

Art. 23. Participation in and Ties with the Groups of the Salesian Family

§1. *In fidelity to Don Bosco's vision that "weak forces, when united, become strong, and if one cord taken by itself is easily broken, it is rather difficult to break three united,"¹ Salesian Cooperators care for the communion and the collaboration with the other Groups of the Salesian Family. They do this by means of reciprocal knowledge and information, reciprocal spiritual and formative help, and involvement in common apostolic tasks, with respect for the identity and autonomy of each Group.²*

§2. *Participation on the Salesian Family Consulta/Commission³ at the different Levels and the link with the pastoral structures of the Church and civic institutions foster the common search for new initiatives. The Salesian mission promotes and gives witness to the rich spiritual and apostolic inheritance it has received.*

§3. *Salesian Cooperators feel close to all the Groups belonging to the Salesian Family because they are all heirs of the Salesian charism and spirit.*

They are open to and foster every form of collaboration, especially with lay groups, respecting the identity and autonomy of each one.

CONSIDERATIONS

Core Themes

1. Collaboration with the Salesian Family
2. Values to Be Promoted Together

Keys to Understanding

A. Horizons are broadened in this article: attention moves from the Association to the Salesian Family and focuses on *how* the Salesian Cooperator and the Association can *put into effect* communion, collaboration, and co-responsibility within the sphere of the Apostolic Family founded by Don Bosco.

To every gift from God, there is a corresponding *task* so as to render it proficuous to the benefit of others. Because of its "vocational and apostolic" bond, belonging to the Salesian Family requires the *commitment* to live in communion and to collaborate on a co-responsible plane with the other Groups.

Communion and collaboration "with the other Groups and members of the Salesian Family", therefore, is to be understood as being with *all* and not just with *some*. It is clear, nonetheless, that the ties among the vocational Groups founded by Don Bosco himself are tighter and more exigent. With these Groups, the Salesian Cooperators are co-responsible for the life of Don Bosco's apostolic project inasmuch as they are bearers of the same Salesian vocation. Co-responsibility implies a mutual "coming together" and action on the part of all those concerned by putting in common their individual work and their respective responsibilities.

¹*Salesian Cooperators: A Practical Way...*Art. I. Eccles. 4:12.

²*Salesian Cooperators: A Practical Way...*Art. VI, 1-2.

³*Salesian Family Charter.* 66-67.

B. On the level of interpersonal communication and collaboration, the article enumerates three types of values that are to be promoted together: “reciprocal knowledge and information, reciprocal spiritual and formative help, and involvement in common apostolic tasks.”

The first value is the foundational basis for any and all collaboration which seeks to be sincere and lasting. The different forms of encounter experienced among the various Groups in these last years, (the Salesian Family Spirituality Days and the Salesian Family Consulta, etc.) demonstrate how truly necessary are reciprocal knowledge, the human and Christian wealth of persons, and the apostolic initiatives of the Groups. All these things create family and render us visible within the Church and within the areas in which we live and work.

The profound sense of belonging to one Family fosters the sharing of the riches of each Group so that they can become the riches of all. This is dynamic fidelity to the Holy Spirit and to His Gifts, so that each Group can realize the Salesian Family's "common cause." Through such intercommunication, we will all be more illumined concerning *the authenticity of the gift* given to Don Bosco and of those gifts which, in line with it, the Holy Spirit bestows upon each one of us.

In their circular letters to the *Salesian Family*, the Rectors Major (first Don Viganò and then Don Chavez) vigorously highlighted the specific value that each Group can bring to the common Family. It is beautiful and enriching to feel that one is a member of a Spiritual Family in which the various differences bring clarity of identity and the beauty of harmony – and not confusion or a leveling of the individual Groups but, rather, esteem for each one in its own identity.

