

# **Youth Pastoral Document No.5**

## **RESOURCE MATERIAL AND GUIDELINES FOR AN EDUCATIONAL AND PASTORAL PLAN IN SALESIAN ORATORIES AND YOUTH CENTRES**

DEPARTMENT FOR YOUTH PASTORAL WORK-ROME

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## CONTENTS

<b>FOREWORD</b>	7
<b>INTRODUCTORY WORDS</b>	8
1. An original inspiration	8
2. Towards a synthesis for Today	11
3. Points of convergence	13
1. <b>THE SALESIAN EDUCATIVE AND PASTORAL COMMUNITY IN THE ORATORY OR YOUTH CENTRE</b>	
<b>1.1 PERMANENT GOAL</b>	16
<b>1.2 LINES OF ACTION</b>	17
1.2.1 Actuate the animating role of the Salesian-community	18
1.2.2 Give more space for the adults to exercise co-responsibility	18
1.2.3 Encourage the young to take part	18
1.2.4 Get the community of the oratory to be involved in the Church	19
1.2.5 Be involved in the locality	20
<b>1.3 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES</b>	22
1.3.1 The Director of the oratory and/or Youth Centre	22
1.3.2 Salesians holding posts of responsibility	23
1.3.3 The animators	23
1.3.4 The Council of the Oratory or Youth Centre	24

1.3.5	The Provincial Commission	25
<b>2.</b>	<b>THE PROGRAMME OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION THAT WE OFFER</b>	
<b>2.1</b>	<b><i>STEP BY STEP ACCORDING TO A PLAN</i></b>	26
2.1.1	Beginning with the Salesian Community	26
2.1.2	Bringing the young together	26
2.1.3	Welcoming the young	27
2.1.4	The programme of Christian education	27
2.1.5	The unifying element	28
2.1.6	The goal: an experience of faith and life	29
<b>2.2</b>	<b><i>LINES OF ACTION</i></b>	29
2.2.1	A climate of community	29
2.2.2	A large number of youngsters	30
2.2.3	Groups	30
2.2.4	The individual	32
2.2.5	Community Events	32
2.2.6	Linkages for a more complete formation	33
<b>2.3</b>	<b><i>ACTIVITIES</i></b>	33
2.3.1	Games and sports in the Oratory and the Youth Centre	34
2.3.2	Social Communication	35
2.3.3	Camping for Oratory boys or "Holidays with a difference"	36
2.3.4	Camps (study camps, work camps, vocation camps)	36

<b>2.4</b>	<b>SERVICES</b>	37
<b>3.</b>	<b>SOME ASPECTS OF AN ORATORY: Goals, Programmes, Groups</b>	
<b>3.1</b>	<b>FACTS for consideration</b>	38
<b>3.2</b>	<b>SPECIFIC GOALS</b>	39
<b>3.3</b>	<b>LINES OF ACTION</b>	39
3.3.1	Invitation and welcome	39
3.3.2	The programme we offer	40
3.3.2.1	The programme we offer takes place in two, but not in successive stages.	40
3.3.2.2	Growth in the faith	41
3.3.3	The inner working of the Oratory, viz. the birth and development of groups	42
3.3.3.1	Spontaneous groups	42
3.3.3.2	Groups proposed by Salesian educators	42
3.3.3.3	The programme and the values of the 'groups	43
3.3.3.4	The animator of the group	44
<b>4.</b>	<b>SOME PARTICULAR ASPECTS OF A YOUTH CENTRE</b>	
<b>4.1</b>	<b>THREE IMPORTANT FACTS</b>	45
<b>4.2</b>	<b>GENERAL OBJECTIVES</b>	45
<b>4.3</b>	<b>LINES OF ACTION</b>	46
4.3.1	Invitation	46
4.3.2	The programme of the Youth Centre: A youth Spirituality	46
4.3.3	The inner working of the Centre, viz. groups.	49

## FOREWORD

1. In October 1979 the Department for the Youth Apostolate sent to all the Provincial Councils an Aid entitled: "Resource material and guidelines for a Salesian Educational and pastoral Plan".

This new dossier follows and links up with that document as it intends to draw out attention to the characteristic elements and the problems involved in elaborating an Educational and Pastoral Plan for Oratories and Youth Centres.

2. Wherever they are, our Centres will draw profit from a reflection made on their actual vitality. And where they do not exist, the provinces could seize this opportunity to ask themselves about the feasibility and suitability of starting this most original type of Salesian presence.

We are aware of course that some provinces do not have any "Oratorian" tradition and are not able to begin a work of this kind.

3. This dossier, like the preceding ones, is meant in the first place for Provincial Councils and for the coordinators and animators of the Youth Apostolate at Provincial level. They must see how best to make it known so that

- \* the ideas given here may reach everywhere,
- \* each situation and its causes may be courageously examined,
- \* solutions and lines of action may be proposed, and
- \* the specific character of certain works may be respected.

4. Our experience with the previous documents has shown that they can very well be used in Houses of formation and with our young confreres, to give them an idea of the pastoral thrust of the Congregation and its methodology of action.

## INTRODUCTORY WORDS

### 1. AN ORIGINAL INSPIRATION

We can glean the fundamental aspects of the Oratory and Youth Centre from what Don Bosco himself did and from the evolution of these forms of Salesian presence as compared with other models and institutions.

Don Bosco began with a first conversation and rapport with a boy; he came to understand his language and his difficulties; he fixed an appointment with him for a "catechism class", and that catechism class came to be his first "Oratory".

The Oratory of Don Bosco took its name from an "institution" existing in his time, but it turned out to be quite different from preceding or contemporary models.

The changes Don Bosco effected describe to us even today the characteristics of the Oratorian apostolate.

There were altogether six basic transformations Don Bosco brought about:

#### **A. *From "rendering a service" to being with and sharing in a youngster's life***

The Oratory was, before Don Bosco's time, a service of catechetical instruction. Connected with it were games in order to attract youngsters and provide them with recreation.

Don Bosco did not simply offer his service as a priest, but shared in and "made his own" the life of the youngsters: the problems connected with work, the lack of a place to go to on Sundays, the need to have friends, etc. At times he would meet youngsters in the very places where their problems arose and could be solved, and thus he helped them to understand and face up to their situation in a Christian manner.



**B. From "part-time to 'full-time" activity**

The Oratory from which Don Bosco drew his inspiration was conducted for a few hours only, viz. the time that was necessary for catechesis and recreation.

Don Bosco changed the Oratory into a "full-time" affair. It came to occupy the whole of Sunday and was prolonged through the week by means of personal contacts and activities

**C. From the teaching of catechism to a programme of integral formation**

The two transformations we have just mentioned gradually led to a third: the oratory passed from a limited catechetical programme to a programme of integral formation. Games came to be seen as a need of life, as something necessary for a person to grow. But to games there soon came to be added other forms of self-expression; and so, there arose stage performances put up by the youngsters themselves; they were trained in music and singing; evening classes got under way; the boys were taught the three R's; groups and sodalities were formed. Thus, the boy came to realize his potential and his dignity; he was encouraged to put his talents to good use. Of course, the Oratory of Don Bosco, did not exhaust all the possibilities of imparting education; but it met the more urgent needs, and helped the youngster learn from his various experiences and develop a synthesis for life.

Salesian schools in fact, saw the light of day in the context of these needs; they were meant to complete and combine the various efforts at education.

