

Works and services for young people in situations of vulnerability and exclusion

Salesian Youth
Ministry Sector

ABBREVIATIONS

- AGC** *Acts of the General Council.*
- C.** *Constitutions and Regulations of the Society of Saint Francis de Sales.*
- EPC** *Educative and Pastoral Community.*
- GC** *General Chapter of the Salesians of Don Bosco.*
- OPP** *Overall Province Plan.*
- SEPP** *Salesian Educative and Pastoral Project.*
-

Table of Contents

Presentation 6

» Chapter 1

The original nature of works and services for young people in situations of vulnerability and exclusion 9

- 1.1 Don Bosco's social option 10
- 1.2 The specific nature of this setting in Salesian Youth Ministry 13
- 1.3 Structures, services and specialised projects 17
- 1.4 Groups we serve 19

» Chapter 2

The Educative and Pastoral Community: Works and services for young people in situations of vulnerability and exclusion 23

- 2.1 The importance of the EPC 24
- 2.2 The individuals involved in the EPC 25

» Chapter 3

The educative and pastoral project of the Works and services for young people in situations of vulnerability and exclusion 31

- 3.1 The spiritual dimension and the journey of faith 33
- 3.2 The family atmosphere and formative proposal 36
- 3.3 The preventive criterion 38
- 3.4 The social and political perspective 41

» Chapter 4

Systematic pastoral animation of the Works and services for young people in situations of vulnerability and exclusion 45

- 4.1 Main interventions in this proposal 46
 - 4.1.1 In-depth knowledge of the youth reality and cultural processes 46
 - 4.1.2 A plan for integral accompaniment 47
 - 4.1.3 Development of network programs and projects 49
- 4.2 Structures of participation and responsibility 53
 - 4.2.1 At the local level 53
 - 4.2.2 At the province and inter-province level 54

» Conclusion

From the trap of withdrawal to mobilisation towards unknown territories 57

Presentation



I am immensely pleased to be able to present you with this new edition of the Works and services for youth in situations of vulnerability and exclusion in the Youth Ministry Frame of Reference (2014). It retraces the path of reflection and practice of recent years within the Salesian Congregation concerning the current issues, identity, and educative and pastoral work of these Salesian presences. The efforts of the Youth Ministry Sector has consisted in gathering what we have shared across many meetings, reflection days, and during the International Congress held in 2022.

Our service on behalf of the least is highlighted as a **congregational priority**: this preferential option shapes our vocation and the sense of our Salesian mission. It is not “charismatic archaeology”. Behind these lines lie the many reflections and experiences of so many Salesian presences, that can be summed up in that terrible question that echoed in Paradise: “Where is your brother?” (Gen 4:9). This is the question that continues to loom over us today and invites us to be surprised, and to be aware that God’s original plan for humanity has been marred. As Salesians, we accompany many people, young people in particular who are born, live and die surrounded by various injustices, suffering and helplessness. *Everyone has a face, a name and a surname, a story, a family, an experience, feelings, desires, dreams, values, qualities, and potential.*

The main thrust of the text’s reflections revolves around **some convictions we wish to embrace** even more strongly and that must be guidelines for rekindling the flame of our charism: what our intervention is and should be like in these Works and services in light of Don Bosco’s experience; the importance of the individuals involved in the Educative and Pastoral Community; what the nature, guidelines and principles of our educational and pastoral proposal are; what changes should occur in management and working methodology in our resources, services, and centres.

We use the term *exclusion*, which is more complex than the lack of financial means. It has a multidimensional character in which the individual is

deprived of a series of rights and fundamental freedoms that have to do with their well-being: work, health, education, formation, housing, quality of life. The inability of these individuals to exercise their rights and participation in society prevents them from enjoying full citizen status in this society.

The concept of *social vulnerability* refers to a broad range of situations somewhere between inclusion in the social fabric and exclusion, as well as the fragility and propensity of certain individuals or communities to slide from a situation of vulnerability into one of exclusion. In the case of our young people, it is associated with exposure to very different risks (complex personal situations, family upheaval, dropping out of school, drug addiction, unwanted loneliness, transgression or crime...). Vulnerability does not necessarily lead to exclusion. Therefore, it is important to implement preventive measures typical of Salesian activity.

Finally, it should be noted that these reflections, guidelines and proposals aim to be both *concrete enough* that they can transcend the world of ideas, and *general enough* that they allow flexible action in a changing reality. There are issues in this document that are merely sketched out and subject to further exploration, and others that are likewise simply suggested, because each place and each province, starting from its own circumstances and possibilities, must make them even more concrete and give shape to them.

A special thanks to Father Rafael Bejarano and the extensive network of educators involved in these Salesian Works and services for the wealth of contributions they have made to this document, always within the dynamic of shared responsibility and life. **All of them, every day, demonstrate their professionalism, their enthusiasm, pastoral intelligence, and their immeasurable dedication** to many young people immersed in serious situations of exclusion. Theirs is an educative and evangelising activity that leaves a mark for posterity.

Let me attempt to summarise the work of these Salesians and laypeople in a few verses by Fernando Sabino; since the important things in life are best expressed in poetic registers and codes:

*Three things remain of everything:
the certainty that we are always starting
the certainty that we need to continue
and the certainty that we will be interrupted before we finish.
Therefore, we must make
of interruption a new journey,
of false steps a dance step,
of fear a ladder,
of dream a bridge,
of need an encounter.*

Father Miguel Angel García Morcuende, sdb

General Councillor for Youth Ministry

ROME, 24 MAY 2024



THE ORIGINAL NATURE OF WORKS AND SERVICES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN SITUATIONS OF VULNERABILITY AND EXCLUSION

CHAPTER

I

1 1

DON BOSCO'S SOCIAL OPTION

❖ Moved by God's merciful goodness, Don Bosco felt called by the dramatic situation of many adolescents and young adults: job insecurity, low wages, overcrowding in inadequate housing, hygiene and health problems, moral misery, poverty, and educational risk. His arrival in Turin in November 1841 immersed him in this harsh reality, taking care of artisans, migrants, orphans and former prisoners, opening new and innovative educational and pastoral environments and involving many people and institutions in these projects.

He entered the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* (a residence for priests) to pursue further studies in moral theology and preaching. It was there that Father Cafasso, Director of the *Convitto* and his spiritual guide, entrusted him with the task of visiting the prisons where he first became aware of the alarming condition of the young inmates. **The impact that these incarcerated young people had on him moved and disturbed him.**

When he had to leave this Residence, he continued to be concerned about the most abandoned boys who followed him from there, going from the Refuge to Saint Peter in Chains, Saint Martin of the Mills, the Moretta house, the Filippi fields, until arriving at Valdocco on 12 April 1846, Easter Sunday. The Oratory's wanderings are not understood without the "poor and abandoned boys" who roamed the streets of Turin.

"I was beginning to learn from experience that if young lads just released from their place of punishment could find someone to befriend them, to look after them, to assist them on feast days, to help them get work with good employers, to visit them occasionally during the week, these young men soon forgot the past and began to mend their ways. They became good Christians and honest citizens." (MO, 104 2010 NEW ROCHELLE EDITION).

"The Virgin Mary showed Don Bosco his field of labour among the young, and was the constant guide and support of his work" (C.8). His journey was courageous and committed. He launched the exercise of active citizenship and prevention of the causes of the many ills that afflicted young people, promoting a comprehensive education that prevented many of them from becoming victims of this structural malaise. This is why,

in the first instance, he welcomed and offered basic physical necessities (such as food, clothing, housing, and education) to many orphaned or unaccompanied adolescents and young adults who arrived in the city of Turin in search of work: both during the week and on weekends and holidays when they were completely abandoned to their fate.

❖ **With the same pastoral charity of Don Bosco, as a sign of the Church which goes forth** (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 20), today we go out to meet children, adolescents, young people, families and communities living in conditions of vulnerability and exclusion. This reality is the greatest moral crossroads of our societies and challenges us as Salesian educators to position ourselves in this contradiction.

“Don Bosco clearly saw the social implications of his work. We work in poor areas and for poor young people. We work with them, educating them to assume their moral, professional and social responsibilities, and favouring their involvement in groups and in the larger community. In a way appropriate to religious, we share in the witness and commitment of the Church to justice and peace.” (C. 33).

For this reason our Works and services have a vocation to transform, one that seeks to break social exclusion, which is a constellation of closely linked factors making the development of the most needy difficult or indeed directly impeding it. This exclusion goes beyond poverty understood in its traditional meaning of deprivation of goods and refers to **everything that is against the freedom of the children of God and violates their human dignity.**

❖ **Given the awareness we have today, this dignity is called Human Rights;** its denial is the highest level of humiliation. Commitment to solidarity combines the recognition of dignity with the universal nature of civil, political and social rights. For us Salesians, this lack of dignity is discouraging and we feel called upon by those who are deprived or dispossessed of it due to historical or other circumstances.

