

Art. 11. Typical Activities

Salesian Cooperators are open to varied forms of apostolate. Among these they give a privileged place to family life, besides their own work and their life in the Association¹:

- *Christian catechesis and formation;*
- *animation of youth and family groups and movements;*
- *collaboration in educational and scholastic institutions;*
- *social service among the poor;*
- *work in social communications;*
- *cooperation in pastoral ministry for Vocations;*
- *missionary work;*
- *collaboration in ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue;*
- *witness to their own faith in socio-political service; and*
- *the development of the Association.*

Please see the Appendix for a model lesson including introductory Prayer, Orientation, and Questions

CONSIDERATIONS

Core Theme

Activities as the Place of Apostolic Commitment

Keys to Understanding

A. The Salesian mission and its educational service are put into effect by means of a vast array of initiatives and activities. This article repeats this general principle by which all forms of Salesian apostolate are open to the Cooperators for they are true Salesians in the world. It puts forth, therefore, a list indicating those activities which correspond directly to the mission specific to Salesians and which, possibly, are to be privileged above others. The choice of one of these typical activities or others not listed but still in keeping with Salesian Spirituality will depend upon the aptitudes and abilities, the preparation and openness, and the circumstances of the individual Cooperator; therefore, it makes proposals and not “binding stipulations.”

B. The passion for education and evangelization was the soul of Don Bosco's life. He gave ample space to catechetical work and to the Christian formation of the young. Many of his Priest and lay

¹ *Salesian Cooperators: A Practical Way...* Art. IV, 1.
Lumen Gentium. Par. 35.

Catechism of the Catholic Church. (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994) nos. 904-906. Print.

Salesian Cooperators: A Practical Way... Art. IV, 2-5.

collaborators at the very beginning were involved in catechesis and in initiatives which sought to impart a religious education to the young. In his *Constitutions*, he wrote: "the first charitable work will be to gather the poorest and most abandoned young to instruct them in our Holy Religion." In order to respond to the needs of our times, catechesis and various activities directed towards the Christian formation of adults and young people have been placed first and fourth in the *Project of Apostolic Life* of the Salesian Cooperators.

Don Bosco was also very attentive to the gregarious nature of the young, their need to be part of a group; it is enough to think of the importance he gave to the sodalities to realize this. He considered them an effective means for the social, moral, and religious formation of the young and for helping them mature in their sense of personal and collective responsibility.

A considerable number of Salesian Cooperators work today in educational and scholastic centers as their profession: as educators, teachers, and counselors at various levels. Scholastic law in many countries foresees the active participation in the running of the school or of the center even by parents of the educandi in addition to the scholastic personnel.

In numerous lands at present, the Salesian mission to common folk has assumed the form of "social service to the poor," carried out through initiatives suggested by the needs and possibilities of the place: welcome centers, dispensaries, ambulatory clinics, hospitals, oratories, scholastic and recreational centers...

C. Commitments in the realm of Communications Media, which create culture and place life models before people, interests the Salesian Cooperator. Don Bosco had courage and zeal when realizing avant-garde initiatives in this area. "The press was one of the principal undertakings that Divine Providence entrusted to me. I do not hesitate in calling this means 'Divine' since God Himself assisted in man's regeneration." (*Epistolario*. Volume IV. 318 ff.) Those words are from Don Bosco's March 19, 1885, Circular to his Salesians; they summarize Don Bosco's thought and work and are the "Magna Charta" of Salesian work in this field. His love for the young caused him to excogitate all the means that would be apt or useful in creating a propitious atmosphere for their holistic formation. In theater and acting, he saw a valid formative element and one that would help the young develop their youthful personality; in music, he saw a vehicle to get across wholesome ideas and the means to raise up a climate of pure joy. To all the Groups of the Salesian Family he left this saying: "I pray you and I adjure you never to omit this most important part of our mission." (*Epistolario*. Volume IV. 321) Don Bosco understood the value of this "school for the masses" which creates culture and proposes life models so he put himself to work in apostolic undertakings that would defend and support the Faith among the people.

D. Privileged attention is also given to those young people who show signs of a specific apostolic Vocation. In the vocation pastoral, Salesian Cooperators can offer their collaboration in various ways: sensitizing both individuals and groups to the family atmosphere, to work, and to the ecclesial community in which they live and work; drafting vocational pastoral plans at all levels of the local and provincial Salesian communities, of the parish, and of the diocese; undertaking responsibilities for vocation animation; and engaging in vocational discernment through identifying the young who show signs of a specific apostolic Vocation and directing them to people and places where they can receive vocational guidance.

