

# The parish and the shrine entrusted to the salesians

Sector for  
Salesian Youth  
Ministry

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Sector for  
Salesian Youth  
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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

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|---------------------|--|
| <b>CCC</b>          | Code of Canon Law (1983).  |
| <b>Cost. / Reg.</b> | Constitutions and Regulations of the Society of Saint Francis de Sales (1984). |
| <b>GC</b>           | General Chapter of the Salesians of Don Bosco.                                 |
| <b>SEPP</b>         | Salesian Educative-Pastoral Plan.  |
| <b>PSEPP</b>        | Provincial Salesian Educative-Pastoral Plan.                                   |
| <b>EPC</b>          | Educative-Pastoral Community.  |
| <b>FR</b>           | Salesian youth ministry. Frame of reference. Youth Ministry Department (2014). |

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# Introduction



**The parish**, as a Church in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters, to be able to evangelize, has always had to adapt to the times, changing the ways in which she is present. Today, the Salesian parish is called to do the same. It must be a Church which “goes forth” throughout the local area in which she is located, capable not only of bringing people together, but of igniting stories of faith and creating bonds in everyday life.

As a Congregation, the need arose to *identify some privileged areas of pastoral renewal in the Salesian parish*. After the first text of the sector “Salesian parish and Shrines entrusted to the Salesians” in the “Frame of Reference for Youth Ministry” drawn up in 2014, it was decided to adapt the content, based on a more current knowledge of parish realities.

For this reason, the Salesian Youth Ministry Department has involved the Provinces, with the aim of promoting, in the first place, a *critical analysis of the situation of the parish* with regard to certain issues: the current socio-religious situations, the characteristics of evangelization which exist today at the local level, the specific nature and roles of the people involved (priests and parish priests, *the faithful, young people, parents, etc.*). At the same time, the guidelines of the Rector Major and the Council and the various contributions sent by the provincial delegates for youth ministry and by some national commissions were received and examined with attention and involvement.

This process made it possible to develop a **relevant reflection on the Salesian parish**. This document does not claim to be exhaustive and complete with respect to this broad context, but aims to offer further stimuli and possible pastoral implications. In fact, since each reality has its own crucial issues and challenges, choices have been made by giving preference to the essential elements that characterize and guarantee its original nature and its specific educative-pastoral characteristics, as a place of welcoming and apostolic service, in the face of the challenges of this era of great changes.

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Therefore, the text takes the form of a synthetic and organic collection of the *major reflections, Educative-pastoral guidelines and operational issues that emerged* from the various contributions received from the provinces, thus preventing an articulated exposition of the theological foundations and a complete analysis of the cultural and pastoral context of each reality.

To make the contents more systematic, it was decided to divide the text into five chapters. This structure can be functional in order to conceptualize the essential elements of all Salesian settings.

- ▶ The first Chapter focuses on the **ORIGINAL NATURE** of the parish entrusted to the Salesians in order to better identify the purpose for which we are present in these ecclesial realities. A programme that arises from Don Bosco's intention to create a parish for young people without a parish, a *precious gift for the mission in the entire ecclesial community*, by retracing the process of the assumption of parishes in the various deliberations of the General Chapters.
- ▶ Next we identify the **PEOPLE** involved in the mission: the Educative-pastoral Community, a *community of people (a "home"), not a structure or an institution*. Being a community of communities, there is emphasis on the importance of the EPC of the parishes and of all its members who take on a common mission that involves everyone in shared responsibility.
- ▶ The **VISION** identifies questions that characterize the third Chapter: What hopes, and dreams do we have? What apostolic challenges are we facing as a parish entrusted to the Salesians? Whom and what are we trying to transform evangelically? In other words, it focuses on *what objectives we intend to achieve*. Then follows an analysis of all the elements characterizing the educative-pastoral proposal of the parish entrusted to the Salesian community.



- ▶ The fourth focuses on **ORGANIZATION**. The proposal, inspired by the Christian catechumenate, looks after the personal, community and celebrative and liturgical dimension and the commitment to evangelization which guide the correct planning of interventions with young people, ensuring *the completeness and integrity of the Christian experience of the people and structures of participation and responsibility*.
- ▶ In the last Chapter, an update relating to public churches and Shrines is presented.

At the end of this process, I would first like to thank all those who have contributed their observations; we have certainly had a positive experience of listening to the realities of the Congregation. Thanks to the quality of the reflections, we were able to gather valuable elements for verifying and relaunching our pastoral charity in the parish setting. The effort to systematize all aspects related to the parish setting was carried out with the intention of continuing the reflection at the local and provincial level, hoping that this work will have pastoral effects/fruits.

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

*General Councillor for Youth Ministry*

15 OCTOBER 2021



# THE ORIGINAL NATURE OF THE PARISH ENTRUSTED TO THE SALESIANS

CHAPTER

I



## ASSUMING OF PARISHES IN THE DELIBERATIONS OF THE GENERAL CHAPTERS

Don Bosco's apostolic zeal for the poorest youth of Turin led him to create a **parish for young people without a parish**. During his time, Don Bosco accepted seven parishes and in 1887 he wrote a regulation on the proper functioning of the parish. He touched on the issues that concerned him most: the priority of attention to young people, especially the poorest, the educative preference of the Congregation and the identity of the Salesian parish priest that served in communion with the Bishop and the diocesan clergy. These themes continued to be central points of reference in the following years.

*«The sick, the poor and the children are the subjects of special concern (of the parish priests)» (DELIBERATIONS OF THE FOURTH GENERAL CHAPTER, 1886).*

After a long process that lasted many decades, the GC 19 of 1965 states that “the Salesian ministry seeks to include all the ordinary activities of its Parishes in the overall plan of diocesan pastoral ministry, even if they are carried out according to our spirit and in harmony with our methods and our structures” (GC19, Part I, chap. XI, 3). GC 20 affirmed in 1971 that “the parish entrusted to the Salesians should no longer be seen as a work situated next to the college or school, but as the true centre and pivot of our service to the local ecclesial community. In this perspective, the parish is presented as a field of work centred on a community of Salesians, to whom the Church entrusts the mandate of spreading the Kingdom of God” (GC20, 436).

The subsequent General Chapter of 1978 defines the parish commitment as Salesianally valid, also “because it allows to reach out to young people in their natural environment and to assist them throughout their development; it offers easier opportunities to involve parents and adults for their education; it promotes their natural integration in the local Church and in the territory” (GC21, 135). The reflection is based on two assumptions:

- ▶ the parish allows us to position ourselves among young people;
- ▶ here we can evangelize them in the style of the SEPP (Salesian Educative Pastoral Plan).

In this General Chapter the parishes are entrusted to the youth ministry department (GC21,400).

In 1984, with the definitive approval of the renewed *Constitutions and Regulations of the Society of Saint Francis de Sales*, the parish is explicitly recognized as one of the environments in which we implement our proposal: “We carry out our mission also in the parishes, responding to pastoral needs of the particular Churches in those areas which offer us adequate scope for service to the youth and to the poor” (cf. *Const. 42; Reg. 25*).

Considering the importance of the steps described above, we can draw two conclusions:

- ▶ Primarily, in the Salesian parish, the charism of the Congregation must manifest itself no less than in other sectors of our Salesian works. Basically, it is fundamental to bear in mind that it is not necessary to start from structures to seek the Salesian identity, but *from the charism, spirituality, and mission*. This is expressed in article 42 of the Constitutions of the Salesians of Don Bosco:

*«In parishes [...] we contribute to the spreading of the Gospel and to the advancement of the people. We collaborate in the pastoral programme of the particular Church out of the riches of our specific vocation» (CONST. 42)*

- ▶ The second conclusion is that *the province has a responsibility for animation and governance*, not only in reference to the religious life of the people and the religious community to which the parish is entrusted, but also in reference to the pastoral and educative activity of the parishes themselves. This is due precisely to the main goal of each province: promoting the life and mission of the Congregation and offering a specific service to the particular Church (cf. *Const. 157*).

Therefore, taking on a Salesian parish implies first of all identifying the Salesian components in the animation of this environment, asking ourselves what charismatic contribution is given to the diocese through the parish entrusted to us.

## 1 2

## A PRECIOUS GIFT FOR THE WHOLE ECCLESIAL COMMUNITY

The parish is the first community instance in which the Church carries out the mission entrusted to her by Jesus *in a well-defined socio-cultural context*. In *Evangelii Gaudium* 28, Francis recalls some significant aspects of the identity of the parish, which, in addition to being a “presence of the Church in a given area”, is a “community of communities”, a place and sanctuary of Christian life, a missionary and evangelizing community.

*“Since its inception, the Parish is envisioned as a response to a precise pastoral need, namely that of bringing the Gospel to the People through the proclamation of the faith and the celebration of the Sacraments [...], called upon to read the signs of the times, while adapting both to the needs of the faithful and to historical changes [...], in search of new forms of accompaniment and closeness. A task of this kind ought not to be seen as a burden, but rather as a challenge to be embraced with enthusiasm.”*  
 (“THE PASTORAL CONVERSION OF THE PARISH COMMUNITY IN THE SERVICE OF THE EVANGELIZING MISSION OF THE CHURCH”, 2020).

In our case, the parish entrusted to the Salesians enters the pastoral ministry of the Church with a style, a structure, a peculiarity; by its nature, it is configured as a privileged space for the evangelization for young people and the option for them is not exclusive or discriminatory, but preferential and constitutes a timeless challenge. This preferential option is a precious gift for the mission in the whole ecclesial community.

This pastoral presence has many diverse characteristics, both with regard to the request for entrustment and with respect to social position.

*The request for entrustment may concern:*

- parish presences of the diocesan clergy which are subsequently entrusted to a religious community: in some cases, the religious animate only the parish environment; in others, the confreres who animate the parish are part of a broader Salesian Work, which also includes other pastoral activities;

- ▶ passages from “public church” or “Shrine” to “parish”;
- ▶ the entrustment of a parish or of different parishes to several priests “in solidum”, all equivalent to the parish priest; in this case the “the coordinator” is to direct the joint pastoral action and answer for it to the Bishop (cf. *CIC*, can. 517, §1);
- ▶ lastly, parishes entrusted to religious who are isolated or in a personal capacity, or for contingent reasons. With respect to this last mode of entrustment, the Congregation is gradually no longer accepting this type of request. All the indications concerning the



conditions established by law and the procedures to be followed for the acceptance of a parish, are contained in the document “Legal elements and administrative practice in the government of the Province” (Directorate General for Works Don Bosco, 2004, no. 126).

*As for the pastoral and social position in which the parishes entrusted to the Salesians are included, there has been a certain multiplicity:*

- ▶ they are located in regions of widespread social adhesion to the Church that require in-depth evangelization; others are located in contexts in which faith requires a phase of reformulation due to the rapid process of secularization;
- ▶ quite a few develop in societies in which the Church is not allowed other structures, environments or methods of evangelization;
- ▶ some parishes are mission stations, while others are located in rural environments;
- ▶ they are also present in environments with a strong popular religiosity, but also in interreligious contexts;
- ▶ there is no shortage in large urban areas and in the suburbs of big cities, with related aggregation, human promotion and rooting problems;
- ▶ lastly, several are located in medium-high socio-economic contexts, while others in more modest ones.

# AT A GLANCE

## ORIGINALITY of PARISH ENTRUSTED TO THE SALESIANS

A privileged space of evangelization for young people...

... according to the Salesian Pastoral-Educational Project

- Assumption of parishes in the deliberations of General Chapters
- Salesian Parish: a precious gift for the entire ecclesial community

- The charism of the Congregation must be manifested no less than in other sectors of our Salesian works
- The Province has an animation and governance responsibility

Differentiated and multiple features starting with:

Request for entrustment

Social Placement

- diocesan parishes entrusted to a religious community
- transitions from "public church" or "sanctuary" to "parish"
- delivery of one or more parishes to several priests "in solidum"
- parishes, finally, entrusted to isolated religious or in a personal capacity (the Congregation is moving towards no longer accepting this type of request)

- placed in regions of widespread social adherence to the Church
- located in contexts where faith requires reformulation
- in societies in which the Church is not permitted other structures
- mission stations or rural settings
- environments with a strong popular religiosity, but also in interfaith contexts
- in large urban agglomerations, in the suburbs of large cities
- in medium-high or modest socioeconomic contexts





# THE EDUCATIVE PASTORAL COMMUNITY OF THE PARISHES

CHAPTER



## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE EPC OF THE PARISH

From the mystery of the incarnation arises the mystery of the Church: “In the human nature united to Himself the Son of God, by overcoming death through His own death and resurrection, redeemed man and re-molded him into a new creation. By communicating His Spirit, Christ made His brothers, called together from all nations, mystically the components of His own Body” (LG 7). The Church is a “mystery of communion”. The essence of the Church is determined by the mystery of the Triune God: it is the people of God the Father (LG 2), the mystical body of Christ (LG 3) and the temple of the Holy Spirit (LG 4).

The parish, in this society and in this history, becomes the face of the Church, which is concretized as a Eucharistic, missionary and evangelizing community in the territory of a particular Church, and which people find close to their own homes, visibly and socially inserted in their daily lives. In it, Christians live faith, hope and charity, nourished by the Word of God, in the celebration of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, creating communion in a community committed by its essence to the mission of salvation of the Universal Church, through the particular Church.

The parish is a large community of baptized believers, a “portion” of the universal Church, within the dynamics of diocesan ministry. The Christian community is the place where communion is experienced: the believer finds a home there. In this respect, today the typology of the parish is certainly not unique but rather it is a complex reality. Being a community of communities, the parish creates a broad weave of human relationships that fosters communion and fraternity: a “spirituality of communion” (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 43-45).

The Salesian form of animation of every educational reality, which carries out Don Bosco’s mission, is defined as the *Educative-pastoral Community* (EPC) (cf. Const. 47; GC24, no. 149-179; *FR*, chap. V). It is not a new structure that is added to the other management and participation agencies existing in the various pastoral works or environments, nor is it an organizational way of working or a technique of participation. It is a group of people (young people and adults, parents and educators, religious and lay people, representatives of other ecclesial and civil institutions and also belonging to other religions, men and women of good will) who work

together for the education and evangelization of the young, especially the poor, in the style of Don Bosco. This reality can be conceived as a structure of concentric circles, based on how individuals' responsibilities in the mission are shared.

