



THE FORMATION OF THE SALESIAN COOPERATOR: DIMENSIONS AND PILLARS

Objective: to deepen the contents of formation so that it fully encompasses the human, Christian and Salesian dimensions of the Salesian Cooperator and offers the knowledge necessary for his vocation.

Dear brothers and sisters in Don Bosco of the Inter-American Region. It is a pleasure to share this moment of formation together again. I say together because I hope it not only serves you but also that it serves me. Not only is the listener formed, but also the formator, thanks to your contributions. You know I like to be interrupted by questions in interviews because it makes it livelier. However, this format does not allow to do it that way, but we will surely achieve the goal together.

I especially thank Francisco for this invitation and the confidence he continues to show in me to help us in our common reflection. I appreciate the patience and the work of the translators to be able to share with all of you in your respective languages. It is a great effort that you have to know how to value. This, too, is FORMATION in capital letters.

As you have heard in this theme, we want to focus on the dimensions and pillars of Formation. This theme is the easiest to develop. In five minutes maximum, we finish the topic. Carefully read the document "Guidelines and Indications for the Formation of the Salesian Cooperators" where all the keys are found to achieve the objective.

It has been a pleasure to share this formation time with you and I hope you invite me again (and that it will be face to face so I can give you a hug).

Did I use all my allotted time? I still have time to share this exciting topic with you.

The first thing I must tell you is that you have to read the proposed document. But the reading that I recommend is not the reading of a book, it is not the reading of a book that fascinates us, but rather the paused and thoughtful reading of the document. I encourage you to read paragraph by paragraph in the Ignatian style: love each paragraph and internalize each word to see what it says to each of us.

The second recommendation is, once this reading is completed, to reread our PAL with a different focus. And the reading we do with two characteristics:

1. An individual reading which deepens and internalizes each article. A reading where we try to find out what reminds us of what we have learned and what we are discovering anew.
2. A time to share with my group, from my personal reference and beginning with what I have discovered and transitioning to a time of listening to what my brothers and sisters have discovered. This dual orientation will help us to grow together, to grow in community, to advance the fourth pillar of the three dimensions proposed in the document: "knowing how to live in communion" (I prefer to say "knowing how to live in community").



Well, let's not anticipate the events or the topic of the discussion and let's not kill the topic.

To focus on the theme, the first thing we need to remember is article 29 in its two sections. This article 29 is entitled “Responsibilities and Initiatives as Regards Formation”. This article says that “Salesian Cooperators are the first ones responsible for their own human, Christian, Salesian, and professional formation.” (the latter only in the personal sphere). However, the Association also must offer and support this formation.

Attention and first warning. We are talking about formation, all formation. Not only in the aspirant stage but in all of life. The SSCC's are in a continuous process of formation. Both auto-formation and group formation ...

And formation that is promoted by the Association comprises a series of characteristics which are summed up as... formation is a life project in which we will cultivate and realize our capacities and our personal gifts. In this process, we will embrace the Gospel values in order to realize them in our lives. But all this starting from a concrete way of living it, from interiorizing and embracing the Salesian Spirit in our life.

But formation is not compartmentalized for Salesian cooperators, formation is not separated by independent grids where its axis are the pillars and the dimensions. And it is not compartmentalized because formation helps us in a continuous process of personal maturation in the faith which leads us to the Master, Christ. And this maturing process helps us to develop our life plan to follow Christ as best as possible as the saints did.

Our life project leads to Holiness (cf. article 41 PVA / S) and on this path we are “shaken from lethargy to spread the energy of charity” (cf. Introduction RDB).

In formation, there is nothing to invent, only read our PAL. In the aforementioned article 29 of PAL / S, the three dimensions that we must cultivate together are mentioned. We cannot separate that we are people, Christians, Salesians. These three qualifiers are intrinsic in us as Salesian Cooperators. But it is even more important in the formation of aspirants to work on these three dimensions.

In initial formation we must help the aspirants to discern whether the Lord is calling them to a specific vocation in the world. For this reason, we have to work on these dimensions concurrently, even though each dimension has its own set of specifics that we have to deal with and work on. But beware, the same goes for Salesian Cooperators in their ongoing formation.

In the **human dimension**, we must:

- *Help aspirants and cooperators to forge a strong identity.* In a world where the immediate and the lack of principles prevail as well as the “throw-away” culture it is necessary to oppose, to form a moral conscience, to have reasoned and responsible judgments, to promote a life with coherence and responsibility, to propose credible models whose referents are Jesus and Don Bosco, accompany the SSCC in the maturation of their affective and emotional life.
- *Promote a culture inspired by human humanism.* From the discovery of the good that there is in today's society, to create a culture of solidarity and commitment which helps to promote the culture of life.



