



The Holy See

***LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
ON THE OCCASION OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER
OF THE SALESIANS OF DON BOSCO***

*To the Very Reverend Pascual Chávez Villanueva, S.D.B.
Rector Major of the Salesians of Don Bosco*

I am particularly pleased to extend my cordial greeting to you and the participants in the 26th General Chapter, which is a moment of grace in the life of this Congregation, now present on all the continents. At the Chapter, those taking part will be required to address the wealth and diversity of experiences, cultures and expectations of Salesians, involved in many apostolic activities and desirous of making their service to the Church ever more effective. Don Bosco's charism is a gift of the Spirit for the entire People of God, but only in docile listening and readiness for divine action is it possible to interpret it and make it fruitful also in our day. The Holy Spirit, who descended in abundance upon the newborn Church at Pentecost, continues like a breeze to blow where he will, like fire to melt the ice of selfishness, like water to irrigate parched land. In pouring out an abundance of his gifts upon the Chapter Members, the Spirit will reach the hearts of your confreres, he will make them burn with his love, set them on fire with the desire for holiness, impel them to be open to conversion and strengthen them in their apostolic daring.

Don Bosco's sons belong among the numerous throngs of disciples whom Christ has consecrated to himself through his Spirit with a special act of love. He has set them apart for himself; for this reason the primacy of God and his initiatives must shine out in their witness. When one renounces everything to follow the Lord, when one gives to him all that one holds dearest, facing every sacrifice, one should not be surprised to become, as happened for the Divine Master, a "sign of contradiction", because the way a consecrated person thinks and acts often ends by clashing with the logic of the world. Actually, this is a cause of comfort since it testifies that the lifestyle of a consecrated person is an alternative to contemporary culture and that he can play a role in it which, in a certain way, is prophetic. To this end, however, it is necessary to be alert to the possible influences of secularism so as to defend oneself and hence be able to continue with determination on the path on which one has set out, overcoming a "liberal model" of consecrated

life and leading a life centred wholly on the primacy of love of God and one's neighbour.

The theme chosen for this General Chapter is the same programme of spiritual and apostolic life which Don Bosco made his own: "*Da mihi animas, cetera tolle*" [Give me souls, take away all else]. This theme expresses the great Saint's entire personality: profound spirituality, creative initiative, apostolic dynamism, tireless application, pastoral daring, and especially his total dedication to God and to youth. He was a Saint with a single passion: "the glory of God and the salvation of souls". It is vitally important that every Salesian continue to be inspired by Don Bosco: may he know him, study him, imitate him, call on him, make his own Don Bosco's apostolic passion that flows from the Heart of Christ. This passion is the ability to give oneself, to be enthusiastic for souls, to suffer for love, to accept serenely and joyfully the daily demands and sacrifices of an apostolic existence. The motto "*Da mihi animas, cetera tolle*" sums up the mysticism and asceticism of the Salesian. There can be no ardent mystic without a vigorous asceticism that sustains him; and vice-versa, no one is willing to pay an exorbitant price unless he has discovered a fascinating and priceless treasure. In a time of fragmentation and fragility such as ours, it is necessary to overcome the dispersive effects of activism and foster the unity of spiritual life by acquiring a deep mysticism and a solid asceticism. These qualities nourish apostolic commitment and are a guarantee of pastoral effectiveness, and they must imbue the journey to holiness of every Salesian. The formation of new vocations to consecrated Salesian life must focus on them. *Lectio divina* and the Eucharist lived daily are the light and strength of the consecrated Salesian's spiritual life. The Salesian must nourish his day with listening to and meditation on the Word of God and with helping young people and the lay faithful to appreciate it in their daily lives, striving in addition to bear witness to what the Word suggests. "The Eucharist draws us into Jesus' act of self-oblation. More than receiving the Incarnate Logos passively, we enter into the very dynamic of his self-giving" (cf. Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, n. 13). Leading a simple, poor, sober, essential and austere life: this will help Salesians to strengthen their vocational response in the face of the risks and threats of mediocrity and slipping into bourgeois ways, this will bring them closer to the needy and the marginalized.

After the example of their beloved Founder, Salesians must be consumed by apostolic ardour. The universal Church and the particular Churches in which they are inserted expect of Salesians a presence marked by pastoral dynamism and daring evangelical zeal. The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortations on evangelization in the various continents can serve as an incentive and guide in carrying out an inculturated evangelization in the different contexts. The recent *Doctrinal Note On Certain Aspects of Evangelization* (3 December 2007) can help them learn the best way to communicate the riches of the Gospel gifts to all, especially to the poorest youth. May evangelization be the principal and prime focus of their mission today. It offers multiple commitments, urgent challenges and vast fields of action, but its fundamental task is to propose to everyone to live human life Jesus' way. In multireligious and secularized situations, unheard-of ways must be found to make the figure of Jesus known, especially to young people, so that they perceive his perennial fascination. The apostolic action of Salesians must therefore be centred on

