



# Colleges and University Residences

Salesian Youth  
Ministry Sector

# Colleges and University Residences

*Graphic design:* Artia Comunicación  
*Illustrations:* Javier Carabaño  
*Translation (English):* Carol Russo

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**Salesians of Don Bosco – Head Office**  
Via Marsala, 42. 00185 Rome

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Ministry Sector

## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

**Const. / Reg.** Constitutions and Regulations of the Society of St. Francis de Sales (1984).

**SEPP** Salesian Educative and Pastoral Plan.

**EPC** Educative and Pastoral Community.

**IUS** Salesian Institutions of Higher Education.

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# Introduction

**The colleges** and university residences promoted by the Salesians have enormous formative potential. They are particularly well equipped to facilitate study, encourage community life and develop integral human formation. Therefore, the residential function is general, common to other accommodation structures; *the formative function is specific to the Salesian environment.*

University students are looking for an environment that makes them feel at home. In this situation, many try to find it in the welcoming structure offered by the Salesians. In this way, the colleges and residences offer students *adequate opportunities for personal growth* through contact with students of the same or higher level, as well as with a Salesian community.

The Salesian educational proposal of the colleges and university residences must present its *Salesian Educative and Pastoral Plan* as a path that offers the spaces, environments, opportunities and educators that offer young people opportunities for holistic growth and a point of reference for their integration into society.

The purpose of this document is to reflect on the essential features of the colleges and university residences promoted by the Salesians in order to offer *a renewed approach to these realities* and, at the same time, to *encourage the Provinces to consider the implementation of these structures in their Provincial Plans* as a contemporary response to the needs and challenges presented by the world of university students.

Throughout this text we have tried to answer some questions related to this experience:

- ▶ How can an educative and pastoral proposal be made to these young adults, with dedication, interest, patience and maximum success, in a life and society so different from that of a decade or two ago?
- ▶ What do young people expect from college and university residences in terms of the acquisition of soft and relational skills?
- ▶ What model of residential education can we imagine today?
- ▶ What experiences and activities (e.g. sports, theater, art, volunteer work, community life, etc.), guided by a project and educational purposes, can offer opportunities for growth in this sense?
- ▶ What are the essential tools (educational models, personal interviews, shared norms and responsibilities, assumption of tasks, etc.)?
- ▶ What is the reality of these Salesian institutions today?

The following reflections will help to answer these questions as best as possible.

**Fr. Miguel Angel García Morcuende, sdb**  
Councilor General for Youth Ministry  
ROME, 28 MARCH, 2025

# THE ORIGINALITY OF THE SALESIAN UNIVERSITY RESIDENCES

CHAPTER

I



## A DOUBLE VOCATION OF SERVICE: TO THE YOUNG ORATORIAN AND TO SOCIETY

- A. Don Bosco was aware that education was primarily concerned with the more interior and personal aspects of young people's growth, in his words, "moral and religious instruction"; but it also implied a social assistance aspect, that is, the satisfaction of the basic needs of life: food, clothing, security, home, school and work.

In 1847, Don Bosco began to welcome "young men far from home" in the humble rooms of the Pinardi House. These boys were what we now call "unaccompanied minors". At that time they were called "orphans", but Don Bosco called them "me fieuj", "my children". He began with a young man of about fifteen years old from Valsesia, who was soon joined by other poor, orphaned and unemployed boys. A year later, the number of boarders increased to fifteen.

Thus, after the first years of adjustment, the Oratory of Turin-Valdocco underwent a decisive, albeit gradual, transformation: the shelter became a boarding school for shoemakers, tailors, carpenters, bookbinders, mechanics and printers (1852-1862) and for students (1855-1859). This residence for those who went to work or school in the city was called "Home attached to the Oratory", a two-story building. The house registered 257 young people in 1864 and 412 in 1867.

Don Bosco gradually offered **more comprehensive educational solutions**, a holistic formative environment able to welcome the greatest number of young people and respond to all their needs: the Oratory with a capital letter indicated, both in Turin-Valdocco and in other cities, a youth educational complex that included an oratory for outsiders and a boarding school for students, artisans (many of humble status) and clergy.

In the '60s and '70s, Don Bosco founded shelters-boarding schools for students, colleges and vocational schools in other cities (Genoa-Sampierdarena, Nice, Marseille, Florence, La Spezia, Rome-Sacro Cuore, Buenos Aires, Barcelona-Sarria, Lille).

- B. The Salesian Congregation **has followed a long process of discernment and consolidation** of its evangelizing and educating presence in higher education, a journey that is expressed and consolidated in article 15 of the Constitutions of the Salesians of Don Bosco, and deepened and explained in the Frame of Reference for Salesian Youth Ministry (2014).

