

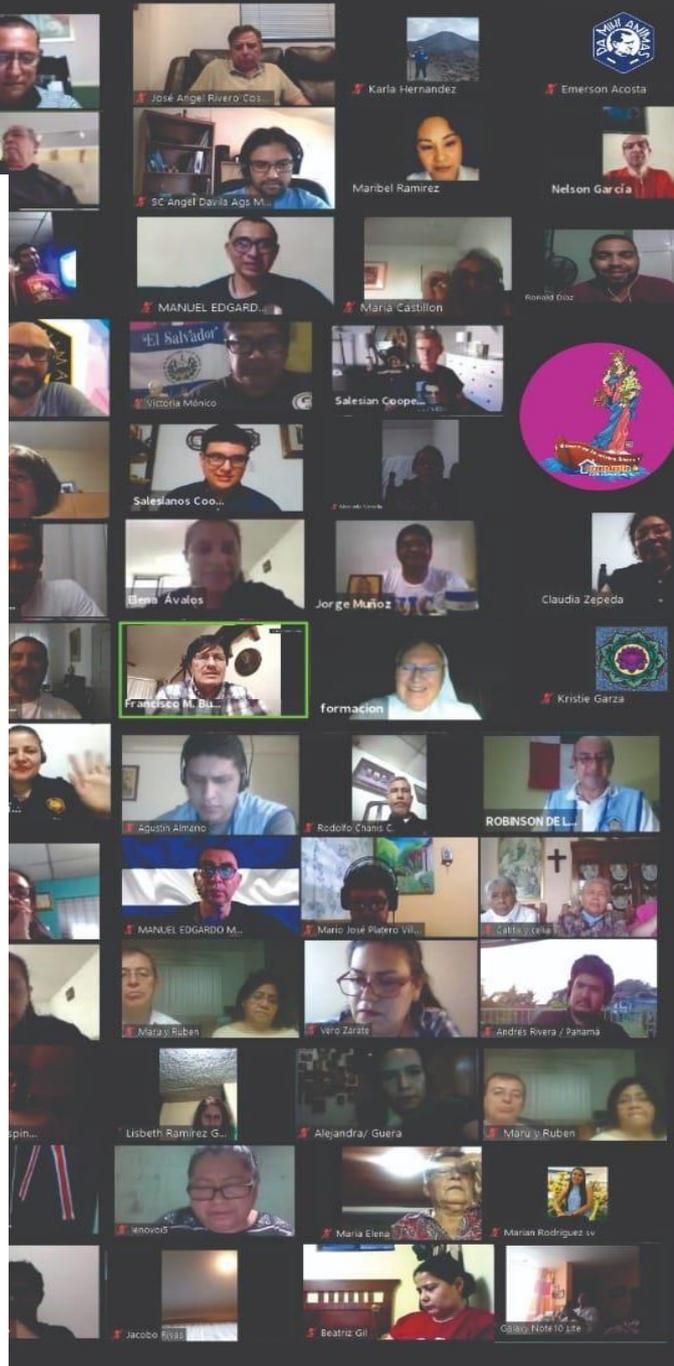
REGIONAL FORMATION CONGRESS SSCC 2021

THE FORMATION OF SALESIAN COOPERATORS IN TODAY'S WORLD



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Abbreviations:

SSCC: Salesian Cooperators

THE FORMATION OF SALESIAN COOPERATORS IN TODAY'S WORLD

When we are faced with the ever-changing reality in which we are immersed and where many live with a sense of uncertainty on a daily basis due to the pandemic, the political, social and economic situations in our countries, then, desperate moments can seize us or we find ourselves in a dead end because we cannot find the answer to be able to return to everyday life as we knew it before 2020.

As children of Don Bosco, who never ceased to be attentive to the needs of his time nor to the contexts in which his presences developed, we are called to have an evangelical vision of the future and to cultivate a spiritual life which allows us to discover light in the darkness, to believe that God is present even in the problems and uncertainties of our time and to let ourselves be challenged by him.

Our formation aims to gradually assume the vocation of SSCC in a free and conscious way. Likewise, with what each one is, we share a path of formation which leads us to increase the spirit of communion and the mission of the Association.

The Project of Apostolic Life, in articles 13-17 of the Regulations, very well describes the goal to be reached in both the initial and continuing formation of the SSCC.

There are three dimensions which are recurrent in the texts of the Association and which become transversal themes which must be taken care of in the moments of formation: the ability to read reality in all areas of formation, continuous qualification of those who are called upon to exercise positions of responsibility and the use of technological or social means of communication to be accessible to all SSCCs.

