

encourage each other in witnessing to our faith and in sharing our experience of following the Lord. We can grow inasmuch as we allow ourselves to be challenged by the young, to be disturbed by their questions and concerns. Only then can we become more aware of the reason for our faith and hope. This journey of education to gratuitousness will naturally facilitate young people's joining the volunteer associations present in the Institute. Then volunteering becomes the training ground for us (young people and adults) to grow in patience, meekness, joy in the gift of ourselves to others, and readiness to do God's will.

Mary, *the volunteer par excellence* who said yes to the annunciation of her Son, accompanies us to open new ways to grow together in the *culture of gratuitousness*. The experience of a network of volunteering, at the local and world levels, as a response to the great challenge of the world and of the Church and as our participation to the new evangelisation, is supported by generous young people who have understood in a *Salesian way* that Jesus came so that all, especially the smallest and the abandoned ones "*may have Life and have it to the full*" (Jn 10:10).

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## EDUCATING TO GRATUITOUSNESS. A JOURNEY TO VOLUNTEERING, A SUITABLE EDUCATIONAL STRATEGY TODAY<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

This issue of the Youth Ministry Series is geared at giving light to Volunteering, one of the priority strategies indicated by the *Guidelines for the educational mission of the FMA*. We want to begin our reflection by recounting some experiences that tell us about the Institute's history and praxis. They show that the education to a mentality of gratuitousness and solidarity has always been encouraged and strengthened, albeit in different forms, in the different stages of education from childhood to higher education, and in every type of educational setting, in view of an evangelical and concerned citizenship.

A.

Mother Marinella Castagno, Mother General from 1984 to 1996, died last February. Some FMAs share that she was always very sensitive to the issue of poverty. When she was a teacher and councillor for the school at the Mary Help of Christians Institute in Valdocco, she took an active interest in the oratory during those years when it was crowded with girls and young women immigrants from southern Italy. She made available to them the classrooms for catechism classes and she invited the students to leave under their chairs some snacks ... she invited the senior students to be animators (assistants) of the little ones on Sundays. These gestures of Salesian education always characterized her style of animation, especially the years of government of the Institute.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Guidelines for the educational mission of the FMA*, Chapter 5.

B.

Theatre, music, games, and outings are typical ways of the Salesian tradition of getting through to young people and of expressing loving kindness. In the '70s these ways took on new forms. Sports, theatre group, pop music, days in the desert, Word of God camps, and mission camps represented the plurality of proposals and initiatives to form the youth community of the oratory and to lead it towards youth empowerment.<sup>2</sup>

“We do not educate the girls for ourselves or in view of our activities, as if the oratory is a world unto itself, because, in this case it is not true education. Rather, we must prepare the young girls to engage and to commit themselves in the community of believers.”<sup>3</sup>

“In our experience, the group of young animators is crucial. It is with their responsible and faithful help that we carry out different initiatives and proposals: music, theatre, sports, summer camps, formative moments, experience of service to the poorest (*an animator from Rome*).”<sup>4</sup>

C.

The choice of animation is the reference point for the setting of formative paths within the group-community. Such educational style calls on the Oratory-Youth Centre to show, through its structures and organization, a climate of trust and of complete openness to the young, and to encourage them to enhance their energy through a shared design and management of initiatives. The educational environment is set as an open place, in dialogue with the territory and with social and ecclesial institutions, and as a true workshop of culture and of life experiences.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Cf SCARPA GABRIELLA, *Giovani per la gioventù*, in *Da Mihi Animas* 24 (1977)5 147-148.

<sup>3</sup> ID., *Rinascere come?*, in *Da Mihi Animas* 24 (1977)17, 539.

<sup>4</sup> MUSATTI, *Per gestire l'oratorio-centro giovanile nella logica dell'animazione*, in *Da Mihi Animas* 32 (1985)4, 221-223.