**D. From a "structure" to a youth-community**

The classic Oratory functioned at the parish-priest's residence and leaned heavily on the religious authority of the parish and the family. Fr. Ceria recalls that the Oratory of those days took in "boys who were well-behaved and presented by their parents..."

Don Bosco's Oratory instead was conducted in the open; it was a boys' world where youngsters came to spend time with him, to play and to work; these were already the basic outlines of his future programme.

What gave each boy a sense of belonging to the Oratory was the opportunity he had to take part in activities, to meet friends and work together with them, and his sharing in all the vicissitudes of the Oratory.

**E. *From the "system" as the centre-piece to the centrality of persons and Interpersonal relationships.***

The Oratory of Don Bosco was not without a time-table, a set of activities and a programme of education in the faith.

But it was not the system alone that gave a tone to the Oratory. At the very centre of the community of boys stood the person of Don Bosco and his ability to feel with them, approach them and strike up a relationship with them.

For him the programme that was set out in its basic outlines was an opportunity for a personal and vivid encounter with each boy.

Thus, there arose the Salesian Oratory as something different from a system of plans, time-tables, activities and programmes: it was above all a meeting of persons.

**F. *From a "parish affair" to an activity with a missionary thrust***

The Oratory of Don Bosco was not "a parish affair" in the sense that it was confined to the boys of a particular parish and not even in the sense that it chose to serve those boys who already recognized themselves as members of a parish.

Instead, Don Bosco's Oratory had a missionary thrust it was open to boys who did not even know which parish they belonged to and did not consider the parish as a point of reference for their religious needs and human problems. In fact, the first boys of the Oratory were immigrants, boys who were cut off from the pastoral care of a parish. The Oratory represented an attempt to offer human solidarity and Christian formation for boys who had urgent needs. In its initial stages (Valdocco, at the beginning), it embraced all those boys who lived in certain situations; later (when the work of the oratory developed in Turin at St. Aloysius and outside Turin at the Guardian Angels, etc.) it took in the boys of the zone.

## 2. TOWARDS A SYNTHESIS FOR TODAY

The inspirational principles and the characteristic traits of the Oratory have not undergone any change with the development and spread of Don Bosco's work. But there has taken place an inevitable change in methodology because of

- \* the diversity of socio-educational situations, and
- \* the changed conditions of the youth scene

As a matter of fact

- \* There have arisen new moving forces such as clubs, associations, communities and groupings of the young and of adults.
- \* There have appeared new and varied centres of interest: cultural, charitable, social, deeper Christian living, etc.
- \* There have emerged new forms of commitment for boys, adolescents and youth, viz. to be catechism teachers, group leaders and animators among the young themselves; such youngsters often band together in special groups or communities.
- \* There have increased the kind of religious groups that provide formation for those who are willing and enables their apostolic commitment to grow.
- \* There have appeared various kinds of cultural associations having links on a national level and aiming to make use of their legal status to intervene in matters pertaining to culture.
- \* We have also to take into account our surroundings and how we can meet its problems.

Furthermore, in the field of education today, we notice an evolution taking place along three lines:

- \* Education inspired by the principle of ongoing formation, embraces many kinds of activities, agents and programmes - all of them have the same rights as the school but differ from it because of their form, contents, frequency and objectives.
- \* The schools themselves are preoccupied about taking on more and more elements which exceed the strict requirements of the

syllabus and call for linkages with the socio-cultural and ecclesial milieu in which they are situated.

- \* There is also developing today a new concept of "leisure- time" which can be utilized for an enrichment of one's experience for alternative and complementary forms of culture and for general and specific formation.
- \* Our Oratories and Youth Centres have faced up to this situation with varied resources, approaches and outcomes.
- \* some have remained flourishing and grown from strength to strength.
- \* others have entered a phase of redimensioning and have been struggling to discover their identity and effectiveness as centres offering a rich variety of formation programmes for the young.

At the root of these problems there have sometimes been particular circumstances and external environmental factors, such as:

- \* a different approach by the local Church to the world of the young.
- \* a lack of demand from the neighbourhood for the traditional type of Oratory.

We should also not underestimate certain negative factors arising from within the Salesian community itself.

The Oratory or Youth Centre, in fact, requires from us

- \* a conviction on the part of the community about the particular nature and effectiveness of this form of setting and apostolate;
- \* a will to provide it with sufficient and suitably prepared personnel, according to the possibilities of the province; we must firmly reject the idea that the Oratory or Youth Centre is an apostolate for our spare moments or a supplementary activity in a Salesian institution;
- \* sacrifice, even of a financial nature, to provide it with the proper facilities;
- \* an awareness that our charism is a gift of the Spirit, not only for the youngsters who are talented and already occupied in useful pursuits, but also for the large number of working-class youngsters.

### 3. POINTS OF CONVERGENCE

The considerations made by the 20th and 21st General Chapters offer the points of convergence that have been reached at the level of the Congregation.

We must, in the first place, determine the meaning of the words we use, because each of them refers to a specific overall plan and methodology.

Following GC21 therefore, this is what we understand by:

**ORATORY:** a setting for boys (about 9-14 years of age) with membership open to ALL, and therefore, having different and spontaneous levels of belonging, and offering suitable means of Christian formation

**YOUTH CENTRE:** A setting for young men (about 15-22 years of age), laying an emphasis on GROUP relations having definite forms of organization and membership and wielding a decisive influence for HUMAN and CHRISTIAN COMMITMENT.

**ORATORY-YOUTH CENTRE:** a complex setting adapted to both boys and young men, in which methods and directions vary with the age of the persons concerned (cf. GC 21 122).

We must note that these distinctions do not apply to all kinds of "oratory" existing in the Congregation (cf. GC 21, 122). In fact, it often happens that the traits we have described above as distinctive of one setting or another, are mixed up and joined together in some of our Salesian works. Thus, for instance, there are initiatives meant for a large number of young men, having a very simple and elementary kind of organization: such settings resemble an Oratory more than a Youth Centre.

However, these distinctions and definitions serve to clarify the specificity of the programmes we offer, in keeping with the different needs of education and formation, according to the age and situation of the youngsters, and in continuity with the original intuitions of Don Bosco.

Having said this, we should now be in a position to grasp the fundamental lines of an Oratory or Youth Centre on the operational level. It is:

- a) A particular pastoral CRITERION. This means that the ecclesial community
- \* does not limit itself to proclaiming the message of salvation but provides the possibility of experiencing it, fusing together faith and life;
  - \* addresses itself not only to the boys of a parish, but also to those who do not see themselves belonging to it;
  - \* adopts a style of presence and action that makes for growth by being open to the several interests of youngsters and bringing the youngsters themselves and their educators to take part in them.

- b) A specific SETTING

That is, a place of gradual formation which

- \* is endowed with whatever is useful for education: halls for games and meetings, a quiet and dignified place for prayer, a playground, a library, a gymnasium, a sports field;
- \* has the specific aim of being open to all lads, welcoming them and assisting them in their growth to maturity;

- \* manifests a proper atmosphere which requires in the first place a community that is sensitive and available.

c) An educational METHOD

- \* Everything is based on a spontaneous, not institutionalized meeting of persons, with a willingness to commit oneself, and on the offer of appropriate initiatives in religion and culture.

And so, the Oratory or Youth Centre is seen as a place for a religious animation of the culture of working-class youth or as a focal point for a synthesis of one's experiences of life together with the motivations and truths of the faith.

