

## Art. 21. Brothers and Sisters in Don Bosco

*Their common apostolic Vocation and membership in the same Association makes Salesian Cooperators spiritual brothers and sisters. Indeed, “united with one heart and one soul alone,”<sup>1</sup> they live their communion with those bonds characteristic of Don Bosco’s spirit.*

*They joyously take part in the “family life” of the Association through getting to know each other, growing together, exchanging faith experiences, and working on apostolic projects.*

*They foster the associative life by welcoming each other reciprocally.<sup>2</sup>*

### CONSIDERATIONS

#### Core Themes

1. Spiritual Brothers and Sisters in Don Bosco
2. Family Life as Expression of Communion

#### Keys to Understanding

**A.** Salesian Cooperators are, before all else, brothers and sisters in Christ. This Christian fraternity of theirs is enriched by the strength of their common Salesian vocation. Christian fraternity is sacramental in nature because its existence is created by the Sacraments. It is "charismatic" by nature because it is linked to a specific vocation to follow Don Bosco and is a vocation which owes its existence to a gift, or a charism, of the Holy Spirit. This Salesian fraternity is to be understood in the light of the specific mission of the Founder, Don Bosco.

As the first article of the *Statutes* states, the Holy Spirit raised up Don Bosco in the Church and destined him to have secular witnesses who, while living in the world, prolong his mission throughout time and live his spirit. As charismatic Founder, he is at the center of the charismatic constellation formed by those who have received the Salesian Vocation. He is called "father" by the vocational Groups of his apostolic Family on account of their Salesian Vocation. For this reason also, the Salesian Cooperators are brothers and sisters in Don Bosco, their Spiritual Father.

All of this fosters in the Salesian Cooperator a profound *sense of belonging* to the Association and nourishes the conviction that each one is a living part of a communion of persons committed to a common mission. Following the example of the Early Christian Community, they live the Gospel values which, among other things, are fraternity and communion. How? By imprinting upon their relationships with every brother and sister sentiments of respect and sincere affection and by assuming behaviors which effectively manifest such sentiments; therefore, the sharing and the exchange of spiritual values, such as ideas, projects and plans, joys and sorrows and sufferings, and reciprocal help, even as concerns economic aspects, are perceived as shared participation: all of this is part of the Salesian Spirit.

**B.** The Salesian Cooperators are invited to live fraternal communion in their everyday life by remaining in communion of thought, affection, and prayer with the other members. They can show this through

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<sup>1</sup>*Salesian Cooperators: A Practical Way...*Art. I.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.* Articles V, 7 and VII, 4-5.

informal or formal gatherings with the frequency and modalities dictated by what is possible for them. Besides this, the Association as such, at its various Levels (Local, Provincial, Regional, and World), provides moments of "family life." These include gatherings, spirituality days, celebrations, weeks of study or updating, spiritual retreats and exercises, etc. The objectives of all these initiatives are to:

- *get to know one other*: mutual knowledge in an atmosphere of serene and joyous Salesian "closeness," one-on-one, or in a group, or in an assembly: these are the first steps to create communion by spending time together;
- *share experiences and apostolic plans and projects*: this exchange may be accompanied by sharing and approval, suggestions, encouragement, promise of support, of help, and of comfort; they can uncover the creative possibilities present in every person, youth or adult, and in every area of the apostolate, great or small, and they motivate imitation and emulation; and
- *grow together*: better knowledge of each other and the sharing of experiences and plans inevitably produces an individual and collective growth, a process of maturing, a more illumined and courageous Salesian apostolate, and stronger bonds among all those belonging to the different Levels of the Association.

This idea of "communion" of all Christians with God and with each other is inherent in the concept of Gospel fraternity. "Communion", in the Biblical sense, defines one's manner of being and acting and one's relationship with God and with others and marks it with the characteristic of the Christian Community: intimate and vital union with Christ. This communion is realized concretely through sharing with others and receiving from them, while respecting each one's personality. In this way, all the members of the Church are in communion with Christ through the Holy Spirit, participating in His fullness and in communion with all their brothers and sisters to form with them one "Community", this very Church.