In this plenary session, I will come back to these major axes which are intimately linked to the moments of formation, to the means and resources that each SSCC and local center must take into account.

A) Reality and formation, an inseparable pair

The formation of each SSCC should not be separated from the circumstances or situations that surround it, for it is called to announce and evangelize reality, with its opportunities and difficulties, with its stakes and challenges. Formation is understood in the Association, not only as the transmission of contents (which is good to have since they support what we live or preach) but also as a progressive path of growth throughout life. The danger of falling into stagnation or comfort in formation programs can lead us to disembodiment and fail to meet the needs of members and the challenges they face.

The challenges posed by the pandemic are a clear example of how reality limits us and has made us enter into a process of continuous search for concrete actions in decision-making that will lead us to maintain the bond of communion and unity among all.

The constant exercise of reality check requires three principles:

- 1) **Discernment:** it is the capacity that we have to distinguish one reality from another. Personal and community discernment is made to discover the passage of God in the reality in which we live and what concrete response we must give.
- 2) **Knowledge of reality, of young people, of the life of local centers** so that the answer is the most appropriate. This leads us to make proposals more in line with the recipients of these, with the language and strategies that reach them most, that is to say at the level of each.



- 3) ***Continuously assess the impact of what we do.*** The evaluation of the impact of the proposals must make us enter, in a positive perspective and full of hope, in a dynamic of work which saves what it builds; promotes communion and strengthens the feeling of belonging.

All of this must be accompanied by the cultivation of a strong faith and a spiritual maturity which enables us, at times, to give up our own ideas or positions which may hinder the action of the Spirit in the life of each one and of the Association. It therefore requires a lot of flexibility, patience, openness in order to be in a constant attitude of learning and to be attentive to what is happening in the world, the Church, the Association, the Salesian Family, the Provinces. and local centers.

Monthly and annual retreats, meetings at local or national centers and formation sessions are privileged moments to return to themes, challenges or orientations of common interest in order to deepen the scope or the effects between us.

Likewise, sharing formation with other groups of the Salesian Family can give us the opportunity to broaden our perspective and to know what others are doing in the same situations.

B) *Formation and Service of Leadership, qualification for animation.*

Article 17 of the PAL specifies that each SSCC makes themselves available to offer a service of animation and leadership within the Association. Elected officials must have a clear awareness of fostering the bonds of unity, charismatic fidelity and active participation in the life and activities of the Association and among themselves.

We must pay particular attention to the formation of those who animate us. The governance structure of the Association must ensure, at all levels, the support of the leaders of local, national or provincial councils. It is one of the most effective tools for immediately knowing the achievements and difficulties, fatigue, concerns and challenges experienced by those who guide us and helps us to better orient the interventions that are made in the centers and consultas. Each person in their uniqueness has great gifts to bring to others, but there are also attitudes that must be acquired, cultivated and strengthened in order to be more effective in the service of animation, especially for those who are doing it for the first time. Those who do not have the experience of being accompanied will find it difficult to do so with others.

Similarly, priority must be given to the forming of formators, because we place in them the confidence to guide and accompany the future SSCC's. The profile and the specific tasks that the formator must accomplish must be made clear in the Provincial Handbooks, and all the means must be made available to the Association to qualify its interventions. The demands of the times, ask of us to have an attitude open to continuous updating in all areas and seeking to interconnect initial and on-going formation.

There are 2 aspects that can be taken into account in the formation of the service of animation:

- 1) ***Give continuity and quality to successful formation initiatives or practices,*** take the responsibility of following clear objectives on a path already covered by all. These experiences can be an opportunity to recognize and highlight new paths, initiatives and leaders for the future of the Association.
- 2) ***Provide formation spaces for local centers,*** this promotes the growth of one's own vocational identity and in constant dialogue with the members an immediate response is given to the needs or challenges they face in the center.

It must be recognized that another important aspect to take into account is the formation of the Delegates who accompany the Association. The Salesian Family Secretariat (SDB) and the Salesian Family Office (FMA) have already raised the need for consecrated persons, from their initial formation, to know and experience the



participation of groups of the Salesian Family. Likewise, it is planned to promote experiences in collaboration with Youth Ministry to reflect on common aspects and the animation of SYM groups in a vocational perspective.

C) Formation and technological resources : accessibility for all.

