



INM CIR/KMJ/12

FEBRUARY 2018

Dear Confreres,

Affectionate greetings from the Provincial House!

We have just concluded the dissemination of the *Strenna* 2018 in the four regions of our Province. These were indeed moments of sharing of views and experiences on this very important theme of cultivating the art of “*listening and accompaniment*” of our youngsters. In this circular I would like to reflect with you on some practical aspects of how we can implement this *Strenna* in all our educational institutions: schools, colleges, ITIs, polytechnics, hostels, boarding houses, night schools, evening study centres, etc.

At the outset I would like to thank Bro. Joseph Das SDB and many other Salesians working in the Educational Sector for their valid contribution based on their practical experience, that have helped me in the preparation of this circular. I hope it will benefit all of us to become better listeners and accompaniers of the young entrusted to our care.

To listen to the youngsters and to accompany them on their journey to growth and maturity is the privileged ministry of the Salesian educator. This is the mission that Don Bosco has bequeathed to us. However, to do it effectively, certain basic requirements are necessary. Let me mention a few which I consider very important.

1. Creating the Right Environment for listening and accompaniment



Every Salesian is called to be a listener and accompanier of the young. The first requirement for effective listening and accompaniment is to create the right environment where students feel a sense of belonging and connectedness to others; where all feel accepted and respected by everyone and experience a healthy sense of freedom and spontaneity. What is needed is a caring and nurturing environment, where the focus is on the child for whose holistic growth and integral formation everything else exists. And whose job is it to create and promote such a positive and inclusive school climate? Without doubt, it’s EVERYONE’S JOB! We should not think that it is the duty only of the Rector or Headmaster or the Staff or the Counsellor. Everyone has a role to play in building a positive school climate. It begins with a healthy, respectful relationships throughout the school community, where students, parents and staff

“feel welcome and responsible for the common good” (C 16), making each one feel at home and at ease. In this climate students progressively learn to take responsibility for themselves and are encouraged to be partners in building the community. Don Bosco used a happy phrase to describe this climate: namely, **Family Spirit**. The family spirit is the “hallmark of the Salesian community and inspires every moment of its life: work and prayer, meals and recreation, meetings and other encounters” (C16). Don Bosco gave the youngsters “all freedom compatible with discipline and good conduct” (BM IV, 338). In his treatise on the Preventive System, Don Bosco says, “Let the boys have full liberty to jump, run and make as much noise as they please” and quotes St. Philip Neri’s famous dictum, “Do anything you like as long as you do not sin.” Creating and maintaining this climate of freedom, joy and spontaneity requires constant and ongoing collaborative effort from all concerned, and especially from the Salesians.

2. Presence In Their Midst – An Indispensable Requirement



As educators, we need to be always ready to be with the young not only when they need us in times of difficulties, but all the time. How can we listen to them or accompany them if we are not ready to be with them? Remember Don Bosco’s words to the boys in the Oratory, “Here in your midst I feel completely at home! This is really where I belong” (BM IV, 455). “For me living means being here with you” (C39). “I have no other goal than your physical, mental and moral welfare. I am here only for your benefit.” “You are the objects of my thoughts and concerns.” Can we make these words of Don Bosco our own and repeat them to the children in our institutions? *Are we able to develop “a harmonious relationship with the young, liking what they like, without abandoning our adult role as educators”* (GC 21, 13)? It means “tuning in to their wavelength when discussing their problems and getting into an educative dialogue with them” (GC 21, 21). **For their welfare are we prepared to “give generously of our time, talents and health:** for you I study, for you I work, for you I live, for you I am ready even to give my life” (C 14).

The desire to be in the midst of the young is an essential part of the Salesian DNA. The Salesian is invited by the preventive system to live among the young; this is a practice stemming from the heart rather than the pedagogical sciences, which stimulates the Salesian to learn the art and sacrifice of staying with youngsters, especially the neediest ones, of loving them, of getting to know them individually together with the problems arising from the situation in which they live (cf. GC 21, 13). The young people should be able to identify us as people who are interested in them and committed to helping them to become the best they can be. The Salesian is present with the young to “assist” them, and that is what Don Bosco meant by the expression “Salesian Assistant”. In fact, **the great law of Salesian education is “Assistance”**.