Involvement in common apostolic tasks is the area in which communion and collaboration have considerable incidence and effect. Putting into motion such shared apostolic involvement occurs on a practical level through initiatives oriented to two possible ends: *those activities which have a Salesian appeal and a richer service rendered to the Universal and Local Churches.*

In moving forward as a *Salesian Family*, four *concrete objectives* are to be met "together":

1. reviving and reinvigorating knowledge of Don Bosco and, consequently, of our pastoral charity;
2. evangelization of our young people;
3. privilege given to the specific formation of each Group and the co-involvement of the laity; and
4. a unified vocation pastoral.

Courage in doing good and trust in positive resources become two keywords in this shared journey.

For Don Pascual Chavez, Rector Major emeritus, the effective instruments of communion are the Local and Provincial Consulte of the Salesian Family. Giving greater solidity to them means seeking the most adequate forms to establish them so that they become not only an opportunity for the sharing of ideas and experiences but, above all, a tool for reflecting together on the challenges of the mission in one's own area and for sharing some fundamental lines of action with which to respond to them – which each Group will make an effort to take on according to their possibilities. Beyond this, it is a matter of seeking ways to collaborate in an effective and well-coordinated manner in projects of education and evangelization which are, above all, at the service of the young.

The Salesian Cooperator cannot belong at one and the same time to another Association with a different Charism. He or she can participate as a faithful lay person, if wished, in moments of prayer and spirituality or of relaxation and can help with them as a Salesian Cooperator, considering it as one area of his or her apostolate. This, however, does not authorize him or her under normal circumstances to forgo his or her commitments to the Cooperator Association, especially where planning and evaluation meetings of the Local Center are concerned for these are formative moments having great import. If it be necessary, then, a discussion and an agreement with the Coordinator and the Delegates of his or her Center must be made so as to plan, with discernment and flexibility, other ways that he or she can link with the Local Center.

References

Atti del Capitolo Generale XVI 152.

Atti del Capitolo Generale Speciale 157 e 757, 5.

Atti del Capitolo Generale Speciale 174; 189.

Vecchi, J. E., *Carta di Comunione*.

Chavez V. P., *Carta di identità* art. 21-22.

Chavez V. P., *Strenna* 2009.

Costituzioni SDB 1984 art. 5; 19.

Statuto Exallievi art. 9-27.

Viganò E., “La Famiglia Salesiana”, 21 e 24-27; 33-39.

Ecclesiastes 4:2

And I thought the dead, who have already died, more fortunate than the living, who are still alive.

from the Regulations to the Project of Apostolic Life

Art. 7 Co-Responsibility in Acting

So that co-responsibility in the mission translates into co-responsibility in acting:

§1. those who are entrusted with leadership roles within the Association, at whatever level, carry out said roles in a spirit of service, according to the principles of communion, co-responsibility, synergy, and cooperation;

§2. given their diverse situations and commitments, Salesian Cooperators offer their witness by participating in various ways in the life of the Association:

- the young, bearers of dynamism, contribute to the common mission with their sensitivity and their creative capacity;
- the adults and the elderly, with their mature experience and long fidelity, bring with them the witness of a life rooted in Christ and lived in temporal realities: in the family, through their commitment in the areas of their own work and of culture, and in their exercise of social, economic, and political responsibilities;
- those for whom for it is impossible to carry out an active apostolate give strength to the educative action and to the apostolate of all the others through the offering of their suffering and their prayer;
- the members of the diocesan clergy who are Salesian Cooperators offer the service of their own ministry.

Art. 10 Ties with the Groups of the Salesian Family

§1. The Salesian Cooperators, recognizing the common spirituality and mission which unite them to the other Groups of the Salesian Family⁴ work in solidarity and in synergy in confronting the pastoral challenges of the Salesian mission.

The ties with the Groups of the Salesian Family are expressed particularly in apostolic co-responsibility. This requires, in some cases, the mutual commitment to carry out common objectives, to share educational concerns, and to make the Preventive System known.

Each and every Salesian Cooperator is personally responsible for animating and promoting the spiritual inheritance received.

§2. In order to realize this communion with the Groups of the Salesian Family in a concrete way, the Salesian Cooperators are called to participate actively in encounters and celebrations; days of formation and of updating; moments of animation, friendship, and familiarity; and days of prayer, retreats, and spiritual exercises.

