



# The Salesian Oratory-Youth Centre

Sector for  
Salesian Youth  
Ministry

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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

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- FR** *Salesian youth ministry. Frame of reference.* Youth Ministry Department (Rome, 2014).
- YMF** *Youth Ministry and Family.* Youth Ministry Department (Rome, 2021).
- YML** *A youth ministry that educates to love.* Youth Ministry Department (Rome, 2023).
- EPC** Educative-Pastoral Community.
- GC** General Chapter of the Salesians of Don Bosco.
- EG** Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* of Pope Francis (2014).
- ChV** Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit* of Pope Francis (2019).
- Const. / Reg.** Constitutions and Regulations of the Society of Saint Francis de Sales (1984).
- SYM** Salesian Youth Movement
- SEPP** Salesian Educative-Pastoral Plan.
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# Presentation

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**Don Bosco** made the Oratory the centre of his activities and initiatives. Moved by pastoral charity, he began without a fixed abode and housed in a shed. Then, as now, it **is the prototype of the Salesian presence and mission**: it simultaneously provides hospitality and formation, cultural growth and preparation for life.

The Oratory-Youth Centre continues to be the specific “environment” of reference that radiates the Salesian charism: from the encounter with the neediest young people and from an integrated and concrete proposal in an atmosphere of spontaneous participation, our pedagogy was born, with its characteristics of content and method, with the figure of an educator who goes beyond the institutional role and is for the young people a friend and a father.

Thanks to the Oratory-Youth Centre, contact with young people helps us to discover their inner richness, their potential, and their innate, perceived, and desired dignity. Every young person personally bears the signs of God’s love; their personal situations do not prevent them from growing as persons and children of God.

The Oratory-Youth Centre is also a space that is potentially open to all young people in the neighbourhood and the area, making it a concrete place of service by “young people for young people”. By being involved in its dynamics, the young people themselves learn to be animators of an educational environment at the service of their peers.

It is precisely this original charismatic reality that has encouraged us to renew the text of the 2014 Frame of Reference for Youth Ministry, involving all Provinces. In fact, the volume can rightly be considered as the compilation of a “reflection matured in several voices”, born and nourished by a truly symphonic pastoral praxis in the Congregation today.

In the multiplicity and diversity of the different oratorical realities, these pages aim to identify the peculiar physiognomy of this sector. This is not an easy task to accomplish, as the variety of approaches or models provides a great deal of diversity and originality.

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We intend to offer a broad and up-to-date understanding of the Oratory-Youth Centre. We want to contribute to **confirming, renewing and revitalising the newness of the Oratory-Youth Centre**, rooted in our charismatic memory, and to make its educational and evangelising potential relevant. In the dialogue and exchange with the Provinces in view of the publication of this renewed text, we have perceived a growing interest in relaunching an institution that has deep roots in our educational and pastoral history.

We invite each local and provincial reality to ask itself with these reflections in hand: How could the Oratory-Youth Centre be updated, reinforced, or saved in my province or my local reality?

New wineskins are needed for this new wine which is the new generation of young people. Mary, our Mother educator, knows how to ask her Son for wine, so we entrust ourselves to her so that these challenges become realities.

**P. Miguel Angel García Morcuende, sdb**

*General Councillor for Youth Ministry*

TURIN, 8 DECEMBER 2023





# THE ORIGINALITY OF THE SALESIAN ORATORY

CHAPTER

I

## 1 1

## THE ORATORY OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES IN VALDOCCO

The Oratory of St. Francis de Sales was **Don Bosco's first stable work**, which provided the impetus for all the others. The formative environment built in Valdocco was the pastoral response to the educational challenge posed by the neediest adolescents and young people of 19th century Turin. Don Bosco founded his Oratory by appealing directly to their needs, not driven by structured parish action, but guided by charity and his pastoral heart. It was conceived, therefore, as an "open mission" on the continent of young people, to seek them out where they were physically and psychologically.

Don Bosco was surrounded by immigrant boys, family-less and homeless children. He went to meet them in the prisons:

«I was horrified to see a large number of young people between the ages 12 and 18, healthy, robust, intelligent, seeing them there idle, tormented by bedbugs and lice, without bread and a good word. They were humiliated to the point of losing their dignity». (*MEMOIRS OF THE ORATORY*).

However, the Oratory had to be open to as many people as possible: it began on the street, seeking to meet them; it expressed itself festively on Sundays in a youth community and continued with visits during the week to workplaces where they practised a simple trade. For most of them, along with catechism, it provided healthy entertainment, basic education and formation for life.

Don Bosco knew how to humanly guarantee harmonious personalities **by accompanying the young people personally, in groups and through the environment**, meeting them, accepting them, getting to know them and promoting them holistically. This accompaniment was so significant that it became a paradigm for all other Salesian experiences, and it needs to be increasingly developed in different times and cultural contexts.

## 1 2

## THE PERSONAL FOOTPRINT OF DON BOSCO

Everything Don Bosco did was aimed at the salvation of young people; this shaped his praxis and turned it into **a distinctive type of education, which he called “preventive”** and which was applied over the years in the Oratory. Gradually, it expanded:

- from initial catechesis to presence-participation in the life of the young people responding to their needs, problems and opportunities;
- from a “part-time” festive oratory to a “full-time” house that lasts the whole week, with personal contacts and complementary recreational and religious activities;
- from an exclusively catechetical proposal to a proposal for the integral education of young people, that is to say, for the maturation of their physical, psychological, cultural, social, vocational and spiritual potential;
- from an educational environment “limited” to the world of young people to a familiar presence of educators, families and significant adults in the midst of young people;
- from an adult-led institution to a community of life with co-responsible young people that is open to all;
- from the primacy of the programme to the primacy of the person and interpersonal relationships;
- from a place enclosed within its own walls to the missionary impulse of a youth community that is open to all young people;
- from a non-existent organisation to an area of the Salesian house structured by regulations and/or statutes that define responsibilities, relationships and activities.

Don Bosco summed up in the Oratory this practical, original and up-to-date synthesis of the Preventive System which today identifies us and which we present as his hallmark and legacy. His preventive dynamism has awakened

in young people the desire to grow and mature, **moving from the immediate needs of entertainment or education to more systematic and deeper commitments to human and Christian formation.**

1 3

### THE ORATORIAN CRITERION IS FULLY ALIVE AND RELEVANT TODAY

The originality and exemplarity of Don Bosco has bequeathed to us the Oratorian heart that beats in every good Salesian today, wherever he is called to carry out his educational and pastoral task. A heart that emphasises the heartbeat of the apostolic passion of the first Oratory, the untiring love of charity, the “pastoral thrust” as the **inspiring principle of our predilection and presence among young people**. In short: it is the Salesian condition from the first profession to the last breath!

We must strongly affirm that the term “Oratorian” does not therefore refer only to an institution, but to a model of educational-pastoral youth environment for the various scenarios of the Salesian mission. It is thus revealed as a commitment model that is fully alive and up to date.

In view of what has been said about its originality, **the Oratory of Don Bosco is at the origin of the whole Salesian work and constitutes its prototype**. Therefore, if Valdocco was the main place of the Salesian historical mission, the spiritual and apostolic experience of Don Bosco remains our permanent criterion for discernment and renewal today. In conclusion, revitalising the Oratory means rejuvenating the physiognomy of the Salesian vocation. The spiritual and apostolic experience of Don Bosco here remains our permanent criterion for discernment and renewal:

«Don Bosco lived a pastoral experience in his first Oratory which serves as a model; it was for the youngsters a home that welcomed, a parish that evangelized, a school that prepared them for life, and a playground where friends could meet and enjoy themselves. As we carry out our mission today, the Valdocco experience is still the lasting criterion for discernment and renewal in all our activities and works». (CONST. 40).

This being so, this **Oratorian criterion** identifies every Salesian presence and distinguishes it charismatically. It requires starting first and foremost from the youthful condition of the neediest young people and from the popular environments (“preferential option for the poor”), with the central concern of giving a spiritual formation (parish that evangelises), and simultaneously offering a family welcome (home), human promotion (school) and living together in an atmosphere of joy and friendly relationships (playground).

To “discern and renew” a Salesian house in the light of this criterion of reference means subjecting the activities and works that we carry out today to constant verification in order to check whether and to what extent they are a faithful continuation of the mission of Don Bosco, as a capacity of response and as a style of presence. These Salesian values and principles have also been conceptualised in terms such as *spirit, environment and/or the Oratorian heart* (cf. *FR* Chapter V, n. 3).

## 1 4

## THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND EXTENT OF DON BOSCO'S WORK

**A** With the passage of time, neither the inspiring principles nor the characteristics of the original Salesian Oratory have changed. However, the process of cultural globalisation, the volatility of the phenomena that characterize the condition of youth and the new challenges require appropriate “responses” that are centred on the vital context of the here and now. Pope Francis reminds us of this:

«In addition to the ordinary, well-planned pastoral ministry that parishes and movements carry out, it is also important to make room for a ‘popular’ youth ministry, with a different style, schedule, pace, and method. Broader and more flexible, it goes out to those places where the real young people are active, and fosters the natural leadership qualities and the charisms sown by the Holy Spirit» (*CHV*, 230).

