

WALKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE IN OUR DIGITAL CULTURE



SOCIAL COMMUNICATION SECTOR



1. I would like to begin this letter with a question that involves all of us: how can we continue to be communicators, faithful to Don Bosco and our charism, in a changing world? It is a question put to me by provincials, young people, communication delegates and members of the Salesian Family, concerned about how to live and pass on our charism today in the digital world, without losing their soul.

2. If Don Bosco were here today, he would be a digital explorer. He would know how to get right to the heart of the young. He would want to understand its meaning and its mechanisms, so he could follow up their wild teenage pursuits and also their potential. He would invite us to follow him without any generational detachment, but with the kind of light that only those who know how to walk close to the earth, with a gentle and accustomed step can do, and who know how to deal with essential topics at life's own pace.

Intelligently, Don Bosco understood that to communicate is to be in relationship. He lived and developed his educational system based on one central idea: young people are the reason for our existence. It is with them and for them that we communicate. In these times of great social and cultural change, the educational presence of the Salesians in the digital sphere aims precisely to educate through a direct relationship with young people, with a clear charismatic identity and fidelity.

3. We are all communicating within a virtual universe that conditions our relationships. Social media in particular are a place where people interact, share experiences and cultivate relationships as never before.

This dimension can cause us to lose sensitivity to interpersonal relationships, neglect fraternal communion in the community, or distance ourselves from the educational relationship with young people. The digital world is a great opportunity to educate and evangelise, but it always requires reflection and discernment, starting with the Gospel, to place fraternal relationship and communion always at the centre.

Journeying into the future, in tune with the Church and the Congregation

4. In pursuance of the Salesian Congregation's programme of animation and governance,



in this letter I present points for reflection and orientations regarding our Salesian presence as educators and communicators in the context of major social and cultural changes. This letter is the result, as I was saying, of a work that has involved Salesians and lay experts in communication, educators, and young professionals from the various Regions of our Congregation.

5. The aim is to tackle some of the main questions regarding the digital world, social media, Internet, artificial intelligence, but all from a Salesian educational and pastoral perspective. It is not our intention to develop an analysis of the digital context in today's world, nor is it to describe the different concepts that concern the complex and ever-changing digital world. Our intention is precisely one of adopting an approach inspired by our Salesian identity, and that allows us to comprehend better and appreciate the digital world at a personal, communal and pastoral level.

6. The Salesian Congregation, in its various areas of intervention, aims to always keep up with the times. This is an attitude that over the years has led us to the continuous search for a dialogue between faith and science, the Gospel and youth culture, the Preventive System and the digital world. As educators of young people we have certainly found ways to respond to the great transition of communication towards information technologies, the Internet and social networks. Together with the laity and educators, we seek to approach reality by listening to the new generations, accompanying adolescents in their social worlds, finding new languages and new methods to educate them to love, the meaning of life, and to responsibility, building their own personal life project, starting from the values of the Gospel and the Preventive System.

7. The Church, after the Synod on Young People, asked us to deepen our knowledge of the dynamics of the digital world: “The digital environment presents a challenge to the Church on various levels; it is essential, therefore, to deepen knowledge of its dynamics and its range of possibilities from the anthropological and ethical point of view. This requires not only entering into it and promoting its communicative potential with a view to the Christian proclamation, but also giving a Gospel flavour to its culture and its dynamics. Some initiatives along these lines are already under way and should be encouraged, deepened and shared.”¹

¹ FINAL DOCUMENT OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS ON YOUNG PEOPLE, The young, faith and vocational discernment (27 October 2018), no.145.



Recently, the Vatican Dicastery for Communication² published a text on the question of the digital world, stating that we are living through a gigantic change today, but we still need to address how we as individuals and as a Church community we can approach the digital world as “loving neighbours” who are genuinely present and attentive to each other on our common journey along the “digital highways”.

8. The digital reality belongs to our life. The Church and the Salesian Congregation are journeying together in discernment, vision and guidance of our young people, especially from an educational, critical and ethical approach to provide a concrete example.