## **1. THE SALESIAN EDUCATIVE AND PASTORAL COMMUNITY IN THE ORATORY OR YOUTH CENTER**

### **1.1. PERMANENT GOAL**

"The formation of true pastoral communities, based on shared responsibility and collaboration, is one of the principal objectives of our pastoral renewal" (GC2 I, 62)

"The Salesians should renew and promote the EDUCATIVE COMMUNITY in the places where they work, and engage the laity in pastoral corresponsibility" (cf. GC21, 79/2.4.1). Our first goal is to create and develop an educative and pastoral community:

- \* made up of salesians and lay people, adults and youth;
- \* co-responsible for a particular work of evangelization,
- \* within a milieu or human community,
- \* aiming at a growth in one's own identity
- \* and, in a constant openness to the problems affecting people's lives (cf. "Resource material and guidelines for a Salesian educational and pastoral Plan" n.4).

The educative and pastoral community in an Oratory or Youth Centre has its own characteristics deriving:

- \* from the very nature of the Oratory or Youth centre as a dynamic setting offering ample scope for creativity and initiative;
- \* from the freedom experienced by the young in coming together without being obliged to do so in any way by rules or precedents (as in the case of a school).



## **1.2. LINES OF ACTION**

### *1.2.1 Actuate the animating role of the Salesian community*

The essential task of a religious community is ANIMATION. The delicate nature of this task is seen from the breadth and importance of the duties entrusted to the young and to lay people: for this they constantly stand in need of witness, formation and coordination.

*Animation* is a stimulus, builds competence, gives clear ideas, supports and reminds. It sets in motion a process of ongoing formation of the lay members of the educative community.

Animation is affected when we help youngsters and lay people to become more mature with the help of:

- \* deeper insights in theology and pedagogy;
- \* a reasonable assessment in the face of the educational goals of the Oratory or Youth Centre;
- \* regular experiences of faith and prayer;
- \* a review of the various situations that arise;
- \* the common elaboration and periodic verification of the local Salesian educational plan;
- \* a deeper study of the "style"; contents and characteristics of Don Bosco's pastoral system;
- \* a fraternal communion in attitudes, events and plans

The animation of the Oratory or Youth Centre is a task of the community as a whole; it devolves on ALL THE CONFRERES OF THE HOUSE, but of course in due proportion, for some confreres more than others are straddled with specific responsibilities.

With the religious community it is good

- \* to be aware of the implications of this animating role,
- \* to sharpen the motivations for, and skill in animating others,
- \* to devise "occasional" initiatives to foster the growth of the members of the educative community.

### *1.2.2 Give more space for the adults to exercise corresponsibility*

Since it is indispensable for the youth apostolate that the generations meet each other in faith and love, and since the Oratory or Youth Centre is an educational enterprise allotting proper functions and space to the layman and his vocation, we consider it necessary to foster the participation of adults in this community in order to help the young to mature.

The adults have particular responsibilities in the task of animation and decision-making, and a specific contribution to make in terms of their own experience.

Their role is also one of witness and moral, social, cultural and financial support; they can bring to the work of planning and execution the richness of their experience of family life; above all, they should be able to facilitate the dialogue between the generations.

Among the adults, we consider it important that the following be involved in the Oratory or Youth Centre:

- \* adults who have specific animating roles;
- \* the parents of the boys, especially if they wish to collaborate in our work of education;
- \* the members of the Salesian Family. All those who share the spirit of Don Bosco and live his heritage as a social group according to their possibilities, are to be counted among the dynamic forces at work in an Oratory or Youth Centre.

### *1.2.3 Encourage the young to take part.*

In every Salesian work, the ones who occupy the centre-stage are the young.

Our guiding principle is to entrust to them whatever they are capable of doing.

In an Oratory or Youth Centre, our educational effort aims at helping them become mature through their ever-increasing participation in the life and activity of the Centre. We enter into a dialogue with the boys right from our first meeting with them. We keep our channels of communication with

them always open in order to help them in their efforts to form themselves. We make them gradually corresponsable in the activities and groups they choose for themselves.

We set up structures for participation by which we can give the young as much responsibility as possible for the whole Centre:

- \* By these means they take a real and active part
- \* in the formulation of the educational plan; in the drawing up of the annual programme;
- \* in the responsibility for conducting various activities;
- \* in the responsibility for the finances of the Centre (especially in the case of a Youth Centre);
- \* in periodic assessments

Those youngsters who show themselves to be more mature and capable of handling responsibility can be entrusted with more and more duties not only in the Oratory and the Youth Centre but also in the parish, in the neighbourhood, and even in public bodies (commissions, consulting bodies, etc.) where the Oratory or Youth Centre has a right and duty to participate and they can officially represent it, if need be.

#### *1.2.4 Get the community of the Oratory to be involved in the Church.*

The Oratory and the Youth Centre are particularly significant occasions and places, even if not the only ones, for an approach to, and evangelization of, the young within an overall pastoral framework.

The involvement of the young in the Church. will be seen in the mutual relationship of their (= youth and the Church) belonging to each other. For this:

- \* it seems necessary that the one who is responsible for the youth apostolate be present in some way or the other in the parish where the Oratory or Youth Centre is situated.
- \* the educative community of the Oratory or Youth Centre should form part of the parish council and bring to the joint pastoral action a particular youth concern and perspective;

- \* the parish council should encourage the youngsters themselves to be active, and coordinate the programme of the Oratory or Youth Centre with the other pastoral works, programmes and needs.
- \* Furthermore, if the Oratory or Youth Centre operates in a parish entrusted to the Salesians:
- \* we establish a real integration of the programmes of the parish and the Oratory or Youth Centre; we see such an integration as a requirement of unity in the pastoral plan of the community (cf. SGC, 432);
- \* the parish-priest (who is a Salesian) is the coordinator of all the youth apostolate in his parish and is therefore the ultimate one responsible for the educative community of the Oratory or Youth Centre;
- \* the Oratory or Youth Centre, while it is open to a wider service to the city or zone, constitutes the point of reference for the youth apostolate in the parish, even if it is possible for the parish to establish other forms of work with the young;
- \* the Director of the Oratory or Youth Centre should be an Assistant parish-priest in charge of the parish (cf. SGC 432), and should have sufficient freedom of action.

#### *1.2.5 Be involved in the locality*

The relation between the Oratory or Youth Centre and its surroundings is one aspect of the more global relation between the local Church and its cultural milieu, and between the Salesian work and the local human community.

To be involved in one's surroundings (zone, ward, neighbourhood) entails:

- \* an analysis of the local youth situation;
- \* a sensitive concern for the common problems facing those who live near us;
- \* an active solidarity with the least members of society, the poor and all those brothers of ours who are really in need in some way or the other;

- \* supporting and passing on genuine culture and deeply meaningful traditions;
- \* witnessing to and defending human and religious values.
- \* The involvement of the educative community in its surroundings is achieved by means of:
  - \* participation in the bodies which take decisions, to the extent permissible by law;
  - \* links and suitable agreements with lay apostolic movements and civil youth organizations (cf. SGC 379);
  - \* a creative effort to plan and conduct initiatives for the benefit of the locality;
  - \* assistance especially to the less gifted to voice their opinions;
  - \* activities to promote advancement, conscientization and corresponsibility;
  - \* participation in initiatives for promoting culture and human development;
  - \* a critical assessment of a situation, and of what is desirable, just or possible;
  - \* a reading of every event in the light of the Gospel;
  - \* an availability of the facilities for local activities and initiatives, provided these are compatible with the goals of the Centre.

