



More seeds... One same precious gift: Memory and prophecy

A fraternal welcome to a specific vocation
 Of the Volunteers with Don Bosco (CDB)

We, Volunteers with Don Bosco (CDB) are in a feast. Our Institute, part of the Salesian Family from its beginning, celebrates its Silver Jubilee: Twenty-five years for God and for the world. In a simple, silent but extraordinarily lively and grateful way, all of us feel that we are instruments of Divine Providence. God has done great deeds in us from the first years in which the desire to live our Baptism with the radicality of the consecrated life with Salesian style in the world materialized in the hands of Fr Egidio Viganò, until today when we are reflecting on the expansion of the Institute in so many parts of the world.

Permit me to be present in your community with this meditation proposal, to share with you our being and our mission in an atmosphere of prayer and of discernment. It is in this way that our vocation and our group was born. To recall and relive these first moments in the light of the Word of God and in the reality of the Church today will enable us to remain profoundly passionate about youth, about the Church and about the world: We as consecrated laity in the world; and you, as the heirs of a charism which the Holy Spirit had deposited in the heart of Don Bosco.

Following the guidelines that Pope Francis gave in the Year of Consecrated Life, we will try to "look at the past with gratitude", asking the Lord for the grace to "live the present with passion and embrace the future with hope".

The paper that you have in your hands are divided into five points. Let us ask for the light and power of the Holy Spirit to begin well:

**O God, who by the mystery of today's great feast
 sanctify your whole Church, every people and nation,
 pour out, we pray, the gifts of the Holy Spirit across the face of the earth and,
 with the divine grace that was at work when the Gospel was first proclaimed, fill now,
 once more, the hearts of believers. Through Christ our Lord.**

1. September 12, 1994: Official beginning, back to Don Viganò

Before anything else, I propose that you read the preface (forward) to the Constitutions of the CDB and the principle excerpts from the writings in which the Group was formed around Don Viganò and his collaborators. We will not stop at the material aspects of the words. We will try to see in them the particular presence of the Holy Spirit in those first companions of the journey and in the Salesians and in the Volunteers of Don Bosco who had accompanied us. Try to discover, as you read, the signs of this presence in the Salesian Mission, through your Salesian brothers and the other groups of the Salesian Family. We thank the Lord again for this precious gift. We will allow ourselves to be enthused to discover how to live this reality in depth.

From Prologue of the CDB Constitutions

In the second half of the nineteen eighties, some young men in four different countries, moved by the Holy Spirit, without knowing one another, manifested the desire to consecrate themselves to God, being in the world.

Accompanied by three SDBs and a Volunteer of Don Bosco, they began to experience this way of life; Don Egidio Viganò, the Rector Major of the Society of St. Francis de Sales, informed of the journey, recognized the gift of the Spirit and encouraged these young people and their animators to continue the experience.

In December 1993, he met the members of the group and those who accompanied them in Rome. He met them again the following year and decided to officially start the Group of "Volunteers With Don Bosco" on **12th September 1994**, the feast of the name of Mary. On the same day, the "*ad experimentum*" Constitutions were drawn up and the first professions took place. At the same time, the Rector Major, Don Egidio Viganó, recognized the group's membership in the Salesian Family.

Talk by the Rector Major, Don Egidio Viganò (September 1994)

You are organizing an important event for the Salesian Family, for the charism of Don Bosco. My congratulations to you. We are just in the beginning. It begins. It is founded. We are certainly in an important and extraordinary moment - the beginning of a life of consecration - on which we must reflect, thank God and seek to know what to do further.

We need to distinguish two lines of reflection that help deepen what is taking place: the "charism" and the "Institute". The charism is not independent of the Institute, nor is the Institute identified with the charism. In this way, a rich charism can be manifested through various institutes, from which all nourish themselves and live on the vital values of the charism, but according to different institutional modalities and forms. It is enough that we look at the Salesian Family and we already find this distinction very clear.