E. Numerous are the initiatives which the Salesian Cooperators (whether as individuals or in groups), the Centers, and the Councils at various levels can begin for the purpose of promoting the Association. Some concern its *growth* – in both number and quality of its members; some, the *spread* of the Association through the creation of new Centers; and others, the *internal vitality* of the Association as regards its functioning and organization.

By the phrase "missionary work" is intended that entire group of services and of initiatives which foster and support the Missions and solidarity. It also means direct involvement in Mission lands and places of mission. As far as *missionary cooperation* is concerned, a few different kinds of concrete collaboration can be named: cooperation with the Consulte, the Mission Procures, and mission Centers established at the provincial or diocesan level; volunteer organizations; and NGOs. For this to happen, missionary interest among the members and among the people with whom one lives and works needs to be kept alive through promotion and support of initiatives which foster missionary vocations and the drafting of and putting into action projects and plans which seek out ways to finance said initiatives through State, Church, and private organizations and entities.

F. Salesian Cooperators also live in daily contact with non-Catholic Christians. If, in a more or less recent past, relationships between these were inspired by an attitude of defense (apologetics) of each one's respective beliefs and by proselytism, with the advent of the ecumenical movement and after what Vatican Council II said in its Decree on Ecumenism, and the more recent developments within the Catholic Church in this area, the situation has changed. Nonetheless, even if ecumenical and interreligious dialogue are connected and tied to each other, still, they are not one and the same. There exists a specific and qualitative difference between the two that is not to be confused. Ecumenical dialogue is not founded only on the respect due to every human conviction, above all, that of one's Religion; nor is it founded only on a liberal philanthropy or a mere bourgeois courtesy; on the contrary, ecumenical dialogue is rooted in the common faith in Jesus Christ and in a reciprocal recognition of Baptism through which all the baptized are members of the one Body of Christ and can pray together just as Jesus taught, "Our Father". In other Religions, the Church recognizes a ray of that Truth which "illuminates every man," but that is revealed in its fullness only in Jesus Christ; He alone is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life." (*Nostra Aetate* no. 2) It is, therefore, ambiguous to refer to interreligious dialogue in terms of macro-ecumenism or of a new and vaster phase of ecumenism.

Christians, and the followers of other Religions share: the sense of God and respect for Him or for the Divine, as well as the desire for God or for the Divine; respect for life; the desire for peace with God or the Divine, among men, and in the cosmos; and many moral values. They can and must collaborate to defend and promote together social justice, peace, and freedom to the advantage of all men. This is especially valid for the monotheistic Religions which regard Abraham as their Father in Faith. This new climate of dialogue urges the Salesian Cooperators to participate in initiatives undertaken by the Local Church – above all, in fields which concern spirituality and the Salesian mission.

G. The structures which societies confer on themselves never possess a supreme value nor can they guarantee by themselves all the good things desired by the human person. In particular, they cannot substitute the voice of one's conscience or satisfy the thirst for Truth and for the Absolute. Accepting the Gospel of salvation carries with it beneficial effects even in the public dimension of the life of societies and of individuals and is able to humanize the face of this earth. Indeed, the vocation of a Christian, and, in particular, of the Salesian Cooperator, is a public profession of faith and an active presence in all the

sectors of civic life. Therefore, the Church, formed in freedom by those who believe in Christ, must, in matters concerning current legislation – so said Pope St. John Paul II in his address to the European Parliament on October 11, 1988 – “guarantee to all citizens equally the right to live in accordance with their consciences and not to contradict the norms of the natural moral order which are recognized by reason.”

In this area, it is indispensable that the Salesian Cooperators have: a well-formed and correct conscience; obedience to the dictates of the Gospel and the Magisterium of the Church; a conscience capable of a wise and responsible action at the service of said society lest political involvement create division. We and all involved in politics must work in truth, justice, love, and respect for the dignity of man and must keep in mind but one goal: the growth of the common good.

In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, in no. 42, Pope St. John Paul II wrote:

In order to achieve their task directed to the Christian animation of the temporal order, in the sense of serving persons and society, the lay faithful *are never to relinquish their participation in "public life"*, that is, in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the *common good*... this is felt today as a pressing responsibility – the lay faithful must bear witness to [those] human and Gospel values...

The Salesian Cooperators are asked to give their necessary contribution in the reconstruction of a holistic and global vision of man and of the world which opposes the culture of death, of mistrust, and of the secularization of life. Their service will be an honest, upright, and selfless one, in collaboration with all others and able to conserve and develop Christian Tradition and culture on the socio-political plane.

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from the *Original Rule of 1876* by St. John Bosco

Article IV. Ways of Cooperation

The Salesian Cooperators share the same [apostolic] harvest as the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales, to which they wish to be associated.