3. Learning to Listen with Head, Heart and more...

When we are listened to, we feel good; it makes us unfold and expand. It makes people happy and free when they are listened to. This is all the more so, when dealing with young people. **The quality of our listening will show whether we really care for the other person,** whether we are really interested in him or her. It is also important to listen without any personal agendas.

In one-to-one interactions with the young, what is required is a total listening, responding from the heart, not merely from the head. Listening with the head only leads to judgement. Total listening, instead, means listening with one's eyes, ears, head, and heart. In total listening, one hears the tone of anxiety in the voice, sees the expression of joy or worry in the face, and hears even what is not said and communicates the feeling of "you are the only person in my world just now." The educator's responses should clarify, confirm, and affirm the goodness of the young person, not reinforce the badness he sees in him or her. It is important to respond appropriately to the story being told by the youngster. If there is no response, he/she may not have the sense of being heard and that can lead not only to disappointment but even to traumatic experiences.

4. Listening to their Deeper Needs



Young people want to be recognized for what they are. When children and youth in difficulties speak about their school experiences, many often recall how they have felt stigmatized, labelled and disconnected. They also say they want to succeed in school and want to have adults in their lives who care, support, mentor and speak up for them. When the adults in their lives demonstrate understanding, realistic expectations and compassion for them, students experience increased self-worth and success in their academic work and in life as well.

They are not averse to correction or an occasional reprimand if it is done in the right manner with a carefronting attitude. But one thing that they can never accept is humiliation. I remember the responses of some young people when asked how they wanted the Salesians to relate with them:

One said, *"Without making it too obvious, pull me aside and talk to me. Ask me what I need or want, rather than trying to guess. Tell me what I am doing right and ask me in a friendly way how things are going on in my life. Try to understand also that it may take a while for me to trust everyone."*

Another had this to say: *"There is nothing someone in difficulty wants more than to feel normal and belong, and to make mistakes that any other young person might, without the threat of being dismissed or suspended or punished yet again. Please try to realize that there is a lot of pressure on us young people to be perfect, and it seems even more intense when we're dealing with a bunch of other issues in our lives."*

Yet another youngster: *"Please first get to know me and allow time for me to adjust with you and to others around me before deciding if you need to do an assessment to see where I am at."*

Each young person has unique strengths, needs, desires and dreams. Children and youth in our institutions want to be acknowledged for their strengths, given help when it is needed and treated with respect and dignity. They also acknowledge that when there are challenges to overcome, they appreciate discreet support and some "adjustment" on the part of the elders to help them through the difficulties.

5. The Need for Spiritual Accompaniment

In our daily interactions with the young, sometimes we wonder, “Are young people spiritual? Do young people have a capacity for holiness? How can we best facilitate young people’s search for meaning? Don Bosco touched the hearts of so many young people and managed to offer such spiritual guidance because he believed they had a capacity for holiness. Don Bosco was a true spiritual master and companion for the young. He used to say that **education is a “matter of the heart”** and that one must “open a way for God in the youth’s heart not only in Church but also in the classroom and workshop”. **Don Bosco believed that it is not so much ‘what we do’ for young people that is important, but rather ‘who we are’ for them.** He was able to create that youthful environment in which processes of spiritual growth for the young were made possible. He then managed to be that “someone” who could offer direction to each and every young person.

6. Dealing with the Difficult Characters

Dealing with the difficult characters is a major challenge that educators often face. How should the educator deal with a boy who disregards the rule and defies authority? This brings us to the difficult and delicate issue of the place of punishment in educational institutions. Don Bosco, in his treatise on the Preventive System, gives us very clear guidelines regarding punishments. For example:



- “First of all, never have recourse to punishments, if possible...”
- “Praise of work well done and blame in the case of carelessness are already a great reward or punishment.”
- “Except in very rare case, corrections and punishments should never be given in public, but always privately and in the absence of companions...”
- Use patience and prudence “to bring the pupil to see his fault, with the aid of reason and religion.”
- “To strike a boy in any way, to make him kneel in a painful position, to pull his ears, and other similar punishments, must be absolutely avoided...”