So, in the line of the charism, what is there to reflect on? The charism is an initiative, a gift of the Holy Spirit. Those who live a charism must be familiar with it, have a special attachment to it, an exercise in intense dialogue with the Holy Spirit

But when it comes to charisms, the Holy Spirit is concretely manifested in history. What he wants, makes it appear in particular people, in particular situations, with particular commitments, with a style of reading the Gospel, with a style of holiness and with a specific mission. So, from this point of view, for you your reflection on and relationship with the Holy Spirit historically takes place in a very concrete way in Don Bosco.

Don Bosco is not the Holy Spirit, but Don Bosco is the manifestation of the charism that the Holy Spirit wanted to arouse in the Church with certain characteristics. In this, you must be discoverers of the Founder, to understand the Holy Spirit, to see how historically the Holy Spirit has made his initiative appear for the good of the Church. Therefore, an indispensable thing for every one of you is to cultivate a great interiority of dialogue with the Holy Spirit, but oriented in a historical form, just as it was manifested in the one who chose to be the patriarch, the initiator, the builder in history, in the Church, of the charism that the Spirit gave him: Don Bosco.

There are many things to think and learn about this. You would have certainly already thought of them. You should hear what Cagliero and his companions heard from Don Bosco on the day when he invited them to make their profession. He left them a few days of reflection. They understood: "Don Bosco wants to make us friars". And this was precisely something contrary to the cultural environment of the time, especially in Turin. But then, Cagliero said: "Friar or not friar, I want to be with Don Bosco". The phrase "being with Don Bosco" meant accepting the charism of the Holy Spirit through Don Bosco. "Being with Don Bosco" was neither a juridical phrase nor a religious phrase but an expression of young people who were enthusiastic about Don Bosco's spirit and mission, and they said: "We are with him".

This first reflection intensifies what you have certainly done and what is so much needed at this beginning stage. It has an enormous space for development.

In the second aspect - "the Institute", you are the founders. The founders stand out because they are people of great quality, of great intelligence, of intuition with a need for organization, of mutual relations, of instruments and means to make the charism alive, and you

have the capacity for formation, for vocational fruitfulness in finding other colleagues who participate in the life of the same institute.

In this regard, there is a need to pay attention to identity: an approved identity card which is not only an organization but also a very spiritual one. Spirituality and organization together. A spirituality that organizes, an organization that helps spirituality. They are called "Constitutions and Regulations". For those of you who do not live in community, your reflection and meditation on the identity card helps you to grow in the concrete mode of the Institute.

It is also important to cultivate a sense of community. Secular institutes have no community. However, one is not a Christian without a great sense of communion. Communion here, in addition to Christian communion with all, requires special attention, sympathy, dedication, sacrifices for what concerns the Institute: communion with colleagues. It is necessary to cultivate the expressions of communion because it, besides giving you the possibility of knowing each other, strengthens the elements that constitute the strength of the Institute and assures that you live in the same orbit and in the same charismatic concern.

I also stress that in your life, everything becomes vague if there is no concrete apostolic activity. Don Bosco's charism has the "grace of unity" that vitally unites a secure interiority with concrete activity. If there is no activity, in all that we do all through the day, what do we think about? Prayer, what does it consist of? You will not be monks, but apostles are born concretely from these prayers. Apostolic activity is as important as prayer because prayer is the soul of activity. Apostolic commitment is the soul of prayer. The grace of unity is between these two poles: the pole of being with the Holy Spirit, the pole of being with the young, with the man of today and his problems.

What does the Salesian Congregation and the Rector Major expect from the new-born Institute? A wave of Salesian enthusiasm. That is to say, seeing Don Bosco's charism in a young form, without the burdens of time that interprets Don Bosco's mission, with courage and enthusiasm.

Homily of Fr Egidio Viganò during the Eucharist of the first profession of Salesian consecrated secular Institute (8 September 1994)

It is certainly a day of special baptismal commitment for those who are making profession and for your companions, because it highlights the profound mystery of baptism as a covenant with the Lord. Behold, you make a gesture of special intimacy with Jesus Christ. Covenant means relationship, it means collaboration, it means the ability to bear witness to its mystery in the face of any situation in life.