1. The associates shall promote novenas, tridua, spiritual retreats and catechetical instruction, especially in places where material and moral means are lacking.
2. The scarcity of priestly vocations in these times of ours is felt in all its severity. Hence, those associates who are in a position to help shall take special care of youngsters, and adults as well, who have the necessary moral qualities and an aptitude for study, and show signs of a vocation. They can help them with timely advice, and by directing them toward those schools and boarding establishments where they may receive nurture and guidance [in their vocation].
3. [There's an urgent need to] counter the irreligious press by the good press. Hence [associates can help] by spreading good books, leaflets and all kinds of printed matter, in those places and among those families in which acceptance may prudently be expected.
4. Finally there is the exercise of charity in behalf of children at risk. [This includes] taking them in, instructing them in the faith, introducing them to church services, counseling them when in moral danger and taking them where they may receive religious instruction. These activities are another field for Salesian Cooperators [to exercise their zeal]. Those who cannot personally be engaged in such activities might do so through others, for example by involving a relative or friend. Then one may cooperate by prayer, or by helping financially if needs be. The early Christians used to bring their goods to the Apostles, to be used to help widows and orphans, and for other [charitable] purposes.

from *Lumen Gentium*

35. Christ, the great Prophet, who proclaimed the Kingdom of His Father both by the testimony of His life and the power of His words, continually fulfills His prophetic office until the complete manifestation of glory. He does this not only through the hierarchy who teach in His name and with His authority, but also through the laity whom He made His witnesses and to whom He gave understanding of the faith (*sensus fidei*) and an attractiveness in speech so that the power of the Gospel might shine forth in their daily social

and family life. They conduct themselves as children of the promise, and thus strong in faith and in hope they make the most of the present, and with patience await the glory that is to come. Let them not, then, hide this hope in the depths of their hearts, but even in the program of their secular life let them express it by a continual conversion and by wrestling "against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness."

Just as the sacraments of the New Law, by which the life and the apostolate of the faithful are nourished, prefigure a new heaven and a new earth, so too the laity go forth as powerful proclaimers of a faith in things to be hoped for, when they courageously join to their profession of faith a life springing from faith. This evangelization, that is, this announcing of Christ by a living testimony as well as by the spoken word, takes on a specific quality and a special force in that it is carried out in the ordinary surroundings of the world.

In connection with the prophetic function is that state of life which is sanctified by a special sacrament obviously of great importance, namely, married and family life. For where Christianity pervades the entire mode of family life, and gradually transforms it, one will find there both the practice and an excellent school of the lay apostolate. In such a home husbands and wives find their proper vocation in being witnesses of the faith and love of Christ to one another and to their children. The Christian family loudly proclaims both the present virtues of the Kingdom of God and the hope of a blessed life to come. Thus by its example and its witness it accuses the world of sin and enlightens those who seek the truth.

Consequently, even when preoccupied with temporal cares, the laity can and must perform a work of great value for the evangelization of the world. For even if some of them have to fulfill their religious duties on their own, when there are no sacred ministers or in times of persecution; and even if many of them devote all their energies to apostolic work; still it remains for each one of them to cooperate in the external spread and the dynamic growth of the Kingdom of Christ in the world. Therefore, let the laity devotedly strive to acquire a more profound grasp of revealed truth, and let them insistently beg of God the gift of wisdom.

from The Catechism of the Catholic Church

Participation in Christ's prophetic office

904 "Christ . . . fulfills this prophetic office, not only by the hierarchy . . . but also by the laity. He accordingly both establishes them as witnesses and provides them with the sense of the faith [*sensus fidei*] and the grace of the word". To teach in order to lead others to faith is the task of every preacher and of each believer.

905 Lay people also fulfill their prophetic mission by evangelization, "that is, the proclamation of Christ by word and the testimony of life." For lay people, "this evangelization . . . acquires a specific property and peculiar efficacy because it is accomplished in the ordinary circumstances of the world."

This witness of life, however, is not the sole element in the apostolate; the true apostle is on the lookout for occasions of announcing Christ by word, either to unbelievers . . . or to the faithful.

906 Lay people who are capable and trained may also collaborate in catechetical formation, in teaching the sacred sciences, and in use of the communications media.

from *The Identity of the Salesian Cooperator*

b) Mission to adults in poor areas (*Project of Apostolic Life, 11*)

The action of the Holy Spirit brought Don Bosco to interest himself directly with adults also. This mission of his appears, above all, as an integration and development of his apostolate to the young. Society as a whole needs to become an educating one. Even in this field of work, Don Bosco's preference is decidedly for those adults of the poor and humble classes, the mainstream and the oppressed, the proletariat and the under-proletariat, the immigrants, and the marginalized because they are the most defenseless from both an ideological and social viewpoint, and are the neediest when it comes to being in need of help for their religious and human advancement.