In fact, this “vicious circle of exclusion” interferes with or even prevents individuals and groups from accessing resources and opportunities for social well-being, ignoring them as holders of rights and placing them at risk of living in poverty. Despite the difficulty of identifying and rigorously

distinguishing all the *manifestations of deprivation of fundamental rights*, let us try to give a brief overview:

- ▶ Mental and physical health through proper nutrition.
- ▶ Access to decent work and, therefore, the availability of income and financial autonomy.
- ▶ Access to the various levels of education and culture.
- ▶ Caring for the spiritual dimension as a holistic approach to the individual.
- ▶ Owning a decent and adequate home as a key space in life for the education of children, and stable relationships.
- ▶ Equity, justice and physical security, where people are free from any kind of exploitation and abuse.
- ▶ Recognition of nationality, citizenship and freedom to move around.
- ▶ The right to integration into society and to freedom of expression.

Significantly, in a volatile, interconnected, complex and ambiguous world like the present one, impoverishment also manifests itself **in the “denial” of what relationship is**. Like in Don Bosco’s time, the experience of children, adolescents and young adults disconnected from emotional environments, from their family nucleus and/or from the immediate context or community and institutions, plunges them into the deprivation of the experience of love. This disengagement manifests itself in various ways and in social issues such as the family:

From a charismatic point of view, there is still a need for a specific focus on the family, because material, cultural, moral and spiritual poverties, sometimes even ‘family poverty’, are often closely related to family issues. (YOUTH MINISTRY AND FAMILY, P .56.

A deep look and creative imagination are therefore required, where we ensure – not exclusively, but with professional specialisation – the consolidation of an intervention model that takes into account the *revitalisation of the experience of “love”*.

❖ It is clear that the weakest members of communities that are impoverished and whose rights are violated (very often children, adolescents and young adults) end up being the victims of this vicious circle and this could condemn them to **replicating destructive and maladjusted behaviours**, increasingly widening the social gap that divides the human family. Don

Bosco's direct experience with the boys he visited in the 'Generala' prison confirms that if timely intervention is not made, the prison solution these young people are facing will prove to be a true school of delinquency, making them worse than before.

“One could note also that little by little they could be led to appreciate their dignity as human beings, that they could reason, and that they must earn their bread in life through honest effort and not by stealing. In other words as soon as their minds were enlightened by a moral and religious principle they began to feel something good in their hearts which they could not explain but which made them want to be better people.” (HISTORICAL OUTLINES CONCERNING THE ORATORY OF ST FRANCIS DE SALES).

Undoubtedly, as long as there are excluded neighbourhoods, marginalised ethnic groups, isolated communities, depressed areas, poor countries, or marginalised minors, the Salesian Family feels called to welcome them, care for them, and offer them food and shelter. And also to develop educative and pastoral strategies, establishing alliances with different bodies so that they can achieve the moral and financial autonomy that allows them to exercise their full rights and belong with dignity to a society.

1 2

THE SPECIFIC NATURE OF THIS SETTING IN SALESIAN YOUTH MINISTRY

❖ To understand the situations in which people live without protection and with limitations in accessing and enjoying social and political rights, Saint John Paul II in his Encyclical *“Reconciliatio et Paenitentia”* (1984) referred to **“social sin”, which we see when the network of relationships within a community becomes unjust.** Exclusion, which affects both the human condition and the social system, grows every day, becoming dramatically and structurally social sin.

The multiple forms of poverty violate both the individual in their rights and the communities that suffer the deterioration of their environment. A society based on growing inequality marginalises all fragile individuals, many young people who are experiencing failure, and all those who are different because they are considered dangerous. Such conditions of

inequality have been normalised and even internalised in the daily life of many contemporary societies, **rendering invisible the pain of those who need to be cared for, and increasing the insensitivity** of those who have the moral and institutional obligation to address these manifestations of inequality.

❖ Works and services too, that are aimed at young people and communities in situations of vulnerability and exclusion are aligned with “**Integral human development**” advocated by the Church’s Social Doctrine.

On 26 March 1967, Pope Paul VI published the encyclical ‘Populorum Progressio’, whose influence on development models and schools marked the beginning of the paradigm of Christian social thinking focused on human dignity – leading to a rights-based approach – and a theology that conceives of the person as being in the image and likeness of God. This Catholic school of thought regarding development expresses itself in “integral human development” (SAINT PAUL VI), solidarity (SAINT JOHN PAUL II IN ‘SOLLICITUDO REI SOCIALIS’), in being charitable - ‘love received and given’ (BENEDICT XVI IN ‘CARITAS IN VERITATE’), sustainable (FRANCIS IN ‘LAUDATO SI’) and fraternal (FRANCIS IN ‘FRATELLI TUTTI’).

The SEPP (Salesian Educative and Pastoral Project) for these works and services takes up the development model as *integral in the personal dimension, and social and supportive in the relational dimension*. It responds to specific situations that strongly restrict young people’s direction in life, and their adult life. In this way we provide support and direct intervention to individuals, families, and groups, planning – together with them – actions that allow them to overcome their situation and generate a positive social impact, as a specific way to proclaim the Gospel.

On the other hand, faced with this reality we run the risk of thinking that a Salesian work with these characteristics for this category of young people is simply an “organisation”, and we forget that we are also **an expression of the Christian community**. In reality, within the framework of the Church’s evangelising mission, we feel called to promote the integral development of individuals and peoples: “bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 273) the poorest and most excluded.

❖ It is important to remember that we cannot speak about social exclusion and vulnerability as univocal concepts, as we would be referring to a universe of specific homogeneous individuals and groups; in other words, we can say that they do not exist in a generic sense; **there is exclusion and vulnerability in almost every individual**, which is recreated and expressed in various ways.

Like Don Bosco, we need to begin by observing what is happening around us and analysing it with the broadest and most all-embracing perspective possible, aware that *everything is connected*: “genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others” (*Laudato Si*, no. 70). Therefore, no situation of poverty/exclusion can currently be explained by a single factor. They are complex and interconnected realities.

In conclusion, the offer of specialised services for young people and communities in these situations does not only occur in Works where this is the environment: **the option for the poor is inherent to the nature and purpose of every Salesian Work**. In this respect, preventing and addressing possible risk situations and identifying the needs of young people in every environment and context is a typical activity of Salesian Youth Ministry.

“With Don Bosco we reaffirm our preference for the young who are poor, abandoned and at risk, those who have greater need of love and evangelization, and we work especially in areas of greatest poverty.” (C. 26).

Therefore, as happens in every educative and pastoral context, after an institutional and personal discernment and an updated and relevant analysis of the youth and social context of its areas, **the provincial community privileges activities with a clear preference for the poorest and most in need**. It is a matter of opening our eyes to reality, being sensitive so that we are moved by the suffering of those most in need, and having the will to put our own abilities, hands and possessions at their service, which is *the program of the Good Samaritan* according to the Gospel.

This is why **the Provincial with his Council must incorporate these options within the OPP**, giving the necessary instructions to all Salesian presences so that action is taken to counter all the areas where exclusion

is generated: economic causes (deprivation of material goods and access to adequate income), deficits in the exercise of citizenship (right to health, education, housing...) and the weakness of social ties (relationships, cohabitation, etc.).

❖ Embedded in the local reality, each EPC belonging to Works and services for young people in situations of vulnerability and exclusion, together with other social actors in the territory develops strategies, on the one hand, to support young people and the community with a systematic approach, while on the other hand it ensures the adequacy of job outlines required for management, administrative and pastoral processes, and psycho-social intervention. Only in this way can projects provide **effective responses in the short, medium and long term** within a consolidated institutional framework. Together with this, it is necessary to ensure sustainable management of its human and financial resources.

Consequently, any kind of personality cult or improvisation must be overcome and avoided in the formulation of programs and intervention strategies, as Salesian presences should not depend on an individual working alone. All are members of the EPC, especially lay and religious educators; **all identify with the same apostolic mission and passion** which guides their educative and pastoral activity.

At the same time, it is essential to give *correct acknowledgement and respect to each one's vocation, roles and competence*, considering that the knowledge and experience of individuals represent an invaluable asset with which one must engage in dialogue in an open, inclusive, and collaborative atmosphere.

❖ The institutional model for intervention and management of these Works and services for young people in situations of vulnerability and exclusion are situated within the social sector and, therefore, develop **within a specific legal and fiscal framework in different countries**.

This Salesian action in the organisational and legal field corresponds to the social or solidarity economy sector, also known as the *Third Sector of Social Action* and developed through non-profit institutions. This has led us to better organise this Salesian Youth Ministry setting, offering competent responses.

Our Works “adopt multiple legal forms of civil or ecclesiastical recognition as a requirement to be able to offer their services in different countries in a professional and transparent manner. Our face in this sector is therefore one of Associations, Cooperatives, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Independent Businesses for Humanitarian Aid, Joint Agreements for the concerted provision of specialised services, Social Centres that provide psycho-social and health care in general, and which are also employment agencies, etc. As in other areas of our youth ministry, what distinguishes us from other similar organisations is this: we Salesians evangelise through the provision of social services, offering everyone a search for meaning and an openness to transcendence, while respecting the freedom of each individual.” (FATHER ÁNGEL FERNÁNDEZ, AGC 438).

1 3

STRUCTURES, SERVICES AND SPECIALISED PROJECTS

❖ The educative and pastoral activity in this setting unfolds in specialised structures and through specific and professional programs. **The initiatives of the Provinces in this field follow different strategies**, adapting to the various geographical and cultural areas.

