. Back then it was possible. Today perhaps it is less so, but back then that was how we lived, the family together, shared prayer, the common table.

At first perhaps, I did not realise how deep that Marian devotion was. But as the years passed, when you begin to distinguish what is essential from what is secondary, I realised how much that maternal presence had accompanied my life.

Devotion to Mary is expressed in different ways: the daily Rosary, when possible; a moment of pause before an image or statue of Our Lady; a simple prayer, but one made from the heart. These are gestures that accompany the journey of faith.

Of course, there are some fixed points: daily Eucharist and daily meditation. These are pillars that are not discussed; they are lived. Not only because we are consecrated, but because we are believers. And faith is lived only by nourishing it. When we nourish it, it grows in us. And only if it grows in us can we help it to grow in others. For us, as educators, it is clear: if our faith does not translate into concrete life, everything else becomes a facade.

These practices – prayer, meditation, devotion – are not reserved for saints. They are an expression of honesty. If I have made a choice of faith, I also have a responsibility to cultivate it. Otherwise, everything is reduced to something external, apparent. And this, over time, does not hold up.

If you could go back, would you make the same choices?

Absolutely yes. There have been very difficult moments in my life, as there are for everyone. I don't want to come across as the 'victim of the moment'. I believe that every person, in order to grow, must go through phases of darkness, moments of desolation, loneliness, of feeling betrayed or unjustly accused. And I have experienced these moments. But I have had the grace of having a spiritual director at my side.

When you go through certain hardships accompanied by someone else, you can sense that everything God allows has a meaning, a purpose. And when you come out of that 'tunnel', you discover that you are a different, a more mature person. It is as if, through that trial, we are transformed.

If I had been alone, I would have risked making wrong decisions, without vision, blinded by the fatigue of the moment. When you are angry, when you feel alone, it is not the time to decide. It is the time to walk, to ask for help, to be accompanied.

Going through certain passages with someone's help is like being dough put in the oven; the fire cooks it, makes it mature. So, when asked if I would change anything, my answer is no. Because even the most difficult moments, even those I didn't understand, have helped me become the person I am today.

Do I feel like a perfect person? No. But I feel that I am on a journey, every day, trying to live in the mercy and goodness of God.

And today, as I give this interview, I can say with sincerity that I feel happy. Perhaps I have not yet fully understood

what it means to be Rector Major – it takes time – but I know that it is a mission, not a walk in the park. It brings with it its difficulties. However, I feel loved and esteemed by my collaborators and by the whole Congregation.

And everything I am today, I am thanks to what I have experienced, even in the most difficult moments. I would not change them. They have made me who I am.

Do you have any projects that are particularly close to your heart?

Yes. If I close my eyes and imagine something I really want, I would like to see a holier Congregation. Holier. Holier.

I was deeply inspired by Fr. Pascual Chávez's first letter in 2002, entitled "Be saints". That letter touched me deeply and left a mark on me.

There are many projects, all of them valid, well structured, with broad and deep visions. But what value do they have if they are carried out by people who are not holy? We can do excellent work, we can even be appreciated – and this, in itself, is not a bad thing – but we do not work to achieve success. Our starting point is an identity; we are consecrated persons.

What we offer only makes sense if it comes from there. Of course, we want our projects to be successful, but even more than that, we want them to bring grace, to touch people deeply. It is not enough to be efficient. We must be effective in the deepest sense, effective in our witness, in our identity, in our faith.

Efficiency can exist without any religious reference. We can be excellent professionals, but that is not enough.

Our consecration is not a detail. It is the foundation. If it becomes marginal, if we put it aside to make room for efficiency, then we lose our identity.

And people are watching us. In Salesian schools, people

recognise that the results are good – and that is good. But do they also recognise us as men of God? That is the question.

If they see us only as good professionals, then we are only efficient. But our life must be nourished by Him – the Way, the Truth, and the Life – not by what ‘I think’ or ‘I want’ or ‘what seems right to me’.

So, rather than talking about my personal project, I prefer to talk about a deep desire, to become saints. And to talk about it in concrete terms, not in an idealised way. When Don Bosco spoke to his boys about *study, health, and holiness*, he was not referring to a holiness made up only of prayer in the chapel. He was thinking of a holiness lived in relationship with God and nourished by relationship with God. Christian holiness is the reflection of this living and daily relationship.

What advice would you give to a young person wondering about their vocation?

I would tell them to discover, step by step, what God’s plan is for them.

The vocational journey is not a question you ask and then wait for a ready answer from the Church. It is a pilgrimage. When a young person says to me, *“I don’t know whether to become a Salesian or not,”* I try to steer them away from that formulation. Because it is not simply a matter of deciding, *“I’m going to become a Salesian.”* A vocation is not an option in relation to a ‘thing’.

In my own experience, when I told my spiritual director, *“I want to become a Salesian, I have to be one”*, he calmly made me reflect; *“Is this really God’s will? Or is it just your desire?”*

And it is right for a young person to seek what he desires; it is healthy. But those who accompany him have the task of educating that search, of transforming it from initial

enthusiasm into a journey of inner maturation.

"Do you want to do good? Good. Then know yourself, recognise that you are loved by God."

It is only from that deep relationship with God that the real question can emerge; "What is God's plan for me?"

Because what I want today may not be enough for me tomorrow. If vocation is reduced to what 'I like,' then it will be something fragile. Vocation, on the other hand, is an inner voice that calls us, that asks us to enter into dialogue with God, and to respond.

When a young person reaches this point, when they are accompanied to discover that inner space where God dwells, then they truly begin to walk.

For this reason, those who accompany them must be very attentive, profound, and patient. Never superficial.

The Gospel of Emmaus is a perfect image. Jesus approaches the two disciples and listens to them even though He knows they are talking confusedly. Then, after listening to them, He begins to speak. And in the end, they invite Him; *"Stay with us, for it is nearly evening."*

And they recognise Him in the gesture of breaking bread. Then they say to each other, *"Were not our hearts burning within us while He was talking to us on the way?"*

Today, many young people are searching. Our task as educators is not to be hasty. But to help them, calmly and gradually, to discover the greatness that is already in their hearts. Because there, in that depth, they encounter Christ. As St Augustine says, *"You were within me, and I was outside. And there I sought you."*

Do you have a message for the Salesian Family today?

It is the same message I shared during the recent meeting of the Salesian Family Council; ***Faith. Let us root ourselves ever more deeply in the person of Christ.***

It is from this rootedness that an authentic knowledge of Don Bosco is born. When the first Salesians wanted to write a book about the real Don Bosco, they did not call it "*Don Bosco, Apostle of Youth*," but "*Don Bosco with God*"— a text written by Fr. Eugenio Ceria in 1929.

This gives us pause for thought. Why did they, who had seen him in action every day, not choose to emphasise Don Bosco's tireless work, his organisational skills, his talent as an educator? No, they wanted to portray Don Bosco as a man deeply united with God.

Those who knew him well did not stop at appearances but went to the root. Don Bosco was a man immersed in God.

To the Salesian Family I say: we have received a treasure. An immense gift. But every gift entails a responsibility.

In my final discourse, I said: ***"It is not enough to love Don Bosco, you have to know him."***

And we can only truly know him if we are people of faith.

We must look at him with the eyes of faith. Only in this way can we encounter the believer that Don Bosco was, in whom the Holy Spirit acted with power, with *dýnamis*, with *cháris*, with charism, with grace.

We cannot limit ourselves to repeating certain maxims of his or recounting his miracles. Because we run the risk of dwelling on the anecdotes of Don Bosco, instead of dwelling on the story of Don Bosco, because Don Bosco is greater than Don Bosco.

This means study, reflection, depth. It means avoiding all superficiality.

And then we will be able to say with truth, ***"This is my faith, this is my charism: rooted in Christ, in the footsteps of Don Bosco."***

Don Bosco and Eucharistic processions

A little-known but important aspect of St John Bosco's charism is Eucharistic processions. For the Saint of young people, the Eucharist was not only a personal devotion but also a pedagogical tool and public witness. In a Turin undergoing transformation, Don Bosco saw processions as an opportunity to strengthen the faith of young people and proclaim Christ in the streets. The Salesian experience, which has continued throughout the world, shows how faith can be embodied in culture and respond to social challenges. Even today, when lived with authenticity and openness, these processions can become prophetic signs of faith.

When we speak of St. John Bosco (1815-1888), we immediately think of his popular oratories, his passion for educating young people, and the Salesian family born of his charism. Less well known, but no less decisive, is the role that Eucharistic devotion – and in particular Eucharistic processions – played in his work. For Don Bosco, the Eucharist was not only the heart of his inner life; it was also a powerful pedagogical tool and a public sign of social renewal in a Turin undergoing rapid industrial transformation. Retracing the link between the saint of young people and the processions with the Blessed Sacrament means entering a pastoral workshop where liturgy, catechesis, civic education, and human promotion are intertwined in an original and, at times, surprising way.

Eucharistic processions in the context of the 19th century

To understand Don Bosco, it is necessary to remember that the 19th century in Italy was marked by intense debate on the

public role of religion. After the Napoleonic era and the Risorgimento, religious demonstrations in the streets were no longer a given. In many regions, a liberal State was emerging that viewed any public expression of Catholicism with suspicion, fearing mass gatherings or 'reactionary' resurgence. Eucharistic processions, however, retained a powerful symbolic force. They recalled Christ's lordship over all reality and, at the same time, brought to the fore a popular Church, visible and embodied in the neighbourhoods. Against this backdrop stood the stubbornness of Don Bosco, who never gave up accompanying his boys in witnessing their faith outside the walls of the oratory, whether on the avenues of Valdocco or in the surrounding countryside.

From his formative years at the seminary in Chieri, John Bosco developed a 'missionary' sensitivity to the Eucharist. The chronicles tell us that he often stopped in the chapel after lessons and spent a long time in prayer before the tabernacle. In his Memoirs of the Oratory, he himself acknowledges that he learned from his spiritual director, Fr. Cafasso, the value of 'becoming bread' for others. Contemplating Jesus giving himself in the Eucharist meant for him, learning the logic of gratuitous love. This line runs through his entire life, "Keep Jesus in the sacrament and Mary Help of Christians as your friends," he would repeat to young people, pointing to frequent Communion and silent adoration as the pillars of a path of lay and daily holiness.

The Valdocco oratory and the first internal processions

In the early 1840s, the Turin oratory did not yet have a proper church. Celebrations took place in wooden huts or in adapted courtyards. Don Bosco, however, did not give up organising small internal processions, almost 'dress rehearsals' for what would become a regular practice. The boys carried candles and banners, sang Marian hymns and, at the end, gathered around a makeshift altar for the Eucharistic benediction. These first attempts had an eminently pedagogical

function, to accustom young people to devout but joyful participation, combining discipline and spontaneity. In working-class Turin, where poverty often led to violence, marching in an orderly fashion with a red handkerchief around one's neck was already a sign of going against the tide. It showed that faith could teach respect for oneself and others.

Don Bosco knew well that a procession cannot be improvised. It requires signs, songs, and gestures that speak to the heart even before they speak to the mind. For this reason, he personally took care of explaining the symbols. The canopy became the image of the tent of meeting, a sign of the divine presence accompanying the people on their journey. The flowers scattered along the route recalled the beauty of the Christian virtues that must adorn the soul. The street lamps, indispensable for evening outings, alluded to the light of faith that illuminates the darkness of sin. Each element was the subject of a small 'sermon' in the refectory or during recreation, so that the logistical preparation was intertwined with systematic catechesis. The result? For the boys, the procession was not a ritual duty but an occasion for celebration full of meaning.

One of the most characteristic aspects of Salesian processions was the presence of a band formed by the students themselves. Don Bosco considered music an antidote to idleness and, at the same time, a powerful tool for evangelisation. "A cheerful march performed well," he wrote, "attracts people like a magnet attracts iron." The band preceded the Blessed Sacrament, alternating sacred pieces with popular tunes adapted with religious lyrics. This 'dialogue' between faith and popular culture reduced the distance between passers-by and created an aura of shared celebration around the procession. Many secular chroniclers testified to having been 'intrigued' by that group of young, disciplined musicians, so different from the military or philharmonic bands of the time.

Processions as a response to social crises

Nineteenth-century Turin experienced cholera epidemics (1854 and 1865), strikes, famines, and anti-clerical tensions. Don Bosco often reacted by proposing extraordinary processions of reparation or supplication. During the cholera epidemic of 1854, he led young people through the most affected streets, reciting litanies for the sick aloud and distributing bread and medicine. It was at that juncture that he made his promise – which he later kept – to build the church of Mary Help of Christians. “If Our Lady saves my boys, I will raise a temple to her.” The civil authorities, initially opposed to religious processions for fear of contagion, had to recognise the effectiveness of the Salesian assistance network, which was spiritually nourished by the processions themselves. The Eucharist, brought to the sick, thus became a tangible sign of Christian compassion.

Contrary to certain devotional models confined to sacristies, Don Bosco’s processions claimed a right of citizenship for the faith in the public space. It was not a question of ‘occupying’ the streets, but of restoring them to their community vocation. Passing under balconies, crossing squares and porticoes meant remembering that the city is not only a place of economic exchange or political confrontation, but also of fraternal encounter. This is why Don Bosco insisted on impeccable order: brushed cloaks, clean shoes, regular rows. He wanted the image of the procession to communicate beauty and dignity, persuading even the most sceptical observers that the Christian proposal elevated the person.

The Salesian legacy of processions

After Don Bosco’s death, his spiritual sons spread the practice of Eucharistic processions throughout the world: from agricultural schools in Emilia to missions in Patagonia, from Asian colleges to the working-class neighbourhoods of Brussels. What mattered was not to slavishly duplicate a Piedmontese ritual, but to transmit its pedagogical core: youth protagonism, symbolic catechesis, openness to the

surrounding society. Thus, in Latin America, the Salesians included traditional dances at the beginning of the procession. In India, they adopted flower carpets in accordance with local art; in sub-Saharan Africa, they alternated Gregorian chants with tribal polyphonic rhythms. The Eucharist became a bridge between cultures, realising Don Bosco's dream of "making all peoples one family."

From a theological point of view, Don Bosco's processions embody a strong vision of the real presence of Christ. Taking the Blessed Sacrament 'outside' means proclaiming that the Word did not become flesh to remain locked up, but to "pitch his tent among us" (cf. Jn 1:14). This presence demands to be proclaimed in understandable forms, without being reduced to an intimate gesture. In Don Bosco, the centripetal dynamic of adoration (gathering hearts around the Host) generates a centrifugal dynamic: young people, nourished at the altar, feel sent forth to serve. Micro-commitments spring from the procession: assisting a sick companion, pacifying a quarrel, studying with greater diligence. The Eucharist is prolonged in the 'invisible processions' of daily charity.