In addition, the experience of some Salesian Provinces in the field of higher education led to the creation in 1997 of the IUS network (Salesian Institutions of Higher Education) and, in 1998, to the first systematic reflection on the Salesian presence among university students.

Although reflection and reception in the various continents where Salesians are present have focused - preferably, but not exclusively - on the IUS, the above-mentioned documents declare *colleges and university residences to be an important way of being present with the Salesian charism in the world of higher education*. They also emphasize the contribution Salesians have made in university environments (Institutes, University Study Centers, Faculties, Polytechnics, Universities) that are not run by the Congregation.

In this way, the Salesian Congregation, following the example of Don Bosco, has sought to read the signs of the times in order to adapt to the needs of the times. The Congregation has therefore proposed these *essential basic pastoral "structures"*, which are distinct from academic life, as in the case of the colleges and university residences. The Congregation chooses, even in these years of profound changes, to keep open (and even to revive) the opportunity for students to live "in common", an experience that is more integrated and complex than mere accommodation, based on the *pedagogical convictions of the Preventive System*.

- C. We would like to point out that the Salesians offer different types of houses, apartments or residential resources **for young adults whose paths of life place them in a position of vulnerability and risk**. These Salesian proposals differ according to the degree of autonomy required of the young people, the socio-educational intervention they need and the degree of support they receive from educational staff:

- ▮ Residential resources for young people in situations of social exclusion who make their own living, with short, medium and long-term stays that guarantee basic needs and where housing allows for processes of change to promote their social integration.
- ▮ Reception centers for young families in situations of social exclusion, aimed at families with dependent children, whether couples, single-parent families or other situations.
- ▮ Transition to adulthood housing for young people leaving child protection programs and coming of age.
- ▮ Shelters and housing for refugee youth, etc.

## 1 2

## A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF PASTORAL CARE WITH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

**A.** For its part, the Church has always wished to promote and explore the fact that a pastoral care of university students is not only a pastoral care of persons, but also a **pastoral care of culture**: “In this way, she carries out her mission of evangelizing by advancing human culture” (*Sapientia Christiana*, II, p. 4). This implies that such pastoral care is a form of evangelization, a specific form of service to the faith, a specialized pastoral care (cf. *Presence of the Church in the University and in University Culture*, I). In the context of the university and its cultural environment, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, in 1975, reminded us that to evangelize culture is to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus in the heart of culture, especially through witness and reflection, and at the same time to seek the conversion of the personal and collective consciences of men and women, the activities in which they engage, their lives and their concrete environment (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 18).

The experience of the Congregation, moreover, highlights the richness of the educative and evangelizing proposals that exist in many parts of the world. The different types of residences for university students are recognized in various educational projects. Whatever type of guidance is offered, **the needs of society, the world of work and rapidly changing cultural contexts** must be taken into account:

- ▮ In fact, the phenomenon of the multiplication and growth of universities is linked to the expansion of higher education systems in various countries, which is considered *necessary for economic and social development*, and also for the *consolidation of democracy*, it has meant significant access to higher education for young people from middle and lower classes.
- ▮ Another decisive factor has been the growing need for *highly qualified people* in the world of work. Thus, university education seems to improve the job prospects of the younger generation. In the so-called knowledge society, education is a key element in finding a job and a salary. Today, going to university is part of the normal process of transition to adulthood and is not linked to a particular vocation or to membership in exclusive or elite social sectors.

**B.** These ecclesial and socio-cultural realities have led to an increase not only in the number and types of institutes of higher education, but also in **service and hospitality facilities which are essential to ensure access to young people living away from study centers**.

*“In particular, structures are often lacking for welcoming and supporting them and for community life, which makes them suffer from loneliness when they are transplanted from their family to an unfamiliar town. In addition, contact with the professors is often limited, and students find themselves without guidance in face of problems of adjustment which they are unable to solve” (PRESENCE OF THE CHURCH IN THE UNIVERSITY AND IN UNIVERSITY CULTURE I, NO. 1).*

For a student embarking on a university career, the college and residence experience can sometimes be a means of solving a logistical problem (enrolling in a structure in order to have a place to live near the university); at other times it can be seen from the perspective of emancipation from the family or, more simply, socialization, that is, making new friends. Sometimes the choice is dictated by the formative potential of the community life offered by the institute; often it is the “word of mouth” of those who have already lived the experience that motivates a potential student.