Our charism is a gift of the Spirit for the Church, thus a Salesian parish unites two distinctive characteristics:

- ▶ first of all, it is *where God's presence is found in the local Church*, in the light of personal charism;
- ▶ secondly, it is the *Educative-pastoral Community*, where everyone feels responsible for proclaiming the Gospel and for the growth of the community, especially young people.

The EPC of the Salesian parish takes up a common mission involving responsibility (cf. *GC24*, 18), shared by the largest possible number of people and evangelizing energies around a pastoral plan. It is therefore necessary to overcome an essentially clerical and "monolithic" parish model, a parish in which only ordained ministers make decisions and govern.

It is a matter of establishing a communal vision of the parish that prevents the self-referential conception and the clericalization of the pastoral ministry, putting the spotlight on fraternal relations; a parish understood as an EPC, in which **the plurality of vocations, charisms and ministries build a harmonious organism**, in which all the members find their place and in which the daily journey is an exercise of shared responsibility. It is a community that is enriched with faces, stories, charisms, dialogue, and discussion.

*A parish in which a "fusion of diversities" takes place; with priests, religious and laity who cooperate in a single mission, mutually complementary in diversity, each bringing their own contribution and all united by the same baptism. In other words, **in the Church there is a place for everyone and everyone can find their place in the one family of God**, respecting each other's vocation and trying to value every charism.*

In fact, in the parish, **diversities "make up the church" together**: diversity of faith itineraries, first of all; socio-cultural diversity; diversity

of temperaments, inclinations, mental categories; diversity of origin; age diversity; diversity of responsibilities in the same parish.

## 2 2

### THE MEMBERS OF THE EPC OF THE PARISH

The numerous vocational expressions are a manifestation of lay co-responsibility and ministry within the configuration of the parishes. In the parish communities there are numerous lay people (adults and young people) who give their service and ministry in view of the common good. From being simple recipients of “religious service”, the members of the parish community must become members of the mission of the church in their area.

People, especially youth, live in an environment where they share interests and experiences, in dialogue with peers and adults, in a climate of mutual accompaniment and in a continuous exchange of skills and talents. Living this experience of reciprocity in a community perspective, this “culture of encounter”, means implementing in every Salesian house **an Educative-pastoral Community, which is not a requirement of order and balance, but our educative-pastoral model**. For this reason, we do not only exist together, but we feel the need to work together, because we believe in the wealth that every vocation offers.

The people who make up the EPCs are: young people, families, groups of the Salesian Family, religious communities, committed lay people, groups, associations and ecclesial movements.

*“The ‘culture of encounter’ is conducive to dialogue, solidarity and openness to others, as it is person-centred. Naturally, a Parish must be a “place” that brings people together and fosters long-term personal relationships, thereby giving people a sense of belonging and being wanted. The Parish community is called truly to master the “art of accompaniment”. (THE PASTORAL CONVERSION OF THE PARISH COMMUNITY IN THE SERVICE OF THE EVANGELIZING MISSION OF THE CHURCH”, 2020).*

**A** The Salesian religious community of the parish increases its value with the significant and complementary presence of **clerical and lay Salesians**,

who constitute an essential element of its make-up and its apostolic completeness. In fact, the Salesian brother brings to every field of education and pastoral activity the specific qualities of his lay status (cf. Const. 45).

Therefore, the community to which the parish is entrusted, with the wealth of its specific vocation, cooperates “charismatically” (according to the Salesian apostolic consecration) with the ministerial mandate entrusted by the diocesan Bishop. The whole renewal of the Congregation after the Second Vatican Council focused on the local “community” as the subject of the mission (cf. Const. 44. 49). It is increasingly urgent to cooperate in the creation of a mentality that considers the pastoral ministry of a Salesian parish as not exclusively connected to the figure of the parish priest, but to the entire Salesian community.

The entire **Salesian religious community** is the bearer of a “specific pastoral sensitivity”, which enriches the overall pastoral ministry through its spiritual and charismatic heritage. Its pedagogical style and its relationships of fraternity and shared responsibility in the mission represent a reference testimony in the parishes and neighbourhoods.

The community lives the family spirit by being a witness of sharing for this purpose; first of all, it experiences mutual understanding and esteem in the internal dynamics. The provincial and his council ensure a religious community for the pastoral care of the parish and support the confreres in the authentic realization of their Salesian vocation by encouraging their apostolic zeal mainly dedicated to youth. The provincial visits a Salesian parish and intervenes to ensure that close commitment with the Bishop, is fulfilled according to the Agreement stipulated (cf. *Legal elements and administrative practice in the government of the Province*, Directorate General Works Don Bosco (2004), Appendix A-14), to assure the Congregation that the Salesian proposal is accepted and implemented in the fullness of Don Bosco’s charism.

It is the whole community that assumes the pastoral guidelines of the diocese, with the wealth of its pastoral charism. The whole community:

- ▶ is fully integrated in the life and guidelines of the province it belongs to;
- ▶ creates a group of leaders for the parish ministry around the parish priest;

- ▶ promotes the development and implementation of the SEPP (Salesian Educative-pastoral Plan) in the parish;
- ▶ is responsible, in collaboration with the parish priest and his team, for the formation and spiritual animation of the faithful;
- ▶ guides the members of the Salesian Family to be the first assistants in the development of the plan;
- ▶ participates in the life of the parish, taking an interest in the life and history of the people, especially the youth.

The religious community (cf. GC21, 138; Reg. 26) *is part of the animating nucleus of the parish entrusted to the Salesians* and assumes a clear role (cf. GC24, 159) as:

- ▶ it bears witness to the primacy of God;
- ▶ it visibly manifests its fraternal life and practice of the evangelical counsels through moments of prayer, meetings and social gatherings;
- ▶ it shares this testimony with the laity of the parish community;
- ▶ it is a portion of the pastoral project that gives space to the different skills of the confreres.

*These peculiarities make the life of the community more serene, more exciting and even more satisfying, giving it in return a more “attractive” gospel and life in the church.*

**B** **The Rector of the Salesian house**, as “first in order of responsibility for its religious life, its apostolic activities and the administration of its goods” (Const. 176), is the custodian of the Salesian consecrated identity for the local community. He accompanies and helps each confrere to discern, develop and use the charismatic gifts bestowed on him for the realization of the Salesian mission, also in the parish (cf. *Animating and governing the community. The ministry of the Salesian Rector*, Society of St Francis de Sales. Salesians of Don Bosco (2019) point 4: “guardian and animator of the Salesian consecrated identity”). He looks after unity and the Salesian identity of the entire Work and

encourages the confreres as they carry out the parish pastoral plan (cf. *Reg. 29*).

The difficulty in coordinating in a single plan his activities as rector, which he carries out from a religious and educational point of view for the whole Salesian Work, with those of the parish priest who is in charge of the parish community (ultimate reference for the animation and direction of the parish), is clarified by GCS 20 (*GCS20*, 435) and by the Regulations (see *Reg. 23*). These directions have attempted to give order to the structure of these two figures. Art. 29 of the Regulation (1984) gathered the results of the experience with this rule: "Where the situation permits, the canonical erection of the Salesian house should be carried out at the service of the parish with its rector-parish priest. When the offices of rector and parish priest are separate, the rector looks after the unity and the Salesian identity of the community and encourages the co-responsibility of the confreres as they carry out the parish pastoral plan".

Therefore, the rector of a Salesian house who is dedicated only to the parish should also be a parish priest, if possible, assuming the role of rector-parish priest. The two roles have the common goal of creating a religious community which is the animating centre of a broader community of the Salesian parish.

On the other hand, it may well be that the rector has a dual responsibility as pastor or a responsible worker of the oratory; this requires a confrere to be appointed, preferably with the role of assistant pastor, assigned to the oratory or parish, allowing him to devote himself to the main tasks and responsibilities of the rector.

In complex works, with more than one environment, the rector chairs the **Council of the EPC or of the Work**. This Council is the liaison and coordination body made up of the rector and representatives of all the settings that make up the Work itself; for this reason, it would be appropriate to encourage the presence of the parish priest and a few members of the Pastoral Council. Animated by the same charism and partakers of the one mission, they are responsible for making the gift and service of the Salesian charism present in an area in its significance. For this reason, they share the various responsibilities, resulting from the management of all the settings of a Work, and they come together not only to organize, but also to be formed and build paths of common reflection.

**C** The **parish priest** is the first person responsible for the parish mission that the Bishop entrusts to the Salesian Congregation; in fact, he is aware of his responsibilities towards the Bishop and the Congregation. It is important to bear in mind that the Salesian parish priest carries out a dual representation. He “makes present” the bishop and the project of the particular Church (cf. LG 28) and it is for this reason that he receives the mandate from his person; at the same time, he represents the Congregation and its proposal, since the parish is entrusted to the Congregation and the latter is in charge of appointing and replacing the parish priest at the end of his mandate. The parish priest presides over the parish community, assuming the responsibility of implementing the Educative-pastoral Plan, in communion with the Rector, with the Salesian community and with the Pastoral Council.

Faithful to the educative-pastoral mission, the Salesian parish priest patterns himself after Don Bosco in the evangelization of young people and the people of God. Today this inspiration is expressed by *cultivating a careful vision of the educative-pastoral model*, which every Salesian should seek. This approach is very important. We recall the importance that the Salesian Constitutions have in the identity of the Salesians as “educators and pastors”, aware of the need to possess a kind of Salesian formation that is able to help them respond to the challenges of today’s societies, to the unexpressed questions and yearnings of the people of God, especially young people; Salesian priests who are more connected to the spaces, times and life situations of the people who live in working class environments.

*Because of this need for relationships, the parish priest should become a permanently accessible reference, in terms of time, but also of desire in “inhabiting” his community, intellectually and emotionally, carrying in his heart all his potential and making it available to others, an ever more fruitful apostolic activity of a youthful and popular style.*

Another characteristic - closely linked to the previous ones - is *the ability to establish quality relationships*, taking care of diversified interpersonal relationships with individuals, with confreres, with the religious men and women he comes across, with the laity, the sick, with young people and children, with the elderly and families, with the people who make up the groups that work in the parish and with the local Church.



In this respect, the parish priest is called to welcome, listen, accompany, and form *the parish community "in a Salesian way"*, that is, with a simple and appropriate spirituality, a concrete apostolic witness, an example of diligence, a sense of optimism, a missionary horizon, a predilection for youth and the poor, a renewed Marian devotion and an engaging practice of the Sacraments.

The personal existence of a Salesian priest is based on a wide array of values inspired by the Constitutions of the Salesians of Don Bosco. In short, it combines the gifts of Salesian apostolic consecration with those of the pastoral ministry. Ecclesial reflection has made it clear that the priesthood is not vague, neither as an exercise of the ministry, nor as a grace. The charism has given rise to a unique way of being a priest and exercising his ministry. The authors who gave the biography of Don Bosco the title: "A priest and educator", or "The young people's priest" have summarized this concept.

**D** **By virtue of Baptism, the laity have a very specific place, role and responsibility** within our parish communities. They promote and accompany the diversity of vocations, also by encouraging a laity that assumes its significant role in the evangelizing mission. The parish community cultivates human relationships and takes care of people and groups so that everyone feels *recognized, accepted and understood*. Our ecclesial communities represent the most fitting place to live the day-to-day Christian experience on a daily basis; the laity, families, young people and the poor are the priority reference subjects in the proposals of the community.

*In every parish there are groups of lay people who donate their time in the various sectors of education, evangelization, celebration and charity. These are members of various (pastoral, economic affairs, oratory-youth centre) councils and leaders of groups, associations and movements, which are present and operate within the parish territory.*

*The value of a parish is given by its ability to build itself up as a community. A place where people are not only identified with roles of a whole range of "ministries" and services (such as priests, deacons, lectors, acolytes, catechists, ministers of the Eucharist, workers of charity, etc.). This list cannot be representative of all realities, as it is modelled according to the activities that the parish decides to activate in response to the characteristics and*

needs (not only strictly religious) of the context in which it lives. In addition, however, it is also a space *populated by families* who bring novelty and life. In order to populate parishes with families it is necessary to look after and accompany them when they are formed (marriage preparation), at the birth of a child (baptism), in the stages of the child's growth in faith (Christian initiation), in being close to the sick and the elderly who live in the houses (pastoral care of the sick), in times of mourning and separation (funeral).

The parish priest, together with his council, gives guidelines regarding the leadership of ecclesial groups, with special attention to the proposals of the *Salesian Youth Movement and the Salesian Family*. In this respect, the charism, which characterizes the parish, is primarily the Salesian charism. This requires that the various components of the Salesian Family, who share responsibility for Don Bosco's charism and spiritual point of reference, take



care of their identity more explicitly and renew their presence with dialogue and collaboration.

**E** The Salesian parish considers **young people as legitimate and indispensable members of the EPC**. They are “the historical ‘fortune’ of the Congregation” (in the words of don Juan Vecchi). Therefore, this charismatic presence must ensure concern for the world of adolescents and young people, for their worries, experiences and expectations. Youth ministry in the parish expresses the Church’s care for a very large number of young people, paying attention to all ages. Being linked to the concreteness of activities should also lead to considering the broad reality of young people which is often found outside the parish.

*“I want to state clearly that young people themselves are agents of youth ministry. Certainly, they need to be helped and guided, but at the same time left free to develop new approaches, with creativity and a certain audacity [...] I am more concerned with helping young people to use their insight, ingenuity and knowledge to address the issues and concerns of other young people in their own language” (Christus vivit, 203).*

The parish aims to be a community that makes room for the **protagonism of young people**, bringing out their needs and accompanying them; freeing their initiative, creativity and autonomy in the activities and paths along which they are accompanied according to their sensitivity and perspective, in order to be actively involved in initiatives for themselves and for the parish community. It is important to encourage the involvement of young people also in the formative programmes of the parish-oratory, not as mere performers of animation, but as active players in thinking and implementing new experiential paths. Ordinarily, some of the members of the Pastoral Council are young people, who are involved in the planning and execution of the Salesian Educative-pastoral Plan. The preference for young people, as previously mentioned, characterizes the pastoral proposal of the parish as dynamic, enthusiastic and proposing Gospel ideals.