Today, in secularised or multi-religious contexts, Eucharistic processions can raise questions. Are they still communicative? Do they risk appearing like nostalgic folklore? Don Bosco's experience suggests that the key lies in the quality of relationships rather than in the quantity of incense or vestments. A procession that involves families, explains symbols, integrates contemporary artistic languages, and above all connects with concrete gestures of solidarity, maintains a surprising prophetic power. The recent Synod on Young People (2018) repeatedly recalled the importance of "going out" and "showing faith with our flesh." The Salesian tradition, with its itinerant liturgy, offers a tried and tested paradigm of the "Church going forth."

For Don Bosco, Eucharistic processions were not simply liturgical traditions, but true educative, spiritual, and

social acts. They represented a synthesis of lived faith, an educating community, and public witness. Through them, Don Bosco formed young people capable of adoring, respecting, serving, and witnessing.

Today, in a fragmented and distracted world, re-proposing the value of Eucharistic processions in the light of the Salesian charism can be an effective way to rediscover the meaning of what is essential: Christ present among His people, who walk with Him, adore Him, serve Him, and proclaim Him.

In an age that seeks authenticity, visibility, and relationships, the Eucharistic procession – if lived according to the spirit of Don Bosco – can be a powerful sign of hope and renewal.

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With Nino Baglieri, Pilgrim of Hope, on the Journey of the Jubilee

The path of the 2025 Jubilee, dedicated to Hope, finds a shining witness in the story of the Servant of God Nino Baglieri. From the dramatic fall that left him tetraplegic at seventeen to his inner rebirth in 1978, Baglieri moved from the shadow of despair to the light of active faith, transforming his bed of suffering into a throne of joy. His story intertwines the five Jubilee signs – pilgrimage, door, profession of faith, charity, and reconciliation – showing that Christian hope is not escapism but a strength that opens the future and supports every journey.

1. Hoping as Waiting

Hope, according to the online Treccani dictionary, is a feeling of “trustful expectation in the present or future fulfillment of what is desired.” The etymology of the noun “hope” comes from the Latin *spes*, which in turn derives from the Sanskrit root *spa-* meaning to stretch toward a goal. In Spanish, “to hope” and “to wait” are both translated with the verb *esperar*, which combines both meanings in one word: as if one could only wait for what one hopes for. This state of mind allows us to face life and its challenges with courage and a heart always burning with light. Hope is expressed – positively or negatively – in some popular proverbs: “Hope is the last to die,” “While there is life, there is hope,” “He who lives by hope dies in despair.”

Almost gathering this “shared feeling” about hope, but aware of the need to help rediscover hope in its fullest and truest dimension, Pope Francis dedicated the Ordinary Jubilee of 2025 to Hope (*Spes non confundit* [Hope does not disappoint] is the bull of convocation) and already in 2014 said: “The resurrection of Jesus is not the happy ending of a beautiful fairy tale; it is not the happy end of a movie; it is the intervention of God the Father where human hope breaks down. At the moment when everything seems lost, in the moment of pain, when many people feel the need to get down from the cross, that is the moment closest to the resurrection. The night becomes darkest just before the morning begins, before the light begins. In the darkest moment God intervenes and raises up” (cf. Audience of 16 April 2014).

In this context, the story of the **Servant of God Nino Baglieri** (Modica, May 1, 1951 – March 2, 2007) fits perfectly. As a seventeen-year-old bricklayer, he fell from a seventeen-meter-high scaffold due to the sudden collapse of a plank, crashing to the ground and becoming tetraplegic: from that fall on May 6, 1968, he could only move his head and neck, depending on others for life in everything, even the simplest and humblest things. Nino could not even shake a friend’s hand or caress his mother... and saw his dreams vanish.

What hope for life did this young man have now? What feelings could he face? What future awaited him? Nino's first response was despair, total darkness before a search for meaning that found no answer. First a long wandering through hospitals in different Italian regions, then the pity of friends and acquaintances led Nino to rebel and lock himself away in ten long years of loneliness and anger, while the tunnel of life grew ever deeper.

In Greek mythology, Zeus entrusts Pandora with a jar containing all the evils of the world; when opened, men lose immortality and begin a life of suffering. To save them, Pandora reopens the jar and releases *elpis*, hope, which remained at the bottom. It was the only antidote to life's troubles. Looking instead to the Giver of all good, we know that "hope does not disappoint" (Rom 5:5). Pope Francis writes in *Spes non confundit*: "In the sign of this hope, the apostle Paul encourages the Christian community in Rome [...] Everyone hopes. In the heart of every person is enclosed hope as desire and expectation of good, even without knowing what tomorrow will bring. The unpredictability of the future, however, gives rise to sometimes opposing feelings: from trust to fear, from serenity to discouragement, from certainty to doubt. We often meet discouraged people who look to the future with skepticism and pessimism, as if nothing could offer them happiness. May the Jubilee be an opportunity for all to revive hope" (ibid., 1).

2. From Witness of "Despair" to "Ambassador" of Hope

Let us return to the story of our Servant of God, Nino Baglieri.

Ten long years had to pass before Nino emerged from the tunnel of despair, the thick darkness cleared, and Light entered. It was the afternoon of March 24, Good Friday 1978, when Father Aldo Modica, with a group of young people, went to Nino's home, urged by his mother Peppina and some people involved in the Renewal in the Spirit movement, then in its early days in the nearby Salesian parish. Nino writes,

“While they invoked the Holy Spirit, I felt a very strange sensation, a great warmth invaded my body, a strong tingling in all my limbs, as if a new strength entered me and something old left. At that moment I said my ‘yes’ to the Lord, accepted my cross, and was reborn to a new life, becoming a new man. Ten years of despair erased in a few moments, because an unknown joy entered my heart. I desired the healing of my body, but the Lord granted me an even greater grace: spiritual healing.”

A new path began for Nino: from “witness of despair” he became a “pilgrim of hope.” No longer isolated in his little room but an “ambassador” of this hope, he shared his experience through a broadcast on a local radio station and – an even greater grace – God gave him the joy of being able to write with his mouth. Nino confides: “In March 1979 the Lord performed a great miracle for me: I learned to write with my mouth. I started like this; I was with my friends doing homework, I asked for a pencil and a notebook, I began making marks and drawing something, but then I discovered I could write, and so I began to write.” He then began to write his memoirs and correspond with people of all kinds around the world, thousands of letters still preserved today. The regained hope made him creative; now Nino rediscovered the joy of relationships and wanted to become – as much as he could – independent. With a stick he used with his mouth and an elastic band attached to the phone, he dialed numbers to communicate with many sick people, offering them words of comfort. He discovered a new way to face his suffering, which brought him out of isolation and set him on the path to becoming a witness to the Gospel of joy and hope. “Now there is so much joy in my heart, there is no more pain in me, in my heart there is Your love. Thank you, my Lord Jesus, from my bed of pain I want to praise you and with all my heart thank you because you called me to know life, to know true life.”

Nino changed perspective, made a 360° turn – the Lord gave him **conversion** – and placed his trust in that

merciful God who, through “misfortune,” called him to work in His vineyard, to be a sign and instrument of salvation and hope. Thus, many who came to console him left comforted, with tears in their eyes. They did not find on that little bed a sad and gloomy man, but a smiling face that radiated – despite many sufferings, including bedsores and respiratory problems – the joy of living; the smile was constant on his face, and Nino felt “useful from the bed of the cross.” Nino Baglieri is the opposite of many people today, constantly searching for the meaning of life, aiming for easy success and the happiness of fleeting and worthless things, living online, consuming life with a click, wanting everything immediately but with sad, dull eyes. Nino apparently had nothing, yet he had peace and joy in his heart. He did not live isolated but supported by God’s love expressed through the embrace and presence of his entire family and more and more people who knew him and connected with him.

3. Rekindling Hope

Building hope means that every time I am not satisfied with my life and I commit to changing it. Every time I do not let negative experiences harden me or make me distrustful. Every time I fall and try to get up, not allowing fears to have the last word. Every time, in a world marked by conflicts, I choose trust and always try again, with everyone. Every time I do not flee from God’s dream that tells me, “I want you to be happy,” “I want you to have a full life... full even of holiness.” The pinnacle of the virtue of hope is indeed a gaze toward Heaven to live well on earth or, as Don Bosco would say, **walking with feet on the ground and heart in Heaven.**

In this furrow of hope, the Jubilee finds fulfillment, which, with its signs, asks us to set out, to cross some frontiers.

First sign, the pilgrimage: when moving from one place to another, one is open to the new, to change. Jesus’ whole life was “a setting out,” a journey of evangelization

fulfilled in the gift of life and beyond, with the Resurrection and Ascension.

Second sign, the door: in John 10:9 Jesus says, "I am the door; if anyone enters through me, he will be saved; he will come in and go out and find pasture." Passing through the door means being welcomed, being community. The Gospel also speaks of the "narrow door": the Jubilee becomes a path of conversion.

Third sign, the profession of faith: expressing belonging to Christ and the Church and declaring it publicly.

Fourth sign, charity: charity is the password to heaven; in 1 Peter 4:8 the apostle Peter admonishes, "Keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins."

Fifth sign, therefore, reconciliation and Jubilee indulgence: it is a "favorable time" (cf. 2 Cor 6:2) to experience God's great mercy and walk paths of rapprochement and forgiveness toward others; to live the prayer of the Our Father where we ask, "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." It is becoming new creatures.

Even in Nino's life, there are episodes that connect him – along the "thread" of hope – to these Jubilee dimensions. For example, his repentance for some childhood mischiefs, like when three of them (he recounts), "stole the offerings from the sacristy during Masses, we used them to play foosball. When you meet bad companions, they lead you astray. Then one took the Oratory keys and hid them in my schoolbag in the study; they found the keys, called the parents, gave us two slaps, and kicked us out of school. Shame!" But above all, in Nino's life there is charity, helping the poor person in physical and moral trial, reaching out to those with psychological struggles, and writing to brothers in prison to testify to them God's goodness and love. Nino, who before the fall had been a bricklayer, writes, "[I] liked to build with my hands something that would last over time: even now I feel like a bricklayer working in God's

Kingdom, to leave something that lasts, to see the Wonderful Works of God that He accomplishes in our Life.” He confides, “My body seems dead, but my heart keeps beating in my chest. My legs do not move, yet I walk the paths of the world.”

4. Pilgrim Toward Heaven

Nino, a consecrated Salesian cooperator of the great Salesian Family, ended his earthly “pilgrimage” on Friday, March 2, 2007, at 8:00 a.m., at only 55 years old, having spent 39 years tetraplegic between bed and wheelchair, after asking forgiveness from his family for the hardships his condition caused. He left this world dressed in tracksuit and sneakers, as he expressly requested, to run in the green flowering meadows and leap like a deer along the streams. We read in his spiritual Testament, “I will never stop thanking you, O Lord, for having called me to You through the Cross on May 6, 1968. A heavy cross for my young strength...” On March 2, life – a continuous gift that begins with parents and is slowly nurtured with wonder and beauty – placed the most important piece for Nino Baglieri: the embrace with his Lord and God, accompanied by the Madonna.

At the news of his passing, a unanimous chorus rose from many quarters: “a saint has died,” a man who made his bed of the cross the banner of a full life, a gift for all. Thus, a great witness of hope.

Five years after his death, as provided by the *Normae Servandae in Inquisitionibus ab Episcopis faciendis in Causis Sanctorum* of 1983, the bishop of the Diocese of Noto, at the request of the Postulator General of the Salesian Congregation, after consulting the Sicilian Episcopal Conference and obtaining the *Nihil obstat* from the Holy See, opened the Diocesan Inquiry for the Cause of Beatification and Canonization of the Servant of God Nino Baglieri.

The diocesan process, lasting 12 years, followed two main lines: the work of the Historical Commission, which researched, collected, studied, and presented many sources, especially writings “by” and “about” the Servant of God; and

the Ecclesiastical Tribunal, responsible for the Inquiry, which also heard witnesses under oath.

This process concluded on May 5, 2024, in the presence of Monsignor Salvatore Rumeo, current bishop of the Diocese of Noto. A few days later, the procedural acts were delivered to the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, which opened them on June 21, 2024. At the beginning of 2025, the same Dicastery declared their “Legal Validity,” allowing the Roman phase of the Cause to enter full swing.

Now the contribution to the Cause continues also by spreading knowledge of Nino’s figure, who at the end of his earthly journey recommended: “Do not leave me doing nothing. I will continue my mission from heaven. I will write to you from Paradise.”

The journey of hope in his company thus becomes a longing for Heaven, when “we will meet face to face with the infinite beauty of God (cf. 1 Cor 13:12) and will be able to read with joyful admiration the mystery of the universe, which will share with us endless fullness [...]. Meanwhile, we unite to take care of this home entrusted to us, knowing that whatever good is in it will be taken up in the feast of heaven. Together with all creatures, we walk on this earth seeking God [...] We walk singing!” (cf. *Laudato Si’*, 243-244).

Roberto Chiaramonte

Novena to Mary Help of Christians 2025

This 2025 Novena to Mary Help of Christians invites us to rediscover ourselves as children under Mary’s maternal gaze. Each day, through the great apparitions – from Lourdes to

Fatima, from Guadalupe to Banneaux – we contemplate an aspect of her love: humility, hope, obedience, wonder, trust, consolation, justice, gentleness, dream. The meditations by the Rector Major and the prayers of the “children” accompany us on a nine-day journey that opens the heart to the simple faith of the little ones, nourishes prayer, and encourages us to build, with Mary, a healed world full of light, for ourselves and for all those who seek hope and peace.

Day 1 – Our Lady of Lourdes

Being Children – Humility and faith

Children trust, children rely on others. And a mother is close by, always. You see her even if she is not there.

As for us, are we able to see her?

Little Bernadette Soubirous

11 February 1858. I had just turned 14. It was a morning like any other, a winter's day. We were hungry, as always. There was this cave, with a black mouth; in the silence I felt a rush of air. The bush moved, shaken by some force. And then I saw a young woman, in white, no taller than me who greeted me with a slight bow of her head; at the same time she moved her outstretched arms away from her body a little, opening her hands, like the statues of Our Lady; I was afraid. Then it occurred to me to pray: I took the rosary beads that I always carry with me and began to say the rosary.

Mary showed herself to her daughter Bernadette Soubirous. She who could neither read nor write; she who spoke in dialect and did not go to catechism class. A poor girl, pushed around by everyone in the village, yet ready to trust and rely on others, like someone who has nothing. Nothing to lose. Mary entrusted her secrets to her and did so because she trusted her. She treated her with loving kindness, spoke to her kindly, and said ‘please’ to her. And Bernadette let herself go and believed her, just like a child does with its mother.