We know that teenagers and young adults have an intense experience of digital matters. Their world is a network of images, sounds and interactivity. They are natives of a reality where real and virtual are one and where the imagination speaks a multidimensional language. For them, the Internet and social networks are places of study, research, personal and professional promotion, friendships and entertainment. There are also great challenges in this universe. The digital reflects the complex economic, political and social scenario, where poverty, violence, war, indifference to others, individualism, injustice, joblessness and the climate crisis pose a threat to the present and the future. Although young people are adept at navigating the digital world, they still seek our friendship, our listening, our support as fellow travellers and educators. We must learn, with young people, to walk alongside them.

9. We don't find any difficulty in following this path, because it is part of our roots. Don Bosco, in fact, created a real “communication ecosystem”. He created a true network. He himself was a born communicator and insisted on taking care of this important dimension of the Salesian charism, as stated in our Constitutions which establish that Social Communication is “*a significant field of activity which constitutes one of the apostolic priorities of the Salesian mission...*”³

10. Proof of this lies in the fact that Salesians around the world are active communicators through media such as radio, publishing houses, the Salesian Bulletin, magazines, films, internet, and all the other initiatives of an educational and institutional kind. For us, to communicate is not just a technical and functional matter. It is an important dimension of

² DICASTERY FOR COMMUNICATION, Towards a full presence. Pastoral reflection on involvement with social media, Vatican City, 28 May 2023.

³ C. 43



Salesian pastoral care and a style of operational intervention: “Salesian communication, therefore, has this educational side to it, and expresses it as a commitment to the cause of culture and education, as a safeguarding of Salesian cultural tradition, a response to the question of communication and the skills of educators and young people in this area, and as communication content and form. We believe that our commitment to education is ‘our most important contribution to changing the world for the coming of the Kingdom’ (GC24, 99).⁴ For us, communication is a dimension of animation, a basic element of our educative and pastoral action.

Following the path taken by the Church and the Salesian Congregation, our intention is to continue to develop criteria for analysis and produce critical considerations to strengthen project proposals in the field of social communication. We will strive along this path, always taking care to consider the different socio-cultural realities of the Provinces and Regions.

11. Today we are all communicators. For this reason, each of us has the task of exploring the issue more deeply, not only in its functional and technical aspect. It is therefore necessary to reflect on how, in a high-technology context, it is possible to continue to place the human person at the centre, fostering fraternal communion. While recognising the importance of the digital, the Church has shown its potential weaknesses, such as individualism, relativism, indifference, mental health problems and political radicalism and violence. These dangers, but also the many opportunities, require our experience and active presence so that no one is left behind.

12. We Salesians walk in step with the times, as our Father Don Bosco asked us and, as educators of young people, we cannot be afraid of what is part of their social and cultural reality. Currently, artificial intelligence, computer systems that simulate the behaviour of the human brain are gaining more and more importance. This is an epochal change that requires our discernment, in order to educate people to their critical and conscious use.

13. As the world becomes increasingly digital and virtual, we all have a responsibility to explore, with our educators, the guidelines for establishing a healthy relationship between people and technology, with a particular focus on care for creation, dignity and rights, the ethics of economics and politics. The objective is to safeguard our Common Home through

⁴ SOCIAL COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT, Salesian Social Communication System. Guidelines for the Salesian Congregation, Editrice S.D.B, Rome 2011, no. 28.



fraternity, as Pope Francis proposed in the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*⁵ and in his *Global Compact on Education*.⁶

To face the present and the future, it is crucial to develop an interdisciplinary dialogue on digital and artificial intelligence. An epistemology that involves philosophy, anthropology, ethics, psychology and studies on the digital world and artificial intelligence.

We therefore respond to the call of digital and artificial intelligence by looking for inspiration in Don Bosco. Our aim is to continue working together, to give our way of communicating quality and operational professionalism, pastorally promoting social communication.

Living and communicating in a changing world

14. Information technologies have transformed the way we think and act. They have influenced all human activities: the way we study, work, travel, shop, do research, listen to music... The digital environment is present in almost everything we do. Recently, we have observed the impact that artificial intelligence has had in, e.g. medicine, scientific research, creativity and the economy.

