

Art. 24. The Ministry of the Rector Major

§1. *The Rector Major of the Society of St. Francis de Sales is the successor of Don Bosco¹ through the explicit will of the Founder, he is the Superior of the Association and carries out the function of Supreme Moderator within it. He guarantees its fidelity to the Founder's Plan and promotes its growth.*

§2. *In his ministry, exercised also through his Vicar or the World Coordinator, he normally avails himself of the World Council and the World Executive Secretary (the SEM), above all, to animate the entire Association and to coordinate the various formative and apostolic initiatives.*

§3. *The members of the Association nourish sentiments of sincere affection for the Rector Major and of fidelity to his guidelines.*

CONSIDERATIONS

Core Themes

1. Successor of Don Bosco, Father and Center of Unity in the Salesian Family
2. Superior of the Association

Keys to Understanding

A. The article dedicated to the Rector Major is significantly placed between the one on the entire Salesian Family, in which he is the *Father and Center of unity*, and the one on the bonds with the Salesian Congregation. In his position as successor to Don Bosco and the representative of his charismatic fatherhood, the Rector Major has the identical bond as far as a charismatic spiritual order goes in relation to the various Groups of the Salesian Family. He is the charismatic promoter, animator, and guarantor of unity in this Family and of fidelity to the apostolic project and spirit of the Founder.

Article 126 of the 1984 Salesian *Constitutions* states: "The Rector Major is the successor of Don Bosco, the Father and Center of unity of the Salesian Family. His principal concern is to promote... the constant fidelity of the Salesian confrères to the Salesian charism so as to accomplish the mission entrusted to our Society by the Lord." Article 3 of the 1982 FMA *Constitutions* reads: "The Rector Major of the Society of St. Francis de Sales – as Don Bosco's successor – is the animator and the Center of unity in the Salesian Family."

B. The "fatherhood" which the Founder left as a precious heritage to his successors has the authority of the Rector Major taking on a characteristic Salesian face – comprised of animation and goodness – and orients such authority to be at the total service of the vocation of the persons and of the vitality of the Association. Not for nothing is it defined as "ministry."

The article presents three *ways* in which the Rector Major exercises this charismatic and juridic ministry to the Association:

¹*Salesian Family Charter. 23.*
Salesian Cooperators: A Practical Way... Art. V, 3.

1. personally or in collaboration with his Vicar or the World Coordinator;
2. availing himself of the World Council and the World Executive Secretary (SEM); and
3. being present, on the Provincial and Local Levels, through the ministry of both the SDB and FMA Provincials.

The article also points out the functions of the Rector Major. They are to: guarantee the *fidelity* of the Association to the Founder's plan (such a plan regards the identity of the Association); foster its numerical *growth*, animating and motivating it; care for its internal *unity*, given that the Association has an international character and a strongly Catholic physiognomy; and care for its *communion and collaboration* with the other groups of the Salesian Family and with ecclesial entities.

C. As to what concerns the *juridic* aspect, his role differs in relation to the distinct Groups. He is the "Apostolic Visitor" of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, as the 1982 FMA *Constitutions*, Article 111, states. To the Salesians of Don Bosco, he is the Superior or Rector Major, and, to the Salesian Cooperators, he is the "Supreme Moderator." Obviously, he himself is the first to understand that he is the Superior of the SDB *Religious* and of the *laity* and *secular Priests* who are Salesian Cooperators. For this reason, he governs and animates the two Groups keeping in mind their very different nature, in the light of Vatican Council II doctrine, and respecting the authority that the *Project of Apostolic Life* recognizes as belonging to the Councils and the Coordinators at the various Levels. As the Supreme Moderator of the Association, the Rector Major has ordinary powers of governance, which he exercises according to Canon Law, over the entire Association, its Councils, its Centers, and its members. This juridic function of being the Superior actualizes, on the functional level, his charismatic role as Father and Center of Don Bosco's Spiritual Family.

The World Council is a body that was initially established in 1974 (under Coordinator General Luigi Sarcheletti) as the "World Consulta" to the Rector Major, of which he availed himself for the animation of the Association when the new *Rule ad experimentum* was approved. It was composed of members by right and also members who were either appointed or elected. Its role was one of subsidiarity to the Rector Major for the World-Level governance and animation of the Association. When the seven-year term of the members of the second Consulta was completed (1981-87 Coordinator General Luigi Sarcheletti), a third was established (1987-94 Coordinator General Paolo Santoni) made up of World Councilors and some others who were given the task of preparing the Second World Congress and of seeing, via commissions, to the revision and updating of a new *Rule*.

Following the Fourth World Consulta (1994-2001 Coordinator General Roberto Lorenzini), and during the term of the fifth World Consulta, extended to an eleven-year term for the purpose of drawing up the new *Project of Apostolic Life* (2001-2012 General World Coordinator Rosario Maiorano), with the approval *ad experimentum* of the *Project of Apostolic Life* in 2007, the World Consulta took the name of World Council and, as such, became a collegial governing body, as did the Provincial and Local Councils. Starting in 2012 (2012-2018 World Coordinator Noemi Bertola), the World Council is a body created to aid the Rector Major directly in the animation and governance of the Association and has a six-year term.