She believed in her promise that Our Lady **would make her happy not in this world, but in the next.** She remembered this promise for the rest of her life. A promise that would allow her to face all her difficulties with her head held high, with strength and determination, doing what Our Lady asked her to do: pray, always pray for all of us sinners. She also made a promise: she would look after Mary's secrets and give voice to her request for a Shrine in the place where Mary appeared. And as she lay dying, Bernadette smiled, thinking back to Mary's face, her loving gaze, her silences, her few but intense words, and above all, that promise. And she still felt like a daughter, the daughter of a Mother who keeps her promises.

Mary, the Mother who promises.

You, who promised to become the mother of humanity, stayed your children, starting with the youngest and the poorest. You drew close to them and revealed yourself to them.

Have faith: Mary will also shows herself to us if we are able to strip ourselves of everything.

The Rector Major's words

We can say that the Virgin Mary is a beacon of humility and faith for us, accompanying us through the centuries, accompanying our lives, accompanying the experience of each and every one of us. Let us not forget, however, that Mary's humility is not simply outward modesty, it is not a facade, but rather a profound awareness of her smallness before the greatness of God.

Her 'yes, here am I, the servant of the Lord' spoken before the angel is an act of humility, not presumption. It is the trusting abandonment of someone who recognises herself as an instrument in God's hands. Mary does not seek recognition; Mary simply seeks to be a servant, placing herself in the last place with silence, humility and simplicity that we find disarming. This humility, this radical humility, is the key that opened Mary's heart to divine grace, allowing the Word of God, with his greatness and immensity, to become incarnate in

her human womb.

Mary teaches us to place ourselves as we are, with our humility, without pride, without needing to depend on our authority or self-referentiality, placing ourselves freely before God so that we may receive fully, with freedom and openness, like Mary; so that we may live his will with love. This is the second point, this is Mary's faith. The humility of the servant places her on a constant path of unconditional adherence to God's plan, even in the darkest, most incomprehensible moments, which means courageously facing the poverty of her experience in the cave at Bethlehem, the flight into Egypt, the hidden life in Nazareth, but above all at the foot of the cross where Mary's faith reaches its peak.

There, beneath the cross, with a heart pierced by pain, Mary does not waver, Mary does not fall, Mary believes in the promise. Her faith, then, is not a passing feeling, but a solid rock on which the hope of humanity, our hope, is founded. Humility and faith in Mary are inextricably linked.

Let us allow Mary's humility to enlighten our human condition, so that faith may also sprout in us, so that, recognising our smallness before God, we do not abandon ourselves because we are small, we do not allow ourselves to be overcome by presumption, but we place ourselves there, like Mary, with an attitude of great freedom, with an attitude of great openness, recognising our dependence on God, living with God in simplicity but at the same time in greatness. Mary therefore urges us to cultivate a serene, firm faith, capable of overcoming trials and trusting in God's promise. Let us contemplate the figure of Mary, humble and believing, so that we too may say our yes generously, as she did.

As for us, are we able to grasp her promises of love with the eyes of a child?

The prayer of an unfaithful child

Mary, you who show yourself to those who are able to see...
make my heart pure.

Make me humble, little, able to lose myself in your mother's embrace.

Help me rediscover how important the role of a child is and mark my steps.

You promise, I promise in a covenant that only a mother and child can make.

I will fall, mother, you know that.

I won't always keep my promises.

I won't always trust you.

I won't always be able to see you.

But you will stand there in silence, smiling, your arms and hands outstretched.

And I will take the rosary and pray with you for all children like me.

Hail Mary...

Day 2 – Our Lady of Fatima

Being Children – Simplicity and Hope

Children trust, children rely on others. And a mother is close by, always. You see her even if she is not there.

As for us, are we able to see her?

The little shepherd children in Cova di Iria

In Cova di Iria around 1:00 pm, the sky opened and the sun appeared. Suddenly, at about 1.30 pm, the improbable happened: before an astonished crowd, the most spectacular, grandest and most incredible miracle that has happened since biblical times took place. The sun began a frantic and frightening dance that would last more than ten minutes. A very long time.

Three little shepherd children, simple and happy, were there and spread news of the miracle that shocked millions of people. Nobody could explain it, from scientists to people of faith. Yet, three children saw Mary, heard her message. And they believed it, they believed the words of the woman who showed herself and asked them to return to Cova di Iria every

13th of the month. They do not need explanations because they placed all their hope in Mary's repeated words. A difficult hope to keep alive, one which would have frightened any child: Our Lady revealed suffering and world conflicts to Lucia, Jacinta and Francesco. Yet they had no doubt: those who trust in the protection of Mary, the mother who protects, can face everything. And they knew this so well; they knew it first-hand, risking being killed so as not to betray the word they gave to their heavenly mother. The three little shepherd children were ready for martyrdom, imprisoned and threatened with a pot of boiling oil.

They were afraid:

"Why do we have to die without hugging our parents? I'd like to see Mum."

Yet they decided to keep hoping, believing in a love greater than themselves:

"Do not be afraid. We will offer this sacrifice for the conversion of sinners. It would be worse if Our Lady never came back."

"Why don't we say the Rosary?"

A mother is never deaf to the cries of her children. And the children placed their hope in her. Mary, Mother who protects, stayed with her three children from Fatima and saved them by keeping them alive. And today she still protects all her children around the world who go on pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima.

Mary, the Mother who protects.

You, who have taken care of humanity from the moment of the Annunciation, have remained beside your simplest and most hopeful children. You drew close to them and revealed yourself to them.

Place your hope in Mary: she will be able to protect you.

The Rector Major's words

The Virgin Mary, hope and renewal

The Virgin Mary is the dawn of hope, an inexhaustible source of renewal.

Contemplating the figure of Mary is like turning our gaze towards a bright horizon, a constant invitation to believe in a future full of grace. And this grace is transformative. Mary is the personification of Christian hope in action. Her unshakeable faith in the face of trials, her perseverance in following Jesus to the cross, her confident expectation of the resurrection are the most important things for me. They are a beacon of hope for all humanity.

In Mary, we see how certainty is, so to speak, the confirmation of the promise of a God who never fails to keep his word. That pain, suffering and darkness do not have the last word. That death is overcome by life.

Mary, then, is hope. She is the morning star announcing the coming of the sun of justice. Turning to her means entrusting our expectations and aspirations to a motherly heart that presents them with love to her risen Son. In some way, our hope is sustained by Mary's hope. And if there is hope, then things do not remain as they were before. There is renewal. The renewal of life. By welcoming the incarnate Word, Mary made it possible to believe in God's hope and promise. She made possible a new creation, a new beginning.

Mary's spiritual motherhood continues to generate us in faith, accompanying us on our journey of growth and inner transformation.

Let us ask Mary for the grace necessary so that this hope that we see fulfilled in her may renew our hearts, heal our wounds, and enable us to pass beyond the veil of negativity to embark on a journey of holiness, a journey of closeness to God. Let us ask Mary, the woman who stands with the apostles in prayer, to help us today, believers and Christian communities, so that we may be sustained in faith and open to the gifts of the Spirit, so that the face of the earth may be renewed.

Mary urges us never to resign ourselves to sin and mediocrity, but, filled with the hope fulfilled in her, to long for a new life in Christ. May Mary continue to be our model and support

so that we may always believe in the possibility of a new beginning, of an inner rebirth that conforms us ever more closely to the image of her son Jesus.

The prayer of an unfaithful child

As for us, are we able to hope in her and be protected with the eyes of a child?

The prayer of a discouraged child

Mary, you who show yourself to those who are able to see...

make my heart simple and full of hope.

I trust you: protect me in every situation.

I entrust myself to you: protect me in every situation.

I listen to your word: protect me in every situation.

Give me the ability to believe the impossible and do everything in my power

to bring your love, your message of hope and your protection to the whole world.

And please, my Mother, protect all humanity, even those who do not yet recognize you.

Hail Mary...

Day 3 – Our Lady of Guadalupe

Being Children – Obedience and dedication

Children trust, children rely on others. And a mother is close by, always. You see her even if she is not there.

As for us, are we able to see her?

Young Juan Diego

Juan Diego," said the Lady, "the little favourite among my children..." Juan sprang to his feet.

"Where are you going, Juanito?" asked the Lady.

Juan Diego replied as politely as he could. He told the Lady that he was going to the church of Santiago to hear the Mass in honour of the Mother of God.

"My beloved child," said the Lady, "I am the Mother of God,

and I want you to listen to me carefully. I have a very important message to give you. I want a church to be built on this spot, from where I can show my love to your people.

A gentle, simple and tender dialogue like that of a mother with a child. And Juan Diego obeyed: he went to the bishop to report what he had seen but he did not believe him. Then the young man returned to Mary and explained what had happened. Our Lady gave him another message and urged him to try again, and so on and so forth. Juan Diego obeyed, he did not give up: he would complete the task that the heavenly Mother was entrusting him with. But one day, overcome with the problems of life, he was about to skip the appointment with Our Lady: his uncle was dying. **“Do you think I would forget someone I love so much?” Mary healed his uncle, while Juan Diego obeyed once again:**

“My beloved child,” the Lady said, “go up to the top of the hill where we first met. Cut and pick up the roses you will find there. Put them in your tilma (cloak) and bring them to me. I’ll tell you what you have to do and say.” Despite knowing that there were no roses growing on that hill, and certainly not in winter, Juan ran all the way to the top. And there was the most beautiful garden he had ever seen. Castilian roses, still shining with dew, stretched as far as the eye could see. He gently cut the most beautiful blooms with his stone knife, filled his cloak, and quickly returned to where the Lady was waiting for him. The Lady took the roses and placed them back in Juan’s tilma. Then she tied it behind his neck and said, “This is the sign the bishop wants. Quickly, go to him and don’t stop along the way.”

The image of Our Lady had appeared on the cloak and at the sight of this miracle, the bishop was convinced. And today the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe still preserves this miraculous effigy.

Mary, the Mother who does not forget

You, who do not forget any of your children, leave no one behind, have looked upon the young people who have placed their hopes in you. You drew close to them and revealed yourself to them.

Obey even when you do not understand: a mother does not forget, a mother does not leave you on your own.

The Rector Major's words

The Virgin Mary, motherhood and compassion

Mary's motherhood does not end with her yes that made the incarnation of the Son of God possible. Certainly, that moment is the foundation of everything, but her motherhood is a constant attitude, a way of being for us, of relating to the whole of humanity.

Jesus on the cross entrusts John to her with the words, 'Woman, behold your son,' symbolically extending her motherhood to all believers of all times.

Mary thus becomes the mother of the Church, the spiritual mother of each one of us.

We see how this motherhood manifests itself in tender and thoughtful care, in constant attention to the needs of her children and in a deep desire for their good. Mary welcomes us, nourishes us with her expression of fidelity, protects us under her mantle. Mary's motherhood is an immense gift that brings us closer to her; we feel her loving presence accompanying us at every moment.

Mary's compassion is the natural corollary of her motherhood. Compassion is not simply a superficial feeling of pity, but a profound participation in the pain of others, a 'suffering with'. We see it manifested in a touching way during her son's passion. In the same way, Mary does not remain indifferent to our pain; she intercedes for us, consoles us, and offers us her maternal help.

Thus, Mary's heart becomes a safe refuge where we can lay down our burdens and find comfort and hope. Motherhood and compassion in Mary become, so to speak, two sides of the same

human experience in our favour, two expressions of her infinite love for God and for humanity.

Her compassion is then the concrete manifestation of her being a mother, compassion as a consequence of motherhood. Contemplating Mary as a mother opens our hearts to the hope that finds its fullest expression in her. Our Heavenly Mother who loves us.

Let us ask Mary to see her as a model of authentic humanity, of a motherhood capable of 'feeling with', capable of loving, capable of suffering with others, following the example of her son Jesus, who for love of us suffered and died on the cross.

The prayer of an unfaithful child

As for us, are we sure that a mother never forgets, just as children do?

The prayer of a lost child

Mary, you who show yourself to those who are able to see...
make my heart obedient.

When I'm not listening, please insist.

When I don't come back, please come and look for me.

When they do not forgive me, please teach me forgiveness.

Because we human beings get lost and we will always get lost

But you don't forget us, your wandering children.

Come and get us,

come and take us by the hand.

We do not and cannot be alone here.

Hail Mary...

Day 4 – Our Lady of La Salette

Being Children – Amazement and reflection

Children trust, children rely on others. And a mother is close by, always. You see her even if she is not there.

As for us, are we able to see her?

Little Melanie and Maximin from La Salette

On Saturday, September 19, 1846, the two boys climbed the slopes of Mount Planeau, above the village of La Salette, each leading four cows to graze. Halfway there, near a small spring, Melanie was the first to see a ball of fire on a pile of stones, "as if the sun had fallen there", and she pointed it out to Maximin. From that shining sphere a woman began to appear, sitting with her head in her hands, her elbows on her knees, deeply sad. Faced with their astonishment, the Lady stood up and in a soft voice, but in French, said to them, "Come closer, my children, do not be afraid, I am here to tell you great news." Heartened, the boys approached and saw that the figure was crying.

A mother announced great news to her children and did so in ears. Yet the youngsters were not surprised by these tears. They listened, in the tenderest of moments between a mother and her children. Because even mothers are sometimes worried, because even mothers entrust their children with their own feelings, thoughts and reflections. And Mary entrusted a great message to the two little shepherds, poor and neglected in their affection: "I am worried about humanity, I am worried about you, my children, who are distancing yourselves from God. And life away from God is a complicated, difficult life, made up of suffering." That is why she was crying. She cried like any mother and told her youngest and purest children a message as amazing as it was great. A message to be proclaimed to everyone, to be brought to the world.

And they would do so, because they could not keep such a beautiful moment for themselves: the expression of a mother's love for her children must be proclaimed to everyone. The Shrine of Our Lady of La Salette, which stands on the site of the apparitions, lays its foundations on the revelation of Mary's pain in the face of the pilgrimage of her sinful children.

Mary, the Mother who proclaims/who tells us who she is
You, who give yourself completely to your children so much

that you are not afraid to tell them about yourself, have touched the hearts of your youngest children, who are able to reflect on your words and welcome them in wonder. You drew close to them and revealed yourself to them.

Be amazed at a mother's words: they will always be the most authentic.

The Rector Major's words

The Virgin Mary, love and mercy

Do we feel this dimension of Mary, these two dimensions? Mary is the woman whose heart overflows with love, attention and also mercy. We feel that she is a harbour, a safe refuge in times of difficulty or trial.