This communion is dynamic and destined to transform itself on the level of action – in collaboration and in service. When Saint Luke says in the *Acts of the Apostles* that the Christians, beyond being "persevering in the doctrine of the Apostles, and in the breaking of the bread, and in prayers" made "communion", he meant to make reference to a very concrete Community which expressed its profound communion in interpersonal relationships: "They were of one heart and one soul alone." There was no duality, therefore. It was a Community called and joined together by the presence of the Risen One and the power of the Holy Spirit and, therefore, it was spiritual but expressed this fraternity with tangible signs.

This ecclesial communion does not occur within each single Community only but also defines the relationships among the Local Churches. These Churches express this communion in their mutual recognition and acceptance and they realize it by means of the exchange of spiritual goods, visits, the sending of apostolic workers, and also through concrete acts of solidarity.

The documents of Vatican Council II give ample space to this Gospel message. They present *fraternity* as the fundamental component of Christian existence and of the reality of the Church. She is, in fact, by definition, a *Community of brothers and sisters* since all its members have received the same Spirit of the Lord. Christian fraternity must preside over and inform all relationships in the ecclesial sphere: those of the Faithful among themselves and with their Pastors; those of the Priests, among

themselves and with the Laity; those of the Bishops, among themselves and with their Priests; and those of all who belong to Religious Institutes. Only in this way will the Local Churches and the Church Universal become sign and witness of fraternity before all men.

Vatican Council II took the Early Church as its very own concrete *model* in addition to the *values* and the *demands* inherent to it and applied them to the present-day situation. It defined both the Local Church and the Church Universal as "communion" – a reflection of and participation in the ineffable and mysterious communion that in God, the Holy Trinity, unites Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In effect and before all else, this dynamic of *communion* cuts across the entire composition of the Local Church and of the Universal one, animating them from within. For this reason, the Church is a communion of faith, of hope, and of charity; it is a Community which participates in Christ's common priesthood and in His mission to give witness to and to animate the temporal order with Christian values. The fruit of this ecclesial communion is *radical Christian equality*, as underlined by Vatican Council II when speaking of the laity: "And if by the will of Christ some are made teachers, pastors and dispensers of mysteries on behalf of others, yet all share a true equality with regard to the dignity and to the activity common to all the faithful for the building up of the Body of Christ." (*Lumen Gentium* no. 32)

This dynamic of "communion" thus implies that the entire activity of both the Local Churches and the Church Universal be carried out in *cooperation, collaboration, and solidarity*. It is the principle to be put into practice in the apostolate of the laity, in their relationship with their pastors, and in their work with Catholics and non-believers alike. It marks the dynamic ties among Priests and between the Priests and their Bishops, the laity, and with the Religious. It characterizes the relationships among the Bishops themselves and with the Pope and the Priests. It interests, directly, at all Levels, the relationships among Religious themselves, with the Bishops, with diocesan Priests, and with the laity. It guides the entire ecumenical and missionary activity of individuals and of the various Christian communities. It is open to a vaster collaboration and cooperation with all men of goodwill. Thus, all members of the Christian Community are tied to each other by a *common responsibility*. All, as active members of the Mystical Body of Christ, are called to collaborate responsibly in the apostolic mission.

## References

*Apostolicam Actuositatem* 18; 23; 26, 27, 33.

Aa.Vv., *Linee di rinnovamento. I Salesiani di Don Bosco oggi*, Elle Di Ci, Torino-Leumann 1971.

*Atti del Capitolo Generale Speciale* 171.

*Ad Gentes* 15, 23c; 35-41.

*Christus Dominus* 7, 30; 33-35; 36.

*Gaudium et Spes* 32d.

*Lumen Gentium* 13; 28; 30; 32c, 37d.

*Perfectae Caritatis* 15ab, 22-23.

*Presbyterum Ordinis* 4; 6a; 7b; 9.

*Regolamento di Don Bosco VI 2.*

*Sacramentum Caritatis 33.*

*Unitatis Redintegratio 12.*

Viganò E., “La Famiglia salesiana”, 10-11.