- *Work for human advancement and humanistic and professional competence.* We need to form stable attitudes that allow us to act as people free from a critical outlook of the reality around us.
- *Help them reflect on the reason for their own faith.* In this line, we must cultivate a reading of the Christian message and of the world in which we live with openness towards God, a critical religious formation that strengthens the heart and an attitude of respect and dialogue towards the other denominations.

In the ***Christian dimension***, we must:

- *Promote the development of the religious dimension of the person.* In the formation of Salesian Cooperators, there must be proposals in which we become aware and develop our typical attitudes of a religious experience such as wonder, contemplation, openness to mystery, the sense of gratuity, apostolic commitment.
- *Stimulate, accompany and deepen the experience of faith.* The experience of faith should help us see life through the eyes of Jesus. We must succeed in integrating faith and life in our existence. We must therefore be able to:

1. Announce the Faith in a Meaningful Way
 2. Adhere to the Lord through personal encounter and through accompaniment. By accompaniment we mean the figure of an accompanist or a spiritual director.
 3. Ensure that the celebrations are a real encounter with Christ.
 4. Live faith in Jesus Christ daily
 5. Seek encounters with the Lord, through personal and community prayer.
- Offer progressive experiences of service and apostolic commitment. We must not only receive but also give what we have learned. Our social dimension must be cultivated with practice to be a witness and evangelizer of the reality that surrounds us because we cannot be different depending on where we are. Always follow the model of Jesus Christ.

In the ***Salesian dimension*** we must:

- *Build a family environment.* In an environment of trust and proximity, apostolic proposals are more credible.
- *Promote community life in the local center.* The local center is the privileged environment in which the Salesian charism develops and is lived.
- *Create different proposals and working environments.* We must respect the pace of personal growth and leave no one behind.
- *Offer moments of conviviality.* We must reactivate and educate in the intense moments of retreat, of conviviality, of spiritual exercises in our own centers.



In short, these aspects of the Salesian dimension are synthesized in the key to the Salesian charism: the Preventive System.

But we must not forget a nuance in the Salesian dimension which has not been written before. We must take care of the world dimension of the Salesian Cooperator and foster the need to feel a member of a center, a member of a province, a member of a region... In short, member of an Association.

This feeling of being a member of an Association will become more present if we have to move from our usual residence, we are going to ask ourselves: "Is there a SSCC center where I am going?" And with an affirmative answer, one can say: "I am home again.

As we have already said, these dimensions must be reflected in the initial formation of our aspirants but also in the on-going formation of our brothers and sisters. The work of the three dimensions will strengthen us by strengthening our sense of belonging. The work in the three dimensions will help us to discern the call of the Lord to the vocation of Salesian Cooperator as aspirants and later they will help us to strengthen the sense of belonging to the Association and our own vocation.

And in the three dimensions, we have to work the four basic pillars. These pillars are not an invention of the Salesian Cooperators but, given the meaning and approach of current formation, they are used in the processes of university and professional formation.

These four pillars are: knowing, knowing how, knowing how to be and knowing how to live in community (knowing how to live in communion). And they must be combined with the three dimensions that we have seen previously.

1. **Knowledge** designates the knowledge that it is necessary to acquire, in relation to the maturation of a specific identity; in this context, we will always strive to have the identity of the Salesian Cooperator as our horizon.
2. **Know-how** refers to a series of skills and competences required to face the different situations in which the Salesian Cooperator has to live and express this specific identity.
3. **Knowledge of being**, in which the two preceding pillars converge and of which they take on meaning, refers to the values, attitudes and motivations which determine, in the personal and deep sphere, being. This is the proper identity of the Salesian Cooperator.
4. **Knowing how to live in communion** refers to the development of the understanding of the other and to the appreciation of the relational and community aspect.

Good formation, both initial and ongoing as formators, should not only develop theoretical knowledge without encompassing our skills to help us grow and mature around our own identity and our relationship skills with one another.

These are not successive compartments that we must overcome but must be harmonized in a single process. This will mean that in each dimension indicated above (human, Christian and Salesian) it will be necessary to ask:



1. What is important to know?
2. What should you know how to do?
3. What is knowing how to be?
4. What does knowing how to live in communion mean in practice?

This combination will give us 12 general principles from which we can obtain guidelines that help us plan any formation that we carry out. And when we say any formation, we include the three formative actions that our PAL mentions: initial formation, continuing formation and the formation of those responsible (or formation of formators).

