



CONCLUSION AND CLOSING REMARKS

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Dear Congress participants:

It is very difficult to summarize everything that happened in 5 days, an event filled with intense work, participation and a lot of Salesian heart. Nevertheless, I would like to give you a simple summary. We are consoled by the certainty that the end of the Congress is only the beginning of a long-term challenge and commitments in reality itself.

I would like to draw these conclusions in three points: first, some EVIDENCE that we have seen; then, a series of CONVICTIONS with which we have built the Congress; finally, some PROPOSALS for the FUTURE.

EVIDENCE: A SALESIAN OUTLOOK ON THE WORLD (OF YOUNG PEOPLE)

[1] Ongoing social processes, especially **socioeconomic globalization** and **cultural globalization**, are not only changing living conditions and ways of being in the world, but also ways of thinking about it and, above all, living it. The metaphor of navigating in uncertain conditions and without a clear direction illustrates the transformation of ways of thinking in the face of complexity and uncertainty.

[2] Service in favour of the least is highlighted as a **congregational priority**: such a preferential option shapes our vocation and gives meaning to our Salesian mission. It is not 'charismatic archaeology'. For this reason, it is a programmatic line of the General Chapters of the Congregation and has therefore acquired significant importance in all the provinces. For this reason, *the responses of our provinces have been adapted to this new scenario*, adopting different formulations in order to respond to the most needy young people in the midst of an accelerated transformation of societies. We recognize the great diversity of services and entities in terms of their size, field of action, geographical and territorial location, purposes, working methods or organizational culture.

At times in an expected and planned manner, at other times in a more intuitive and spontaneous way, educative-pastoral proposals have taken shape in this sector with creative and realistic changes: a gradual integration of competent lay people, improvements in organizational management, the professionalization of the entities themselves, a change in relations with the Public Administration, more comprehensive interventions or a greater emphasis on the response at a local level.



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In the case of some initiatives and social services, there is a weakness arising from the lack of **adequate integration in the Salesian Work and the province**, strengthened either by the physical distance in which they are located, or by the failure to incorporate them into the organic ministry.

[3] The coincidence that occurs, from different realities and without previous agreements, when we ask ourselves the same questions and share the need to give them new and creative answers is very encouraging and motivating. We note how, in the light of questions and in the search for innovative paths, **some nations and/or regions have created coordination mechanisms**.

[4] **We have an extraordinary treasure**, we are «experts» in envisioning *pastoral charity* for young people, which in turn is a «pedagogical charity» with very original and striking characteristics. We are bearers of something remarkable that we must be able to value, in which we must believe and from which we must live. And that treasure is Don Bosco, the Salesian charism, the dream of an education capable of changing the heart of every child and young person because it has changed ours first.

[5] We have discovered that we have **an identity that unites us but does not make us identical**. We are different, we respond to different situations, we try to give the best of ourselves to the children and young people we have before us, and for this reason we give appropriate and effective responses in each culture. But our educative-pastoral approach is recognized in all of them.

How can we help to build this great dream? The fight against exclusion will only be successful if we agree on some **CONVICTIONS** and **PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE**, thus connecting the guiding principles and operational actions. In both cases, they are specific enough to transcend the world of ideas and general enough to allow us to act flexibly in each context.

CONVICTIONS: TO WIN BATTLES, FOLLOW DREAMS AND EDUCATE PEOPLE

From the snare of 'withdrawal'
to the mobilization towards unknown territories

[1] There are situations of vulnerability which are hidden and insignificant (not emphasised), not portrayed, that plunge into anonymity and lead so many people to the dark corners of exclusion. We have meditated on the widow from Nain (Lk 7:11-17), with her only child, who was everything to her. Two lives in a single coffin, hers and her son's. Even today there are so many similar stories, *so many families where death is the order of the day*. Jesus feels sadness because of the woman's pain. He sees her crying and is moved; he doesn't continue, but stops, and says calmly: Woman, don't cry. But he is not content with wiping away her tears. Jesus consoles by liberating.

We, Salesians of Don Bosco, have not lost the *ability to let ourselves be moved by the Spirit*, in order to develop an action similar to that of Jesus: truly inclusive, human and transcendent.