In fact, as has been said, **new scenarios or crucial contexts have emerged** in **which the Oratorian proposal comes into play**. The complexity of the reality in which we live also influences and conditions

the educational and evangelising action in this environment. We would like to point out some phenomena that deserve special mention.

Firstly, *a new conception of Leisure Time*, which is increasingly valued by young people as a space open to all kinds of social, cultural and sporting experiences, where they can develop social relationships and personal skills. On the other hand, leisure time is saturated with multiple and divergent activities in which adolescents and young people are involved and engaged. In addition, some of these proposals are managed by civil institutions that invest significant human and economic resources, some of which require a new and urgent anthropological reflection.

Secondly, it is also worth remembering and emphasising that the exponential increase in interaction space brought about by *digital culture* and the increasing sophistication of *technology* have pushed us even further toward an educational paradigm shift.

Finally, there are still other aspects that affect the day-to-day life of formal and non-formal educational environments: the migration movement on a global scale; the recovery of the community outside traditional institutions; the coexistence and collaboration with other faiths and confessions; the anthropological-cultural change that is taking place in our time and that fully affects the family.

**B** Having said that, the Oratory-Youth Centre, in network with other educational institutions, continues to offer activities characterised by the style and quality that are proper to it. The genuine Oratorian heart, with the collaboration of families and significant adults, means that this sector **has been adapting its Educational and Pastoral Project to respond to a wide range of realities**, according to the different geographical, religious and cultural areas, but all with the same educational-evangelizing intentionality.

In this sense, the Oratory-Youth Centre has brought the educational-evangelising proposal to many places, as an initial proclamation, initial catechesis, or re-evangelisation; at other times, it has emerged as a response to emerging basic needs, non-formal education, integral human promotion and work training; likewise, it has been set up to promote recreational, sports and artistic spaces, always paying attention to integration, participation and personal, group and community commitment.

In many cases, the Oratories-Youth Centres have proved to be *founding experiences for other environments*, a spearhead that opens the way for the implantation of the Salesian charism. In this way, the Oratories-Youth Centres have been the vehicle for a nuclear implantation of the Salesian charism in each context which has then expanded over time through more formal forms. In fact, many Oratories-Youth Centres have emerged in situations of periphery or pastoral frontier, and there are many cases where, over time, in order to better respond to the context and the needs of young people, they have subsequently given rise to formally evangelising works (churches/parishes), educational works (schools/vocational training centres), or works for the promotion and care for the most vulnerable (works and services for young people at risk and in exclusion).

But even more, the Oratory-Youth Centre, without losing its capacity to welcome everyone, *has made room in its internal dynamics for school activities, vocational training, parish life or with formal and systematic proposals of attention to vulnerable young people in situations of risk and social exclusion.*

## 1 5

## VARIOUS OPERATIONAL MODELS OF THE ORATORY-YOUTH CENTRE

Considering the geographical extent of the Congregation, the Oratories-Youth Centres are truly diverse and dynamic realities that are constantly updated and renewed. For this reason, **we cannot speak of a single and exclusive model of the Oratory-Youth Centre**, but of a plural, multifaceted and rich Salesian reality.

In chronological order and importance, first, the **festive Oratory**, and then the **daily Oratory**, are the most popular, flexible and personalised expressions of Don Bosco's educational-pastoral action. Both are configured as the operational model of the Oratory-Youth Centre, which acquires nuances and typologies over time. Each of these models is defined by its options and actions in specific local contexts. Here we would like to describe some of them in the current circumstances:

- Oratories-Youth Centres in the area or neighbourhood that are networked with each other, committed to supporting the needs of

young people in their territory, in such a way that they contribute to the support and development of the integral training project.

- ▶ Oratories-Youth Centres at night that offer initiatives and activate appropriate facilities for young people (by way of example only: cultural, recreational, sporting, social, theatrical, musical, media and/or religious initiatives).
- ▶ Oratories-Youth Centres as an itinerant presence, where experiences of cultural animation and social service are developed, aimed at enhancing the life and history of young people in the area, always with constant reference to the Salesian proposal.
- ▶ Oratories-Youth Centres that offer young people who are unemployed and outside the school system the opportunity to acquire basic training or prepare for some kind of employment; or extracurricular training aimed at preventing school dropout and achieving educational and training success.
- ▶ Oratories-Youth Centres that seek to rehabilitate young people who are in a situation of risk or social exclusion. For this purpose, they offer temporary residential resources to meet social, health, cultural, training or employment needs. In this context, some also offer humanitarian reception and social integration of immigrants and refugees.

A Salesian Oratory-Youth Centre is therefore a proposal that is at the same time faithful to its origins and open to new and changing youth and social realities, able to adapt to educational and religious diversities, socio-cultural contexts and personal histories. With its original historical roots in Turin, it has a strong creative and life-giving capacity everywhere, which manifests itself in new, flexible and multifaceted proposals.

In this sense, it has a special vocational and missionary potential due to the breadth and diversity of its recipients and the multiple possibilities of presence and accompaniment.



## AT A GLANCE





# THE EDUCATIONAL-PASTORAL COMMUNITY OF THE ORATORY-YOUTH CENTRE

CHAPTER



## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE EPC AT THE ORATORY-YOUTH CENTRE

A consequence of what we have said about the capacity for openness, adaptation and convocation in the Oratories-Youth Centres is the valorization of all their protagonists (young people, educators and Salesians) and their institutional processes (their animation, management and organisation).

In this sense, the Oratory-Youth Centre, a youth community open to all, is proposed as a **living experience of the Church that functions and is organised with an EPC** made up of young people, animators-educators, consecrated Salesians, and other members of the Salesian Family, families, collaborators and benefactors.

Like Don Bosco with his young people and with his collaborators in Valdocco, the aim is to make each Oratory-Youth Centre a truly welcoming home, open to a wide variety of families, children, adolescents and young people, especially those most in need.

In this sense, **intergenerational coexistence** is of vital importance in the Oratory-Youth Centre. This community atmosphere allows for overcoming the intergenerational gap driven and reinforced by individualism. Although the activities are usually programmed for a specific group, the Oratory-Youth Centre is always an inclusive space with the possibility of bringing together members of several generations (children, young people, animators and families) in the same activity. Occasionally, there are sports championships for different age groups, joint activities in Salesian festivals, solidarity initiatives or celebrations in which young people and their families participate. These and other proposals promote a sense of belonging, interrelation and, in many cases, interculturality.

We have also chosen to work together, Salesians and laypeople, in communion of spirit and intentions, growing in joint formation and the experience of genuine and authentic moments of co-responsibility.

2 2

## THE SUBJECTS OF THE EPC OF THE ORATORY-YOUTH CENTRE

2 2 1

### *The Recipients*

**A** Don Bosco wanted to open the doors to as many young people as possible. **The Oratory was not a cenacle for the best.** It was born to serve the neediest recipients because of their family status (orphans, homeless, and abandoned); because of their socio-economic status (poor and immigrants); because of their risk status (street children and those released from prisons); because of their professional orientation (workers, artisans, students and seminarians); because of their young age (those between eight and twenty years old).

Young people are the backbone of Don Bosco's Valdocco-educational experience: without them, neither Don Bosco, nor his charisma, nor the Oratory can be understood. Even today, the centrality of young people has the same weight. With Don Bosco, we believe that young people are the most important part of society, on whom the future of society rests. The diversity of the Congregation highlights the great challenge and the great opportunity that the current multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious context represents.

The Oratorian educational-pastoral proposal must maintain **its absolute inclusiveness and its commitment to those most in need**, with special attention on young people who live in the most conflictual contexts, those who are at risk of becoming victims of criminal groups or those involved in situations that threaten their health or dignity. With regard to migration, a globalised phenomenon and an aspect of the complex universe that characterises our contexts, the Oratory-Youth Centre must respond to the challenges of integrating young migrants into a new and unfamiliar reality through a new culture of welcome. As Salesians, we are at the forefront when it comes to providing a space for interpersonal relationships and promoting their interaction with others.

In view of the various risks to which young people are exposed, the Oratory-Youth Centre is presented in many contexts as an *alternative for a safe environment, peaceful coexistence and comprehensive prevention*.

**B** Concerning the age of the recipients, we can say that we have moved **from the Oratorian experience to the Salesian Oratory-Youth Centre**. It is worth mentioning these two modalities:

- ▶ In some contexts, the Oratory is often differentiated from the Youth Centre, although this distinction does not affect its nature. By **'Oratory'** we mean an educational and evangelising environment, intended for *children and pre-adolescents*, open to a wide range of people. It encourages various forms of recreational activities and friendly encounters in the playground and informal spaces.
- ▶ **'Youth Centre'** means an open meeting and training place for *adolescents and young people* as direct addressees, who participate in various proposals for integral growth, focusing on group methodologies for human and Christian commitment. Here too, leisure time is certainly a space for humanisation, for the development of values rooted in freedom, fun, creativity and the cultivation of friendships.