Today more than ever, the development of communication technologies allows us to have the world with all its proposals in one click. Messaging apps, entertainment, work and education platforms convey reality in its simultaneity, but also in the fleeting attention we pay to events.

Don Bosco used the technology of his time to make himself known, to attract benefactors and friends to his works and many members of the first groups of the Salesian Family became sons and daughters of Don Bosco thanks to the distribution of the Salesian Bulletin, the publications of books, to see the theaters and the bands of their young people; autumn walks and his tireless presence where needed. He was interested in anything that could help him achieve the goal of lifting his young people out of poverty and ignorance, through a qualified education imbued with a deep evangelization of everyday life.

Although current communication technologies can change the structures to which we are accustomed, they can in no way replace the direct contact of personal and community meeting. If before there was the danger of not participating in the activities that were offered, now we have to be very careful in assimilating the use of the media as the only option of presence. The health emergency we are still experiencing must require us to have flexible but clear criteria to know when to use communication platforms or when it is necessary to be in person. Multimedia communication allows us to make formation proposals and initiatives accessible to all. This involves serious self-training in their use to be in constant and interested communication with the Association. At the personal and community level, every effort should be made to learn or update the use of these means and, as far as possible, to ensure that we have an open attitude to the new learning that this implies.

Special care must be taken to ensure that the languages and channels we use are consistent with the variety of age groups and experiences that are offered in the Association. The message must reach everyone in a clear, precise and essential way. The Communication Secretariats of each Province should be concerned with preparing formation material in which the documents which are specific to us (PAL, Commentaries, Orientations, Economic Solidarity), those of the Church and of the Salesian Family will be taken up. In addition, they must be vigilant to help others understand and use current multimedia applications well. Each SSCC should be aware of the great opportunity and responsibility it acquires in the field of social communication.

It is necessary to resume the process of disseminating what we are doing and that it be considered for the evangelization of reality and as a promotion of the beauty of the vocation to which we have been called. Working with the new generations requires a "Salesian look" on the world and the culture of young people where communication technologies are a vital part of their life. The challenge is to come closer, to accompany them in their growth and to concretize Don Bosco's sentence: "to love what they do, so that they love what we do".

D) FORMATIVE METHODOLOGY FOR OUR TIME.

Faced with the above-mentioned situation, the methodologies to be followed are proposed in our own documents and those of the Salesian Family to ensure a significant formation which affects the transformation of life and the sense of ecclesial and Salesian belonging which should characterize us.

Among the proposed methodologies are:



a) **Inductive method:** In chapter II of the document Criteria for Animation and Governance of the Association of the Salesian Cooperators, it is suggested that the method to be followed in the meetings be the inductive method understood as the opportunity to contact texts or documents, to discuss and to gradually know the identity of the SSCC and be an effective and enriching experience. Inductive reasoning starts from singular evidence that leads us to a general conclusion and allows us to be creative in reaching innovative conclusions that we can implement.

b) **Online learning experiences** that simplify and enrich the formation proposals, giving a feeling of coherence, unity and basic knowledge common to all. It is continuous, synchronous and asynchronous as it is currently done when forums, retreats, training meetings are held virtually.

c) **Methodology for collaboration:** In the Charismatic Identity Charter of the Salesian Family, art. 39 and 41 tell us about the importance in training of *thinking, working and praying together*. To achieve this, the Methodology for Collaboration is given as a premise, which presents some essential elements:

- **Learning to share projects:** all educational and apostolic activities start from the analysis of the situation of the recipients themselves and specify short, medium and long term objectives. All of this leads to the need to program together, making the most of the available capacities, respecting the diversity of opinions and promoting convergence.

- **Activate the logic of coordination:** know the problem that we must solve, discern the possibilities of intervention and evaluate the available resources

- **Submit to the logic of reciprocity:** it means becoming aware of one's own gift and that of others, and welcoming the exchange of sensitivities, ideas and complementary skills; It is an offering made with generosity and humility

- **Educating oneself in shared responsibility:** the good result of collaboration in the apostolic educational field depends on the acceptance of the responsibilities of each one, leaving room for an active participation in the common project.

Last but not least, learning must be taken into consideration in adult formation, which aims to ensure that everyone develops and enriches their life and work capacities for their own benefit or that of their community. The formation process is not only a moment or a parenthesis in associative life; It must be able to make us grow in our daily life, to give more conscious and meaningful responses in apostolic life, and to value and take care of the vocation to which we have been called in the Salesian Family.

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