It should be possible for the situation of the area to become the concern of the educative community through certain qualified spokesmen. Depending on the selection of these persons and their availability and depending too on the objectivity and complexity of the situation, we could envisage the presence of professional people of those responsible for the social and educational institutes in the locality, and of the animators of the social communications sector, especially if all these persons draw their inspiration from Christianity.

With regard to relations with our surroundings and our social milieu, it is in the local (Salesian) community, that we study the concrete manner of our involvement. Accordingly:

- \* We keep our distance from political party organizations, even if they are of Christian inspiration: in the active field of culture, we remain a distinct reality from them, even if they and we have complementary functions to perform.
- \* We spell out clearly the real reasons for our actions and for our faith in the Transcendent One; we know full well that the human values we defend do not obscure but rather give proof of His existence, because "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."  
"
- \* We take participation to me and not only our entering into another's initiative, but, following in the footsteps of Don Bosco, we seek to create and foster a movement of public opinion and action for just reasons.
- \* While other kinds of professional socio-political involvement and party activities require a prior commitment to an ideology, we encourage our charges to assume responsibilities boldly and we take interest in training those youngsters who show the proper aptitudes and capabilities.

### **1.3 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

#### *1.3.1 The Director of the oratory and/or Youth Centre*

His role is inspired by Don Bosco at the Oratory: his calling, his likable ways and competence in his work, his apostolic zeal, his ability to engage in deep relationships with his collaborators and his encouraging presence among the young, his creativity and enterprising spirit, his capacity to generate enthusiasm and solicitude for the unity of his team in their work and their growth in Christ.

He has a role of animating and coordinating the various forces that work in the Oratory/Youth Centre.

It is his responsibility too, to link up and collaborate with the forces operating in favour of education and of the young in the zone or local Church.

He has the important task of being present in, and sensitizing the parish council. It is up to him to make the Oratory/Youth Centre perceived as a living cell of the Christian community, and to make his programme of activities part and parcel of the local Church's pastoral action. Within the Salesian community, he it is who informs, creates a sensitive concern among his confreres and makes them co-responsible as a group.

### 1.3.2 *Salesians holding posts of responsibility*

They have specific tasks to perform, according to the various dimensions of work in the Oratory/Youth Centre. They collaborate with the Director in clearly understanding and implementing the educational Plan. They work in a spirit of solidarity, carrying out an animation of the community of the Oratory or Youth Centre and getting it involved in the life of the parish and of the neighbourhood.

### 1.3.3 *The animators*

They are the ones responsible for the various groups, the teachers of catechism, the programme coordinators, the heads of associations, the coaches in games and sports and the animators of activities such as tourism, art, recreation. They may also have specific responsibilities in respect of bodies having their own statutes, in relation to the activities chosen, to the boys taking part in them, and to the boys' families.

The role of the animator comprises the following tasks:

- \* *bringing together*: this is seen in activities involving large numbers, such as: feasts, competitions, shows, meetings, films and even youth liturgies, debates in religion and culture, a new Salesian presence among the young and a celebration of popular religious traditions;
- \* *establishing a rapport* with the youngsters who have come together, by presenting to them in the Oratory/Youth Centre and assigning them easy responsibilities such as: looking after the facilities, halls, playgrounds, sports equipment, etc.;

- \* *conducting* specific activities in various sectors of the Oratory or Youth Centre: the notice-board, extra-curricular activities, posters, social service, liturgical and catechetical duties etc.;
- \* *sharing* as much as possible within the overall set-up;
- \* *forming*: it is his job to prepare and support animators chosen from among the youth themselves, to enlist their help and, to the extent possible, to enable them to take over one day.

#### 1.3.4 *The Council of the Oratory or Youth Centre*

The persons whose roles we have described above come together in bodies. Among such bodies, we attach a lot of importance to the Council of the Oratory or Youth Centre.

Its composition and its functioning follow certain schemes and criteria that make for change; but they also follow the principle of continuity for what concerns functions and responsibilities.

Its tasks are the following:

- \* an exchange of information about the functioning of the various sections, groups, programmes and about their mutual interaction;
- \* an analysis of the youth condition;
- \* a study and coordination of fresh initiatives to respond to new requirements;
- \* a regular appraisal of the Centre: its vitality and its capacity to draw youngsters together and further their growth as men and as Christians;
- \* a support for the religious and "professional" growth of the members of the Council;
- \* an exchange and collaboration with activities in similar settings in the province.

Within and in dependence on the Council, groups and commissions can be set up for the specific purpose of looking after important sectors of activity.

#### 1.3.5 *The Provincial Commission*



The needs of our pastoral work today require new forms of collaboration, communication of experience and coordination on a broad level.

The province is for us the larger community in which it becomes possible:

- \* to conduct a regular evaluation (cf. GC21, 126/1.5.2) of the Oratory's and Youth Centre's work;
- \* to draw up a common line of action so as to make for continuity and harmonious development;
- \* to study specific problems and the policies of the local Church (cf. *ibid.*) and of the Congregation.

**Note:** For a more complete picture of the motivations, basic principles and general objectives of an educative and pastoral community in an Oratory or Youth Centre, cf. "Resource Material and Guidelines for a Salesian Educational and Pastoral Plan", n. 4.

## **2. THE PROGRAMME OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION THAT WE OFFER**

### **2.1 STEP BY STEP ACCORDING TO A PLAN**

#### *2.1.1 Beginning with the Salesian community*

The "engine" or driving force in all our work is the group of Salesians who are there not for themselves but for the sake of the young. The Salesians are present among them and strive to be a sign of God's love for them. They have to form themselves in the first place, and keep themselves in a state of continuing growth in their human development, work skills and Gospel inspiration.

As a Salesian community we intend to take care of and foster:

- \* the pastoral goal of our "work",
- \* the "religious" meaning of our activity, fraternal union, and
- \* our typical pastoral approach.

#### *2.1.2 Bringing the young together*

The Salesian Oratory and the Youth Centre are noted for their ability to attract boys and young men and to interact with them by projecting an image and employing a language which stirs up interest and expectations.

We bring the young together:

- \* making the Oratory and the Youth Centre an absorbing place, open to all and interested in the problems facing the young;
- \* going to those centres and places where these problems are discussed and clarified;
- \* meeting and conversing with the young, wherever they are to be found;
- \* projecting the Oratory and the Youth Centre in the neighbourhood through some useful activities;
- \* taking the initiative as animators, and also getting the young, to make the Centre known and invite others to come to it.

### 2.1.3 *Welcoming the young*

Though it has an "open-door" policy, the Oratory and the Youth Centre do not believe in institutional anonymity. Don Bosco welcomed his boys with a personal approach to each one; he was able to bring them to speak of their past and present situation and of their future ambitions; his conversation was not of the formal type, but spontaneous and full of human warmth.

In welcoming the young to the Oratory and the Youth Centre, we make use of the following:

- \* a personal meeting or approach by the one-in-charge and by the other animators - they take the "first step";
- \* the friendship existing between the new youngsters and those who already frequent the Oratory or Youth Centre and the care and interest shown by the better elements of the Centre in the new recruits;
- \* the concern manifested by the animators in the life situation of the youngster;
- \* inviting the youngster to take part in the Oratory or Youth Centre, once he has clearly understood its goals;
- \* making known to the youngster the plan or programme of youth activities in which he may take part.

### 2.1.4 *The programme of Christian education*

The programme we offer the young is rich and varied, and suited to their possibilities. At the same time, it is a consistent one and requires effort. We do not offer only "entertainment", but we intend to carry out a work of Christian education through some freely chosen activities.

