

GBR Provincial Chapter

2007



*The documents approved by the Provincial Chapter and forwarded
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Key topic 1 - Return to Don Bosco

God's Call

We are called

1. to be present to those for whom we work, and with whom we work, in our school, parish, retreat house or other apostolate so that
 - a. we know directly their difficulties and challenges,
 - b. we can learn from experience the best way to work,
 - c. we can easily motivate potential co-workers by our example.
2. to help and encourage young people in any way we can (eg, by listening carefully to their stories) to be in contact with the God who calls them, in the midst of their daily lives.
3. to put the affirmation and the good of young people at the centre of everything we do, continually engaged with their culture and never 'closing the door'.
4. to be fired by an apostolic love for the young similar to that of Don Bosco who, through his presence with young people, established formative relationships that challenged them
 - a. to be ever more faithful to the gospel themselves,
 - b. to be active amongst their peers to promote gospel values,
 - c. to join in the life and work of the community established by Bosco.
5. to know Don Bosco so well that we don't simply wearily repeat what he did, but have the courage, imagination and faith to respond to the needs of the young today, true to his energetic, compassionate and pragmatic spirit.
6. to attempt to engage the latent idealism and generosity of the young through dialogue, supported by the effective witness of welcoming, open, compassionate, prayerful, gospel-centred and truly flexible, Salesian communities.
7. to pray for our mission, giving thanks to God for the good that is being done, asking that we may not lose our nerve (through losing sight of Don Bosco), and recognising (as we age) that, for many of our most vulnerable young people, the only hope of safety and stability may remain with their grandparents.

Situation

Positive:

1. Generally, our Salesian work is well-respected. We work for the young and there is an ever greater need for engagement with the young (parents often feel that they are losing the battle) – education is recognised as a key priority for the future of our society. Some of our works put us in touch with big numbers of young people, enabling us to share their insights and difficulties.
2. Don Bosco is an attractive and charismatic figure whose spirituality has its feet well and truly 'on the ground'. We live closely connected to 'ordinary' life (often amongst the less well-off and the vulnerable). We turn up, day after day.

We get on with things and work hard. We believe in what we do. Our structures are not elaborate. Our communities are supportive. Our prayer life is simple and sound. Our Provincial gatherings are joyous occasions.

3. We are learning to live and work more collaboratively, with both employed staff and young volunteers (through whom our mission has been uniquely blessed). We are becoming more open to the sharing of our facilities with the wider community. Generally, we are seeking new ways of working that will enable us to make our ministry to the young ever more effective. Being engaged in a dialogue with the young (trying to keep things relevant and interesting) has moved us to reflect on and re-model our practice.
4. The international dimension of our congregation enables us to share and gather insights and examples of 'good practice' from a wide range of experience.

Negative:

1. Our numbers are falling, our ages are rising (European trend). We do not now possess the fund of energy that was taken for granted in the past. Because, today, we are not automatically in key positions in our works, our influence in these works is declining.
2. Those for whom we work (and their parents) do not always see us as friends. Currently, in our society, media stories of abuse, Child Protection legislation and a culture of litigation have produced a climate of anxiety, suspicion and fear, which makes our task increasingly more difficult.
3. Since family life in our parish communities is often broken, fragile, or weak, and does not offer the fertile soil that will nourish the faith of the young, how are we to speak of religious life and tackle vocations promotion?
4. It seems that the experience of some of us is described well by phrases provided by the Rector Major – we are left 'feeling out of tune' and 'excluded' from the world of the young.

Courses of Action

1. Each member of our province must recognise that everyone participates in the mission of the province and has a personal responsibility to promote the successful outcome of our mission – in a way that is appropriate to their individual circumstances. To this end, the Rector of each community shall draw up and maintain a calendar of intentions for prayer.
2. A variety of strategies should be adopted to help develop and deepen our understanding of the charism of Don Bosco and Salesian Spirituality (e.g. through our personal reading, Retreats, Pilgrimages, Days of Study and Recollection...)
3. The young people with whom, and for whom, we work should be involved in an annual celebration of their links with us, which would help to deepen our shared appreciation of the charism of Don Bosco, as it affects our daily lives.
4. There should be, at both local and provincial level, specific, co-ordinated events that celebrate and strengthen the collaborative ministry, in the style of Don Bosco, taking place in our work with our committed adult co-workers.