**F** The **responsible agent of the oratory- youth centre**, according to the guidelines of the GC20 (cf. 432) should be the assistant pastor for the youth sector. This prospect can still offer valid suggestions. In fact, it has two advantages:

- ▶ on the one hand, it connects the parish and the Oratory-Youth Centre in a single pastoral action plan;
- ▶ on the other hand, it presents the Oratory-Youth Centre as a centre where youth initiatives are spread throughout the area and not only as an setting where activities are proposed.

*Indeed, the missionary nature of the Salesian Oratory can and must originate from the territory of the parish, without making the mutual mistake of withdrawing into its own world.*

In some cases, the responsible agent of the Oratory-Youth Centre is a lay person. In fact, some province realities have taken advantage of the possibility of establishing this figure full or part time. It is strongly recommended that the lay person having this role be present at the Parish Pastoral Council.

Attention should be paid to the link with the Oratory-Youth Centre (see *Reg.* 26) as we will see later on. In many situations there are no parishes without an oratory, while there are some examples of the opposite situation (oratories in the pastoral area) without a parish.

## AT A GLANCE

### THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATIVE-PASTORAL COMMUNITY OF THE PARISH

It assumes a common mission: it involves in the co-responsibility around a project the greatest number of people

Plurality of vocations, charisms and ministries: a "culture of Encounter"

### PARISH EPC SUBJECTS

Salesian religious community of the parish

increases its value with the significant and complementary presence of clerical and lay Salesians

- bearer of a "specific pastoral sensitivity"
- lives the family spirit in sharing
- assumes the pastoral guidelines of the Province and the diocese
- is part of the animating nucleus of the parish and assumes a distinctive role therein

The Rector of the Salesian House

- keeps the consecrated Salesian identity for the local community
- cares for the unity and Salesian identity of the entire Work
- encourages the confreres in the implementation of the pastoral project of the parish
- presides over the Council of the EPC or Work

The parish priest

- first responsible for the parish mission entrusted by the Bishop to the Salesian Congregation
- represents the Congregation and its proposal
- presides over the parish community
- assumes responsibility for implementing the Salesian Educational-Pastoral Project in communion with the Rector, the Salesian community and the Parish Pastoral Council



PARISH EPC SUBJECTS

The laity

- promote and accompany the diversity of vocations
- assume their significant role in the evangelizing mission (by virtue of Baptism)
- attention to the Salesian Youth Movement and the Salesian Family

Young people

- legitimate and indispensable members of the EPC
- members of the Parish Pastoral Council
- involved in the planning and execution of the Salesian Educational-Pastoral Project

The person in charge of the Oratory-Youth Center

- parish vicar for youth
- connects the parish and the Oratory-Youth Center into a single pastoral action plan
- animates the Oratory-Youth Center as a center of irradiation of youth initiatives towards the territory

# THE EDUCATIVE-PASTORAL PROPOSAL OF THE PARISH ENTRUSTED TO THE SALESIAN COMMUNITY

CHAPTER



The parish certainly has its own needs, in view of its ecclesial and cultural nature, which must be considered in a Salesian presence that assumes them, but our charism fits into them in a homogeneous and original way. Consequently, our task is to fully assume this tension, taking care to enrich our educative-pastoral proposals with our nuances, while being faithful to our Salesian DNA.

***But what is the educative-pastoral “proprium” of the parish entrusted to the Salesians?***

3 1

## A CENTRE FOR EVANGELIZATION AND EDUCATION IN THE FAITH

The *Acts of the Apostles* is the book of the New Testament which helps us best understand the difficult life of the first Christian communities. In this book the sharing and spreading of the truth of Jesus Christ blossomed and was strengthened. The following passage can truly accompany the life of every parish community: *“They persevered in the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers.”* (Acts 2:42).

- ▶ In this passage from the Acts of the Apostles we speak of “perseverance” in the teaching of the apostles. This involves *proclaiming the Gospel* and deepening this proclamation through *catechesis*. *Listening to the Word* is an important moment for a community filled with the power of the Spirit, indeed, the encounter with the Word takes place in the community.
- ▶ A further perseverance takes place in communion, in “being together” and *being in agreement*. This is embodied by all the members of a parish, by remaining on the same foundation, on the same faith; hence an agreement that leads to the *sharing of material goods* and indicates unity in faith and *the communion of charity*.
- ▶ The third “perseverance” is that of the “breaking of bread”. This “breaking of bread” recalls our Eucharistic celebrations; this gathering to eat the Bread of Life implies that the story with Jesus is not over, but continues.



- Finally, there is perseverance “in prayer”, which is the basis of all community life. It is the *prayer that guarantees* a link between listening to the Word, the celebration of the Eucharistic and the practice of charity.

« *When the Salesians are called by the Bishop to the pastoral care of an area or sector of God’s People, they assume, before the Church, the stimulating commitment to build - in full co-responsibility with the laity - a community of brothers, gathered in charity, to listen to the Word, to celebrate the Lord’s Supper and to proclaim the message of salvation*» (GC20, 416)

**A** Along these lines, the parish is the natural place where a **systematic proposal of evangelization and education in the faith** takes place for everyone (cf. GC23, 116-157). By promoting the first proclamation to those who are estranged from it and by offering ongoing programmes and gradual education in the faith, the parish entrusted to the Salesian community sees the urgent need to shift from a pastoral ministry of sacramentalization (with a catechesis which is mainly oriented towards it) to a pastoral ministry of ongoing formation in the faith (initiation and maturity in Christian life, with a corresponding catechesis).

Attention to promoting the first proclamation is a concrete missionary expression of the Salesian parish. The “first proclamation” of faith, which concerns the vital encounter with the risen Lord, is not only the “beginning”, but the “centre” and “heart” of our belief. A faith that must give rise also to a journey of formation, maturity, growth, “which entails taking seriously each person and God’s plan for his or her life” (EG 160). This is a challenge for all our parishes. “It is the principal proclamation, the one which we must hear again and again in different ways, the one which we must announce one way or another throughout the process of catechesis, at every level and moment” (EG 164).

Don Bosco transmitted to the Salesians above all his passion for the salvation of the young, an attention that is expressed in concrete terms through the constant commitment of a simple and essential catechesis, which is tailored to the condition, age and culture of the young, linked to other educational and recreational proposals of the Oratory: “*This Society, in its principle, was a simple catechism*”. Therefore, it is important to promote a *diversification and renewal of catechetical itineraries*. In this respect, the

anthropological dimension of catechesis should be emphasized, not only the methodological sphere, but also the one relating to content, paying attention to the psycho-sociological conditions of children, adolescents, young people and adults; to the “signs of the times”; to “youth cultures”; to openness to human sciences.

**B** The parish is a community where **the most characteristic values of Salesian youth spirituality** can be experienced: the joy of daily Christian life, the hope that sees the positive in people and situations, the promotion of communion and the social dimension of charity, a fundamental practice in our charismatic expression.

The parish community *therefore strives, with everyone, for human and religious maturity with a specific proposal of Christian life* which consists in opening up to new forms of acceptance, welcoming those who are searching for the religious meaning of their life; offering compassion and accompaniment to those who are tempted to turn away from it; accepting everyone, even those who are not initially interested in setting out on a journey of faith.

**C** It is a missionary and evangelizing community where **the Word of God and the liturgy** support the life of faith of its members, promoting the communication of the Christian experience. The parish community places the Eucharist at the centre of community life and celebrates the sacraments of Christian life in a meaningful way, in particular the sacrament of Reconciliation.

For this reason, our parish churches are called to create spaces of silence, prayer and personal encounter with God, among many other activities. His Word must be proclaimed, studied, received, prayed, lived... His presence is celebrated. His call is listened to and followed, His will is accomplished. The parish should not be a meeting place only for socializing, even if it welcomes everyone, let alone a place to escape to in a false spirituality ... The fact that the Lord is present there tells us that this is the house where he lives, **the place of transcendence and of his presence**, which we choose to dwell in; this is our common and priority interest.

There are several opportunities in which this centrality of the Word of God can be implemented. Priests have a unique opportunity: the homily. The

faithful can tell if their priest believes in what he is saying, if he is passionate about the Word of God, if he tries to live it personally in his heart, through love and acceptance of his neighbour.

**D** The Salesian parish nourishes **devotion to Mary Help of Christians**. The Virgin of Don Bosco is to be considered a very active presence encouraging us to follow Jesus better, “do whatever He tells you”: is our Mother’s invitation. Furthermore, devotion to Mary Help of Christians unites us in the universal community of the Church. Devotion to Mary Help of Christians is, in fact, a distinctive aspect of the Salesian contribution to the Church because it becomes an original sign of Don Bosco; we cannot separate our spirituality from devotion to Mary Help of Christians, which is therefore an essential element of our Charism; it permeates every recognizable feature and vitalizes its components. Without a vital Marian dimension, our spirituality would lose its vigour and fruitfulness; conversely, giving appropriate attention to a profound Marian vitality will reinvigorate the whole Salesian vocation. Our devotion to the Help of Christians which, as Salesians, we promote in all settings, has a very intimate, mutually life-giving connection with both the Salesian “mission” and the “spirit” proper to our Charism. Marian worship and piety show if a parish is properly Salesian.

*The Association Mary Help of Christians (ADMA) lives and spreads this devotion, in accordance with Don Bosco’s spirit. It offers a programme of sanctification and apostolate, by promoting veneration of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and devotion to Mary Help of Christians in a special way. By joining the ADMA, one strives to imitate Mary and to live a daily spirituality with evangelical attitudes, renewing participation in liturgical life and strengthening the Word of God and the prayer of the Rosary, especially on the 24th of each month. ADMAS’s members in the parishes are eager to collaborate with local apostolic initiatives, at the service of others, with particular attention to priestly and religious vocations.*

**E** One of the characteristics of the Salesian parish is the importance given to **educative mediation**. Indeed, the preferential option for the new generations, especially the poorest, immerses the entire parish in *a particular kind of activity and a particular educational approach*. This educational contribution to the Church and to pastoral care takes on a particular implication in the Salesian parish priest. In fact, he finds himself having to manage articulate activities that range from catechesis, to the

celebration of the Sacraments, to the practice of charity, to approaching families and visiting the sick, etc. His educative charism is reflected in all these areas, hence he becomes a model from an educational point of view.

Expressions of educative mediation also involve the field of culture, youth associations, human promotion, educational support, experiences of service and solidarity, and socio-educational projects. Hence, activities that are not only liturgical or catechetical, but ones that are of growth and orientation in life. Engaged in a *dialogue with the various areas*, the parish helps everyone to develop values, criteria of judgment and patterns of life according to the Gospel, through a presence based on trust (given and received).

3 2

## A PRESENCE OF THE CHURCH THAT IS OPEN AND FULLY PART OF ITS LOCALITY

**A** The parish is the face of the Church. It is **the reference point in its locality which makes the Church visible in everyday life**. It is where Christians experience and live out faith, hope and charity, nourished by the Word of God and the celebration of the Sacraments. The parish is “the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters” (*Christifideles Laici*, 26).

Indeed, the Salesian parish makes visible the Church’s concern for the young and, by making it take root in a concrete place, it makes it “communal”, belonging to a community characterized by a charism. Together with other sectors of our Salesian work, it is part of the local Church and its pastoral ministry. The parish is a community, open to everyone, in which the family spirit is lived intensely, and it becomes a school and instrument of communion and solidarity. It is an educative-pastoral community, gathered and called by the Lord Jesus, in a place that represents and defines a sense of belonging, Salesian spirituality, the love for the Church that lives among the young and in the midst of the simple people of God.

*The territoriality of the neighbourhood offers the parish concreteness and history, cultural heritage and family and social problems; it brings people in difficulty with whom we can dialogue and accompany, even in the life of grace. It is important*

*to emphasize **that belonging to a territory on a permanent basis does not always coincide with belonging to the same parish.** In fact, the concept of belonging has expanded due to the great mobility of people and to the network of relationships that binds people outside their own territory.*

Therefore, the territory is not only a geographical place, but it is also a network of traditions and human relations. Today there are many places of membership and the memberships are constantly being redesigned. In other words, the originality of the parish with regard to the evangelical proclamation in a territory is perceived in *its unravelling in people's lives*. Living in a parish community entrusted to the Salesians therefore means "trusting" the quality of human relationships, wherever people are.

**B** A parish is conceived and understood in the light of its territoriality, as already specified, in which the faithful are made up of all the people who live there:

- ▶ the baptized, "with their diversity" of paths and journeys within a Church where fervent and committed faithful, but also occasional or seasonal faithful, live together;
- ▶ Christians who have turned away due to individualism or disappointment towards religious institutions;
- ▶ people who follow other religions and live in the same geographical area, city or town;
- ▶ non-believers, the doubtful and those who live in indifference.

We are yeast, that is, simple witnesses of communities that recognize the joy of the Gospel and strive to make it present in a comprehensible way with sincere hospitality, an open door ... all **distinctive elements of a Salesian style of hospitality**.

Aware of this, the parish is positively challenged by those who consider themselves to be indifferent or non-believers. We are required to learn the languages and cultures in which these people tell about their experiences in order to understand what is important and interesting to them, as Paul did in Athens (Acts 17).

*Each parish has its own characteristics and its own features. As Salesians, we propose a pastoral care that includes all diversities, however there must be **a preventive discernment** aimed at ascertaining that the proposal includes certain conditions which are in harmony with Don Bosco's charism (CF. REG. 26).*

**C** As a result, the parish community is a **significant focus also for the various ecclesial communities and groups that exist within it**. This is an enormous wealth, but it implies a certain availability and organization: the groups present within it conceive our way of being Church through the EPC and SEPP or in any case they must be accompanied in understanding and sharing them.