So, in short, when we speak of **"Oratories-Youth Centres"**, we are referring to a rich diversity of works that are widely accepted, an Oratorian reality that is open to all and that takes on its physiognomy according to the age and needs of the young people, the context, the possibilities of Salesian educational-pastoral intervention, the leadership and the human resources available.

**C** The **Salesian Youth Movement** is an eminent manifestation of the Salesian youth mission and has a particular potential in the Oratories-Youth Centres precisely because of its openness to all and its diversity of proposals and contexts. We are all called to animate it according to the characteristics proper to the Movement, which are those of an "educational-evangelising" Movement, which places at the centre and involves all the young people of the province and, therefore, even those of the Oratory-Youth Centre. It must be clearly recognised that this multiple and differentiated reality finds its unity and dynamism in Don Bosco and in the sharing of his spirituality and pedagogy according to the contexts and possibilities of each individual.

## 2 2 2 *Educators-Animators or Leaders*

The EPC of the Oratory-Salesian Youth Centre is under continuous construction and needs people to animate its project. To speak of a project means to speak of content, precise goals, stages to be identified, resources to be sought and activated, and people who are committed to fidelity to the goal and constancy in the processes. For this oratorical task, the presence of educators is fundamental.

Starting from the fact that in an Oratory-Youth Centre, every person who exercises a specific and appropriate function is considered an “educator” - precisely because he/she “gives life” to educational and formative processes - it becomes necessary to distinguish between the “animator-educator” and the “professional educator”.

**A** By “**animators-educators**” we mean young people or young adults who have undergone formation processes and who voluntarily and freely offer multiple services within the Oratory-Youth Centre, whether as an apostolate or as a voluntary service, supporting both operational logistical and organisational matters, as well as Salesian assistance and accompaniment. Reference is also made to the young people who, in co-responsibility, give life to the charism among other young people outside the physical walls of the Oratory-Youth Centre, take on the educational proposal developed together in the Oratory-Youth Centre and actively promote its implementation.

The educator-animators are aware that, among all the educational figures of the Oratory, they have a decisive role and that the life of the Oratory-Youth Centre depends to a great extent on them: for their witness of service, for their youthful experience of Salesian values, for their knowledge of the Oratory, for their managerial and organisational role, and because they are called to be, together with the other young people, the dynamisers of the life of the Oratory itself.

On the other hand, the “**educator-professionals**” provide their qualifications and particular experience, either voluntarily and free of charge, or through a paid employment relationship. This figure is increasingly present in the Oratory-Youth Centre. Neither goodwill nor structures alone can cope with certain emerging social phenomena

(multiculturalism, immigration, violence, vulnerability, exclusion, etc.), hence the need for professional figures to take on and take charge of certain situations. It is clear that both the increased professionalisation and the institutionalisation of this function often require qualified and contracted personnel.

This assumption of responsibilities by contracted professional figures, suitably trained and motivated, *does not mean an impoverishment of the multiple forms of occasional and voluntary collaboration of animators that the tradition of our Oratories-Youth Centres has bequeathed to us*; on the contrary, it aims to be at the service of each of them and, even more, the overall coordination; it aims to make the Salesian educational-evangelising proposal reach more young people better and more effectively.

**B** Both the witness of voluntary work and that of a professional educational service find their *raison d'être* **in the centrality of the young person and in the formative horizon that is projected for him/her**. This priority in the educational work, in all projects and activities, must always be guaranteed and present even in those situations in which, depending on the circumstances of the area or the different structures, a specific professionalisation of the functions, or an assignment of work, may be necessary for the good functioning of the Oratory-Youth Centre and better attention to the young people.

All educators, by virtue of their youth and/or professional condition, assume the Salesian mission and vocation of educators-evangelisers of other young people. Therefore, they need a continuous responsible confrontation with the Salesian charism and the educational-pastoral objectives of the Oratory-Youth Centre; and they must be the *object of special attention, accompaniment and theoretical-practical training* on the part of those in charge of the Oratory-Youth Centre.

In any case, whether they are volunteers or hired, they are usually Christian people who are always respectful and open to Christian anthropology and evangelical values. Aware of being baptised, they want to live their faith and vocation of service, they walk with the young people in their continuous training, they know the Salesian charism and the young people, they allow themselves to be challenged by them and they know how to propose new goals of personal maturity with enthusiasm and determination. Many of them have personally experienced the educational



process of the Oratory-Youth Centre, responding to a vocation and a life project that makes them grow as persons. They are aware of their role as educators inside and outside the Oratory-Youth Centre, and therefore live the values they propose.

**C** Being present in **multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious contexts**, the Oratories-Youth Centres, aware and attentive to this, generate proposals that also help young people of other religions to develop their leadership skills, their inner dimension and their faith in an experiential way, taking into account their diversity and always respecting their personal choices.

In this situation described above, which is increasingly affirmed and recognised, the educational option of non-Christian animators-educators must also be carried out with joy, conviction and the witness of life. These leaders must also strive for a respectful dialogue with the people they are called to serve. This attitude requires an openness and willingness to listen, learn, and witness to the values of Salesian pedagogy.

### **Coordinators/Directors**

The coordinators and/or directors are usually Salesian religious delegated by the community for this environment, but in several provinces it is mainly lay people who coordinate and/or direct the Oratory-Youth Centre. In the case of religious, *the rector of the community may also be the coordinator of the Oratory-Youth Centre sector*. As for lay people, some offer this service on a voluntary basis; others, with a stable paid employment relationship.

It would also be appropriate to reflect on the possibility of entrusting the coordination of the Oratory-Youth Centre to a team (of young people/lay animators who are trained and accompanied).

Likewise, the development of this managerial function must be contrasted with an exemplary ethical practice, so that the witness of life, organisational decisions and innovations of all kinds breathe the authentic Oratorian spirit that goes beyond attachment to bureaucracies and purely instrumental values. On the other hand, it is important that the aspect of management, financing and maintenance does not overburden the animators directly involved in pastoral activity.

Many Oratories-Youth Centres have been consolidated and institutionalised in such a way that they have ensured a permanent full-time service through a coordinating or management team. This more committed leadership has given **institutional strength**, ensuring certain dynamics: economic sustainability; continuity of processes; project mentality; quality of services; clarity of profiles, roles and functions; legality of labour relations; and ongoing training, both induction and permanent.

## Other Significant Figures

### *The Salesian Community*

The Oratory-Youth Centre is characterised not only by the centrality and protagonism of the young people but also, where it exists, by the protagonism and living witness of the entire Salesian religious community, a witness that cannot and must not be replaced.

For this reason, all Salesians in the community, and not only the one or ones in charge, have **a moral responsibility and a specific role in the animation of the Oratory-Youth Centre**. The Salesians must consider the Oratory-Youth Centre as a place of pastoral care entrusted to the responsibility of the entire community. So, we come logically to the role of the Salesians within this reality, the competencies they must bring and the functions they must assume so that the very purpose of the Salesian environment is not diluted.

Consecrated Salesians are educators in the faith, points of reference for communion and participation, regardless of age, academic preparation, stage of formation, specific vocation (coadjutor or priest), office, etc. This puts all Salesians in a position to establish with young people the same relationship that Don Bosco had, establishing affective bonds that generate a sense of belonging and a witness of fraternal communion.

It is therefore urgent to deepen the meaning of **this typically “Oratorian” paternity in its many human and divine aspects**. This is the inescapable task of every disciple of Don Bosco, a task that cannot be delegated. As educators of young people who wish to be loved and accompanied in the various stages of their development, the Salesians must know how to

behave as true fathers - each according to his role: responsible, patient, generous and motivating.

The religious community also offers shared experiences of faith and prayer with young people, initiatives to live together processes of ongoing formation, provides spaces for vocational discernment and accompaniment, promotes living life according to a personal project, and encourages participation in the elaboration, development and periodic review of the local SEPP.

### *Salesian Family, Adults and Significant Families*

Typical of Oratorian pastoral care is the co-responsibility of adults, individuals or significant families who share with young people the atmosphere of friendship, the Christian educational proposal of life, and the experience of family and community.

In this sense, it would be more urgent and important than ever to define the criteria based on which to structure organisational models capable of regulating the dynamics of subsidiarity and synodality; **thus, bringing out, the specificity of the different vocations present in the Oratory-Youth Centre.**

Adults include those with specific animation roles, such as parents and family members or members of the Salesian Family. The experience of the Oratory-Youth Centre, or better still the Oratorian approach applied to all areas of life in which the Salesians work, is also an indispensable element for the members of the Salesian Family and can be a significant contribution to the EPC.

Just as for the religious community, for the other members of the Salesian Family the Oratory-Youth Centre can be an excellent place where called by the young people, the Salesian vocation is lived and realised, a witness of Christian life is given and a true family spirit is fostered. In fact, in many cases, both educators-animators and coordinators-managers of the Oratories-Youth Centres are members of the Salesian Family.