In the document "Guidelines and Indications for the Formation of Salesian Cooperators" these twelve pillars are detailed with their operational indications and something very important which remains, in my opinion always as a quotation or footnote, its possible junction with the PAL. In other words, a reference to the specific PAL appears.

There can be no formation, at any of its levels, which does not have references to our Personal Life Project, to what we are committed to doing throughout our own life, to what gives birth to our existence, to our daily mirror. ... It can be named in several ways, but it can be summed up in four words or three acronyms: Project of Apostolic Life (PAL).

1. What is important to know?
 - a. In the human dimension, to know and be immersed in the reality that surrounds us.
 - b. In the Christian dimension, to find in Christ the foundation, the way and the goal of his being, his call and his mission within the Church.
 - c. In the Salesian dimension, the study of the charism of our founder Saint John Bosco and of the Salesian identity in general and in particular of our ASSCC.
2. What should you know how to do?
 - a. In the human dimension, to acquire a competence which helps the SSCC to exercise an apostolate in the accomplishment of the entrusted mission (cf. PAL / R 2.1) in the light of ethics in conformity with Christian values.
 - b. In the Christian dimension, learn to match the gifts received with adequate motivations. In short, to welcome and live our vocational call as a gift of the Spirit.
 - c. In the Salesian dimension, it will be a good gift, a carefully prepared gift for the recipients themselves and their companions on the journey. In short, to find in the apostolate a "place" of discernment and verification of the Salesian vocation.
3. What do you need to know how to be?
 - a. In the human dimension, it is human maturity in all dimensions (intellectual, psychological, affective, social, moral, spiritual...).



- b. In the Christian dimension, help the SSCCs to become convinced witnesses of Christ, living members of the Church and apostles passionate about the cause of the Kingdom, aware of being called to holiness.
 - c. In the Salesian dimension, discovering and nourishing his Salesian vocation by living the charismatic project of Don Bosco on a daily basis in the different circumstances and stages of his life.
4. What does knowing how to live in communion mean in practice?
- a. In the human dimension to mature that the ability to work together is an essential aptitude for the development of the mission.
 - b. In the Christian dimension, it is a requirement that springs from the very reality of being Christians where since Baptism we belong to the Church, to the people of God, we share and celebrate the same faith and we participate in the mission of evangelization and immersing oneself in the intimacy of the God in the Holy Trinity.
 - c. In the Salesian dimension, discover that the vocation of Salesian Cooperator is embodied in a concrete, fraternal and associative way where the local center is the fundamental nucleus of our associative life which helps us and encourages us in our concrete mission: “to contribute to salvation of young people, especially the most needy”.

We are not going to develop the operative indications for each pillar. In doing the homework assigned at the beginning of the presentation, you will discover in the proposed document these operational indications and a deepening of the pillars and dimensions by stages (initial formation, ongoing formation and formation of formators).

To conclude the theme, formation is an art that lasts a lifetime. This art is embodied in a dynamic process that adapts throughout our life. But in this adaptation to time, we must not lose most of our formation. We cannot ignore the fundamental principles contained in the dimensions (human, Christian and Salesian) and in the pillars (knowing, knowing how, knowing how to be and knowing how to live in communion) that I have exposed in this interview but which emanate from our own Project of Apostolic Life and which are specifically explained in the document “Guidelines and Indications for the Formation of Salesian Cooperators”.

This is the starting point that the Association of Salesian Cooperators needs in order to be Salesian Cooperators aware of their own Christian and Salesian vocation.

And this vocation, this call from the Lord is made concrete in:

- Devoting oneself to the evangelization of culture and social life
- Collaborating in building the Kingdom of God where you live. Testify with family, at work, with friends ...
- Always being ready to go out to meet others and to be ready to save the souls of each of them (in particular that of the most needy and poor young people) through the pedagogy of good as a charismatic element. of the spiritual and apostolic experience of Don Bosco.



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Let us never forget who we are, where we live and what we do, and constantly peer within ourselves on our way to Holiness by living THE PVA.

With the time allotted and some clarity, I hope to have accomplished the elaboration of the title and the achievement of the set objective.

Thank you for listening and I ask you one last favor: let us spread what we have learned and received in our environments, share our gift with those around us and be proactive with our way of life without imposing but with humility and sharing with others our way of life.

I reiterate my thanks to Francisco and to the whole Region for allowing me to share with you all the dreams of this sinful son of Don Bosco, of this son of God. As our promise says: may Mary Help of Christians guide and accompany us on our journey.

A big hug to all

Raúl Fernández, world counselor of the Iberian region of the Association of Salesians Cooperators and responsible for formation at world level