In this regard, the growing need to offer these young people hospitality and, above all, **a positive experience of human, Christian and professional growth**, has led Salesian communities to create a variety of residences for young university students from abroad. In addition to the extracurricular activities that take place within the university, these Salesian environments offer students their own formation programs – personal growth, spiritual, social and cultural development - combining study with the value of the experience of living and sharing a project together.

In accordance with the higher education systems and the socio-economic conditions of each country or region, colleges or university residences have been developed, either as separate structures close to the centers of studies, or as integrated structures within the campuses of Salesian institutes of higher education or within Institutes run by others:

- *Salesian University Colleges*, unlike traditional colleges whose main purpose is to provide board and lodging, are centers outside the university structure that offer students a welcoming space and an educational program. Many colleges are the result of a restructuring of Salesian work and an openness to the new needs of young people, especially in cities where there are large traditional universities. In these cases, there has generally been a shift from the initial offer of board and lodging, made possible by renovating existing buildings, to the construction of appropriate environments that offer human, Christian, academic and professional formation.

*University Colleges*, as separate structures from the university campus, are generally associated with a Salesian Work, which also involves other sectors (Oratory-Youth Center, school, parish, etc.) all of which are connected and integrated. As such, they are under the responsibility and promotion of the Salesian community responsible for the Work. Its operational management is generally entrusted to a Salesian or lay rector, assisted by other tutors and service personnel.

- *Salesian University Residences* are structures belonging to an institute of higher education and are designed to accommodate

students. They are generally located within the campus and, as well as offering accommodation and a supportive setting where students can live and study, they allow them to engage in experiences on-campus, enjoying a whole range of academic services (library, study and reference areas) and formation opportunities (cultural, sports, religious and social activities and programs) provided by the institute.





# THE EDUCATIVE AND PASTORAL COMMUNITY FOR UNIVERSITY RESIDENCES

CHAPTER



## 2.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF THE EPC FOR UNIVERSITY RESIDENCES

It is not a question of form or name, but of educational intention. As Salesian Educational Works, colleges and university residences are called to promote communities that develop a *formation program* and offer an *experience of educative and pastoral guidance*.

In this kind of presence, the EPC is made up of all leaders, Salesians and laity, who are involved in the management of the hosting institute, as well as the university students involved at various levels in animating the life of the community and in achieving its goals.

## 2.2 MEMBERS OF THE EPC IN UNIVERSITY RESIDENCES

People are formed not only by the concepts they study (and understand) and the skills they acquire, but above all by the people they live with and the life contexts they experience. Each one of us is shaped by the quality of the relationships that weave our existence and by the wealth of stimuli we receive in our daily lives. The aim of the colleges and university residences is to enable students to pursue their studies with the support of a *humanly rich everyday environment* characterized by friendship, coexistence and shared activities.

For this reason, the Salesian colleges and university residences, faithful to their charism, are committed to living and building the community as a human experience that develops from the diversity of its members and from respect for the contribution of each person.

At the center of it all is the **person of the young university student**, in communion with the other young university students of the institute, who is called to be the true protagonist of their own growth and formation, assuming specific roles in the life of the college or residence, each according to their abilities and possibilities.

Here lies the heart of the formation of the university student between the ages of 19 and 25: the assumption of personal responsibility, both

culturally and professionally, and in the entire existential horizon. In short, *becoming adults*.

The role of the student is not a solitary one, but is combined with the role of all the persons who characterize the life of the structure and who, through their different roles, support its educational work. In this respect, the organization of the various services of the residences and the development of their educational function require the commitment and shared responsibility of the various members:

**The Rector and the Salesian community** are part of the animating nucleus of the EPC. Within this nucleus, they are specifically responsible for guaranteeing the charism through the management and animation of the whole work or university institute as well as the university residence.

The Salesian community in particular is called to ensure its constant presence in the environment and life of the college or residence, providing young people with its testimony and the opportunity to experience the family spirit that Don Bosco so desired in his houses.

A particularly important figure is the **Residence Assistant**, Salesian or lay person who, on behalf of the community, ensures the guidance and management of the college or residence, and develops the formation program. This person is appointed by the Provincial.

Speaking of the educative and evangelizing proposal, one cannot overlook the adequacy and quality of the **tutors or educators** who in various ways are part of the EPC and accompany its experience (counselors, psychologists, administrators, chaplains, etc.).

Finally, the involvement of **families** in the educational responsibility is undoubtedly crucial for the peaceful growth of young students. It is important to meet with them as often as possible, to maintain personal contacts when they visit their children, or to promote educational initiatives. The educational impact that the presence of a child in such an institute can have on families is highly appreciated: in many cases, it is an opportunity to learn more about the Salesian charism.