Therefore, we recognise the great diversity of services and institutions in terms of their size, scope of action, geographical and territorial location, purposes, methods of work or organisational culture. Furthermore, depending on the complexity of the work, in many places different projects have their own structures and specialised processes focused on their beneficiaries, including the following:

- ▶ **Pastoral proposals for accompanying young people in situations of vulnerability and exclusion:** pastoral teams that reflect and promote the accompaniment and growth in faith of young people in this setting with experiential proposals, respecting their history and culture.
- ▶ **Reception houses:** boarding establishments, residential and semi-residential structures, transition homes, apartments for young people who were previously accommodated, protection homes, and family homes.

- ▶ **Pastoral and psychosocial support:** a spiritual and professional support team in crisis and social emergency situations who design and implement educational projects for attention and interdisciplinary intervention processes for spiritual growth, healing, rehabilitation, restoration of rights, and rebuilding support networks.
- ▶ **Programs for compliance with socio-educational measures:** developed with young people in conflict with the law and also with individuals detained and confined in detention facilities and penitentiaries.
- ▶ **Schools:** educational projects developed starting from official programs that respond to socio-pedagogical models adapted to the needs of young people in situations of vulnerability and exclusion.
- ▶ **Vocational training centres:** workplaces and pre-workplaces with special programs and agreements with public and private organisations. This includes pathways to support job transition, recovery, and activation of young people.
- ▶ **Services for personal and social development:** preventive support to promote the growth of minors and young adults through the development of individualised programs.
- ▶ **Job placement services:** programs to improve employment with training in *power skills* and in selection processes and support during the job placement phases. In the same way, formation activity in entrepreneurship and job intermediation with companies.
- ▶ **Training centres for sports, art and culture, as well as for recreational spaces:** specific structures and programs that allow learning and practice of sports, enhance artistic qualities for the development of social skills, mental health, and entrepreneurship.
- ▶ **Facilities for healthy eating and nutritional balance:** catering services in institutions, such as community kitchens and social restaurants, supported by teams that ensure adequate nutritional assessment and monitoring.
- ▶ **Health centres:** general and specialised medicine, with particular attention to mental health. Help in connecting with state healthcare systems.

- ▶ **Legal Service Centres:** provide guidance, inter-institutional coordination, and support in restoring rights.

❖ All these services structure the different resources and assets in each area for promoting, facilitating and defending the dignified life of all human beings and the rights of the most fragile. The Works and services for young people and communities in situations of vulnerability and exclusion are not, therefore, “service providers”, but rather **sustained and transformative processes**, often of a preventive and promotional nature.

Given the predominantly social nature of this setting where many initiatives respond to serious and painful emergencies affecting youth, it is appropriate *to avoid impulsiveness*. It is true that these emergencies lead us to increase services and accumulate tasks. They are, undoubtedly, a necessary activity, but perhaps they lead us to prioritise immediate help over the idea of working through more medium- and long-term processes in search of a transformative solution.

We are clear that the commitment is to trace processes in which each individual is the central element, knowing that these are “long and complex paths” and that how we measure timing and objectives is different for each individual. In this respect, the social issue becomes an “anthropological question” for us today (*Caritas in Veritate*, no. 75), as Benedict XVI stated.

1 4 GROUPS WE SERVE

❖ As we have seen, valuable Salesian experience has facilitated the emergence of a wide variety of services in different provinces. It is natural that the types of services **constantly adapt to the dynamic social reality**; therefore, it is an ongoing necessity not to lose sight of and to work with great attention to events and with an eye to the future.

We believe that the world can be different and better, especially for the group of children and young people in vulnerable situations, the preferential option of our charismatic mission. They **are not just recipients of our service, but the reason for our commitment. They are responsible for who we are and what we do.**

“We feel the need to go deeper into the interpretation of the times we are living in, to the point of recognising that social phenomena and spiritual challenges, appeals of the young and movements of the Spirit are closely linked, without any possibility of separating them.” (GC 28, 7).

❖ The following list provides an overview of the most common support groups:

- ▶ **Boys, girls, adolescents and young adults on the street:** support for family and social reintegration, rebuilding of the parental network, strengthening of personality and support networks, protection of minors, and restoration of rights such as identity, health, education, and protection in safe environments.
- ▶ **Adolescents and young adults in conflict with the law:** Young victims of recruitment by outlawed armed groups. Young people tied to urban gangs, accompanying young people with degrees of deprivation of liberty, young people under protection orders, programs to strengthen the abilities of young people who are incarcerated or in the release phase.
- ▶ **Children, adolescents, and young adult victims of exploitation and human trafficking:** Protection programs for minors and young adults who are exploited for work purposes and/or sexually abused, or under-age girls given in marriage. Use of minors by criminal organisations to commit crimes.
- ▶ **Unaccompanied migrant children; migrant youth, families and communities; refugees and displaced persons:** Reception centres, orientation and support in transit and destination countries. Pastoral, psychosocial, nutritional, and healthcare support. Programs for social and employment integration in destination countries. Meeting centres for faith communities, evangelisation and catechesis. Spaces provided for ethnic minorities to meet and integrate. Special schools and oratories for migrants and refugees. Social assistance in refugee camps through specialised educational projects. Programs to strengthen different skills.
- ▶ **Youth rehabilitation:** Centres for treatment, accompaniment, and support in situations of addiction and dependencies due to the abuse

of psychoactive substances. Programs for accepting and caring for young people living with HIV.

- ▶ **Presence among poor or rights-violated groups:** Believing communities within low-income neighbourhoods as a testimony to the Christian faith. Accompaniment of individuals in these spaces with specialised social services (healthcare, nutritional, and legal) and development of formation and growth in faith processes.
- ▶ **Services for the care and promotion of indigenous cultures and peoples:** Specialised works for supporting and improving the academic, health, and professional qualifications of these communities. Works for the development of the skills of the Roma/ Gypsy people and peasant communities. Reception, protection, promotion of rights, and generation of social mobility for communities traditionally excluded from social systems in different countries due to certain cultural or religious traditions. Accompaniment of communities that have experienced forced displacement due to violence or climate change and suffer from uprooting; promoting inter-cultural education, literacy, environmental care, and vocational training among them.
- ▶ **Complementary educational services:** Programs for developing personal skills and academic reinforcement to overcome academic failure with psycho-pedagogical support for learning difficulties. Offer of adapted spaces with technologies that facilitate personal study and research. Programs for children and young people with special physical and mental educational needs. Updating programs for adults or for those who cannot find work.
- ▶ **Alternative educational services:** artistic or sports training programs with methodologies for social integration and skills enhancement, leading to respect for citizens. Offer of social group, sports, and art programs for healthy coexistence which strengthen self-esteem, promote discipline and personal growth, and create opportunities for work entrepreneurship. Programs for availability and healthy enjoyment of leisure time.
- ▶ **Support services for families and women:** temporary protection and accommodation for families at risk due to violence or

displacement. Education for responsible motherhood and fatherhood. Support for young mothers in support facilities and care during pregnancy and early childhood. Workshops to strengthen family bonds. Support for single mothers or heads of households.

- ▶ **Open spaces for young people who do not study or work:** generation of a sense of hope, with socio-educational support, training in autonomy and responsibility, training in managing free time, and universal skills that allow them to reintegrate into the school system or be connected to entrepreneurial or employability projects.

THE EDUCATIVE AND PASTORAL COMMUNITY: WORKS AND SERVICES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN SITUATIONS OF VULNERABILITY AND EXCLUSION

CHAPTER



2 1

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE EPC

❖ Don Bosco, through the Oratory, offered abandoned and vulnerable young people a real family in which to grow and prepare for life. This is why he considered the community experience important. The commitment to the poor, the excluded, and the vulnerable in Salesian presences has been consolidated since the beginning as a point of reference for the Salesian charism and mission. This comprehensive educational service is a true Salesian option of family welcome and presence. **All EPC members are part of this transformation process.** The mechanism or vehicle to direct this community action is generated through the relational processes among the people of the aforementioned community.

Starting from this principle, let us state some common elements so that the EPC can be truly transformational in its activity:

- I. *The desire or intention to work on shared goals and values in a community-oriented way, converging around a project that has the local circumstances as its context and interacts with it. In order to achieve this goal, a cohesive local EPC focuses on the individual needs of young people and supports them as they become active members of their communities with recognised rights.*
- II. The option for the poorest young people throughout the EPC is not an issue for those who are more receptive to the needy, nor is it a horizontalist or sociological trend. *It is a strong conviction, rooted in the liberating action of the Gospel, on which the entire principle of the Salesian charism and spirituality is focused.*
- III. The centrality of *young people as individuals who also play an active part in actions and decisions* with the goal of influencing change and improving their living conditions.
- IV. *Awareness of belonging* to the Salesian house that welcomes, includes and accompanies all people, establishing welcoming, humanising and engaging spaces.

2 2

THE INDIVIDUALS INVOLVED IN THE EPC

❖ The different members of the EPC have a relationship of closeness and friendship with young people based on the specific role that has been entrusted to them. We start, therefore, **from the absolute centrality of every individual**, from their inalienable and inviolable dignity as a child of God. Every child, youth or adult actually enjoys the dignity and beauty of being a child of God, is hungry for values, hope, faith, freedom, dignity, peace, infinity, eternity. These are the individuals who are chiefly involved in the EPC.