Fr. Austin Auffrey in his biography of Don Bosco sums up the saint’s pedagogy on punishments thus:

- Punishments were to be deferred as much as possible;
- they were to be neither humiliating nor irritating, but always reasonable.
- They were to be prompted by kindness, with an appeal to the heart of the child.
- No general punishment when culprit could not be traced;
- No punishments to be inflicted while in anger.
- Expulsion was used only in very compelling and extraordinary circumstances. In practice, no boy was dismissed without regard to his own feelings and ensuring that the expelled pupil understood why it was better for him to withdraw. In such cases, the reputation and character of the boy was to be protected. In many cases Don Bosco would find employment for such boys.

In today’s context, it is much better to find viable alternatives to suspension and expulsions and **endorse a policy of “zero tolerance” with regard to punishments in all our institutions**, while at the same time, providing special assistance and guidance for those who repeatedly disregard disciplinary norms.

7. Involve Teachers, Parents and Pupils



Teamwork is the key to creating a sense of well-being in the campus.

As educators, it is our duty to create a safe and nurturing environment for our youth. One of the ways of doing it is by getting teachers and parents to work together to respond to student needs. Have appropriate contact information and use all possible ways to stay connected. We need to ensure that parents find time to have regular check-ins with the child's teacher. Teachers need to keep the Headmaster/ Principal updated on how the students are doing. This is an important relationship which needs to be seriously cultivated even though it is a time-consuming process.

It is high time to "put away the gadgets and find activities that build face-to-face interactions." Students are looking for authentic connection and a place where they feel safe. As Salesian educators, we must ask ourselves, how do our institutions rate in this regard? We need to make our institutions more of a home by providing activities that build "togetherness." At school this might involve better planning, participation and evaluation of events together, instead of just trying to do everything by ourselves! This is where the crucial role of the EPC and the EPCC comes. Salesians, staff, parents and students need to spend time together to listen to one another and to share ideas and dreams as well as to appreciate one another.

Conclusion: Listening and Accompaniment is possible only in a friendly and pleasant environment where the educator/ care giver/ youth worker/ Salesian and the young person know each other by name. **Responsibility for the relationship lies first with the adult**, but over time there is to be an appropriate sharing of responsibility with the young person. In our tradition, **every person is seen as a child of God and is to be treated with respect and dignity.** There is a depth to every person that deserves exploration, education and celebration. This can only happen when there is a genuine and caring relationship between the young person and the adult accompanying him or her. As you can see, all these suggestions and proposals are flowing from the Preventive System of Don Bosco. **A better practice of the preventive system in our educational institutions will help us to listen better to our youngsters and accompany them more fruitfully.**

NEWS FROM INM

THANK YOU TO THALAVADI COMMUNITY

On 14th January 2018 we celebrated our INM Province Community Day in Don Bosco Mission, Thalavadi. It was a very fraternal gathering and I was happy to see many of our confreres present for the festive family gathering. My sincere thanks to the Vice-Provincial and the Economer for planning and coordinating the day's program. Special thanks to the Rector & Community of Thalavadi for all the arrangements made to make this day a memorable one. I also thank all the communities for your generous contribution towards the development and growth of this Mission.

SOUTH ASIA ECONOMERS' MEET

From February 2nd to February 4th, 2018 all the Economers of South Asia will meet in Citadel to plan and evaluate the financial aspects of our Provinces. I welcome all of them wholeheartedly and I wish them all a fruitful meeting. I wish Fr. Xavier Packia SDB, INM Economer, who is also the Coordinator of the Economers' Network, and all the participants an enriching and productive meeting.

MEETINGS IN FEBRUARY 2018

I would like to remind you once again what I have already communicated to the Rectors/Leaders regarding some of the changes in the Annual Programme given in the Province Directory.