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[2] We realize that today it is necessary to interact with the contextual situations of people, realities which cannot all be found within our institution, centres and services. *It has become necessary to go out into the streets to look for stories, to spread hope.* There is only one way to get to know a person, a country or a suffering: by stopping, kneeling and looking closely. Looking at others in the face, in their eyes, in their voice. When you stop because of someone you have already done a great deal for the history of the world.

Being a “Church which goes forth” (Pope Francis) requires time and effort, it implies being creative and, at the same time, *learning with others and learning from others* the pioneering initiatives carried out by other realities inside the Congregation or outside of it. Moving around together to the new peripheries as an institution implies generating complicity, mutual support, motivation, and greater security to innovate and transform local practices.

From fragmentation **to networks and interdependence**

[3] In a world interconnected by interests and problems, we need to create bridges and *alliances at a local, provincial and regional level.* This type of cooperation at the operational level remains a challenge in some cases. It basically encounters various obstacles such as the differentiation of vulnerable groups, resistance to change, the diversity of interests or the lack of adaptability and flexibility.

We are convinced that the *exercise of interdependence* consists in seeing social reality as a set of connections, in which institutions and people (social agents, ecclesial institutions, social services, public administrations and international associations) are involved in connection and common solutions. Creating networks means that it is possible to articulate the presence of all these elements without hindering or overlapping them, but rather complementing and enriching each other.

Furthermore, when the concrete actions of people come into communication, they generate a new reality, which cannot be reduced to the action of each party.

[4] On which axis can this interdependence of sharing be built? The interdependence of our Salesian institutions with other organizations can be built on fear or solidarity, on the conflict of ideas or on the central role of each young person. Clearly, we are reluctant to believe that *fear or conflict are the bonds needed to create a more humane society.*

[5] Due to the fact that our Works and our services are an organization, we must also and above all suppose that they are an *expression of the Christian community of the Church*, which places us in a position of healthy tension that we must know how to handle. Consequently, our mission is to recreate social bonds and take steps towards public policies with the contribution of our Christian and Salesian identity.



*From the functional relationship
to the approach of Salesian care*

[6] We know from experience that from closeness and daily life, the Salesian educator is *committed to caring for people, as a vocation and as a destiny*. Don Bosco's educational charism is based on empathy, on relationships with others. There are Salesian works and social services that take care of life, especially the most threatened one (exclusion); they take care of fragility, especially the most vulnerable (health); they take care of the earth, especially the one damaged by human abuse (ecology); they take care of a single world (cooperation).

[7] Our direct knowledge of reality reminds us that *solidarity is a school where you keep your eyes open*, look behind and further ahead. Opening your eyes and letting yourself be looked at by the poor children and young people of Turin is the advice Don Cafasso gave to Don Bosco: *"I was horrified to see the number of boys (in prison), from twelve to eighteen years old, healthy, robust and intelligent, who stood there idle, gnawed by insects and totally deprived of material and spiritual nourishment"*. Our conscience is awakened by our gaze, especially when we see the unpleasant face of poverty and the exclusion of the poorest among the poor, who have ceased to hope and often even to desire. This is the picture that was revealed to Don Bosco at the beginning of his apostolate as an educator of the young.

Even today the authenticity of the Salesian gaze in all our Salesian presences is an exercise of closeness and presence; we are seduced by the human face of so many young people and we are forced to commit ourselves by the weight of reality.

[8] With regard to educators, we share the words of Pope Benedict XVI: "Professional competence is a primary, fundamental requirement, it is not of itself sufficient (...) They need humanity. They need heartfelt concern. Those who work for the Church's charitable organizations must be distinguished by the fact that they do not merely meet the needs of the moment, but they dedicate themselves to others with heartfelt concern, enabling them to experience the richness of their humanity. Consequently, in addition to their necessary professional training, these charity workers need a '*formation of the heart*' (*Deus Caritas Est*, 31.a).

Salesian loving kindness is an emergency brake and a dam against oblivion, abstraction, anonymity and generalization. It is a word that revolves around the potential of tenderness, human capabilities and the strengthening of the individual. Our young people, like all living beings, need oxygen, water and food; but as human beings they need recognition and affection, which is a right and a duty of daily life.