Where appropriate, oratorical presences managed entirely by laypeople should always ensure that **reference is made to the provincial SEPP.**



## AT A GLANCE

1

The Oratory-Youth Centre, a youth community open to all, is proposed as a living experience of the Church (young people, animators-educators, consecrated Salesians, and other members of the Salesian Family, families, collaborators and benefactors).

Intergenerational coexistence and to work together, Salesians and laypeople, is of vital importance.

2

Don Bosco wanted to open the doors to as many young people as possible.

The Oratorian educational-pastoral proposal must maintain its absolute inclusiveness and its commitment to those most in need.

"Oratories-Youth Centres": a rich diversity of works that are widely accepted, open to all.

6

Typical of Oratorian pastoral care is the co-responsibility of adults who share with young people the atmosphere of friendship, the Christian educational proposal of life, and the experience of family and community. Adults include those with specific animation roles, such as parents and family members or members of the Salesian Family.

The Educational-Pastoral Community of the Oratory-Youth Centre

3

The EPC of the Oratory-Salesian Youth Centre needs people to animate its project.

The educator-animators are aware that they have a decisive role and that the life of the Oratory-Youth Centre depends to a great extent on them.

The witness of voluntary work and that of a professional educational service find their *raison d'être* in the centrality of the young person and in the formative horizon.

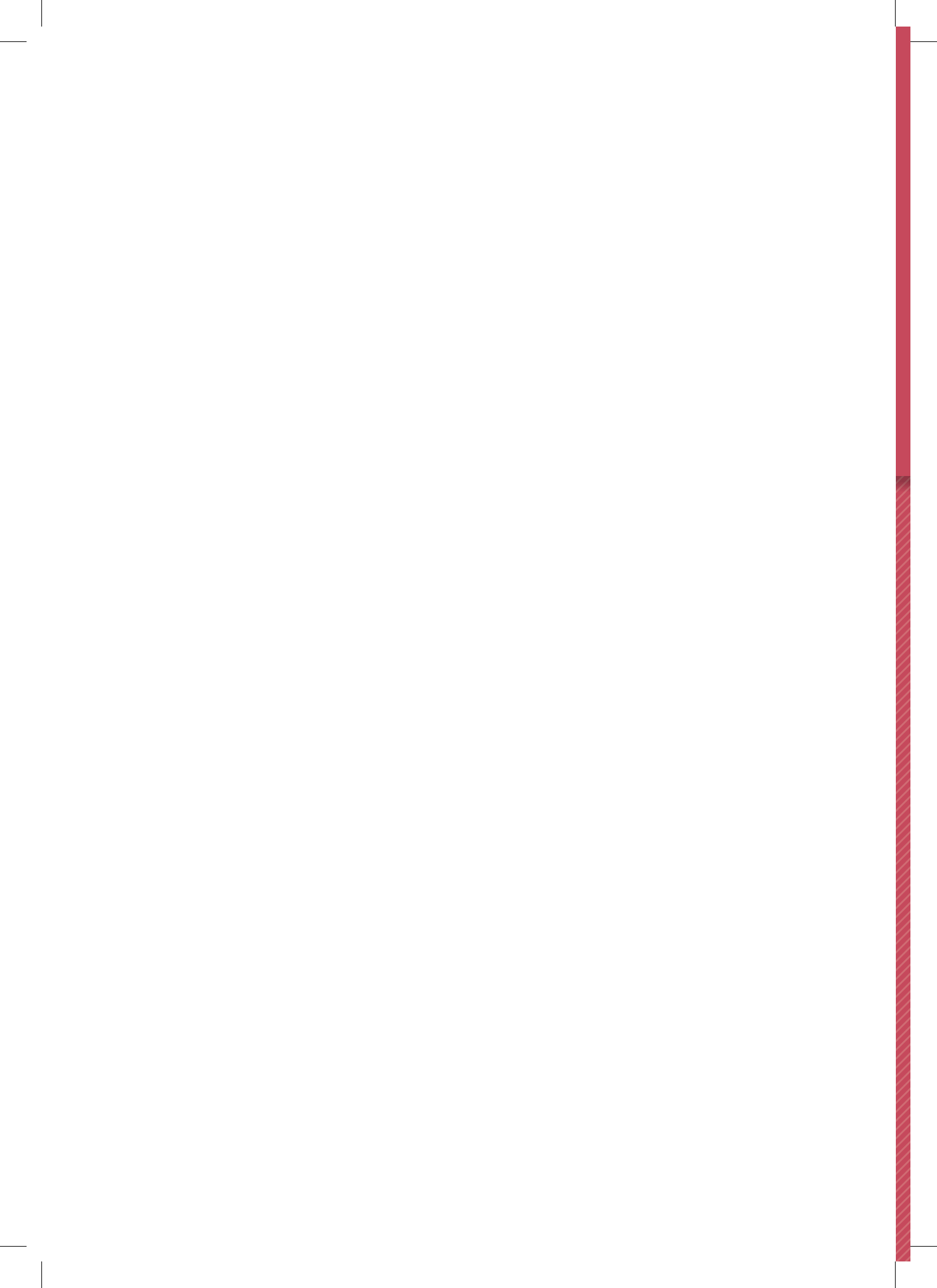
5

The Oratory-Youth Centre is characterised not only by the centrality and protagonism of the young people but also, where it exists, by the protagonism and living witness of the entire Salesian religious community, a witness that cannot and must not be replaced.

4

The coordinators and/or directors are usually Salesian religious delegated by the community for this environment, but in several provinces it is mainly lay people.

This more committed leadership has given institutional strength.



# THE EDUCATIONAL-PASTORAL PROPOSAL OF THE ORATORY-YOUTH CENTRE

CHAPTER



The training proposal for the **integral and integrating education of the person at the Oratory-Youth Centre is carried out through specific and structured itineraries** that correspond to the interests of the young people. Each of them can choose from the various possibilities of participation offered the itinerary that best suits their condition and level of maturity. Integral formation is a need that must be grasped, valued and satisfied beyond any individual religious adherence.

For this reason, attention must be paid to the ever-present risk of focusing the dynamics of the Oratory-Youth Centre exclusively on the recreational-cultural activities typical of Salesian educational pastoral care. It is necessary to continually *rethink the identity of the Oratory-Youth Centre and to recreate its original educational-pastoral methodology.*

In the educational activity of the Salesian Oratories-Youth Centres, the constant reference to the Oratory of Valdocco reminds us of **the profound unity of our proposal, which is both educational and evangelising**, and urges us to live the foundational attitudes that give it life: educational sensitivity and pastoral intentionality.

The inseparability of the 'educational-pastoral' binomial is an essential qualification: if there is no education, there is no Salesian methodology; and if there is education without pastoral care, there is no Oratory. The two aspects are inseparable, even if they differ from each other. In the Salesian Oratory, the educational act and the pastoral act (that is, the one that concerns education to the faith) enrich and support each other in a special relationship.

### 3 1

## AN EVANGELISING EXPERIENCE

**The proposal of the Oratory-Youth Centre which is aimed at young people is based on Christian humanism, i.e., on the values and life criteria of the Gospel.** This educational-pastoral proposal, whose active core is Salesian Youth Spirituality, offers a human-spiritual coherence that in turn requires a continuous process of inculturation. This implies redefining the ways of making it operational and meaningful, especially with the presence of other educational methodologies or of young people of other



religions, to help pre-adolescents and adolescents to be formed in the light of the design of a concrete man and a concrete woman.

By offering our *Salesian Youth Spirituality* (cf. FR Chapter IV, n. 3) as an impulse, motivation, encouragement and sense of personal and community life, we propose an educational-pastoral action that makes possible and accompanies the personal processes of discovery and deepening of faith. In this environment, the whole EPC, and particularly the young people, will be able to meet Jesus Christ personally and follow him, gradually discovering a space rich in evangelical values that will them to experience faith in their daily practical life.

It is a matter of promoting an educational-pastoral space in which a climate of faith and spiritual growth is experienced, particularly suitable for *personalised attention, beyond purely functional relationships*. And this is undoubtedly an inseparable aspect of the Oratorian style.

Like Don Bosco, today we are building an environment in which we **breathe Gospel values and propose an itinerary** that recovers community and educational elements, giving priority to the fundamental dimensions of proclamation, liturgy and service in a climate of fraternal communion. In our Oratories-Youth Centres, different initiatives are offered according to the age and interests of the person to whom they are addressed: gradual itineraries of education and personalisation of the faith; festive celebrations of faith and the sacraments; education for Christian commitment and maturing of one's own life project in the Church and society.



### *Cultural Diversity and Religious Plurality*

We must emphasise that we are part of a world characterised by cultural diversity, religious plurality and largely secularised sectors. Some of our young people at the Oratory-Youth Centre belong to other religious denominations or none at all. Our educational proposal aims to **accompany everyone in their human, social and spiritual maturity**, to respect their beliefs, and to help them to grow as people. This is why merciful closeness, or person-to-person proclamation is so important.

The Salesian proposal is above all a commitment to the human life of each person, sharing their way of seeing and being in the world, their desires

and hopes, their religious values through the exercise of dialogue, which is an exercise of mutual enrichment. For this reason, personal dialogue-accompaniment is a dynamic that should not be overlooked. The formative process of each pre-adolescent and adolescent depends primarily on the meaning they find and give to their lives. Human and spiritual values and vocational projection are often at stake in this personalisation of relationships.