Key topic 2 - Urgent need for evangelisation

God's Call

Very simply, our call is to spread the Gospel by serving the young and poor. In doing this we are called:

1. to a life of prayer;
2. to build up relationships that can lead to an invitation to faith through presence and accompaniment;
3. to carry out a 'patient work of evangelisation that does not too easily condemn';
4. to be honest and share our struggles and questioning with others;
5. to set an example by our own quality of life, particularly by living simply and joyfully;
6. to respond to issues of justice, peace and the environment;
7. to renew ourselves;
8. to have a pastoral concern for those distanced from the Church;
9. to be hopeful and optimistic and radiate joy.

Situation

Positive

1. Our way of evangelising is distinctive and represented
 - a. by the model of the Good Shepherd reaching out to people where they are at,
 - b. by attitudes of welcome, acceptance and openness which affirm and value every person,
 - c. by the 'Emmaus road' model as a valuable way of building relationships with people which are essential if we are to touch their inner lives.
2. We have the opportunity to be with a large number of young people each day and our school, parish and retreat house structures offer a well established and stable environment with many experienced people working in them.
3. There are formal and informal programmes which allow us to touch peoples' lives frequently – especially at significant moments in their lives.
4. Living with volunteers in community makes the Church an attractive living reality for those who visit.
5. The quality of our publications provides an opportunity to evangelise through the written word, using the skills of several experienced people around the province.

Negative

1. We live in a society where many have become distanced from the Church and where a growing secular culture increasingly sees religion as a private matter. This situation is compounded by the way the Church is often ridiculed in the media, by the values put forward by the media, by social fragmentation, and by

affluence. As a result many young people are indifferent to religion and see the Church as irrelevant. In this context there is the danger that we can lose confidence.

2. It is recognised that there can be different understandings of just what is meant by evangelisation.

Courses of Action

We commit ourselves to:

1. developing ourselves as evangelisers by regular community reflection on what we are doing and what we hope to do in our mission;
2. periodic evaluation of our evangelising mission;
3. developing and supporting small groups at both local and provincial level, eg parish catechists, parish councils, school councils;
4. emphasising the importance of hospitality, recreational and social events as the beginning of the process of evangelisation;
5. continuing to promote suitable material through publications and the web which will help in the process of evangelisation.

Key topic 3 - Need for Recruitment

God's Call

1. God is calling us to see the needs of young people to-day to have 'a father, a teacher and a friend', who is totally dedicated and fearless in reaching out to them and guiding them on their journey of life and faith.
2. This involves a call for us to be 'living witnesses' by our joyful following of our Salesian vocation.
 - a. By appreciating the generous movement of the Spirit in the lives of many young people, especially those who are involved in our mission.
 - b. By our offering young people opportunities to play a vital part in the Salesian mission in serving the less fortunate and deepening their spiritual lives.
 - c. By personally proposing a Salesian vocation to possible candidates: to live poor, chaste and obedient in the service of the young as Don Bosco did in imitation of Jesus.
3. To appreciate much more the unique contribution of the Salesian Brothers to our vocational identity as a congregation of priests and lay religious dedicated to being signs and bearers of the Good News to the young.
4. To be confident that people are still being called in spite of the general 'negative' climate for the promotion of religious ideals.
5. To realise that there are people 'on our wavelength', and that we should be robust enough in inviting them to discern God's call for them.
6. While they may be at present and in the future fewer in numbers – at least in Western society – there is clearly the need for perpetually professed SDBs, 'a nucleus of identifiable consecrated persons', if the Salesian mission is to

continue and develop in response to God's call to serve the young and the poor. These will be the 'nucleus' which will continue to inspire, affirm and collaborate with the many dedicated lay people who proudly claim the name 'Salesian' and continue Don Bosco's mission.

Situation

Positive signs:

1. Young people are immensely idealistic, generous and willing to get involved in practically helping the poor and working for the disadvantaged: the HCPT, gap year experiences in the developing world, and volunteering in all its forms, including our own Salesian organisations.
2. In the Church and in our works there has been a growth of more active, committed and well informed laity willing to take serious responsibility for building up the local Church and committed to supporting the Salesian mission.
3. Our work for the young, being signs and bearers of the Gospel for the young, is deeply appreciated and necessary in a world where there is little good news and where there is a distinct lack of 'fathers, teachers and friends of the young, like Don Bosco'.
4. Our communities are in general open to receiving candidates, pre-novices and students and are peaceful and united in prayer and community life. Young people can live with us in community and actually enjoy the experience.
5. Recent vocations have given us confidence in our vocation again: young men do want to be professed SDBs.
6. The present discernment and formation process for those who express an interest in becoming a Salesian and those in Salesian Formation is a personalised accompaniment on the gradual, often slow and twisting, journey of discernment.