<sup>5</sup> BORSI MARA, *Un ambiente educativo con proposte molteplici e differenziate. L'identità dell'oratorio-centro giovanile promossa dalla*

collaboration to various associations, devoting a limited time for each, as if looking for a possible employment in this time of unemployment and insecurity. There are other trends that negate experiences of relationship and presence among the poorest and the smallest in the name of a false realization that is self-centred ...

These trends do not discourage us. We know that the young volunteers are generous and open. We can courageously propose to them the pedagogy of peace that “calls for a rich interior life, clear and valid moral points of reference, and appropriate attitudes and lifestyles. Acts of peacemaking converge for the achievement of the common good; they create interest in peace and cultivate peace. Thoughts, words and gestures of peace create a mentality and a culture of peace, and a respectful, honest and cordial atmosphere. There is a need, then, to teach people to love one another, to cultivate peace and to live with good will rather than mere tolerance. A fundamental encouragement to this is “to say no to revenge, to recognize injustices, to accept apologies without looking for them, and finally, to forgive”, in such a way that mistakes and offences can be acknowledged in truth, so as to move forward together towards reconciliation. This requires the growth of a pedagogy of pardon. [...] This is a slow process, for it presupposes a spiritual evolution, an education in lofty values, a new vision of human history [...] The pedagogy of peace ... implies activity, compassion, solidarity, courage and perseverance.”<sup>32</sup>

We, educators of young people, from childhood to youth, must never be discouraged as we propose “something more”, higher goals, vast visions and passion for the good! Let us

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<sup>32</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Message for the celebration of the World Day of Peace. Blessed are the peacemakers*, 1 January 2013.

Church and places of joyful witness to the faith. It is in these communities that young people can learn to become *directly involved in the new evangelisation* among their peers. They learn to live and witness to a Christianity not reduced to cult and tradition, but lived as a force for civilising environments and institutions.”<sup>30</sup>

### Meeting God

Everyday life offers us many manifestations of God, but the experience of volunteering lived daily in a community of believers who choose to be with the poor, the little ones and those in the margins of society draws many young people to open themselves to the Transcendent. Some begin to ask seriously about the meaning of life, the reasons to hope or to be resilient, and the meaning of justice, peace, fraternity among peoples ... The presence of a community of adults who live and witness to the faith, and who know how to accompany young people in their life’s journey of knowing Jesus, becomes *crucial* especially for young people who are searching for their vocation. In fact, the time spent in self-giving and the volunteering experience become the privileged space of discernment of one’s life plan, to take the leap of faith-trust and joy of a life given forever.<sup>31</sup>

Many lay people and FMA accompany young people everyday to *encounter Jesus of Nazareth*. They toil so that *His call may be accepted and that many young people may decide to make of their lives a generous gift to the human family*.

We know that today there are trends towards *pluri-volunteering*, that is, the phenomenon of those who offer their

<sup>30</sup> *In preparation for General Chapter XXIII.*

<sup>31</sup> Cf *Guidelines for the educational mission*, n. 131.

The *Guidelines for the educational mission* present “Volunteering as a strategy to educate to a culture of free giving and solidarity, to justice and peace, by offering their personal contribution to the transformation of society and to the realisation of a citizenship based on solidarity.”<sup>6</sup> In the everyday youth ministry of many FMA and educators in the five continents, we can easily grasp the commitment to consider the growth and development of volunteering as an educational practice that arouses in the hearts of many young people the recognition *that life is a gift that is received, which, for its nature, is to be given*.

FMA Youth Ministry gives impetus to the *culture of gratuitousness* in the plurality of its presence and for different ages. It is for this reason that it proposes *volunteering not as something added in the pastoral journey, but as a point of arrival, as a decisive response to the evangelical call: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations” (Mt. 28: 19)*.

### Volunteering: from Valdocco and Mornese ... to today

From the time of Don Bosco and of Mother Mazzarello, in Valdocco and in Mornese, young people and girls have been involved in many concrete gestures of service and gift. “The *educating community*. is the first place of service offered to the young people. Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello gave preference to this form of youth action in which young people can prepare, in everyday life, for broader missionary perspectives. In Mornese, the boarders shared the missionary

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*rivista Da mihi animas (1953-1990)*, Incontro internazionale per il rilancio dell’oratorio-centro giovanile “Ecco il tuo campo...”, Castelgandolfo (Roma), 26 settembre - 2 ottobre 2011.