§3. They are particularly open to collaboration with the Salesian Lay Associations while respecting their diverse identities.

from the Original Rule of 1876 by St. John Bosco

Article I: please see PVA Article 21 above

Article VI. Special Obligations

1. The members of the Salesian Congregation regard all Cooperators as brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. They shall call on them for collaboration in things that may redound to the greater glory of God and the

⁴ Pascual Chavez, SDB. *Charter of the Charismatic Identity of the Salesian Family of Don Bosco (Salesian Family Charter)*. Trans. (Rome: Tipografia Vaticana, 2012) 45-47. Print.

good of souls. In like manner the cooperators should feel free to call on the members of the Salesian congregation.

2. The members shall do all in their power to promote and support the works of the Association whether with their own financial contributions or with offerings collected from charitable people.

from the Charter of the Charismatic Identity of the Salesian Cooperator

Art. 29. Dynamic apostolic charity

Dynamic apostolic charity represents the heart of Don Bosco's spirit, the essence of Salesian life, as well as the force behind the apostolic commitment of the members of the Salesian Family

Charity/Love is the very name of God (cf. 1Jn 4,16). It does not indicate merely the powers of the human heart but is participation in the anticipatory mercy of the Father, in the compassionate heart of Christ and the indescribable love of the Holy Spirit. This is the distinguishing feature of the disciples of the Lord: loving one another with the same love with which God loves.

Apostolic: it is participation in the infinite love of the Father who sends Jesus so that we may have life to the full; it is a sharing in the solicitude of the Good Shepherd for the salvation of all; it is openness to the flow of love with which the Spirit works in consciences and in peoples' life-history.

Dynamic: expresses lively activity, a capacity for innovation, not being satisfied with what has been done already, not giving way to habit, avoiding all kinds of mediocrity and the comfortable, but rather with passion and creativity, seeking what is the most necessary and effective way of responding in practical terms to the expectations of the world of youth and of the working classes.

For Don Bosco all this was called an oratorian heart: it is fervour, zeal, making all possible resources available, seeking new paths, a capacity to resist under trial, the will to start again after defeats, an optimism that is nurtured and cultivated and spread abroad; it is that concern, full of faith and of charity, which finds in Mary a shining example of self-giving.

In the Groups in which Salesian service is directed towards infants and children, dynamic apostolic charity becomes evangelical tenderness; in the Groups which educate adolescents and young people it becomes acceptance, participation and guidance in the goals of growth and development; in the Groups dedicated to the care of people affected by various forms of poverty it has a tone of merciful and providential love; in the Groups whose apostolate is among the sick and the elderly it becomes compassionate charity; in the Daughters of the Sacred Hearts it shows itself in oblatinal love, especially towards the lepers; in the Groups engaged in a Salesian apostolate among the simple people, scattered in far distant villages or immersed in urban slums, it becomes a humble love which offers solidarity and oneself.

Art. 30. The grace of unity

Expressions used in Salesian circles to refer to the source of this apostolic charity are: the grace of unity, apostolic interior life, the contemplative dimension of life, a vital synthesis, a single movement of love for God and for the young, the liturgy of life.

Evangelising by educating and educating by evangelising is a formula well known by now to express the interior unity of the members of the Salesian Family, since it refers not only to a method of education but also to the spirituality of individuals and of the Groups: when one allows oneself to be guided by the Spirit, life and the apostolate form a single whole, just like prayer and action, love for God and for one's neighbour, attention to oneself and dedication to others, education in human values and the proclamation of the gospel, belonging to a Group and being part of the Church. Everything leads to unity; and it is the vital synthesis which is holiness. From this comes an incredible force for action and witness, by the power of the Spirit who has taken possession of all the people to make them free and joyful instruments of his action.

Apostolic charity constitutes for everyone belonging to the Salesian Family the inner principle and force capable of unifying the many different daily activities and preoccupations. It fosters the fusion in a single inner movement of the two inseparable poles of apostolic charity: passion for God and passion for one's neighbour.