And then, to see the presence of so many people from the Congregation and the Volunteers, when it should have been a profession, let's say, a bit special, almost hidden like the seed that falls into the soil and then grows luxuriant, it means that this is a day of celebration for the Salesian Family. I say 'family' to understand the whole charism of Don Bosco. To see that from the vigorous, fruitful root of Don Bosco's charism a new and long-awaited virgulum is blossoming which will certainly be flourishing and which will give whole Salesian Family a sense of novelty of the first day, a sense of enthusiasm to carry out what the Holy Spirit has suggested to Don Bosco which he carried out with great generosity, creativity and flexibility and which we are called to continue according to the needs of the new times.

For this reason, we are happy and feel one with you. We assure you of our prayer, our accompaniment, our trust and above all we are full of gratitude to the Lord, because this was not born of a plot of some "cunning" men but was born of the initiative of the Lord, who puts in the hearts of people the generosity, the sense of the current needs of the Church and above all the relevance and urgency of Don Bosco's mission for the new times.

So, thank God, congratulations to you, and we celebrate together accompanying you in this act and gesture, which is the greatest you can do as baptized, the supreme act of freedom that testifies the radicality of the baptism.

What do these precious pages highlight?

— First of all, the action of the Holy Spirit, a continuous action in space and time of the Church and of the world, particularly noticeable in moments of special spiritual intensity within individuals and groups of young people. This is how the first four initial groups felt.

- The dynamism of the Salesian charism which from Don Bosco's heart continues to open itself to the new situations and needs of the Church in a way that is always more secular, also through new forms of lay consecrated life.
- It is important to know how to accompany the youth and the adults spiritually and the value of shared discernment for assisting and taking the right decisions.

What thoughts and sentiments arise in you when you keep the memorial of the beginning of the Institute of Volunteers with Don Bosco (CDB)...

- on the type of the Vocation of the CDB
- on the type of youth ambient in which it arises
- on the accompaniment that those youth found in the Salesians
- on the process of discernment promoted by Don Viganó, RM in those years
- on their resolute response to the Vocation which they felt.

Pray that the Holy Spirit helps you to understand and evaluate the significance of this type of consecrated vocation in the Church today.

2. An Institute of Consecrated laity for the Church today. The Spirit of Vatican Council II and Consecrated Secularity.

The CDB are in the first 25 years of life. We are a young Group in the phase of consolidation. We are at the moment 85 brothers, spread out in 27 countries, but we are very little known. Many of you ask: What is this group? There never was a group of persons who took the vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience, but who do not live in community, but (which) leaves everyone in his own house as any other Christian? How do they feel Salesian?

We invite you at this moment to enter into contact with some concrete experiences which have illuminated our itinerary and, finally, which have moved us on to discover and live the marvel of a vocation which, without being easy, is helping us to feel very happy to have followed. Here they are:

a) The Year 1988. Centenary of the death of Don Bosco: The Salesian Spirituality and the witness of Salesians and of the VDB.

The itineraries of the initial groups were different. But we had similar experiences: the deepening of Salesian spirituality, so much emphasized in the years before and after 1988; the life and apostolic drive of the Salesians who accompanied us; and the model of the consecrated life of the Volunteers of Don Bosco. A desire arose within us. We asked ourselves: could we not live the same consecration as the Salesians maintaining our lay status?

b) The spirit of Vatican II and consecrated secularity

Those accompanying us spoke to us about consecrated secularity in the Church: a form of Christian life with a long history in the Church. The experiences have grown in recent times between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Pius XII recognized and regulated its specific place in the Church (1947). The Council enhanced this original form of Christian life (1965), especially during the pontificate of Paul VI (1963-1978), when its identity and mission were developed, relating them to the spirit of renewal of Vatican II. Currently there are about 200 secular institutes of pontifical right.

Paul VI explained in 1972: "We cannot but see the profound and providential coincidence between the charism of Secular Institutes and what was one of the most important and clearest lines of the Council: the presence of the Church in the world ... In a moment like this Secular Institutes, by virtue of their charism of consecrated secularity (PC, 11), appear as provident instruments to incarnate this spirit and transmit it to the whole Church. If, already before the Council, they anticipated this aspect existentially in a certain way, with greater reason today they must be specialized, exemplary witnesses of the disposition and mission of the Church in the world.