As open and welcoming houses, we therefore contribute to **the creation of a culture of encounter** in which we try to build a new attitude oriented towards the integration of cultures in mutual acceptance and enrichment. In this respectful encounter, we cannot fail to propose with determination and clarity the Christian principles that give meaning to the Salesian identity.

### **3 1 2** *A Church Which Goes Forth*

The Oratory-Youth Centre, as we understand it, is neither an isolated structure nor a pastoral platform in a bubble. Embedded in a specific geographical location and in a human community, it is a mediating ecclesial presence, **a “frontier” between the Church, society and youth groups** that guarantees the search for and contact with young people, especially those most in need.

In this sense, we can apply the words of Pope Francis, who calls us to live “permanently in a state of mission” (EG, 25), “without inhibitions or fear” (EG, 33), without fear of making mistakes or being questioned; “bold and creative”, acting with generosity and courage” (EG, 33). All this embodies the expression “Church going out” (EG, 20-24) and implies, concretely, changing customs, style, language, and even timetables.

The Oratory-Youth Centre, as a work on the frontier between the religious and civil spheres, between the lay world and the ecclesial world, offers educational and evangelising responses to the deepest challenges and urgencies, especially those that concern the least. It is a meeting place for Salesian youth with Christian inspiration, where the spaces are open to all who wish to enter. As a place on the frontier, it has a natural vocation to become more and more a place where bridges are built. It is, therefore,

**necessary to reflect on the ways of initial proclamation and the other elements that make up the overall process of evangelising young people.**

The Oratory-Youth Centre is a privileged place for the animators, not only as a place of broad welcome, but also as *an explicit proposal of broad evangelisation for them*. Here everyone can live their faith in a personal and communal way. In a natural and continuous missionary tension, they are accompanied in their discernment and vocational choices, building a life project, with an attitude of openness to the service of the most needy and distant. This last aspect is not an addition to the animating action, but an inherent part of the proclamation of the Gospel itself.

Through their example and witness, the educator-animators challenge and engage families and young people who do not normally participate in the life of the Church.

## 3 2 A PREVENTIVE EXPERIENCE

### 3 2 1 *The Preventive Approach*

At the Oratory-Youth Centre, everything must be educational, and this is achieved by implementing the preventive approach, which promotes positive experiences, provides motivation and seeks to respond to the deepest aspirations and interests of young people. Therefore, emphasis is placed on the following elements:

- *the opening of the Oratory-Youth Centre to all young people, especially those most in need and those who do not always manage to integrate into other educational structures and proposals; it is necessary to find ways to make it accessible to all, even in the presence of highly discriminatory cultural factors;*
- *the accompaniment of the deepest and most personal strengths of each young person from the essential aspects of the Preventive System: with religion (the desire to go deeper, to understand God as the source and summit of each person's happiness, to enter into the*

search for meaning), based on reason (dialogue, reasoning together) and proposed in an atmosphere of amorevolezza (the affective bond, reciprocated love, personal encounter and accompaniment);

- ▶ the constant search for new pastoral methods to respond also to *the more willing young people who ask us for more challenging and demanding proposals*: these must be followed and prepared with an authentic path of attention and formation (listening to and sharing the Word of God, praying together, dialogue on life, spiritual accompaniment, sacramental life, personal devotion to Mary Help of Christians, etc.);
- ▶ *the family, joyful and festive atmosphere*, which fosters optimism and a positive outlook on life;
- ▶ *animation as an educational option*, which is realised in the active presence of educators among young people, in openness to all and to each young person in particular, in the liberating power of educational love (cf. Sector for Youth Ministry, *A Youth Ministry That Educates to Love*, 2023), in trust in the person and in the positive and good forces it contains;
- ▶ *the sense of duty and responsibility* in the concrete forms of personal commitment, service to others and the integral care of creation;
- ▶ *the care of tidy, welcoming, and bright youth spaces* that are in harmony with the current world of ideas and language, which favour a family atmosphere.

### *The Associative Criterion*

Youth associationism has been and continues to be part of Salesian pedagogy since its beginnings. Oratorian practice favours all constructive forms of activity and associative life. A privileged space is therefore occupied by **a wide and articulated proposal of groups and associations according to youth interests** around which they are organised: apostolic, spontaneous groups, in which natural leaders and immediate interests prevail; groups of various kinds, with specific formative itineraries according to the different sporting, cultural, socio-political, ecological, social communication, religious deepening, missionary awareness, voluntary work areas.

These are all forms of active learning in which young people are encouraged to experiment, investigate, be protagonists, invent, and show initiative in a sufficiently flexible and malleable environment. These activities are the place where the expectations of young people encounter the value propositions of the animators. They are always an educational experience.

3 3

### A TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE

- A** The Oratory-Youth Centre helps to understand the Salesian charism in depth and, true to the original thought of Don Bosco and his mission, it is a living cell “hooked” to the life of the territory and to the local Church. **This territorial peculiarity distinguishes the Oratorian experiences.**

The educational-pastoral proposal of the Oratory-Youth Centre is embedded in society in order to transform it, *responding to the challenges, problems and real needs of young people*. The EPC of the Oratories-Youth Centres knows and lives the reality of young people, makes their concerns, problems and expectations its own, and opens up spaces to live and commit to their world. It therefore has a great capacity for advocacy and social transformation in urban neighbourhoods and rural areas.

*The environment is both an offer and a provocation for the Centre and its recipients.* It is an offer with manifold possibilities: both for dialogue with the surrounding reality and for formative action. It is provocation as a challenge to be, to identify oneself in and with its context and to transform the existing social reality. The Oratory-Youth Centre presents itself as a radar that is sensitive to the youth problems that arise in the area, in order to then decide concretely which announcement and intervention can become a meaningful experience for their lives.

- B** The Oratory-Salesian Youth Centre promotes **transformative competencies and social impact** through its activities in some key commitments, which are summarised below:

- Act proactively on the ground to promote, protect and defend the human rights of children, adolescents and young people, overcoming passivity and conformist indifference.

- ▶ Support adolescents and young people in socio-educational processes and healthy life choices, preventing exclusion and their displacement to the margins of the system of guaranteeing rights, public policies and society.
  - ▶ To understand and welcome today's family realities, in harmony with the orientations of the Church and the Congregation (cf. Sector for Youth Ministry, *Salesian Youth Ministry and Family*, 2021).
  - ▶ To offer the resources and facilities of the Oratory-Youth Centre not only as a one-off action, but as a habitual way of favouring the relationship with the needs of the environment, and thus fostering the very structures of meeting, dialogue, celebration and the community atmosphere itself.
  - ▶ Promote educational alliances with civil and religious institutions in order to network and encourage an active and critical commitment to the social situations in which we live.
  - ▶ To train and accompany in the responsible use of digital space, recognising its educational and evangelising potential and placing it at the service of communion and the formation of young people.
  - ▶ Promote education and eco-social management from the perspective of integral ecology and the ethics of care for our common home.
- C** Since the Oratories-Youth Centres are a presence of the Church, an opportunity to show its friendly face to young people, they are invited to **insert themselves co-responsibly into the various participatory structures of the local Church** (parish and/or area pastoral councils), taking into account the pastoral orientations of the local Church.

Since the Salesian Oratory-Youth Centre is a pastoral presence in the world of youth, its educational-pastoral programmes are particularly significant for the local Church: they bring the Church closer to young people and promote their evangelisation in integral pastoral care (cf. *FR CHAPTER VII, N. 2.4/B*).