Contemplating Mary is like immersing ourselves in an ocean of tenderness and compassion. We feel surrounded by an environment, by an inexhaustible atmosphere of comfort and hope. Mary's love is a maternal love that embraces all of humanity, because it is a love that has its roots in her unconditional yes to God's plan.

By welcoming her son into her womb, Mary welcomed God's love. As a result, her love knows no boundaries or distinctions; it bends over human frailty and misery with infinite delicacy. We see this manifested in her attention to Elizabeth, in her intercession at the wedding at Cana, in her silent, extraordinary presence at the foot of the cross.

Behold, Mary's love, this maternal love, is a reflection of God's own love, a love that draws near, that consoles, forgives, never tires, never ends. Behold, Mary teaches us that to love means to give oneself completely, to be close to those who suffer, to share the joys and sorrows of our brothers and sisters with the same generosity and dedication that animated her heart. Love, mercy.

Mercy then becomes the natural consequence of Mary's love, a compassion, we might say, that is visceral, when faced with the sufferings of humanity, the world. We look at Mary, we contemplate her, we encounter her with her maternal gaze and we feel it resting on our weaknesses, on our sins, on our

vulnerability, without aggression, indeed with infinite tenderness. It is an immaculate heart, sensitive to the cry of pain.

Mary is a mother who does not judge, does not condemn, but welcomes, consoles and forgives. We feel that Mary's mercy is a balm for the wounds of the soul, something that warms the heart. Mary reminds us that God is rich in mercy and never tires of forgiving those who turn to him with a contrite, serene, open and willing heart.

Love and mercy in the Virgin Mary merge in an embrace that envelops the whole of humanity. Let us ask Mary to help us open our hearts to God's love, as she did, and to let this love fill our hearts, especially when we feel most in need, most weighed down by trials and difficulties. In Mary, we find a tender and powerful mother, ready to welcome us into her love and to intercede for our salvation.

The prayer of an unfaithful child

As for us, are we still able to wonder like a child when faced with a mother's love?

The prayer of a distant child

Mary, you who show yourself to those who are able to see...
make my heart capable of compassion and conversion.

In silence, I find you.

In prayer, I hear you.

In reflection, I discover you.

And faced with your words of love, Mother, I am amazed
and discover the strength of your connection to humanity.

Far from you, who will hold my hand in times of difficulty?

Far from you, who will comfort me in my tears?

Far from you, who would advise me when I am taking a wrong
turn?

I will return to you, as one with you.

Hail Mary...

Day 5 – Catherine's Medal

Being Children – Trust and prayer

Children trust, children rely on others. And a mother is close by, always. You see her even if she is not there.

As for us, are we able to see her?

Little Catherine Labouré

On the night of July 18, 1830, around 11:30, she heard herself called by name. It was a child who told her, "Get up and come with me." Catherine followed the child. All the lights were on. The chapel door opened as soon as the child touched it with his fingertips. Catherine knelt down.

At midnight Our Lady came and sat in the armchair next to the altar. "Then I jumped up near her, at her feet, on the steps of the altar, and I placed my hands on her knees," Catherine said. "I stayed like this, I don't know how long. I thought it was the sweetest moment of my life..."

"God wants to entrust you with a mission," the Virgin said to Catherine.

Catherine, who lost her mother at 9 years of age, was not resigned to living without her mother. And she approached the Mother of Heaven. Our Lady, who was already looking at her from afar, would never abandon her. In fact, she had big plans for her. She, her caring and loving daughter, would have a great mission: to live an authentic Christian life, a personal relationship with God that was strong and firm. Mary believed in the potential of her child and entrusted her with the Miraculous Medal, capable of interceding and working graces and miracles. An important mission, a difficult message. **Yet Catherine was not discouraged. She trusted her Heavenly Mother and knew that she would never abandon her.**

Mary, the Mother who gives confidence

You, who are trusting, and entrust missions and messages to each of your children, have accompanied them on their journey as a discreet presence, remaining close to all, but especially

to those who have experienced great suffering. You drew close to them and revealed yourself to them.

Trust: a mother will always entrust you only with tasks that you can complete and will be by your side all the way.

The Rector Major's words

The Virgin Mary, trust and prayer

The Virgin Mary presents herself to us as a woman of unshakeable trust, a powerful intercessor through prayer. Contemplating these two aspects, trust and prayer, we see two fundamental dimensions of Mary's relationship with God.

We can say that Mary's trust in God is a golden thread that runs through her entire existence, from beginning to end. That 'yes' pronounced with awareness of the consequences is an act of total abandonment to the divine will. Mary entrusts herself, Mary lives her trust in God with a heart firmly fixed on divine providence, knowing that God would never abandon her.

So, for us, in our daily lives, looking to Mary, this abandonment, which is not passive but active and trusting, is an invitation not to forget our anxieties and fears, but in some way to look at everything in the light of God's love, which in Mary's case never failed, and neither will it fail in our lives. This trust leads to prayer, which we can say is almost the breath of Mary's soul, the privileged channel of her intimate communion with God. Trust leads to communion. Her life of abandonment was a continuous dialogue of love with the Father, a constant offering of herself, of her concerns, but also of her decisions.

The visit to Elizabeth is an example of prayer that becomes service. We see Mary accompanying Jesus to the cross, after the Ascension we see her in the Upper Room united with the Apostles in fervent expectation. Mary teaches us the value of constant prayer as a consequence of total and complete trust, abandoning oneself into God's hands, precisely to encounter God and live with God.

Trust and prayer and Mary Most Holy are closely interconnected. A deep trust in God gives birth to and brings forth persevering prayer. Let us ask Mary to be our example so that we may feel urged to make prayer a daily habit because we want to feel continually abandoned in God's merciful hands. Let us turn to her with filial trust so that, imitating her, imitating her trust and perseverance in prayer, we may experience the peace that only when we abandon ourselves to God can we receive the graces necessary for our journey of faith.

The prayer of an unfaithful child

As for us, are we able to trust unconditionally like children?

The prayer of a mistrustful child

Mary, you who show yourself to those who are able to see...
make my heart capable of praying.

I am unable to hear you, open my ears.

I am unable to follow you, guide my steps.

I am unable to keep faith with what you wish to entrust to me;
make my soul steadfast.

The temptations are many, let me not give in.

The difficulties seem insurmountable, let me not fall.

The contradictions of the world shout loudly, let me not follow them.

I, your worthless child, am here for you to use.

Making me an obedient child.

Hail Mary...

Day 6 – Our Lady of Sorrows of Kibeho Being Children – Suffering and healing

Children trust, children rely on others. And a mother is close by, always. You see her even if she is not there.

As for us, are we able to see her?

Little Alphonsine Mumiremana and her companions

The story began at 12:35 on a Saturday, November 28, 1981, in a boarding school run by local Sisters, attended by just over a hundred girls in the area. A rural, poor school, where one learned to become a teacher or secretary. The building was not equipped with a Chapel and, therefore, there was not a particularly strong religious atmosphere. That day all the girls from the school were in the refectory. The first of the group to "see" was 16-year-old Alphonsine Mumureke. According to what she herself wrote in her diary, she was serving her companions at the table, when she heard a female voice calling her: "My daughter, come here." She headed for the corridor, next to the refectory, and there a woman of incomparable beauty appeared to her. She was dressed in white, with a white veil over her head, which hid her hair, and which seemed joined to the rest of the dress, which had no seams. She was barefoot and her hands were clasped on her chest with her fingers pointing towards the sky.

Subsequently, Our Lady appeared to other of Alphonsine's school friends who at first were sceptical but then, faced with Mary's appearance, they had to reconsider. Mary, speaking to Alphonsine, described herself as the Lady of Sorrows of Kibeho and told the children about all the cruel and bloody events that would soon take place with the outbreak of war in Rwanda. **The sorrow would be great, but so too would be the consolation and healing from that sorrow, because she, the Lady of Sorrows, would never leave her children in Africa on their own. The children remain there, stunned by these visions, but they believed in this mother who reached out her arms to them, calling them "my children."** They knew that only in her would there be consolation. And in order to pray that the consoling mother would alleviate the suffering of her children, a shrine dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows of Kibeho was erected, now a place marked by extermination and genocide. And Our Lady continues to be there and embrace all her children.

Mary, the Mother who consoles

You, who comforted your children like John beneath the cross, have looked upon those who live in suffering. You drew close to them and revealed yourself to them.

Do not be afraid to go through suffering: the mother who consoles will wipe away your tears.

The Rector Major's words

The Virgin Mary, suffering and invitation to conversion

Mary is an emblematic figure of suffering transfigured, and a powerful invitation to conversion. When we contemplate her painful journey, it is a silent yet eloquent warning, a profound call to review our lives and our choices, and a call to return to the heart of the Gospel. The suffering that runs through Mary's life, like a sharp sword, prophesied by the elderly Simeon, marked by the disappearance of the Child Jesus, to the indescribable sorrow at the foot of the cross, Mary experiences all this, the weight of human fragility and the mystery of innocent suffering in a unique way.

Mary's suffering was not sterile suffering, passive resignation, but in some way we notice that there is an activity, a silent and courageous offering, united with the redemptive sacrifice of her son Jesus.

When we look at Mary, the woman who suffers, with the eyes of our faith, that suffering, rather than depressing us, reveals the depth of God's love for us, which is visible in Mary's life. Mary teaches us that even in the most acute pain we can find meaning, a possibility for spiritual growth, which is the fruit of union with the Paschal Mystery.

Thus, from the experience of transfigured pain, a powerful call to conversion emerges. Looking at Mary, contemplating how she endured so much for love of us and for our salvation, we too are called not to remain indifferent to the mystery of redemption.

Mary, the gentle and motherly woman, urges us to abandon the ways of evil and embrace the path of faith. Mary's famous

words at the wedding at Cana, 'Do whatever he tells you', still resound for us today as an urgent invitation to listen to the voice of Jesus in times of difficulty, in times of trial. In times of unexpected and unknown situations.

We immediately notice that Mary's suffering is not an end in itself, but is intimately linked to the redemption wrought by Christ. Her example of faith is unshakeable in pain. May it be a light and guide for us to transform our sufferings into opportunities for spiritual growth and to respond generously to the urgent call to conversion, so that the depth that still resounds in the heart of every person, the invitation of God, of a God who loves us, may find meaning, an outlet and growth through Mary's intercession, even in the most difficult moments, in the most painful moments.

The prayer of an unfaithful child

As for us, do we let ourselves be comforted like children?

The prayer of a suffering child

Mary, you who show yourself to those who are able to see...
make my heart capable of healing.

When I am down, hold out your hand to me, Mother.

When I feel broken, put the pieces back together, Mother.

When suffering takes over, open me to hope, Mother.

Because I am not only seeking healing for my body, but also
realising how much my heart
needs peace.

Lift me up from the dust, Mother.

Lift me up and all your children who are in distress.

Those beneath bombing,

those who are persecuted,

those who are unjustly imprisoned,

those who are harmed in rights and dignity,

those whose lives are cut short too soon.

Lift them up and console them.

because they are your children. Because we are your children.

Hail Mary...

Day 7 – Our Lady of Aparecida

Being Children – Justice and dignity

Children trust, children rely on others. And a mother is close by, always. You see her even if she is not there. As for us, are we able to see her?

The little fishermen Domingos, Felice and Joao

At dawn on October 12, 1717, Domingos Garcia, Felipe Pedroso and Joao Alves pushed their boat into the waters of the Paraiba River that flowed near their village. They didn't seem lucky that morning: they cast their nets for hours without catching anything. They had almost decided to give up when Joao Alves, the youngest, wanted to give it one last try. So he cast his net into the waters of the river and slowly pulled it up. There was something there, but it wasn't a fish... it looked more like a piece of wood. When he freed it from the meshes of the net, the piece of wood turned out to be a statue of the Virgin Mary, unfortunately minus its head. Joao threw the net back into the water and this time, pulling it up, he found another piece of rounded wood entangled in it that looked just like the head of the same statue: he tried to put the two pieces together and realized that they matched perfectly. As if obeying an impulse, Joao Alves threw the net back into the water and, when he tried to pull it up, he realized he couldn't do it, because it was full of fish. His companions threw cast nets into the water in turn and the fishing that day was really abundant.

A mother sees the needs of her children, Mary saw the needs of the three fishermen and went to their rescue. Her children gave her all the love and dignity that can be given to a mother: they put the two pieces of the statue back together, placed it on a hut and turned it into a shrine. From the top of the hut, Our Lady of Aparecida – which means She Appeared – saved one of her slave sons who was running away from his masters: she saw his suffering and restored his dignity. And

today, that hut is the largest Marian shrine in the world and bears the name of the Basilica of Our Lady of Aparecida.

Mary, the Mother who sees

You, who have seen the suffering of your abused children, starting with the disciples, have stood beside your poorest and most persecuted children. You drew close to them and revealed yourself to them.

Do not hide from a mother's gaze: she also sees into your most hidden desires and needs.

The Rector Major's words

The Virgin Mary, dignity and social justice

The Virgin Mary is a mirror of fully realised human dignity, silent but powerful and inspiring for a just sense of social life. Reflecting on the figure of Mary in relation to these themes reveals a profound and surprisingly relevant perspective.

Let us look to Mary, the woman full of dignity, as a gift that helps us today to see her original purity, which does not place her on an inaccessible pedestal but reveals Mary in the fullness of that dignity to which we all feel a little attracted, called.

Contemplating Mary, we see shining forth the beauty and nobility, precisely the dignity of the human being, created in the image and likeness of God, free from the game of sin, fully open to divine love, a humanity that is not lost in details, in superficial things.

We can say that Mary's free and conscious 'yes' is the gesture of self-determination that elevates Mary to the level of God's will, entering in some way into God's logic. Her humility then makes her even freer, far from being diminished by humility. Mary's humility becomes an awareness of the true greatness that comes from God.

Here, then, is this dignity that Mary helps us to see how we are living it in our daily lives. The theme of social justice

may seem less explicit, but from a careful contemplative reading of the Gospel, especially the Magnificat, we can grasp, feel and encounter the revolutionary spirit that proclaims the overthrow of the powerful from their thrones and the raising up of the humble, that is, the reversal of worldly logic and God's privileged attention to the poor and hungry. These words flow from a humble heart, filled with the Holy Spirit. We can say that they are a manifesto of social justice ante litteram, a foretaste of the kingdom of God, where the last will be first.

Let us contemplate Mary so that we may feel attracted to this dignity that is not limited to closing in on itself but is a dignity that in the Magnificat challenges us not to remain closed in our own logic but to become open, praising God and seeking to live the gift we have received for the good of humanity, with dignity for the good of the poor and for the good of those who are rejected by society.