The great technological achievements on the one hand contribute to human, social and cultural development; on the other hand they question the person. At risk is our privacy and a reflection on the ethics of artificial intelligence and the emergence of the digital divide becomes increasingly urgent. Moreover, digital advances have catapulted the human being into a new temporal and spatial dimension, characterised by instantaneousness and interactivity. This dynamic has brought out various challenges, such as the importance of dialogue in different social and cultural contexts; psychosocial health care; ethics in the processing and transmission of news, with respect for the person and their values.

15. As educators of teenagers and young adults, we have the responsibility of helping them to a critical understanding of the digital world. Cyberspace is evolving within the political and economic system. Hence it is always necessary to connect the use of things digital with a knowledge of the contexts of reference. For example, parts of Africa, Central and South America and Asia are plagued by poverty and the digital divide. Many communities don't

⁵ *Encyclical Laudato Si'* of Pope Francis on caring for our common home, St Peter's, 24 May, 2015.

⁶ Holy Father Francis' message for the launch of the *Educational Pact*. Vatican, 12 September 2019.



have the power grid to power a computer or phone. In some countries, the State controls the content that users publish on the web and their interactions on social media.

16. Despite this, we must not be afraid of the digital world, because it remains a great opportunity to educate and evangelise, but it always requires reflection and discernment. Starting from the Gospel, it is important to put communion at the centre of any form of communication, maintaining a Salesian educative and pastoral perspective and an ethic that ensures respect for the human person and the entire community. This is essential to ensure that communication is always a means and never an end. The value of encounter will change communication, consequently the quality of our lives, making us people open to the future, to the “signs of the times”, in the conviction that faith is bringing the Gospel to young people today, and for us Salesians, an authentic calling.

Inhabiting the digital world with evangelical wisdom and a sense of beauty

17. Living in the world today implies knowing and understanding it, in order to make right choices. Starting from some points of reference which contain extensive and significant analyses, we would like to verify how, in our daily lives, we see, understand, choose, judge and act in today's world. We must evaluate whether our actions contain the “heart” of Jesus.

We all live in a time not only of great changes, but in a time that questions our way of being Christians, religious and church members. This is why we need to continually test our ability to read and interpret the world adequately and live consistently according to the proposal of Jesus.

In order to have a healthy relationship with digital world we need to put young people at the centre. Indeed, the Salesian's approach cannot be reduced to the trivial and superficial suggestion to download social apps on one's smartphone or to become an active user of Instagram or Twitch.

Rather, it is necessary to take the approach of dynamic accompaniment, which translates into “walking alongside” young people who live most of their lives with their eyes focused on the screen of their mobile phones. More necessary, as Don Bosco would say, is for them to know that they are loved!



18. The model for accompanying young people digitally is Jesus on the road to Emmaus (cf. Lk 24:13-35). A very Salesian, very youthful text!

In the dynamics of communicative accompaniment, Jesus approaches and walks together with two men to Emmaus. Along the way, an intimacy is created between the three of them that makes the heart “burn” during the conversation. This passage has always made me think about the very nature of our role as communicators.

To communicate with the other, it is not necessary to “become” the other, that is, to change one’s attitude. Everyone can remain themselves. The important thing is to acquire the attitude that leads us to know the values of those in front of us, even when they are light years away from ours. To touch them, we need to know the digital world they inhabit and frequent: to immerse ourselves, to observe, to explore, to try to understand. Through conversation, we will seek the closeness that goes straight to the heart, that breaks down barriers, that leads to mutual respect.

We believe this is the way to “propose and not impose”, as Pope Francis recommends in his message for World Communication Day.⁷ It is the educational approach to arrive at the “miracle of encounter that makes us look at each other with compassion, welcoming each other's fragility with respect.”

19. The invitation for us is to continue walking with young people in digital culture, moving through their digital habitat and walking alongside them in their time: is it a difficult challenge to enter it, to enter their way of thinking, perhaps they might not follow us, will we be clumsy or inadequate? So fragile, so variable, our way is love, the fact of being beside them. This is our place. Because by walking together, with the Salesian kindness and joy that we learnt from Don Bosco, we will be able to create trust and bonds, and, in this way, dialogue. To practise the great art of communication: listening in order to interpret. To walk with them in the search for truth and in the experience of beauty.