An imminent risk in understanding our young people is “grammatical reduction”, that is, the tendency to work by starting from “labels” (“distinct”, “different”, etc.) losing sight of the individual as a whole. These individuals are labelled because they “do not fit” the puzzle that makes up our social model. Our activity, however, is based **on the abilities and potential of individuals rather than on their difficulties and misfortunes**. Faced with shortcomings we focus on development factors, possibilities, opportunities and dreams. It is a new way of looking at, approaching, and relating to people.

Salesian education is all-encompassing and integrative. This approach obliges us to recreate the helping relationship, overcoming the model of assistance and charity where some give while others receive, some know while others are ignorant, some make history while others endure it, some are saved while others founder.

It is crucial that the psychosocial support offered to young people during their growth process is aimed at facilitating their becoming independent individuals capable of managing their own lives. It represents, **therefore, an intervention model that promotes the empowerment of young people**, their experiences and life paths, since they are unique, personal, and full of dignity.

Young people who are capable of expressing themselves freely, of defending their rights as an expression of their own process of personal and social promotion in the three areas of integral human development: response to needs, to the meaning of life, and to responsible participation.

Furthermore, it is necessary to prioritise all those occasions in which young people can acquire *the ability to make autonomous decisions, responsible attitudes in choices* (also very important for the discovery of faith), by proposing small goals, a very Salesian element that contributes to how someone defines their possibilities, achievements, abilities, and limits.

In this way, this community experience is consolidated as a **school of experience for the young people themselves**. They recognise themselves as jointly responsible for educational action with their peers, with whom they share the same process of integral growth to maturity that gradually prepares them for future service tasks in the same work, in their families, and in society.

Therefore, the implementation of new programs and projects must always meet the needs of young people and the territory in which they live. Involving them in the animation and governance groups of the Works is essential for ensuring the relevance and adequacy of formation proposals.

Pope Benedict XVI develops this approach in *Caritas in Veritate* (no. 17): “Integral human development presupposes the responsible freedom of the individual and of peoples: no structure can guarantee this development over and above human responsibility.”

“It is very important to emphasise that good accompaniment does not place the young person in a passive or subordinate position, but on the contrary promotes that individual’s active participation in community life and shared responsibility in the service of the poorest. It is therefore an accompaniment for involvement, for active and responsible presence in society and in the Church” (GC 28, 10).

❖ Educative and pastoral activity in this setting is essentially a community process, a dialogue between individuals who recognise themselves as living together legitimately. Hence life develops through **shared work between religious and lay people** and **interdisciplinary teams** that include professional figures such as social and re-educational educators, psychologists, social workers, socio-cultural animators, healthcare personnel (physicians of various specialities, nutritionists or physiotherapists), lawyers, accountants, administrators, project specialists, and global management specialists, among many others. This

combination of experiences, formation, and strengths is important to ensure comprehensive assistance.

- I. The Salesian Educative and Pastoral Project is realised not only through the offer of an original and specific educational and cultural proposal, but also through the **witness of those who work in the Salesian house** who today, more than in the past, are called to present themselves as points of reference for the younger generations. *It is charity in word and deed.*
- II. Today nobody doubts that **ethics is a central element in the practice of any profession**, especially those related to accompanying individuals. Ethics is involved in every moment of activity: in the accuracy of diagnoses or interventions, in the treatment of those being served, or in the use of power derived from one's professional role. Best practice, professionalism, and Salesian kindness are a combination of knowledge with respectful treatment and confidentiality.

The accompaniment process is inter-subjective, it is something that involves two people; therefore, the people involved in the educational relationship have their own subjectivity, can establish their own limits, must navigate between affections and disaffections, encounters and disagreements, etc. The accompanying educator must understand their own psycho-affective, social and spiritual dynamics and those of the person they are accompanying.

- III. **Joint formation between Salesians and laypeople** is an opportunity to achieve this goal, as it integrates elements of charismatic identity with those related to the different roles and functions of the organisation. To do this, it is necessary to allocate human and material resources that offer specific knowledge and ensure the ability to develop strategies that provide vitality to the presence.

The formation of socio-political awareness must be carefully promoted through diplomas, higher education cycles, and social integration to be pioneers in these fields: to be specialists in addressing and intervening in associated problems such as drug addiction, violence, school failure, family planning, etc.

- IV.** In order to provide these services it is necessary to gain a deeper appreciation, through **the study of the Preventive System**, of current youth needs arising from the cultural and socio-economic reality and the national and international legal framework.
- V.** At the same time **the study of the Social Doctrine of the Church from the perspective of integral human development is needed**. We move according to the parameters of this Social Doctrine, whose mission is the concrete enlightenment of humankind starting from the Gospel, a constant and repeated attempt to apply the message of Jesus Christ to changing social realities.

As Salesians, we embrace the values and attitudes promoted by this “Christian social thought” or “social teaching of the Church” as a historical response to social, cultural, economic and political problems; with the aim of promoting the transformation of reality into a more just, supportive, and fraternal society through respect for the dignity of the human person, human rights and duties, and the rights of peoples.

- VI.** Finally, leadership groups must pay particular attention to the **well-being of the human resources of the organisation**, seeking their involvement and avoiding high staff turnover. This is done with both those who are contractually tied to the work and with those who volunteer, through good relationships, fair compensation, and recognition of their work. Furthermore, it has to be said that the educative and pastoral activity of these presences is carried out by people who are not immune to fatigue and tiredness. They are normal, fragile individuals who also require care and support.

❖ The members of the **Salesian community**, wherever their presence is possible, are called to be a humble prophetic presence and a witness of fraternity and of a simple and joyful life.

On the other hand, they must be “experts” in imagining pastoral care for young people, which in turn is “pedagogical charity” with very original and surprising characteristics, that is, with unconditional educational love, the energy that imbues every Salesian relationship and every person. It makes the individuals in the Salesian house exist and live for each other, in others and for others. No one lies outside this inclusive relationship.

The exemplary nature of the Salesians must be the same as Don Bosco's. His testimony, *his concrete language puts the "heart" at the centre*: the heart desires, the heart understands, listens to what is said to it, reflects, moves. The Salesian is supported by mature affectivity, by love that is strongly internalised yet transparent to the gaze of the other – perceivable, visible, witnessed through the primacy of **educational fatherhood**. It is a "cheerful" love which bears the seal of celebration and joy. The religious community, in short, bears witness through care, familiarity, and affectionate dedication. *Young people feel loved forever, with an educational and, at the same time, personal love.*

❖ **The pastoral Coordinator**, together with those responsible for interdisciplinary care in the Works and services for young people and communities in situations of vulnerability and exclusion, is tasked with the preparation, implementation, and evaluation of the local SEPP. The shared responsibility of everyone in the structuring of the project, including young people and families, is a characteristic element of Salesian pedagogy.

❖ Various forms of **social volunteering** have been carried out in this setting for several decades. They represent another very valid method to ensure interdisciplinary work in support of social interventions carried out with young people, families, and groups.

Promotion of social volunteering in the various areas of mission and local management is a contribution to sustainable development, integrating within (for example) the European Volunteers' Project and working groups according to their profiles and the time they have available to dedicate to the cause. There are numerous experiences that demonstrate that this expression of volunteering is deeply rooted in the Salesian charism, as it integrates people – friends of Don Bosco's work – within a movement of cultural, religious, and professional diversity. To all of them, therefore, the doors are open to contribute with their knowledge and skills, enhancing the culture of solidarity.



THE EDUCATIVE AND PASTORAL PROJECT OF THE WORKS AND SERVICES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN SITUATIONS OF VULNERABILITY AND EXCLUSION

CHAPTER



The educative and pastoral project of the Works and services for young people in situations of vulnerability and exclusion

In the Works and services for populations in situations of vulnerability and exclusion, our special preference is to work *with young people and starting from young people*, which means being by their side, looking at the situation, and shaping our criteria and our personal, pastoral and social projects from there. It is from there that we configure our priorities, our lifestyle, and our strategic directions.

In this regard, educating in the Salesian way means that:

- I. On one hand, **the focus is social and the methodology is interdisciplinary**, to guarantee effective support paths aimed at the integral development of young people/groups and at restoring their rights.
- II. On the other hand, **the social dimension of pastoral charity** that takes advantage of Don Bosco's pedagogical model is in tune with Jesus' fervent desire to reach out to the most vulnerable and excluded.
- III. We are, finally, faced with the challenge of applying a style, an essential identity: the Salesian educational style that is the most characteristic and expressive embodiment of Don Bosco's pedagogical method and spirituality in Valdocco. This involves a return to the origins, **to the Oratory criterion**, the guiding principle of action, discernment, and renewal of all Works and activities.

In the Salesian tradition, this original criterion has been expressed through certain icons: a family environment that welcomes, values, cares for, and supports ("home"), characterised by joyful encounters and friendship ("playground"); where everyone can develop their potential, acquiring new skills ("school") and can journey in a holistic way, educating and valuing their interiority ("church"). Therefore, this dynamic is always present in the configuration of these Works and services.

THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION AND THE JOURNEY OF FAITH

❖ We might be tempted to think that socio-educational discourse has nothing to do with **the spiritual and religious imagination of young people**. We forget that they have a spiritual desire and also have the ability to satisfy it. And with this, activities related to interiority can often go unnoticed.

Interiority, inner life, is not the monopoly of believers or Christians: every person experiences an inner dimension, lives – we can say – “spiritually”, lives with awareness, a search that is typical of the human being and transcends nature. It is the movement that every human being makes to return to their essence, to their home, to their source. In conclusion, *interiority is an experience that belongs to every young person*.

The educative and pastoral activity offered by a Salesian work represents the opportunity to give soul, breath, depth and continuity to existing services, inserting them into a framework of meaning and perspective that is more complex than simply “doing good” for young people. *The religious question*, therefore, also resides in this context of meaning, because Salesian pedagogy involves guiding the young person in their growth from an explicitly integral perspective: it is education, with a component of “science and art” that aims to develop all their potential.

❖ We consider the individual to be an *integral system* where every action taken has an impact on the interconnected parts that make up the human being as a whole. For this reason, among other things it is necessary to implement **a pedagogy of interiority**. If this aspect is missing, there is a risk of disfiguring the authentic and integral meaning of the Salesian mission.

To incorporate this pedagogy of interiority it is necessary to start by deconstructing some prejudices and stereotypes. Our interiority must be like Don Bosco’s in the field of education: *an interiority that is receptive to engaging with others in a rich and complex active way*. Don Bosco would be remembered as a man of exemplary character and active faith in charity, fully embodying human fullness, especially for those who are on the “margins” of society.

Don Bosco's letters reveal a great sense of the primacy of God in him in all his endeavours. He expresses concern for the answers to the "ultimate" questions: the meaning of life, of inner life, the destiny of communion with God, the tension to become human in dealing with others, with history, with small or great difficulties that reality poses.

As a result, educators who want to experience this Salesian educative and pastoral proposal must also think of it as **a response to the increasing questions of meaning, belonging, fullness, in other words a proposal of spirituality.**

The education of the inner dimension will be fruitful precisely because it allows the young person to enter the fascinating territory of human questions and experiences. These are a propitious moment for the first proclamation of the Gospel, because it is at these crossroads that every man or woman experiences that life is "more", it is worth more than what we produce; they are crossroads that urge us to open the heart and mind to the gift of God.

Catechesis and education in the faith are not something we should offer only to the most fortunate, able and capable boys and girls. It is precisely those most in need who are the first to be enriched by the gift of the Lord's presence in their lives, by the gift of faith – whatever their religion."(FATHER ÁNGEL FERNÁNDEZ, AGC 438)

Cultivating interiority from a Christian perspective means creating the optimal conditions that allow each person to recognise themselves as precious and authentic, to find meaning in their life, and a vital project from which to develop and encounter humanity. Often the *desire for transcendence* arises in people. It is about directing our efforts so that young people discover within themselves "the hidden treasure" which is not perceived by a superficial glance: the presence of God in their life and the face of Jesus in every human being.

❖ As we said above, we start from the absolute centrality of the person, **from that person's inalienable dignity as a child of God.** We recall the vivid scenes around Jesus Christ himself, to whom many in need come and feel privileged: the socially excluded (lepers and the disabled), the religiously marginalised (prostitutes and tax collectors), the culturally

oppressed (women and children), the socially dependent (widows and orphans), the physically handicapped (deaf, mute, lame, and blind), the psychologically tormented (those possessed by demons and epileptics), the spiritually humble (simple and God-fearing people, repentant sinners). *Jesus Christ is more interested in your health than in your guilt, more in the freedom of what is new than in the restoration of what is old.*

From Jesus we have learned that only proximity, words, and presence can humanise/evangelise. One of the deepest wounds of socially excluded individuals is not being recognised, the feeling that their identity is despised and that they are expendable. The renewed attention to Jesus Christ, to his person, by the entire Salesian pastoral work is a priority and an invitation in particular to place **Christian humanism at the centre of our Educative and Pastoral Project.**

Our educational commitment is totally inspired by this Jesus who approaches the reality of youth, touches it and brings life in situations where there was only death (Luke 7:11-17). The Master felt the same mercy for the most vulnerable and excluded of his time that the Father always showed for his people.

❖ We therefore assume the belief that the Works and services directed towards young people and communities in situations of vulnerability and exclusion **are a setting of Salesian Youth Ministry in which evangelisation is accomplished through actions promoting human dignity.** In this respect evangelising means proximity, commitment, humanisation and accompaniment to respond to the reality we are addressing. In respect of the beliefs and cultural values of individuals and the diverse societies in which we find ourselves, our presence and actions are concrete forms of first announcement and become a genuine path of evangelisation.

In Christian societies, proclamation is made explicit; in secularised and non-Christian societies, it is expressed through the witness of life. Under no circumstances do we give up our charismatic identity. We find the best way to share and offer our values by seeking to build the Kingdom of God and social friendship. *Members of the EPC who are neither Christian nor Catholic, or who have not experienced processes of faith, are respected for their ways of life, while they are invited to share Don Bosco's charism,*

to engage in the institutional mission, and to participate in and implement the educative and pastoral proposal expressed in the SEPP.

3 2

THE FAMILY ATMOSPHERE AND FORMATIVE PROPOSAL

❖ The “home” is a symbol of intimacy and rest; it goes beyond its walls, it is the place of relationship with others who are made welcome. Home and encounter with others are the two most significant points of reference for a person. Many of our young people, however, suffer from situations of brokenness, loneliness, and powerlessness that they would like to forget; the deep impact of these vulnerabilities on their lives sometimes conceals the **strength of positive or reference relationships**.

Our first task is, therefore, to create a welcoming environment. But this is not achieved simply by opening doors or arms. What is needed is a precise intentionality that focuses on the affective-relational dimension. This means creating **free relational spaces** within the EPC where listening to our young people, their problems, their values becomes a fundamental moment of shared living, appreciation and respect for every individual. Every educator must understand that everyone in their individual history is a world and that every world has its richness.

Earning the friendship and trust of the boys; accompanying them in their contexts of work or prison; bringing them together on Saturdays and Sundays, and offering them confession and communion, singing, catechism, an example of life and something to eat... “This is how things normally ran at the Oratory for nearly three years, up to the end of October 1844” (MEMOIRS OF THE ORATORY OF SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES, 107 NEW ROCHELLE EDITION 2010).

The positive and realistic vision of Don Bosco’s youth is imbued with “preventive love” in the sense that it gives credit to the young person in a free and gratuitous manner. Love, or if you prefer, the loving-kindness of the educator in this process has the essential function of triggering the positive response and collaboration of the young person, a *conditio sine qua non* of the authenticity of the formative work. This is why *intelligence and heart must be cultivated in every relationship*.

Salesian loving kindness is an emergency brake and dam against forgetfulness, abstraction, anonymity and generalisation. It is a word that revolves around the potential of tenderness, human abilities, and the empowerment of the individual.

Regarding educators, we share the words of Pope Benedict XVI:

“Individuals who care for those in need must first be professionally competent... They need humanity. They need heartfelt concern. Those who work for the Church’s charitable organisations must be distinguished by the fact that they do not merely meet the needs of the moment, but they dedicate themselves to others with heartfelt concern, enabling them to experience the richness of their humanity. Consequently, in addition to their necessary professional training, these charity workers need a ‘formation of the heart’” (DEUS CARITAS EST, 31.A).

Indeed, the good received turns into a gift of good because the perception of being loved and receiving love drives the will to choose what is good. This freely given good, methodologically transformed by the educator into *“demonstrated love”*, is the cornerstone of this system where prevention expresses all its multiple dimensions: taking the first step, getting there first, searching, approaching, being accessible, welcoming, inspiring confidence, encouraging, caring; and also, leading as a guide, and then accompanying, advising (cf. *A youth ministry that educates to love*, Rome 2023).

This love necessarily implies the recognition of the dignity and rights of the young. *To separate charity and justice is equivalent to emptying Christian love of its real content.* Our young people, like all living beings, need oxygen, water, food; but as human beings they need recognition and affection which is a right and a duty of everyday life. This is the revolution of tenderness to which Jesus invites us in the Gospel, the culture of tenderness that Pope Francis asks of us (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 209).

Personal relationship is always and in any case predominant and essential. In the brief decalogue that introduces the “Regulation for the houses” written in 1877, Don Bosco returns to speaking about assistance with an interesting clarification in Article 3: “Assistance requires few words, but a lot of work.” (THE “GENERAL ARTICLES” OF THE “REGULATION FOR THE HOUSES”).

❖ **A Salesian house is always an educational place**” where every young person feels valued for who they are, for what they have, for what they need, and not judged for what they should be. Every person finds their own role and is valued not for what they can do. Even young people who do not want to or cannot find their way in formal situations discover, through more informal elements (educational, cultural, recreational initiatives), an opportunity to express themselves. Some informal Salesian elements are very helpful: the playground, walks, theatre, music, games, images, sports, art, graphics, dance, storytelling, comics, singing, etc.

The protection of minors and vulnerable persons *must always be promoted* within the framework of the culture of institutional care. Manuals for a safe environment, ethical codes and other tools will be developed, implemented, and continuously updated for this, and always communicated to all members and stakeholders.