3 4

## AN EXPERIENCE OF VOCATIONAL AND MISSIONARY MATURATION

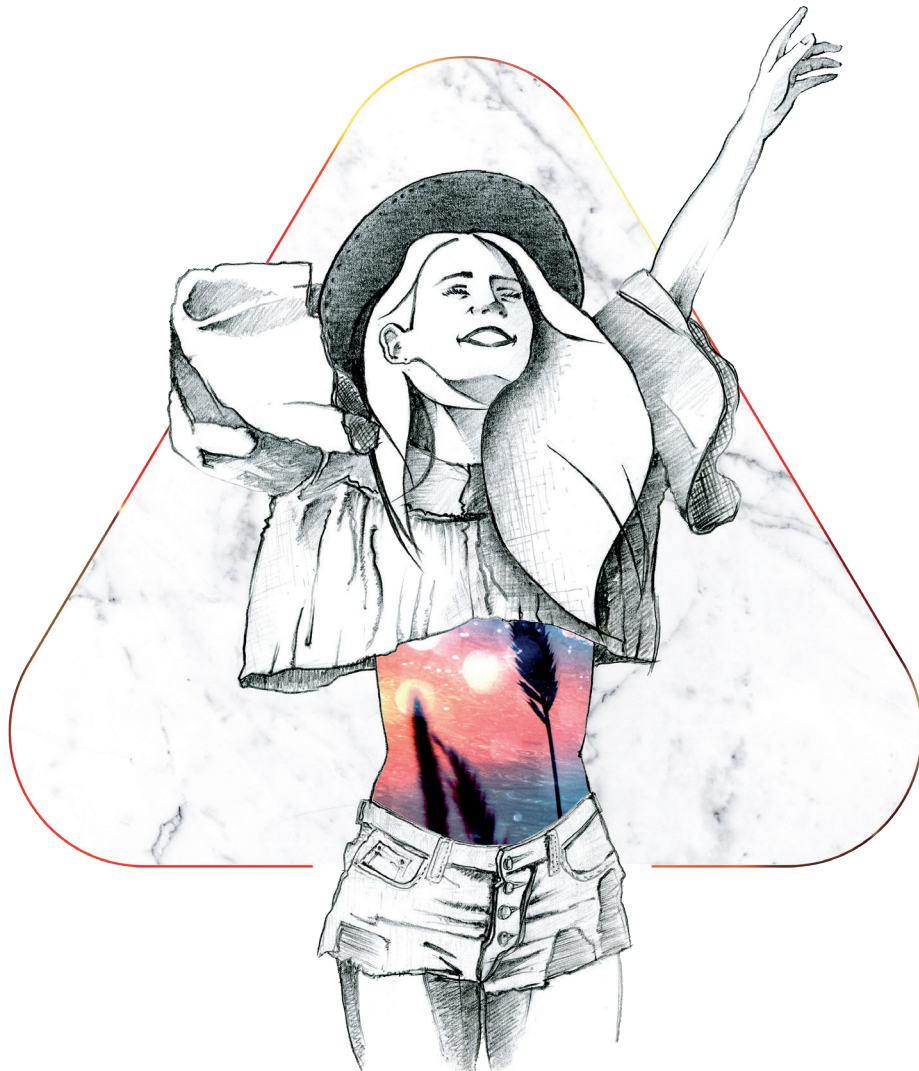
In the beautiful undertaking of forming the person, certain dynamics come into play that the pedagogy of educational accompaniment in the Oratory-Youth Centre must promote. **The local SEPP of the Oratory-Youth Centre foresees the service of accompaniment for all young people.** Both lay and consecrated people must be trained to carry out this ministry.

It is now a question of asking the EPC to manifest their own educational passion, ensuring that each young person can rediscover themselves, to strengthen and develop their qualities, to orient their lives and to prepare themselves to respond to the personal and group-community vocation to which they feel called.

With personal accompaniment, attentive prayer, the pedagogy of the personal life project, **discernment for responsible choices matures**, such as: stable commitment in favour of others, the mission as parents in the future, the conscious exercise of a profession, other ministries and apostolic services of the Church, always in accordance with one's own vocation.

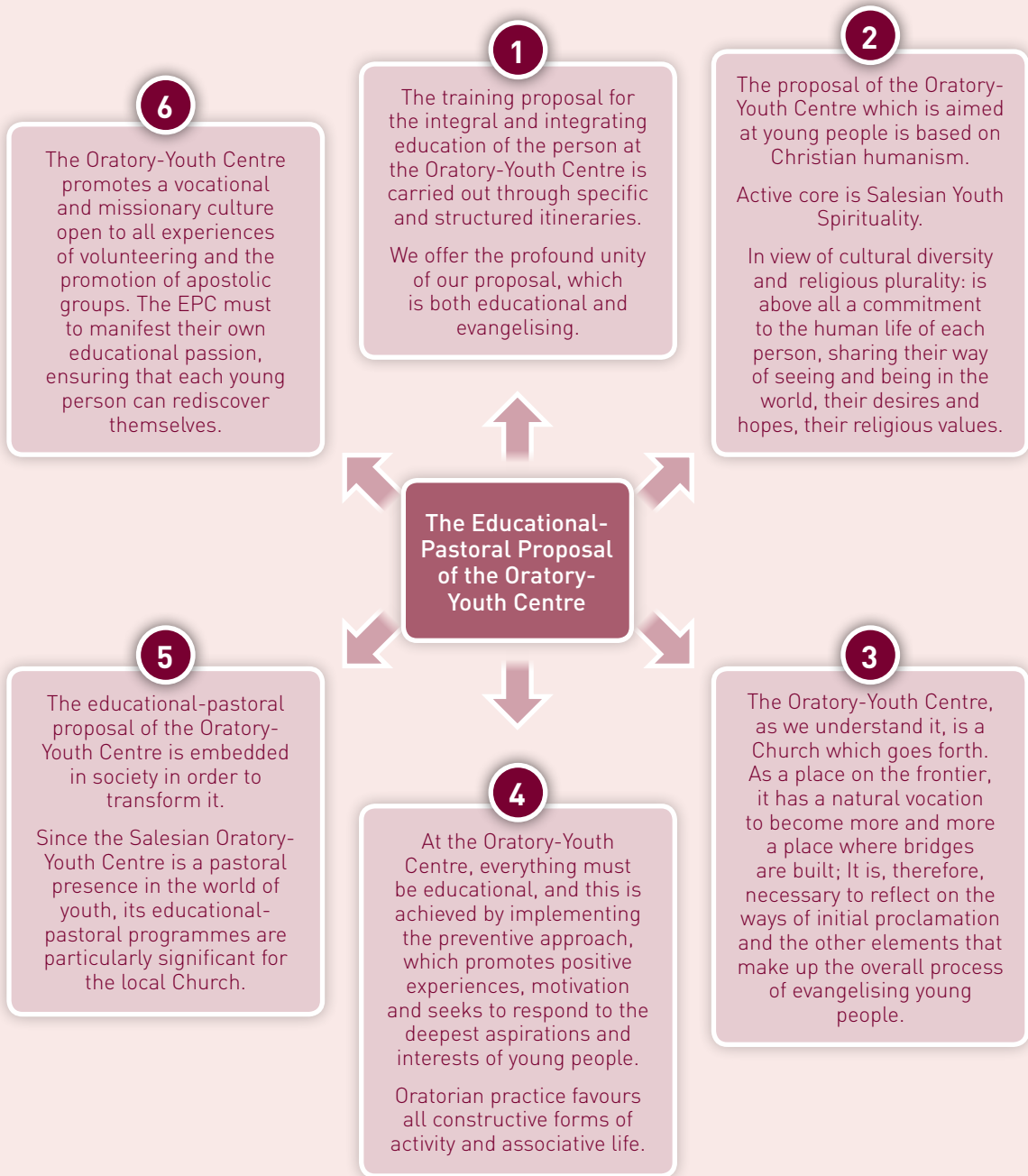
In this sense, it is important to accompany the former members of the Oratory-Youth Centre in their responsible integration into social and ecclesial life, for the good of the young people themselves and the Oratorian environment. The cooperators, Salesians by vocation, assume an important role and responsibility in this process.

The Oratory-Youth Centre promotes a vocational and missionary culture open to **all experiences of social volunteering** and **the promotion of apostolic groups**: educational summer activities for children and adolescents, missionary camps, solidarity support for the neighbourhood community and initiatives of ecological care, street Oratory initiatives to develop the missionary dimension throughout the territory, and much more.





## AT A GLANCE





# **THE ORGANIC PASTORAL ANIMATION OF THE ORATORY-YOUTH CENTRE**

CHAPTER

**IV**

## 4 1

## MAIN INTERVENTIONS OF THE PROPOSAL

The Salesian Oratory-Youth Centre is an open house, a physical place of relationships, a familiar context of gathering and expression for young people. It is therefore **an “environment of reference and radiance” of the Salesian charism.**

- A** For this reason, it is important to emphasise that the “Oratorian environment” is not only created to keep the doors open and provide young people with everything they need to attract them but also to entertain them. On the contrary, the Salesian Oratory-Youth Centre cannot be limited to being a container of activities, nor can it be “reduced” to a square, a street, a playroom or a playground. Rather, the need to **think of concrete, diversified proposals and to turn every Oratorian reality into an integral, formative space** must be felt as a priority need.

The value of the educational-pastoral proposal of the Salesian Oratory-Youth Centre lies in the accompaniment of the person, the subject of the growth processes and the protagonist of the educational-pastoral actions through which this itinerary is carried out.

- B** On the other hand, in the educational field of association, the original pastoral pedagogical experience of Don Bosco, which has its axis in the **“sacrament of presence”** (expression of Don Angel Fernández Artime), has been consolidated. *Salesian assistance* is the real, affective, and effective closeness of educators to young people, even outside the physical environment of the Oratory-Youth Centre (face-to-face or virtually), in their vital and existential spaces: it is the Salesian style of animation and pedagogical intervention in any process of mission on the youth continent.

The first time a young person comes to the Oratory-Youth Centre he/she needs something to help him/her overcome indifference and distance and to awaken the desire to repeat positive experiences and gradually get involved. Every young person and every member of the EPC perceives this **welcome through some identifiable features**: the educational and family atmosphere, rich in relationships, with specific and well-defined spaces for various activities; the clear and understandable gestures at the “first welcome”; the accompaniment of groups and individuals, always respectful on the part of the educators; the adoption of simple and

common rules of coexistence; the harmony and decorum of the facilities and the variety of proposals aimed at making everyone a protagonist, according to the functions of each individual.

