



From:

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Which means more to come!

# Now is the acceptable time

## Vocations: food for thought

Within the theme of the 25<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, in reference to 'the life and mission of our communities', we want to examine the conditions of life and activity which can foster a joyful and encouraging experience of vocation. This is one of the factors that led to the Chapter theme.

Young people need witnesses; they need people and environments that show by their example the possibility of adopting a life style in accordance with the Gospel. This is our first proclamation of the Gospel - our witness.

Promotion of vocations is amongst the objectives of our mission: "Faithful to the commitments Don Bosco has passed on to us, we are evangelizers of the young, and the more so if they are poor; we pay special attention to apostolic vocations"(C 6). And: "We are convinced that many young people are rich

in spiritual potential and give indications of an apostolic vocation. We help them to discover, accept and develop the gift of a lay, consecrated religious or priestly vocation, for the benefit of the whole Church and of the Salesian Family. With equal zeal we nurture adult vocations". (C. 28).



The many faces of Don Bosco

Every Salesian therefore should be someone who seeks vocations and follows them up. Every community has this purpose amongst its main objectives.

## The experience and practice of Don Bosco

Don Bosco created the students section at Valdocco for the benefit of those who gave signs of a vocation to the ecclesiastical state (priests, religious).

There are incredible statistics coming out of those Oratory years. In 1883 he had this to say: "I am happy now! I have careful statistics drawn up and we have found that more

than two thousand diocesan priests have come from our houses. Let us thank the Lord and his holy mother for having given us the means to do all this good". Before he died another 500 had entered the seminary. From various statistics and observation it would seem that Don Bosco was directly responsible for forming some six thousand priests in his lifetime.

### What's here?

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### Special points of interest:

- Vocation seeking and nurturing is one of the priority objects of our mission
- At the heart of Salesian experience is the Oratory at Valdocco
- The aim of pastoral work for vocations is to help young people recognize and follow God's call. - whatever it is for them.

## A favourable moment



A favourite photo of Don Bosco

The Sacred Scriptures offer us understandings of the God who never fails us and the conditions for response by men and women. For example, the Bible has pages for times of vocation difficulty or sterility. The episode of Samuel for instance. It was a time of decay of religious institutions, everyone's attention was focused on war and even the prophets were forgotten. There were no models of vocation to follow - yet God spoke directly to the heart of a boy to make him his witness and spokesman.

Perhaps we are living in a time of special

vocational possibility - new times, where we need to adapt our pastoral language for vocations, our images, our suggestions. The Lord is giving us a new opportunity and at the same time asking for a purification, an emphasis on what is essential, an ability to get into living contact with Christ...more than just personal relationships with youngsters and provision of services.

There can be a difference between the kinds of people attracted by our life and their behaviour once they have joined a community - it is a matter of authentic motivation, of Christian spiritual formation, of a project of life in Christ, of interiorized faith.

## Vocational guidance in a renewed pastoral approach

As part of education of young people to faith, we find that vocational guidance is its essential dimension. We spread a vocational culture - promote a form of life and choice of options according to certain values like generosity, acceptance of the mystery, availability to be called and involved, belief in self and others, courage to dream and desire on a large scale.

We give priority to complementary activities which are mutually supportive of each other - guidance offered to all young people in our educational programmes; a constant effort to

discover and follow up vocations of special commitment (in Church and world); special attention to vocations of service to the Church itself (diocese, Religious Life) and the world (missionary calling); a particular attention to the Salesian charism in its many forms.

We work from the conviction that.....

**We make a gift of great treasure to the Church when we discover a good vocation**

## A new approach.....

We Salesians have grown in our understanding of many aspects of seeking and nurturing vocations. Here are some:

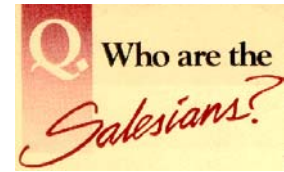
- We focus on the young adult - so in particular the animators, volunteers, uni (tertiary) students, older students in schools.
- We recognize that talking to this group has its demands - they are not joining a team for work or service - only. Only if they are attracted by Jesus and understand what kind of life he is offering do they decide to follow. It's more than short-term generosity. No place for being

anonymous religious - better to declare in word and deed who we are and what we do, our choice, and our joy in making it.