It is an open community, *collaborating with other parishes and communities*, with diocesan pastoral organizations and with other social and educational agencies in the area which provide for the human and spiritual growth of its citizens. The relationship between the religious community to which the parish is entrusted and *the other male and female religious communities* that operate within the area around the Salesian parish, must be inspired



by authentic fraternity, making them feel they are an effective part of an overall pastoral ministry, while complying with the specific goals.

The parish carries out its mission *in communion with the local Church and the Bishop* by collaborating with the pastoral ministry of the particular Church through the wealth of a vocation; it is therefore an expression in the local Church of the “Oratorian criterion of Don Bosco”. In fact, Art. 40 of the Constitutions of the Salesians of Don Bosco, the experience of Don Bosco, for us Salesians is the guiding criterion:

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

In our provinces we try to respond to those challenges that we take on in all Salesian settings: shifting from a pastoral ministry of “maintenance” to the articulation of an educative-pastoral Community capable of being a friendly and family environment (“home”), marked by joy (“playground”); where everyone can develop their potential and acquire new skills for life (“school”) and walk according to a clear proposal of faith (“church”).

**D** It is also **attentive to dialogue with other religions and traditional beliefs**. Where there is a significant presence of people of other religious traditions, as indicated by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (*Dialogue in truth and charity. Pastoral orientations for interreligious dialogue, 2014*), “parish priests are to take lead in the task of implementing the policies and directives for interreligious dialogue in their parishes, making them part of the pastoral plan. It may also be fruitful to establish relationships with leaders of other religions in the neighbourhood, based on, when possible, small groups for dialogue.

Through personal example and activity, priests can inspire parishioners to live in solidarity with people of other religions, sharing in their joys and sorrows, such as at times of birth and death, marriage, success and failure, sickness, adversity, etc. As circumstances allow, common, social and cultural

programmes and celebrations with people of the various religions present in the parish may be good occasions of exchange of friendship and solidarity”.

The coexistence of ethnic groups, traditional beliefs, languages and even original expressions of life, celebration and thought, highlights the need for a pastoral ministry that is attentive to this reality, so that the truths and values of these cultures may be touched and transfigured by the Gospel. Therefore, it is necessary to engage in a dialogue of friendship, esteem and respect for those who belong to these traditional religions, highlighting the positive values that blend harmoniously with the content of the faith. Such a capacity for integration and creativity requires an open and critical spirit.

### 3 3

## A COMMUNITY WITH A MISSIONARY OUTLOOK

**A** In a world that needs the message of the Father’s tenderness, forgiveness and mercy, it is urgent that every Christian become a missionary. They must be ready to be there for others in times of hope, in times of desolation and also in times of persecution (Mt 2:3-6).

Indeed, all Salesian parishes must be animated by the missionary spirit of Don Bosco. Many Salesian parishes are located in diversified mission areas, in metropolitan cities and in large urban areas, but also in other contexts, at the service of human dignity and the proclamation of the Gospel.

In fidelity to Jesus, the parish believes that the Kingdom of God has the poor as its beneficiaries and privileged target. Therefore, its pastoral, **evangelical nature should reflect the preferential option for the poor and needy.** The Salesian parish must pay particular attention to what creates unease and marginalization in the territory. This helps us to bear in mind that we must first of all start from the clarification of two terms: choice and preferential. By “choice” we mean a mature, personal, conscious, ultimate gesture; a free act, the consequence of a vocation, that is, a call by Jesus Christ, who came among us, benefiting especially the poorest and the sick. A sign that is full of responsibility for pastoral care. By “preferential” we state a choice which is not exclusive or discriminatory.

The parish is encouraged to be a welcoming place, one of hope for everyone, especially for the tired, disinherited, marginalized, sick and



suffering. Thus, in close dialogue and cooperation with institutions within parish boundaries, it strongly promotes the protection and promotion of their human rights and shares their concerns, aspirations and actions.

It assumes as its fundamental choice and criterion the *existential unity of evangelization, human development and Christian culture*. Evangelizing means manifesting the God of Love without excluding anyone.

*We proclaim the Gospel and the person of Jesus in intimate relationship with the history of the people, their problems and their possibilities. In the desire to heal situations of vulnerability, we are guided by the value of human fullness the individual finds in God. Development of evangelization in the parish calls for both the spreading of the Gospel and the advancement of the people (CF. CONST. 42).*

**B** In the past, the parish was perceived as an enclosed space, a sort of aquarium with the numerous organisms within it; today we have the impression we are all in the open sea. This expression “in the open sea” can tell us about the breadth and depth of our mission. **We are “fishers of men” in a vast and complex world** that demands of us a pastoral attitude of openness and acceptance, which requires us to sharpen our gaze, to reach out to everyone. We cannot ignore or neglect the spiritual thirst of so many people, nor can we ignore the cry that takes on so many forms and languages and not detect the desire for authentic spiritual expressions.

It is no longer possible to proceed according to the perspective of “trying to bring people to the parish”, which is of a centripetal nature. It is necessary to become aware of the profound changes in society, the urgency of a permanent dialogue with the community; we must acquire a kind of inclusiveness in the way we relate to others, with the proposal of multiple and diverse paths of faith - in language and form – compared to what is usually proposed.

It is essential for us to try to observe the daily life of the parish in some of its usual recipients which require greater vigilance and pastoral attention:

- The parish experience is an observatory and terrain through which we carry out our missionary capacity. If we focus on our loved ones,

we realize, for example, that it is the place where many of our **elders** feel at home; the place where they can pray for the dead and seek comfort in their solitude. It is the place where they can express their religious sentiments with simplicity, often through a popular religiosity, in harmony with many wise evangelical attitudes. Other elderly people, on the other hand, must be reached outside the walls of the parish temple, in their solitude. Loneliness can be healed with charity, closeness and spiritual comfort.

- ▮ Parishes cannot and must not be recognized only for their architectural grandeur (even though many of them have an inherited historical and artistic heritage which we must preserve), but as territories in which “**foreigners**” find a home. They are the context in which we manifest God’s promise to this part of humanity, a place where what God says in the covenant with his people becomes reality: I am a faithful God, a God who is close, a God of tenderness and mercy, which makes new every day that dawns. We meet young men and women whose lives have led them to existential changes, including traumatic ones: these are migrants and foreigners, for work and for necessity. What are these men and women actually requesting of us? How do they live their faith? Our parish is the place attended by more and more men and women from other latitudes, cultures and languages. In the face of these realities, the parishes entrusted to the Salesians must be a welcoming home for citizens of every continent, because of our Catholic nature. And each member of the parish community contributes to this hospitality in a humble and merciful way, more by the practice of life than by words, especially with the wounded.
- ▮ For this reason, we are all called to be aware that in the geographical space of our parishes, there are many human situations: “**existential peripheries**” of all kinds. It is in charity that the proclaimed Word becomes credible, for example by visiting families, the sick and the poor, bringing the Eucharist or even a word of consolation. For this reason, the parish also relies on pastoral charitable organizations (Caritas and other forms of volunteer service) or activates listening centres for psychological and social support, in order to be the place of God’s presence in the city, as Francis has said many times; cities and towns where the paths of life cross, sometimes full of pain, sometimes full of hope; paths that we must accompany and which must not be obstructed with borders.

- ▶ A missionary conversion of the parish is urgent in order to reach people while taking into consideration the current reality. An outgoing church that can deal with the **emergencies** that arise during economic, social, educational and pandemic crises, which bring out vulnerabilities and lead to numerous consequences in various fields.
- ▶ In our Congregation there are several **chapels and parish mission stations**. They are places, around the parish, where one or more confreres regularly go to provide pastoral service. They are found mainly in very large parish districts, in areas of new evangelization in urban centres, in rural or mountainous areas, or in contexts where Catholics are a minority. They are generally animated by lay catechists, while the priests visit them from time to time to celebrate the Sacraments for the benefit of the community, which otherwise would not be able to participate in the life of the Church.

They are characteristic places of the first missionary proclamation which promotes the development of the 'rays of truth' (*Nostra Aetate*, 2) and the growth of the 'seeds of the Word' that the Lord has planted in cultures, religions and peoples (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 53) and also the social promotion of the poorest and most marginalized. Thanks to the mission station, the local community, enjoying the presence of lay ministers and priests, is stimulated to 'go forth' in order to build the Church.

In fact: "the missionary is integrated within the local church, and in the life and educative-pastoral project of the Province, enriching them with his personal gifts, apostolic zeal and missionary sensitivity" (*The Salesian Missionary Vocation. Reflections, processes and operational guidelines*, Part I. point 1, 4 April 2021).

3 4

## CLEAR OPTION FOR THE YOUNG AND FOR WORKING CLASS PEOPLE

- ▶ **A** Don Bosco's charism is a substantially pastoral commitment which is characterized by its youthful and popular mission. Youth ministry should be considered the dimension that most characterizes parish life. This is the particular contribution the Salesians offer as an enrichment to the mission of the particular Church (cf. *Const.* 48; *Reg.* 26). Our preferential choice

of a youthful dynamic in evangelization is, therefore, the special attention we give to young people.

In every area of the Salesian Work - and therefore also in the parish - this choice sets the tone for the whole evangelization of a specific territory: it develops a pastoral ministry of the future, especially for young people and the working class, offering *educative-pastoral proposals which are a model for the new generations*. Indeed, Salesian pastoral care among young people has a “style” and “method” for all fields of the mission, as stated in art. 20 of the Constitutions: «Don Bosco lived with the boys of the first oratory a spiritual and educational experience which he called the ‘Preventive System’ ... he passes this on to us as a way of living and handing on the Gospel message...”.

A clear option for young people, however, does not mean that the parish’s goal is a “concentration of youth pastoral initiatives”, while neglecting other groups; it is rather a question of entering into a perspective in which every parish community is a place of human and Christian growth, with particular attention to the new generations, supported by the presence and service of adults, explicitly trained. Nobody is asking the parish to be a “youth institution”. “Preference” does not mean “exclusion” because the parish embraces without discrimination all the persons and groups that make up the Christian people, whom the Word of God must reach according their particular life situation: children, adults, the elderly, the sick, etc. Therefore, it is inconceivable to think of a parish that does not presume a corresponding care of the whole community. The preference for young people is primarily a perspective, which is then expressed in sectoral methods and initiatives.

In our parishes, children, adolescents and young people cannot and must not be relegated to a secondary role. It cannot only be those whom we “teach catechism” that fill the parish halls for a few years and then leave them permanently when they receive the Sacraments of Christian initiation.

**B** We need to revive a hopeful outlook for young people, similar to that of our father Don Bosco. The Oratory of Valdocco was defined by Monsignor Franzoni, the Archbishop of Turin, as “the parish of abandoned children without a parish”. The preferential choice of young people, especially the poorest, became the backbone of his pastoral work. Today we are called to “respond” to the cry that young people are sending out to the world of

adults with the request to “be seen” and accepted: it is a cry that implores hope for the future, theirs and ours.

“Evangelization proceeds therefore, and of ever increasing necessity, by way of an analysis of life-situations that influence the personality of the young” (GC21, 20). The ability to skilfully grasp or read the condition of youth in the light of the Gospel can give the Salesian parish a characteristic trait. As a result, Christian communities must also open their mentality to the culture of young people with respect to those aspects that are new. For this reason, it is necessary not to get lost in discouraging complaints and analyses which often produce a sense of inadequacy and threatens to turn us away from a world from which we feel disconnected in many respects.

*We must be a Church that encourages, instead of complaining, a Church that brings and conveys joy, instead of bitterness, a Church that conveys faithfulness, instead of abandonment. We need to rediscover a positive outlook, but one that is in line with the divine and providential reality of history.*

It is necessary, as Francis says, to overcome the temptation of “We have always done it this way” (EG 33). We need the creativity and the noisy presence of young people. It is necessary that our parishes undergo a profound conversion that will give them an opportunity to *introduce a friendly face to young people*; that it be a house in which the reality of the new generations (pre-adolescents, adolescents, young adults) takes over, despite its complexity in a world that is changing dramatically; young people can teach us to interpret their reality in order to meet their needs and desires in a fitting way.

*“The world in which we live in this twenty-first century, characterised by the diversity of cultures and contexts, needs – expects, we could say – to encounter consecrated Salesian apostles who are prepared and willing to live their lives with the mind and heart of Don Bosco. Salesians capable of continuing to give their lives for the young people of today’s world, with their languages, their visions and their interests. Without doubt, many of these adolescents and older youth are in Salesian houses, while many others frequent “other courtyards” or playgrounds: we are Salesians for them too”. (GC28.2)*

- C** On a practical level, the parish can implement possible activities or develop interests in favour of young people in their daily life:
- A relevant knowledge of the situation of young people and, therefore, competence in the pastoral problems which the leaders of the parish must also cultivate in order to enrich the particular Church;
  - developing programmes, initiatives and proposals in the parish that make it possible to embrace a greater number of young people, to involve them in the definition of their needs and the most appropriate educational solutions (in Don Bosco's pastoral methodology evangelization and education are inseparably linked, that is, the pedagogical dimension is always included in pastoral practice);
  - appreciating the people who work with/for young people, whose skills and work must be valued, as well as the environments and institutions that deal with children and young people;
  - raising the awareness of the diocesan community with regard to the problems and needs of youth ministry;
  - the concern to bring young people closer to the faith and to make them grow within it, especially apostolic attention to those most in need, to the underprivileged, etc.;
  - interest in the world of work and issues related to unemployment;
  - promoting an active participation of young people in the celebrations;
  - updating the procedures of Christian initiation and formation of adolescents and young people (we are ever more convinced that the paths of education in the faith must go beyond the concern for conveying content, in order to open up to a more comprehensive formation, in which the experience of God can bear fruit);
  - the renewal of Christian means of expression (songs, gestures, language, methods, narratives, testimonies, symbols, posters);

- ▶ the participation of young people in parish councils (they need to feel they are key players in the life of the community, even with voice and vote when possible);
- ▶ promoting the participation of young people in parish groups and in experiences that make young people evangelizers of other young people;
- ▶ raising the awareness of the whole parish community to educational matters;
- ▶ preparing adults to address the issue of youth in family, educational and public environments, also through groups and initiatives for reflection and study.