[9] The dimension of care and loving attention is fundamental for the *social reconstruction* of our neighbourhoods, towns and cities. The perspective of care concerns justice and the humanization of relationships. It is transversal and crucial. And in place of "care" we can put a thousand words: welcome, trust, recognition, authenticity, hope, empathy ... and many other terms.



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From aspirations to human rights (dignity)

[10] *The name of dignity in today's conscience is called human rights; its denial is the highest level of humiliation. The commitment to solidarity engages the recognition of dignity with the universality of civil, political and social rights.*

When we speak of the recognition of dignity, we do so, almost unconsciously, in terms of "giving", or "giving back" something to those who, due to historical or other circumstances, are deprived or robbed of it; we never or almost never consider the possibility of actively assuming it on the part of the deprived themselves: *we talk about them, but without them.*

This approach obliges us to recreate the relationship of help, going beyond the care model and mere charity according to which some give, and others receive, some know, and others are ignorant, some make history and others suffer, some are saved, and others are buried. We must realize that behind every group there are people who hold values and the ability to reason, love, choose, participate and act. *Each young person is the subject of his or her own development process.* Let us listen and give a voice to our young people!

[11] We are aware of how many things we have forgotten in the name of progress and economic growth. This is why it is essential to harmonize *human rights, the Preventive System and our models of social intervention* within this culture of the recognition of dignity. In Salesian terms, this is addressed starting from Salesian pedagogical charity, that is, with unconditional educational love, that energy which pervades every Salesian relationship and every person; it allows beings to exist and live for each other, in each other and for each other. No one is foreign to this inclusive relationship.

It is unconditional love that gives rise to the inclusive relationship which is therefore divine: only God loves unconditionally and without presuppositions even what has no value, what may be repulsive and does not even have a human face.

[12] Don Bosco's social pedagogy was aimed directly at improving a situation in which young people were losing their dignity: the coexistence between artisans and students, the resulting social harmony and the original initiatives submitted remind us that one of the pillars of his "social system" was the *world of work*. Don Bosco was concerned with the immediate interests of the young, their future, their profession, their future responsibilities. Connected to this is the importance he gave to *relationships with social institutions*, from the small communities in which the saint lived to organizations dedicated to a public service.

[13] On the other hand, we must redefine the dreams of many people who live, today more than ever, *in a state of human mobility (migrants, refugees, the displaced)*. Undertaking a migration project inevitably involves challenges, often unpredictable, especially for the person affected, but also for the host society. When this process occurs also during adolescence, which is



characterized by uncertainties, doubts about the future and difficulties in giving priority to goals, its impact increases exponentially.

From politics
to integral human development and denunciation

[14] The first victory of solidarity is in the field of words. We don't need violent actions; *our actions are part of the dynamics of reason and justice. Development cooperation and political advocacy* give visibility to those existences that have become invisible and disguised in the social geography.

It is the denunciation of cover-ups (the most dangerous form of lies!), of concealing unjust structural realities, of shifting to the future what is denied today, of denying personal and collective responsibility. *We have to be critical to be constructive* and voice problems to address them without harming people.

[15] We move within the parameters of the Social Doctrine of the Church, whose mission is the *concrete enlightenment of man starting from the Gospel*, an attempt to constantly and repeatedly apply the message of Jesus Christ to changing social realities.

As Salesians we assume the values and attitudes promoted by this "Christian social thought" or "social teaching of the Church" as a historical response to social, cultural, economic and political problems; with the aim of promoting the transformation of reality into a more just, supportive and fraternal society, through respect for the dignity of the human person, for human rights and duties and for the rights of peoples.

[16] In the same way, we also accompany a heterogeneous space of crossroads of people, such as *interculturality*, where conflicts accompany relationships and condition coexistence and peace. We must live in the *working-class environments* in which we work, using all possible channels of participation and expression. We are also committed to the *equality of women and the accompaniment of families and indigenous peoples*.

From the linearity of the paths
to the spiral of individualized processes

[17] Let us take the path of the *absolute centrality of the person, from his inalienable dignity as a child of God and our brother*. A person constitutes and is constituted by the social fact, to which he belongs, and which belongs to him entirely. A person lives in a territory where his personality develops, and which is much more than a piece of land.

