

Art. 18. Style of Relationship

Salesian Cooperators, taking their inspiration from the Preventive System of Don Bosco, practice loving-kindness¹ in their relationships as a sign of the love of God and as a means to re-awaken His presence in the heart of all those whom they meet. They are always ready to “take the first step” and to welcome others with goodness, respect, and patience. They tend to establish rapports of trust and friendship so as to create a family atmosphere of simplicity and affection. They are peace workers and seek clarification, consensus, and accord in and through dialogue.

CONSIDERATIONS

Core themes

1. Loving-kindness in Their Relationships with Others
2. Privileged Style: Creating a Family Atmosphere
3. Resolution of Conflicts

Keys to Understanding

A. Salesian *loving-kindness* represents an attitude of goodness which is both interior and exterior and which characterizes the relationships of the Salesian Cooperator, not only with the young, but with all: brothers and sisters, friends, colleagues, those with whom free time is spent, brother and sister Salesians, and persons encountered from time to time. If an efficacious educative relationship is to begin, *loving-kindness* answers the deep need the young have not only to be loved but to know that they are loved; it is a particular style of relationship and of “wishing well,” of “wanting the other’s good” – of love – which reawakens the energies of the heart in the young and makes them mature to the point of total oblation.

Loving-Kindness was introduced by Don Bosco in the first Oratory in Valdocco. It is a style overflowing with fraternal love: everyone sees the other as a brother or a sister, accepts him or her openly, with a smile, and ready to share life. This is so because the “sense of the person” exists and each one is regarded as the image of God. In this way, one is loved personally, without discrimination, just as does Christ the Good Shepherd Who recognizes His Sheep and calls each by name. Every person is a universe, a Mystery, and a brother or sister for whom Christ sacrificed Himself.

Joy is an unmistakable characteristic of the Salesian Spirit. Salesian joy is not defined as “a good sense of humor” or as being “loud” or “boisterous”; rather, it is a profound reality that the Salesian Cooperator “nurtures in him or herself” in an on-going manner. It is the state of mind of one who, with a living faith, places his or her life and concerns in the hands of a Father of infinite goodness. He or she is conscious of the fact that his or her vocation is a call to complete and unselfish oblation. Salesian joy is, therefore, a *serene* joy which springs from union with the Risen One. It is a joy which refuses aggression. It is manifested on one’s face and in amiable gestures. It is nourished with and in the presence of the Lord because Salesian joy is a fruit of the life of Grace.

¹Pietro Braido, SDB. “[I molti volti dell’amorevolezza.](#)” *Rivista di Scienza dell’educazione*. 37.1 (1999) 17-46. Print. (available in Italian only)

The Salesian Cooperator is open *and cordial, ready to make the first step and to welcome others always with goodness, respect, and patience.* He or she is aware of being a man or a woman called to relationship and a Christian apostle who has received from the Father the mission to evangelize the world and so does not behave as a hermit. What is more, he or she knows how to approach others and to receive another who comes to him or her and to make the first step to encounter someone who is timid or fearful or who, due to an exaggerated sense of respect, keeps quiet and at a distance. He or she knows how to shrink distances, to approach with empathy, to “come down from the pedestal” and to “become little with the little ones.” If, then, it is the other person who approaches first, he or she always extends welcome, carries him or her in their own heart, listens with empathy and takes interest in the other’s concerns. This all comes into play with an attitude of goodness which seeks the good of the other, with esteem and respect each person’s dignity, and with patience that is none other than constant and persevering love.

B. The Salesian Spirit is a “Family Spirit”: it makes it such that everyone feels “at home”, “at ease”, and, at the same time, responsible for the common good. It is a style which is characterized by mutual confidence which is principally expressed in two attitudes: intense intercommunication, i.e., where thoughts and plans, joys and sorrows, experiences and initiatives, and even material goods are shared. The members enrich each other in their mutual relationships and they grow in communion. Relationships are not ruled by having recourse to the law and to authority or to regulations and conveniences but by appealing to one’s interior capacities of reason, freedom, the heart, and faith. One trusts more in persuasion than imposition; initiative and co-responsibility than duty and obedience; joyous love freely given than precise and strict discipline. Don Bosco used to say: “God is not pleased by those things done by force. Since He is a God of Love, He wants everything to be done out of love. The Family Spirit finds its roots in the Eucharist. Indeed, any education which tends to form to the Family Spirit takes its inspiration from there.

C. Conflicts are always possible and are most probably inevitable. Even Don Bosco found himself in situations in which he was misunderstood or there was a clash. He didn’t lose his calm or get discouraged. He knew how to avoid a frontal attack. He was attentive to prevent possible opposition. He knew how to pray and to wait with fortitude. In the case of a conflict, the first move that the Salesian Cooperator is to make is to seek to clarify the situation through sincere and serene dialogue so as to find common ground because “charity believes all things, bears all things, hopes all things.”

References

Aubry J., *Lo spirito salesiano.*

Chavez V. P., *Strenna* 2003.