But, beyond that, the wisdom of Salesian assistance has taught us to be present at the front door, in the courtyard, in the playroom, in the informal outdoor spaces; to be present every day, to greet the children warmly and to intervene educationally both personally and at various moments of convocation, etc.

All these gestures run the risk of becoming only occasional experiences or simply tied to the sensitivity of a few people. If, on the other hand, they are part of the DNA of Salesians and educator-animators, the effectiveness of the action will be different:

*«Education is, by nature, relationship, communication. The Preventive System, appealing to the resources of intelligence and heart and to the longing for God that is present in every young person, presupposes a capacity for listening, dialogue and respect for young people. The active and animating presence (“assistance”) of SDBs and lay educators among young people is an excellent form of educational and evangelising communication that young people expect» (GC24, N. 131).*

The Oratory-Youth Centre refers to the presence of educator-animators, their style, their “animation”, their “channels of communication” with young people, their cordiality, friendship, availability, gratuitousness, their ability to make demands with kindness, and their moral authority. All laypeople and consecrated persons who wish to place themselves at the service of and with young people in accordance with Don Bosco’s educational intuition must be trained in this.

**C** The creation of an educational environment is therefore the result of a series of meaningful encounters, of stories and names, of the quality of human relationships. **The affective-relational dimension**, whose value is nowadays strongly revalued and appreciated, especially by the younger generations, is key.

In the same way, special attention should be paid to the guidelines and protocols of the Province and of the ecclesial and civil authorities of each

country that refer to a safe environment. In this way, assist each Oratory-Youth Centre in reviewing and updating its policy and procedures for the protection of children, young people and vulnerable adults.

- D** Likewise, the multiplicity of initiatives, activities and experiences of coming together, commitment and faith that characterise Salesian Oratorian pastoral care require a coordinated and convergent animation, whose basic criteria are oriented towards **the promotion of small groups by age and/or interest group**, led by educators who are aware of the path they are following and who are capable to experience deep relationships to allow greater opportunities for protagonism.

Among the more specific educational activities of the Oratory-Youth Centre are: games and interactive activities; formal and informal meetings; sporting events and activities, both spontaneous and organised; everything related to expressive, artistic and communicative forms such as theatre, music, dance, cinema and radio; outings, excursions and youth tourism; camps and activities in contact with nature and also solidarity and missionary activities.

- E** **The recent technologies, social networks and virtual content** are also significantly and constantly present in the world of the new generations of our Oratories-Youth Centres, and as usually happens within the technological transformations that make resources, information and new horizons available, they also directly question our educational-pastoral proposal. We must evaluate these new resources and their possibilities and, at the same time, we must ask ourselves what formative processes (first us as educators-animators, then the young people) we should focus on.

An important indication in this regard, which should not be neglected, is *the pedagogy of listening and reciprocity by being physically close to the young people*. It is also necessary to cultivate a critical awareness of the languages and contents (values, models of existence and behaviour) that each digital product entails. Finally, it is necessary to learn to inhabit virtual environments and environments in their communal dimension, that is, to consider them as creators of a new proximity, an opportunity for continuous confrontation and encounter with others, overcoming the logic of isolation and consumption.

## 4 2

## ANIMATION AND COORDINATION OF INTERVENTIONS

**A** The proposal of the Oratory-Youth Centre is multiple, varied and integral. It touches on all aspects of the life and growth of young people (spiritual, formative, intellectual, recreational, cultural, social, ecological...). It is therefore essential that all activities are well articulated and coordinated so that they can develop their educational potential for the benefit of young people. The concrete praxis of Salesian works is the backbone of **a Salesian Educational-Pastoral Project** built with the contribution of the young people themselves and shared with the families in educationally constructive interaction.

What is proposed must correspond to the formative objectives provided in the Provincial SEPP or, if there is one, in the SEPP at the provincial and/or national level, which refers exclusively to the Oratory-Youth Centre.

On the one hand, *planning*, aimed at illuminating and energising the life of a given formative environment, necessarily has the characteristics of gradualness (a path to follow), educational continuity (no improvisation), and harmony (acceptance of limits and diversity, understood as a resource). On the other hand, it attempts to achieve an educational objective and to evaluate the extent to which it has been achieved, bearing in mind that this process is not necessarily in contradiction with the spontaneity and family environment that it tends to build.

It is important to encourage **the participation of young people in the planning, implementation and review of activities, through the** various groups and commissions with clear and defined educational projects. Their participation, which is not marginal, gives this sector its face and a clear element of its identity. This is precisely why we speak of youth protagonism, not only for young people, but with them!

**B** Likewise, it is necessary to coordinate the times, means and educational methods of the Oratory-Youth Centre with those of the other environments of the Salesian house-presence. Hence **the presence of the Oratory-Youth Centre in the Council of the EPC/Salesian Work**, where all its members participate in the animation of the Salesian house, promoting co-responsibility and coordination, paying special attention to the most

decisive aspects of Salesian identity and educational and evangelising quality. The EPC Council is also the body that animates and coordinates the implementation of the local Educational-Pastoral Project.

- C** It should be borne in mind that although some **Oratories-Youth Centres live in the same Salesian house with a Parish entrusted to the Salesians**, or are actively inserted in a diocesan pastoral area, they are neither part of the pastoral project of the Parish, as if they were an appendix to it (among many other groups), nor are they a reality foreign to it.

It is important to enrich the SEPP of the Oratory-Youth Centre and the parish in convergence and dialogue, but we must *respect both environments in order to remain faithful to Don Bosco's approach and to the identity of the Salesian Oratory-Youth Centre*. The Oratory-Youth Centre certainly has its own personality as a living force that participates in the same evangelising-formative mission. A mission that it ensures in well-defined times and places, with a particular style and with activities that provide unique nuances.

This means that in the *local Educational-Pastoral Project*, the inspiration that drives the entire machinery of each Salesian Work, some concrete aspects are reflected: the mutual connection, rapport, dialogue and communion between the two environments; reciprocity in the relationships between those in charge; the creation of synergies between the initiatives of both sectors of the Salesian Work. The presence of educator-animators on the Parish Pastoral Council guarantees the link between the parish and the Oratory-Youth Centre itself.

4 3

### FORMATION, A TRANSVERSAL AND PERMANENT INTERVENTION

- A** The elements listed above are only partially outlined, but they are sufficient to make us understand the imperative and overarching need for formation as a cornerstone. Indeed, it is. **The quality of systematic formation requires a continuous and permanent effort** of educational, Christian and Salesian qualifications of people.

In conclusion, the preparation of educational and pastoral agents cannot depend on the sensitivity of a single Salesian or the passion of a particularly



committed animator. The programmes of the school of animators, the basic courses, the specialisation courses for a specific field, the courses on skills for more effective and authentic educational-pastoral action, or the courses to strengthen the use of didactic and technical resources are generally accompanied by other initiatives: camps, retreats and spiritual exercises, encounters with the Salesian community and other authentic, stimulating and transforming experiences enrich and qualify the experience of the animator's own daily life. *It is only based on this updated, complete and continuous education and formation that it makes sense to take on responsibility.*

**B** It is therefore advisable for Oratories-Youth Centres to clarify, formalise and qualify their formation processes. The constant mobility of the protagonists and beneficiaries, as well as the ever-changing situations they have to deal with, pose **some formative objectives for the animators**, including the following:

- ▶ To encourage a continuous reflection on the personal and vocational identity of the animators-educators. In this sense, to deepen the motivations that underlie the educational-pastoral service itself.
- ▶ To familiarise themselves with the Salesian tradition and pedagogy, particularly in the field of animation as a Salesian way of thinking, reading reality and conceiving action. Also, knowledge of Don Bosco and the implementation of the Preventive System, Salesian Youth Spirituality and educational and spiritual accompaniment on a personal, group and environmental level.
- ▶ To acquire skills for educational leadership and other competencies specific to their role that will help resolve the initial difficulties inherent to their educational work.
- ▶ To develop skills to participate actively and work co-responsibly in the teams and groups of the Oratory-Youth Centre. In addition, to develop positive leadership qualities and social commitment.
- ▶ To assume continuous training as an instrument of personal and educational growth that helps to provide appropriate responses to the needs of the moment.

**C** Finally, the **experiences of living together, fraternal life, ongoing formation and prayer of the young animators with the Salesian community** are remarkably interesting and fruitful. In this sense, it is an enormous enrichment to activate specific and regular programmes of this kind in local planning.

Moreover, the praxis of many provinces considers the Oratory-Youth Centre environment as an ideal space for pastoral experiences in the initial formation of candidates for Salesian life and young Salesians doing their tirocinium.

## 4 4

### STRUCTURES FOR PARTICIPATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

One of the strengths of the Oratory-Youth Centre lies in the promotion of co-responsibility. This is based on trust, making the animators and the young people the real protagonists of the proposals. Everyone is co-responsible for the animation, but some specific roles should be highlighted.