This educational task for the good of common folk necessitates that the Salesian Cooperators know and put into action the Social Doctrine of the Church. Today, the common good, in fact, seems to be ignored, irrelevant. This derives from a widespread feeling of disgust at political scenarios, tempting some to become uninvolved and given over to a "whatever" attitude - while causing others to go to the lengths of a revolt. The most subtle temptation that can overtake a society is that of thinking that living rightly is useless. To find the meaning and the passion for "living rightly," we must return to the inspiring and critical force of the common good. Vatican Council II defined the common good as: "the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 26). Service to the common good implies, therefore, responsibility and commitment for the full realization of everyone and of each one as the fundamental condition for political acts; having at heart the advancement and the defense of every person's life; serving the growth of the whole man in every man, putting each person's human dignity at the center, no matter what his condition, his history, his origin, or his culture; obeying the truth always - this is what it means to commit oneself to the common good. (pp. 24-25)

Who can be a Salesian Cooperator «missionary»?

Don Bosco, evidently, excluded no one of good will from carrying out this action of great stature. But how much has been said to make it understood that the Cooperators enlist themselves more easily in certain social categories and among those persons whom their very life, profession, and usual concerns put them into direct contact with the young, with the more humbles and poorer classes, with those not yet evangelized, or who have problems of a social, political, cultural, or ecclesial order which concerns them.

a. The young

The young are more able to understand their brothers and sisters of their same age and to be in solidarity with them, more available often to render a dynamic, bold, generous action. The Council has recognized them and has drawn this conclusion: "They should become the first to carry on the apostolate directly to other young persons, concentrating their apostolic efforts within their own circle, according to the needs of the social environment in which they live." (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 12b) "The most holy council,

then, earnestly entreats all the laity in the Lord to answer gladly, nobly, and promptly the more urgent invitation of Christ... in a particular way younger persons should feel that this call has been directed to them especially and they should respond to it eagerly and generously.” (AA, 33)

b. Parents

Parents are all naturally invited to Salesian cooperation, above all if their educational cares and their influence extend around them, among their relatives, in their neighborhood, and in family movements to which they belong. What a grace for their love, what a pledge of educational success, if both, father and mother, should feel called to Salesian action.

c. Schoolteachers

We have no choice: school will either become a giant supermarket or an educating community. In the school-supermarket everyone goes to get whatever serves him in function of his own plan of self-realization. It is a make-it-yourself school, like the make-it-yourself family and religion. Teachers, then, become simple clerks, whose role is reduced to showing the clientele the characteristics of the various products.

In a “supermarket” school, it is natural that the communal dimension is placed in second place. In a store, customers find themselves side-by-side, but they do not form a community.

An educating community is completely centered on the realization of an educational Project which puts the integral formation of the young at the center, according to the Christian vision of man, of history, and of the world.

The passage from the formation of the “good” man to the “builder man” is the true interpretive key of the educational question. The family, like the school, is no longer an ethical-religious educational subject, as if a prolongation of the educational function of the Church, but, rather, subjects at the service of the construction of a Christian community and of society. In the family, the new generations must be educated to construct the Christian community and society. It must construct itself for the family is, *per se*, a reality of the Christian community and of society. Thus, it, too, just as the school, is called to form the builders of society which is self-built. In other words, the family and the school are historical-dynamic structures and not simply educational agencies. Their educative task is much more demanding than in the past.

Educators and parents, just like the teachers, are formators of the builders, inserting the young into the dynamic practices of the Christian community and of society. No longer are they educators who only “propose” religious or social values so as to give meaning to life, but they are now “master teachers” immersed in the dynamicity of historical reality. No Christian can skip over history.

d. Mass Media workers

The instruments of mass media are managed by a growing number of persons and of professional categories. With particular insistence, Don Bosco calls them to serve: writers, journalists, editors, the press and the media, artists, or managers of the world of song, music, theater, the radio, the movies, television. Knowledgeable of the enormous influence that these means have today, especially on the young, the

Salesian Cooperators, following Don Bosco's example, who was always in the avant-garde in this field, must take on this task with intelligence and creativity.

e. Leaders in Public Life

At the local, regional, national, and international levels, a good number of persons participate in this "indirect action" for the young and the poor, of whom we have spoken above: members of municipal councils, those designated to different services, members of various commissions, delegates, and senators. Salesian action can enormously benefit from their labor, and it is our task to encourage them to promote political rights in favor of the young.

Once again, these indications do not tend to exclude anyone. In truth, everyone, no matter what his condition, can do his part. These words from Don Bosco are consoling: "The Salesian Cooperators are destined to do great good in the Church and in civil society. Their work... will be so appreciated within time that I already seem to see that not only families, but cities, and entire countries will become Salesian Cooperators." (Don Bosco in the *Bollettino Salesiano* of March 1878) (pp. 39-41)