<sup>6</sup> CONGREGATION OF THE DAUGHTERS OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS, *That they may have life and have it to the full. Guidelines for the educational mission of the FMA*, Elledici, Leumann (Torino) 2006, 66.

ideal of the community. In Valdocco, Dominic Savio, Michael Magone and other boys felt responsible for building an environment that facilitated the serene growth of their companions. We remember the practice in the oratory of Valdocco of boys and youngsters who become “guardian angels” of the smaller ones, of the new ones, of those who were most in need of accompaniment in their insertion in the new environment. There has always been a lively commitment of young people, both in Salesian environments and in other areas, and this has become more intense and has adapted to changing situations.”<sup>7</sup>

Of course, at the time of our saints there was no chance for young people to go to distant lands to serve the poor (only those who emigrated in search of work went there ...), but there was a union of heart, enthusiasm, friendship and prayer with the young people and missionaries who lived so far away... It was already a seed of youth volunteering present in the young Salesian Family!

We saw in the new film “Main. The house of happiness” that Main herself chooses to be a young volunteer in Mornese. Together with some of her friends they gave gestures of care and service to the young, the poor, women ... later on, giving birth to the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians! From a group of young volunteers in Mornese, began the adventure of many educators that, in its 140 years of history, have continued and will continue to propose to generations of students, oratorians, and animators to be “missionaries of other young people”, a service above all in favour of the poorest. This adventure continues even today for many young people whose lives have been “marked” by their unforgettable experiences that have changed their choices, attitudes and decisions. In the Salesian environments there are so many responsible citizens who act in a critical and proactive way inspired by Gospel values

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Ibid* n. 132.

In his first audience at Saint Peter’s Square, Pope Francis has strongly invited us: “Living Holy Week, following Jesus not only with the emotion of the heart; living Holy Week, following Jesus means learning to come out of ourselves — as I said last Sunday — in order to go to meet others, to go towards the outskirts of existence, to be the first to take a step towards our brothers and our sisters, especially those who are the most distant, those who are forgotten, those who are most in need of understanding, comfort and help. There is such a great need to bring the living presence of Jesus, merciful and full of love! [...] demands “coming out of ourselves”, requires us to be outgoing; to come out of ourselves, out of a dreary way of living faith that has become a habit, out of the temptation to withdraw into our own plans which end by shutting out God’s creative action. God came out of himself to come among us, he pitched his tent among us to bring to us his mercy that saves and gives hope. Nor must we be satisfied with staying in the pen of the 99 sheep if we want to follow him and to remain with him; we too must “go out” with him to seek the lost sheep, the one that has strayed the furthest. Be sure to remember: coming out of ourselves, just as Jesus, just as God came out of himself in Jesus and Jesus came out of himself for all of us.”<sup>29</sup>

The *Church’s coming out and going to the outskirts of existence* is the prophetic action of many volunteers who choose to become, together with other lay people and FMA, *a home that evangelises* so that many may have life and hope. “Fraternity is a prophecy that the world of today understands instantly. In a complex, multi-cultural and multi-faith setting, *the educating communities* can be places where a more human life-style and universal citizenship are built, signs of the universality of the

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<sup>29</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *General Audience*, Saint Peter’s Square, 27 March 2013.

volunteers to become progressively more proactive in the ecclesial and socio-cultural situation for the common good.”<sup>26</sup>

In this line, the outcome of volunteering that is lived as *quality gift* is the transformation of society. In her circular letter in preparation for General Chapter XXIII, Mother writes to the FMA communities that “aspirations towards authenticity, freedom, truth, generosity and social commitment emerge in the young. As Salesian educators, we are convinced that young people can find an adequate response in the freeing power of the grace of Christ, which facilitates the maturing of solid convictions and opens them to the gift of self. They then become a *home* for other young people and even for adults. They awaken us from routine with their capacity for creativity.”<sup>27</sup>

It is this creative ability that allows many young people to discover new motivations, new choices to favour a profession that is at the service of the human person, new direction in their secondary and university studies, and new motivations to live with hope and flexibility the difficulties of unemployment, insecurity and underemployment.