Art. 45. Points of reference

In force of their apostolic communion of a charismatic nature, the Groups which make up the Salesian Family recognise in the Rector Major, Successor of Don Bosco, the Father and centre of unity of the Family itself.

Then, the Salesians of Don Bosco particular heirs of his charismatic richness have the responsibility of animating the whole of the Salesian Family. They in fact have particular «responsibilities: to preserve unity of spirit and to foster dialogue and fraternal collaboration for mutual enrichment and greater apostolic fruitfulness». Therefore they carry out a service which does not belong to the authority of government, but to the humble and joyful dedication of one who promotes a path of fidelity to the gift received, fostering its communication, sharing and realisation.

Art. 46. Organisations of animation and times for meeting

To ensure a regular and effective animation of the Salesian Family, some essential coordinating bodies are available to us and we encourage specific occasions for meeting together.

At world, regional, national, province and local level, unity and animation are supported and strengthened by Councils or Consultative Committees of the Salesian Family.

The meeting of the Consultative Committee at various levels is intended to achieve the following objectives:

1. To study and examine more deeply Don Bosco, his life, his pedagogy and his spirituality in order to know, understand and better take on board his apostolic project and his criteria for pastoral activity.
2. To strengthen the sense of belonging, fostering a direct and practical knowledge of the various different Groups of the Family and appreciation of their specific identity.
3. To arrange meetings and formation experiences in common.

4. To know the pastoral challenges facing society and the local Churches within which the Salesian Family takes its place, studying possibilities for forms of pastoral synergy, according to the specific nature of the individual groups, and in communion with the Salesian mission.

5. Seeking to put into action as often as possible, practical apostolic initiatives, shared by all the groups in the area.

The World Consultative Committee meets every year at the Salesian Generalate and proposes the essential lines for animation in the coming pastoral year.

In the individual Regions or Provinces every year the Salesian Family Day is celebrated with proposed opportunities for formation and the sharing of experiences.

At world level every year the Spirituality Days of the Salesian Family are held. These represent a time of communion, of reflection and of sharing, during which it is possible to study specifically the contents of the Strenna of the Rector Major. This document is proposed each year by the Successor of Don Bosco as an invitation to come together in reflection and in the practical implementation of particular aspect of Salesian spirituality and mission.

from Guidelines and Indications for the Formation of Salesian Cooperators

This relationship begins with those closest to him. “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’ they live their communion with those bonds characteristic of Don Bosco’s spirit.”⁵

To be brothers and sisters is to live an experience of community. This particular call brings one to live Christian and Salesian fraternity in the perspective of a concrete mission: to contribute to the salvation of the young, especially those most in need.

It is fundamental to...

- consider working together as a fundamental element of one's very identity: “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.*”⁶;
- respond to the challenges and the needs of young people who are the most poor and seek together with other Groups of the Salesian Family and other ecclesial and civic groups to give an adequate response to the demands of the area in which one lives; and

⁵ *Project of Apostolic Life: Statutes and Regulations*. Statutes, Article 21. 41.

⁶ See Giovanni Bosco. “Salesian Cooperators: A Practical Way of Contributing to Public Morality and to the Good of Society.” Article I. 1876 ed. in *Don Bosco: History and Spirit*. Vol. VI. Trans. Arthur J. Lenti, SDB. (Rome: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 2009) 239. Print.

- care for communion and collaboration with the other Groups of the Salesian Family, in a particular way with the Salesians of Don Bosco and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and cultivate sentiments of sincere affection for and of fidelity to the Rector Major.

Annual gatherings and meetings

It is the responsibility of the leadership of the Association to encourage and to foster the participation of the Cooperators in some gathering – organized at the Provincial, Regional, or World Level – whether it be from the Church-at-large or the Salesian Family. This refers to experiences which will provide an intense spiritual richness, generally leaving a strong resonance within individuals, and which will help them grow notably in the sense of belonging to the Church and to the Salesian Family.