The prayer of an unfaithful child

As for us, do we hide or do we say everything like children do?

The prayer of a child who is afraid

Mary, you who show yourself to those who are able to see...
make my heart capable of restoring dignity.

In a time of trial, look at my shortcomings and make them whole.

In a time of fatigue, look at my weaknesses and heal them.

In a time of waiting, look at my impatience and heal it.

So that when I look at my brothers and sisters I can look at their shortcomings and make them whole,
see their weaknesses and heal them, feel their impatience and heal it.

Because nothing cares like love and no one is as strong as a mother seeking justice for her children.

And then I too, Mother, will stop at the foot of the hut, look with confident eyes at your image and pray for the dignity of

all your children.

Hail Mary...

Day 8 – Our Lady of Banneaux

Being Children – Gentleness and everyday life

Children trust, children rely on others. And a mother is close by, always. You see her even if she is not there.

As for us, are we able to see her?

Little Marietta of Banneaux

On January 18, Marietta was in the garden, praying the rosary. Mary came and took her to a small spring on the edge of the forest, where she said, "This spring is for me", and invited the little girl to immerse her hand and the rosary in it. Her father and two other people followed Marietta in all her gestures and words with indescribable amazement. And that same evening the first to be conquered by Banneaux's grace was Marietta's father, who ran to go to confession and receive the Eucharist: he had not been to confession since his first communion.

On January 19, Marietta asked, "Ma'am, who are you?" "I am the Virgin of the poor."

At the spring, she added, "This spring is for me, for all the nations, for the sick. I come to console them!"

Marietta was a normal girl who lived her days like all of us, like our children, our grandchildren. Hers was a small and unknown village. She prayed that she would stay close to God. She prayed to her Heavenly Mother to keep the bond with her alive. **And Mary spoke to her gently, in a place familiar to her.** She would appear to her several times, confide secrets to her and tell her to pray for the conversion of the world: this was a strong message of hope for Marietta. All children are embraced and consoled by their Mother, all the sweetness that Marietta found in the "Gentle Lady" she passed on to the world. And from this encounter came a great chain of love and

spirituality that found its fulfilment in the Shrine of Our Lady of Banneaux.

Mary, the Mother who stays beside us

You who remained beside your children without ever losing a single one, have enlightened the daily path of the simplest people. You drew close to them and revealed yourself to them.

Abandon yourself into Mary's embrace: do not be afraid, she will comfort you.

The Rector Major's words

The Virgin Mary, education and love

The Virgin Mary is an incomparable teacher of education, because she is an inexhaustible source of love, and those who love educate, truly educate those they love.

Reflecting on the figure of Mary in relation to these two pillars of human and spiritual growth, we have here an example to contemplate, to take seriously, to incorporate into our daily choices.

The education that emanates from Mary is not made up of precepts or formal teachings but is manifested through her example of life. A contemplative silence that speaks, her obedience to God's will, both humble and great, her profound humanity.

Here, the first educational aspect that Mary communicates to us is that of listening.

Listening to the word of God, listening to that God who is always there to help us, to accompany us. Mary keeps this in her heart, meditates on it carefully, encourages attentive listening to the word of God and, in the same way, to the needs of others. Mary teaches us that humility which does not choose to remain detached and passive, but rather the humility which, while recognising our smallness before God's greatness, places us as people who are active in his service. Our hearts are open to truly be those who accompany, living the plan that God has for us.

Mary is an example that helps us to let ourselves be educated by faith. She teaches us perseverance, remaining steadfast in love for Jesus, even at the foot of the cross.

Education and love. Behold, Mary's love is the beating heart of her existence. It continues to be for us. Every time we draw close to Mary, we feel this maternal love that extends to all of us. It is a love for Jesus that becomes a love for humanity. Mary's heart opens with the infinite tenderness that she receives from God, which she communicates to Jesus and to her spiritual children.

Let us ask the Lord that in contemplating Mary's love, which is a love that educates, we may allow ourselves to be moved to overcome our selfishness and our closed attitudes and to open ourselves to others. In Mary, we see a woman who educates with love and who loves with a love that is educational. Let us ask the Lord to give us the gift of love, which is the gift of his love, which in turn is a love that purifies us, sustains us and makes us grow, so that our example may truly be an example that communicates love and, by communicating love, we may allow ourselves to be educated by her and let her help us so that our example may also educate others.

The prayer of an unfaithful child

As for us, are we able to abandon ourselves as children do?

The prayer of a child of our times

Mary, you who show yourself to those who are able to see...
make my heart gentle and docile.

Who will put me back together after breaking under the weight
of the crosses I carry?

Who will bring light back to my eyes after seeing the ruins of
human cruelty?

Who will alleviate the sufferings of my soul, after the
mistakes I have made on my journey?

Mother, only you can comfort me.

Hold me tight and keep me with you to keep me from falling
apart.

Let my soul rest in you and find peace like a child in its mother's arms.

Hail Mary...

Day 9 – Mary Help of Christians

Being Children – Building and dreaming

Children trust, children rely on others. And a mother is close by, always. You see her even if she is not there.

As for us, are we able to see her?

Little John Bosco

At the age of 9, I had a dream. All my life this remained deeply impressed on my mind. In this dream I seemed to be near my home in a very large yard. A crowd of children were playing there. Some were laughing, some were playing games, and quite a few were swearing. When I heard these evil words, I jumped immediately amongst them, and tried to stop them by using my words and my fists. At that moment, a dignified man appeared, a nobly-dressed adult.

"You will have to win these friends of yours not by blows but by gentleness and love."

"Who are you, ordering me to do the impossible?"

"Precisely because it seems impossible to you, you must make it possible through obedience and the acquisition of knowledge."

"Where, by what means can I acquire knowledge?"

"I will give you a teacher. Under her guidance you can become wise. Without her all wisdom is foolishness."

At that moment I saw a lady of stately appearance standing beside him. She was wearing a mantle that sparkled all over as though covered with bright stars.

"This is the field of your work. Make yourself humble, strong and energetic. And what you will see happening to these animals in a moment is what you must do for my children.

I looked around again and where before I had seen wild animals, I now saw gentle lambs. They were all jumping and

bleating as if to welcome that man and lady. At that point, still dreaming, I began crying. I begged the lady to speak so that I could understand her, because I did not know what all this could mean. She then placed her hand on my head and said, "In good time you will understand everything."

Mary guided and accompanied young John Bosco throughout his life and mission. He, a child, thus discovered his vocation from a dream. He would not understand it but he would let himself be guided. He would not understand it for many years but in the end he would be aware that "she did everything". And his mother, both the earthly and the heavenly one, would be the central figure in the life of this son who would provide bread for his children. And after meeting Mary in his dreams, John Bosco, by then a priest, would build a Shrine to Our Lady so that all her children can rely on her. And he would dedicate it to Mary Help of Christians, because she had been his safe haven, his constant help. Thus, all those who enter the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Turin are taken under the protective mantle of Mary who becomes their guide.

Mary, a Mother who accompanies/guides

You who accompanied your son Jesus throughout his journey, offered yourself as a guide to those who listened to you with the enthusiasm that only children can have. You drew close to them and revealed yourself to them.

Let yourself be accompanied: your Mother will always be by your side to show you the way.

The Rector Major's words

The Virgin Mary, our help in conversion

The Virgin Mary is a powerful and silent help on our journey of growth.

It is a journey that constantly needs to free itself from whatever blocks its growth. It is a journey that must

continually renew itself, so as not to turn back or stop in the dark corners of our existence. This is conversion.

Mary's presence is a beacon of hope, a constant invitation for us to continue walking towards God, helping our hearts to remain focused on God and his love. Reflecting on Mary, on her role, means discovering Mary who does not impose, who does not judge, but rather supports, encourages, with her humility, with her maternal love, helping our hearts to remain close to her so that we may draw ever closer to her son Jesus, who is the way, the truth and the life.

Mary's 'yes' at the Annunciation, which opens up the history of salvation to humanity, remains valid for us too. Her intercession at the Wedding at Cana supports those who find themselves in unexpected, unprecedented situations. Mary is a model of continuous conversion. Her life, a life of the Immaculate, was a gradual adherence to God's will, a journey of faith that led her through joys and sorrows, culminating in the sacrifice of Calvary.

Mary's perseverance in following Jesus becomes an invitation for us to live this continuous closeness, this inner transformation, which we know well is a gradual process, but one that requires constancy, humility and trust in God's grace.

Mary helps us in our conversion through her attentive and focused listening to the Word of God. Listening that helps us find the strength to abandon the ways of sin, because we recognise the strength and beauty of walking towards God. Let us turn to Mary with filial trust, because this means that, while recognising our frailties, our sins and our faults, we want to foster those desires for change. A change of heart that seeks to let itself be accompanied by the maternal heart of Mary. And in Mary, let us find that precious help to discern the false promises of the world and rediscover the beauty and truth of the Gospel. May Mary, the Help of Christians, be for all of us a constant help in discovering the beauty of the Gospel. And in accepting to walk towards goodness, the greatness of God's word, alive in our hearts so

that we can communicate it to others.

The prayer of an unfaithful child

As for us, are we capable of being taken by the hand like children?

The prayer of a motionless child

Mary, you who reveal yourself to those who are able to see...
make my heart capable of dreaming and building.

I who do not let anyone else help me.

I who get discouraged, lose patience and never believe I have
built anything.

I who always believe I am a failure.

Today I want to be a son or daughter who can give you their
hand, my Mother

to be accompanied on life's paths.

Show me my field,

show me my dream

and make sure that in the end I too can understand everything
and recognise that you were there
in my life.

Hail Mary...

Final Address of the Rector Major at the conclusion of the General Chapter 29

Dear confreres,

We have come to the end of this experience of the
29th General Chapter with hearts filled with joy and gratitude

for all that we have been able to experience, share and plan. The gift of the presence of the Spirit of God that we have prayed for daily in morning prayer as well as during our work through conversation in the Spirit, has been the central strength of the General Chapter experience. We asked that the Spirit play a leading role, and this has been given to us abundantly.

The celebration of any General Chapter is like a milestone in the life of every religious congregation. This also applies to us, to our beloved Salesian Congregation. It is a moment that gives continuity to the journey from Valdocco that continues to be experienced with commitment and carried forward with zeal and determination in various parts of the world.

We have come to the end of this General Chapter with the approval of a Final Document that will serve as a chart to navigate the next six years – 2025-2031. We will see and feel the value of this Final Document to the extent that we are able to maintain the same dedication to listening, the same care to letting ourselves be accompanied by the Holy Spirit who has marked these weeks, once this Salesian Pentecost experience has concluded.

Since the beginning, when the Rector Major Fr Angel Fernández Arttime made the **Letter of Convocation of the 29th General Chapter** public on 24 September 2023, in **AGC 441**, the motivations that were to guide the Pre-Chapter work were clear and subsequently, the work of the General Chapter itself. The Rector Major wrote that,

The chosen theme is the result of a rich and profound reflection that we have carried out in the General Council on the basis of the answers received from the Provinces and the vision that we have of the Congregation at this time. We were pleasantly surprised by the great convergence and harmony we found in the many contributions from the Provinces, which had a lot to do with the reality we see in the Congregation, with the path of fidelity that exists in many sectors and also with

present challenges. (AGC 441)

The process of listening to the provinces that led to the identification of the theme for this General Chapter is already a clear indication of a listening methodology. In light of what we have experienced in recent weeks, the value of the listening process is confirmed. The way in which we first identified and then interpreted the challenges that the Congregation is determined to face has highlighted our typical Salesian atmosphere, a family spirit which does not seek to avoid challenges, which does not try to standardise thinking, but which does everything possible to arrive at that spirit of communion where each of us can recognise the way to be Don Bosco today.

The focal point of the challenges identified has to do with the fact that "it refers to the centrality of God (as Trinity) and Jesus Christ as Lord of our lives, without ever forgetting young people and our commitment to them" (ACG 441). The way the General Chapter developed testifies not only to the fact that we have the ability to identify challenges but that we have also found ways to

bring out agreement and unity, recognising and treasuring the fact that we are in different continents and contexts, different cultures and languages. What is more, this atmosphere confirms that when we look at reality with Don Bosco's eyes and hear today, when we are truly passionate about Christ and dedicated to young people, then we discover that this diversity becomes a wealth, that journeying together is beautiful even if it is tiring, that together we can face challenges.

In a world fragmented by wars, conflicts and depersonalising ideologies; in a world marked by economic and political thinking and models that remove the active role that young people can play, our presence is a sign, a "sacrament" of hope. Young people, regardless of skin colour, religious or ethnic affiliation, ask us to put forward proposals and places of hope. They are the sons and daughters of God who

expect us to be humble servants.

A second point that was confirmed and reaffirmed by this General Chapter is the shared conviction that "if fidelity and prophecy were lacking in our Congregation, we would be like the light that does not shine and the salt that does not give flavour" (AGC 441). The point here is not so much whether we want to be more authentic or not, but the very fact that this is the only path we have and it is the one that has been strongly reiterated here over these weeks: to grow in authenticity!

The courage shown during some moments of the General Chapter is an excellent premise for the courage that will be asked of us in the future on other issues that came out of this General Chapter. I am sure that this courage here has found fertile ground, a healthy and promising ecosystem that holds great promise for the future. Having courage means not letting fear have the last word. The parable of the talents clearly teaches us this. The Lord has given us only one talent: the Salesian charism, concentrated in the Preventive System. Each of us will be asked what we have done with this talent. Together, we are called to make it bear fruit in challenging, new and unprecedented contexts. We have no reason to bury it. We have so many reasons, so many cries from young people who urge us to "go out" to sow hope. Don Bosco already experienced this courageous step, filled with conviction, in his time, and today he asks us to experience it like he did and with him.

I would like to comment on some points that are already found in the Final Document and which I believe can serve as pointers to encourage us on the journey over the next six years.

1. Personal conversion

Our journey as a Salesian Congregation depends on the personal, intimate and profound choices that each of us decides to make. Broadening the background against which we

need to reflect on the theme of personal conversion, it is important to remember how, over these years after the Second Vatican Council, the Congregation has embarked on a journey of spiritual, charismatic and pastoral reflection that has been masterfully commented on by Fr Pascual in his weekly talks. This interpretation and contribution further enriches the important reflection that the Rector Major Fr Egidio Viganó left us in his last letter to the Congregation: *Reading the Founder's Charism at the Present Day* (AGC 352, 1995). If today we talk about a "change of era", Fr Viganó wrote in 1995:

The reinterpretation of our Founder's charism has kept us busy for the last thirty years, And in our task we have been helped by two great beacons of light: the first is the Second Vatican Council, and the second the epoch-making acceleration of history at the present time." (AGC 352, 1995).