## ....with certain realizations

1. Vocation is an attraction - the disciples asked 'where are you staying?' and they went and stayed there. Today he is found in the open and welcoming community.
2. Vocation is a call and grace: it is not within our power to inspire it or bring it to birth. God's initiative. 'You did not choose me but I chose you'.
3. Vocation is a journey closely linked to a maturing faith in a dialogue with God that lasts through life....so it means developing the specific religious nature of this journey - truth, good behaviour, prayer. Grasp the mysterious dimensions of life's journey this way.
4. God has a plan for every individual. Everyone needs to become aware of this. It is up to us to help each one according to need.
5. Vocations of a particular consecration or service need direct and explicit attention and work - models need to be presented, animation taught and experienced.
6. Every community, and every member must be deeply involved according to his possibilities
7. Young people feel the need of a direct experience and contact with the realities involved in vocational choice - so the environment in which the person is committed is important. Does it have models, values to be tested, friendships to be made, responsibilities to be practised? That's the task of each community.
8. A longer period of accompaniment is the norm. Vocational catechesis should begin early, but then extended beyond school (the average age of people entering novitiates is between 21-27). This accompaniment must be consistent re faith and Christian practice.
9. Connection with a community setting is indispensable. The criterion to be followed is 'come and see' - in prayer, pastoral planning, community life.
10. Some experiences in the journey of faith are particularly revealing - for example commitment in pastoral work, learning how to pray, reflection on faith, work as a volunteer, retreats. These are open to the religious dimension.
11. In many cases an explicit invitation is needed.
12. Accompaniment/spiritual direction is necessary. Here the term 'spiritual director' is intended in a broader sense - someone able to do the follow-up, who knows the background, the demands of spiritual life, who can open up new goals and directions



## THE SALESIAN COMMUNITY SETTING

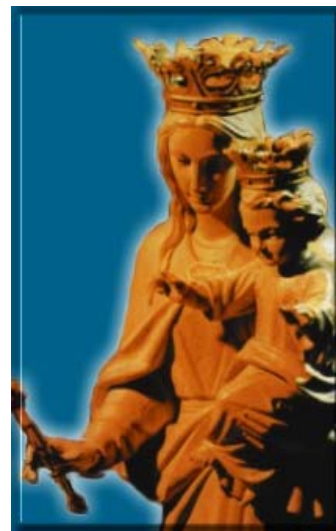
At the very beginnings of our Society we find a special community - Valdocco. This was a novel pastoral setting and community. It gave rise to a new culture - a style of relationships between priest and people, youngsters and educators, workers and students. It raised eyebrows and caused people to think Don Bosco was crazy.

'Religion' took on a new meaning in this place. And included invitations to undertake a life in God. Young people wanted to belong to this community. How did Don Bosco create this atmosphere?

- It was intensely spiritual - personal relationship with Jesus, frequent sacramental experience, devotion to Mary, lively prayer
- He tried to purify motives along the way - centring them on God, especially through generous commitment.
- He was careful to be seen as animator and spiritual guide especially of those who showed signs of vocations
- He was deeply convinced that it was God's work and

Mary's protection that achieved results.

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The aim of pastoral work for young people is to help them to be attentive to the Lord's call and to follow it. This means we need to give preference to persons over organization, to evangelization over any other activity

SOME AREAS TO FOCUS ON

**Vocation to consecrated life.**

Our society does not have an adequate understanding of this. It is our task to present a model of the consecrated person which is meaningful for the young and which highlights the real fundamental side of consecration, not just the 'work'. It is not enough to talk about Don Bosco, but also about the place God has in his life.

**Vocation to lay and family life.**

This is a vocational option with its proper values. We give greater value to Christian marriage as a true vocation. And help young people to mature and discern this. We help families nurture vocation.

**Young adult volunteers.**

Help young people to see their experience has a vocational aspect and can bring them to think about the plan of God for their life.

**The logic of 'come and see'**

This was the process that Don Bosco followed. He wanted to show young people a form of life that was happy. So too today our community needs to communicate its own life experience this way. How?

1. Show the joy of brotherhood and the family style of life. - make the fact visible that we are a community which 'lives and works together'.
2. Witness to the joy of vocation - where we proclaim reasons for hope, satisfaction, contentment, rather than ill-humour displeasure, discouragement.
3. Show the human and educative value of the Gospel counsels - poverty chastity and obedience do not diminish human life but add to it. Present obedience as extending not limiting freedom. Chastity allows us to love the young more openly and in an uncomplicated way...and so on.
4. Give life to a wider community - young, old, individuals, institutions. We share our spirituality which is

very open, involved in the local community.



**Don Bosco House Suva Fiji**