

International Congress of the EXA-DB

Turin, 3 – 6 October 2024

Welcome greeting at the beginning of the Congress

Good morning, friends, past pupils of Don Bosco.

What a joy to be here with you, representing all Past Pupils around the world, knowing also that many others are following us through social networks! Welcome.

I greet you warmly on behalf of the Rector Major, whose functions, as you know, are being carried out over these months of preparation for the General Chapter by the Vicar of the Congregation, Fr Stefano Martoglio, who will be with us in the coming days. Our dear Fr Ángel had to resign and respond to the Pope's call to serve the Church as bishop and cardinal. But, without a doubt, we feel very close to him.

And let me greet you on behalf of the Leaders of the other 30 Groups that make up the worldwide Salesian Family.

Welcome to Don Bosco's home in Valdocco, a home for all of you, because this is where the Association was born, with Carlo Gastini and his companions, who year after year met Don Bosco on the feast of St John, his namesake. And in this same place, in 1911, the first International Congress was held with the urging of Blessed Philip Rinaldi, third successor of Don Bosco, who believed in you so much.

It is a joy, therefore, that you, as leaders of the Association scattered throughout the Salesian world, 150 years after those simple and family-style origins are here in a new Congress.

By the way we have been hearing about this Congress for months. I know you have prepared for it very conscientiously. The World Presidency spared no effort to ensure that we could meet here these days. They certainly deserve a big round of applause.

A Congress that seeks to echo the 150 years of the Association (in reality, it is already 154, but Covid prevented things at the time). An event that the entire Salesian Family appreciates and congratulates from their heart.

Thank you for being continuers of an authentically Salesian way of living, being and doing, for being witnesses to the education received and your commitment to the young generations of Past Pupils.

In the Statutes there is an article that has always attracted my attention. This is Article 2. An article that talks about four levels of belonging. Obviously, you embody the first level, as Past Pupils who have made the spirit of the Association a true *life project* "which encourages them to unite to continue their formation, to spread the educational charism of Don Bosco in society, and to develop specific projects for youth."

In this greeting, as one of the first steps of the Congress, I strongly encourage all of you to bring into play who and what you are, that is, your deep identity: your confidence and your reflections emerge from this; have the courage to place the faces of the young generations before your eyes, just as Don Bosco laid eyes on that first generation of Past Pupils of his Oratory. Believe in the potential of a united and renewed Association to give continuity to a style of being and doing, today more than ever necessary, that opens new paths in favour of young people.

It is certainly a question of opening spaces, of creating bonds, of promoting projects in which young people can feel that they are playing an active role with their peers in a new faith-based humanism that gives meaning to their lives, in the midst of the complex situations of our world. Do not lose sight of the fact that the Salesian spirit and style is a true alternative in life for today's young people and families.

The word that should distinguish us is "enthusiasm". A word that Fr Pascual Chávez often repeated, Fr Ángel too; a word that should define us as sons and daughters of Don Bosco.

In the Salesian Family it is enthusiastic people (guided by the spirit of God, by the spirit of what is most noble and beautiful in humanity) who open horizons for the future. Don Bosco was like that. So was Carlo Gastini. This is how many past pupils around the world have been and continue to be. Enthusiasm brings us in touch with reality, awakens our capacity for analysis, reflection and creativity, and urges us to trust and transform.

Thank you for your presence, thank you for your work these days. Take advantage of your stay in this "mother house". May Mary Help of Christians who guided and accompanied Don Bosco, who accompanies and guides the entire Salesian Family, be the beacon that sheds light on our work and gives us strength for the new paths to follow together, as Past Pupils and as a Salesian Family.

Thank you very much.