As a result, these proposals **call for an intelligent review of organizational procedures of the parishes entrusted to the Salesians**. Massive doses of creativity are needed in experimenting with new forms of presence, witness and listening of youth culture.

We must stimulate our imagination and suggest ideas and activities that may be a stimulus in the daily life of our young people. Indeed, more than being an answer to an attitude of quest, Jesus' proposal must be a *provocation and a question addressed in particular to wounded, broken or disoriented young people*. Hence the need to insist on the newness of the Gospel, its potential to give unsurpassable joy and meaning to life, acknowledging at the same time that its acceptance places the Christian against the tide of certain socially prevailing values.

We need to accompany young people who want to start dreaming again ... enthusiastic young people, who choose to fall madly in love with Jesus' plan, and who, spiritually equipped, decide to live the commitment of the Gospel.

**D** The Salesian parish is of **a broadly accepting popular nature**. Salesian parishes are generally found in the poor and populated neighbourhoods of big cities (GC21, 141), in "poor, working class neighbourhoods" (GCS20 411, 407), with "humble people" (GC21 141): areas where there is a type of activity that tends to reach the largest number of people. The evangelization of popular culture requires constant attention to the many ways this manifests itself. Evangelization is contextualized and integrated

into these poor environments, through consideration of their history, tradition and culture, customs and its roots:

*“ The parish **entrusted to the Salesians is popular** both because of its location, because it is preferably integrated into the poor and populated neighbourhoods of big cities, and the style of its activity which looks after the connection with the people and does not wish to be a sheltered and closed community, or a church for a few. Therefore, it looks after the liturgies and feasts in which the people can meet with ease and simplicity; it pays attention and affection to the expressions of popular piety and is able to guide them, with respect, through a pedagogy of evangelization. It is also popular because of its openness to the life of the neighbourhood because it participates in the problems of the people with whom it lives and with whom it shares joys and sorrows” (GC21,141).*

When, from a Christian faith perspective, we speak of popular piety (or *religiosity*, or even devotion), we refer to a genuine Christian faith, which is rich in religious and historical-cultural values which cannot be ignored. Many of these devotions represent a set of values of historical tradition, folkloristic atmosphere and natural and artificial beauty; they combine rich human emotions of shared friendship, equality of treatment and the value of all that is beautiful in life in the common joy of celebration. Under these profound roots we can see genuine spiritual values of faith in God.

Furthermore, we cannot but question ourselves about the care of external popular manifestations in the pastoral life of our Christian communities. Devotion to the Blessed Virgin, for example, is very positive and encouraging, but we must be able to give these roots of faith their evangelical fullness, leading us to rediscover the profound reasons for the presence of Mary in our lives as a model in our pilgrimage of faith. On the other hand, it is consoling to note that in some cases there is great concern and solicitude in promoting a greater Christian formation in this type of religiosity and a more active liturgical and charitable participation in the life of the Church, which results in true apostolic dynamism.

We wish to stress the importance of the evangelical care that is able to draw human religious goodness from all the expressions and customs of popular piety, which by accepting them purifies, strengthens and elevates them.



3 5

## A MEETING PLACE FOR THE VARIOUS SECTORS OF THE SALESIAN HOUSE

- A** The parish becomes a central environment in which all the other sectors converge as a point of reference for celebrating and sharing the faith. It is indeed a pastoral environment that embraces the whole Salesian Work, especially the sectors in which young people are present.

Animating this context implies integrating it first of all into the overall plan of the Salesian house, which “enters the vision of an organic, unitary and co-responsible service for the human, civil and religious development of the neighbourhood it is a part of (GC20, 436). The parish is in fact called to be “the house of God and the gate of heaven” (a reference to Jacob’s dream, cf. Gen. 28:12-17) for all those who enter a Salesian house.

One of the urgent needs of our works, in a globalized society, which is often distant from the faith, is that of being a space which is open to transcendence: a skylight that makes God’s presence transparent. The parish cannot simply be a meeting place for people, where various types of activities take place (theatre, games, workshops, camps, music); nor is it only a school of social voluntary service, a centre for support or social integration. There is no doubt that all of these activities, of great pedagogical value, are essential within the community, but as previously mentioned, the Salesian parish is *the place where the Christian community of the Salesian Work celebrates and prays*; it is called to be the “tent of meeting”, the space the Lord has chosen to dwell among us.

*“The house where he dwells” is the name that Jacob gave to the place where he fell asleep and had a dream (cf. Gen. 28:12-17). The parish is not a monastery or an exclusive place of prayer, but the unique space which is always available for encounter with God, where the elderly and young people, adolescents and children who visit our house pray.*

- B** The parish is called to be a welcoming place for those young people, educators or families who return to the faith after being disappointed by the idols that our society offers us, and who in the end are unable to give meaning to their lives. **Our Works embrace the concerns of many pilgrims of life**, of many travellers who ask to be “saved”, that

is, to be continually restored to life; they ask to find reasons and support for a good and happy life, in the name of the Lord Jesus. The parish is not a building, but a meeting place for all those who seek the one true God, even without knowing him. In all our pastoral settings, our concern must be how to accompany so many people who are searching (whether explicitly or not), so that through its witness and the beauty of a personal encounter with Jesus it may be capable of kindling (or rekindling) their faith. Using a beautiful definition dear to St. John XXIII, the parish has the same importance as the “village fountain”: it quenches our thirst, gives refreshment and is a meeting place.

**C** We must make his home, our home, a place where children, adolescents, young people and adults sing: **a place of joyful celebration, linked to life.** Liturgical celebrations that do not lose their sacramental dimension, in which symbols are an expression of the depth of our existence and, therefore, give them an ultimate meaning: a place “that provides an opportunity also for conversing, celebrating, singing, listening to real stories and experiencing a shared encounter with the living God.” (*Christus vivit*, 204).

The house of God is called to be the place where the community is lived as an additional family, which meets *every Sunday to sit at the Father's table as children and as brothers and sisters*. It is the place where adults, children and youths meet after the various duties of the week and day-to-day concerns, the table around which stories, anecdotes, hopes, but also worries and failures, are shared. It is not the place where differences are resolved, but where, thanks to the Father's mediation, we children can make peace and ask forgiveness for the pain we have caused them.

It can be truly said that a parish community that lives in this way has *the Eucharist at its centre*. In this community, the breaking of bread and its distribution does not become a routine liturgical gesture, but the memorial Sacrament of the body of Christ given to us out of love and the expression of who we are, “God's family”, and on what we live, brotherly love and service.

## AT A GLANCE

### TASK OF THE PARISH

- inserting the Salesian charism into the ecclesial and cultural structure of the parish
- fidelity to our Salesian DNA

### EDUCATIONAL-PASTORAL PROPOSAL

A center for evangelization and education in the faith

From a pastoral care of sacraments only to an initiation and maturation in the Christian life

- It offers a systematic proposal for evangelization and education in the faith
- attentive to continuous, gradual and diversified paths of Christian life
- a community where one can experience the values of Salesian Youth Spirituality
- promotes the centrality of the Word of God
- makes community life central
- the sacraments of christian life
- feeds the devotion to Mary Help of Christians
- gives relevance to educational mediation

A presence of the Church open and inserted in the territory

A point of reference that makes the Church visible

- socially inserted in the daily life of the territory
- believers: all those who inhabit the geographical space (baptized in their diversity, Christians who have moved away, people of other religions, non-believers, doubters or indifferent)
- with a Salesian style of welcome
- significant center also of all the various ecclesial communities and groups
- attentive to dialogue with other religions and traditional beliefs



EDUCATIONAL-PASTORAL PROPOSAL

A community with a missionary outlook

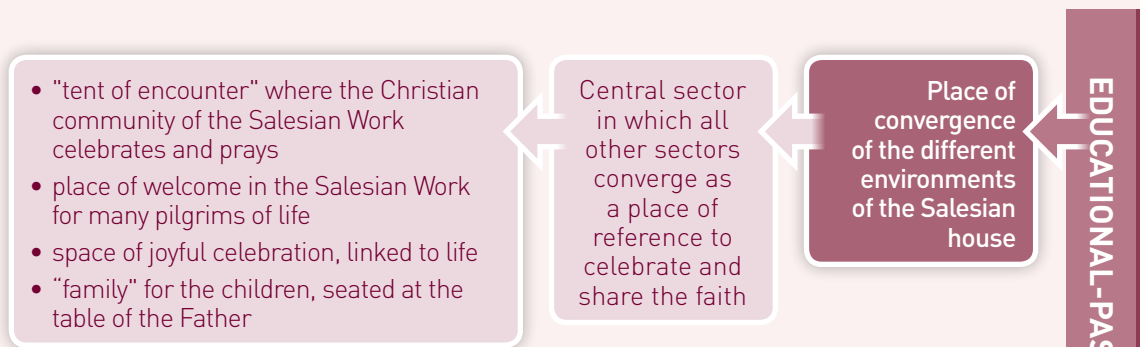
The evangelical preferential option for those most in need

- pastoral attitude of openness, of welcoming, which requires us to sharpen our gaze, to reach out to all
- treating existential unity of evangelization, human promotion and Christian culture
- greater care and pastoral attention towards: the elderly, foreigners, "existential" peripheries, emergencies and parish missionary chapels and stations

A clear option for young people and the working class people

Preferential choice for youth (not exclusionary) and popular character of wide acceptance

- to reinvigorate a trusting gaze on the young as Don Bosco did: the parish, a friendly face for the young
- up-to-date knowledge of the youth situation
- elaboration of itineraries, initiatives and proposals for young people
- valuing people who work with/for youth
- awareness of the diocesan community
- concern to bring the young people most in need closer to the faith
- interest in the world of work and unemployment
- promotion of active participation of young people in the celebrations
- updating the processes of Christian initiation and formation
- renewal of songs, gestures, language, etc.
- youth participation in parish groups and bodies
- sensitization of the entire parish community to educational issues
- adult preparation on youth issues





# **SYSTEMATIC PASTORAL ANIMATION IN THE PARISH**

CHAPTER

**IV**

## 4 1

## MAIN INTERVENTIONS OF THE PROPOSAL

**A** The parish is an evangelizing community: it brings first proclamation to those who are estranged from it and catechizes them, taking them as they are as the starting point. Therefore, it seems appropriate to recover **certain principles inspired by the Christian catechumenate** as a pedagogical element and basis for education in the faith. It is a question of considering the gift of faith as a dynamic force of progressive growth, which consists of phases, stages and passages which result from each other. It is a journey that is supported (as well as by the free gift of God), by necessary educational assistance. Thus, education, from the Christian perspective, must be seen as a necessary accompaniment on the path of faith, as a journey made together, along the lines of the travellers of Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35), for man's global fulfilment in the light of faith.

Therefore, the catechumenate seeks to evangelize in the four main areas of growth in the faith, found in the Church's experience: the personal dimension, the community dimension, the liturgical and celebrative dimension and total commitment to evangelization. Through these dimensions we understand that:

- apart from the proclamation, a personal, free and responsible response is required;
- it is necessary to initiate a process of Christian education which leads to a faith that is lived, celebrated, expressed and witnessed as a whole;
- it is essential to integrate the conversion of life and the witness of charity.

This path can assist in proper programming of interventions with young people, ensuring the completeness and integrity of the Christian experience.

**B** The parish **creates and offers gradual and diversified programmes in faith education**, particularly for young people and families, teaching them to live their faith in a very simple way, through their experiences, and not only in terms of "theoretical courses". The programmes could prepare families for the faith education they offer their children, set up



processes for baptismal catechesis, offer education in faith programmes of faith education for engaged couples which might later form family group programmes (cf. *Youth Ministry and Family*. Salesian Youth Ministry. Salesians of Don Bosco, 2021, chap. 3)

*Christian initiation* considers the personal experience, the community relationships and the testimony of life. It is a demanding journey that requires an appropriate period of formation, also called catechumenate, including many lively and creative pastoral processes and initiatives which allow for personal encounter with Jesus Christ.

*In all these forms, catechesis should transmit an **adequate and relevant summary of the Christian message** and, above all, **integrate personal experience** in the process of maturity and growth, seeking to encourage and accompany gradual commitment to Christian life.*



However, an indispensable prerequisite for ensuring this fruitful integration in concrete terms is *the planning* carried out by the catechists and leaders of the faith groups. It is not simply “desk” planning”, in search of the best proven program; nor does it object to catechetical “art”, but it is in function of it. Planning is a due act of the individual catechumen with his specific needs and potentials (religious sensitivity, preparation level, pace of learning ...); is an important task for the value given to the Christian message; is a condition for making the dialogue and verification possible.

**C** Another parish activity is to encourage **membership of groups in the Church** by making them grow in the awareness of a pastoral accompaniment that is increasingly attentive to their various specific characteristics. For this purpose, the parish welcomes movements, youth groups and Salesian Family groups, among others. It promotes the coordination of these groups with the SYM (Salesian Youth Movement) and the invitation to Salesian Youth Spirituality. Group experiences should be able to lead to more open and integrated Christian communities.

On the other hand, the parish priest is a Salesian priest, who tries to bring together all the presences of the Spirit that live together in the parish, not preferring only one of them exclusively. We must be careful not to exclusively promote movements, particular experiences, or sector groups. By not fostering associative pluralism, not only do we prevent young people and adults from becoming familiar with various vocations and opportunities, but we impoverish the very nature of the parish community.

At this point, we can further emphasize the significance of the lay ministry of a parish. The parish priest should constantly promote the growth of lay pastoral workers and enhance their charisms, without running the risk of falling into the temptation of being interested or praising them only at the approach of a necessity or organizational problem. In the same way, it is dysfunctional to entrust tasks in an improvised way to anyone who is available, without a discernment of his skills and actual maturity.

**D** **The parish is a community that practices liturgy and the Sacraments: celebrating them with dignity and beauty.** All parts of the work live the celebrative dimension with the parish by experiencing the liturgy, the place of celebration, the sacred space and lived Sacraments, because the parish is the place where everyone nourishes their faith. It is necessary to think of a liturgy that is in close contact to life, trying to use an under-

standable and accessible language, expressed in a simple way through songs, gestures, stories, testimonies, symbols, the Word of God presented well, so that the celebration is alive, and everyone can be actively involved in its preparation and implementation. A language therefore that is not trivial, far from stereotyped formulas, which are often incomprehensible and almost always devoid of the expressiveness of the celebrating assembly.