In fact, we usually see in many educating communities that young people’s example of volunteering, *with* the poor and *at* the service and defence of the marginalized and vulnerable, has helped even adults to make a transition from *engaging in a little volunteer work of the dole out type* to becoming ecclesial communities that willingly promote the dignity and autonomy of persons by infusing them with the “delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Cf *Guidelines for the educational mission*, n. 131.

<sup>27</sup> REUNGOAT YVONNE, *Circular Letter n. 934. In preparation for General Chapter XXIII*, Rome 2013.

<sup>28</sup> PAUL VI, *Apostolic exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Vaticano 1975, n. 80.

and, where it is possible, become active agents of change in society.

Volunteering is an irreplaceable line in Salesian educational practice. Experiences of this sort in the different parts of the Institute (school, oratory-youth centre, home for young people at risk, etc.) show that volunteering allows us to reach young people who are questioning the meaning of life, even if they are not always close to the church community. In non-Christian contexts, volunteering provides an opportunity to meet with young people belonging to other religions, to cultivate openness to ecumenism and interfaith dialogue.<sup>8</sup>

The reasons that lead us to encourage young people to be volunteers in everyday life as well as in organisations and associations, is rooted in the Gospel call, “freely you have received, freely give”. For followers of Jesus Christ, volunteering springs from the need to live clearly the Gospel values. Volunteering is an experience that is carried out by a dynamic Christian community that is close to the little ones, the poor, and the excluded.

For lay people who share with us a passion for education, youth volunteering is motivated by the joy of being disciples and missionaries of Jesus in the Church. Volunteering that is a *formative journey* in everyday life is beautiful and helpful for a person’s growth. Many educators have experienced this type of volunteering. It is formation that makes volunteering an experience that is significant for the growth of the younger generations. So *from being a mere event*, from giving because of a felt need (for example, to appease one’s restlessness), *to being an experience*, a reality that is lived intensely and in a global way in the daily, that directs us towards choosing with our whole being what is good and what is true.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Cf *Ibid* n. 130.

<sup>9</sup> Cf *Ibid* n. 87.

This is why today so many young people's prolonged experience of volunteering becomes a style of life that is effective for their growth and for their human and Christian maturation. Volunteering is "a strategy that should be encouraged because it unites two fundamental aspects of the Salesian mission: young people taking on leadership roles and service to others. In fact, educational processes do not close people in on themselves, but open them to responsible participation in human affairs."<sup>10</sup>

In various forums of social initiatives present in many Provinces, there are volunteering and solidarity projects whose protagonists are university students and young workers and professionals. Their "exercise of volunteering" gives concrete help in our various educational environments. They make themselves available to be of service to people. They protect the environment and strengthen the sense of belonging to the human family. Gradually they become "volunteers" in their own families, school environment, parish, and community.

### Young people at the centre

Our mission today asks us respond generously and effectively to the need for education. We feel the need to reaffirm our option for an evangelising education as a charismatic task and to be with young people as a preventive presence that proposes paths to holiness. All of this leads us to draw more explicit and courageous pathways of education to faith. But how can we do this in a society that threatens to dim hope,<sup>11</sup> choosing to "promote a vision of man apart from God and from Christ?"<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid* n. 130.

<sup>11</sup> Cf *Ecclesia in Europa*, n. 7.

<sup>12</sup> *Ecclesia in Europa*, n. 9.