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

#### **Article I. Christian Union for the Work of Charity**

Good [Christians] have at all times seen the necessity of uniting in order to help one another in doing good and in avoiding evil. This is the example that the faithful of the early Church left us. Faced with impending dangers every day, they did not give up. United as one heart and one soul, they encouraged one another to be steadfast in the faith and to stand ready to overcome the assaults that relentlessly

threatened them. This is also what the Lord taught us when he said: “Feeble forces that unite become strong. A single strand may be easily broken, but a three-ply cord is hard to break: *Vis unita fortior; funiculus triplex difficile rumpitur*. This is exactly what secular people do to further their temporal interests. Should then the children of light be less farsighted than the children of darkness? Certainly not! We who live as Christians in these turbulent times must likewise unite in a spirit of prayer, charity and zeal, using all possible means that our religion makes available to us. We must strive to stamp out, or at least diminish, the evil that puts at risk the moral life, without which civil society itself collapses.

**Article V, #7.** Every three months, or even more frequently, through a printed bulletin or sheet, the members shall be given a report on things done, in progress or proposed for future action. At the end of each year they shall be notified of projects that should be given priority during the up-coming year. Information about those members who may have been called into eternity that year shall also be provided, and prayers solicited.<sup>3</sup>

**Article VII, #s 4-5.** On the day following the feast of St. Francis de Sales all the priests of the [Salesian] Congregation and the priests who are Cooperators shall offer holy Mass for deceased members. Those who are not priests shall endeavor to receive Holy Communion and recite the third part of the Rosary [for the same intention].

Whenever an associate becomes ill, the Superior shall be notified without delay, so that special prayers may be offered to God. The same shall be done in the event of the death of any Cooperator.

## **from the 2018 *Handbook of St. Philip the Apostle Province***

### **CHAPTER II**

#### **SALESIAN COOPERATORS IN COMMUNION AND COLLABORATION**

##### **Family Spirit**

**Art 11.** Salesian Cooperators share with their Center’s Coordinator their great joys, needs, and other situations which require prayer and special attention, whether those difficulties be illness, crisis, or others that they are living. The Local Coordinator will inform the Provincial Coordinator as soon as possible so that it may be communicated to the Province.

**Art 12.** The members of a Center, in accord with the Local Council, will agree upon the ways and means to be close to and come to the aid of their Center Cooperators who are ill, elderly, or in special need.

**Art 13.** The Secretary of the Provincial Council will see to the sending of a Purgatorial Mass card from the Salesian Missions to a Center on the occasion of the death of one of its members.

**Art 14.** The Secretary of the Council concerned (Local or Provincial) will also see to sending a Purgatorial Mass card from the Salesian Missions to its member who suffers the loss of a close relative.

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<sup>3</sup> The provision of this article was complied with by the founding of the *Salesian Bulletin*.

**Art 15.** The Secretary of the Local and Provincial Councils will keep note of the birthday and important anniversaries of the members of their respective group and will animate its celebration, enlisting the help of the others.

**Art 16.** The members of a Local Center will participate annually in a Mass for the repose of the souls of all deceased Cooperators.

**Art 17.** The Secretary of a Local Center will record the date of decease of one of its members and will make it known to the Provincial Secretary in a timely manner.

**Art 18.** The Provincial Secretary will keep an up-to-date necrology and will send it each year to all the Centers during the month of December so that their members may remember the deceased in prayer, and, if possible, at Holy Mass, on the anniversary of their death.

**Art 19.** Effective January 2018, each Center will keep in its archives a brief biographical sketch, including his/her apostolic activities as a Salesian Cooperator, of each of its deceased Cooperators. The Secretary of the Center concerned will also forward a copy to the Provincial Secretary for placement in the Archives of the Province.

**Art 20.** The numerous means of social communication today make contact simple and efficient; therefore, moved by the sense of Family, the members of the Provincial Council will make appropriate use of email and the Salesian Cooperator Province website and Don Bosco Salesian Portal (<https://DonBoscoSalesianPortal.org>), the website for the Salesian Family of the eastern United States and of Canada), in addition to personal meetings, mailings, and phone calls, to keep the lines of communication open and effective with the Center Coordinators and Members of the Association throughout the Province, and *vice versa*.

**Art 21.** Each Center Coordinator will see to it that a short news item from that Center will be sent annually to the Provincial Communications person, who, in turn, will see to it that it be posted to the Salesian Cooperator Province, Regional (<http://scinteramerica.org/en>), and World (<http://www.ascc-mondiale.org/webSite/?lang=en>) websites and to Don Bosco Salesian Portal so that all members throughout the Province and beyond may share firsthand in the joys and sorrows of each Center and join with them in the bonds of fraternal charity through grateful prayer to God for the good being done, through prayerful support in times of need, and through whatever other means that Family Spirit may suggest.