Personal and community responsibility. Here we are!

20. Inhabiting the digital world affects the way we express ideas, create our communication policy, share information, express ourselves, see the world and the realities in which we live.

⁷ Pope Francis' message for the 57th World Day of Social Communications Speaking from the heart. “According to the truth in charity” (Eph 4:15), Rome St John Lateran, 24 January 2023, memorial of St Francis de Sales.



This requires great responsibility, so that one can always communicate without dominating, relate without controlling people, express oneself without the temptation of worldly power. We are also faced with challenges such as individualism and relativism. Malaises that take on the traits of self-referentiality, indifference, lack of respect for nature, and including various forms of violence. Sometimes then, even unconsciously, digital communication prompts and leads to situations of personal and group conflict, even to forms of radicalism. This can lead to a digital identity crisis. A kind of Plato's "cave myth" in a contemporary version. Instead of seeing the shadows on the wall of a life happening elsewhere, the prisoner is forced not only to observe himself, but also to see others showing themselves on social media. Something that can transform us profoundly.

21. In line with the Salesian charism, our role is to "equip" young people to face the "cave" represented by current events. Obviously, it is not in any way desirable to make misfits out of them, to try to drive them away from social media or to terrorise them. Rather, we must help to train them in responsible freedom, providing them with the tools so that they are aware of the opportunities, risks and opacity of the algorithms that manage the workings of the Internet; free to live their emotions to the full outside social media; free from the unwritten rules that can be overwhelming, if one does not know IT and the sociological strategies that generate them.

It is true that young people are much better than us at creating a reel or airing a live broadcast. But it is equally true that, at times, they have difficulty reading and interpreting all that lies behind the digital world: the business dynamics that animate the social worlds and the relationships that populate them. And this is where we come into play with our Salesian culture. We must inform, support and often even console them. We must try to be reliable and trusted partners for them, who motivate them to share difficulties and frustrations. It is up to us to bring them out of the drama of isolation, which leads them to think that no one is willing to understand them and that everyone is there to judge them instead. We need to communicate to them that a problem, if shared, is lighter, maybe even solvable and definitely addressable. And that we are there for them. Here we are!

We communicate as a great movement in the world

22. Don Bosco, our father, was a born communicator and put communication at the service of education and evangelisation. Following this path, we move today as Salesian Family, in



a vast movement of people guided by the same pastoral and apostolic energy. In our homes, schools, social works, universities and parishes, we can count on extensive and very varied media material which expresses our creativity and culture in all the Regions of the Salesian Congregation.

23. Fr Egidio Viganò, writing to the Salesian Family, observed how communication is a cultural phenomenon, which has young people at its centre: “Now we are well aware that our Salesian mission is closely linked with cultural matters: the whole of our evangelizing activity lives and develops within the ambit of culture.”⁸

24. Consistent with what Fr Egidio Viganò wrote, Fr Juan Vecchi⁹ F. Felt the urgency to incorporate communication into the Salesian mission. He emphasised the importance of designing our educational project, in which communication plays a fundamental role in formation, in the organisation of pastoral work, but also in project mentality.

25. Furthermore, Fr Pascual Chávez¹⁰ encouraged Salesians to educate and evangelise “with the courage of Don Bosco on the new frontiers of social communication.” Fr Chávez added that it is not enough to use communication technologies, but that a “cultural conversion” must be implemented, giving priority to the formation of Salesians and ensuring an organisational and institutional response, so that the Salesian educator and pastor is a communicator for young people, in a constantly changing world.

26. In the Rector Major’s Guidelines following GC 28,¹¹ Fr Ángel Fernández Artime called for a commitment “in offering resources and stimuli for a constant process of verification, updating, inculturation of the Salesian mission in the digital habitat.” Starting from the Salesian educative and pastoral perspective, the Tenth Successor of Don

⁸ VIGANÒ Egidio, *The Challenge of the Media*, in: Acts of the General Council 62 (1981) 302, pp. 3-30.

⁹ VECCHI Juan Edmundo, *Communication in the Salesian mission. “They were astonished beyond measure! He even makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak”*, in: Acts of the General Council 81 (2000) 370, pp. 3-44.