Giovanni Bosco, *Il giovane provveduto.*

Giovanni Bosco, Lettera 1884.

Giovanni Bosco, *Memorie dell’Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855.*

Giovanni Paolo II, *Novo millennio ineunte.*

Memorie Biografiche VI 15; XVII 111; XVIII 111s.

from the *Regulations to the Project of Apostolic Life*

Art. 6 Family Spirit

§1. To make the sense of belonging to the Association grow, Salesian Cooperators support each other through the sharing of spiritual goods.

§2. They show their human and Christian solidarity in a concrete way to those Salesian Cooperators who are ill and in difficulty, accompanying them also with their affection and their prayer.

§3. In communion with the deceased Salesian Cooperators and benefactors, and grateful for their witness, they continue their mission with fidelity. They pray for them, in particular, in the celebration of the Mass in memory of Mamma Margaret.

§4. In fidelity to the Magisterium of the Church, and to Her pastoral guidelines concerning family issues, the Association gives attention to those members who are undergoing the consequences of separation and/or divorce. The Association accompanies them along this difficult life and faith journey which they are traveling. Such an attitude will be met with a similar one on the part of the member, with the commitment to live one's present condition trusting in the infinite mercy of the Father, and maintaining a tenor of life which is coherent with the commitments assumed with the *Promise*.

§5. In keeping with the Family Spirit, the Association shows itself open to Religious of the Salesian Family who have legitimately left their Institute, and who feel themselves forever tied to the spirit of Don Bosco.

For these persons, official entrance into the Association requires accepting the *Project of Apostolic Life*. If the person requests it, he or she agrees with the Delegate on a formative itinerary. He/she will also decide as to the manner of the making of the Promise, whether it will be public or private.

from *Guidelines and Indications for the Formation of Salesian Cooperators*

1.1.4. TO KNOW HOW TO LIVE IN COMMUNION

General Principles

From the moment in which the response to the call to be a Salesian Cooperator carries with it an active belonging to the ecclesial community, to the Association, and – for the laity – to the realities and civic community in which they live, it is fundamental to grow in certain aspects which concern the ability to live and to work together with others.

This attitude of maintaining good relationships, in fact, is not only the fruit of a personal temperament, which is more or less sociable, but can be developed and increased through the constant effort of being open and of overcoming one's interior conditionings. One must become able to sympathize with others and to develop an attitude which seeks to create a favorable affective atmosphere characterized by human warmth. This can be achieved little by little.

Salesian Cooperators *live and give witness to* “a firm will to be a builder of peace in a world agitated by violence and class hatred,” by which they “are peace workers and seek clarification, consensus, and accord in and through dialogue.” This commits them to a journey which goes from the ability to *resolve conflicts*, to discussion, collaboration, reciprocal esteem, the ability to work together, and all the way to *friendship*.

As to what concerns the ability to work together, the Salesian Cooperator matures the conviction that this aptitude is essential for the carrying out of the mission; therefore, he *wishes* to be capable of working together with others.

Indicated Actions

It is fundamental to:

- grow in a spirit of peace, harmony, and concord, and in the inclination to live love in an authentic manner;
- develop a sense of and a profound understanding of the meaning of *friendship*;
- increase one's ability to relate by becoming gradually aware of one's closed-mindedness and egocentric attitudes;
- welcome and appreciate other people's thoughts and reasoning, maturing attitudes of openness and trust, of reciprocal esteem, and of growth in the ability to *resolve conflicts* and to have constructive discussions;
- know how to experience the joy of working together;
- identify those dynamics which help one better one's character and become aware of one's personal defects so as to propose goals of gradual and attainable growth for oneself; and
- participate actively in the life of the civic community to which one belongs.

from The Identity of the Salesian Cooperator

1. Accepting the demands of a Salesian apostolic formation

“Since the laity share in their own way in the mission of the Church, their apostolic formation is specially characterized by the distinctively secular and particular quality of the lay state and by its own form of the spiritual life.” (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* 29a); and, for the Cooperators we add: adapted to the *Salesian* character proper to the mission and the spirit of their vocation.

a) Contents of the Formation Program

The Salesian Cooperator cares, first of all, for his own *basic human and Christian formation*, developing the “human virtues” and “ecclesial modes of acting” which are more directly required by our specific

mission and our spirit: e.g., joy in work, a spirit of initiative, optimism, a sense of unity, and “the art of living fraternally and cooperating with others and of striking up friendly conversation with them.” (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* 29e; and see 29b).

“[Spiritual] formation should be deemed the basis and condition for every successful apostolate.” (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* 29c) “[It is obvious that] the success of the lay apostolate depends upon the laity's living union with Christ... in the ordinary conditions of life... [but] such a life requires a continual exercise of faith, hope, and charity.” (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* 4a-b) Only an intense love for God the Father and for His Kingdom and an intense love for our brothers to be saved are able to bring us to “commit” to co-responsibility in the Salesian mission.