**Art 22.** All members of the Association throughout the Province will keep abreast of the news from the Provincial Council, from other Centers, and from the larger Salesian Family through the reading of, at least, the SDB Province newsletter, the *Salesian Bulletin*, postings to our Salesian Cooperator Province website and to Don Bosco Salesian Portal. If there are particular members of a Local Center who do not have access to or do not know how to use the internet, then the responsibility for communicating the news and important information from these sources to them falls to the Local Councilors.

*from The Identity of the Salesian Cooperator*

**a. The Salesian Family (*Statutes Project of Apostolic Life*, 5)**

Don Bosco consciously, purposely founds one single Family, the Salesian Family, so that his work will continue.

At the conclusion of one of his studies, Fr. Desramaut summarizes the “identity of the Association” in 1876 (in *Costruire insieme*, 1983, pp. 94-100) and concludes: “There was the fraternal association of three societies, two Religious, and one non-Religious, whose members:

- were strictly united to the Superior of the male Congregation, who was the center of the entire structural system,
- pursued the same moral (sanctification) and social (particular apostolic service) goals,
- lived in common according to the values and to a program, in the degree in which the Statutes, Religious or not, permitted to each one” (p. 100).

Aware of being, by the dispositions of Divine Providence, the Father of a vast movement of united and joined spiritual-apostolic forces, Don Bosco lived his call profoundly. Although helped by his temperament and the socio-ecclesial mentality of his time, he also held the firm conviction that the charism which he was passing on to his sons was original. Thus writes Don Stella: “He appears dominated by the aspiration for unity, the “*vis unita fortior*” (a united force is stronger), in which we see reflected his rather firm idea about his religious patrimony: that of “one single Family” in the image and likeness of the human family which has God as its Father, and also that of the Church which has the Pope as its common Father” (Don Bosco... I, p. 225). In 1877 he expressed his concept in a stupendous text for the first General Chapter in which he puts the three groups he founded on the same plain and in association with each other, using his typical stylistic form of a triple “We have...” (cited by P. Stella, I, p. 225, and by the Acts of the General Chapter, SDB, no. 153).

One can declare that for Don Bosco no one group was ever conceived or existed in isolation, outside of a unitary vision, stronger and richer than the distinction among the three groups required by Canon Law and by a legitimate process of personalization, but, unfortunately, exaggerated over the passage of time and history.

The fact that the first three groups - the Salesian Cooperators (SC – formerly CC), the Salesians of Don Bosco (SDB), and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (FMA) - were the object of the direct charismatic founding action on the part of the Founder is to be considered fundamental. The first mode of existence for the Salesian Family was that of intimate communion among the SDB, FMA, and Cooperators, all “held in the reins” by Don Bosco himself. This is the first form, and probably the most typical and profound one. Precisely this historic fact makes us understand something further: the yet more special place held by the SDB. For them, Don Bosco was “Founder” in a totally special way: “the sure and stable bond of union” (Reg. CC II). Logically, according to tradition, the Rector Major, inasmuch as he is Don Bosco’s successor, has taken this place of Father and Center of Unity for the entire Salesian Family. And, as Father of the Salesian Family, we listen to what he has to say to us today:

I make a pressing invitation to this Family to acquire a new mentality – to think of ourselves and to act always as one Movement, with an intense spirit of communion (unity of heart), with a firm will to act in synergy (unity of intent), with a mature capacity to network (unity of plans). In the Regulations of the Salesian Cooperators, Don Bosco wrote: “In every era, unity among good people was deemed necessary so they could help each other in doing good and in keeping far from evil... Weak forces, when united, become strong; if one little cord taken by itself is easily broken, it becomes rather difficult to break three united together. Weak forces, united, become strong: *Vis unita fortior, funiculus triplex difficile rumpitur.*” We need never forget that we were founded by a Saint of social charity, Don Bosco (cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 40), who was conscious of the fact, however, that educative pastoral work needs cooperative charity and that, to this end, the Holy Spirit raises up charisms” (Don Pascual Chavez, Strenna 2009).

