

Art. 28. The Value of Membership

§1. *Salesian Cooperators are aware that membership in the Association nourishes their faith experience and that of ecclesial communion. It represents, moreover, a vital element in support of one's own apostolic Vocation.*

§2. *Membership demands concrete signs which are expressed both in an active participation in the life of the Association and in a fitting demeanor on the part of the member in his/her daily and professional life.*

CONSIDERATIONS

Core Theme

Belonging: Its Formal and Spiritual Value

Keys to Understanding

To belong to any human and social Association presupposes some formal aspects which are executed through the formulation of a question, in a welcoming by the organizational structure of the Association, and by the inclusion of the new member in its life and work. Some formal moments are respected for the Salesian Cooperator as well: the Aspirant seeks to be welcomed into a Local Center and, through it, enters into a Province/Provincial Grouping. After an initial formative journey, the Aspirant who has been found suitable pronounces his or her official *Promise* during a public ceremony and thus enters the Association.

Alongside these formal aspects, other realities are also to be given their proper value. First, there is the vocational aspect. If becoming a Salesian Cooperator is to respond to a Call from the Lord, then it is very important not to forget along the course of one's life in the Association that the initiative belongs to God. This is inscribed in one's will to follow Christ according to the fascinating example that the figure of St. John Bosco exercised on the Aspirants. It is recognized in the same passion for poor, abandoned, and marginalized youth to whom one wants to dedicate his or her educative action and to give witness to as a convinced Christian. It is for this reason that every Salesian Cooperator shares his or her love for the young with other men and women who are attracted by Don Bosco's charism and feels that he or she is an integral part of one same spiritual Family.

Belonging brings with it many consequences. It implies a life of communion with the other members, the sharing of one and the same spirit, and collaboration in a common mission which is translated into actions which are adequate to meet the needs of a specific place, area, or territory. It is expressed in active and joyous participation in important initiatives but also in simpler, everyday ones. This fidelity is demonstrated by being present at the monthly meetings and at the provincial and national gatherings where the "visibility" of the Association plays a major role. Besides this, communion among all the Salesian Cooperators makes it such that each one feels part of one same living "body" – just as happens in the Church, in which all the baptized live their belonging as brothers and sisters in Christ the Lord. To consider oneself part of a dynamic reality that is in continual growth allows one to "dream big," to exchange enriching experiences, and to draw up significant pastoral plans for one's area in the knowledge that one is never alone but can count heavily on spiritual and human fraternity. These bonds of communion must be reinforced also through a commitment to constant prayer which is expressed both in the daily entrustment of the Association to God's Mercy and to the maternal guidance of Mary, as well as in sharing in the moments of reflection in the Center, in the Holy

Sacrifice of the Mass, and in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament – all of which increase fraternity and help to smooth over the inevitable difficulties in human relationships which are all too often at the base of tensions and misunderstandings.

The most precious fruit of a belonging lived in fullness is joy: joy is not a superficial and fleeting good humor but a profound one which is grafted from and finds its roots in shared faith and is realized in works done for the good of the young.

References

Christifideles Laici 63.

Francesco, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 274.

from the *Regulations to the Project of Apostolic Life*

Art. 14 Sense of Belonging

§1. So that the sense of belonging to the Association may grow, and to nourish constantly their own vocation, the Council of every Local Center commits itself annually to offer the possibility to the Salesian Cooperators to renew their apostolic Promise, preferably on the occasion of a Salesian Feast.

§2. A lapse in the renewal of the Promise lasting a period of three years, without a valid motive, accompanied by a distancing from the associative life, will commit the Local Council to verify this situation of detachment from the life of the Center.

§3. The Local Council has a fraternal responsibility to contact and accompany the Salesian Cooperator who has distanced him or herself, inviting said member to make a process of discernment regarding his/her situation of belonging to the Center.

§4. The Salesian Cooperators who are particularly involved in other apostolic realities or in volunteering give witness to their specific charism, spread the work of the Association, and enrich the Center by sharing their experiences.