How wonderful it is to hear young people say: "*my heart is more open and in my mind a dream is coming to life, which for a time I have kept only to myself because I thought it is impossible: to dedicate my life to young people ... Right now it is still difficult for me to understand whether this is what I really want in life. I hope God will show me the way.*"

Through their service in an educational environment rich in human and Christian values, the young volunteers progressively grow and develop their capacity to be "neighbours" to all. This growth begins from childhood and requires the accompaniment of educators who are capable and open. It is a *gift of quality*. The educational environments of the FMA are places where it is possible *to educate* and *to educate oneself* to gratuitousness, to a mentality that gives priority to a person's *being* over that of *having*. It is possible to learn from childhood and adolescence that the human persons are more valuable for what they are than for what they possess. This will give way to children and young people being gradually educated to brotherhood/sisterhood, sharing, generosity, and sacrifice, through concrete, small, and daily acts. They will become young adults who can critically assess and oppose a society that gives first place to profit and efficiency as models for the interpretation of life.

"Volunteering, which aims at *making people responsible* and encouraging *participation*, helps young people to get involved, in an ever more aware and mature way, in the life of the educating community and in its work for the weakest groups in society. Shared planning, active participation in projects for the poorest – immigrants, victims of human trafficking – allows the young

of God's people and embrace with tender affection the whole of humanity, especially the poorest, the weakest, the least important, those whom Matthew lists in the final judgment on love: the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and those in prison (cf. *Mt 25:31-46*). Only those who serve with love are able to protect!"<sup>25</sup>

### Life is something more

Listening to the stories of the young volunteers, one common element emerges: their contact with something different – another world, another culture, another mentality – has led them to question contemporary society's values of consumerism, of "being valuable because of what one has", and of its lifestyle. These questions have led them to assume new convictions and criteria in making judgment, to be more radical in their decisions, and to make life-changing vocational choices!

These radical choices occur not only as a result of experiences in other countries, but also in the course of sharing their time and talents in the marginalized outskirts of the big cities, in oratory-youth centres, in residential homes for young people at risk, in centres of socio-cultural animation, and in summer camps. They are experiences that make an impact. They make young people experience firsthand the truth that "being is more important than having", the strength of resilience, the true and deep joy that comes from giving, and the certainty that no one is so rich as to have no need of others and no one is so poor as to have nothing to give.

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<sup>25</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Homily. Mass, Imposition of the Pallium and Bestowal of the Fisherman's Ring for the Beginning of the Petrine Ministry of the Bishop of Rome*, Saint Peter's Square, 19 March 2013.

How can we proclaim the beautiful news of the Gospel in a changing world?

It is important to place ourselves within the broad ecclesial horizon of the *new evangelisation*, which is based on the explicit proclamation of the Lord Jesus. "For this reason we believe that youth ministry is *vocational by nature* since it is by nature directed towards discerning God's plan of love for each one's life and history."<sup>13</sup> Hence the importance that in youth ministry and in every educational setting we give *priority attention to the personal accompaniment of young people*, to the *Salesian Youth Movement (SYM)* and to *volunteering*, since they are *all concrete opportunities of vocational growth and responsible citizenship*. Furthermore, we assume *co-ordination for communion* that "gives priority to the involvement of people, the exchange of resources and co-responsible animation by FMA, young people and lay people who share our educational mission with us."<sup>14</sup>

The *Guidelines for the educational mission* offers pathways to a youth ministry that is organic and dynamic, according to the Salesian style, and fruitful and relevant in today's massively changing world that calls for discernment as to the type of presence among the poorest youth. The point of reference for this is always our *charismatic memory*.<sup>15</sup>

The theological foundation of our educational mission is the criterion of the Incarnation. From the perspective of the Incarnation, the educating community designs a youth ministry that focuses on the young person and looks at the educational mission from the perspective of Christian salvation that is holistic, that is, of the whole person and of every person.

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<sup>13</sup> *Guidelines for the educational mission*, n. 9.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid* n. 10.

<sup>15</sup> Cf *Ibid* n. 28 – 35.

