Farewell Letter

Dear Salesian Cooperators,

After 8 years of service to the Association, I would like to greet you with the same dignity and love with which I have lived these years. For me they have been years of grace and great human and spiritual wealth. I met people strong in their faith in Christ, aware of their baptismal and Salesian vocation, women and men in love with Don Bosco and fully involved in the Salesian mission. Their witness was for me a great gift that leaves a profound mark on my life. I have met these Salesian Cooperators on the six continents and with significant moments that I want to remember.

First of all, I attended the 2012 World Congress where the *Project of Apostolic Life* was definitively approved. The approval of this book of life was a historic moment for the whole Association, and from there the commitment was born to present the PVA in all the Regional Congresses, together with the *Charter of Charismatic Identity of the Salesian Family*. Together with these fundamental documents, we have developed and presented on all continents the other documents that form the backbone of our Association: the *Commentary*; *Guidelines and Indications for the Formation of the Salesian Cooperators*; the *Criteria of Animation and Governance*; and the *Animating Economic Solidarity* (ASE).

With Sister Leslye we visited many African countries. From these visits came the idea of convening a Regional Congress in Addis Abeba. For Africa, it was a historic moment because following that Congress the decision was made to create two linguistic zones: one for Anglophone Africa and one for Francophone Africa. This choice of animation, confirmed in the Congress of Nairobi, signaled a good moment of growth for the Association on that great continent.

I am happy to leave an association that is growing in the sense of belonging and communion. Together with Sr. Leslye, we have attested to these values in which I firmly believe. We shared joys, sufferings and dreams together. We felt and really acted as brother and sister. We always experienced this same communion on the World Council. I thank each of you personally, but especially Noemi for her wise, maternal, and generous service. Thanks also to Antonio for the courage with which he took over the Association. I can't help thanking Giuseppe. We spent many moments together and I have always admired his generosity made of simplicity and friendliness. A true model of an authentic Salesian Cooperator.

But perhaps the most fruitful period of my service was the year of my chemotherapy. Suddenly discovering that you have lymphoma is a bad surprise for anyone, even for a priest. It is an unexpected and unwelcome guest. It changes your life. One suddenly moves from an active life, made of commitments and travel, to a passive life. One must submit a protocol that does not leave much room for what used to be usual occupations. Even for a priest it is not easy to handle this time that seems "lost" and which ought to be removed at all costs. In faith, I decided to transform that sterile isolation into fruitful solitude. Thus silence became a place of dialogue with God and with myself so I could return to what is essential, to rediscover the laws of the soul and the center of life which is always threatened by dispersion and fragmentation. During that time I offered my sufferings for the Salesian Family and for the Association. I felt close to Jesus who saved humanity through his Passion and Death.

At this point I believe I have given it all: love, service, and suffering. These are also the gifts that I leave to the Association and to my successor to whom I wish the same blessings I have received.

I thank all those who have accompanied me during these years and I shall gather together all your "thanks" in the Eucharistic celebration, the heart of the Church and of the Salesian Family, so as to render a

unique "THANK YOU" to God the Father who sustains us with love on the journey that continues, even if in different directions.

May Mary Help of Christians accompany the Association of Salesian Cooperators. At the right moment during this pandemic – a time when the mission field among young people seems even more difficult and arid – the Madonna of difficult times will make it rain and will make flowers spring up in the soil drenched by the sweat of our labors.

Fraternally in Don Bosco

Don Giuseppe Casti