Negative signs

1. The rapid pace of cultural change, the fragmentation of shared values in society and particularly the widespread break-down of marriage and the fragility of family life has meant there is a widespread, often unspoken, sense of insecurity among young people about taking on life commitments in a society that is sceptical of any form of commitment.
2. The age profile of our communities, the age gap between young people and the active Salesians, and the smaller numbers of those directly engaged with the young, are probably discouraging possible candidates.
3. While there are large numbers of young 'Salesian co-workers', many of them don't see the need to become vowed religious to fulfil a Salesian vocation.
4. In this province the ideal of the Salesian Brother has largely disappeared; we have lost Don Bosco's idea of the lay religious Salesian.

Courses of Action

As individual Salesians we commit ourselves:

1. To continue to pray for vocations to the Salesian life and to support those in the province who have the more specific task of identifying suitable individuals and being present with them in their discernment process.
2. To welcome and support those who have made their temporary profession as Salesians.
3. As far as we can, in our own situation, to keep an eye out for and assist any young men we think are doing Salesian work and who could be encouraged to think about becoming a professed Salesian.

As communities we commit ourselves:

4. To promote the active invitation of young people to be involved not only in our mission through small groups, teams, etc, but also in our way of life as priests and religious, by opening our table, our prayer life and our friendship to them.
5. To offer real opportunities to all those involved in our works for personal spiritual growth, a deeper sense of the religious side of our mission, and help with discerning their own vocation with suitable help, eg trained spiritual directors.

As a Province we commit ourselves:

6. To review and clarify the specific roles of the Formation Team, the Youth Ministry Team and the Salesian Family Vocations Team in promoting and directing potential SDB vocations and explore the option of a distinct SDB vocations team.
7. To a genuine openness to new developments in terms of a wider sharing of our vocation, among committed laity, members of various lay associations, the VDB, Cooperators, parish workers, past pupils, etc., conscious of the movement of the Holy Spirit even in our declining numbers.
8. To preparing and promoting even better vocations material, interactive stimulus on the internet, literature, and new ways of projecting our image.
9. To promoting ways of reaching more young people making life decisions, eg at the end of Sixth Form or university, gap years, etc.

As a congregation:

10. We should explore the possibilities of other forms of commitment to the Salesian religious life.

Key topic 4 - Evangelical Poverty

God's Call

We are called to follow Christ, living Gospel values as vowed religious.

1. We are called to live a simple life
 - a. to accept responsibility for our personal and community lifestyle
 - b. to be aware of environmental issues
 - c. while recognising our genuine needs.

2. We are called to freedom
 - a. to share our material resources
 - b. to be available to those who need us, giving up time for others.
 - c. to be ready to take risks when choosing apostolates
3. We are called to service
 - a. to meet the needs of young people
 - b. to be prepared to join in everyday tasks that arise in our community and our ministry
 - c. to work for justice for the young and poor

Situation

Positive

1. Our lifestyle can challenge others
 - a. We do not keep our personal income.
 - b. We give substantial financial support to the AFW (English Speaking West African Province) and to other work related to our mission at home and abroad.
 - c. Our assets (property, location, educational qualifications, etc) are at the service of others.
2. In general we do work hard and live simply.
 - a. Our work is service for the 'young who are poor, abandoned and in danger' (Const 26).
 - b. We help with domestic tasks in our communities.
 - c. Many continue in various forms of ministry well after retirement age.

Negative

1. We can appear to be rich. We can be in danger of accepting the negative values of consumerism by, for example, spending on what we want rather than what we need.
2. The word 'Poverty' can be misunderstood
 - a. Poverty is generally seen as something negative, to be overcome. We see Evangelical Poverty as freeing us for the mission.
 - b. Some probably work too hard and take on too many responsibilities. No matter how simply we live, our assets do give us a measure of security that many around us do not have.
 - c. The extremes of living conditions, whether squalor or luxury, of some of those around us are not to be imitated.
 - d. The poverty of those for whom we work may be of different kinds: financial, material, educational, emotional, relational, or spiritual.

Courses of Action

1. Finance
 - a. Cultivate personal and community accountability as described in the Province Finance Directory. In particular, confreres should discuss their spending at regular intervals with the Rector.