Against this "background" we carry out the following activities, patiently waiting for the right moment when each young person is capable of responding at his own pace:

- \* lively recreation where one mingles freely with others and has a first little responsibility in organizing or conducting the recreation

- these are the fruits of the openness and the welcome accorded to the youngster right from his first contact with us.
- \* Topics concerning his daily life, which are given the proper space for sharing in depth at meetings and on other occasions.
- \* Deeper to pics belonging to the "religious" sphere which are already the object of the first spontaneous "chats".
- \* an explicit and synthetic presentation of the faith – this takes place at suitable moments along the way to help the boys and young men recover, through a catechumenal process, the Christian elements they have inherited from their family and social environment and acquire new elements to enlighten their actual experience.

#### 2.1.5 *The unifying element*

Within this complex programme of culture and religion, there is a MOTIVATING FORCE and a UNIFYING POINT. It is a permanent ideal and point of reference which does not take away the proper meaning of each experience and each value, but places them all in a kind of hierarchy within a new vision of life and action.

This motivating force which gives the youngster's life new meaning is the PASCAL EVENT: to live the faith means to make a fundamental option to become the unifying element in the person of the youngster, it is necessary that it does not remain cut off from his life or enclosed within its religious meaning only, forgetting about his daily life. Instead, it must become a guiding principle for his goals, his style of relationships and the global understanding of his existence.

Our programme of formation aims to develop a youth spirituality, that is to say, a Christian identity and a sense of the uniqueness of the faith as a meaningful guide through life.

For this reason:

- \* we make the contents of our catechesis consist in a deeper understanding of the pascal event,
- \* we celebrate it as a mystery in the liturgy, and
- \* we embrace it as a power of transforming and a principle of action.

This unifying element in the life of the youngster also becomes the unifying element in the life and plan of the Oratory and the Young Centre. In it, everything tends towards the creation of a new type of man, modelled on the image of Christ, conscious of his divine sonship and consequent dignity, and aware of his responsibility to mould a world according to the measure of his vocation.

#### *2.1.6 The goal: an experience of faith and life*

The goal of our programme is to make available TOGETHER, IN OUR CENTRE, EXPERIENCES OF FAITH AND LIFE, so as to foster a truly YOUTHFUL CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.

Such an experience contributes towards:

- \* knowing the world little by little and judging it in the light of the Gospel;
- \* acquiring an ever-clearer awareness of oneself, of the others, and of being a man among other men in society and in the Church;
- \* making it possible to live one's youthful years with vigour (games, meetings, friendships, culture, enjoyment, exchange of ideas, growth) and to build one's life-plan inspired by the Gospel.

## **2.2. LINES OF ACTION**

### *2.2.1 A climate of community*

We consider it essential for the identity of an Oratory or Youth Centre to create a CLIMATE OF COMMUNITY in connection with our programme of Christian education.

The centre comprises our programme, our style of functioning, our relationships and our experiences and presents a variety of examples and influences by which the young are stirred up to think and reflect.

### 2.2.2 *A large number of youngsters*

Since the Oratory or Youth Centre is an ambient to which youngsters flock and a factor in the religious animation of the neighbourhood, it plans its activities so as to reach all the youngsters who have not yet made an explicit option for the Christian faith.

Such activities presuppose:

- \* an accessibility of the centre,
- \* a concern for all areas – sports, recreation and the faith and
- \* an availability of persons to assist growth and foster creativity.

### 2.2.3 *Groups*

Every stage of life constitutes a big "group". So, we have to chalk out a programme of growth for each stage of life and within each stage, offer some demanding experiences for the more sensitive among the boys.

In each stage (pre-adolescence and youth) groups are not only possible but also desirable. The centres of interest around which they arise, make for the different kinds of groups:

- \* sports groups, which are concerned with games and more appropriately speaking, with sports as a part of the overall educational context of the Centre;
- \* cultural groups which cultivate and offer possibilities for study, information and self-expression both inside and outside the Oratory or Youth Centre;
- \* charity groups, which meet the needs of the poor people;
- \* social service groups, which seek to tackle and understand the problems of a zone and prepare the young to act in their neighbourhood, to join citizens' bodies, and to stir up a movement of public opinion at local level;

- \* We can also envisage the possibility of support for outreach projects in favour of youth and in response to other urgent needs, such as: providing schools & houses. Improvement in certain city-peripheries. taking care of housing colonies, etc.;
- \* groups of formation and growth in the faith which develop an experience of prayer, a programme of Christian witness, a meditation on the Word of God and vocational search;
- \* missionary groups, which are concerned with the problems of the Third World and support people in the vanguard of preaching the Gospel;
- \* groups for an internal animation of the Oratory or Youth Centre, which offer their services for the benefit of the centre itself.
- \* Committed youngsters who make a vocational choice of the SALESIAN FAMILY, can, even while they continue their activities at the Centre, gather together for their personal and apostolic maturation in faith, in groups and associations typical of the Salesian charism, and therefore of the Salesian Family (YOUNG CO-OPERATORS).
- \* In each of these groups, there ought to be a PLAN leading from a particular or superficial point of interest to a full growth in Christian life by means of:
  - \* Liberation from the alienation and superficiality caused by a first dabbling in any activity, because of the force of habit or environmental factors (this happens in sports, cinema, acting etc);
  - \* growth to full personhood by discovering values and the meaning of life;
  - \* socialization by acquiring the consciousness of being and acting with others and for others and so overcoming the phase of seeking one 's own private enjoyment and relaxation;
  - \* Christian commitment, so as to permeate one's activities with the spirit of the Gospel;
- \* The catechesis is to be done in the groups, practically follows the phases required by the situation of the participants. It goes:

- \* from a basic understanding of the faith to a confrontation between the faith itself and the great problems of culture;
- \* from a simple and straightforward commitment right up to an undertaking to discharge some permanent responsibility in the Church or in 'society on the basis of one's Christian identity;
- \* from a normal participation in the liturgy up to an experience of prayer and an intense sacramental life.

#### 2.2.4 *The individual*

The person in his individuality is always the focus of our attention. The knowledge of, and the relation between persons that arc had at the start of the programme also set the tone for the activities directed towards the large number and in fact yield better results in the groups. It is typical of an Oratory or Youth Centre to impart its message through a person-to-person encounter as the need and opportunity arises.

#### 2.2.5 *Community events*

Whatever be the activities chosen by individuals, we consider it necessary to have some moments in common. The centre therefore sees to the COORDINATION of the various activities and of the different groups, without however ignoring their specific objectives.

We believe that this coming together as a community widens the horizons, facilitates an exchange of experiences, and offers opportunities to try out new initiatives - all this in a small context (of the community) which, no matter how circumscribed it is, represents the microcosm outside.

The community expresses itself best on the occasion of feasts, which thus become for the Oratory and the Youth Centre:

- \* an opportunity for catechesis so that the truths of our faith can be understood and lived under different aspects (e.g. the feasts of our lady);
- \* a time of joyful conversion for persons and for the community; the community identifies itself with the mystery or the person



celebrated and accordingly brings about a transformation in its feelings, criteria and actions. Community and individuals live out the feast personally by means of purification and sacramental conversion;

- \* a time for an intense Christian education, and a gelling of different experiences, for it is in a feast that there is simultaneously had the living of the faith, cultural performances, relaxation, entertainment and a community event;
- \* a manifestation of the Christian togetherness of the community, since the feast-day manifestations are a result of the collaboration and mutual giving of everyone;
- \* a rediscovery of the bond that unites us and a deepening of our sense of belonging.
- \* We aim to make the most of FEASTS and of significant events by preparing well for them and so drawing the benefits mentioned above.