Its task is two-fold:

1. to animate the entire Association and
2. to coordinate the formative and apostolic initiatives of the World Council, on which the SDB and FMA World Delegates take part by right.

For “animation” is intended an activity which makes one grow from within in one's sense of belonging and participation. It is put into motion by means of a process which tends to enable co-responsibility as an expression of a mature conscience. It presupposes the capacity for dialogue, an attitude of listening, of communication, and of discernment. Salesian animation is essentially spiritual and is defined simultaneously as vocational and pastoral.

In regard to the importance and the modalities of *coordination*, the indications of *Gaudium et Spes* are to be kept in mind:

There are also various Catholic associations on an international Level which can contribute in many ways to the building up of a peaceful and fraternal Community of nations. These should be strengthened by augmenting in them the number of well qualified collaborators, by increasing needed resources, and by advantageously fortifying the coordination of their energies. For today both effective action and the need for dialogue demand joint projects. Moreover, such associations contribute much to the development of a universal outlook—something certainly appropriate for Catholics. They also help to form an awareness of genuine universal solidarity and responsibility.

Coordination on the World Level does not mean substituting those apostolic forces already at work on the lower levels or to level their initiatives but, rather, to make it such that forces converge so as to construct an organic whole to reach the goals and the objectives of the Association more efficaciously.

References

Atti del Capitolo Generale Speciale 46.

Codex Iuris Canonici can. 622.

Costituzioni SDB (1984) artt. 126, 127.

Costituzioni FMA (1982) artt. 3, 111.

Costituzioni VDB (1878) art. 99.

Gaudium et Spes 90a.

Progetto di Vita Apostolica art. 34 § 1.

Regolamento di Don Bosco V 3.

Regolamenti SDB 1984 art. 147.

Regolamenti della Vita Apostolica artt. 42 § 2, 44 § 1, 45 § 2 e 3, 47 § 1 e 3.

from the Regulations of the Project of Apostolic Life

Article 30

“§1. The Rector Major makes Don Bosco, his mission, and his spirit present today. In him is recognized the service of unity as Don Bosco’s Successor and as our common Father, the Center of unity of the entire Salesian Family.

Within the Association, to him falls the charismatic task of offering guidelines necessary to guarantee the fecundity of the charism, the development of the Association, and the maturation of formative and apostolic initiatives.

§2. In the exercise of his ministry, carried out personally or through his Vicar or another representative chosen by him, the Rector Major ordinarily avails himself of the Salesian Cooperator World Council, above all, for the animation of the entire Association and for the coordination of the formative and apostolic initiatives.”

from the Charter of the Charismatic Identity of the Salesian Family

Art. 13. The Rector Major in the Salesian Family

Belonging to the apostolic family of Don Bosco has its origin in communion and is nourished by communion. This consists in corresponding to the Spirit Who leads it towards unity, bringing into existence and giving practical and even official forms to it, so as to ensure an effective relationship and collaboration in activities.

Belonging to the Salesian Family therefore of necessity requires a vital center which makes the reference to Don Bosco, to the common mission and to the same spirit a reality.

This center, according to the mind of Don Bosco, is the Rector Major. In him all recognize a three-fold ministry of unity: Successor of Don Bosco, common Father, center of unity for the entire Family. It falls within his official competence to admit to the Salesian Family the groups which request it, according to the pre-established criteria.

Since this is his mission, he feels he has a duty to offer the necessary guidelines to ensure the fruitfulness of the charism in each group of the Family. Through his example and teaching he constructs unity and ensures in the variety of the specific vocations, fidelity to the spirit and the coordination of certain initiatives. He exercises this ministry with the paternity which was Don Bosco's own: an approach that requires understanding and kindness, attention to the growth of each one, guidance in charismatic fidelity, commitment to the fruitfulness of the Salesian vocation in all its expressions, just as Don Bosco had written: "Your Rector will have care of you and of your eternal salvation."

from the Original Rule of 1876 by St. John Bosco

Article V. Constitution and Governance of the Association

3. The Superior of the Salesian Congregation is also the Superior of the Association.

from The Identity of the Salesian Cooperator

d) Don Bosco, Father and Teacher: our point of reference

Don Bosco is a "giant of the Spirit" and he has left us a rich and well-defined heritage: our spiritual patrimony. He is the initiator of a true school of apostolic spirituality which is both new and attractive. He is the mandatory point of reference for each and every one of us who, moved by a particular impetus of the Holy Spirit, feels called to share, today in our times, both his destiny and his mission – in whatever state of life we find ourselves, and each according to his/her own rank and level. Belonging is formed around some unifying center: a person, a criterion, a style. For us, this person is our "Don Bosco today": our Rector Major. (p. 65)