The meeting for the Rectors and Leaders scheduled for the 10th of February and the meeting for the Administrators scheduled for 18th February are cancelled.

Instead, we shall have the meetings as follows:

HMs/Principals of Schools, Colleges	-	11.02.2018 (10 am to 1 pm)
Administrators	-	09.03.2018
Principals & Headmasters	-	10.03.2018
Rectors & Leaders	-	17.03.2018

Looking forward to your active participation in all these meetings and praying for you all.

SCRUTINIES/STATISTICS OF THE COMMUNITY/ ADMISSIONS

As we are nearing the end of the academic year, I exhort and remind all the communities who have not yet done so, to kindly ensure that the Personal Growth Appraisal of the young Salesians in Formation, the Statistics of the various sectors of your Community Mission (submitted in printed format during the Provincial Visitation) together with the SEPP and SCPL (prepared in June 2017) reach the Provincial's Office by the end of February 2018. Kindly email them to inmpvsec@gmail.com. Rectors and Leaders are also requested to do the needful for those in initial formation regarding their renewal of vows and admission to the Ministries.

Rest in peace dear Fr. Stanislaus Fernandez SDB



With deep sorrow, we grieved the passing away of our dear confrere Father Stanislaus Fernandez, 85 years, in the early morning of 19 January 2018 at Don Bosco, Aluva, Kerala. He was a Salesian for 64 years and a priest for 55 years. His funeral service was held at Don Bosco, Tirupattur, on Saturday, 20th January 2018 at 3 p.m. Born on 6th April 1933, at Kumbalam (Quilon), Kerala, in the diocese of Quilon, the seventh child of Michael and Elizabeth Fernandez. He completed his schooling at Carmel School, Nagercoil, and joined the Salesian aspirantate in Tirupattur in 1949. He entered the Salesian Novitiate at Yercaud on 24 May 1953 and made his first profession on 24 May 1954 at

The Retreat, Yercaud, and completed his philosophical studies at Mount Don Bosco, Kotagiri, in 1954-56. He did his practical training at Don Bosco, Katpadi (1956-1957) and Sacred Heart College, Tirupattur (1957-1958). He made his Perpetual Profession on 24 May 1959. His theological studies were done at Sacred Heart College, Mawlai, Shillong (1959-61) and at Mount Don Bosco Kotagiri (1961-63). He was ordained a priest on 1st May 1963 at St. Mary's Co-Cathedral, Chennai, by Archbishop Louis Mathias SDB. His elder brother, Fr. Charles M. Fernandez, was Vicar General of the diocese of Quilon.

The major part of his life as a priest was spent in educational ministry. He earned his Ph. D. in Education from Meston College, Chennai, in 1990, with an excellent study on the Psychological Aspects of Human Relations in Educational Administration by Heads of Schools. His distinguished services in the field of education was recognized both by the State Government and the Central Government. He was a member of the Planning Board for Education, Govt. of Tamil Nadu. He served as Principal/ Headmaster in our schools in Pannur (1964-66), Panjim (1966-68), Katpadi (1968-70), Varadarajanpet (1970-73), Don Bosco, Egmore (1973-80), St. Bede's, Chennai (1980-85), St. Gabriel's, Chennai, (1985-86), and Carmel, Nagercoil (1986-90). He was Rector and Principal at Don Bosco, Egmore, (1973- 76), at St. Bede's (1980-83), The Citadel, Chennai (1993-94) and Don Bosco, Varadarajanpet (1994-97).

He was well known for this tender devotion to Our Blessed Mother and Don Bosco. He had a keen interest in helping poor young people to come up in life through education. The past few years, he had been living a serene and restful life at the Senior Salesians' Home at Aluva, Kerala. May his soul rest in peace.