#### 2.2.6 *Linkages*/or a more complete formation

The school, family and other agents of socialization and education have their own particular tasks and functions to perform. The oratory and the Youth Centre have no intention of substituting them, and much less of only completing them.

The different stages in the formative plan of the Oratory or Youth Centre do include contacts with families, the school and the work- place and a deepening of what they offer. In this way, we are able to understand, take up and recycle a youngster's experiences, avoid dispersing them and thus bring them to converge on a single vision.

### **2.3 ACTIVITIES**

Activity is THE moment in the Oratory or Youth Centre in a way similar to what the class hours are in a school. Activity is also the communication link between the groups, suggests and sees that the activity takes place in an

orderly way. The mass instead takes part, enriches itself and grows to maturity.

We seek to maintain a substantial continuity in those activities that possess a rich content and instead from time to time we offer other activities that respond to passing interests.

In each of the activities that are conducted we aim:

- \* to respond to a particular need in the life of the youngster;
- \* to coordinate with other ambient (such as the school, the family etc.) the time and the manner in which it will be carried out;
- \* set formative goal.

We shall now present some of the more common activities.

### *2.3.1 Games and sports in the Oratory and Youth Centre*

Like Don Bosco, we too wish to give ample rein to the spontaneity, the creativity and the energies of youngsters by means of games and lively recreation.

We attach importance to recreation:

- \* because of its intrinsic educational possibilities;
- \* because it makes for a healthy balance in youngsters;
- \* because it leads a youngster to reveal in a spontaneous way his inclinations and his temperament, and this knowledge is of invaluable help for his education.

Our games and sports are meant to contribute towards setting the young person free, and this is quite unlike what takes place in some other sports centres. We endeavour therefore, to make the educative community and each educator be examples of rich human feeling; they must learn not to be easily taken in by secondary considerations, such as results at all costs, prestige for the wrong reasons and financial imbalances in planning facilities, activities, the performance of athletes involving persons in the educational ambient etc.

Indeed, we give a lot of encouragement to games and sports. We even consider organized games and sports to be important because they train to discipline to an intelligent sense of team-work and to a style of collaboration; they also form to hard work and sacrifices, to camaraderie and friendship, to a level of sufficient motivation and to a sense of limitations.

In our Salesian works, sports and games do not constitute a parallel programme of education.

The groups that are interested and take part in sports and games are not autonomous bodies within the community. Instead, they conduct their sector of activity within the community's overall plan and by a proper functioning with other educators and other requirements, they contribute to the richness of what the Centre has to offer as a whole. (2)

### 2.3.2 *Social Communication*

The problems about getting involved in a local culture, knowing the language by which messages are conveyed, and the role that the means of social communication assume in leisure-time, underline the urgency of attentively studying this cultural phenomenon and programming appropriate activities as part of the educational and pastoral plan.

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- (2) We must not forget that sports and games do not exhaust the recreational-educational activities of an efficient Oratory; there are other recreational activities too, such as: feasts, tourism, singing, recitation. Further, it becomes difficult to draw a precise line between recreation and commitment in the case of certain initiatives, such as: poster-drawing, exhibitions, popular gatherings, topical photography, thematic stage presentation etc. Here too this list is only an exemplification of some realizations and experiences. There is a whole field of Salesian creativity and balanced initiative on the part of youngsters waiting to be tapped.

We consider as our priorities:

- The formation of animators and the sharpening of their concern for the values and techniques of the different media;
- A formation plan, by which we can develop in all -
  - an ability to read the different languages of communication;
  - a study of the concrete situations that the means of social communication set before us;
  - a way of reacting and constructively facing up to these situations in order to enhance the human and Christian growth of the young.

### 2.3.3 *Camping for Oratory boys or "holidays with a difference"*

We support these experiences because they enable us to impart a human and Christian education - in the life of the young; through contact with nature; by utilizing one's energies; by pursuing the specific goals of each of these initiatives; through an easy contact with other groups.

- \* in the life of the young;
- \* through contact with nature;
- \* by utilizing one's energies;
- \* by pursuing the specific goals of each of these initiatives;
- \* through an easy contact with other groups;

### 2.3.4 Camps (study camps, work camps, vocation camps)

We organize camps to offer opportunities for growth.

A camp is based on:

- \* a central point of interest; manual work to be done, a deeper study to be imparted, an exchange of ideas on a certain topic, a programming of activities to be worked out etc.
- \* co-responsibility of all the participants in the running of the camp
- \* an intensity in what has to be done

Along these lines we can distinguish:

- \* camps for particular sectors: they have their own specific goals and conduct initiatives to prepare and update field-workers in sports and culture, animators of social communication, group leaders, etc.
- \* camps for specific vocational purposes: they help boys and young men to clarify the reasons for their choice of life and offer possibilities to engage in some dedicated work.
- \* camps for reflection, like spiritual retreats.

## **2.4 SERVICES**

We believe that the possibilities of an Oratory or Youth Centre can be expanded by making available, services to meet the needs of the young in the neighbourhood: tutorial facilities, vocational and professional orientation, evening classes, counselling services, etc.

These services should correspond to:

- \* the requirements of those most in need;
- \* a Gospel inspiration and specific Salesian characteristics in contents and methods;
- \* the concrete availability of personnel.

N.B. The general outlines of our service of education and a presentation of the lines of action are to be found in "Resource Material and Guidelines for a Salesian Educational & Pastoral Plan, n.3.

In this chapter we have only dealt with the "elements" pertaining to the Plan of an Oratory or Youth Centre.

### 3. SOME ASPECTS OF AN ORATORY

#### Goals, Programmes, Group

##### ***3.1 We have to take certain FACTS into consideration:***

- \* In slums and very thickly populated area, there is a considerable number of abandoned boys to be found during a good part of the day, because of their family situation or because of the nature of their work.
- \* Often times even boys who are socially and economically well off have scarce possibilities of socialization outside the compound walls of their school and they waste much time and energy for want of proper opportunities. Schools do find it hard to offer a complete education; they would need to become "full-time" schools. Indeed, there are serious problems that stand in the way of freeing the potential of youngsters for creativity and collaboration, and making them touch with their hands, so to say, the many aspects of real life in a manner conducive to their educational benefit.
- \* The well-to-do classes of society have more and more specialized centres available to them today whither they can send their children to pass their leisure-time. Such centres are generally one-dimensional (either sports or culture or recreation); they have their own physiognomy, and are not bothered about offering a youngster a global synthesis of life. In fact, they end up by accentuating the discrimination to be found in society and falsifying the hierarchy of values.
- \* The Christian community is today aware of a pastoral difficulty it faces, not so much in handing on the Gospel message to youngsters, but in helping them to perceive and live this message as a SYNTHESIS, as an animating ideal, as a light to illumine all their life's experiences as individuals and in community.

### **3.2 SPECIFIC GOALS**

The Oratory beckons children and preadolescents to:

- \* their HUMAN and SOCIAL, development during their leisure-time;
- \* their CHRISTIAN growth
- \* by bringing all their experiences together;
- \* by animating their cultural activities;
- \* and by guiding them towards a life-plan.

### **3.3 LINES OF ACTION**

#### *3.3.1 Invitation and welcome*

Oratory is meant for children and preadolescents. It helps them to overcome the first hurdle, viz. that of "crossing the threshold" and "entering another's house".