- b. Review community income and expenditure on regular basis with guidance from the Provincial Economist. Inform confreres about the real costs of everyday living.
2. Sharing our Resources
 - a. Use our property and other resources for others.
 - b. Support and collaborate with other agencies who work for justice and help the poor.
 - c. Be generous in accepting opportunities for ministry.
3. Lifestyle
 - a. Make a positive choice to live simply as Salesians.
 - b. Take positive steps to keep fit and healthy.
 - c. Conduct a regular review of our community lifestyle.
 - d. Take account of environmental impact and sustainability issues in the maintenance of our buildings. (This should be in the Province Administration Manual.)
4. Hospitality
 - a. Value and promote a sense of welcome and availability.

Key topic 5 - New frontiers

God's Call

1. We recognise that God is calling us as Salesians, in imitation of Don Bosco, actively to seek out the young who are 'poor, abandoned and in danger' and to take up our apostolate where they are to be found.
2. We recognise that 'new forms of poverty' mean that 'nowadays all young people are in need'. However, the most needy are those for whom material poverty combines 'with affective, spiritual, and cultural' poverty.
3. We accept that the 'new frontiers' of the Salesian mission are found 'in the fields of immigration, social exclusion, discrimination, sexual exploitation, child labour and the lack of a religious sense.'
4. We accept that to be at these 'new frontiers' will take us into 'mission situations that may be risky, demanding and fraught with difficulty'. Abraham, our father in faith, provides us with a model for our journey.

Situation

Positive

1. Through the Provincial Planning Process (1993 – 2000) and the developments that followed, Savio House was endorsed as a key work, two purpose-built community houses for the elderly were established, a Joint Pastoral Team (SDB, FMA, DC) was set up for the parishes in Easterhouse to form an empowered laity, Salesian Publications was re-energised as Don Bosco Publications to become a vital force in the mission of the province, and the Provincial Office itself has now been transferred to Bolton.

2. Currently, within our family of schools and parishes, there are new and exciting developments taking place, for example in Battersea and Bootle, both through new build and new modes of operation. Our optimistic, person-centred approach to ministry is a strength.
3. Our Youth Ministry Team is now a well-established excellent example of collaborative ministry, facilitating the work of different Salesian groups in our own province and throughout the world, encouraging volunteering where an opportunity exists. Building on the quality of its printed materials, it is now developing an outreach via the internet.
4. We have a good record when it comes to personal updating and renewal, new apostolic initiatives and pastoral activity. At present, we are developing work for immigrants, support for asylum seekers, school chaplaincy, pastoral care and education for those in danger of exclusion from school and parish sacramental programmes for children and families on the 'margins' (often as a way of allowing the adults to re-claim their faith).

Negative

1. As an ageing province we have to be realistic about new initiatives. Sadly, we now have fewer young confreres than previously. As SDBs we tend to be more involved in leadership/management than on the front line with young people – though such positions do give us influence over policy and practice.
2. Our Salesian approach can be counter-cultural in both Ecclesiastical and Educational circles. Where such conflict exists, there can be frustration in our mission.
3. In areas of high socio-economic deprivation, an initiative may prove to be unsustainable because of the nature of the demands on both personnel and resources in the longer term. Typically, there are fewer trained lay people in these poorer areas, to lighten the load of bureaucracy and administration involved in running a project.

Courses of Action

1. Each community should ask the question, "Who are the young people in most need in our area and how can we help to serve their needs?" For most communities the answer will lie in some form of collaborative ministry with other established work – which would be enriched through our Salesian charism. We should, therefore, continue to work as we are doing, but with a much greater awareness of the 'new frontiers' and consciously seeking to weave the concerns these raise into our current Salesian practice.
2. We continue to give priority to presence among, and listening to, young people. Therefore we will investigate new ways of reaching them through the use of modern technology. The Youth Ministry Team will search out examples of good practice from which we can learn.
3. Though we have little spare capacity at present, there is great untapped potential for collaboration in the Salesian Family, with our co-workers and through generous, suitably-skilled volunteers. We must identify, support and

- work with all those who are able to help – on both a local and provincial basis.
4. There are many young people in our country from a wide variety of ethnic communities. Some seek asylum, refuge from violence, injustice and oppression, others seek employment and education. Where we can support work for young people seeking asylum (as in Liverpool) or employment (as in the Heathrow Airport project) and education let us do so in the tradition of generosity that our province has.
 5. Many young people enter further and higher education. We should explore the opportunities for apostolate in this area.