❖ It is important to help shape the “identity” of or, in some cases, to **rebuild and unify, the person**. In a context of fragmentation, unity can be achieved only through vital contact with people and institutions endowed with a strong identity, respectful of diversity and therefore liberating. We educate through conviction and motivation, with personalised relationships that express welcome and dialogue, respect and unconditional acceptance.

We are bearers of something formidable that we must know how to value, in which we must believe and by which we must live. And that treasure is Don Bosco, the Salesian charism, the dream of an education capable of changing the heart of every child and young person because it first changed ours. In other words, every **educator is a positive role model for identification and a point of reference** in the personal growth process of young people.

3 3

THE PREVENTIVE CRITERION

❖ From the beginning of his stay in Turin, Don Bosco frequented the places where educational and welfare activities took place, such as the juvenile prison, the Generala, or the works of the Marchioness Barolo. Life, formation, and the spiritual, pastoral and social activity of Don Bosco

were nourished by a group of saints and witnesses of the faith who had a special social sensitivity and commitment to the poor: for example, Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Leonard Murialdo. Even his direct relationships with institutions and individuals who shared **his preventive concern are documented.**

“Don Bosco made a gospel choice to become poor with the poor. He took on the poverty, including the material poverty, of the Son of God, in order to reach out to those who were most in need. The streets and squares became his workplace, the field or playground his meeting place and the place where he proclaimed the Gospel. He welcomed young people without exception and without prejudice, recognising and valuing what was in their hearts (their dreams, their difficulties and their challenges). He walked with them, adapting himself to their pace” (SALESIAN YOUTH MINISTRY FRAME OF REFERENCE, 41).

Don Bosco reinterpreted everything he experienced through his rich personality and experience among young people lacking material, psychosocial, and spiritual resources. And in this process he was **convinced of the preventive value of education in society**, and of how prevention is a criterion that permeates the educational relationship and calls for the presence of a community/family strategically gathered around a project.

Prevention is the best way to educate: on one hand, it generates **healing and reconciliation processes**; on the other hand, it has **a clear vital projection** aimed at avoiding, from a promotional perspective, scenarios of greater distress, building a proposal for young people for an integral and healthy life (*“upright citizens and good Christians”*, Don Bosco).

❖ The preventive criterion was therefore the guiding principle of Don Bosco’s educational practice. Today, this criterion continues to enlighten and progressively guide the entire Salesian method: the vision of the young person, educational purposes and objectives, content and means, educational relationships, environment, and proposed activities. In other words, there is **a “preventive” way of being educators** that involves a particular way of thinking about young people, of being among them, “loving what they love”, and making proposals that dynamically involve each and every one of them.

This is preventive thinking *in the broadest sense of the term*:

- I. The “preventive criterion” aims to prevent harmful or distorting experiences in young people. It includes the more *protective-negative* sense of the term, that particular sensitivity necessary for every educator to pay attention to everything that can be an irreversibly negative experience at a time when the young person is developing. It is about anticipating the risk factors that must be fought or contained, warning of the risk of internal or environmental threats. Preventing in this case means *reducing the incidence of harm*, avoiding, preventing, isolating, neutralising negative and counterproductive elements; very often, in fact, the educational proposal responds to social emergencies and, therefore, offers assistance, defence, and social protection. Furthermore, it seeks to address the root causes that lead to vulnerability and exclusion.
- II. On the other hand, it should be noted that prevention means bringing out the best in everyone, positively influencing the young by promoting constructive and edifying experiences. In this way, it is not so much about containing the risks as it is about promoting and improving the starting conditions and resources. So, through sports, creative activities and cultural activities among others, the young person’s process of maturing is activated, their human potential, their opportunities to discover themselves and grow as individuals. In this case, prevention is *promoting, valuing, building, strengthening*.
- III. Thirdly, prevention includes interventions aimed at rehabilitating and recovering those who suffer from complex, adverse, or conflict situations, transforming these environments into *true scenarios of youthful resurrection*.

“The defence, restitution and safeguarding of the rights of children, teenagers and older youth – as well as their families, groups and neighbourhoods – give the Salesian Preventive System a very concrete characterisation and implementation. Mitigation of social risk, the restoration of rights, and reintegration into social life are the expected results of this pastoral action.” (FATHER ÁNGEL FERNÁNDEZ, AGC 438).

❖ The two core areas identified as privileged places for the application of the preventive criterion are *relationships* (as we explained above) and *the group*: while the first is the privileged place for prevention, the second is the essential condition for preventive education. **The pedagogy of the environment and the group is an experience of social integration** for learning to live in relationship and spontaneous dialogue, in autonomy and interdependence, drawing on the resilient capabilities that young people possess so that they can overcome the pain they have experienced and strengthen their personality.

3 4

THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE

❖ Salesian social action and its response to the vulnerability and social exclusion of young people necessarily has a **political perspective**. Its Works and services promote prevention, reintegration, a culture of care for others, as well as everything related to peace, justice, social dialogue, environmental protection, and the reconstruction of family and social ties that enable cohesion among peoples.

Our action must be transformative of people and the structures that generate poverty. It must be prophetic, must denounce injustice, must alleviate suffering, but take on the political implications of so-called “social friendship”.

Social friendship, an expression of Pope Francis in his social Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* (2020), is closely linked to universal fraternity, leading to closeness especially with the poorest and most needy. There is continuity between friendship and fraternity; they are not two opposing areas, *loving those far away without loving those close to us to means deceiving ourselves*.

The construction of this social **“fraternity-friendship”** pair urges us to respond like Don Bosco who, with the attitude of the Good Samaritan, could see human suffering, heal and cure the wounded, and reintegrate them into the normalcy of life as a sign of Divine salvation.

“It is clear that we cannot speak of Salesian Social Works and Services without recognising that we are involved in this call to participate in the path of integral human development to

which Pope Francis has invited the Church and the world. It is, so to speak, the official agenda of the Church to which we are institutionally aligned as a Congregation. This adds value to the significance of our works, reinforces the charismatic identity of our educational and social intervention and enlightens us in our choice of allies and stakeholders.” (FATHER ÁNGEL FERNÁNDEZ, AGC 438).

❖ We realise how many things we have forgotten in the name of progress and economic growth. In many contexts we observe the existence of a societal model that has confused ‘development’ with ‘growth or progress’. ‘Progress’ has shown us that the existence of people in situations of poverty and exclusion becomes the most visible sign of their crisis and contradiction. These situations of inequality are the most significant proof of a social model that is moving in a direction that does not correspond to God’s plan for humanity. Therefore, **an essential element is the development of critical-social thinking regarding our own environment and the world**, with new criteria of analysis.

We have a challenge of stance and testimony in our action, of proclamation and denunciation. The first victory of solidarity occurs in the arena of what we say. We do not need violent actions; our action is rooted in the dynamics of reason and justice.

Given that these presences have a high social impact, it is necessary to say that they also enjoy **political ramifications**, as the defence and promotion of various human rights conventions, particularly that of minors, places us in an active position of *political influence or advocacy*, working in collaboration with states and other organisations responsible for ensuring people’s development. With Development Cooperation, moreover, situations that have become invisible and hidden in the social geography are made visible.

“While not getting involved in ideologies or party politics, we reject everything that encourages deprivation, injustice and violence. We cooperate with all who are trying to build a society more worthy of human dignity. The advancement to which we dedicate ourselves in the spirit of the gospel makes tangible the love of Christ which sets us free, and is a sign that the Kingdom of God is among us.” (C. 33).

It is the denunciation of cover-ups (the most dangerous form of lying!), of concealing unjust structural realities, of moving towards a future that

is currently denied, of denying personal and collective responsibility. We must be critical in order to be constructive, expressing problems to address them without harming people.

❖ The small commitment “for others” brings new responsibilities, forces one to search for, to find new energies. It makes one capable of resisting and reacting to difficulties, possible crises, and negative events. *Small potential steps, so long as they are experienced fully, transform.* This is why we help young people rediscover a greater adherence to the typical elements of Christian humanism, as far as their commitment in the world is concerned.

Educational activity in these Works and services prepares and helps young people to engage in their surrounds. At the same time, it promotes **the care of our common home**. We include the responsibility to preserve a whole and healthy environment for all people in our educational proposal. Pope Francis, in his Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, has effectively introduced this issue into educational and social reflection, connecting the environmental crisis and the social crisis, and calling for both social dialogue to achieve sustainable development and the need for a human and integral ecology. As educators, we take on the fact that concern for nature and justice for the poor are inseparable, and we promote an ecological approach that listens to both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.





THE SYSTEMATIC PASTORAL ANIMATION OF WORKS AND SERVICES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN SITUATIONS OF VULNERABILITY AND EXCLUSION

CHAPTER

IV

4 1

MAIN INTERVENTIONS IN THIS PROPOSAL

So the time has come to provide, in an open and non-exclusive manner, at least three specific strategic priorities that allow us to act effectively.

4 1 1

In-depth knowledge of the youth reality and cultural processes

❖ The educative and pastoral action in our territories cannot work only with short-sighted perspectives that focus just on what is immediate and at hand. We need a thorough approach to uncover the challenges posed for us by social and cultural realities, enabling us to discover new paths and engage with a perspective that humanises, transforms, and liberates.