We are sincere. Discovering this charism so clearly and alive in the Church, through the Volunteers of Don Bosco and the Salesians who accompanied us, strengthened the call we felt "to

live fully our baptism, consecrated by the Holy Spirit, assuming Jesus of Nazareth as a 'icon with which to shape our life' (CDB Constitutions, 3). But how to realize this call?

c) To recall the dream of the external Salesians that Don Bosco had.

We learned that Don Bosco, as Fr Rinaldi explained to the first VDBs, had thought of a Congregation with "two distinct categories of people following the same rule, one would live in Community, the other in the world, there to promote the spirit of the Congregation in the daily living out of their lives." (Quaderno Carpanera, 2 and 3). Could we not live as consecrated external Salesians maintaining our condition of "lay", a charism that the Church has so much appreciated? It was Don Viganó himself, as you read above, who encouraged us and proposed the name "With Don Bosco", echoing Giovanni Cagliero's famous phrase: "Friar or not a friar, I will stay WITH DON BOSCO".

d) The process of maturation and of consolidation expressed in our Constitutions, accepted and approved by the Church.

And so, we started. We were accompanied by Don Antonio Martinelli and don Corrado Bettiga. After the first meetings we took a first "rule" with which to live what had matured within us. After four years of that first experience, the Church welcomed us as an Association of lay faithful "with a view to becoming a Secular Institute". Since then, there have been several General Assemblies celebrated. We have deepened the formation. Practically definitive Constitutions guide us. We are 85 brothers who walk with them all over the world. There are many others interested in this journey; the process of discernment has led several of us to choose other ways to live the Gospel, many are lay people committed to the Church and some, even, are Salesians living in community. And those interested keep coming. A blessing.

This is our life: "Working for the salvation of the young", like all the groups of the Salesian Family, trying to "carry out this mission of the Church in the world", living "inserted into it", "incarnating the Gospel in secular areas where we move (family, work, social action, ecclesial action ...) as consecrated lay people. The secular realities (the world), are for us the sacred space in which we discover the signs of the Holy Spirit, the place where He moves us to recognize him and act in the spirit of Don Bosco.

— Did you know our story? We, in its simplicity, consider it extraordinary. Because it is ours and because we believe that it enriches the entire Salesian Family. Thank you for accompanying us in our thanksgiving to God for these 25 years.

— Stop to consider and thank the Lord that after a 100 years the dream of Don Bosco of external Salesian consecrated people could be fulfilled: lay people who feel called to consecrate themselves to the Lord with the same vows you did, remaining in the normal environments of life, living the radical nature of their baptism and their professional and apostolic work with a Salesian spirit.

— See how the Holy Spirit promotes, in every historical epoch, new ways of intense Christian and apostolic life with which to respond to the new situations and needs that occur in the world. Pray asking for you and your brothers the sensitivity to comprehend and the ability to accompany the possible vocations that may arise in you and around you.

3. The Word of God: An outgoing Church, outside the garden, on the banks of the river (Acts 16:4-15)

In the Gospel Jesus, does not call only those who will be his followers, the twelve apostles. He calls and sends the "seventy-two"; those who hear the word "Follow me" from the Master; those who were healed ("Go home and explain what God has done for you"); the Samaritan woman, Mary Magdalene, the disciples of Emmaus. All of them understand that they must go

to communicate their experience of faith in Christ Jesus. The diversity of charisms and services is even more evident in the early Christian communities

Our CBD vocation is situated in the diversity of Christian forms of life that occur in the Church and in our Salesian Family. It is something of the Spirit of Jesus present also in our moment of history. Pope Francis helps us understand the meaning of the newness of our vocation through the letter "Proclaim" which the Vatican Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life addressed to all consecrated persons in the Year of Consecrated Life. How to "live the present with passion and embrace the future with hope"? The reflection of the letter starts from the meditation of this fragment of the book of Acts 16, 4-15. There is the key.