*We must come up with new communication strategies for proclaiming the faith and decipher a way to reach the hearts of young people by speaking about the Gospel. **A new evangelization that is able to translate Jesus' message using the new methods of communication.** Cultural diversity (which also affects "our" young people) causes a lack of connection and therefore a lack of messages. In more concrete terms, there is no communication because the way of expressing the Good News is not in tune with the lived experience.*

**E** By fostering growth of an active faith the parish educates to the **social dimension of charity**, building a culture of solidarity. Thus, it recognizes and encourages the commitment of members of the parish community to being involved in social and charitable activity.

A church community needs to exhibit concrete and visible gestures of a *modest lifestyle and one which is open to generosity and solidarity through actions which manifest the values of the Kingdom*. This charitable activity of parishes is extensive, but we can focus on how this dimension has been readapted. for example, in the implementation of activities that allow the parish Caritas to know and accompany situations of poverty, hardship and social vulnerability. Among many other actions, we highlight: opening of listening centres; welcoming particularly underprivileged groups such as irregular migrants and the homeless; taking on more specific services and building networks (with other ecclesial realities and civil organizations) to respond to the needs of the new poor who come knocking at our doors. The request for assistance no longer comes only from the chronically poor but also from people who have fallen into poverty due to particular events such as the loss of a job, addiction, physical and mental health problems and the pandemic.

Therefore, the assistance offered by the parish cannot be limited to mere financial support (food parcels, clothes, small subsidies), rather it must

reach the deepest needs of individuals, relationships and meaning in order to bring hope. It is a question of “rearranging” and rethinking things, time, people and parish places, starting from those who are ‘missing’, those who are ‘far away’, those who are ‘alone’, those who ‘suffer’, those who ‘are growing’, those who ‘don’t work’. Even when people ask for material help, they bring with them a greater suffering, arising from the difficulty in giving meaning to their life, from experiences they have lived and at times from conditions of solitude. The real need is to re-establish relationships and discover the meaning of one’s own biography.

*The specific nature of the parish is no longer economic support or food parcels, rather **the relational style that transforms life** from simply listening, to companionship and hospitality (where possible), up to more structured paths. In addition to giving economic support, the parish manifests its presence by being close and listening to individuals and families.*

The social dimension of charity fosters the apostolic involvement of youth leaders in the social, cultural, charitable and missionary initiatives of the parishes. It supports the promotion, formation and accompaniment of voluntary services and missionary work. (cf. *Voluntary service in the Salesian mission*. Youth Ministry Department. Missions Department, 2019). The formation of (young and adult) street educators also has an educational impact in reaching youngsters who do not normally attend our settings; this specialization makes it possible to reach the many types of poverty, invisible at times, that surround us.

**F** The parish community is to become a **formation centre for lay people who are dynamic and committed, above all for pastoral leaders of young people**. A priority that keeps the future of the Church community in mind is the development of appropriate formation courses for a variety of categories. Among these operators, a particular place is occupied by those who are involved in delicate matters and in the crucial sector of faith education, such as catechists, educators, leaders of groups of young people, adults and engaged couples, etc.

The function of these catechetical figures is fundamental. With their witness, teaching and formation, they are called to a true spiritual accompaniment: to lead youngsters to listen to and embrace the word of God, to meet with the Lord, to make coherent choices. In addition to

their competence and exemplary Christian life, catechists are asked for loving kindness, dedication, great skill in preparing the soil, generous sower, loving closeness, encouragement, prayer, patient expectation. A creative and dynamic approach cannot be truly fruitful unless practised by catechists who have themselves been well formed.

Francis officially instituted the “lay ministry” of catechists (*Antiquum ministerium*. Apostolic Letter issued “Motu Proprio” by the Supreme Pontiff Francis, 10 May 2021), thus giving a greater value to the “mission” of the baptized lay people who proclaim the Gospel. Each ministry is a sign of the strengthening of the laity’s role in the community.

*A common basic formation must be ensured, which guarantees the Salesian identity of each collaborator in the Salesian educative-pastoral implementation. It is essential to know, assume and practise the educative-pastoral model (cf. Salesian youth ministry. Frame of Reference. Youth Ministry Department, 2014) and within it, **the nuclei of Salesian youth spirituality**: the spirituality of everyday life, where people recognize the active presence of God and live their own personal fulfilment; the spirituality of joy and optimism, without renouncing commitment and responsibility; the spirituality of friendship with the Lord Jesus, which gives reasons for hope and introduces a life that finds its full meaning in him; the spirituality of ecclesial communion, the natural environment for growth in faith through the Sacraments (in the Church we find Mary, the first believer, who precedes, accompanies and inspires); the spirituality of responsible, generous, ordinary and extraordinary service (cf. *IBID.* CHAP. IV).*

**G** In the Oratory, Don Bosco created a community, that is, a family in which he himself was the centre and heart, a welcoming meeting place for various vocations, where human and Christian values were practised and enjoyed to the point of making the proposal of holiness desirable (cf. *Youth Ministry and Family*. Salesian Youth Ministry Department. Salesians of Don Bosco, 2021, chap. 2). The Salesian parish is also a place where “vocations” can be introduced in a lively, effective, continuous and complete way. In this context, the parish is a community that **accompanies the faithful in their vocational choices, especially the young**. Accompaniment of young people requires considerable effort.

This service helps them personalize faith, listen more profoundly to God and mature in their Christian life understood as vocation. The parish guides and accompanies various vocations in the Church but offers young people in particular a specific invitation to religious life, priesthood or a committed lay vocation. Prayer for vocations is continuously fostered in the parish community and its various groups and movements.

**H** One of the most significant challenges of evangelization today arises from the digital environment. **The new media and the Internet are indeed a great and indispensable communication opportunity for evangelizing.** However, it is necessary to learn about their nature, functioning, limits, strengths and the transformations they introduce. Communication tools are a great opportunity for the parish, because they make it possible to *transform the events of community life into news*: the website and social profiles have now become privileged communication channels not only for young people, but also for adults.

The attention to communication in parishes, therefore, is not a secondary activity, but a vital focus; it is not related solely to the creation of parish bulletins, posters and leaflets. In many cases, the parish radio, for example, reaches many people who cannot participate, for various reasons, in the life of a local community. The radio becomes an effective and practical solution for spreading the voice of the parish and it helps to make one feel part of parish life, especially with regard to the elderly and the sick.

Parishes are called to play an active role in the challenge of communicating also through the Internet, but the commitment to 'inhabit' digital environments should not be interpreted as the need to follow a fashion, but as an opportunity to give new impetus to pastoral activity. This task requires the acquisition of skills, community outreach and the appreciation for those who have shown to have strong, often lay, skills in this field; many parishes cultivate the life of communion and missionary activity also through text messages, Internet sites and newsletters. These methods give the opportunity to interact and communicate with young people, to contact daily with pastoral workers, to create and increase the sense of belonging to the parish community. Furthermore, they allow more and more people to be actively involved in the activities promoted by the parish; they also provide useful "service information" (through websites or social networks) especially for those who do not attend the parish and to spread information about the life of the Church and local area. This digital habitat,

where many committed lay people are present, is lived in communion or in network with other local or general agencies and institutions.

## 4 2

## STRUCTURES OF PARTICIPATION AND RESPONSIBILITY

### A ) Leadership in the local parish community

In the previous sections we defined the Salesian educative-pastoral proposal of the parish and the different roles involved (parish priest, rector, religious community, lay people and young people), so as to dwell now on the **bodies of shared ecclesial responsibility in the parish**. They represent a significant opportunity for participation in the pastoral activity of the parish through *the contribution of the "council" which is offered for the good of the Church, in view of common discernment for the service of the Gospel.*

*In the Church, "counselling" is a privileged moment of discernment, in a prayerful context of listening to the Word of God and to the requests of all the members of the local Community; it is a result of communion and is expressed in a mature form in shared responsibility. All the faithful, in a complementary and co-responsible way, have the right and duty to **participate actively in the life and mission of the Church**, in order to fulfil the universal vocation to holiness, to contribute to the integral development of the individual and society and to extend to all men and women and to all human realities the saving plan of the Father, revealed and accomplished in Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.*

**I** Among the ecclesial bodies in which the sacramentality of the Church is fulfilled through the communion, participation and shared responsibility of pastors, religious and laity, the **Parish Pastoral Council** occupies a privileged place. Within it the whole community is represented in the unity of faith and in the variety of charisms, gifts and ministries, not by a mere matter of delegation or by a mere organizational request, but by an **organic exercise of sense of the church**, which is accomplished through mediation, discernment and decision.

**Membership** in the Pastoral Council has above all a mediating function, not in the sense that the members of the Council act by delegation of those they represent, but because they mediate the requests of the whole local community.

Every parish has its own Council and takes charge of the tasks attributed to the Parish Pastoral Council, and therefore covers the functions assigned by the Code of Canon Law (c. 536, §§ 1-2). In the "one educational environment" works, *the Parish Pastoral Council coincides with the Council of the EPC (see FR, chap. VII, p. 2)*. In the case of very complex works with many educational environments, it would be preferable for the rector not to be absent from parish life and therefore it would be desirable for him to be a member of the Pastoral Council of the parish. At the same time, it is appropriate to specify that in any case the Parish has its own juridical personality (can. 515§3) and the Parish Priest is its only title holder, just as it is necessary to keep in mind the provisions of can. 519: The Parish Priest is the Pastor of the Parish.

*The parish council is an advisory, operational pastoral team by nature, in accordance with the Code of Canon Law (cf. can. 536) and the guidelines of the local Church. In this way, the **consultative nature** of the structures of participation is outlined, which must be understood in a strictly ecclesial sense and only analogically in reference to the common language and practice of democratic legal systems.*

While it is true, in fact, that - due to the hierarchical constitution of the Church - the decision-making opportunity is entrusted to the parish priest (at the parish level), it is equally true - due to its communal nature - that the decision must mature through dialogue, contact. and community discernment with all the bodies of shared responsibility that support him in the various activities.

The decisions made in the Pastoral Council are the opportunity in which the various opinions and suggestions developed in **community discernment** must be summarized through the own ministry of pastors. In this way, the Pastoral Council is truly a **unified subject of ecclesial choices**, as a complete expression of communion in true Christian fraternity, albeit with the various forms of collaboration of the pastor and all the other faithful.



*The Council is ultimately a team which is essential for the pastoral animation of the parish.* It is presided over by the parish priest, led and accompanied by him along with other Salesians in the community; the team is made up of priests assigned to the parish, representatives of the various sectors of parish life, and the other members. Therefore, in order for it to carry out this task it should be:

- ▶ appointed from the bottom in a shared form;
- ▶ representative of the main groups, activities and communities of the Parish, ensuring that the various members are the voice of everyone, especially young people, regardless of the group they represent;
- ▶ made aware of the particular Salesian charism and work together under the coordination of the parish priest.

Its functions are defined in its own Statute and are mainly as follows:

- ▶ analysing the local situation, taking note of the needs of the parish and its members, offering an evangelical response to the challenges encountered;
- ▶ participating in defining and implementing guidelines and initiatives;
- ▶ studying and approving the regular parish budget;
- ▶ finding the most suitable ways for a broader communion and lay involvement;
- ▶ ensuring the formation of the pastoral workers in the parish;
- ▶ promoting the SEPP to the parish assembly, implementing it and evaluating it periodically.

**II** The obligation to establish the **Parish Council for Economic Affairs** remains unaffected and it must be constituted in accordance with can. 537 of the Code of Canon Law. The criteria for its composition include competence and administrative efficiency. It is the organ of the faithful's collaboration with the parish priest in the administrative management of the parish. Its role is advisory:

- ▶ it assists the parish priest in preparing the Parish budget;
- ▶ it approves the financial statement;
- ▶ it expresses its opinion on the acts of extraordinary administration;
- ▶ it looks after the annual updating of the parish balance sheet.

Its members should be experts in finance and of upright conduct and actively involved in parish life. It is made up of at least three faithful appointed by the parish priest, after hearing the opinion of the Parish Council. The chairman of the finance council is the parish priest, as its “proper pastor” (cf. CIC, can. 515.519) of a specific community of faithful. The parish priest is responsible not only for the Sacraments, liturgy, catechetics and charitable requirements, but also for administration. He is the legal representative (cf. CIC, can. 532) and sole administrator (cf. CIC, can. 1279).

*It can be deduced that it is essential to pay attention to an **orderly, documentable, precise and formed administration based on moral and ethical principles**. Therefore, it will be necessary to engage in the good administration of money and goods that pass through parish channels; make the due annual financial statement for the people concerned (the community, province, Curia, faithful); follow up on the employment contracts of lay collaborators, their social insurance, compliance with municipal and national regulations; be well aware of what yearly contributions are to be allocated to national and diocesan collections. From this set of recommendations, it is clear that the Council for Economic Affairs, if well informed and well approved, can make a very effective contribution to the parish, by recognizing the specific competence belonging to the lay people.*

**III The committees and working groups** are teams that, in accordance with the SEPP, provide leadership in various areas of activity. Among these *the Youth Ministry leadership commission or team* is particularly important. It is coordinated by the assistant parish priest, or by a Salesian/lay person responsible for the Oratory-Youth Centre (cf. GC20, 432). In

some realities the Oratory council is identified with the *Youth Ministry leadership or team commission*; this is a good solution to prevent dispersion and guarantee the ordered and systematic unity in reflection and choices. All this while taking into consideration the different realities, which also include Salesian houses with a single “setting”, namely the Oratory-Youth Centre.

**IV** **The parish assembly and groups** are instruments both of communion, lay involvement and shared responsibility in the life of the community, in particular with the lay people identified and committed to the Salesian mission. Their identity is strengthened through the preparation and implementation of the Salesian Educative-Pastoral Project for the parish.