It is urgent and necessary to cultivate direct knowledge of the root causes of social exclusion and vulnerability. This reminds us that **solidarity is an open-eyed school**. Father Cafasso advised Don Bosco to look at things from the perspective of those on the outer, and to let himself be seen by the children and poor youngsters of Turin. One's awareness is prompted by what one sees, especially when looking at the unpleasant face of poverty and the exclusion of the poorest who have stopped hoping and often even desiring.

This image is the one presented to Don Bosco at the beginning of his apostolate as an educator of young people. Today, once again, maintaining the genuine Salesian perspective in all our Salesian presences involves actively demonstrating closeness and being present. We are captivated by the human face of so many young people and feel motivated by the challenges of their situation to be committed to them.

❖ It is necessary to be able to rely on EPC members capable of **reflecting on, organising experiences, collecting and analysing data** that allow us to measure the impact of the work carried out and evaluate and strengthen our educative and pastoral service in every institution. To implement this option, it is necessary to qualify the action we offer as a Congregation to the neediest in each of these Works and services, to avoid the risk of ourselves becoming just one more agent who violates their dignity.

Therefore, constant reflection on the effects of different types of poverty, human mobility and exclusion and their influence on the youth world, especially on the family, also implies a *systematic collaboration among the various institutions to be found in the area*. Our charism asks us to carefully perceive the cultural categories of the young, the needy, the minorities, to contribute to rebuilding a new humanity, even starting from the margins of history.

“our preferential option for the poorest young people means we must necessarily look at the different environments they come from. So the focus of these social works and services demands reflection and interdisciplinary intervention which offers processes of accompaniment for young people, their families (when they have one) and their core social group. This says that situations of poverty, wherever they arise, must be analysed seriously and in depth. It is clear that we must have as much preparation and expertise in accompanying people and communities in situations of vulnerability just as we do in the other “common and traditional” areas of our pastoral work, where we take care to respond to various needs with professional and quality offers.” (FATHER ÁNGEL FERNÁNDEZ, AGC 438).

A plan for integral accompaniment



❖ An individual grows through slow and gradual processes. By this we mean that transformation processes take precedence over immediate results. Therefore, our action is essentially **the accompaniment of integral processes of personalised development**.

This accompaniment of processes is a characteristic that deserves Salesian attention: it is an integral accompaniment that does not focus on partial elements of the individual. This proposal for overall development, which encompasses all the life experiences of young people and all dimensions of their person (personal, family, sociocultural, environmental, sociopolitical, and ethical-religious), will constantly and systematically take into account their personal resources, so that they themselves can increasingly become the protagonists of their own lives.

That is why the social sector model encourages an interdisciplinary approach and develops a specific educational support plan for each young person. This plan is the basis for accompanying them, evaluating their progress, and deciding together with them when the objectives have been achieved. All educators, as a consequence, will have progressively acquired a theoretical background and basic attitudes regarding **accompaniment as a transformative process involving dialogue**.

❖ The SEPP of a work explicitly dedicated to serving young people in situations of vulnerability and exclusion, plans **policies and care strategies and support that involve:**

- ▶ *Approaching the reality of young people, being interested in and knowing about it, sharing their interests in their world and where they live, welcoming them unconditionally from the outset.*
- ▶ *Valuing the talents of each individual, giving everyone the opportunity to develop and achieve their potential, also known as “gifts”, in a continuous journey that also becomes a guide for the construction of the individual’s life project, involving all aspects of their humanity: intellectual, physical, ethical, social, and religious.*
- ▶ *Implementing significant interventions for the education and personal guidance of young people, helping them to accept themselves and then offering them the opportunity to rehabilitate and positively redirect their lives (cultivating appropriate attitudes for a healthy relationship with themselves and with others).*
- ▶ *Knowing their religious world, offering experiences that from the beginning can encourage the growth of their spiritual dimension and help them personally assimilate educational, religious, and gospel values.*
- ▶ *Helping them discover and experience the loving and fatherly presence of God in their lives, creating conditions for a personal, patient, trusting and confidential encounter between the educator and the young person.*
- ▶ *Proposing concrete activities for bodies interested in young people to keep them away from violence, drugs, and organised crime. Sports,*

music, dance, games and other artistic activities are essential for intellectual and motor development; but they also improve social skills and integrate young people into the community, offering additional options for healthy entertainment and/or distraction. Examples of such initiatives include, among others, sports tournaments, integration games and teamwork activities, and singing and acting competitions.

- ▶ Redefining the dreams of many people who are living, now more than ever, *in a situation of human mobility (migrants, refugees, displaced people)*. Addressing this situation through the four verbs promoted by Pope Francis at the International Forum on Migration and Peace in February 2017: “welcome, protect, promote, and integrate.”

The implementation of a migration project inevitably involves often unpredictable challenges, especially for the individual concerned but also for the host society. When this process, moreover, occurs during adolescence, characterised by insecurities, doubts about the future, and difficulties in prioritising goals, its impact increases exponentially.

- ▶ Motivating young people to participate *in solidarity initiatives* through volunteer activities where they take care of others in order to gradually involve them in active citizenship.
- ▶ Accompanying young people in the transition to adulthood by establishing educational and work paths that allow for *recovery, activation, and approaching the world of work*.
- ▶ In the same way, we also accompany situations where very different people come together such as *interculturality*, where conflicts accompany relationships and influence peace and how people live together.

Development of network programs and projects

- ❖ Salesian accompaniment is not just a methodology, but it follows the Salesian intervention model, **a humanistic model where the helping relationship involves empathy, connection with others, and care for life.**

There are Salesian works and services that take care of life, especially when it is most threatened (*area of exclusion*). They take care of fragility, especially of the most vulnerable individuals (*area of health*). They take care of the earth, especially where it has been damaged by human abuse (*ecological realm*). They take care of a just and equitable world (*area of cooperation*).

Given the vastness of the fronts engulfing us, we must consider intentionally planned and multidisciplinary actions aimed at achieving a goal with a specific population, always within an institutionally established framework. In other words, it is about developing transformation tools and processes, given the increasing complexity of social phenomena.

To achieve educative and pastoral activity of quality, insights, sporadic experiences, or good personal intentions generated by philanthropy are not enough. In other words, just any kind of help does not work and just any kind of action does not work.

❖ Hence it is useful in the first instance for this commitment to be specified in the **Province SEPP**, indicating in which places educative and pastoral services are developed, clearly defining objectives, timelines, teams, methodologies, as well as the indicators that will help the Province to strengthen them. Considering that these are educational and evangelising places, it is necessary to ensure the dignity of the spaces, work materials, and all types of resources that make working with the poorest an opportunity to raise their quality of life. It is about building an ideal reference shared by all the people involved in the form of principles and values that must guide educative and pastoral activity.

Secondly, it is necessary that every EPC periodically includes a study of youth culture in its **local SEPP** and examines it with an attitude of faith and discernment. The encounter with the real situation of young people must be the starting point and, for this encounter to be honest, it must be imbued with listening and courage.

Additionally, any self-referentiality in the mission will be avoided to the extent that this in-depth knowledge of the youth reality is supported by networking and coordination with other church and civic bodies present in the immediate environment.

The journey which the Salesian Educative and Pastoral Project (SEPP) aims at for this setting sees to the articulation of its four dimensions with true apostolic zeal, so that by accompanying the educational process of young people in relation to their family (if they have one) and their environment, a true redesigning of culture takes place, mitigating the devastation of social evil found in their personal story. In our ecclesial commitment for the salvation of humanity, we strive to build processes of reintegration of these young people once left on the margins, excluded from society, to return them to it as people capable of autonomous development, as active and believing citizens – with absolute respect for their freedom. (FATHER ÁNGEL FERNÁNDEZ, AGC 438).

❖ This organisational model, in which the participation and involvement of the EPC play a crucial role, allows it to gain not only experience in accompanying people but also in **how it measures and organises its pedagogical knowledge**. In this regard, many contexts have implemented management and quality systems that allow *the monitoring and continuous improvement of services*; moreover, they have promoted measurement and communication mechanisms to involve all levels of the Congregation in understanding the impacts of the environment, enabling processes of reflection and decision-making and the responsible involvement of institutional bodies. This allows them, in turn, to prepare *the social balance sheet of their activity*.

Finally, it is necessary **to optimise the digital dimension**, adapting the technologies available, thus bridging the gap between the social and digital sectors: it is an important aspect today for the transformative social intervention action that we Salesians are called to realise in people's lives and in society itself.

❖ Faced with a world interconnected by interests and issues, we need to create bridges, **alliances at the local, provincial and regional levels**. In some cases, this type of operational-level cooperation continues to pose a challenge. The practice encounters barriers of different nature such as the differentiation of vulnerable groups, resistance to change, diversity of interests, or lack of adaptability and flexibility. Nevertheless:

- I. Awareness of networking collaboration is growing, first of all, **among Salesian Works** in this setting to strengthen themselves corporately

in the region, as well as with the Works from other Salesian settings which are called to open their doors to the neediest, promoting the use of their facilities and facilitating their integration into their educational offerings.