"As they traveled from city to city, they handed on to the people for observance the decisions reached by the apostles and presbyters in Jerusalem. Day after day the churches grew stronger in faith and increased in number. They traveled through the Phrygian and Galatian territory because they had been prevented by the Holy Spirit from preaching the message in the province of Asia. When they came to Mysia, they tried to go on into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them, so they crossed through Mysia and came down to Troas. During (the) night Paul had a vision. A Macedonian stood before him and implored him with these words, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." When he had seen the vision, we sought passage to Macedonia at once, concluding that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them. We set sail from Troas, making a straight run for Samothrace, and on the next day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, a leading city in that district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We spent some time in that city. On the sabbath we went outside the city gate along the river where we thought there would be a place of prayer. We sat and spoke with the women who had gathered there. One of them, a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth, from the city of Thyatira, a worshiper of God, listened, and the Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what Paul was saying. After she and her household had been baptized, she offered us an invitation, "If you consider me a believer in the Lord, come and stay at my home," and she prevailed on us.

Reflection on this passage from Acts

- Paul wants to visit the communities founded in the first trip. But the Spirit prevented him from doing so. He had to go to Tróade, to suburbs that were unknown to them.
- Dream or nightmare? Paul reads it as a call, to be answered quickly on board. Thus begins the evangelization of Europe. Those who made use of the synagogues for the first proclamation now see themselves obliged to invent new possibilities of encounter.
- The lack of stable platforms exacerbates the imagination. Paul and Silas intuited where to find someone to begin with, outside the door on the banks of the river! They sow, the Lord opens the heart and inspires acceptance. Paul discovers friends and disciples where he least expects it!
- The difficulties, the risks, the wounds have been transformed into opportunities of something new, the challenge of going beyond one's own schemes, in an exercise of faith and communion. It was a step of maturity with human intelligence but also with *parresia* and audacity.
- This page illuminates the experience of the brothers who started the CDB adventure. The Spirit moved them in another direction "beyond the traditional community into the midst of the world". This was understood by Don Viganó and the group of the first companions, and so it was that the Church blessed them with its recognition and approval
- This page also opens us to the future that the Spirit continues to inspire in his Church and in the Salesian Family.

4. Call of the Church: to be witnesses and prophets of salvation in the world

- We have completed the first 25 years. With difficulty and patience, the Institute has taken its first steps. The fruits are seen in the testimony of the brothers scattered around the world. At this moment, will it be enough for us to know how to manage and transmit the reality of the Institute and nothing else? As for Paul, the Spirit does not allow us or you Salesians to enter into an attitude of holding on (protecting) and maintaining results or simply to export the charism we love so much.

- If, on the other hand, we must recognize that we have just had news of the Institute, will we not have to consider it as an opportunity to make room for the Spirit's call to the Church to make itself present in the areas in which of itself it is not so easy to arrive?
- Pope Francis does not cease to launch the Church "outside", (outgoing Church!). The Year of Consecrated Life led us to "Rejoice", to "Scrutinize", to "Contemplate", to "Proclaim." *To go out of the door and descend to the edge of the river* is all a symbol of the exits made by the first brothers. After 25 years, it is a question of going out to meet the charism as it was born, as did the Salesians who accompanied the first four groups: How can we collaborate with the Spirit today, so that this precious reality can take deeper root in the Salesian Family? And respond with heart and faith.
- How can we make our mission of being witnesses and prophets of salvation concrete today? Here are some secular indications taken from the letter "Proclaim", with the conviction that sharing the passion that inhabits us generates new movements, opens new horizons:
 - To look at reality with the eyes of God, in search of the creative footprint that has impressed upon you. A wise and generative process of evangelical life.
 - Living in open solidarity with the world to be a seed of sanctification. To accompany the distinct realities in which we find ourselves in all its processes, whether they be hard or prolonged, with patience, without crossing the limits (Joy of the Gospel 24).
 - To immerse ourselves in secularity, comparing our faith and allowing this encounter to lead us to discover the newness of the Spirit and the enjoyment of a "beyond", of God's horizon.
 - To build real places of encounter with young people and to grow together as disciples and missionaries. Young people urge us to awaken and increase hope.
 - Act in a meaningful way. "To work in little, immediate but with a wider perspective" (Joy of the Gospel, 235). Reality, like the Spirit, inspires creativity.
 - To come out to meet new situations, learning the art of relating to diversity and of cordial collaboration to build together (spirituality of communion).
 - To be present in situations of misery and oppression, of doubt and discouragement, of fear and loneliness, showing that God's tenderness has no limits. Where?
 - In the peripheries of existence, wherever they are, with a style of poverty, proximity, solidarity. "Being in the suburbs helps to see and understand better."
 - Walking with the poor, a characteristic trait of every beginning and reform.
 - Developing an integral and supportive humanism, capable of generating a real alternative to the cultural and ecological crisis of the world, and to the culture of waste.
 - Non-violent action. *Vita Consecrata's* commitment is to a culture of respect, tolerance, reconciliation, peace, collaboration in favour of the weakest.
 - In the daily life of the family and the educational frontiers, opportunities that God puts before us, embracing concrete situations, even if our hands were to get dirty; engaging wise and dialogue with young people and the world, with a pedagogy of life, orienting and accompanying.
 - In concrete situations sharing humanity, capable of responding to the requests for help and development of people.
 - In ecumenical and interreligious places, sharing spiritual richness and collaborating in aspects of common interest (compassion, peace, dignity of the human person)
 - In the places of the Spirit, spaces of an alternative project of society, places of pilgrimage, environments of welcome, dialogue or prayer and experience of God.