Every child, young person or adult who enjoys the dignity and beauty of being a child of God hungers for values, clarity, hope, faith, freedom, dignity, peace, infinity and eternity. He is loved forever, with an infinite and at the same time personal love.



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For this reason, our action wants to be a "sacrament" in itself of God's action. *We have the task of demanding love as a word and as an attitude* with regard to the poorest and most socially excluded children and young people: children under guardianship, young offenders in conflict with the law, young people with functional or psychological diversity, young people without support for emancipation, street children who are victims of gender violence, addictions, family abandonment or abuse.

[18] The "*spiral*" model means that each person is never in a fixed phase of growth, but in all of them at the same time and to a different extent. The person is not in one exclusive stage, but in several steps and in each of them to a different extent. Consequently, this dynamic obliges us to understand our work essentially as an *accompaniment to holistic development processes*.

We address young people with their personal names and biographies, with experiences and life paths that are therefore unique and personal. They are the ones who call us and invite us to share their pain with the intention of addressing its causes; they invite us to support their dreams and their illusions, in the search for accomplices who may intervene in this process. They designate us as their companions to guide and interpret the difficulties that this goal brings them.

[19] Our challenge is twofold: to focus on *people's potential and not on their problems*. Instead of shortcomings, we must focus on development factors, possibilities, opportunities and aspirations. It is a new way of seeing, recognizing and relating to people. On the other hand, we consider the person as an *integral system* in which it is not possible to act harmlessly towards the rest of the parts that make up this global being.

Salesian education is global and inclusive, an intervention model that promotes the empowerment of people in situations or at risk of exclusion, so that they may express themselves freely, defend their rights and guarantee their integral human development. And this all takes place within the Preventive System, created to restore a climate of total and integral familiarity to young people. A positive pedagogical atmosphere, interwoven with educational relationships.

[20] We must give our educators the awareness that all *dimensions of the person are important, including the inner one*. It is necessary to define or delimit the concept of spirituality from a transversal and integrative perspective of various religious traditions or personal beliefs. It is necessary to provide professional tools that make it possible to adequately meet the spiritual needs that emerge during the accompaniment: the capacity for silence, amazement and admiration, contemplation and discernment, depth, transcendence, awareness of the sacred and virtuous behaviours such as forgiveness, gratitude, humility and compassion are elements of what we call spiritual intelligence. This is a very Salesian perspective for taking care of our young people in a global way, including all their needs, even spiritual ones.



*From the paradigm of efficiency
to the responsibility approach*

[21] We also believe that it is necessary and urgent to promote the integral formation of educational agents in order to make life more human. Today no one doubts that *ethics is a central element in the exercise of any profession*, especially in those that concern accompanying people. Ethics is always present in every moment of the activity: in the rigour of the diagnoses or actions, in the relationship with the people assisted or in the use of power that derives from the professional role.

Salesian good practice, professionalism and kindness are the combination of knowledge and respectful treatment of the people we serve and the commitment to taking on responsibilities and building welcoming human environments.

[22] *We believe in the ethics of common achievements around a project: giving substance to one's dreams, to profound desires, starting from the reality and the foundations to be guaranteed; translating them into objectives and strategies, in a permanent reflection, with a very active heart, mind and hands. All this translates into the Salesian Educative-Pastoral Plan (SEPP).*

It is a question of *building an ideal reference shared* by all the people involved in the form of principles and values that must guide educational and pastoral activity. Hence, our programming activity is a way of thinking about action that incorporates attention to the disruptions that will (surely) occur in order to seek to overcome them and, better yet, to exploit them in the direction we want. In this sense, *creativity and innovation are essential components, as opposed to routine and improvisation.*

[23] For nearly two decades now, innovation has often been cited as a key driver of change and social transformation. *Social innovation* refers to the development and implementation of new areas to incubate innovative ideas, mutual learning and the transfer of knowledge and experience, in order to be able to provide answers to various (new or existing) social needs. All this requires a "navigation chart", a project.

