

Journeying Together, Change for Continuity

Celebrate, Dream, Hope for the Young

Dear Friends of Don Bosco

It is with great warmth that I welcome you all to Valdocco - the place where our story started, a sacred space where we gather to dream and anchor hope as we journey alongside young people.

Why did we come together for this Extraordinary General World Assembly?

We are here to celebrate!

We are here to dream!

We are here to journey together, embracing the spirit of synodality!

We are here to change, and to continue the rich legacy of our Movement!

Celebration

But what is the significance of celebration?

We celebrate because it reminds us of the past - who we are, our traditions, and our origins.

Celebrations are an integral part of our lives highlighting our origins and traditions - we celebrate in every country, in every community, in every religion, in every family, and in every organisation. Celebrations reflect our identity and values!

Our Movement was born from a spirit of celebration – a spirit sparked by Carlo Gastini and his friends to celebrate the feast day dedicated to Don Bosco to express their love and gratitude for what Don Bosco did for them.

Today, we stand together here again in Valdocco, once again to celebrate the gift of education that Don Bosco bestowed upon us.

We celebrate to show our gratitude.

Each celebration honours the hard work and personal sacrifices of those who came before us, paving the way for our journey. It is essential to stop and reflect on our past as we move forward, to cultivate a sense of gratitude and appreciation for the rich legacy that we have inherited.

Celebrations also foster a deep sense of community and family spirit.

Let us take this opportunity to get to know one another better, to deepen our connections, and to experience the diversity of our communities. Together, let's strengthen the bonds of our Salesian family and re-energize ourselves for the journey ahead.

We celebrate by dreaming about the future.

Let us reflect on our past, we discern the present and dream about the future. Celebrations help us to identify the next steps to move forward. They remind us of the strengths and experiences that will support us to lead the future.

We celebrate because it's fun.

And, of course, we celebrate to have fun! This gathering is not just about reflection and planning; it is a joyful moment, filled with the spirit of our Salesian charism. Let us embrace this time of joy together, sharing the richness and diversity we bring from every corner of the world. Following Don Bosco's footsteps means not only working hard but also finding joy and happiness!

Why Journey Together - Synodality?

Journeying Together: A New Path to Leadership

These days we gather to learn and reflect on a new model of leadership in the Church, a guiding way being demonstrated by a past pupil - Pope Francis. Our leadership in our Movement must be characterised by the model of journeying together – synodality - based on communion, participation, and mission.

Listening to Everyone

Synodality is about listening and accompanying each other, ensuring that everyone feels heard, and valued. God speaks to us through people. I encourage you during this Assembly to listen deeply—not just to what your mind thinks, but to the voices of others, recognizing that God is communicating through them.

Creating a Welcoming Environment: A Salesian Characteristic

Creating a welcoming environment is a Salesian characteristic that is essential for fostering this spirit of synodality. We must ensure that everyone feels heard, valued, and embraced within our community.

Synodality through the Preventive System

May we approach one another in the Salesian Family Spirit and the Preventive System, that is with loving-kindness, reason, and a spirit of prayer. Let us experience together the Salesian way of synodality.

Participation

Our Salesian Family Spirit - the sense of belonging, not only encourages participation but also fosters collaboration. We must strive for a spirit of inclusion where diverse opinions and backgrounds are respected and celebrated.

The Symphony Analogy

To illustrate this journey together in synodality, Pope Francis makes the analogy of a symphony. In an orchestra, each instrument plays a vital role, contributing to a beautiful, harmonious outcome. Our Movement, too, is like creating a symphony; when we unite our unique contributions, we create something greater than ourselves. Together, while we are here in Valdocco, I invite everyone to perform as an ensemble representing the world, that is, coming together as a unified orchestra that will create music that can be played in every corner of the world.

Engage in Transformation

As we walk the path of synodality, we will experience a metamorphosis. Much like caterpillars transforming into butterflies, our journey together will lead to profound transformation. Through

this process, we adapt and flourish, showcasing our strengths and beauty as a united organization.