The logic of the Incarnation calls for interventions, in the different educational settings, that take into consideration all the human dimensions. We reach this goal by linking together aspects that are closely integrated: *the aspects of culture, evangelisation, social formation and communications*.<sup>16</sup>

The world in which we live asks that educators take as their own the words of Jesus “I have made known to them your name and I will make it known, that the love with which you loved me may be in them and I in them” (Jn 17:26), so that “every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:11). The evangelisation aspect should not be considered separately; rather, it must be closely associated with the other three. Only then do we express the totality of the Preventive System, knowing that the different aspects must be considered in all the processes that aim to form “good Christians and honest citizens”.

The *Guidelines for the educational mission* offers the Salesian Youth Movement as the place where young people, Salesians, FMA and other members of the Salesian Family make present the Salesian charism, sharing significant experiences of faith and life. “Among its *areas of commitment* the SYM gives pride of place to the educative-preventive area, whether in settings where everyone is welcome or in those dedicated to systematic education. It commits itself to liturgical and catechetical animation; the animation of culture and leisure in its local area; social and political involvement in the search for the common good and educational and missionary volunteering. The formation of the leaders is fundamental in building up and promoting the Movement and is a prerequisite for the development of the SYM in the various settings.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Cf *Ibid* n. 41 – 57.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid* n. 127.

here it was not a matter of seeking fulfilment or wanting to live one’s life for oneself. These young people did good, even at a cost, even if it demanded sacrifice, simply because it is a wonderful thing to do good, to be there for others. All it needs is the courage to make the leap. Prior to all of this is the encounter with Jesus Christ, inflaming us with love for God and for others, and freeing us from seeking our own ego.”<sup>24</sup>

The beauty of being for others is expressed in different ways such as educational activity *among those at the margins* of society, innovative experiences of sharing knowledge, creating job opportunities, networking in the territory *to show the good* that is present thereon, campaign against corruption, resistance through non-violent ways, objective information and truth, professional ethics to retain one’s freedom and independence, the stories of heroes of our countries, collective responsibility, and *being volunteers*, which means that, more than “doing a bit of volunteering”, one’s attitudes are at a generous service to promote life ...

In line with this, Pope Francis said these words at the Mass for the beginning of his pontificate:

“Let us never forget that authentic power is service, and that the Pope too, when exercising power, must enter ever more fully into that service which has its radiant culmination on the Cross. He must be inspired by the lowly, concrete and faithful service which marked Saint Joseph and, like him, he must open his arms to protect all

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<sup>24</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI on the occasion of Christmas greetings to the Roman Curia*, Clementine Hall, 22 December 2011.

necessary” as persons who witness to human and Gospel values and create social ties, relationships and “social capital”.<sup>23</sup>

Always and everywhere young people are attracted to become volunteers, to serve others, to be generous to others, to be “their brother’s keeper”, and to “be responsible” if they are educated, from childhood, to gratuitousness, sharing, reciprocity, and love for others, especially the most needy and in distress. Here is what Benedict XVI said during about his meeting with the volunteers at the World Youth Day 2011 in Madrid:

“Those who give their time always give a part of their lives. At the end of the day, these young people were visibly and tangibly filled with a great sense of happiness: the time that they gave up had meaning; in giving of their time and labour, they had found time, they had found life. And here something fundamental became clear to me: these young people had given a part of their lives in faith, not because it was asked of them, not in order to attain Heaven, nor in order to escape the danger of Hell. They did not do it in order to find fulfilment. They were not looking round for themselves [...] How often the life of Christians is determined by the fact that first and foremost they look out for themselves, they do good, so to speak, for themselves. And how great is the temptation of all people to be concerned primarily for themselves; to look round for themselves and in the process to become inwardly empty, to become “pillars of salt”. But

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<sup>23</sup> BARBERA GUIDO, *Come costruire rapporti di giustizia e pace nell’era globale. Volontariato e Diritti umani*, Relazione al Convegno internazionale VIDES Recall – Rejoice – Renew, Trevi, 1-4 novembre 2012.