This is the invitation of the Church that we CDB perceive today. A call that coincides with what we perceive from the Rector Major when he convokes the entire Salesian Family towards the new frontiers in which young people find themselves.

From personal and institutional experience, we are convinced of the goodness of the proposal of Salesian consecrated secularity. With simplicity we ask you for these four things:

- a) First of all, your prayer, because everything is the work of the Holy Spirit;
- b) to grow in sensitivity to consecrated secularity as a form of Christian life in following Christ and

serving young people like Don Bosco;

c) to get in touch, if there are any, with our assistants or the provincial delegates of the Salesian Family, to know how to take the first steps with the young people that your pastoral action can discover with indications of a similar vocation;

d) not to fall into the fear of a strange vocational competition. A good accompaniment tries to help everyone discover and follow his call. In the Salesian Family there is no competition, only the synthesis of the various calls.

If you need help you can contact us, in your language, with:

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formazione@volontaricdb.org

assistente.centrale@volontaricdb.org

www.volontaricdb.org

Time for Silent Prayer

Points for reflection and prayer

- You came into contact with our origins. Our history is part of the development of Don Bosco's charism. It is a story that brings us closer to God and enriches the Salesian Family Tree. We invite you once again to join us in our thanksgiving. You can be inspired by the words of Mary in the Magnificat. Or perhaps from the tears of Don Bosco during Holy Mass in May 1887 in the Church of the Sacred Heart, in Rome.
- If you have been struck by a style of Salesian consecrated life that is different from yours. Don Bosco had dreamt about it. The Church today considered it particularly suited to the multiple needs of the world and made it possible. What can you do to integrate this secular perspective into your educational and pastoral work? Share your thoughts with the confreres. Get in touch with those who do.
- Take up the prayer of the 25th anniversary. It is the prayer of the CDB. Meditate on it and adapt it to your condition as a Salesian. Ask to develop in yourself the same apostolic zeal and Salesian ardour for the young initiators of the Institute and those who live thus guided by the Holy Spirit.

Prayer

We praise and bless you, Father:
in your Providence since the creation of the world
you called wise and generous men,
ready to follow you along the paths of history to be light,
salt and new yeast in the world.

We praise and bless you, Lord Jesus Christ,
that with your life hidden in Nazareth
you have become a model for those who, remaining in the world,
travel the path of evangelical radicality.

We praise and bless you, Holy Spirit,
because you fill the Church with your gifts,
and in particular the gift of the Salesian charism:
it is in the great Salesian Family that we, Volunteers With Don Bosco,
make our contribution for the construction of your Kingdom in the world.

We praise and bless you, Holy Trinity,
for the 25 years of our history:
true to your call, we commit ourselves to live
as authentic witnesses to the Gospel as secular Salesian consecrated persons.
Mary, Mother and Help of Christians, St. Joseph and St. John Bosco,
Be for us a sure support and help us be a bridge. Amen.

Celebration of the 25 anniversary: 12 September 2019