The Oratory:

- \* considers that the best way to invite youngsters is just to make itself known;
- \* links up with the parishes, offering those who frequent it the opportunity of preparing for First Communion or Confirmation, if need be;
- \* does not omit "searching " for boys on the streets, in schools and in places of work and inviting them personally, as Don Bosco did.
- \* The beginnings of a formative programme in an Oratory coincide with:
  - \* the first moments of feeling at home
  - \* joining a group and
  - \* finding something interesting for oneself to do
  - \* We want that the boy who comes to the Oratory feels welcome. Hence,
  - \* we guide him to choose those activities that interest him;

- \* we try to meet him personally from time to time, in order to help him adjust easily to his new ambient;
- \* we help him see the complementarity and integration of the Oratory activities as a whole and we invite him to make his own contribution to the common good.

### 3.3.2 The programme we offer

The Oratory offers boys an educative experience of:

- \* socialization, by means of
  - a gradual getting to know each other, mutual respect, learning to meet others and to share;
  - games, both free and organized;
  - a progressive development of a sense of solidarity and consequently of service in proportion to each one's age;
- \* personal and spontaneous creativity by:
- \* making available a variety of activities covering the more significant aspects of the youngsters' life and growth;
- \* giving the youngsters a chance to have a say in the planning, realization and evaluation of the various aspects and activities of the Oratory.

3.3.2.1 The programme we offer takes place in two but not successive stages:

**A) Regaining an appreciation for what is human, by provoking questions and bringing to the surface the faith the youngster carries with him from the family ambient and tradition, (cf. GC21, 123).**

For this purpose, the following are of help:

- \* a knowledge of the condition of the youngsters;
- \* the establishing of a hierarchy among our activities so as not to compromise our aims;
- \* the application of our educational method;
- \* the imparting of contents step by step.



## **B) Carrying out an explicit teaching of the Gospel message**

For this purpose, the following are of help:

- \* an occasional catechesis which begins right from the moment of our first informal "chats"; This catechism can be imparted through good-nights homilies, contacts ...;
- \* regular and planned catechesis, imparted in groups, which takes into account the purpose of the groups and the questions arising in them;
- \* a systematic catchiest for the various faith- levels;
- \* an initiation to the sacraments of the Eucharist and Confirmation, following the programme and the orientations of the particular churches;
- \* popular manifestations of a cultural and religious nature with accompanying activities to be performed; such manifestations are generally organized by parishes, zones and dioceses as part of a faith-pilgrimage of God's people.

3.3.2.2 In this programme of growth in the faith, there are certain contents we wish to emphasize:

- \* paying heed to God's Word and his incarnation, in an attitude of conversion;
- \* a sense of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man;
- \* the meaning of prayer and its various models; it is important to go beyond the prayer of petition and learn how to pray personally and as a community; this may require that we prepare meaningful texts and that we also make use of those texts which already belong to the Christian community;
- \* the liturgy as a point of personal encounter and communion, and the pedagogical value of the Eucharist and Reconciliation;
- \* a sense of the Church, of the community, and of the missionary relevance of the witness of one's life;

- \* discovering sanctified prayer: the asceticism of "doing the right thing at the right moment" viewing responsibility as one's "cult and liturgy"; sanctification of relaxation, study and friendship;
- \* a search for one's proper place in the future, wherein to bear witness, to proclaim the good news, and to grow in one's own experience.

### 3.3.3 The inner working of the Oratory, viz. the birth and development of groups

#### 3.3.3.1 Spontaneous group

In the Oratory we offer encouragement to spontaneous groups, in which the following elements are to be found:

- \* natural leaders who have imagination, initiative and energy;
- \* small cells based on affinities;
- \* certain values already present as seeds waiting to be developed, viz. socialization and the striking up of close and lasting friendships.
- \* But it is our intention to help spontaneous groups evolve into groups having some definite aims. We achieve this purpose:
  - \* by getting the spontaneous groups to gradually become part of a more clearly defined organization;
  - \* by suggesting to them useful activities that can endear the youngsters to the ambient of the Oratory;
  - \* by stirring up motivations which lead to a progressive enlargement of the groups, to whatever structures are necessary, and to link up with other groups.

#### 3.3.3.2 Groups proposed by Salesian educators

It is important, we feel, that children and pre-adolescents outgrow the phase of spontaneous friendships, family relationships and class-mates.

And so, the groups we propose, are marked by:

- \* a particular structure, standard programmes, and often even linkages with large organizations at national level;
- \* a continuity in their set-up, so that they remain unaffected even if persons change;
- \* a continuity in their set-up, so that they remain unaffected even if persons change;
- \* a role allotted to the young in organizing the Oratory.
- \* By means of these groups, the boys:
  - \* come to know other boys; they learn to understand one another, no matter how different the others are; they begin to realize the complexity of life and of their own human personality and human inclinations;
  - \* gradually learn to work together; they learn integration, collaboration and the real meaning of friendship;
  - \* they come to speak with adults who are not their own family members or their teachers; they obtain a first-hand idea of the various possibilities of life-choices available to them.

The groups that we propose to the boys:

- \* are of many kinds in order to cater to a wide range of interests and levels;
- \* base their functioning on the disciplined freedom of each boy;
- \* aim more at the development of the person than at efficiently satisfying certain external aims.

### 3.3.3.3 The programme and the values of the groups

In spontaneous groups and in the groups, we propose, we foster:

- \* a growth in harmonious living;
- \* a spelling out of the aims in two successive moments- the more immediate interests and the deeper ones;
- \* questions about the meaning of things; such questions may arise from the experience of the group, from its interests or from the persons who comprise it;

- \* an opening up to the great vistas of religion, which are in a way offered to everyone, and in a certain sense offered to those who mature gradually and consequently are able to receive more.

This programme is carried out by means of:

- \* informal meetings
- \* meetings on specific topics;
- \* particular moments of activity and relaxation for the groups;
- \* times of prayer, catechesis, activity or entertainment - and these are open to others as well;
- \* the performance of certain duties, and consequently the evaluation of the results and attitudes;
- \* reference material drawn up by the group itself.

#### 3.3.3.4 The animator of the group

For us, the animator, who is an adult, has a fundamental role to play, for he:

- \* gradually makes the youngsters take up tasks and responsibilities that initially were done by him;
- \* intervenes whenever difficulties or tensions require his mediation or clarification;
- \* reminds them of the specific purpose of the group within the educational context of the Oratory, and this especially when he notices some difficulty cropping up or some centrifugal tendencies;
- \* helps each one to grow up according to his capacity;
- \* opens them up constantly to considerations of faith.

## 4. SOME PARTICULAR ASPECTS OF A YOUTH CENTRE

**4.1** We begin with three important FACTS that need to be taken into consideration:

- \* At a time when the passage should take place from an Oratory to a Youth Centre, many young men drop out of the ambient either because they are "saturated" and want to have other experiences, or because they have no confidence in the newness or meaningfulness of what the Youth Centre has to offer them.
- \* Those youth who remain or who begin to frequent the Youth Centre are not satisfied with a paternalistic approach on the part of the educator or the protective atmosphere they find; they want something more serious and expect more satisfying activities.
- \* Thus, there is a tendency for interesting initiatives to flourish among the young, sometimes too limited to a particular sector; groups that are active because of their specific interests and responsibilities tend to become independent and to close in on themselves ("closed groups").

We see the need therefore, for a youth ambient that is basically *ALL-EMBRACING* in an intelligent sort of way.