To Know How to Live in Communion

to interact with and participate on the Local Salesian Family Commissions and Consultae at the various levels,⁷ and with the other animating bodies and the representatives of other groups of the Local Church⁸.

from the Delegate Resource Manual

In a moment of inspiration and genius, Don Bosco sought to give uniformity to his many youth services and to ensure its continuance by founding a pious society that would include both consecrated religious and lay people. These followers would carry on Don Bosco's service with the poor young people in the name of Jesus and within the mission of the Catholic Church.

One of these groups was for consecrated religious. Don Bosco began this group in 1859 when he invited some of his older boys to stay with him and animate (give unified form to) his works. That group of consecrated religious was approved by the Vatican as the Pious Society of St. Francis de Sales in 1874. The other group of mostly lay people was in existence from the beginnings of the Oratory in 1841. However, its approval as an integral part of the congregation as "extern Salesians" was not accepted by the Vatican in 1864. Subsequently, in 1874, Don Bosco requested that this group be approved as the "Union of Salesian Cooperators." That petition was granted in 1876.

In this way, Don Bosco had founded a "Salesian Family" of consecrated religious and lay people who were totally dedicated to serving the young in the name of Jesus and the Church. While there were two branches to Don Bosco's family, there was one movement to serve the young most in need. There was one educational philosophy (preventive system). There was one spirituality (find God in everyday life). There was one sense of community (family spirit). There was one educational objective (good citizens and faithful Christians). There was one pastoral approach (oratory criteria).

⁷ *Project of Apostolic Life*. Regulations, Article 22 §1. 91. and 26 §1. 98-99.

⁸ *Ibid.* Article 10. 73-74.

from *The Identity of the Salesian Cooperator* (pp. 63-68)

Please see also excerpts to article 5 in this Compendium

Identity in the Heart of the Salesian Family

We could compare the Salesian Family with the image that St. Paul uses for the Church in Chap. 12 of his First Letter to the Corinthians. She is one body, of different and diverse members. Paul's insistence about this rests on these two points at the same time: on taking care of the unity of the body and the on importance that each member fulfill its own proper function well for the benefit of the other members and for the body as a whole.

a) Autonomy

True autonomy allows the Salesian Cooperators to stand "on their own two feet" and to take responsibility for all they must, even if there is always the concern to act in "communion". They are "united" to the Salesian Congregation, their "element of stability", and are "animated" spiritually by it; but they ought not depend on it on the administrative level or on the apostolic activity level since these are at the service of the global Salesian mission (and, through it, of the entire Church) and not at the service of the Salesian Religious or of only the part of the mission they have undertaken. Don Bosco already recognized the possibility of their having "their own works", which they need to sustain "with their own material means or with donations" (*Rule of 1876*, ch. VI, 2-3). A just conception of things, therefore, makes us understand that autonomy means a certain freedom in decision-making and action, and a relative independence, but it does not mean total independence: this freedom recognizes the bonds that exist and fosters them. This is completely in harmony with the spirit of Vatican Council II: "Bishops, pastors of parishes, and other priests of both branches of the clergy should keep in mind that the right and duty to exercise this apostolate is common to all the faithful, both clergy and laity, and that the laity also have their own roles in building up the Church. For this reason they should work fraternally with the laity in and for the Church and take special care of the lay persons in these apostolic works." (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* no. 25a)

The Salesians commit themselves to respect their autonomy with the following declarations: "the autonomy of every Group in the Family is guaranteed so that each one might express in totality its own riches (*Acts of the Special General Chapter*, no. 172). With respect for their autonomy and according to their requests and needs, we will offer our spiritual service... to the FMA and the Cooperators." (*SDB Constitutions*, art. 30)

"Indeed, we are not speaking of imposing uniformity of action on everyone: that would bring about a levelling of the differences, generating confusion and uncertainties in the apostolic work. Rather, we are speaking of harmonizing our individual actions within a project shared by all." (*Salesian Family Charter*, no. 20)

b) With a unique task

What task within the Salesian mission will be uniquely theirs as Salesian Cooperators? Their being secular carries with it certain obligations and special possibilities.