“In addition to spiritual formation, a solid doctrinal instruction in theology, ethics, and philosophy adjusted to differences of age, status, and natural talents, is required. The importance of general culture along with practical and technical formation should also be kept in mind.” (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* 29) Enlightening and guiding the young are very demanding tasks, indeed. Every Salesian Cooperator must give his very best: indeed, the simple experience of a life well-lived teaches many things just by itself! But everyone needs to study and to know Don Bosco: his life, his work, his spirit, his pedagogical method. “To be faithful to Don Bosco means knowing his history and the history of his times, making his inspiration our own, taking up his motivations and choices. To be faithful to Don Bosco and his mission is to cultivate in ourselves a strong and abiding love for young people, especially the poorest. This love leads us to respond to their most pressing and deepest needs.” (Chavez, *Strenna 2012*) Returning to the source always produces most beautiful fruits. A constant effort is also needed to make oneself aware of the situation of today's youth. A Salesian Cooperator tends to become “an expert in youthful humanity.”

Finally, “Since formation for the apostolate cannot consist in merely theoretical instruction, from the beginning of their formation the laity should gradually and prudently learn how to view, judge and do all things in the light of faith as well as to develop and improve themselves along with others through doing...” (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* 29). Don Bosco was always wary of a formation that was too theoretical: “*Fabricando fit faber.*” (“It is by building that one becomes a builder.”) We need to throw ourselves into practicing, trying, and reflecting on the results we've obtained, and to start over again better with the help of seasoned apostles.

from A Prophecy's Journey

3. In a letter dated January 25, 1878, Don Bosco convoked the first "Conference" (gathering) of the Salesian Cooperators of Rome. "With the authorization and the talk given by his Excellency the most Rev. Cardinal Monaco La Valletta, Vicar of his Holiness, the first Conference of Salesian Cooperators will be held, as is prescribed in Chapter 4, Article 4 of the Rule." (*Biographical Memoirs*, vol. XIII, pp. 477-478.) After having narrated the history of the Salesian Cooperators from the beginning up until that day, in his talk, Don Bosco, warmly exhorted everyone to help the Salesians in their work for the salvation of at-risk youth.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, the Protestants, the unbelievers, and sects of every kind leave nothing untried to the ruination of unsuspecting youth and, like hungry wolves, roam around to make a slaughter of the lambs of Christ. Publications, photographs, grammar schools, kindergartens, high schools, aid, promises, threats, and calumnies – they use them all to pervert tender souls, to rip them out of the maternal womb of the Church, to lure and draw them to themselves and to throw them into the arms of Satan. What is most painful is that teachers, founders, and even certain parents lend a hand in this work of desolation. Now, before this very heartbreaking spectacle, can we remain cold and indifferent? May it never be so, oh most courteous souls; let it never happen that the sons of darkness should be more astute, more audacious in doing evil than the sons of light in doing good. Let each one of us become a guide, a teacher, a savior of children. Let us counter deceitful acts of evil with loving actions of our charity: publications for publications, schools for schools, high schools for high schools. Let us watch attentively over the little ones in our families, parishes, and institutes. And since the huge crowd of poor boys and girls find themselves everywhere exposed to the greatest dangers of perversion, whether through lack of care on the part of their relatives and parents or due to extreme misery, let us, according to our strengths and position, become their fathers and protectors, bringing them to a safe place, far from the attractions of vice and of scandalous attacks. In order to spur ourselves on and to encourage each other ever more to such wonderful works, let us often recall to mind the care and the loving kindness poured out upon the little ones by the Son of God during His mortal life. Let us also remember the great gift promised by Him, to those who, by their example, their words, and with their own hands, will do good for a child. He assured us one hundredfold in this life and an eternal crown in the next. (*Biographical Memoirs*, vol. XIII, p. 479)

from *The Salesian Cooperator* by Fr. J. Aubry, SDB

The Ways of Relating to Others in the Salesian Spirit

In relating to other members of the Salesian Family, every member should be inspired by the following virtues:

1. **Loving Kindness** – The Salesian’s manner of action is to seek to do all things well, with due measure and simplicity. He is open and cordial, ready to make the first advance and to receive people with kindness, respect and patience, especially the young. His love is truly personal and affectionate, showing himself to be a father and friend and arousing friendship in response. This is the kindness so much recommended by Don Bosco.

2. **Family Spirit** – “The community becomes a family when affection is reciprocal and the young feel at their ease. In this climate of mutual confidence people feel the need and the joy of sharing everything and relations are governed not so much by recourse to rules as by faith and goodness of heart”.

3. Optimism and Joy – “Let nothing perturb you” Don Bosco used to say. Because God has sent us we have complete confidence in his providence and are not discouraged by difficulties. There is also the optimistic humanism of St. Francis of Sales which helps us to believe in the natural and supernatural resources of man without however ignoring his weakness. With this background we know how to make our own what is good in the world and refuse to lament over our times. We “hold fast to what is good” especially if it is attractive to the young. We make our own St. Paul’s exhortation, “Rejoice in the Lord always”. This is the witness we must give to youth. “...The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace...” and this is where our own hope and our openness to the spirit is rooted.