I am referring to this journey of the Congregation with its riches and heritage because the matter of personal conversion is the space where this journey of the Congregation finds its confirmation and further impetus. Personal conversion is not an intimate, self-referential affair. This is not a call that only touches me in a way that is detached from everything and everyone. Personal conversion is that special experience from which a renewed pastoral care will emerge. We can see the Congregation's journey because it finds its starting point in the heart of each one of us. It is from here that we can notice the continuous and convinced pastoral renewal. Pope Francis condenses this urgent cry in a single sentence: "The Church's closeness to Jesus is part of a common journey; "communion and mission are profoundly interconnected" (*Christifideles laici* no.32 , *Evangelii Gaudium* 23).

This leads us to discover that when we are insisting on personal conversion we must be careful not to fall into an intimist interpretation of spiritual experience on the one hand, and, not underestimating what is the foundation of every pastoral journey on the other.

In this call of renewed passion for Jesus, I invite every Salesian and every community to take the concrete choices and commitments that as a General Chapter we

believed to be urgent for a more authentic educative and pastoral witness seriously. We believe that we cannot grow pastorally without this attitude of listening to the Word of God. We recognise that the various pastoral commitments we have, the ever-increasing needs that confront us and that testify to unceasing poverty, risk taking away the necessary time to "be with him." We already find this challenge at the very beginning of our Congregation. It is about having clear priorities that strengthen our spiritual and charismatic backbone that gives soul and credibility to our mission

Fr Alberto Caviglia, when commenting on the topic of "Salesian Spirituality" in his *Conferences on the Salesian Spirit* writes:

What was most astonishing for those who studied Don Bosco during the canonisation process was the discovery of his incredible work of building the inner man.

Cardinal Salotti... in reference to the study he was then engaged in, told the Holy Father that "in studying the voluminous Turin processes, more than the external grandeur of his colossal work, [he] was struck by the inner life of the spirit, from which the whole prodigious apostolate of Ven. Don Bosco originated and was nourished."

Many are only familiar with the external work that seems so impressive, but are largely ignorant of the wise, sublime edifice of Christian perfection that he had patiently erected in his soul by practising the virtue of his state every day, every hour.

Dear brothers, here we have our Don Bosco. It is this Don Bosco that we are called to discover today:

We study and imitate him, admiring in him a splendid blending

of nature and grace. He was deeply human, rich in the qualities of his people, open to the realities of this earth; and he was just as deeply the man of God, filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit and living "as though he saw him who is invisible."

These two aspects combined to create a closely-knit life project, the service of the young. He realized his aim with firmness, constancy and the sensitivity of a generous heart, in the midst of difficulties and fatigue. "He took no step, he said no word, he took up no task that was not directed to the saving of the young... Truly the only concern of his heart was for souls" (C 21).

I would like to recall here an invitation from Mother Teresa to her sisters a few years before her death. Her dedication and that of her sisters to the poor is known to everyone. However, it is good for us to hear these words of hers written to her sisters: However, it is good for us to listen to these words of hers written to her sisters:

Until you can hear Jesus in the silence of your heart, you will not be able to hear him say "I am thirsty" in the hearts of the poor. Never give up this intimate and daily contact with Jesus as a living and real person, not just as an idea ("Until you can hear Jesus in the silence of your own heart, you will not be able to hear Him saying, "I thirst" in the hearts of the poor. Never give up this daily intimate contact with Jesus as the real living person – not just the idea", in <https://catholiceducation.org/en/religion-and-philosophy/the-fulfillment-jesus-wants-for-us.html>).

Only by listening in the depths of our hearts to those who call us to follow him, Jesus Christ, can we truly listen with an authentic heart to those who call us to serve them. If the radical motivation of our being servants does not find its roots in the person of Christ, the alternative is that our motivations are nourished by the soil of our ego.

And the consequence is that then our own pastoral action ends up inflating the same ego. The urgency of recovering the mystical space, the sacred ground of the encounter with God, a ground in which we have to take off the sandals of our certainties and our ways of interpreting reality with its challenges over these weeks, has been repeated many times and in various ways.

Dear brothers, here we have the first step. Here we give proof if we really want to be authentic sons of Don Bosco. Here we prove if we really love and imitate Don Bosco.

2. Getting to know Don Bosco not only loving Don Bosco

We are aware that one of the central challenges we have as Salesians is to communicate the good news through our witness and through our educative and pastoral proposals in a culture that is undergoing radical change. While in the West we talk about the indifference to religious proposal that is the result of the challenge of secularisation, we notice how the challenge takes other forms in other continents, first of all in the shift towards a globalised culture that radically shifts the scale of values and lifestyles. In a fluid and hyper-connected world, what we knew yesterday has radically changed today: in short, we are dealing here with the oft-mentioned question of the change of epoch.

With this change affects every area, it is positive to see how, since the SCG (1972), the Congregation has been on a continuous journey, until today, rethinking and reflecting on its educative and pastoral proposal. It is a process that responds to the question "what would Don Bosco do today, in a secularised and globalised culture like ours?"

Throughout this process we recognise how, from its very origins, the beauty and strength of the Salesian charism lies precisely in its inner capacity to dialogue with the history of the young people we are called to encounter in every age. What we have been contemplating at Valdocco, in this Salesian holy land, is the breath of the Spirit that guided Don Bosco and that we recognise as continuing to guide

us today. The Constitutions begin precisely with this foundational and fundamental certainty:

“Through the motherly intervention of Mary, the Holy Spirit raised up St John Bosco to contribute to the salvation of youth ...

The Spirit formed within him the heart of a father and teacher, capable of total self-giving. “I have promised God that until my dying breath I would dedicate myself entirely to my poor boys.”

To ensure the continuation of this mission, the Spirit inspired him to initiate various apostolic endeavours, first among them our Society.

The Church has acknowledged God’s hand in this, especially by approving our Constitutions and by proclaiming our Founder a saint.

From this active presence of the Holy Spirit we draw strength for our fidelity and support for our hope. (C 1).

The Salesian charism contains an innate invitation to place ourselves before young people in the same way that Don Bosco placed himself before Bartholomew Garelli... “his friend”!

All this sounds very easy to say, and it comes across as a friendly exhortation. In reality, it conceals within itself an urgent invitation to us, the sons of Don Bosco, to re-present the Salesian charism in a suitable and meaningful way in today’s world, wherever we may find ourselves. However, there is an essential condition that allows us to undertake this journey: a true and profound knowledge of Don Bosco. We cannot say that we truly “love” Don Bosco if we are not seriously committed to “knowing” Don Bosco.

Often the risk is to settle with a knowledge of Don Bosco that fails to connect with current challenges. With a superficial knowledge of Don Bosco, we are really poor in the charismatic baggage that makes us his authentic sons.

Without knowing Don Bosco, we cannot and do not end up embodying Don Bosco in the cultures where we are. All our efforts in this poverty of charismatic knowledge results only in charismatic cosmetic operations, which in the end are a betrayal of Don Bosco's very legacy.

If we want the Salesian charism to be capable of engaging in dialogue with today's culture, today's cultures, we must continually deepen our understanding of it, both in itself and in light of the ever-changing conditions in which we live. The foundation we received at the beginning of our initial formation, if not seriously deepened today, is not sufficient – it is simply useless if not even harmful.

In this direction, the Congregation has made, and continues to make, a tremendous effort to reread the life of Don Bosco and the Salesian charism in light of the current social and cultural conditions throughout the world. It is a legacy we have, but we run the risk of not knowing it because we fail to study it as it deserves. The loss of memory risks not only makes us lose touch with the treasure we have, but also risks making us believe that this treasure does not exist. And this would be really tragic not so much and only for us Salesians, but for those crowds of young people who are waiting for us.

The urgency of this deeper understanding is not merely intellectual in nature, but responds to the thirst that exists for a serious charismatic formation of the laity in our Educative and Pastoral Communities (EPCs). The Final Document deals with this issue often and systematically. The lay people who today share in the Salesian mission with us are individuals eager for a clearer and more meaningfully Salesian formation proposal. We cannot truly experience these spaces of educational and pastoral convergence if our language and the way we communicate the charism lack the depth of understanding and the proper preparation needed to spark curiosity and capture the attention of those who share the Salesian mission with us.

It is not enough to say that we love Don Bosco.

True “love” for Don Bosco implies the commitment to know and study him, not only in the light of his time, but also in the light of the great potential of his relevance in the light of our time. The Rector Major, Fr Pascual Chávez, made an invitation to the entire Congregation and the Salesian Family for the three years that preceded the “Bicentenary of the birth of Don Bosco 1815-2013”. (Fr Pascual Chávez, *Strenna* 2012, “*Let us make the young our life’s mission by coming to know and imitate Don Bosco*” [AGC 412]) It is an invitation that is more relevant than ever. This General Chapter is a call and an opportunity to strengthen the historical, pedagogical, and spiritual knowledge of our Father and Teacher.

We recognise dear brothers, that at this point this issue connects with the previous one – personal conversion. If we do not know Don Bosco and if we do not study him, we cannot understand the dynamics and efforts of his spiritual journey and consequently the roots of his pastoral choices. We end up loving him only superficially, without the true ability to imitate him as a profoundly holy man. Above all, it will be impossible to inculturate his charism today in different contexts and situations. Only by strengthening our charismatic identity will we be able to offer the Church and Society a credible witness and a meaningful and relevant educative and pastoral proposal to young people.

3. The journey continues

In this third part, I would like to encourage the entire Congregation to keep alive the focus on certain areas where, through the various **Resolutions** and concrete commitments, we have sought to give a sign of continuity.

The area of animation and coordination of marginalisation and youth distress has been an area in which the Congregation has been very committed over recent decades. I believe that the response by the provinces to growing poverty is a prophetic sign that sets us apart and finds all of us determined to continue to strengthen the Salesian

response for the poorest.

The provinces' efforts in the area of **promoting safe environments** continue to find a growing and professional response in the provinces. The effort in this area is a testimony that this is the right direction to affirm the commitment to the dignity of all, especially the most vulnerable.

The area of integral ecology emerges as a call for greater educative and pastoral work. The growth of attention in educative and pastoral communities to environmental issues requires a systematic commitment to promote a change in mentality. The various proposals for formation in this area found in the Congregation should be acknowledged and accompanied.

There are also two areas that I would like to invite the Congregation to consider carefully for the coming years. They are part of a broader perspective of the Congregation's efforts. I believe these are two areas will have substantial consequences for our educative and pastoral processes.

3.1 Artificial intelligence – a real mission in an artificial world

As Salesians of Don Bosco, we are called to walk with young people in every environment in which they live and grow, even in the vast and complex digital world. Today, Artificial Intelligence (AI) presents itself as a revolutionary innovation that can shape the way people learn, communicate and build relationships. However, as revolutionary as it may be, AI remains exactly that: artificial. Our ministry, rooted in authentic human connection and guided by the Preventive System, is profoundly real. Artificial intelligence can assist us, but it cannot love like we do. It can organise, analyse and teach in new ways, but it can never replace the relational and pastoral touch that defines our Salesian mission.

Don Bosco was a visionary who was not afraid of

innovation, both at the ecclesial level and at the educational, cultural and social levels. When this innovation served the good of young people, Don Bosco went ahead with astonishing speed. He took advantage of the press, new educational methods and workshops to lift young people up and prepare them for life. If he were among us today, he would undoubtedly look at AI with a critical and creative eye. He would see it not as an end but as a means, a tool to amplify pastoral effectiveness without losing sight of the human person at the centre.

Artificial Intelligence is not just a tool: it is part of our mission as Salesians living in the digital age. The virtual world is no longer a separate space but an integral part of young people's daily lives. AI can help us respond to their needs more efficiently and creatively, offering personalised learning paths, virtual mentorship, and platforms that foster meaningful connections.

In this sense, artificial intelligence becomes both a *tool* and a *mission*, as it helps us reach young people where they are, often immersed in the digital world. While embracing AI, we need to recognise that it is just one aspect of a larger reality that encompasses social media, virtual communities, digital storytelling, and much more. Together, these elements form a new pastoral frontier that challenges us to be present and proactive. Our mission is not simply to use technology, but to *evangelise the digital* world, bringing the gospel into spaces where it might otherwise be absent.

Our response to AI and digital challenges must be rooted in the Salesian spirit of optimism and proactive engagement. Let us continue to walk with young people, even in the vast digital world, with hearts full of love because they are passionate about Christ and rooted in the charism of Don Bosco. The future is bright when technology is at the service of humanity and when the digital presence is full of authentic Salesian warmth and pastoral commitment. Let us embrace this new challenge, confident that the spirit of Don Bosco will guide us in every new opportunity.

3.2 The Pontifical Salesian University

The Pontifical Salesian University (UPS) is the University of the Salesian Congregation, of all of us. It is a structure of great and strategic importance for the Congregation. Its mission is to bring the charism into dialogue with culture, the energy of Don Bosco's educative and pastoral experience with academic research, so as to develop a high-profile formation proposal at the service of the Congregation, the Church and society.

From the outset, our University has played an irreplaceable role in the formation of many confreres for roles of animation and government and still performs this valuable task. In an era characterised by widespread disorientation about the grammar of the human being and the meaning of existence, by the disintegration of the social bond and the fragmentation of religious experience, by international crises and migratory phenomena, a Congregation like ours is urgently called to face the educative and pastoral mission by making use of the solid intellectual resources that are developed within a university.

As Rector Major and as Grand Chancellor of UPS, I would like to reiterate that the two fundamental priorities for the University of the Congregation are *the formation of educators and pastors, Salesians and laity, at the service of young people* and the cultural – historical, pedagogical and theological – deepening of the charism. Around these two pillars, which require interdisciplinary dialogue and intercultural attention, the UPS is called upon to develop its commitment to research, teaching and the passing on of knowledge. I am therefore pleased that in view of the 150th anniversary of Don Bosco's text on the Preventive System, a serious research project has been launched in collaboration with the FMA's "Auxilium" Faculty to focus on the original inspiration of Don Bosco's educational practice and to examine how it inspires pedagogical and pastoral practices today in different contexts and cultures.

The governance and animation of the Congregation

and the Salesian Family will certainly benefit from the cultural work of the University, just as academic study will receive valuable nourishment by maintaining a close connection with the life of the Congregation and its daily service to the poorest youth around the world.

3.3 150 years – the journey continues

We are called to give thanks and praise to God in this jubilee year of hope because during this year we remember the missionary commitment of Don Bosco which arrived at a very significant moment of development in 1875. The reflection that the Vicar of the Rector Major, Fr Stefano Martoglio, offered us in *Strenna* 2025 reminds us of the central theme of the 150th anniversary of Don Bosco's first missionary expedition: ***recognising, rethinking*** and ***relaunching***.