Art. 17. Formation to the Service of Leadership

§1. The service of animation and of leadership in the Association is an apostolic one, by means of which the Association grows and matures in communion, in the spiritual life, and in the Salesian mission. It may be requested of any and all the Salesian Cooperators to offer their energies and abilities for a determinate amount of time in the service of animation and of leadership.

§2. The Salesian Cooperators welcome with availability the time of leadership service requested of them, live it with discernment and synergy, and deepen the specific formation which is necessary to qualify them for their task according to the established programs of the Association.

At the end of their period of service they give witness to their belonging with attitudes of simplicity and availability for the Association.

§3. The Salesian Cooperator who has a role of responsibility in the political sphere is invited to suspend temporarily his/her role as Coordinator of the Association at whatever level, in order to avoid any interference.

from A Prophecy's Journey

3. The Strengthening of the Association through 1888

Fr. Morand Wirth, SDB

The Salesian Cooperators ought not only gather alms for our hospices but must also avail themselves of every means possible so as to cooperate in the salvation of their brothers and, in a particular way, of the young (DON BOSCO, "Conference to the Cooperators at Lyons", 1882).

Immediately following its approval, Don Bosco got to work – speaking, traveling, and recruiting. He had foreseen that it would take two years to get the Association off the ground. His timeline would be respected.

The method varied, but the results were eloquent: often, when it was certain there would be no resistance, Don Bosco limited himself to sending the future Cooperator the *Rule* along with his certificate of membership. For persons of high rank, he added a personal letter. It was important to him to have “big names” who would give “luster” to his list of members, beginning with Pope Pius IX, who told Don Bosco that he not only wanted to be a Cooperator but he wanted to be the first of the Cooperators. With all simplicity he made the same proposal to Pope Leo XIII who declared that he wanted to be not only a Cooperator but a “worker.” [A play on the Italian words “*cooperatore*” and “*operatore*” – translator’s note]

When traveling and moving about in Italy, France, and Spain, he added a notable number of Associates. In Rome, he won many great families and numerous prelates to his cause. Genoa and Liguria furnished him huge contingents. In France, Nice became an important center due to the cosmopolitan character of the city. In Marseilles, the Cooperators were so fervent that Don Bosco had the impression of being among family. In 1880, in a conference to the Cooperators of San Benigno Canavese, he announced that both the number of men and women Cooperators had grown to 30,000 and that this was increasing every day. In Spain, the name of the great lady of Barcelona, Dorotea de Chopitea, must be mentioned for she was a “true mother of the Salesian Works” around whom the initiatives and the members multiplied.

The Annual Conferences and the Salesian Bulletin

One means to preserve the unity in spirit and to increase the number of the Cooperators was the *Conferences* (a term which can be considered synonymous with “meeting”), which were normally held on the Feasts of St. Francis de Sales and of Mary Help of Christians. The very first of these was held in Rome on January 27, 1878. After reading a chapter on the love that our Patron Saint had for the poor, Don Bosco gave his talk on the works being carried out to help youth – “works which cannot but be respected, and even desired, by any government or political leaning whatsoever.” (*Biographical Memoirs*, vol. XIII, p. 480) The meeting concluded with song and prayers. The *Biographical Memoirs* record for us the chronicles of about 50 such conferences held by Don Bosco in various cities in Italy and France, as well as in Barcelona in Spain.

Don Bosco also wanted to give the Cooperators an instrument of communication which would serve to keep them all united to the center of the Congregation and among themselves without forgetting its other purposes: publicity and fundraising. In January 1878, the *Catholic Book Lover (Il Bibliofilo Cattolico)*, a periodical written, in the first place, to make the publications of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales known was changed into the *Salesian Bulletin*, a monthly publication, which was sent free of charge to Salesian Cooperators and to all who were interested in it, whether near or far. The distribution of this periodical increased from year to year, until finally reaching 40,000 subscriptions in 1887. A French edition appeared in 1879, an Argentinian one in 1880, and a Spanish one in 1886.

