



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE SALESIAN INSTITUTE
OF DON BOSCO**

Dear Sons of Don Bosco,

1. I greet you warmly, as you come together from the five continents for the celebration of the 25th General Chapter of your Institute. It is the first one in the third millennium and gives you an opportunity to reflect on the challenges of the education and evangelization of young people, challenges that Salesians want to take up by following in the footsteps of their founder, St John Bosco. I hope you will find the Chapter a time of communion and useful work, of sharing in the spirit that unites you in your mission to youth, in your love for the Church and in your desire to be open to new apostolic frontiers.

At this time I naturally recall the late Major Rector, Fr Juan Vecchi, who died recently after a long illness, offered up to God for the whole Congregation and especially for this Chapter. As I thank the Lord for his service to your religious family and to the Church, and for the witness of evangelical fidelity that always distinguished him, I assure you that I will pray for the happy repose of his soul. It is now up to you to pursue the work that he carried out so successfully, following in the footsteps of his predecessors.

As attentive teachers and competent spiritual guides, you will be able to meet the needs of young people who long to "see Jesus". You will be able to lead them gently but firmly towards the high goals of Christian fidelity. "*Duc in altum!*". May you adopt this dynamic motto for your Congregation and may the present chapter assembly motivate all the members to give a courageous fresh start to their own evangelizing activity.

2. You have chosen as the theme of the chapter: "*The Salesian community today*". You are well aware that you must renew your methods and manner of working, so that your "Salesian" identity may clearly emerge in today's different social situations that require openness to the contribution

of lay collaborators with whom you share the spirit and charism that Don Bosco left to you as his legacy. Your experience in recent years has enlightened you on the great opportunities for this collaboration, that will enable the various members and groups of the Salesian family to grow in communion and to develop a common apostolic and missionary spirit. To open yourselves to cooperation with lay people it is important that you bring into focus the special identity of your communities: may they be communities as Don Bosco wanted them, gathered around the Eucharist and motivated by deep love for Blessed Mary, ready to work together, sharing a single educational and pastoral plan; communities that can motivate and involve others, especially by their example.

3. In this way Don Bosco continues to dwell among you. May he live through your fidelity to the spiritual heritage that he left you. On his institute he impressed a special form of holiness, and today's world needs holiness above all! Aptly and courageously, the General Chapter intends to propose "striving for holiness" as the first response to the challenges of the contemporary world. In short, it is not so much a question of initiating new activities and initiatives but rather of living and witnessing to the Gospel without compromises, so as to stimulate to holiness the young men you work with. Salesians of the third millennium! Be passionate teachers and guides, saints and formers of saints as was St John Bosco!

Do everything to be educators of young people for holiness, practising the typical pedagogy of happy and serene holiness that defines you. Be welcoming and fatherly, so that you can ask young men on every occasion with your own example, "Do you want to become holy?". And do not hesitate to hold up before them the high standard of ordinary Christian living, guiding them on the path of radical dedication to Christ who proclaims in the Sermon on the Mount: "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5,48).

Yours is a history full of saints, many of whom were young. On "the Hill of the Youthful Beatitudes", as you call the Colle Don Bosco (Don Bosco Hill) where the saint was born, during my visit on 3 September 1988, I had the joy of beatifying Laura Vicuña, the young Chilean Salesian girl whom you know well. Other Salesians are on their way towards that goal: two are confreres, Artemide Zatti and Luigi Variara, and one is a Daughter of Mary Help of Christians, Sr Maria Romero. The value and timeliness of the Salesian lay brother's role shine out in Artemide Zatti; and Don Luigi Variara, priest and founder, manifests a further realization of your missionary charism.

4. You too are asked to join the large group of Salesian saints and blessed committed to walking in the footsteps of Christ, the source of holiness for all believers. Make the whole of your congregation shine with holiness and fraternal communion!

At the beginning of this millennium, the great challenge of the Church, as I recalled in my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte*, consists in making the Church "the home and the school

of communion" (n. 43). If the apostolate is to bear fruits of good, it is indispensable that the communities live a spirit of real mutual brotherhood. To carry out a single educational and pastoral project, all the communities must be linked by a firm family spirit. May every community be a true school of faith and prayer open to young men, where it becomes possible to share in their expectations and difficulties, and to respond to the challenges that adolescents and young people must face.

But where is the secret of the union of hearts and of apostolic action if not in fidelity to the charism? Always keep your gaze fixed on Don Bosco. He lived entirely in God and recommended the unity of his communities around the Eucharist. Only from the Tabernacle will flow that spirit of communion that becomes a wellspring of hope and dedication for every believer.

May the love of your father continue to inspire and sustain you. His teaching invites you to mutual confidence, daily forgiveness, fraternal correction, the joy of sharing. This is the path on which he walked, on which you too will be able to attract the laity, and especially young men, to share the evangelical and vocational mission that unites you.

5. As you see, the reference to youth comes up often in this Message too. Do not wonder at this bond that unites Salesians with young people. We could say that young men and Salesians walk together. In fact, dear friends, your life is lived among boys, just as Don Bosco wanted. You are happy with them and they enjoy your friendly presence. Yours are the "homes" in which they do well. Is not this the apostolate that distinguishes you everywhere in the world? Continue to open your institutions especially to poor children, so that they feel "at home" there, enjoying the activity of your charity and the witness of your poverty. Guide them during their integration in the working world, with culture and social communications, fostering a climate of Christian optimism in the framework of a strong and clear consciousness of moral values. Help them in turn to be apostles of their friends and peers.

This challenging pastoral action puts you in touch with the many realities operating in the field of education of the new generations. Be ready to make your contribution generously at various levels, cooperating with those who draft the educational policies in the countries where you live. Defend and promote human and Gospel values: from respect for the person to love for neighbour, especially the poor and the marginalized. Work hard to direct the multicultural and multireligious reality of contemporary society towards an ever more harmonious and peaceful integration.

6. Dear sons of Don Bosco, you are entrusted with the task of being educators and evangelizers of the youth of the third millennium, called to be "sentinels of the dawn", as I said at Tor Vergata, at the World Youth Day celebration in 2000. Walk with them, be alongside them with your experience and personal and community witness. May you be guided by the Blessed Virgin, whom you call by the beautiful name of "Mary Help of Christians". Always place your trust in her as you follow Don Bosco, suggest devotion to her to everyone you meet. With her help you can do a lot, as Don

Bosco used to like to say over and over again, it is she who has done everything in your congregation.

The Pope shows his delight in your apostolic and educational dedication, and prays that you may continue in full fidelity to the Church and in close collaboration with one another. May Don Bosco and the host of Salesian saints and blessed go with you!

I reinforce these wishes with a special Apostolic Blessing, which I send to you, members of the General Chapter, to your confreres across the world and to the whole Salesian family.

From the Vatican, 22 February 2002, the Feast of the Chair of St Peter.

JOHN PAUL II