In the light of the 29th General Chapter that we are concluding, it helps us to place this invitation in the six-year period ahead of us. We are called to be ***grateful*** because "it makes the fatherly nature of every beautiful accomplishment evident. Without recognition, gratitude, there is no capacity to accept."

To gratitude we add the duty to ***rethink*** our fidelity, because "fidelity involves the ability to change", in obedience towards a vision that comes from God and from interpreting the 'signs of the times... Rethinking, then, becomes a generative act in which faith and life come together; a moment in which to ask ourselves: what do you want to tell us Lord?"

Finally, the courage to ***re-launch***, to start over again every day. As we are doing in these days, we look far ahead, "welcoming new challenges, relaunching the mission with hope. (Because the) Mission is to bring the hope of Christ with clear and conscious awareness, linked to faith."

4. Conclusion

At the end of this concluding address I would like to present a reflection by **Tomas HALIK**, taken from his book

The Afternoon of Christianity was The author, in the last chapter of the book entitled “The Society of the Way”, presents **four ecclesiological concepts**.

I believe that these **four ecclesiological concepts can help us to positively interpret the great pastoral opportunities that await us**. I offer this reflection with the understanding that what the author proposes is intimately related to the heart of Salesian charism. It is striking and surprising that the more we venture into a charismatic, pastoral as well as pedagogical and cultural interpretation of the current reality, the more the conviction is confirmed that our charism provides us with a solid basis so that the various processes that we are accompanying find their rightful place in a world where young people are waiting for hope, joy and optimism to be offered to them. It is good that we recognise with great humility but at the same time with a great sense of responsibility how Don Bosco’s charism continues to provide guidelines today, not only for us, but for the whole Church.

*4.1 Church as the people of God on pilgrimage through history. This image outlines a Church on the move and grappling with incessant change. God moulds the Church throughout history, reveals himself to her through history, and imparts his teachings to her through historical events. God is in history (HALÍK, Tomáš, *Afternoon of Christianity*, p. 229)*

Our call to be educators and pastors consists precisely in walking with the flock in this history, in this constantly changing society. Our **presence in the various “courtyards of people’s lives”** is the sacramental presence of a God who wants to meet those who seek him without knowing it. In this context, “**The sacrament of presence**” acquires an inestimable value for us because it is intertwined with the historical events of our young people and of all those who turn to us in the various expressions of the Salesian mission – the **COURTYARD** or playground.

4.2 The ‘school’ is the second vision of the Church – school

of life and school of wisdom. We live in an era in which, in the public space of many European countries, neither a traditional religion nor atheism dominates, but rather agnosticism, apathy and religious illiteracy prevail... In this era it is urgently necessary that Christian society is transformed into a 'school' following the original ideal of medieval universities, which arose as a community of teachers and pupils, a community of life, prayer and teaching (HALÍK, Tomáš, Afternoon of Christianity, pp. 231-232).

Retracing Don Bosco's educative and pastoral project from its origins, we discover how this second proposal directly touches the experience we currently offer to our young people: **school and vocational training**. They are educational paths which are an essential tool for giving life to an integral process where culture and faith meet. For us today, this space is an excellent opportunity where we can witness to the good news in the human and fraternal, educational and pastoral encounter with so many people and, above all, with so many children and young people who feel they are accompanied toward a dignified future. The educational experience for us pastors is a lifestyle that communicates wisdom and values in a context that encounters and goes beyond resistance and that dissolves indifference through empathy and closeness. Walking together promotes a space of integral growth inspired by the wisdom and values of the Gospel – the **SCHOOL**.

4.3 The Church as a field hospital... for too long, face to face with the diseases of society, the Church has limited itself to morality; now it is faced with the task of rediscovering and applying the therapeutic potential of faith. The diagnostic mission should be carried out by the discipline which I have suggested be called kairology – the art of reading and interpreting the signs of the times, the theological hermeneutics of the facts of society and culture. Kairology should devote its attention to times of crisis and changing

cultural paradigms. It should see them as part of a 'pedagogy of God', as the opportune time to deepen the reflection on the faith and renew its practice. In a certain sense, kairology develops the method of spiritual discernment, which is an important component of the spirituality of Saint Ignatius and his disciples; it applies this method when it delves into and evaluates the current state of the world and our tasks within it (HALÍK, Tomáš, Afternoon of Christianity, pp. 233-234).

This third ecclesiological criterion goes to the heart of the Salesian approach. We are not present in the lives of children and young people to condemn them. **We make ourselves available to offer them a healthy space of (ecclesial) communion, enlightened by the presence of a merciful God who places no conditions on anyone. We develop and communicate our various pastoral proposals precisely with this perspective of facilitating the encounter of young people with a spiritual proposal capable of enlightening the times in which they live, of offering them hope for the future.** The proposal of the person of Jesus Christ is not the result of sterile confessionalism or blind proselytism, but the discovery of a relationship with a person who offers unconditional love to all. Our testimony, and that of all those who live the educational and pastoral experience as **community**, is the most eloquent sign and the most credible message of the values we wish to communicate in order to share them – the **CHURCH**.

4.4 The fourth model of the Church... it is necessary that the Church establish spiritual centres, places of adoration and contemplation, but also of encounter and dialogue, where it is possible to share the experience of faith. Many Christians are concerned that in a large number of countries the network of parishes, which was formed a few centuries ago in a completely different socio-cultural and pastoral situation and within a different interpretation of the Church's self, is fraying (HALÍK, Tomáš, Afternoon of Christianity, pp. 236-237).

The fourth concept is that of a “home” capable of communicating **welcome, listening and accompaniment**. A “home” in which the human dimension of each individual’s story is recognised and, at the same time, the possibility is offered to allow this humanity to reach its maturity. Don Bosco rightly calls “home” the place where the community lives its call because, by welcoming our children and young people, it is able to ensure the conditions and pastoral proposals necessary for this humanity to grow in an integral way. Each of our communities, each “house” or home is called to be a witness to the originality of the Valdocco experience: a “home” that intersects with the history of our young people, offering them a dignified future – the **HOME**.

In our Constitutions, Art. 40 *we find the synthesis of all these “four ecclesiological concepts”*. It is a synthesis that serves as an invitation and also as an encouragement for the present and the future of our educative and pastoral communities, of our provinces, of our beloved Salesian Congregation:

Don Bosco’s Oratory a permanent criterion

Don Bosco lived a pastoral experience in his first Oratory which serves as a model; it was for the youngsters a home that welcomed, a parish that evangelized, a school that prepared them for life, and a playground where friends could meet and enjoy themselves.

As we carry out our mission today, the Valdocco experience is still the lasting criterion for discernment and renewal in all our activities and works.

Thank you.

Rome, April 12, 2025

donbosco.info: a Salesian search engine

We present the new donbosco.info platform, which is a Salesian search engine designed to make it easier to consult documents related to the charism of Don Bosco. Created to support the Salesian Bulletin Online, it overcomes the limitations of traditional archiving systems, which are often unable to intercept all occurrences of words. This solution integrates dedicated hardware and specially developed software, also offering a reading function. The deliberately simple web interface allows you to navigate through thousands of documents in different languages, with the ability to filter results by folder, title, author, or year. Thanks to the OCR scanning of PDF documents, the system identifies the text even when it is not perfect, and adopts strategies to ignore punctuation and special characters. The contents, rich in historical and educational material, aim to spread the Salesian message in a widespread manner. With free uploading for documents, continuous enrichment of the platform is encouraged, improving the search.

As part of the work for the drafting of the Salesian Bulletin Online, it was necessary to create various support tools, including a dedicated search engine.

This search engine was conceived taking into account the limitations currently present in the various Salesian resources available online. Many sites offer archiving systems with search functionality, but often fail to locate all occurrences of words, due to technical limitations or restrictions introduced to avoid overloading the servers.

To overcome these difficulties, instead of building a simple archive of documents with a search function, we have created a real search engine, also equipped with a reading function.

This is a complete solution, based on dedicated hardware and specially developed software.

During the design phase, we evaluated two options: software to be installed locally or a server-side application accessible via the web. Since the mission of the Salesian Bulletin Online is to spread the Salesian charism to the greatest number of people, it was decided to opt for the web solution, so as to allow anyone to search for and consult Salesian documents.

The search engine is available at www.donbosco.info. The web interface is deliberately essential and “spartan” to ensure faster loading speeds. The “home page” lists the files and folders present, in order to facilitate consultation. The documents are not only in Italian, but also available in other languages, selectable via the icon at the top left.

Most of the uploaded files are in PDF format derived from scans with OCR (optical character recognition). Since OCR is not always perfect, sometimes not all the words searched for are detected. To overcome this, several strategies have been implemented: ignoring punctuation and accented or special characters, and allowing searches even in the presence of missing or incorrect characters. Further details can be found in the FAQ section, accessible from the footer.

Given the presence of thousands of documents, the search can return a very high number of results. For this reason, it is possible to narrow the scope of the search by folder, title, author, or year: the criteria are cumulative and help to find what you need more quickly. The results are listed based on a relevance score, which currently mainly takes into account the density of keywords within the text and their proximity.

Ideally, it would be preferable to have the documents in vector format instead of scanned, as the search would always be accurate and the files would be lighter, with consequent advantages in terms of speed.

If you have documents in vector format or of better quality than those already present in the search engine, you can upload them via the upload service available on www.donbosco.space. You can also add other documents not present in the search engine. To obtain access credentials (username and password), send a request via e-mail to bsol@sdb.org.

With Don Bosco. Always

It makes a difference whether or not a General Chapter is held in one place or another. Certainly, in Valdocco, in the “cradle of the charism”, we have the opportunity to rediscover the genesis of our history as well as the originality that constitutes the heart of our identity as consecrated persons and apostles of youth.

In the ancient setting of Valdocco, where everything speaks of our origins, I am almost obligated to recall that December of 1859, when Don Bosco made an incredible decision, unique in history: to found a religious congregation with some young boys.

He had prepared them, but they were still very young. “For a long time I have been thinking of founding a Congregation. Now is the time to get down to business”, Don Bosco explained simply. “Actually, this Congregation is not being born now: it already existed in that set of Rules that you have always observed by tradition... Now it is a matter of moving forward, of formally establishing the Congregation and of accepting its Rules. But know that only those who, after serious reflection, want to make the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience in due course will be enrolled... I will give you a week to think about it.”

There was an unusual silence as they left the meeting. Soon, when they began to speak, it could be seen that Don Bosco had been right to proceed slowly and cautiously. Some muttered under their breath that Don Bosco wanted to make them friars. Cagliero paced the courtyard overwhelmed by conflicting emotions.

But the desire to “stay with Don Bosco” prevailed in the majority. Cagliero came out with the phrase that would become historic: “Friar or not, I’m staying with Don Bosco”.

At the “accession conference,” held on the evening of December 18, they were 17.

Don Bosco convened the first General Chapter on September 5, 1877, in Lanzo Torinese. There were twenty-three participants, and the Chapter lasted three full days.

Today, for the 29th Chapter, there are 227 capitulars. They have come from all over the world, representing all Salesians. At the opening of the first General Chapter, Don Bosco said to our confreres, “The Divine Saviour says in the Holy Gospel that where two or three are gathered in His name, there He Himself is in the midst of them. We have no other purpose in these gatherings than the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls redeemed by the precious Blood of Jesus Christ.” We can therefore be certain that the Lord will be in our midst, and that He will lead things in such a way that everyone feels at ease.

An epochal change

The evangelical expression, “Jesus called those He wanted to be with Him and sent them out to preach” (*Mk 3:14-15*), says that Jesus chooses and calls those He wants. We too are among these. The Kingdom of God is made present, and those first Twelve are an example and a model for us and for our communities. The Twelve are ordinary people, with strengths and weaknesses. They do not form a community of the pure, nor even a simple group of friends.

They know, as Pope Francis has said, that “We are not living an epoch of change so much as an epochal change”. In Valdocco,

these days, there is a climate of great awareness. All the confreres feel that this is a moment of great responsibility. In the life of the majority of the confreres, of the provinces, and of the Congregation, there are many positive things, but this is not enough and cannot serve as “consolation,” because the cry of the world, the great and new poverties, the daily struggle of so many people – not only poor but also simple and hardworking – rises up strongly as a request for help. These are all questions that must provoke and shake us and not leave us at ease.

With the help of the provinces through consultation, we believe we have identified on the one hand the main causes of concern and on the other, the signs of vitality of our Congregation, always expressed with the specific cultural traits of each context.

During the Chapter, we propose to concentrate on what it means for us to truly be Salesians passionate about Jesus Christ, because without this we will offer good services, we will do good to people, we will help, but we will not leave a significant impression.

The mission of Jesus continues and is made visible today in the world also through us, His envoys. We are consecrated to building ample spaces of light for today’s world, to be prophets. We have been consecrated by God and have been called to follow His Beloved Son Jesus, to truly live as if we have been redeemed by God. Therefore, once again, the essential point is all about the Congregation’s fidelity to the Holy Spirit, living, with the spirit of Don Bosco, a Salesian consecrated life centred upon Jesus Christ.

Apostolic vitality, like spiritual vitality, is a commitment in favour of young people, of children, in the most varied poverties, therefore we cannot stop at offering only educational services. The Lord calls us to educate by evangelising, bringing His presence and accompanying life with opportunities for the future.

We are called to seek new models of presence, new expressions of the Salesian charism in the name of God. This should be

done in communion with young people and with the world, through “integral ecology,” in the formation of a digital culture in the worlds inhabited by young people and adults.

Also, there is a strong desire and expectation that this will be a courageous General Chapter, in which things are said, without getting lost in correct, well-packaged phrases, but which do not touch life.

We are not alone in this mission. We know and feel that the Virgin Mary is a model of fidelity.

It is good to return in mind and heart to the day of the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of 1887 when, two months before his death, Don Bosco said to some Salesians who, moved, looked at him and listened: “So far we have walked on what is certain. We cannot err; it is Mary who guides us.”

Mary Help of Christians, Our Lady of Don Bosco, guides us. She is the Mother of us all, and it is she who repeats, as at Cana of Galilee in this hour of the CG29, “Whatever He tells you, do it.”

May our Mother Help of Christians enlighten and guide us, as she did with Don Bosco, to be faithful to the Lord and never to disappoint young people, especially those most in need.

The Vicar of the Rector Major. Don Stefano Martoglio

We have the joy of announcing that Don Stefano Martoglio has been re-elected as Vicar of the Rector Major.

The chapter members elected him today with an absolute majority and from the first ballot.

We wish Don Stefano a fruitful apostolate and assure him of our prayers.