# THE EDUCATIVE AND PASTORAL PROPOSAL IN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITY RESIDENCES

CHAPTER



## 3 1

## A DECISIVE PERIOD IN THE FORMATION OF THE PERSON

- A. Entering higher education is a milestone in the life of every student. Entering this education system is indeed a period of transition that involves a series of adaptation strategies for each student, who will be *faced with a series of significant changes* that come at a time when young people are called to make choices that will direct their life journey, to develop a profound vision of themselves and of others, and to open themselves to ever broader horizons of relationship and commitment. This includes an exploration of the fundamental meaning of existence and the religious dimension, which is an essential part of it.

If the university experience is to become a place and opportunity for the overall development of personality, it cannot be reduced to pragmatic and utilitarian motives, such as passing exams in order to obtain the university degree required by society.

For this reason, the colleges and residences offer students not only a place to live and study, but above all **an educative proposal that allows them to grow as individuals, professionals and citizens.** Their identity clearly derives from the goals that this period of higher education gives them. In other words, they are given a specific contribution to the formation-education of young people through a *formative “complementarity” with the university*. Therefore, the aim is not only to provide accommodation and a suitable environment for the acquisition of technical and academic knowledge.

- B. The way to develop personal identity consists in building an “inner center” around which one’s life can be shaped. This becomes difficult due to the *dispersion that often characterizes both the young person’s personal experience* and the university experience itself, with its emphasis on the fragmentation of knowledge, the depersonalization of learning, the excessive focus on academic success and the lack of attention to the integral development of the student.

In order to find the right balance between the educative and pastoral proposal of this Salesian environment and respect for the freedom of

the person and their time of maturation, it is necessary to identify **a pedagogy that is attentive to gradualness**, that is, to the different individual expectations, to the learning that has been achieved and the learning that remains to be done and to one’s particular spiritual journey. Related to this is the predominance of feeling over intellect, of affection over concept, of the concrete sensible linked to first-hand experience (of a narrative and circular type) over abstract reasoning linked to the written word (of a speculative and linear type). In short, the world of young university students is as plural as the rest of youth.

In this respect, the educative and pastoral proposal contained in a formation project responds to this reality and offers a path of growth aimed at human, relational, social, spiritual and ethical formation. The main mission of this environment *is not only professional, but also formative*.

## 3 2

## THE DIMENSIONS OF THE SEPP: THE VITAL AND DYNAMIC CONTENT OF SALESIAN YOUTH MINISTRY

Salesian educative and pastoral activity in higher education is a dynamic process that develops in a series of transversal dimensions, which are different but related and complementary. These dimensions for university students respond both to the nature and dynamics of personal growth and to the commitment to dialogue between faith and culture and to the transformation of society (cf. *Guidelines for Pastoral Care in Salesian Institutions of Higher Education (IUS)*, no. 20 and 21).

The Salesian educative and pastoral approach involves not only the intellectual dimension, and the exercise of thinking, but the whole person. For this reason, the SEPP formative project combines different dimensions necessary to ensure a holistic educational experience for young people, including:

- A. The **educative and cultural dimension** strengthens the interest of all the members of the college and the residence in cultivating a culture inspired by Christian humanism and based on humanistic and professional competence in order to form upright citizens. The complexity of the socio-cultural context requires the intelligent

development of intellectual categories that allow us to interpret and give meaning to reality. This leads us to focus on the following aspects:

- human growth towards full maturity, involving the ability to organize life with autonomy and freedom;
- the improvement of responsibility for continuous study, discipline and personal formation;
- the development of the capacity for reflection, discussion, critical reading of reality in its values and ambiguities, together with a commitment to the search for truth;
- the ability to develop and introduce new personal skills and abilities into the life of the college, assuming responsibilities.

**B. The dimension of education in the faith** nourishes the evangelizing environment of the house, in which university youth are educated in the dialogue between the Gospel and culture (cf. *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, n. 43); it promotes the development of the religious dimension of the students and encourages solidarity, thus forming good Christians. It promotes:

- spiritual growth through a gradual awareness and experience of the faith, lived personally and in the community;
- the free and attentive proposal of the practice of the sacraments as a fundamental moment of Christian experience.

**C. The relational and social dimension** maintains the family atmosphere by fostering interpersonal relationships through participation and integration in the activities and life of the school and residence. It encourages:

- the value of interpersonal relationships, living together and service to others;
- the development of a sense of living together in a community for a better and more successful human, civic, social, cultural, religious and ethical education.