**To sum up**, it is to be hoped that these councils and groups are understood through the prism of shared responsibility, as an expression of communion, and not the result of curiosity and goodwill:

- ▶ These bodies aim to be competent in *promoting the original and creative nature of each parish*, capable of creating a pastoral project on the basis of the local and provincial SEPP, according to the areas of commitment of each one.
- ▶ Everything, therefore, is aimed at discovering the parish community as a subject of evangelization, with *shared responsibility and full involvement in the mission of the Church*.
- ▶ For these reasons, *the places and times of community discernment* (groups, meetings, assemblies) must be explored, promoted and valued, by focusing as a community on the present moment and its requests, without running the risk of being too attached to the nostalgia for past administrations and leaderships, which were perhaps conceived exclusively by priests and religious.
- ▶ These organisms are the expression of a true “Christian community”, which does not indicate a restricted circle of a chosen few (cf. *EG*, 28), perhaps to please the parish priest: speaking of “community” leads, rather, to strengthening awareness that the *Christian call is lived together with others and is mutually sustained and strengthened* in a circularity of vocations and fruitful relationships.

## B ) *In dialogue with the Bishop and the Local Church*

- II The Salesian Work enjoys great esteem in the diocese and in ecclesial bodies. While confirming the complete availability to collaborate with the particular Church, wherever possible, it is important to recognize the parish's entrustment to the Salesians as a community of consecrated persons in line with the founding charism. The Bishops themselves urge us to make **our work in the field of youth ministry more visible, in order to enrich the territory with the expression of the Salesian charism and tradition.**

Herein lies the question of the written *Convention between the province and the diocese*, requested both by *Mutuae relationes*, 57 and can. 520 of the Code of Canon Law. What is officially expressed in these conventions highlights the relevant and valid reasons for accepting the parish and the characteristics that must be highlighted in the service the Salesian community and the diocese must render.

We are aware that the first commitment we have when we are assigned to the parish is not that of substituting, but of contributing the wealth of a charism to the particular Church.

*We should bear in mind the invitation that "Mutuae relationes" addresses to Bishops: "It is the specific office of the Bishop to defend consecrated life, to foster and animate the fidelity and authenticity of religious and to help them become part of the communion and of the evangelizing action of his Church, according to their distinctive nature"(MR 52). And furthermore: "No apostolic commitment should be an occasion to deviate from one's vocation" (MR 46).*

- II From what has been said, we must move towards **communion and collaboration in the particular Church.** Membership in the Congregation, which is important in order to remain faithful to one's vocational choice and to continue to be assisted in one's specific charism, must not be seen as an alternative to belonging to the diocesan presbyterate, but at the service of the overall pastoral plan of one's diocese. There are a number of different diocesan structures in which our parishes are integrated (pastoral area, deanery, vicariate ...). We believe it is worth reflecting, from the perspective of communion, on the positive relationship with neighbouring parishes and the archpriesthood.

The parish priest is generally present at the retreat or at the meetings of the vicariate or the diocese: these days of coexistence and planning strengthen the atmosphere of collaboration and the bond between the parish priests and the diocese. In communication with the bishop and the other parish priests, he gains an experience of diocesan communion that he must be able to communicate to the whole community. It is a type of awareness and mediation that the parish priest should handle in a systematic way. Interparish and inter-diocesan communion is not a simple organizational strategy, but a requirement of the very mission of the Church (cf. *CGS20*, 416).

The above passes not only through true consistency in the life and action of individuals and parish Communities, but also the sense of belonging to the particular Church, its history and pastoral ministry, to the point of becoming dialogue, good relationships, cordiality of relationships, willingness to make oneself present, commitment to support the proposed initiatives, conviction that in the Church nothing is ever just organizational and functional, but communal.

### C) *The unified and articulated Educative-Pastoral Plan*

**I** The parish is immersed in a world which is undergoing profound and rapid change. It is necessary to sit down, share, reason, reflect, analyse, identify objectives and priorities, involve, share responsibilities, form, verify, in short: plan. We need a more detailed interpretation of the changes and provocations of the territorial reality and of the impact that ecclesial communion and its mission must have on it. It is a unified and complex reality and requires a plan (cf. *GC21*, 140). The primary objective of pastoral action, carried out in the Salesian parish, is to become a real house made up of many individuals who share a mission. For this reason, **the Salesian charism needs methodological attention, an operational tool, which makes it possible to trace paths in order to achieve the objectives, to use resources well, to verify the results**: The Educative-Pastoral Plan.

«*The parish entrusted to the Salesians evangelizes according to the style and spirit of our Educative-Pastoral Plan*» (*GC 21 140*)

Parish ministry is given a unified and articulated shape in the plan, a mental and community process of involvement, clarification and identification.

Planning is done in the light of faith, indeed, *it is a definite form of facing reality with the eyes of faith*. Therefore, it does not immediately fall within the context of a “technical aspect” or a simple printed compliance. This plan helps the parish forge effective collaboration in its pastoral mission to teach, sanctify and guide everyone. Parish structures strengthen communion, convergence and complementarity amongst people, activities and other structures focused around this operational plan.

To ensure that parish pastoral ministry has continuity, it must not only ensure the stability of people, but it must have “*precise points*” of reference for all people: a plan. The SEPP is a concrete operational channel that guides the journey of our parish communities and, therefore, it is a proposal that cannot be derogated. It is:

- an indispensable tool for carrying out parish ministry according to the Salesian identity, interpreting and renewing our proposal and its method;
- an important element for the pastoral continuity of parish life when inevitable staff turnovers take place;
- a point of reference in the dialogue with the bishop and diocesan bodies;
- a condition that is integrated in, qualifies and enriches the local Church’s project, responds to its requests and needs and those of the local area.
- a concrete possibility for a journey together in the convergence and mutual enrichment between the parishes of the same province (cf. *Salesian Youth Ministry. Frame of Reference. Youth ministry Department, 2014, chap. VI*).

**II** In conclusion, because of its membership in the local Church, **the Salesian parish incorporates the pastoral guidelines of the diocese and those of the provincial and local SEPP in its SEPP**. There needs to be the effort of a global project which is able to formulate a wide-ranging pastoral plan in connection with both the diocese and the province. It is a matter of making a synthesis, of creating harmony. The vision of the diocese must therefore be experienced not in a conflictual way, nor in

mutual indifference or distrust, but in mutual and necessary reference and enrichment (cf. GC 21 139b; GC 20 403). The parish priest in particular is called to this action, in order to prevent the flattening of the Salesian pastoral proposal, the quantitative and qualitative estrangement from the youth and the loss of “educational” capacity.

In implementing the line of the charism, both the fear and the danger of juxtaposing two pastoral ministries must be overcome: the pastoral ministry of the particular Church must be reinterpreted with the awareness of one’s own Salesian charism, making choices that are dictated by the specific service in which the Congregation is called to bear witness. At times the difficulty of “reconciling” these two references is more apparent than real, in the sense that it refers to organizational and calendar aspects, rather than to the right/duty to express one’s own charism. For this reason, the Salesian parish priest dialogues not only with the bishop, but also with the provincial, who is a reference and inspiration.

**III When a parish is one of a number of other sectors in a given area** (Oratory-Youth Centre, School, Social Work, Boarding house, Hostel), through dialogue it fosters along with them **a special collaboration for unified pastoral ministry within a single mission.**

*Our way of evangelizing is not just “religious teaching” or “the service of worship”. Don Bosco preferred a type of pastoral ministry that fostered **a program of holistic education** (recreation-work-study-catechism), in which faith was its illuminating centre.*

*It expresses the desire to grow systematically as a Salesian house.* If the division of responsibilities is legitimate, the multiplication and division of pastoral plans within the same work with dualisms and parallels is not comprehensible. For the Oratory-Youth Centre the parish is a reminder that there is a converging pastoral plan involving the local area and the local Church, based on the different responsibilities of the two sectors. There is a need for a real plan that unites the two sectors, with mutual benefits. Unified pastoral activity is spelt out through mutual relationships and the fact that they are different projects help us provide a better response to quite a few special situations in the Congregation:

- Oratory-Youth Centre in a Salesian parish;

- ▶ Oratory-Youth Centre in diocesan parishes;
- ▶ Oratory-Youth Centre in presences with multiple sectors, where there is also the parish along with other sectors and activities..

The Oratory is an environment full of many educational proposals for children and young people, all centred on relationships and intergenerational exchange, with significant figures according to age and charisma (the pedagogical model). It is the place where catechesis and the celebration of the faith occupy a central, but not unique, place, since it is naturally connected with a rich and varied programme tailored to the basic needs of the young people: group life, singing, music, walks, summer camps, leadership in activities of service according to age.

As mentioned above, the Oratory-Youth Centre council, in its entirety or through a well-chosen membership, has representation within the parish pastoral council to guarantee the unity of the evangelizing activity.

#### D ) *Provincial/National animation*

- I** The parish priest is appointed by the Provincial and presented to the local Ordinary to be of service to the local Church, in communion with the Bishop, the presbyterium and the other parishes. He seeks coordination with other parishes in the Province and the Youth Ministry delegation in the Province. The guidelines of GC 19 and GC 20 (cf. GC 20, no. 441) require **co-ordination of the parishes** to be fostered in all our Provinces.

The parishes depend on the dioceses in which they are located but are entrusted to the Salesian Congregation to respond to the pastoral needs of particular Churches (Reg. 25). If the acceptance of a parish clearly requires the approval of the Rector Major with the consent of his Council, the significance of the Salesian representation in such a vast area as the province is verified by the Provincial with his Council. The restitution of the parish to the diocese, its relocation to another area and the redevelopment of the parishes respond to new needs and new recipients. *The province is not only a juridical/administrative district, but it is also a charismatic and juridical community that is concerned with promoting life and mission in all its works.*



In addition to the precise agreement report, signed by the bishop and the Salesians, in the person of the provincial, *the Province must give operational guidelines in the Provincial Directory*, for example regarding: building structures; the relationship with Bishops and municipal Administrations; the relationship between parish and oratory; the promotion of vocations and lay formation (pastoral workers, catechists, lay people with ministries, administrators); shared responsibility of the religious community in the parish; administrative and economic relations between the parish and the Salesian house, in accordance with universal law, the Constitutions and the document *Legal elements and administrative practice in the government of the Province*, Directorate General for Works Don Bosco (2004), n° 163.

**II** A **Provincial Commission** headed by a coordinator ensures Provincial accompaniment and support for parish communities in their implementation of the parish SEPP. Both the coordinator and the Commission are part of provincial Youth Ministry bodies.

The Coordinator and members of the Commission have the following functions:

- ▮ raising awareness of Salesian communities so that they pay more attention to the parish where they are located;
- ▮ promoting reflection on and improved understanding of the identity of the Salesian parish in relation to the ecclesial and social situation around them;
- ▮ raising awareness of Salesian communities so that they are integrated not only in parishes entrusted to the Salesians, but also so that they may have an impact, collaboration, structure and pastoral care together with the parish where they are located geographically;
- ▮ ensuring the development, implementation and evaluation of the SEPP in parishes and Shrines, offering parish communities guidelines that can help them live out their Salesian identity;
- ▮ fostering communication and collaboration amongst the different parishes of the Province, so that amongst our parishes there may be progress in the communication of experiences, good practice, shared projects and specific formation programmes;

- ▶ supporting ongoing formation of Salesians and laity who share responsibility for parish ministry, through meetings and courses (in fact, some formative programmes cannot be carried out only by one parish, but they require collaboration between the various parishes of the Province);
- ▶ taking a greater care of the formation of parish priests (the formation should facilitate the Salesian parish priest and the community in coordinating the parish according to the Oratorian criterion);
- ▶ convening regular meetings of parish priests, pastoral councils, catechists, diaconal teams, health apostolate and youth ministry and the confreres engaged in the ministry of the Word and Reconciliation;
- ▶ responding to the pastoral challenges of the Church in local churches and Shrines where the mission of the Province is carried out.

*We must stress the importance of establishing a **Provincial commission** if it is not yet present, and there needs to be teamwork with **other Provincial commissions**: Oratory-Youth Centre, Salesian Youth Movement, Vocation ministry, Missionary animation, Social Communication. The Provincial Formation Commission ensures formative accompaniment for students of theology, especially deacons, in the exercise of their ministry. They are part of the actual running of parish ministry.*

III.- The dynamics and work of provincial coordination are supported by **National leadership and coordination**, according to circumstances and contexts. Its function is primarily to promote reflection and a deeper understanding of the Salesian identity of the parish through the development and updating of the educative-pastoral proposal.

Other guidelines and proposals at the national level are, for example:

- ▶ providing precise guidelines in order to encourage the growth of an educative-pastoral harmony between parish and Oratory-Youth Centre in a unified plan and in sharing a program;
- ▶ preparing and offering concrete, structured and open subsidies, of lines and elements to draw up local pastoral projects;

- ▶ facilitating communication amongst the provinces in order to share experiences and challenges;
- ▶ planning a formation and updating service for formation houses on the themes that are typical of the Salesian Oratorian and Parish work.

A common practice in various situations around the Congregation is to promote the updating and formation of parish priests through National organization (formation, retreats and specialization courses). Moreover, it is possible to convene meetings for reflection on a national level, conscious of the wealth arising from the variety of groups involved in our parishes (catechists, pastoral councils, youth leaders, committees, groups).