the proclamation of Jesus Christ and his Gospel, as well as on the appeal to conversion, acceptance of the faith and insertion into the Church; from here, then, they begin journeys of faith and catechesis, liturgical life and the active witness of charity. Their charism places them in the privileged situation of being able to appreciate the contribution of education in the field of the evangelization of youth. Without education, in fact, there is no lasting and profound evangelization, no growth or maturation, no change in mentalities and cultures. Young people harbour a deep desire for a full life, for genuine love, for constructive freedom; but unfortunately, their expectations are often betrayed and come to nothing. It is indispensable to help the young to make the most of their inner resources, such as dynamism and positive aspirations; to put before them proposals that are rich in humanity and Gospel values; to urge them to integrate themselves into society as an active part of it through work and participation and commitment to the common good. This requires those who guide them to expand the areas of educational commitment with attention to the new forms of poverty among young people, to advanced education and to immigration; it also requires attention to the family and its involvement. I reflected on this most important aspect in the [Letter on the educational emergency](#) that I recently addressed to the faithful of Rome, and that I now present in spirit to all Salesians.

From the outset, the Salesian Congregation has been involved in evangelization in various parts of the world: from Patagonia and Latin America to Asia and to Oceania, Africa and Madagascar. In Europe, at a time when vocations are dwindling and the challenges to evangelization growing, the Salesian Congregation must endeavour to reinforce the proposal of Christianity, the presence of the Church and the charism of Don Bosco on this Continent. Just as Europe was generous in sending numerous missionaries across the world, may the entire Congregation likewise be available to Europe, drawing in particular on regions where vocations are numerous. To extend in time the mission to youth, the Holy Spirit prompted Don Bosco to start various forms of the apostolate, inspired by the same outlook and sharing common goals. The tasks of evangelization and education effectively require numerous contributions that can function in synergy. For this reason, Salesians have involved in the endeavour numerous lay people, families and young people themselves, inspiring among them apostolic vocations that keep Don Bosco's charism alive and fruitful. It is necessary to present to these young men the fascination of the Consecrated Life, the radicalism of following Christ, obedient, poor and chaste, the primacy of God and of the Spirit, fraternal life in community and total dedication to the mission. Young men are sensitive to suggestions of demanding commitment but need witnesses and guides who can accompany them in the discovery and acceptance of this gift. In this context, I know that the Congregation is giving special attention to the vocation of the Salesian Coadjutor without which it would lose the features Don Bosco desired to give to it. This vocation is not of course one that is easy to discern and accommodate. It develops best wherever secular apostolic vocations are promoted among young people and offers them a joyful and enthusiastic witness of religious consecration. May the example and intercession of Bl. Artemide Zatti and of other venerable Coadjutor Brothers who spent their life for the Kingdom of God obtain the gift of such vocations for the Salesian family also today.

I gladly take this opportunity to address my special thanks to the Salesian Congregation for the work of research and formation that it carries out in the Pontifical Salesian University. Some of my current closest and most esteemed collaborators were trained and later lectured there. The identity of the University derives from the charism of Don Bosco and makes an original and specific contribution to the entire Church. It is the only one of the Pontifical Universities which has a Faculty of Sciences of Education and a Department of Youth Ministry and Catechetics, sustained by the contributions of other Faculties. With a view to a study that avails itself of the diversity of cultures and is attentive to the multiplicity of contexts, it is to be hoped that the presence in this university of teachers from the whole Congregation will increase. In the educational emergency which exists in many parts of the world, the Church needs the contribution of scholars who analyse the methodology of pedagogical and formative processes, the evangelization of youth and their moral education, working out together responses to the challenges of post-modernity, interculturality and social communications, while seeking at the same time to go to the help of families. There is no doubt that Don Bosco's preventive system and the Salesian educational tradition will certainly lead the Congregation to propose an updated Christian pedagogy, inspired by its own specific charism. Education constitutes one of the key points of the anthropological issue today, to whose solution I am sure that the Pontifical Salesian University will not fail to make a precious contribution.

Fr Rector Major, the task that lies before the Salesian Congregation is arduous yet also exalting: indeed, every member of your great Religious Family is called to make Don Bosco present among the youth of our time. In 2015 you will be celebrating the bicentenary of his birth and with the decisions you make at this General Chapter, you are already beginning preparations for the celebration of this important Jubilee. May this spur you to be increasingly "credible signs of God's love for the young" and to ensure that young people are truly the hope of the Church and of society. May the Virgin Mary, who Don Bosco taught you to call upon as Mother of the Church and Help of Christians, sustain you in your resolutions. "It is she who has done all things", Don Bosco used to repeat at the end of his life, referring to Mary. It will thus once again be Mary who is your guide and teacher. She will help you to communicate "Don Bosco's charism". She will be the Mother and Star of Hope for your Congregation and for the entire Salesian Family, for the educators and especially for the young people. In bringing my Reflections to your attention, I renew the expression of my gratitude for your service to the Church and, as I assure you of my constant prayers, I warmly impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you, Rector Major, to the participants in the Chapter Assembly and to the entire Salesian Family.

From the Vatican, 1 March 2008

BENEDICTUS PP. XVI

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