Obligations

“The specific task that belongs to the majority of you as laity is the Christian animation, in the Salesian spirit, of the earthly realities.” (see *Lumen Gentium* no. 36-37; *Apostolicam Actuositatem* no. 7) “We cannot and ought not take your place, substituting you in tasks which are specifically yours.” (*Gaudium et Spes* no. 43b) “We wish, therefore, to be beside you to help you take and carry forward your role in the shared duty of building the church, but not in a paternalistic way.” (see *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 25; *Ad Gentes*, no. 21) (*Acts of the Special General Chapter*, no. 735)

Possibilities

Because Salesian Cooperators do not live in a Community [as do the Salesian Religious], they are more directly inserted into the structure of the local Church and are more deeply mixed in the ways and thinking of the world, and, therefore, are generally more capable than the Salesian Religious of “perceiving” the problems that the youth encounter and the opportuneness of certain types of Salesian action. Generally speaking, they are more disposed to assure that “flexible and timely service, with rapid action and efficacious means” and that direct and “effective Salesian presence” to those youth of whom the *Acts of the Special General Chapter* speak (no. 731). They are also freer, in the end, to act within social structures which affect the lives of the young. In every case, it is clear that the Salesian Cooperators can take direct responsibility for their own works.

c) Communion and co-responsibility in the Mission

Authentic spiritual fraternity which unites all the members of the Family must be expressed in encounters and in mutual support. This was the ideal proposed by Don Bosco from the very start: “The members of the Salesian Congregation regard all Cooperators as brothers [and sisters] in Jesus Christ. They shall call on them for collaboration in things that may redound to the greater glory of God and the good of souls. In like manner, the Cooperators should feel free to call on the members of the Salesian Congregation.” (1876 Rule, ch. VI)

“The communion among the Groups in and for the mission is showing itself to be ever more indispensable to our educative and missionary commitment; in fact, we realize how urgent is the need to link together our efforts and to propose diverse models of Christian life and to guarantee complementary *ministries*.” (*Salesian Family Charter*, no. 19)

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

To a certain extent one could apply to the Salesian family the analogy St. Paul uses when speaking of the church. It is one body made up of different members. St. Paul insists on two things; the care that must be given to unity in the body, and the importance that each member perform its proper function well for the good of the other members and the general good of the body as a whole. “If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing....The eye cannot say to the hand “I have no need of you” (1Cor. XII). It is important for the other Salesian family groups and for the family as a whole that the Cooperators have their own particular character and that they be responsible for their own proper part in the fulfillment of their mission.

All this presupposes a true autonomy which allows the Cooperators to govern themselves and to assume their own responsibilities – always bearing in mind, of course that they work “in common”. They lean on the Salesian Congregation, and this gives them their stability; and they receive spiritual nourishment from it. But they should not depend on it either in the field of administration or apostolic activities; their work is for the total Salesian mission not for the Religious Salesians as such, nor merely for their particular section of that mission. Don Bosco had already taken into consideration that the Cooperators would have their own activities, supported by “their own material means or by help received from others, One could sum up this autonomy, then, as a freedom to decide and act, with and independence that is relative, not total. This freedom accepts the bonds of unity, and pleasures them.

Regular and occasional contacts, meetings and mutual exchange will give a chance to each group to communicate its riches “so that they may become the riches of all. (SGC 174) The Religious Salesians bring to the Cooperators their “witness proper to consecrated Religious at the service of the Salesian mission. The Cooperators on their part bring to the SDB and FMA the stimulus of their example and enthusiastic projects, “a more realistic outlook, so that the efficiency of pastoral work may be increased’.

The field of Salesian activity constitutes a vast area for collaboration. At the moment the most immediate and most common is educational and pastoral work, and the material help given by the Cooperators to the Religious Salesian men and women in their various enterprises. “You are our first and essential collaborators: You are our collaborators in whatever is to be done for the glory of God, but especially where we lack personnel or material means. (1st. Gen Chapter, 1877)”.