## AT A GLANCE

### MAIN INTERVENTIONS OF THE PROPOSAL

Evangelizing community inspired by the Christian catechumenate (the gift of growing faith in its various stages)

- Commitment to evangelization requires personal response, process of Christian formation conversion of life and charity

Gradual and diversified itineraries of education in the faith

- Christian initiation considers experience, relationships with the community, and witnessing

Membership of groups in the Church

- Coordination of these groups with the SYM and the proposal of Salesian Youth Spirituality
- The parish priest promotes the growth of lay pastoral workers and enhances their skills

Preparation-Celebration of the Liturgy and Sacraments with dignity and beauty

- Forms of prayer closer to life
- Understandable and accessible language expressed in a simple manner (songs, gestures, stories, testimonies, symbols, etc.)
- Revive the active participation of all in its preparation and implementation
- New communication strategies for the proclamation of faith

Education to the social dimension of charity to build a culture of solidarity

- Encouragement for the commitment of members of the parish community involved in social action and charity
- Visible concrete gestures of a modest lifestyle, open to generosity and solidarity
- Promotion, training and accompaniment of solidarity and missionary volunteering

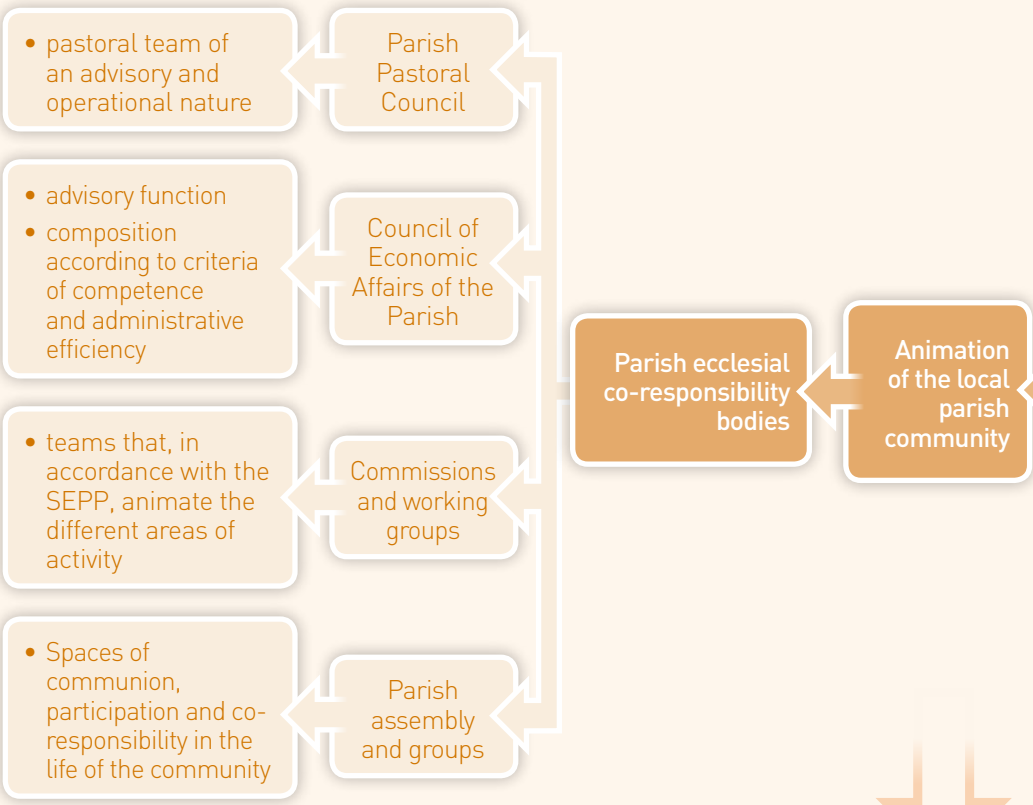
Formation of dynamic and committed lay people, especially pastoral animators of young people

- Adequate paths of Salesian Youth Spirituality, in particular, catechists, educators, youth group leaders and engaged couples

MAIN INTERVENTIONS OF THE PROPOSAL



STRUCTURES OF PARTICIPATION AND RESPONSIBILITY



STRUCTURES OF PARTICIPATION AND RESPONSIBILITY

In dialogue with the Bishop and the local Church

- Visibility of Salesian work in the field of youth ministry
- Enrichment of the territory with the expression of the Salesian charism and tradition

- Written agreement between province and diocese
- Communion, collaboration and sense of belonging to the particular Church

The unitary and articulated Salesian Educational-Pastoral Project

- Indispensable for the realization of the parish pastoral according to the Salesian identity
- Important element for the pastoral continuity of parish life
- Point of reference in dialogue with the bishop and diocesan bodies
- Condition to fit in, qualify and enrich the project of the local Church

- Methodological attention to the Salesian charism
- SEPP, an operational tool to promote the originality and creativity of each parish

- The parish entrusted to the Salesians incorporates in its SEPP the pastoral orientations of the diocese and those of the provincial and local SEPP

Provincial/National animation

- Parish Coordination in all our Provinces
- Operational indications in the Provincial Directory

- Provincial Commission in the implementation of the SEPP

- Animation and national coordination: updating of the educational-pastoral proposal of the parishes

- Parish in the area together with other environments of the Salesian Work (Oratory-Youth Center, School, Social Work, Internship, Residence), promotes a special collaboration for a unitary pastoral within the one mission

# OTHER FORMS: PUBLIC CHURCHES, SHRINES

CHAPTER

V

The **public churches and Shrines represented in the works of the Province** are everywhere a significant Salesian “presence”, a sacred “place” of attraction and meeting, witness and Salesian and ecclesial message.

It is important, as we have emphasized in reference to the parish, to look after the hospitality of the faithful, the visitor and the passer-by, which is manifested by various factors, from the simplest details to the personal willingness to listen and accompany. Here lies the visible aspect of charity, which causes the visitor to reflect as he feels welcomed by God because he is welcomed by his brothers. It could be a *hospitality provided by priests, religious or lay people*, characterized by human qualities, respect for personal processes, which help clarify doubts and even trigger them.

In these circumstances, other elements of particular importance are: the dignity of liturgical celebrations and manifestations of popular piety; an atmosphere of respect and meditation; order and safety; the maintenance of the entire space, the proper indications; a barrier-free architecture; printed material and new technologies; the creation of adequate and welcoming physical spaces for each category of people and for each specific use (chapels for adoration and reconciliation, information points, museums, etc.), to avoid the perception of commercialization in sacred spaces.

*Therefore, even these salesian presences should be considered **within the provincial SEPP** as typical expressions of our tradition, which offer their own cultural and pastoral proposal. This means that each sanctuary or rectory depends both on the religious community and the local parish.*

**A Public churches** are also called “rectories” which operate with some pastoral services but are not recognized as parishes. There are liturgical services on public holidays and weekdays with Eucharistic celebrations, prayer meetings for groups of faithful, including young people, special or Salesian triduum or novenas. Devotion to Mary Help of Christians represents a great contribution to the Church. The service of reconciliation is the most appreciated, not only by the faithful, but also by priests and religious, and in some places even by tourists and pilgrims.

**B Shrines and/or Basilicas** are churches recognized as such by the ecclesiastical authorities and places of welcome and prayer for many



faithful. The Congregation has a wealth of Shrines and basilicas. “Shrines” are *sacred places to which the faithful make pilgrimage for a special reason of piety* (cf. CCC, can. 1230-1234). At Shrines the means of salvation are to be supplied to the faithful by the diligent proclamation of the Word of God, through the celebration of the Eucharist and Reconciliation, and the cultivation of approved forms of popular piety. (cf. CCC, can. 1234). As a rule, Shrines, besides being particular destinations for pilgrimages, are a place of worship and devotion linked to events or manifestations of the Blessed Virgin, Saints or Martyrs. In fact, some preserve relics or images considered miraculous or are places particularly marked by the holiness of a servant of God or by multiple forms of “popular piety”.

We must not forget that the religious presence in public spaces is another way of evangelizing, as well as all the manifestations of popular religiosity (such as processions, festivals and pilgrimages). For some people who



come to the Shrines, this is *the only bond that unites them to the Church community*. The Church, therefore, takes this opportunity to proclaim the Gospel message and lead people to Christ.

In some Shrines there are artistic expressions of paintings, sculptures and sacred representations which are tastefully arranged and supported by doctrinal content and objects for worship. In this regard, music, song, architecture, painting, sculpture and sacred objects and vestments should be given special care in Shrines.

Every pilgrim, visitor and passer-by deserves all the attention he can receive. As far as possible, he must be welcomed as an individual, on a personal level: everyone must find their place in the Shrine.

*The document “The Shrine, Memory, Presence and Prophecy of the Living God” invites us to this when it says that “this experience of Church must be **particularly fostered through the fitting welcome given to pilgrims to the Shrine**. This should take into consideration the specific characteristics of each group and each individual, the yearnings of their hearts and their authentic spiritual needs” (PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE, MAY 8, 1999, 12).*

This is why we cannot be content with a standardized hospitality, but we must strive to expand the proposal, without running the risk of uniformity. If diversified hospitality implies personal encounter, this requires high-quality attention in the Shrine, which implies that those responsible demonstrate an active presence, as well as a loving attitude.

**Other concrete actions** that can help achieve a fitting hospitality are:

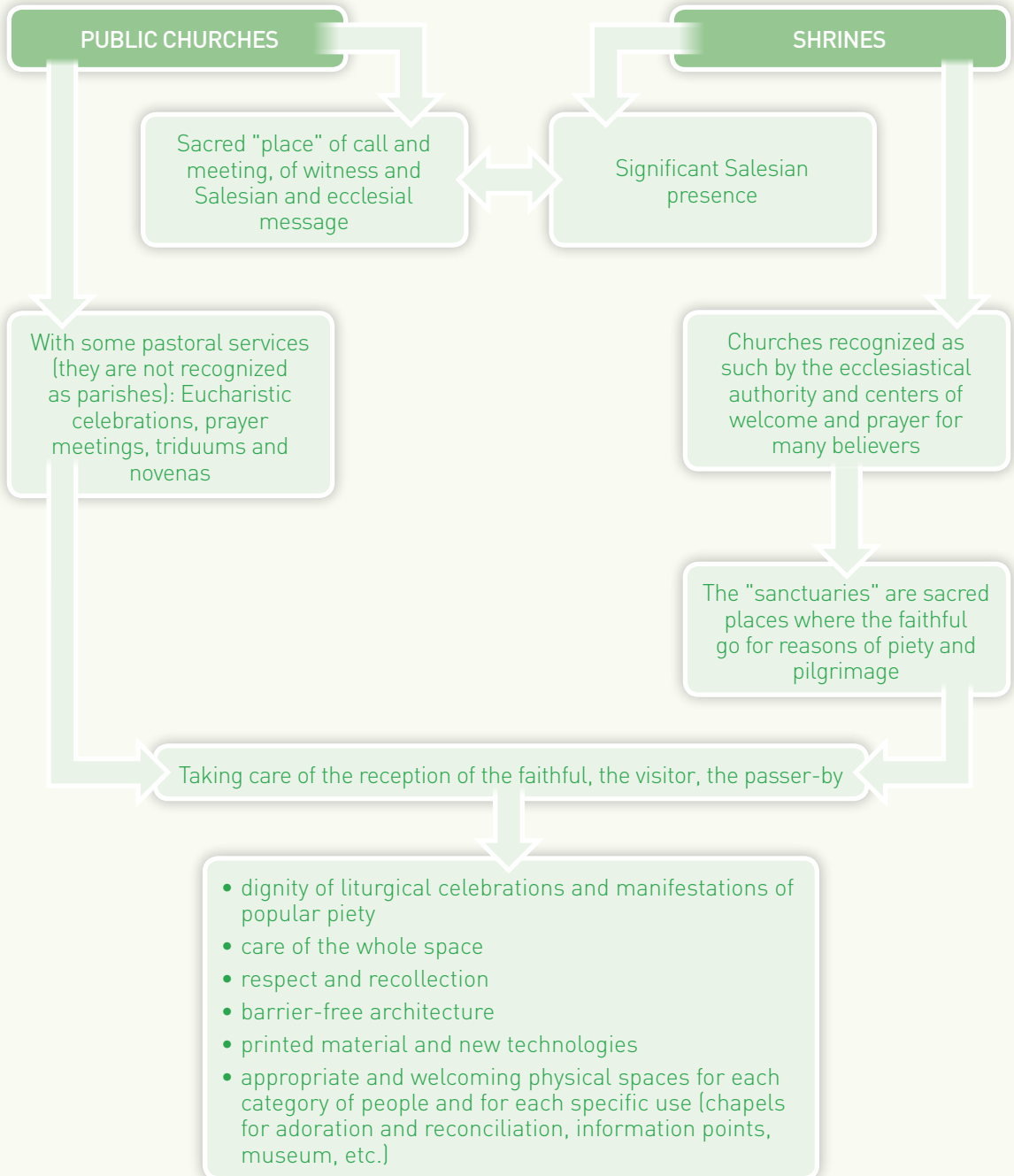
- ▶ promoting voluntary service for the hospitality and formation of those involved in the life of the Shrine, developing specific programmes and manuals for human, doctrinal, spiritual and pastoral formation;
- ▶ organizing guided tours within the Shrine;
- ▶ skill-training of priests who exercise the Ministry of the Word and Reconciliation;

- ▶ the clear definition of the charism specific to the Shrine, which must shape the spirit and meaning of life of the work of volunteers.

All this is part of the timely development of a pastoral plan for welcoming and evangelization, *in harmony with the diocesan pastoral ministry*, so that it may become part of it, also taking into consideration the collaboration between Shrines and parishes, between Shrines and public churches. (perhaps by fostering regional or national meetings with the presence of numerous pastoral workers), between pilgrimage associations, with civil entities, agencies and tourist guides.

Lastly, it is important to stress the relevance of can. 1234 § 2 CCC, which expressly provides for the preservation and protection of votive offerings of popular art and piety. We should also recall Can. 1189 regarding precious images and those honoured with great reverence (cf. can. 1190 § 3) and also that concerning sacred relics and those of great significance (cf. can. 1190 §§ 1 and 2).

## AT A GLANCE





# Concluding remarks

The parish is “Salesian” due to the community style it promotes, the ecclesial experience it lives and the witness of the religious community. It is “Salesian” because of its relationship of communion with the local Church, the support and development of groups and associations, its involvement and favourable integration in the local area and the preferential and priority of attention for young people. We live the parish ministry as a true Salesian apostolate to the extent that we remain faithful to our mission and make Don Bosco’s charism relevant.

The parish entrusted to the Salesians, like the Salesian charism, is characterized not only by some “spiritual” features, but it evangelizes according to the style and spirit of the Salesian Educative-Pastoral Project. This is where Salesian attitudes, initiatives, contents, experiences and pastoral choices are represented. These pages have attempted to provide some stimuli in this direction.

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