### **4.2 GENERAL OBJECTIVE**

The integration of faith and life in a particular phase of a youngster's growth requires that he:

- \* becomes aware of the questions arising in his own life, surroundings and culture, and be able to formulate them correctly;
- \* knows the historical events of Jesus Christ, his challenge and call to transcendence;
- \* assumes the process of conversion in his attitudes, criteria of judgement and in his actions.

### **4.3 LINES OF ACTION**

#### **4.3.1 Invitation**

The Youth Centre presents itself to the young as an open community:

- \* With the possibility of deep communion
- \* with the chance to, live and carry out some specific experiences and activities.

It is a meeting ground. It aims at providing a constant and modern approach to the mass of young men and to committed groups, both these categories being its characteristic and constituent elements.

The Youth Centre is a place for bringing the young together and seeing to their needs, but above all for imparting a Christian sense of concern and responsibility. It is Therefore well aware of its particular physiognomy as a work of the Church and of the socio- cultural ambient in which it is situated.

It welcomes everyone and is "missionary"; but it maintains its own identity. This openness to all necessitates a clear statement of position, viz. that it is a place to help people grow up; it therefore requires suitable behaviour, a respect for others and a readiness to give oneself.

#### **4.3.2 *The programme of the Youth Centre: a youth spirituality***

Amidst the welter of experience: stimuli, attractions and offerings available in the market of the world, the Youth Centre directs its efforts towards a search for Christian identity, that is, a global meaning of life which can unify individual actions and decisions.

Christian identity or spirituality entails:

- \* a concrete way of orienting one's life as a Christian;
- \* the formation of a unified person in which faith and life enrich each other and become intelligible and meaningful through mutual interaction.
- \* a "style" of life.
- \* The spirituality or the search for one's Christian identity as put forward by the Centre:

- \* takes into account the aspirations of the young for a better quality of life;
- \* considers their daily experiences as the stuff with which to formulate a creative response to the event of God in their lives;
- \* welcomes and provokes questions about meaning that arise from their experiences, and leads them to live out the meaning with awareness and seriousness;
- \* fosters experiences bordering on the religious, i.e. experiences which centre around a human event but leads one to its roots in the Transcendent. In such a process the need is felt for "meaning", an affirmation of the "person", and the acknowledgement of life as "free gift".
- \* In answer to these needs the programme we offer presents the PERSONAL ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST not as an isolated event, but as a process of deeper awareness and growth in one's life-plan.

To encounter Christ implies:

- \* living the PRESENT and accepting the problems it throws up with regard to its MEANING, ORIENTATION and CONSISTENCY;
- \* meeting Christ again and again in the community of believers, and frequenting persons and communities that live the Christian experience intensely;
- \* receiving the NEWNESS OF LIFE in solidarity and hope.
- \* In his faith and in his encounter with God, the young person finds the power that "saves" his life, and the vision by which HE redefines his life, unifying his criteria and his actions.
- \* In such a task of reformulation, we have to underscore:
- \* the RADICALITY with which one assumes the cause of Christ;
- \* The CHRISTIAN MEANING of one's daily existence, which simultaneously and inseparably brings him to acknowledge in everything the sovereignty of God, moves him "passionately" to work for the liberation of men, and makes him live a life of redemption;

- \* the HARD life of the Christian, which consists in his taking up the cross to go through "things and events" with a deep asceticism comprising a detachment from the world about him and a patient building up of the Kingdom;
- \* the affirmation of JOY and FESTIVITY as a manifestation of faith in the presence of Christ and of hope in the final goal of one's earthly journey;
- \* the growth of FREEDOM, in the light of the commandment, "You shall love your God with all your heart ... and your neighbour as yourself"; freedom, therefore, in order to give oneself in sincerity of heart and in constant response to the World which is Jesus Christ;
- \* the CHOICE OF THE FIELD OF ACTION in the flow of history, viz. to be on the side of the people of the Kingdom, i.e. with those who desire salvation.
- \* With this programme we believe we are able to resolve those points, which threaten to affect a cleavage in the person of the youngster today. We therefore seek to unite:
  - \* contemplation and commitment;
  - \* personal responsibility and the "collective" meaning of the historical process;
  - \* "doctrine" and the efficacy of action;
  - \* optimism and awareness of sin as a resistance to the Kingdom;
  - \* the indispensability of a "struggle" and the supreme value of reconciliation, pardon and peace.

This new way needs to be deepened, supported and celebrated in the HEARING OF THE WORD, in the CELEBRATION of the sacraments and in COMMUNITY sharing; such a new life is to be lived in its present-day dimensions but also in the "historical dimension of a people on pilgrimage through time, "carrying in its heart and on its forehead the name of God". <sup>(3)</sup>



### 4.3.3 *The inner working of the Centre, viz. groups*

The Youth Centre offers ACTIVITIES and creates SERVICES, as we have already said in the general section above. But above all, it offers the possibility of living in DIFFERENT GROUPS having varied interests and proper objectives.

The first characteristic of the groups in a Youth Centre is a SENSE OF BELONGING to a SINGLE AMBIENT, and their co-responsibility in it. In fact, the ultimate point of reference is not the group but the community of the Youth Centre.

From this it becomes necessary that the group:

- \* be not incompatible with the aims and spirit of the Centre nor cut off from its day-to-day running;
- \* be coordinated;
- \* have times and meetings for prayer, relaxation and an exchange of experiences, in order to agree among themselves on\_ common goals and to organize joint ventures on special occasions.

The groups of a Youth Centre are progressively marked out by:

- \* their commitment to service both inside and outside; they can have different areas of commitment, according to their capabilities and the programme of activities at the Centre;

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- (3) The means, supports and particular aspect of this programme are given in "Resource material and guidelines for a Salesian educational and pastoral plan" n.6.

It is clear besides, that the synthetic presentation here tends to underline some aspects and is addressed to those who animate the Centre than to the young. Finally, it is also clear that the programme has to be adapted to the level of youngsters in each Centre.

- \* the level of maturity attained: with the development of their autonomy and the possibility of their making choices typical of their youthful age, groups must focus still more on the search for Christian identity;
- \* their programme of formation according to their programme of formation, we can envisage initiatives that make for belonging to groups, and are not in themselves - alternatives: catechumenal groups, prayer groups, vocational groups, groups belonging to the Salesian Family, etc

The goals of the groups in a Youth Centre can be formulated thus:

- \* to foster friendships which can be of support and fraternal help in action and in growth to maturity;
- \* to incarnate the religious questions of one's life so as to discover the true answers of faith and Christian hope;
- \* to make the Centre a point of constant reference even beyond the period of youth.

Those groups that can join up on a broad basis, either for the sake of an activity in society and with the support of a legal standing, or for the sake of an experience of Church, appreciate the value of this linkage and seek to maintain it. The coordination at local level ensures that the groups are on the same wavelength and join up well with other elements in the ambient; it also makes the animators co-responsible for the overall administration of the Centre.

The Youth Centre presents itself, therefore, as an all-embracing ambient, in so far as it offers experiences:

- \* of humanity and of faith;
  - \* of entertainment and of responsibility;
  - \* of commitment and of relaxation;
  - \* of personal growth, camaraderie and friendship.
- It is at one and the same time:
- \* an education to face up to reality;
  - \* an imparting of some certitudes for life;
  - \* an invitation to a life-choice;
  - \* an effort at convergence amidst a relatively wide plurality of actions and interests.

It is useful above all for the one who, precisely because of his relative poverty, cannot live certain experiences elsewhere and much less unify them in a synthesis for growth in his life.