### To give fullness of life

In his Report at the X International Convention of VIDES last November, Dr. Guido Barbera, VIDES President, said that the presence of volunteering originates from an emotional, ethical and spiritual momentum that urges one to give a response, to be present, and to act. And the first motivation must always be attention to the other, acknowledging that the other one is a human person, and to open one’s heart to the other. “Organised volunteering demands clarity of motives and purposes; information, education, preparation; continuing evaluation [...] to avoid paternalism, welfare and that attitude of giving that gratifies the one who acts instead of gradually growing in mutual giving and receiving.”<sup>18</sup>

In the diversity of educational settings, the great challenge is that of holistic formation in order that the mentality of volunteering, present in the different stages of education, and the volunteering associations and programmes recognised at civil level, may become more and more educational and evangelising in the Salesian style, a presence that supports the practice of solidarity and the search for the common good. It is important therefore to focus on the motivation that leads people to choose volunteering, to offer suitable formation programmes, to form adequately prepared and welcoming communities and to design well focused projects.<sup>19</sup>

The educating community, in continuing growth and evolution, is called to create an environment where the life

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<sup>18</sup> BARBERA GUIDO, *In the global era we build relationships based on justice and peace. Volunteerism and Human Rights*, Report at the X International Convention VIDES Recall – Rejoice – Renew, Trevi, 1-4 November 2012.

<sup>19</sup> Cf *Ibid* n. 134.

shared with the young is abundant and fruitful: “for the growth of Christ in the hearts of the young.”<sup>20</sup>

In a society that is looking for new proposals, let us accompany the young to discover that newness can be found in Christ. In Him we can have fullness of life; only He can give us the fullness of life. A ministry that puts its focus on the person of Jesus calls on the educating community to take on a new lifestyle: austerity, simplicity, respect for creation, willingness to share one’s goods.

In their Message to the People of God, the Bishops gathered at the Synod last October wrote:

“We want to support [the youth] in their search and we encourage our communities to listen to, dialogue with and respond boldly and without reservation to the difficult condition of the youth. We want our communities to harness, not to suppress, the power of their enthusiasm [...] The world of the young is a demanding but also particularly promising field of the New Evangelization. This is demonstrated by many experiences, from those that draw many of them like the World Youth Days, to the most hidden — but nonetheless powerful — like the different experiences of spirituality, service and mission. Young people’s active role in evangelizing first and foremost their world is to be recognized.”<sup>21</sup>

This is God’s dream today: that many young people may hear the voice of Jesus and follow Him always with the total gift of themselves and be *missionaries of other young people*.

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<sup>20</sup> *FMA Constitutions*, art. 7.

<sup>21</sup> XIII ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *Message to the People of God at the conclusion of the 13th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, Vatican, 26 October 2012.

### It is beautiful to be “a person for others”

The two strongest needs that emerge at the time of youth are: belonging to a group/community and making something beautiful together. *Volunteering responds to this restlessness* of broadening one’s horizons, meeting friends, and putting together resources, talents and dreams for something that is beautiful and great, or for someone ... to the point of giving oneself gratuitously to the service of others.

A holistic ministry that educates the whole person and all young persons sends us forth to educate “young people to be active, critical people, builders of a renewal that promotes justice, love, truth and freedom.”<sup>22</sup> The experience of volunteering helps this commitment to be lived in everyday life. The culture of gratuitousness is developed in our animators in the oratory-youth centres as they render different forms of service like coaching in sports, in music and in other activities.

How many young volunteers we meet in the whole world, in places where they carry out their service! In our conversations with them we often feel the radical change that this experience is causing in the way they look at life, in their dealing with people, in understanding society not only as a responsibility but especially as expression of love, friendship, fraternity and solidarity.

Gratuitousness and solidarity are the ethical foundation of volunteering. They are the distinct characteristics that set volunteering apart from many other forms of social action. The volunteers are not only “socially useful”, but also “ethically

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<sup>22</sup> *Guidelines for the educational mission*, n. 51.