**D. The vocational dimension** allows students to discover their place and vocation in society and in the Church and to commit themselves to building it up. Understanding one's life as a response is a key to maturity. Therefore, this dimension supports:

- the development of a notion of professionalism open to solidarity in the service of those most in need;
- the discovery of one's vocation and the construction of a life project during these years of research and the realization of many processes of personal development.





# **SYSTEMATIC PASTORAL ANIMATION IN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITY RESIDENCES**

CHAPTER

**IV**

The Salesian colleges or residences are characterized by *youthful environments rich in formative stimuli*; they also help to meet the basic needs of ordinary life (having a place to sleep and eat, a point of reference, a sense of security, supportive relationships). People need to be supported in their endeavors, including their studies, by a good quality of everyday life, with its activities that are both routine and imbued with deep meaning: living, sleeping, eating, having fun, taking care of oneself.

However, an environment is truly humanizing when it not only meets some needs, but goes beyond them, allowing people to open up and broaden their horizons. For the colleges and residences, therefore, ensuring good quality in the basic aspects of daily life is only the starting point for proposing and building, together with the students, *a much richer and more engaging experience designed to nurture the deepest aspirations and dimensions of the person*.

The atomized configuration of *autonomous “apartments”* of some colleges and residences, in which young people share only a few material services, does not encourage, or even lead to the formation of a collegial community, thus depriving it of the educational and formative effects that result from living together in a community. This type of “security residence”, or simply “hotel residence”, contrasts with the Salesian proposal of “formative residence”.

From this perspective, it seems reasonable to think that the formative objectives to be pursued through all actions and activities, of whatever order and nature, should be aimed at the full realization of the educative and pastoral proposal.

## 4 1 MAIN INTERVENTIONS OF THE PROPOSAL

### 4 1 1 An educative proposal to grow as “good Christians and upright citizens”

**A.** The Salesian colleges and university residences are an authentic and valid way to offer the Valdocco Oratory experience to today's university youth. **The Oratorian criterion** guides and makes these

institutions “a home that welcomes, a parish that evangelizes, a school that prepares them for life and a playground where friends can meet and enjoy themselves” (Const., 40).

In this regard, the university residences are specially equipped to promote not only a serious commitment to study, but also the promotion and achievement of the goals of this Salesian environment and, ultimately, the *integral formation of the resident student*.

Pastoral care in colleges and university residences is based on what the student experiences and is able to systematize. In this respect, it is important that it be **a pastoral of and for university students**.

**B.** For this reason, this pastoral care finds its direction in a *formative project*, the SEPP, which defines its objectives, mentors, content, method and timing. Education, always and in all circumstances, requires specific and careful planning, which must be accompanied by no less effort on the part of educators. **The SEPP fits into the logic of an orientation map** in the face of two possible directions: the first is that of improvisation, building experiences haphazardly; the second is that of repetition, repeating the same proposals without taking into account the fact that young people change.

The SEPP, which is always open to revision and updating, brings together the various elements of the life, community and formation experience that Salesian colleges and university residences offer to university students. As such, it is a single proposal that integrates responses to their needs, the demands arising from the university experience and the values of Salesian spirituality and pedagogy.

The preparation of such a SEPP requires, first of all, a deep understanding of the circumstances of young people and of the peculiar dynamics that characterize university studies and subsequent employment. Particular attention must be paid to:

- the transition from family life to the university environment (a different institutional environment and different academic tasks);
- breaking away from previous friendships;

- ▮ the need to develop new relationships and to learn to live with other people;
- ▮ adapting to university requirements and study methods;
- ▮ the need to integrate scientific and professional training with one's life and faith convictions.
- ▮ the particular management of free time at this stage of university;
- ▮ the gradual acquisition of a greater degree of responsibility and autonomy, which begins to integrate ideal and reality;
- ▮ the increasing mobility of the university population, an area that urgently needs to be studied in greater depth.

C. It is clear that the issue of education is closely related to the issue of **student participation in education**. In other words, it is necessary to move from a "rule-based college" to an educational environment of shared responsibility. In addition to organizational and disciplinary criteria that facilitate a community experience, a sense of participation and shared responsibility is crucial in this environment. University students must play an active role in the life and dynamics of the college. Valuing and encouraging their initiative fosters a sense of belonging to the college and the residence.

#### **Living together as a formative factor**

A. At all ages and in all circumstances, **life is about encounter**. Likewise, if young people choose not to isolate themselves or become alienated, the university experience offers them a wealth of opportunities for encounter and mutual dialogue. To limit one's formation to an individual space is to run the risk of falling victim to one's own thoughts and prejudices. On the contrary, cultivating the plurality of personal relationships, without falling into dispersion, brings a vital enrichment of experience.