¹⁰ CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA Pascual, *With the courage of Don Bosco on the new frontiers of social communication*, in: Acts of the General Council 86 (2005) 390, pp. 3-46.

¹¹ GENERAL CHAPTER 28, *The Rector Major’s Action Programme for the Salesian Congregation after GC28, Guideline n. 3 – Living the “Salesian sacrament” of presence*, in: Acts of the General Council 102 (2020) 433, pp. 25-29.



Bosco¹² quotes Pope Francis who, in his message to General Chapter GC 28, spoke of the “Valdocco option” and the Salesian charism at the service of the young. The Pope writes that “the Salesian is a living reminder of a presence in which availability, listening, joy and dedication are the essential features which give rise to processes.” Francis adds that “The gratuitousness of presence saves the Congregation from any activist obsession and from any kind of technical and functional reductionism.”

27. Historically, some General Chapters have reflected on the importance of communication and how this activity is part of the DNA of the Salesians. For example, in GC 24,¹³ dealing with the guidelines of Social Communication, the chapter members emphasised that evangelising by educating and educating by evangelising summarises Salesian activity, including in the area of communication. Spiritual sons of Don Bosco and St Francis de Sales, we feel this activity to be in perfect harmony with the choices made by our founder and our patron. It is therefore up to each member of our Family to be open to this new reality. For this reason, it is necessary to invest in the formation of Salesians and lay people, to continue the dialogue between the Gospel and youth culture.

Don Bosco, our example of a communicator

28. I would like to introduce Don Bosco as a communicator starting from an episode in his life. One of his biographers describes Don Bosco's communicative vitality: “He walked on the rope as if he were on a path; he jumped on it, danced on it, hung on it now with one foot now with both, now with both hands and now with only one. To those who applauded him, the future Saint John Bosco responded by talking about God.”¹⁴

Walking in a balanced way, looking ahead with confidence is a great gesture of trust and courage, but it is also a revolutionary act of communication. And that was Don Bosco, the first and among the greatest communicators of his time. When we talk about communication in the Salesian Congregation, it is always important to remember where we come from. Don Bosco is our first teacher and model. In his time he was intuitive and pragmatic, inno-

¹² Ibid., *The Rector Major's Action Programme for the Salesian Congregation after GC28*, op. cit., p. 24.

¹³ GENERAL CHAPTER 24. Salesians and lay people: communion and sharing in the spirit and mission of Don Bosco. (1996), pp. 130-132.

¹⁴ LEMOYNE Giovanni Battista, *Vita di San Giovanni Bosco*, new edition ed. Angelo AMADEI, vol. 1, SEI, Torino 1983, p. 50.



vative and enterprising, visionary and unconventional. His idea was to create a real communication ecosystem, starting from the production of texts, up to the creation of printing and distribution centres. In his *Circular on spreading good books*, our Founder places communication at the foundation of Salesian values and, consequently, at the basis of formation and catechesis, for the construction of the good Christian and the upright citizen.

Don Bosco began his life as a communicator as an adolescent. He developed his artistic skills, through music and play. A young man in search of new languages, to create human relationships and talk about God. As a writer, he dealt with a wide variety of topics: from the almanac of agriculture to the metric system, from Church history to the Life of Dominic Savio. Don Bosco was a complete communicator: he knew how to write scientific texts, tell stories, evoke dreams, create theatrical texts, integrate music with theatre, form bands.

His vision of communication as a “single entity” that combines various experiences was brilliant. He did not “merely” build a church, but gave rise to a new Salesian work, created a printing house and a means of communication such as the Salesian Bulletin. His strength lay in his originality. A characteristic that was accompanied by the ability to create a network of relationships, motivate people to collaborate in his projects, involve young people in professional learning, create affective relationships, promote the active role of young people and open them to a rich and joyful spiritual life.