In this regard it is necessary to **strengthen internal communication networks** to promote common reflection and to be able to share best practices, tools, and protocols used. The creation of this information network regarding these presences and their projects, programs, and activities provides feedback for the effective implementation of their educational and social reintegration processes.

- II. 2) We must see social reality as a set of connections, where institutions and individuals (social actors, church institutions, social services, public administrations, and international associations) are involved in common relationships and solutions. As a result, the development of programs and projects in this educative and pastoral setting is clearly advantageous if there is **networking with other civil and religious organisations** that share similar objectives.

One aspect to consider is the ability to engage in dialogue and negotiation with both government and non-government institutions for participation in projects or for requesting resources *without giving up the values that promote Christian ethics*.

- III. It is necessary to strengthen the involvement of provinces in competent civil organisations in order to follow up the development of **youth social policies** and participate in **reflection, and in how legislative decisions are arrived at**. Working in a network represents a challenge for Salesian institutions because it allows them to acquire greater skills for the delivery of their services, while also sharing their best practices so that they can be replicated by others.

4 2

STRUCTURES OF PARTICIPATION AND RESPONSIBILITY

4 2 1

At the local level

❖ Faced with the speed of significant changes in our societies, all Salesian presences in the province, in each of the pastoral settings where they serve, must provide **effective responses to the different types of poverty that cause vulnerability and exclusion within their environment** by initiating coordinated processes involving the various actors in the area and committing to finding the best solutions to help alleviate social malaise.

In the specific Works and services in the setting that work with young people in situations of vulnerability and exclusion, attention to young people in difficulty must be developed by considering the commitment to establish *interdisciplinary teams in all Salesian settings that are adequately formed and trained*, ensuring a Salesian social action of quality and professionalism.

❖ The sense of openness of the Work to the environment and to the youth world is important, as well as **the strengthening of a well-articulated planning mentality** suitable for the criteria and needs of educative and pastoral work with these young people. In the same way, attention to the dynamics and functioning of the Work itself is fundamental to avoid any type of exclusion, as well as the presence, participation, and involvement of young people in activities and groups. Similarly, constant research into the quality of processes and educational programs is necessary, as required by the circumstances of their beneficiaries.

❖ Specific Works intended for the pastoral care of young people in situations of vulnerability and exclusion have accumulated a large number of criteria and interventions that give their management its identity. Like every Salesian work, and this one in particular, it must be an educative and pastoral presence with **proper management and administration** of the corresponding financial resources. It is a challenge to achieve greater diversification of funding sources to attain independence and autonomy, as well as a stronger commitment to sustainability in order to ensure an effective and sustainable long-term financial model.

At the same time, it requires a deep understanding of the legal frameworks of each country for the implementation and work with minors and people in vulnerable situations.

“As in any process of growth and maturation of institutions, it is necessary to plan the future of these works, but always ensuring that they respond with quality and dignity to the needs of their beneficiaries. It is necessary to overcome the mentality, still persistent in some provinces, that causes there to be a gap and a difference between the buildings, equipment and profiles of the educators and operators of the works that cater to young people living without economic deprivation and those that cater to the poorest. This perpetuates the difference between those who have more opportunities and those who are less favoured and, to be faithful to the Lord Jesus and Don Bosco, we cannot allow this, because the poor deserve the best from us – as we learned from Don Bosco.” (FATHER ÁNGEL FERNÁNDEZ, AGC 438).

❖ As we have stated above, it becomes urgent and necessary to strengthen the capacity of **local bodies for territorial networking**, taking care of the political impact of their environment, also expanding cooperation with platforms, networks, participation and social advocacy movements, and civic solidarity initiatives.

At the province and inter-province level

❖ There is growing sensitivity and concern, reflection and commitment in the Provinces with regard to the world of young people in situations of vulnerability and exclusion. This category of Works and services is not an isolated initiative, identified with some particular presence or driven exclusively by personal initiatives. Faced with individualism based on distrust and self-sufficiency, the proposal is clear: **an “institutional sensitivity”** that is reflected in the conclusions of Chapters and Province assemblies, as well as in the instructions and guidelines of official documents.

The OPP and SEPP, as we have been saying, in keeping with their options, policies and strategies on behalf of the poorest, direct an organic and networked kind of animation, with collaboration in all fields with the Salesian Family and other church and civil organisations.

The **Youth Ministry Delegate** and the Delegate for Province/National Coordination for Works and services for young people in situations of vulnerability and exclusion ensure that there are guidelines in the SEPP for guaranteeing charismatic identity, the pedagogical and organisational models that provide solidity to local processes and establish methodologies for monitoring, evaluation, and feedback at the province/national level.

The **Provincial Coordinator** of this setting is part of the Province's Salesian Youth Ministry team. The role of national and regional province teams and commissions who support the Provinces in the development of this Salesian action is important.

Moreover, it should be considered as a key criterion for vocational discernment **in the initial formation houses of the Salesians**, that young confreres take up and experience the option for our priority, the poorest youth, as an expression of their Salesian vocation and as a clear priority in the mission.

❖ The establishment of Salesian networks at the provincial and national levels allows for coordination in projects, support in the mission, and transparency in administration. **The national and regional Salesian networks** give a sense of unity and belonging to a large national and international movement, which showcases the Church and the Congregation in their commitment to building justice, peace, and social friendship.

Some of the most important tasks of these networks are:

- ▶ joint reflection on the different aspects of young people in situations of vulnerability and exclusion in different countries;
- ▶ the offer of data on the indicators established in Salesian Works encouraging social cohesion;
- ▶ the joint formation of EPC members working in the social sector;
- ▶ and the joint formulation of projects that have a coordinated impact on different geographical areas that suffer from the common consequences of various forms of poverty.

This joint effort strengthens institutional development that makes it possible for Works to provide their services in a competent way, increases the capacity to negotiate resources for the mission with institutions that guarantee rights, and expands the capacity for political influence, giving a voice to the violated in decision-making settings that should promote the well-being of individuals.

❖ It is particularly important in the animation and coordination of this setting to work in an organised way with the **Province's Planning and Development Office** (PDO). This office provides support to the Province and social works to acquire skills for planning, implementing, analysing data, and establishing measurement tools in the evaluation of projects that aim to carry out development actions for young people and social groups. The PDO also searches for sources of funding for them and carries out other actions that lead to institutional strengthening.

The Works and services aimed at young people in situations of vulnerability and exclusion follow the rules of each province for the presentation of financial projects or to obtain financial resources through the PDO, increasing the culture of transparent responsibility with regard to the province and society in general. The publication of the social balance sheet, political impact, participation in networks and inter-institutional alliances, strengthen the capacity of the Works to secure the resources necessary for their functioning.

In some contexts, the fundraising functions of the PDO are integrated within the same Salesian Work which has its own fundraising systems/teams.

Many provinces have developed funding strategies with other institutions, both public and private, that share and mutually integrate their services. The generation of these alliances makes us aware that it is not only the Salesian Congregation that has to respond to social problems, but that it is involved as one actor that generates social change together with others.

CONCLUSION



FROM THE TRAP OF WITHDRAWAL TO MOBILISATION TOWARDS UNKNOWN TERRITORIES

There are hidden and irrelevant vulnerabilities (not highlighted or represented) that are submerged in anonymity and lead many people into the dark corners of exclusion. Like the illustrations of the text about that widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17), with only that son who was everything to her. Two lives buried in a single coffin, hers and her son's. There are so many stories like that today, *so many families where death is at home*. Jesus felt sad at the woman's pain. He sees her tears and is moved, does not continue on but stops, and says softly: woman, do not weep. But he is not satisfied with just drying her tears. Jesus consoles her and frees her.

We too, the Salesians of Don Bosco, have not lost *the ability to be led by the Spirit*, to develop an action like that of Jesus which is truly inclusive, human, and transcendent.

We realise that today it is necessary to engage with people's contexts, which are not all internal to our institution, our centres and services. *Going out on the street to search for real life stories, to sow hope becomes a necessity*. There is only one way to get to know a person, a country, or a suffering: by stopping, kneeling down, and looking closely at this person, looking at the faces of others, their eyes, their voice. When you stop to be with someone, you have already done a lot for the history of the world.

Our educative and pastoral action of "going forth" (like the Church) requires time and commitment, entails being creative and, at the same time, *learning with and learning from others* about the pioneering initiatives carried out by other bodies within or outside the Congregation. Mobilising together towards the new peripheries as an institution implies generating empathy, mutual support, motivation, greater security to innovate and transform local practice.





BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Saint Paul VI, Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (1967).

Saint John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (1985).

Saint John Paul II, Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987).

Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (2005).

Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (2009).

Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (2014).

Francis, Encyclical *Laudato Si'* (2015).

Francis, Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* (2020).

John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales from 1815 to 1855*

John Bosco, The "General articles" of the "Regulations for the houses" [1877].

John Bosco, *Historical Outlines Concerning the Oratory of St Francis de Sales [1862-63]*.

Salesian Youth Ministry Sector, *Salesian Youth Ministry. Frame of Reference (Rome, 2014)*.

Youth Ministry Sector, *Youth Ministry and Family (Rome, 2021)*.

Youth Ministry Sector, *A youth ministry that educates to love (Rome, 2023)*.