New Rector Major: Fabius Attard

We are pleased to announce that Fr. Fabius Attard is the new Rector Major, the eleventh successor of Don Bosco.

Brief information about the new Rector Major:

Born: 23.03.1959 in Gozo (Malta), diocese of Gozo.

Novitiate: 1979-1980 in Dublin.

Perpetual profession: 11.08.1985 in Malta.

Priestly ordination: 04.07.1987 in Malta.

He has held various pastoral and formative positions within his home province.

He was for 12 years the General Councillor for Youth Ministry, 2008-2020.

Since 2020 he has been the Delegate of the Rector Major for the Ongoing Formation of Salesians and laity in Europe.

Last community of belonging: Rome CNOS.

Languages known: Maltese, English, Italian, French, Spanish.

We wish Fr. Fabio a fruitful apostolate and assure him of our prayers.

Rectors Major of the Salesian Congregation

The Salesian Congregation, founded in 1859 by Saint John Bosco, has had at its head a superior general called, since

the time of Don Bosco, Rector Major. The figure of the Rector Major is central to the leadership of the congregation, serving as a spiritual guide and center of unity not only for the Salesians but also for the entire Salesian Family. Each Rector Major has contributed uniquely to the Salesian mission, addressing the challenges of their time and promoting the education and spiritual life of young people. Let's briefly summarize the Major Rectors and the challenges they have faced.

Saint John Bosco (1859-1888)

Saint John Bosco, founder of the Salesian Congregation, embodied distinctive qualities that shaped the identity and mission of the order. His deep faith and trust in Divine Providence made him a charismatic leader, capable of inspiring and guiding with vision and determination. His tireless dedication to the education of young people, especially the most needy, manifested itself through the innovative Preventive System, based on reason, religion, and loving-kindness. Don Bosco promoted a family atmosphere in Salesian houses, fostering sincere and fraternal relationships. His organizational skills and entrepreneurial spirit led to the creation of numerous educational works. His missionary openness pushed the Congregation beyond Italian borders, spreading the Salesian charism throughout the world. His humility and simplicity made him close to everyone, earning the trust and affection of collaborators and young people.

Saint John Bosco faced many difficulties. He had to overcome the misunderstanding and hostility of civil and ecclesiastical authorities, who often distrusted his educational method and rapid growth. He faced serious economic difficulties in supporting the Salesian works, often relying only on Providence. Managing difficult young people and training reliable collaborators was an arduous task. Furthermore, his health, worn down by intense work and constant worries, was a constant limitation. Despite everything, he faced every trial with unwavering faith, paternal love for young people, and

tireless determination, carrying out the mission with hope.

1. Blessed Michele Rua (1888-1910)

The ministry of Rector Major of Blessed Michele Rua is characterized by fidelity to the charism of Don Bosco, institutional consolidation, and missionary expansion. He was appointed by Don Bosco as his successor by order of Pope Leo XIII, in the audience of 24.10.1884. After the Pope's confirmation on 24.09.1885, Don Bosco made his choice public before the Superior Chapter.

Some characteristics of his rectorship:

- he acted as a “living rule” of the preventive system, maintaining the educational spirit of Don Bosco through formation, catechesis, and spiritual direction; he was a continuator of the founder;
- he directed the exponentially growing Congregation, managing hundreds of houses and thousands of religious, with pastoral visits around the world despite health problems;
- he faced slander and crises (such as the scandal of 1907) defending the Salesian image;
- he promoted the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the Cooperators, strengthening the tripartite structure desired by Don Bosco;
- under his leadership, the Salesians grew from 773 to 4,000 members, and the houses from 64 to 341, extending into 30 nations.

2. Don Paolo Albera (1910-1921)

The ministry of Rector Major of Don Paolo Albera is distinguished by fidelity to the charism of Don Bosco and global missionary expansion. Elected in General Chapter 11.

Some characteristics of his rectorship:

- he maintained the preventive system intact, promoting the spiritual formation of young Salesians and the dissemination of the Salesian Bulletin as an instrument of evangelization;
- he faced the challenges of the First World War, with Salesians mobilized (over 2,000 called to arms, 80 of them

died in the war) and houses transformed into hospitals or barracks, maintaining cohesion in the Congregation; this conflict caused the suspension of the planned General Chapter and interrupted many educational and pastoral activities;

- he faced the consequences of this war which generated an increase in poverty and the number of orphans, requiring an extraordinary commitment to welcome and support these young people in Salesian houses;

- he opened new frontiers in Africa, Asia, and America, sending 501 missionaries in nine *ad gentes* expeditions and founding works in Congo, China, and India.

3. Blessed Filippo Rinaldi (1922-1931)

The ministry of Rector Major of Blessed Filippo Rinaldi is characterized by fidelity to the charism of Don Bosco, missionary expansion, and spiritual innovation. Elected in General Chapter 12.

Some characteristics of his rectorship:

- he maintained the preventive system intact, promoting the interior formation of the Salesians;

- he sent over 1,800 Salesians around the world, founded missionary institutes and magazines, opening new frontiers in Africa, Asia, and America;

- he established the association of Past Pupils and the first Salesian secular institute (Volunteers of Don Bosco), adapting the spirit of Don Bosco to the needs of the early twentieth century;

- he revived the interior life of the Congregation, exhorting to “unlimited confidence” in Mary Help of Christians, a central legacy of the Salesian charism;

- he emphasized the importance of spiritual formation and assistance to emigrants, promoting welfare works and associations among workers;

- during his rectorship, members grew from 4,788 to 8,836 and houses from 404 to 644, highlighting his organizational skills and missionary zeal.

4. Don Pietro Ricaldone (1932-1951)

The ministry of Rector Major of Don Pietro Ricaldone is characterized by institutional consolidation, commitment during the Second World War, and collaboration with civil authorities. Elected in General Chapter 14.

Some characteristics of his rectorship:

- he strengthened Salesian houses and training centers, founded the Salesian Pontifical University (1940), and oversaw the canonization of Don Bosco (1934) and Mother Mazzarello (1951);
- he faced the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) which represented one of the main difficulties, with persecutions that severely affected Salesian works in the country;
- subsequently, he faced the Second World War (1939-1945) which caused further suffering: many Salesians were deported or deprived of their freedom, and communications between the General House in Turin and the communities scattered around the world were interrupted; furthermore, the advent of totalitarian regimes in Eastern Europe led to the suppression of several Salesian works;
- during the war, he opened Salesian structures to displaced persons, Jews, and partisans, mediating for the release of prisoners and protecting those in danger;
- he promoted Salesian spirituality through editorial works (e.g., *Corona patrum salesiana*) and initiatives in favor of marginalized young people.

5. Don Renato Ziggiotti (1952-1965)

The ministry of Rector Major of Don Renato Ziggiotti (1952-1965) is characterized by global expansion, fidelity to the charism, and conciliar commitment. Elected in General Chapter 17.

Some characteristics of his rectorship:

- he was the first Rector Major not to have personally known Don Bosco and to renounce the office before his death, demonstrating great humility;
- during his mandate, the Salesians grew from 16,900 to over

22,000 members, with 73 provinces and almost 1,400 houses worldwide;

- he promoted the construction of the Basilica of Saint John Bosco in Rome and the sanctuary on Colle dei Becchi (Colle Don Bosco), in addition to the transfer of the Salesian Pontifical Athenaeum to the capital;

- he was the first Rector Major to actively participate in the first three sessions of the Second Vatican Council, anticipating the renewal of the Congregation and the involvement of the laity;

- he accomplished an unprecedented feat: he visited almost all the Salesian houses and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, dialoguing with thousands of confreres, despite logistical difficulties.

6. Don Luigi Ricceri (1965-1977)

The ministry of Rector Major of Don Luigi Ricceri is characterized by conciliar renewal, organizational centralization, and fidelity to the Salesian charism. Elected in General Chapter 19.

Some characteristics of his rectorship:

- post-conciliar adaptation: he guided the Congregation in the implementation of the indications of the Second Vatican Council, promoting the Special General Chapter (1966) for the renewal of the Constitutions and the permanent formation of the Salesians;

- he transferred the General Directorate from Valdocco to Rome, separating it from the “Mother House” to better integrate it into the ecclesial context;

- the revision of the Constitutions and Regulations was a complex task, aimed at ensuring adaptation to the new ecclesial directives without losing the original identity;

- he strengthened the role of the Cooperators and Past Pupils, reinforcing collaboration between the different branches of the Salesian Family.

7. Don Egidio Viganò (1977-1995)

The ministry of Rector Major of Don Egidio Viganò is characterized by fidelity to the Salesian charism, conciliar commitment, and global missionary expansion. Elected in General Chapter 21.

Some characteristics of his rectorship:

- his participation as an expert in the Second Vatican Council significantly influenced his work, promoting the updating of the Salesian Constitutions in line with the conciliar directives and guiding the Congregation in the implementation of the indications of the Second Vatican Council;
- he actively collaborated with Pope Saint John Paul II, becoming his personal confessor, and participated in 6 synods of bishops (1980-1994), strengthening the link between the Congregation and the universal Church;
- deeply linked to Latin American culture (where he spent 32 years), he expanded the Salesian presence in the Third World, with a focus on social justice and intercultural dialogue;
- he was the first rector major elected for three consecutive terms (with papal dispensation);
- he strengthened the role of the Cooperators and Past Pupils, promoting collaboration between the different branches of the Salesian Family;
- he strengthened devotion to Mary Help of Christians, recognizing the Association of Devotees of Mary Help of Christians as an integral part of the Salesian Family;
- his dedication to scientific research and interdisciplinary dialogue led him to be considered the “second founder” of the Salesian Pontifical University;
- under his leadership, the Congregation launched the “Africa Project,” expanding the Salesian presence in the African continent, which bore much fruit.

8. Don Juan Edmundo Vecchi (1996-2002)

The ministry of Rector Major of Don Juan Edmundo Vecchi is distinguished by fidelity to the Salesian charism, commitment to formation, and openness to the challenges of the post-Council. Elected in General Chapter 24.

Some characteristics of his rectorship:

- he is the first non-Italian Rector Major: son of Italian immigrants in Argentina, he represented a generational and geographical change in the leadership of the Congregation, opening up to a more global perspective;
- he promoted the permanent formation of the Salesians, emphasizing the importance of spirituality and professional preparation to respond to the needs of young people;
- he promoted a renewed attention to the education of young people, emphasizing the importance of integral formation and personal accompaniment;
- through the Circular Letters, he exhorted to live holiness in everyday life, linking it to youth service and the testimony of Don Bosco;
- during his illness, he continued to witness faith and dedication, offering profound reflections on the experience of suffering and old age in Salesian life.

9. Don Pascual Chávez Villanueva (2002-2014)

The ministry of Rector Major of Don Pascual Chávez Villanueva is distinguished by fidelity to the Salesian charism, commitment to formation, and commitment to the challenges of globalization and ecclesial transformations. Elected in General Chapter 25.

Some characteristics of his rectorship:

- he promoted renewed attention to the Salesian community as an evangelizing subject, with priority given to spiritual formation and the inculturation of the charism in regional contexts;
- he relaunched the commitment to the most vulnerable young people, inheriting the approach of Don Bosco, with particular attention to frontier oratories and social peripheries;
- he oversaw the permanent formation of the Salesians, developing theological and pedagogical studies linked to the spirituality of Don Bosco, preparing for the bicentenary of his birth;
- he led the Congregation with an organizational and

dialogical approach, involving the different regions and promoting collaboration between Salesian study centers;

- he promoted greater collaboration with the laity, encouraging co-responsibility in the Salesian mission and addressing internal resistance to change.

10. Don Ángel Fernández Artime (2014-2024)

The ministry of Don Ángel Fernández Artime is distinguished by fidelity to the Salesian charism and to the papacy. Elected in General Chapter 27.

Some characteristics of his rectorship:

- he led the Congregation with an inclusive approach, visiting 120 countries and promoting the adaptation of the Salesian charism to different cultural realities, while maintaining a strong link with the roots of Don Bosco;
- he strengthened the commitment to the most vulnerable young people in the peripheries, inheriting the approach of Don Bosco;
- he faced the challenges of globalization and ecclesial transformations, promoting collaboration between study centers and renewing the instruments of governance of the Congregation;
- he promoted greater collaboration with the laity, encouraging co-responsibility in the educational and pastoral mission;
- he had to face the COVID-19 pandemic which required adaptations in educational and assistance works to continue serving young people and communities in difficulty;
- he had to face the management of human and material resources in a period of vocational crisis and demographic changes;
- he moved the General House from the Pisana to the work founded by Don Bosco, Sacro Cuore of Rome;
- his commitment culminated in his appointment as Cardinal (2023) and Pro-Prefect of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life (2025), marking a recognition of his influence in the universal Church.

The Major Rectors of the Salesian Congregation have played a fundamental role in the growth and development of the congregation. Each of them has brought their own unique contribution, addressing the challenges of their time and keeping the charism of Saint John Bosco alive. Their legacy continues to inspire future generations of Salesians and young people around the world, ensuring that Don Bosco's educational mission remains relevant and vital in the contemporary context.

We also present below a statistic of these rectorships.

<i>Rector Major</i>	<i>Born on</i>	<i>Beginning of Rector Major mandate</i>	<i>Elected at ... years</i>	<i>End of Rector Major mandate</i>	<i>Rector Major for...</i>	<i>Lived for... years</i>
BOSCO Giovanni	16.08.1815	18.12.1859	44	31.01.1888 (†)	28 years and 1 month	72
RUA Michele	09.06.1837	31.01.1888	50	06.04.1910 (†)	22 years and 2 months	72
ALBERA Paolo	06.06.1845	16.08.1910	65	29.10.1921 (†)	11 years and 2 months	76
RINALDI Filippo	28.05.1856	24.04.1922	65	05.12.1931 (†)	9 years and 7 months	75
RICALDONE Pietro	27.07.1870	17.05.1932	61	25.11.1951 (†)	19 years and 6 months	81

ZIGGIOTTI Renato	09.10.1892	01.08.1952	59	27.04.1965 († 19.04.1983)	12 years and 8 months	90
RICCERI Luigi	08.05.1901	27.04.1965	63	15.12.1977 († 14.06.1989)	12 years and 7 months	88
VIGANO Egidio	29.06.1920	15.12.1977	57	23.06.1995 (†)	17 years and 6 months	74
VECCHI Juan Edmundo	23.06.1931	20.03.1996	64	23.01.2002 (†)	5 years and 10 months	70
VILLANUEVA Pasqual Chavez	20.12.1947	03.04.2002	54	25.03.2014	11 years and 11 months	76
ARTIME Angel Fernandez	21.08.1960	25.03.2014	53	31.07.2024	10 years and 4 months	64