29. Today, 135 years after his death, it is our turn to continue walking the tightrope he walked. A rope that crosses the era of social and cultural transformation that we are experiencing. We are called to be communicators with young people, and young people in the world of the Internet, e-sports and artificial intelligence. We live immersed in the digital world, in a network of friends, of young people, of people with whom we stay and work, but also of stresses, distractions and threats. It is, at the same time, a privilege, an opportunity and a great challenge. Communicating based on the Salesian charism, so as not to become invisible in society

30. Communicating today means rereading the Salesian charism, putting on contemporary spectacles and making a clear decision to follow a path of ongoing formation. The updating of each of us and of the communities represents a commitment that expresses our spirituality and our fidelity to the Salesian charism. The goal is to know the values of the world in which we live from an evangelical perspective. We don't always like them and we don't always share them. But we must know them, if we want to maintain an open dialogue with our young



people. Otherwise we risk isolating ourselves and becoming invisible in society. As the Frame of Reference for Youth Ministry indicates, pastoral action starts from the “situation of young people” and takes into account all the implications of their context.¹⁵ The communication challenge is a fundamental part of the world of youth, culture and society.

In the light of Don Bosco’s *Preventive System*, we are called to be educators through communication. Our commitment must grow through our involvement in the Educative and Pastoral Community (EPC). Our sharing Salesian spirituality and pedagogy with the laity allows us to set out into the future while remaining faithful to the charism, without losing the energy that distinguishes us.

31. In a world of great social, cultural and religious changes, it is very important to be open to listening, dialogue and discernment. The goal is to establish a religious comparison with the people in our area, maintaining the ability that enables us to bring the Gospel to a constantly changing world. This means not only keeping up with the pace and rhythm of technology, but also communicating from the core of our Salesian charism and mission. This entails an expansion of the vision of communication, which must always be at the service of the charism, consistent with the Salesian mission of youth ministry and in synergy with other Sectors, such as Formation, Missions, Economy. In this task, the EPC has a great responsibility to work together, harmoniously and with a planning mentality, in a process of operational and organisational shared responsibility.

Starting from the “Salesian sacrament” of presence

32. The Rector Major, Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, in his Guidelines following GC28, presents some original and interesting content in no. 3: “Living the ‘Salesian sacrament’ of presence”.¹⁶ In this reflection, the issue of communication is deeply united with that of the Salesian charism and mission. To communicate is to live our consecration to the young in the educational style of Don Bosco and to incarnate among them the presence of the “good shepherd communicator”. Today there is a big change in what we understand as “presence”, which is physical, but also, virtual. A presence where there is a continuity between the offline and online world: it is there that we must guarantee the Salesian presence.

¹⁵ DEPARTMENT FOR SALESIAN YOUTH MINISTRY, *The Salesian Youth Ministry Frame of Reference* Tipografía Grafisur S.L., pp. 21-36.

¹⁶ GENERAL CHAPTER 28, *The Rector Major’s Action Programme for the Salesian Congregation after GC28*, pp. 25-29.



Living the sacrament of communicative presence means giving value to our choice, which is to be Salesians for the young. Moreover, evangelising digitally does not only mean creating a network of contacts or sharing information. Our task is to show that the authenticity and novelty of our communication are the fruit of our fidelity to our religious consecration, our witness of life and our capacity for dialogue; the result of the meeting of closeness, welcome and trust, established in human and institutional relations.

Today, communicating means offering a testimony, sharing experiences, serving others. It also means valuing initiatives oriented towards art, voluntary work, charity. For this reason, communicating starting from the “Salesian sacrament” of presence translates into trying to express clearly and visibly that our mission is to educate the poorest young people. We are a movement of people united around this mission enlightened by the Gospel, a fundamental starting point for living communication as fraternal communion and service in solidarity.

Communication and fraternal communion

33. God creates a dialogue with man. He does not impose himself: he proposes himself. He seeks first of all the assent of his creature. Communication is a simple and fundamental reality: it is the relationship between man and God, between person and person, between persons and groups and of these among themselves. It consists of listening, receiving, welcoming and, subsequently, giving, transmitting and giving at various levels: personal, family, community, social and religious.

How can we build fraternal communion in our communities and in our relationship with young people? Today, there is sometimes a lack of communication that puts interpersonal and community relations at the centre. Young people often feel immersed in a world of worthless connections. Even in religious life there is the risk of a loss of the sense of the other, of the ability to live moments of gratuitousness, sharing and celebration.