**Living together, therefore, is the fundamental area of education in the college and residence.** In addition to the education that can

be provided by study and the cultural, artistic and sports activities that take place in these environments, there is an enormous educational impact that comes from simply *living in a community*, that is, living together. One lives in a community that seeks to extend or recreate the family home without going "unnoticed in the anonymity" of one's ordinary living environment.

It is a home characterized *by a spirit of family and trust*, with an atmosphere of optimism and understanding to share victories and successes, but also to support each other in setbacks and failures. According to the Oratorian criterion of the "welcoming home," the aim is to create an environment that supports students emotionally and socially, recognizing the importance of community and individual well-being in the educational process.

In this respect, *times and places for community sharing*, where people learn to live together and share an experience of community, are essential. These are places of experience and living designed to give meaning and warmth to the home, where young people are welcomed, listened to and integrated, where they feel that someone is interested in them, where they can rely on others and where they feel accepted.

Living together, therefore, implies a set of values/attitudes so that the colleges and residences can be places of inculturation of the faith and evangelization. Openness, together with respect and appreciation for the faith, realities and values of others, facilitates the expansion and revision of one's own criteria.

B. In a context such as the university, which seems to favor individualistic competition and complexity, the challenge lies in "total immersion" in a daily space where solid bonds of friendship and cooperation can be built. Community life in an environment of "total immersion" and dialogue among students from different professions, places and countries: thinking together, paying attention, taking time, listening, that is, being silent within oneself in order to welcome and appreciate, are just some of the experiences that bring the greatest benefits for one's own growth and for the community in which one lives.

For this reason, in the context of living together, we particularly emphasize **the value of friendship**. Living together in a small community, such as a college or residence, where young people feel connected to common projects and activities, nourishes the hope that, as the intensity and quality of human interaction increases, companionship as well as friendship will grow among the members.

The realization of these authentic interpersonal relationships is *the best example of the excellence of the educative proposal*. In other words, cultivating and living friendships in a community context helps to humanize young people a little more and to make their human and civic relationships more heartfelt.

- C. Finally, we would like to emphasize the tendency of young people today to value the **micro-group** or “**affinity group**”. Even in this environment, the freely and spontaneously organized groups are best suited to their interests. It is in the group that they learn conflict management, cooperation between different people, organized action, community discipline, and faithfulness to one’s word and commitments. In fact, many of the young students participate in the Provincial Salesian Youth Movement.

#### 4.1.3 A pastoral care attentive to personalization: flexibility in proposals and accompaniment

- A. “We can speak of an original Salesian style of pastoral accompaniment. We accompany people at different levels, through the general environment of the EPC, groups, personal relationships and personal guidance” (*Frame of Reference for Salesian Youth Ministry*, p. 114).

With regard to this threefold level of accompaniment, we would like to focus on the personal attention given to the students, which is conceived in different ways, all related to the *formative attitude of the helping relationship*. Another eminently Salesian formative factor is closely linked to living together.

For young university students, especially in their first year of university, it is not enough to have someone at their side to welcome them and

listen to them; they also need someone who *can competently guide and accompany them* in their university life.

The focus is on the educator/rector’s **dialogue or personal encounter** with the youth. In some cases, the focus is on the peer role assigned to older students. There are counseling services, support for career decisions or even just for writing a resume. There are also study support and career guidance initiatives, as well as projects and tools aimed at families in a collaborative relationship, including an annual meeting.

Also important is the daily informal accompaniment, the result of Salesians and educators living with the residents. This is *Salesian assistance* in the form of an empathetic presence and educational accompaniment of young people.

As we can see, accompaniment goes hand in hand with *personal (professional, work-related) guidance*, which helps young students to live and integrate their different learning experiences during their university years. Some colleges and residences offer a program of pre-employment training courses (e.g., language courses) or even support for preparatory university courses.

- B. The years of the university experience represent a period with a wealth of educational opportunities, during which students not only expand their knowledge and define their specific professional skills, but also **consolidate and enrich their personal beliefs** and acquire deeper values and reasons for living.

The question of the true meaning of their lives (the search for identity) can arise at this stage, and often does. They also realize during this time that *the decisions they make are already transcendent*, that they can affect their future, and that they therefore need to think carefully about them.

