

# 2.7 Communication and the Salesian Charism - I

## Aim

- ☉ To discover the importance of the Salesian Charism in the contemporary culture of communication

## Materials Required

- ☉ Constitutions, worksheets for the exercises below each topic

### : Input

In order that the Salesian Charism be effective and relevant in today's age of audio-visual communication, it needs to be perceived in terms of the contemporary culture of communication. The Salesian Charism must become incarnated in the different cultural situations in order to express its powers of service to the young and the poor. Lets attempt to view the Salesian Charism through the model of the basic process of communications proposing a 'Salesian worldview of communication,' one that is consistent with the Salesian spirit and tradition.

#### 1. The Social Communication Paradigm

- The word 'communication' stems from the Latin word, *communio* meaning "fellowship" and also from *communicare* which means "to share". Hence, communication could be defined as a process of establishing, maintaining, modifying or terminating relationships through the increase or reduction of meaning (common understanding between persons).
- The communication process basically includes the Source, which sends a message through a Medium to a Receiver, who receives the Message and responds by Feedback. If all these variables operated as they should and if Distortion does not unduly interfere, successful communication takes place.

#### 2. The Salesian Charism

- A charism essentially has three features: Charism refers to a unique initiative of God which establishes a particular mission and Gospel plan of life giving an institution a concrete style of sanctification and apostolate. This definition can be rephrased using Salesian terminology.
- *The Salesian Charism refers to a Divine call Don Bosco received (unique initiative of God), sending him to be a sign and bearer of God's love to young people, especially the poor (a particular mission and gospel plan of life), empowering him with predilection for the young expressed concretely in the preventive system (a concrete style of sanctification and apostolate).*
- Don Bosco transmitted this charism to his followers to be lived, preserved, deepened and faithfully incarnated in every cultural situation.

#### 3. A Salesian Model of Communication

- The communication paradigm can be applied to the understanding of Don Bosco's divine call, the Salesian mission, the Salesian spirit and youth.

##### 3.1 The Source - God

- The source is the agent from where a message originates and is sent to a destination. It is the origin of any communication. The message goes forth from the Source and hence it is also called the Sender.
- In its deepest reality communication is not just a simple psychological movement inherent in human nature. It is a gift not discovered or invented but received. Communication goes beyond observable psychological and social phenomena to a fundamental priority underlying everything. God is the source from which this gift is received.
- The Source of the Salesian Charism is, undoubtedly, God. Don Bosco was acutely aware that God had called him. Towards the end of his life, as he looked back over his life, he recognised with emotion that the Lord, through the constant presence of Mary, had indeed accomplished His design.

### Sharing

1. In your groups, hold a brainstorming session on Don Bosco to find out incidents from his life where he felt that he was called by God.
2. Share the moments when you were inspired to do something for God or felt called by God to give yourself for the salvation of youth.

### 3.2 The Message – Love for the Young, Especially those who are Poor

- The Message is the idea or feeling that the source communicates. The field of experience of the source affects the message it intends to communicate.
- Since God’s field of experience is only love, He communicates only love. Love is God’s message.
- Don Bosco was formed “to be the sign and bearer of the love of God for the young people, especially those who are poor”. The dream at nine years of age clearly directed him that his mission was to be carried out “not by blows but with love”.
- Every message sent has a purpose: to elicit a response from the receiver.
- With love as God’s message, love is the response elicited.

#### Sharing

1. Hold a brainstorming session to find out various incidents in which Don Bosco communicated care, love and kindness to his boys.

### 3.3 The Medium – The Salesian Spirit, Concretised in the Preventive System

- A message is delivered from the Source to a receiver through an intermediary which is called the medium. The Medium is the means used to convey the message. Words spoken are delivered from one to another by sound waves; movements by light waves.
- God communicated His message of love through a variety of media e.g. creation, human experience. But to youth he communicated his preferential love by means of a very special package, specially designed to suit their whole person: needs, behaviour, aspirations etc. via the Salesian Spirit, concretely and in synthesis expressed in the Preventive System of Don Bosco.
- There is a close similarity between the features of the Salesian Spirit and the audio-visual age. The AV age has no age barrier, but the young definitely enjoy a privileged position in its networks. Almost all the media products (magazines, radio & TV programmes, multimedia...) target the young, albeit for commercial reasons. Predilection for the young is at the core of the Salesian Spirit.
- The AV age influences the individual by forming the environment around.
- The Salesian loving kindness pervading the communities forms the individual member.
- By giving life to a whole variety of activities, he created living environments which made good use of free time for the apostolate, study, prayer, joyful occupation, games and cultural pursuits where the young could come together and grow. An oratory modelled on the Valdocco experience is intended to be the environment for the youth.
- In the AV age, the background has more effect than the explicit message. A Salesian vocation lived out in true family spirit makes the Salesian Vocation even more attractive to youngsters.
- The AV age is an age of vitality, music and openness. Salesian characteristics of joy and optimism mark the life of a Salesian at every age and situation in life.
- The AV age is one in which a new harmonious form is given to the existing information. The Salesian Spirit stagnates without initiative, creativity and flexibility.
- Gifted with such a medium, it can be said that the Salesian Spirit today is the “Medium of God’s Message.”