At Don Bosco's death in 1888, one thing is evident: the apostolic strength of the modest Salesian Congregation had been increased ten-fold thanks to the "fraternal" help of their Cooperators. Perhaps significant in this regard is the fact that at least once from Don Bosco's pen, the expression appeared as “*i Salesiani Cooperatori*” [written this way in Italian, with “*Salesiani*” being the noun and “*Cooperatori*” in apposition with it, as a modifier, places the emphasis on the Cooperator’s being a Salesian, on the same par as the Salesian Priests, Brothers, and, later, Sisters, but the difference can only be noted in the Italian version (*Memorie Biografiche*, vol. XI, pp. 82 and 83)– translator’s note]. Many of these, indeed, could truly have been considered in fact, if not canonically, true "Salesians in the world". [the entire chapter 4, vol. XI is on the Salesian Cooperators]

from the Official Commentary to the Project of Apostolic Life

Please see the introduction to Chapter V

from the 2018 Handbook of St. Philip the Apostle Province

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 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.asscc-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.

Sense of Belonging

Art 67. The date, time, and place of the making of the Promise on the part of the newly-accepted Aspirants is communicated to the Provincial Council in as timely a fashion as possible, at least one month ahead of time, so that the Provincial Coordinator may plan to be in attendance, whenever possible, to receive the Promise and the good news may be announced to the Association-at-large so that all may share in the joy of the Aspirants' and their Center's joy.¹

Art 68. The Ceremony for the Making of the Promise drawn up by the Provincial Council serves as a model for the Local Centers' ceremony. (q.v., Appendix, pp. 77+78) Said ceremony for Local Centers is to be submitted to the Provincial Council for approval along with the notification of the date, time, and place where it will be held.

Art 69. The usual form of maintaining a healthy sense of belonging is for each Member to be actively and whole-heartedly involved in the life of his/her Center, expressed by:

- Regular and participative attendance at scheduled meetings
- Active collaboration in apostolic endeavors
- Interest in and sharing of one's own and others' experiences, joys, and sorrows
- Cheerful participation in the life of the Association through attendance at Formation Days, Retreats, and other initiatives sponsored or promoted by the Association and the Salesian Family to help all grow in their vocation and Salesian Spirituality
- Eagerness in knowing what the other Centers of the Province and the World and the Association at the various levels are doing
- An annual renewal of the Promise
- Contributions to the Economic Solidarity of the Association.

Art 70. Promised Members who have moved and now live at great distances from their original Center and from other Local Centers remain united to the Association through mutual contact with their former Center and with the Provincial Council and in the same ways as other Promised Members (for those made

¹ SUO offers a "Discernment Retreat" to the Aspirants who have completed their 24-month initial formation classes and are ready to make their Promise. The timing is between the completion of the classes, but before they write their petition letter. The retreat focuses on the meaning of the Promise, what happens after you become a Cooperator, mission to serve the young, opportunities for apostolic work, the petition letter, etc. This is a well-received initiative. Those Cooperators who have accompanied the Aspirants may also attend. Candidates find it very "welcoming."

possible by electronic means), as described in Article 69 above. These Cooperators submit an annual written account of their living and working as Cooperators.

Art 71. These Salesian Cooperators “of the Diaspora” are encouraged to form a Salesian Cooperator Center wherever they live and work, *with the help and the direction of the Provincial Council.*

Art 72. The Local and Provincial Councils seek out means to assist said “long-distance” Cooperators’ attendance at initiatives as is feasible.

Art 73. Salesian Cooperators who emigrate from the United States to other lands maintain bonds of unity with the Members of their original Center through mutual communication and concern and through the social communication means listed in Articles 20+21. When requested by the individual Salesian Cooperator, the Provincial Councilors of St. Philip the Apostle Province, through contact with the Provincial Councilors of the other country, will assist the Salesian Cooperator in finding and making contact with said Council and/or a Local Center to which to belong in their new land.