In the document *Fraternal Life in Community*¹⁷ of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, we read an important text dedicated to communication: “In the renewal of recent years, communication has been recognised as one of the human factors acquiring increased importance for the life of a religious community. The

¹⁷ CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTE OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE *Fraternal life in community*. “*Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor*”, Rome, 2 February 1994.



deeply felt need to enhance fraternal life in community is accompanied by a corresponding need for communication which is both fuller and more intense.”¹⁸

Undoubtedly, communication is the lifeblood of the community. Without it there is no unity of hearts and projects and everything is reduced to a group of people who live physically or virtually together, but who are spiritually distant. Interpersonal relationship consists, first of all, in fraternal communion, in taking care of each other, in the awareness that fraternity is realised by communicating and building God's plan together. The future of Christian life and religious life is played out in fraternal community.

34. St Paul, one of the greatest communicators in history, in the Epistle to the Ephesians brings out a way of communicating according to the truth in charity (Eph 4:15). This means desiring each other's growth, allowing everyone the freedom to be themselves, accepting their gifts and defeats, but always believing and acting with sincerity and honesty. Of course, fidelity in charity requires strong and clear convictions, including the duty to intervene between brothers and sisters on a personal and community level at the right time and for the common good, without attempting to placate the other or convince him or her of one's own point of view.

What is the gift of gifts? In Christian communication, the greatest gift is not made of things, but of ourselves. Then even the most humble and simple person has something to give and communicate. It is our young people, on the path with us, who teach us and at the same time learn that communication is a “thing of the heart”.

Mary, an example of a communicator for the digital world

35. Let us conclude with a brief reference to Mary. The Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus and of the Church and our Helper, is an important reference point for communication in the digital world. A look at her attitude, starting from biblical quotations, reveals its wisdom and greatness so much so that it can be defined as the "Mother of Communication".

Mary is the communicator of God's grace, from her unconditional and loving “yes” addressed to the One who chose her as his chosen one (Lk 1:38). Mary announces to Elizabeth that she has been chosen to be the mother of Jesus, the Saviour (Lk 1:39 -44). The interpersonal relationship between them is an encounter between two women deeply involved in God's love.

¹⁸ Ibid, n. 29.



An exchange between sisters, a communication made of mutual attention and care.

In Cana, in Galilee, Mary is the communicator of human relationships, empathy, sensitivity and openness. She interprets the situation with faith, stepping out of herself and projecting herself towards others: 'Meanwhile, when the wine ran out, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine" (Jn 2:3). She values the group, knowing how to live in community, participating in its rituals and joining in the joy of the guests. Her communication with Jesus and the guests at the party is characterised by a loving, active, firm and creative authority: "His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you'." (Jn 2:5). Mary takes the initiative, takes the first step, dialogues, questions, listens and acts to find a solution to the lack of wine. A communicator and great guide, she shows a specific sensitivity for others and an immediate active attitude, a magnificent example of fraternal closeness.

In the Upper Room we see her silently present among the disciples of Jesus. In the Acts of the Apostles (1:14), Luke mentions the humble presence of Mary when they receive the Holy Spirit. She is a woman of communion, of integration in the community; she fits among the disciples as a Woman and as the Mother of Jesus. She interacts, listens, prays, accompanies, participates in the community that is being born. While still the Mother of God, she does not place herself above the disciples. She communicates with her friendly and humble presence, with her deep sense of community.

At the foot of the cross (Jn 19:25-27), she is the communicator of faith in God's plan for each of us. Faithful to the love that is given beyond all human logic, she teaches us to communicate God's redemption in human history and to share the hope that will never pass away, because it has its source in the risen Christ.

Mary is the communicator who knows how to walk with young people! Let us be inspired by the great trust and devotion that our Father Don Bosco had for the Virgin Mary Help of Christians, and let us entrust to her our mission as Salesian communicators wherever we are.

In a changing world, May Mary be the star that guides us and always enlightens us.

Gildàsio M. dos Santos SDB
General Councilor for Social Communication

Valdocco, 24 July 2023