#### Sharing

1. Recall incidents where Don Bosco was instrumental in bringing boys to the oratory.
2. Share your experience of how you go about increasing the number in your oratories.

### 3.4 The RECEIVERS – Youth, Especially the Poor:

- The Receiver is the destination of the message. Just as the source of a message is affected by its entire field of experience, so is the receiver – especially by the cultural invasion of media and technology, consumerism etc. As a result, the message received may not even be analogous to the one that the source has sent.
- God intended Youth, especially the poor, to be receivers of His predilective love via the Preventive System of Don Bosco. The Lord made it clear to Don Bosco that he was to direct his mission first and foremost to the young, especially those who were poor. And Don Bosco was faithful to this. “I have promised God that I would give myself to my last breath for my poor boys.” “That you are young is enough to make me love you very much.”

#### Sharing

1. Suggest various types of apostolate that a Salesian can enter into especially considering the needs of our contemporary society. E.g. Hospital ministry especially catering to sick youth and counselling them, catering to imprisoned youth, journalism, etc.

### 3.5 The Feedback – Collaboration:

- Feedback is fundamental to the communication process because the communication process has a dynamic nature. Otherwise it becomes one-directional.
- When a message reaches a receiver, he gives some mental or physical response to that message which enables us to determine whether communication has really taken place. This response, called feedback, tells the Source whether his message was communicated.



- Collaboration in the mission of Don Bosco is the feedback elicited from the youth to whom the message is directed. This shows whether the message of God's love has reached its destination.
- Feedback can be on different levels. A zero-feedback situation is said to exist when neither the source nor the receiver experiences interaction or collaboration. Some may collaborate on the level of the Salesian Movement, some on the level of the Salesian Family and some may embrace the Salesians of Don Bosco. A vocation is the highest level of feedback.

#### Sharing

1. Recall incidents where Don Bosco involved youth and elders in his work.
2. Reflect on how well you can work in a group and get others to work with you.

#### 3.6 The Distortion – Resistance:

- Distortion is defined as the adverse effect on the process of communication due to certain factors. Known as noise.
- The capability of responding to the message is often inhibited by the amount of distortion (cultural invasion, advertising, social system one is brought up in, unfaithfulness to the preventive system, resisting the incarnation of the charism in new cultures) accompanying the communication.

#### Sharing

1. Share the occasions when you have not succeeded in your apostolate. Evaluate the reasons for this.

#### Review

1. In this audio-visual age and amidst the audio-visual people, the Salesian charism can be symbolised and lived out according to the very vocabulary and characteristics of communication. God (the Source) extends the boundlessness of his love (the Message) into the realm of the young (the Receiver) via the Salesian Spirit (the Medium). The Salesian Charism is the timely intervention of God, which the youth of the audio-visual society are yearning for.
2. With such a change in perspective, the Salesian Charism can effectively be incarnated in the AV age. God formed a heart of a Father and Teacher in Don Bosco. To every Salesian, Don Bosco is the model of the perfect feedback and faithful living out of the Salesian Spirit. Emulating this model faithfully, God's message will be meaningfully communicated to Youth.
3. The Salesian can be an effective symbol of the Salesian Spirit in this age of novelty, flexibility and presenting already known information in new forms. He has to "integrate the message of God's love into his new culture created by modern means of communication with new languages, technology and psychology. Is this challenging? It cannot but be!
4. To be in the communication business, charged with conveying the greatest message the youth of this world have ever known, and assured of the involved presence of Don Bosco to provide us with all the creative resources we need, is an awe-inspiring privilege and responsibility for a Salesian in this Audio-Visual age and in the midst of an Audio Visual people.

#### Reflection

From the above exposition, which 5 qualities of Salesian life that you think you would need to be effective in your apostolate – especially considering that we live in an audio visual culture of communication.

#### Relevant Skills

Enumerate the various activities of the Salesians in Africa for the youth. Mention one prominent work in each of the countries of Africa.

#### Resources

BOSCOM-INDIA. 'SHEPHERDS' FOR AN INFORMATION AGE. Matunga: Tej Prasarini, 2000.