The person grows in authenticity to the extent that they are given the opportunity to *discern, with all that this entails*: knowing how to take one’s time, making conscious choices, accepting limitations and failure, weariness and, often, loneliness. In this dynamic, imbued with humility and patience, young people are led to discover their own

talents, using them well and perfecting them through the choices they make, and understanding that they are part of a greater reality to which they must open themselves with desire and responsibility.

It is truly valuable to be able to interact with peers and adult figures, including those who are responsible for evaluation and guidance in the university environment. For this reason, *personal accompaniment is a key factor that defines and distinguishes the Salesian environment*, which creates identity and differentiates it from other university residences.

#### **A personalized process of integrating faith and life**

**A.** The years of university study are a favorable time to review, deepen or renew one's journey of faith. This is certainly not at the expense of study or in opposition to it: faith is not an alternative to reason and human research, but it requires and enhances them. *An authentic religious experience contributes to the integration of knowledge and life.* For its part, human culture, which includes scientific achievements, is by no means closed to the horizon of transcendence.

In this way, the colleges and residences aim to be meaningful environments, that is, environments that allow students to experience the values of Christian humanism, personalizing environments, that is, environments that support each student in the cultivation of his or her "being a person". For this reason, in this institution the Salesians offer a faith formation program, according to the values of the Salesian Youth Spirituality, through **spiritual direction and moments of prayer**, reflection on the Word of God and liturgical celebrations (accurate Eucharistic celebrations, vigils, important seasons).

It can be noted that for many young people, their fragmented and inconsistent way of living the faith is the highest possible adherence that cannot be overlooked. Pastoral work with these youth requires people with a great ability to listen and be empathetic, lack of prejudice and moralism, knowledge of the registers of youth subculture, ability to share their life experience, a positive outlook, gentleness and affection.

In communicating the Gospel to young people, the great challenge is not to present Jesus Christ merely as a charming and imitable man who left a great imprint, even though we sometimes know him through this exemplary humanity. Both faith and culture must be experienced, they must be lived, just as the encounter with Jesus Christ cannot be merely theoretical, because "becoming a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a Person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction" (*Deus caritas est*, no. 1). **Openness to the transcendent, to interior life and to interior transformation** (three complementary movements) as a place of encounter with the God of Jesus is one of the keys to helping the young university student grow towards an adult faith.

**B.** Pastoral work with university students allows, and often requires, **learning to look at the world**; to open one's eyes and look at certain ignored realities. It is common to meet young people who have not yet come out of certain environments, styles and dynamics. For this reason, the university pastoral care in the colleges and residences must try to help young people to look at the complex world and especially the most wounded world. How can this be done? There are two possibilities, sometimes complementary.

- ▮ An educational/informational part that can be offered through: readings; formation group meetings where life, research and faith are shared; conferences and debates, etc.
- ▮ Another part is direct and real contact with people: volunteer work, internships in different contexts, occasional participation in campaigns, apostolic-missionary activities... as an expression of faith and unconditional love. All of this helps to open their eyes, to develop a sensitivity and concern for the most vulnerable frontiers of the world.

In this way, the request of Pope Francis quoted in *Christus Vivit* (170) has been fulfilled:

"The Synod recognized that "albeit in a different way from earlier generations, social commitment is a specific feature of today's young people. Alongside some who are indifferent,



there are many others who are ready to commit themselves to initiatives of volunteer work, active citizenship and social solidarity. They need to be accompanied and encouraged to use their talents, skills and creativity, and to be encouraged to take up their responsibilities. Social engagement and direct contact with the poor remain fundamental ways of finding or deepening one's faith and discerning one's vocation".

- C. The confessional dimension, moreover, *can no longer be a discriminatory factor in admission to the college or residence*, on pain of exclusion. On the contrary, the college can become a fruitful experience of interreligious and multicultural dialogue and coexistence. We must not miss the opportunity to create and promote places of encounter. In short, it is a question of fostering an openness to understand the specific cultural and religious worlds, to discern in them one's own values and, above all, one's own spiritual aspirations.

#### 4.1.5 A shared formation program

- A. Being a university student is much more than going to class and getting a degree. It is about sharing, discussing ideas and responding to the challenges of society. An educational process shared with others **encourages personal, social and cultural development** for the formation of ethical awareness, responsibility and solidarity, especially towards those most in need in society. These experiences lead to volunteer service as a way of life and human and Christian growth, as we have seen above.

Colleges and residences can also be environments enriched by their *connection with the local area and its resources* (for example, by organizing conferences and debates with academics, important personalities from the world of culture, art and communication, contemporary witnesses, study trips and guided tours). Collaboration with representatives of the professional or cultural world is an opportunity for human enrichment, an introduction to the world of work in a critical and reflective way, and in some cases a stimulus for dialogue between different cultures and religions.

