**(Salesian Youth Ministry Department- Rome)**– Reflection on Schools and Education

We will return to our educational mission in our schools and in our Vocational Training Centres (VTC). Thank God! But nothing will be like before. The learning environment, classes and workshops will never be the same again. It will be necessary to keep social distances, to live with protective masks, to transform timetables, schedules, spaces, with lots of disinfectant gel, because the new normal will be very different.

The great price we will pay for this crisis is not only emotional, because we have had to isolate ourselves for so long; nor just the loss of learning, for the time away from school. The great crisis, and we cannot afford its cost, is a generation marked by the pandemic of mistrust, of fear, the coronavirus being the decisive "experience" of a generation. When all this is over, society will have fundamentally changed, and education will also have to change.

It will be necessary to listen more, discover and identify the different needs of each and plan new forms of learning. Many educators, pedagogues, illustrious thinkers, theorists of all kinds have questioned for many years the status quo of an education made up of daily school which, as a system, has been transformed, according to the wise and clear words of Benedict XVI, into an "educational emergency." An emergency that has now become definitive, an emergency that has become a pandemic of emotions and responses necessary to continue living.

“Meaningful learning is not guaranteed. It does not seem that we are educating for a constantly changing world. We don't ask ourselves what our students really need to learn for the future.” These are words already heard. But on returning from your fears and absences, everything will be different. And it must be different.

We must ask ourselves once again why we are here. Understand how we managed to reinvent ourselves in this pandemic situation and how all this changes things. What role do educators play as significant and trusted adults: hearts that beat or simply repeaters of formulas that seem useless? Containers of empty experiences or creators of dreams, hopes, new worlds?

We have realized these days how technology can be an interesting help. Thanks to technology, schools and VTCs have not closed. The digital environment has become the way to communicate and be present. But ... it has also shown how necessary human relationships are. That a monitor is not enough, the meeting is also needed: to be together, share, laugh, in the beauty of being together, in the greatness of the face-to-face relationship. Giving up on this is too dehumanizing. Especially for us who have learned, following Don Bosco, that "education is a thing of the heart."

A new future was born for schools and VTCs. We all want to be there. With everyone. For the happiness of those who believe that education is for life. A happy life. Now and in eternity.