## 4 4 1

### Local Animation

**A** **The coordinator of the local Oratory-Youth Centre** must not minimise the participation and co-responsibility of the other members of the Centre, but rather stimulate them, opening channels for their development. He/She must be a Salesian or layperson who is coherent in what he/she says, does and proposes; with a vocation to work among young people, with sympathy and competence; with an apostolic spirit, a capacity for direct and deep relationships with the collaborators and a stimulating presence among young people; with creativity and determination to innovate proposals and communicate enthusiasm; with concern for the operational unity of the team and its growth in faith.

**B** **The concrete form of exercising the function of the coordinator of the Oratory-Youth Centre can therefore take various forms.** Among the viable options, it is envisaged that *the Rector of the Salesian House may also be the coordinator of the Oratory-Youth Centre*. In this way, the same person can promote and support the educational-pastoral orientation of the Oratory-Youth Centre, for which he/she has overall responsibility,

both in the ordinary management of the environment and in the ordinary management of human and practical resources.

As was indicated in the *Special General Chapter XX*, the person in charge of the Oratory *should be the parochial vicar for youth*, so that he may more closely accompany the youth sector of the parish (cf. GC20, n. 432).

In some cases, as we know, *the coordinator of the Oratory-Youth Centre is a layperson*. Indeed, some provincial realities have taken advantage of the possibility of establishing this figure on a full or part-time basis. It is highly recommended that the layperson in this position be part of the Council of the Educational-Pastoral Community of the entire Salesian presence.

**C The role of the group of animators**, which is an essential integral part of the EPC, is to serve as a point of reference for young people throughout their lives. The educators of the Oratory-Youth Centre are the first animators on the playground, the members of the coordination group, the animators of the groups, the sports coaches, the educators of the artistic workshops. They work together and undergo continuous formation as educators.

**D The Oratory-Youth Centre Council or Council of the EPC of the Oratory-Youth Centre** is an animation body that acts as a link between the different sectors and activities that make up the Oratory-Youth Centre. It is responsible for drawing up the Educational-Pastoral Proposal that outlines the lines of formation, referring to the SEPP of the Work. It integrates and collaborates with the other councils present in the Work.

The members of this Council *represent the different sectors and, in addition to their specific competence and representation, must have a Salesian and pastoral sense* that makes them participants in the educational issues of the Oratorian community. Together with the coordinator of the Oratory-Youth Centre (who is personally responsible for its functioning), they form the animating nucleus of this environment and share responsibility for its management.

*«In complex works with several sectors of activity (parish, school or college, university residence, young people in difficulty, etc.) there may be several educational-pastoral communities or just one. If there is only one, there will be only one Council of the educational-pastoral community, which will coincide with the Council of the*

*Work. If, on the other hand, there are as many educational-pastoral communities as there are sectors of the Work, each sector has its own Council; there is also a Council of the Work, made up of representatives of the councils of the educational-pastoral communities» (GC24, N. 161).*

The coordinator does not replace the Council of the Oratory-Youth Centre, but presides over it and *promotes the necessary synergy between people*. Its composition and functioning obey dynamic guidelines and criteria, but also continuity, in accordance with the directives of the Provincial and his Council.

*«The Salesian community should create or consolidate the Council of the educational-pastoral community and / or the Council of the Work, as the central body that animates and coordinates the entire Salesian work through reflection, dialogue, planning and revision of the educational-pastoral action. Such Councils are made up of SDBs and laypeople who hold positions of responsibility in the educational-pastoral community, according to the criteria given by the Province» (GC24, N. 171).*

This Council should be a sounding board where the thoughts and problems of the Centre are reflected upon and where responses to the potential problems raised can be found. However, this body is not a decision-making body, but rather a consultative one. However, its proposals will be taken into account if they are in line with the SEPP or the spirit of the SEPP.

Their responsibilities should be as follows: evaluate and promote the annual educational-pastoral programming based on the main requirements of the youth condition and the guidelines of the local SEPP of the entire Salesian Work; coordinate the different educational proposals of the associations and groups and take care of the harmonisation and integration between the various pastoral interventions; promote Salesian associationism as an educational experience, the exchange of information and coordination between the various groups and associations; maintain a connection and collaboration with the other forces that work in the area and the local Church for the world of youth; guarantee the insertion of the Oratory-Youth Centre in the parish Christian community.

**E** The Oratory-Youth Centre Project must activate **participative bodies managed by the young people**, so that they become aware of the educational itinerary together: small groups for reflection and discussion; assemblies; other moments that allow young people to express themselves, identify their own concrete initiatives, review the progress made and plan some steps for the future). Basically, they all contribute to one objective: the participation of all or many in the co-responsibility of the Centre.

In the same way, it is desirable to promote **structures of participation for families**. The Oratory-Youth Centre is also the area in which the guidelines inspired by the “Youth Ministry and Family” (cf. Sector for Youth Ministry, 2021) can be applied most easily. Concretely, our pastoral action must help families to strengthen, maintain and, if necessary, rediscover their contribution to the daily life of the Oratory-Youth Centre; to encourage them in their ongoing journey to grow as human beings and believers; to insist on the need for a family dialogue through which the adolescent feels listened to and respected; to encourage meetings and conviviality between families to allow an exchange of experiences that favours the parent-child relationship; and to pay special attention to the accompaniment of all types of families that make up the EPC (cf. Youth Ministry Sector, Salesian Youth Ministry and Family: here the synergy between Youth Ministry and family is explored and some concrete indications for the SEPP are given).

**F** In addition to the SEPP, one element of the local organisation is the **specific statutes and/or operating regulations**. These specify:

- ▶ on whom the entity and the legal personality of the Centre depend;
- ▶ the person in charge designated by the institution;
- ▶ the participation bodies and the personal and collegial competencies;
- ▶ the relationship with the bodies of participation and animation of the Salesian Work, with families and with civil and ecclesial bodies;
- ▶ the formulation of criteria on aspects relating to association life and day-to-day management: general rules of conduct; opening and use of spaces and facilities; organisation of initiatives and events;

maintenance and cleanliness; legally prescribed safety measures in structural and operational terms; secretarial, documentation and *privacy* management; administration and accounting; communication.

Institutional and religious criteria for action, the development of agreements with other institutions, responsible and careful handling of heritage, and a culture of legality that does not put people or structures at risk, must also be taken into account.

## **Provincial/National Animation**

**A** **The Provincial Commission** for the accompaniment of the Oratories-Youth Centres participates in the animation of Youth Ministry in the Province. The Coordinator and the members of this Commission ensure the elaboration, implementation and evaluation of the lines of the Provincial Educational-Pastoral Project concerning the Oratories-Youth Centres.

The Provincial Commission for Oratories-Youth Centres is fully developed *when it works in a network when it interacts and coordinates with other Provincial Commissions*: Schools, Vocational Training Centres, Universities, Parishes, Social Works, SYM, Vocational Animation, Missionary Animation-Volunteering and Social Communication. The Provincial Formation Commission ensures the formative accompaniment of the young Salesians who are assigned to the management and animation of the Oratory-Youth Centre based on their apostolic work.

**B** For this to be possible, it is necessary to **address in the most appropriate way the question of financing and developing the existing structures** to support the activities and formation of the animators. The local work and the Salesian Province must ensure that this environment has sufficient material and financial resources to be able to develop its educational work concretely. Not all the services provided in this environment can be free and supported by free voluntary labour. The economy must be seen in the light of fidelity to the overall mission of the local Salesian presence.

On the other hand, the Oratory-Youth Centre itself, within its possibilities and in accordance with the local and Provincial SEPP, must seek other sources of self-sustainability, financing and fundraising, such as fees,

institutional fundraising events and initiatives, public and private contributions, income from fundraising activities, sponsorship and advertising, project management for financing, and any other income allowed by the Province; over and above what is provided by the local community and the Province itself.

The Oratory-Youth Centre must have organisational and budgetary autonomy to allow for more accountable, efficient and economical management. However, it should be noted that the activity of the Oratory-Youth Centre is part of the economy of the local Salesian presence, administratively and fiscally, according to the criteria of the Province.

The Provincial Planning and Development Office or Team, under the coordination of the Provincial Economist, can help to ensure the transparency, co-responsibility and sustainability of this sector, so that it serves its specific mission, institutional strengthening and revitalisation, bearing in mind that the Provincial Youth Ministry Delegate is responsible for the coordination of all pastoral sectors and areas.

**C** If there are two or more provincial commissions of Oratories-Youth Centres at the national level, they should coordinate and function according to a shared plan and participate in larger networks. The work of the Oratories and Youth Centres does not end in the city districts. **National networking requires comprehensive coordination** in order to be present in opinion “forums” and children’s and youth organisations that influence decisions concerning youth policies (educational prevention, social action, training and promotion of voluntary work, socio-cultural animation, promotion of educational leisure time).

Our Oratories-Youth Centres can be constituted as a civilly recognised entity to be able to liaise with civil institutions and to have easier access to sources of funding. At the same time, however, their institutional purpose must respect the aims of the Salesian charism and be shaped in a spirit of service and communion with local and provincial realities.

## AT A GLANCE