The evangelization of "man's culture and cultures" (Evangelii Nuntiandi, no. 20) does not take place in a decorative way, but in depth and at their very roots, where true identity is found.

It is necessary to prevent the college and the residence from withdrawing into a kind of self-referentiality, but to encourage openness to the university, to the local Church, to the home communities, to interesting current events and to the world of culture. This includes a rich and articulated cultural program aimed at integrating and enriching university studies, opening up to other fields of knowledge and acquiring a modern interdisciplinary vision in a national and international dimension.

- B. The fact that these environments bring together students from different faculties means that many different opinions circulate freely, leading to controversy and debate. This enrichment includes not only the exchange of ideas, but also **the constant awakening to new experiences** with other students from different geographical areas and mentalities. This unrestricted and unregulated form of education and formation offered by university residency opens up the possibility of "stepping out" of one's own specialization and acquiring a richer map for interpreting life.

In short, it gives young students the opportunity to become free individuals, responsible for their own actions, with a solid spirit, who are not discouraged by difficulties, with a broad and open vision of the world.

- C. **The very structure of the physical space** can be a favorable or unfavorable factor. Both the size (number of students) and the configuration of the spaces influence the living together. This encourages and reinforces individual/isolated living to the detriment of communal living.

In many colleges and residences, young people have a *variety of spaces at their disposal that form the backbone of community life and support learning and personal development*: common areas, co-working, chapel, assembly hall, theater, music, study and computer rooms, TV and recreation rooms, meeting rooms, cafeteria, playgrounds and sports fields, etc.

## 4 2

## 4.2. STRUCTURES OF PARTICIPATION AND RESPONSIBILITY

## 4 2 1

## Local animation

- A. As we have seen, in addition to accommodation and the many services offered to the young people, the educational intention that characterizes life in the college and residence, the human and social relationships that are established, the characteristic activities and the daily routine of the whole community are undoubtedly the distinctive and fundamental elements that promote the integral growth of the person. For this reason, **certain criteria are necessary for the identification and selection of young people** who apply to enter the college and residence: a serious commitment and motivation for university study; willingness to undertake a formative journey; aptitude for community life and openness to sharing the rules of common life; willingness to participate in formative activities.

Some educational priorities need to be addressed by those in charge: attentiveness to the youth of our environment; availability to those from out of town or out of the country; consideration for those who do not always have economic resources, and activation of scholarships or grants.

*A clear presentation of the purpose of the college or university residence is also important. In some cases, a short residential experience is offered prior to admission. In all these cases, an interview aimed at proposing the purpose and style of the institution is crucial.*

The proposal for educative and pastoral animation of the college or residence should seek to be in harmony with the initiatives of *the sectors and bodies of the local Church's University Pastoral Ministry*.

- B. At the heart of the EPC leadership are those in charge of the institution providing the residence and formation services. However, the commitment and shared responsibility of all the members is essential for the success of the formation proposal. From the Rector and the Salesian community that animates the work, to the students and the director of the university or college residence, together with

the educators, they are called to build a community. **To do this, it is necessary to encourage the participation of the students in the life and animation of the college or residence.** This democratic participation of the students in the management and community life of the college or residence is organized through groups, consultations or assemblies, as well as through the bodies set up by the college or residence; in some cases there is a College Council and Assembly.

- C. While the Educative and Pastoral Plan is the document that articulates the educative proposal that underlies the life of the colleges and residences, the **internal Regulations** have another purpose: to specify the rules of conduct for the students and the various people in charge, and to define the operating procedures of the internal participation bodies.
- D. Each college and residence imparts to its students a spirit that accompanies them beyond their university years and their own generation. There are frequent reunions of **former students from different classes**, all enrolled in their respective eras and all part of a common educational awareness.

## 4 2 2

## Provincial/national animation

- A. At the provincial or national level, it is important to **ensure the nature and purpose of the colleges and residences in a given territory** through a series of actions: to serve as a vehicle for communication, cooperation and information among Salesian schools and residences in the country or Province; to develop initiatives for student exchange and mobility; and to promote collaboration with other educational institutions that exist in the Province. For this reason, the responsibilities of the Provincial Delegate for Youth Ministry cannot be delegated to others.
- B. It is also necessary to create **opportunities for coordination and communication** between the young people and the educators of the colleges and residences: meetings between the college and residence directors; meetings between the young people of the various institutions and their directors; meetings between the directors of the colleges and residences in the same city, the university chapels and the diocesan university pastoral ministry.



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