#### **b. The Church (Statutes *Project of Apostolic Life*, 4)**

The venture of God, Who inserts Himself into the vicissitudes lived by man through His Presence, His Word, and His Love – whether to one person or to a people – is a Mystery which surpasses us. The Church is thus the “Body of Christ” and the “Spouse of the Spirit”; an unusual reality, which cannot be comprehended or lived deeply except through the categories and capacities of intuition and of analysis proper and exclusive to faith. Vatican Council II pointed out that the Church is the bearer of a very high vocation and indispensable mission, defining Her more historically as the “People of God”.

This is a vision of the Church in which there is the fullness of co-responsibility and of equal dignity for all, without any individualism at any level, where it is “communarily” faithful in one entity differentiated by multiple ministries and charisms.

*Within the Church, all, both ordained and lay, are cooperators with God and each other.*

Built on the foundation of the Apostles and with Mary, who is its image and prefiguration, the entire Church is a great Co-operator with the Father and with Christ in the work of the patient construction of their Kingdom. There is no true and complete cooperation with God outside of the Church: Don Bosco was also convinced of this. In the Church, all the members, without exception, are called to cooperate actively in the Divine task of salvation. Today, therefore, Christ, in the name of the Father, and Mary and the Church in the name of Christ, call to themselves and send to others every baptized person who is consciously aware of his faith. To lazy, unengaged, sleeping Christians, the Master of the Vineyard says: “Wake up! Why are you here all day long doing nothing? – Their dramatic response: Because no one has hired us! – Therefore, go, you, too, into my vineyard!” (Mt. 9:37). The Council has reaffirmed this with great clarity, and in a very impressive way, using the term “cooperation”. There are to be no parasites in the Church: everyone baptized is personally called to collaborate, as a good son, in the paternal undertaking of God, and precisely for this reason, everyone, whether ordained or lay, receives from the Holy Spirit – in different capacities, and with different gifts (“charisms”, I Cor. 7:7 and 12:7) – the possibility to give his contribution, little but indispensable.

The ordained ministers - Bishops, Priests, Deacons - are obviously eminent cooperators with God. The Council applies this title explicitly to missionaries because they cooperate “in the mystery of salvation” (*Ad Gentes*, AG, 15b and 25b).

Priests, especially parish priests, are often defined as “prudent cooperators with the Episcopal order” (*Lumen Gentium*, LG, 28b and 41c). The laity, in their turn, are all, in full title, co-responsible in the work of God. *Lumen Gentium* says: “Through their Baptism and Confirmation all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord Himself. ... every layman, in virtue of the very gifts bestowed upon him, is at the same time a witness and a living instrument of the mission of the Church itself (LG 33b). *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (AA) says: “the Christian vocation by its very nature is also a vocation to the apostolate... The laity derive the right and duty [emphases my own] to the apostolate from their union with Christ the head;... by the precept of charity, which is the Lord's greatest commandment, all the faithful are impelled to promote the glory of God through the coming of His kingdom (AA 2a; 3 b). And they specify: “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.” (LG 35 d). “They are fellow workers for the truth... they cooperate in presenting the word of God especially by means of catechetical instruction” (AA 6 a and 10). And, magnificently: “they should be aware of the fact that they are cooperating with God the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier (AA 16 a)... “co-workers [of Christ] in the various forms and modes of the one apostolate of the Church” (AA 33). Obviously, they also work with the Bishops, Diocesan and Religious Priests, among themselves, in their parishes, in the diocese, and beyond (cf. LG 27c). The catechists in the Missions are called “reliable coworkers of the priestly order” (AG 17b), “cooperators in grace and witnesses of faith for each other, their children” (AA 11 b), “witnesses and cooperators in the fruitfulness of Holy Mother Church” (LG 41 e).

Christian spouses and parents receive the sublime titles of “cooperators with the love of God” (*Gaudium et Spes*, GS, 50 b), “cooperators in grace and witnesses of faith for each other, their children” (AA 11 b), “witnesses and cooperators in the fruitfulness of Holy Mother Church” (LG 41 e).

All these things manifest the mystical greatness, the ecclesial value, and the doctrinal and spiritual qualities of the name “Cooperator”. What is it, then, to be a Salesian Cooperator? For a Christian, it is a manner of expressing and making real one’s cooperation with the plan of God which is included, as a *sine qua non*, in one’s very vocation as a Christian.

*Please see also excerpts to article 5 in this Compendium*