Embrace Change

This transformation invites us to embrace change. Let us welcome the necessary changes that will bring growth. Together, we must actively engage in this transformative process of synodality, looking forward with hope to the future.

Accepting Change for a Stronger Tomorrow

Change for Continuity

The idea of "change for continuity" may seem contradictory, but let me assure you, change is vital for us to continue and strengthen our mission as an organisation.

Adapting to the Signs of the Times

As an association and a movement, we must adapt to the signs of our times. Earlier this year, Cardinal Angel Fernandez Artime, when still our Rector Major, delivered an important message to the Alumni in the Dominican Republic. He urged them not to be afraid of the changes we need to make to stay relevant in today's world. He encouraged us to stop complaining and instead embrace the future with open arms.

The reality of the Decline

I tell you clearly "We need to change, otherwise we will die." It is a hard truth, but a truth, and I always learned from my Salesian upbringing that truth is to be told.

Look around us: there were countries where our association thrived just a few years ago, yet some of us are barely surviving today and some have died. Why is that? What can we learn from this? How can we remain meaningful in a world that keeps evolving into a global village?

Engaging with today's Youth

We must not be afraid to engage with the youth of today, not the youth of yesterday. It's time for us to refresh, revitalize, and re-engage in our communities.

Adaption to a Changing World

The world is changing fast. Social, economic, and technological developments continuously transform the landscape we live in. The COVID-19 pandemic alone has shifted how we connect and communicate. To remain effective and relevant, we must adapt.

Core Identity Remains Unchanged

Here's the good news: Our identity, mission, and spirituality remain unchanged. They are rooted deep in our organization's history. However, how we express these ideals and values must evolve to keep up with today's world. We do not abandon our roots; instead, we find new ways to breathe life into them so that they are meaningful within the context of today.

Finding Opportunities for Strengthening Our Mission

Let's be clear: We will not give up on our identity, our values, or our aims. Instead, we should seek out opportunities in today's world to strengthen our mission with young people. We must

embrace creativity and innovation. Let us not allow fear, defensiveness, or past habits to hinder our growth.

Inspirational Message from the Gospel of Luke

I encourage all of you to take inspiration from the Gospel of Luke. Jesus told a parable about old garments and old wineskins. He said, “No one tears a patch from a new garment and sews it on an old one.” Why? Because it doesn’t work. And similarly, “No one pours new wine into old wineskins.” If we do, the new wine bursts the old skins, leading to the loss of the new wine and the old wineskins.

Reflection on Tradition

As leaders and active members of our organization, we need to ask ourselves: Are we putting new ideas into old practices? Are our old ways capable of supporting the new direction we want to take? Jesus cautions us to examine our traditions and practices carefully. We must ensure they aren’t holding us back from discerning our mission and actions of solidarity.

Embracing Our Identity as Past Pupils and Friends of Don Bosco

Together, in a spirit of true synodality, let us seek a meaningful understanding of what it means to be a loyal past pupil and friend of Don Bosco in today’s world.

Taking Action on Our Dreams

What dreams do we have as friends of Don Bosco in the 21st century? Let’s allow ourselves to dream, inspired by the love and gratitude we hold for Don Bosco. His love for the young boys in Valdocco ignites a fire within us to reach out and serve others with that same affection.

Commitment to Service

Dreaming is just the first step. We must also act, planning initiatives that connect us with young people in our countries. We cannot claim to belong to Don Bosco’s organization if we neglect our mission with the youth. So, I urge you: dare to dream and strive to implement projects that promote solidarity and support for young people.

Change is a must

Let us not fear stepping into this commitment to serve the young, just as Don Bosco did in Valdocco. Together, we can shape a brimming future full of opportunities.

Conclusion

So, I conclude, during these days let us embark on this journey together, let us celebrate, dream, and inspire one another to bring the changes for a future which is bright, full of life and energy.