Art 74. Salesian Cooperators who must absent themselves from attendance at meetings or from a particular event or initiative promoted and/or sponsored by their Center, the Association, or the Salesian Family must let the Local Council know the reason for such absence. If the Salesian Cooperator needs to be absent for an extended period – three months or more – the Local Council takes the initiative to know the reasons so as to be of support and help.

Art 75. If a Salesian Cooperator fails to inform a Local Council of his/her absence and the reasons for it, as stated in Article 74 above, and is absent for 3 meetings in a row, or does not participate in the life of the Association by failure to attend Formation Days, Retreats, or other initiatives per the norms of the *Project of Apostolic Life*, the Local Council, in fulfillment of Article 14, §2 and §3, of the *Regulations*, shall dialogue with the Salesian Cooperator concerning his/her commitment and his/her determination to remain a Member of the Association.

Art 76. If a Salesian Cooperator fails to respond to the appeals made in Articles 74 and 75 above, or, after a suitable period of prayer and reflection, decides to withdraw from the Association, the Local Council will take the steps necessary for official dismissal, according to the norms of Article 31 of the *Statutes*.

Art 77. Individual Salesian Cooperators are to make the Local Secretary aware of any changes in their personal data on record (email address, phone number, etc.) as soon as possible.

from Christifideles Laici

The Reciprocal Formation Received and Given by All

63. Formation is not the privilege of a few, but a right and duty of all. In this regard the Synod Fathers have said: "Possibilities of formation should be proposed to all, especially the poor, who can also be a source of formation for all"; and they added: "Suitable means to help each person fulfill a full, human and Christian vocation should be applied to formation".

For the purpose of a truly incisive and effective pastoral activity the *formation of those who will form others* is to be developed through appropriate courses or suitable schools. Forming those who, in turn, will be given the responsibility for the formation of the lay faithful, constitutes a basic requirement of assuring the general and widespread formation of all the lay faithful.

According to the explicit invitation of the Synod Fathers special attention ought to be devoted to the local culture in the work of formation: "The formation of Christians will take the greatest account of local human culture, which contributes to formation itself, and will help to discern the value, whether implanted in tradition or proposed in modern affairs. Attention should be paid to diverse cultures which can exist in one and the same people or nation at the same time. The Church, the mother and teacher of peoples, should strive to safeguard, where the need exists, the culture of a less numerous people living in large nations when the situation exists".

In the work of formation some convictions reveal themselves as particularly necessary and fruitful. First of all, there is the conviction that one cannot offer a true and effective formation to others if the individual has not taken on or developed a personal responsibility for formation: this, in fact, is essentially a "formation of self".

In addition, there is the conviction that at one and the same time each of us is the goal and principle of formation: the more we are formed and the more we feel the need to pursue and deepen our formation, still more will we be formed and be rendered capable of forming others.

It is particularly important to know that the work of formation, while having intelligent recourse to the means and methods available from human science, is made more effective the more it is open to the *action of God*. Only the branch which does not fear being pruned by the heavenly vinedresser can bear much fruit for the individual and for others.

from Evangelii Gaudium, 274

The spiritual savour of being a people

274. If we are to share our lives with others and generously give of ourselves, we also have to realize that every person is worthy of our giving. Not for their physical appearance, their abilities, their language, their way of thinking, or for any satisfaction that we might receive, but rather because they are God's handiwork, his creation. God created that person in his image, and he or she reflects something of God's glory. Every human being is the object of God's infinite tenderness, and he himself is present in their lives. Jesus offered his precious blood on the cross for that person. Appearances notwithstanding, every person is immensely holy and deserves our love. Consequently, if I can help at least one person to have a better life, that already justifies the offering of my life. It is a wonderful thing to be God's faithful people. We achieve fulfilment when we break down walls and our heart is filled with faces and names!