But it is also essential to *measure the social impact, that is*, to determine whether the implemented SEPP has produced the desired effects on people, environments and institutions and if these effects can be attributed to this project. We must contrast the expected goal with the actual results, in order to disseminate them and have an in-depth view of the points to be improved.

Although we are aware that we are still a long way from disclosing impact measurement in the sector, we must strive to further this debate in our encounters and to make known and learn from the existing experience in this field.



PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE

At the local level:

- 1.- To strengthen the capacity of *local entities to create a local network, taking care of political advocacy in their context*; in addition, to expand cooperation with platforms, round tables, networks and movements for social participation and demand and civic solidarity initiatives.
- 2.- To periodically promote, in each educative-pastoral community and within each religious community, an *analysis and reflection* of our environment in order to decipher the current needs and identify the ones that should be addressed as a priority, especially those of the most needy young people.
- 3.- To assume as a criterion for vocational discernment in *Salesian houses of initial formation*, that the young confreres take up the option for priority faces and the poorest young people, as an expression of their Salesian vocation and as a clear priority in the mission.
- 4.- To cultivate and accompany the *spiritual intelligence* of young people in Works and social services, as the ability to look with the eyes of the heart, to humanize (which does not claim to be anything else than the desire to evangelize everything that has to do with life, especially when it is vulnerable and requires the help and solidarity of others), cultivating the most truly human values and becoming aware of the ways of accessing the transcendent dimension.
- 5.- *To optimize the digital dimension*, by adapting the technology of our organizations, thus overcoming the lack of synergies between the social and digital sectors: this is an important aspect today for the transformative action of social intervention that Salesians are called to carry out in people's lives and in society itself.
- 6.- To also rethink a *multidisciplinary and charismatic formation of educators that generates changes* from the key of being, because it is not just a question of "educating others", but of educating all of us.
- 7.- To obtain a *greater diversification of funding sources* to achieve independence and autonomy and a stronger commitment to *sustainability*, in order to carry out long-term activities.

At the provincial/national level:

- 8.- To strengthen the *internal provincial and/or national communication networks* as a means of expanding knowledge-experience and integrating similar or complementary actions. In this way, a greater impact is achieved on the reality of children and young people.
- 9.- To encourage our programs to *create networks with other external agents*, interacting proactively with transnational entities and platforms, with its own discourse based on our contribution to the Preventive System.
- 10.- To propose, at the provincial and/or national level, in collaboration with other institutions, concrete responses aimed at *political influence and institutional and social regeneration* (advocacy).
- 11.- To regularly plan the *needs, training and support of volunteers* and intensify updating activities regarding Salesian quality, identity and style.



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12.- To promote the study of diploma courses, higher education and social integration in order to *be pioneers in these fields*: to be specialists in dealing with and taking action on associated problems such as drug addiction, violence, school failure, family planning, etc.

13.- To address *human mobility* (migrants, refugees, the displaced) through the four verbs promoted by Pope Francis at the International Forum on Migration and Peace in February 2017: "welcome, protect, promote and integrate".

14.- To strengthen and promote in the provinces processes of implementation and updating of *professional training* and training/accompaniment in the *processes of social and work inclusion*.

15.- To incorporate planning, evaluation and organisation in our working guidelines in the Works and in social services through the *Salesian Provincial Educative-Pastoral Plan*, thus generating ideas related to solutions and opportunities for change, combining various possibilities, support, time and resources.

16.- To evaluate the decisions of *reorganization and significance of the provinces* from the point of view of the most needy children and young people in the area, adapting human resources to the new demands and needs against discrimination and exclusion.

At the Regional/Congregational level:

17.- To establish a *dialogue and reach agreements at the regional level*, organising the value of meeting spaces and the exchange of initiatives and strategies that ensure the full attention and the prevention of situations of social vulnerability.

18.- To generate *systems and tools for measuring the social impact* of social sector activities through shared tools.

19.- To develop the *map of local and provincial Works and social services* to gain social visibility and become a point of reference in issues concerning rights, inequalities, social policies or sustainable development.

20.- To establish, at the Congregational level, *an agenda of themes on which to support* and arbitrate participation mechanisms, building messages that are comprehensible and solidly based on knowledge and experience.