Rest in Peace - Rev. Fr. Poonthuruthil James SDB

Father James Poonthuruthil SDB, former provincial of Dimapur and currently Rector and Professor at Sacred Heart Theological College, Shillong, passed away on January 21 at NEIGRIHMS (North Eastern Indira Gandhi Regional Institute of Health and Medical Sciences) in Shillong, Meghalaya. He would have turned 63 on January 27. Father Poonthuruthil was under intense medical attention in the Critical Care Unit of NEIGRIHMS after being seriously hurt in a road accident on 14 January while travelling from Shillong to Guwahati. The team of doctors at NEIGRIHMS conducted a surgery on him to stop swelling and haemorrhage in the brain. A part of the skull was removed to monitor and treat the brain. On a ventilator and in a coma, Father James continued to be "not out of danger". On Friday, 19 January, tracheostomy (surgical incision on the windpipe to connect the ventilator) was done. But for occasional and slight involuntary movement of the hands, he responded little to the round-the-clock medical attention that was given him. He passed away at 7.55 PM, on 21 January. Father Poonthuruthil's body was taken to Sacred Heart Theological College and placed in the Shrine of the Sacred Heart. A requiem Mass was held at 5.00 PM on 22 January, after which the body was taken to Salesian College Dimapur in Nagaland for burial at 2.00 PM, on 23 January. Our sincere condolences to the Provincial and confreres of Dimapur Province. May his soul rest in peace.

REST IN PEACE – Heartfelt Condolences

Rev. Sr. Victoria Devashayam FMA (86) passed away on 30th December 2017 while she was making her annual spiritual retreat at Katpadi.

Rev. Sr. Muthusamy Rosary FMA (85) passed away on 24th January 2018 in Thanjavur.

The month of January 2018 also witnessed the passing away of the following relatives of our confreres. We offer our prayerful sympathies to them and assure them of our prayers for their dear departed:

Mr. Susairaj (82), father of Fr. Lourduraj Joseph passed away on 19th January. The funeral was held on 20th January in Trichy.

Mr. Gabriel Peter Ravi (57), brother of Fr. Pudumai Doss passed away on 20th January. The funeral was on 21st January at St. Roque's Parish, Old Washermanpet, Chennai.

Mr. Antonyraj (59) father of Bro. Albert Antonyraj (2nd year, KJC) died on 22nd January. The funeral was held in MHC Church, A. Kattupadi, Vellore.

Mr. George Kadaplackal (89), brother of Rev. Fr. K.V. Abraham, died on 29th January. The funeral was on 30th January at Teekoy, Kerala.



February 14 – March 31, 2018

CONCLUSION

It is a central concern of Pope Francis that the Church and especially religious should not be preoccupied with themselves and their internal problems but go out to the poor and the marginalised in society. The older we become the greater is the risk to turn around our personal problems and ailments. The greater the need to stay alert for the world around us, to try out new ways of Evangelisation and to stay focussed in prayer and action toward the coming of God's kingdom.

Lent is a beautiful time for us to renew our spiritual life. It is a penitential season, a time to "turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel" (Mark 1:15). It is a time to re-examine our lives, acknowledge how we have offended God and neighbour, admit our failings, seek God's forgiveness, receive God's healing grace, reform our lives, conform ourselves to God's will and make headway in virtue and holiness. Prayer is at the top of the list of ways by which we can intensify our preparation for Easter. We need to pray more, or pray better or with a richer variety, whichever applies to each of us. Both types of prayer: communal-liturgical and individual-private are necessary for a well-balanced prayer life. Regular and fraternal communication with all our confreres and collaborators are keys to every quality relationship, and if we hope to be close to God, regular prayer is a must. Finally, Lent is a time to break sinful habits that have not received the remedial attention they deserve, implement spiritual upgrades that have been put off for a long time, and break out of a spiritual holding pattern. Our plan for Lent should be to "Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel" (Mark 1:15).

I wish each one of you a grace-filled season of Lent! Let us begin well and persevere in striving for holiness through prayer (personal and community), healthy relationship (both in and out of the community) and a breaking away from our sinful habits.

Affectionately in Don Bosco,

Fr. K. M. Jose SDB

Provincial

Date: 01.02.2018

Place: Chennai 600010