

## **Art. 32. Meaning and Formula of the Apostolic Promise**

§1. *The meaning and purpose of the Promise is to express the Aspirant's will to live his or her Baptism according to the Project of Apostolic Life. Don Bosco himself proposed the Promise as an apostolic expression of the Salesian Vocation in society.*

### **§2. The Promise <sup>1</sup>**

***“O Father, I adore You because You are good and love everyone.***

***I thank You for having created and redeemed me,***

***and for having called me to become part***

***of Your Church***

***and for having me come to know in Her***

***the Apostolic Family of Don Bosco,***

***which lives for You at the service of the young***

***and of ordinary folk.***

***Drawn by Your merciful Love,***

***I wish to love You in return by doing good.***

***For this reason,***

***I PROMISE***

***to live out the Project of Apostolic Life of the Association of Salesian Cooperators with commitment (as a Priest). That is:***

- ***to be a faithful disciple of Christ in the Catholic Church;***
- ***to work in Your Kingdom, especially for the advancement and salvation of the young;***
- ***to deepen and give witness to the Salesian spirit;***
- ***to collaborate, in Family communion, in the apostolic initiatives of the Local Church.***

***Give me, O Father, the strength of Your Spirit,***

***so that I might know how to be a faithful witness***

***to these commitments.***

***May Mary, Help of Christians, Mother of the Church, assist me and guide me in this life choice.***

***Amen.”***

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<sup>1</sup> The present formula may be adapted according to the differing situations, as long as the contents are respected. When the Promise is renewed, say: “I renew the promise to...”

## CONSIDERATIONS

### Core Themes

1. The *Promise*
2. The Commitments

### Keys to Understanding

Different from other Catholic Institutes or Ecclesial Groups, the Salesian Cooperators are not the simple result of human interest on the part of Christians – men and women committed to an apostolate – even if this was evidently so. Nor are they the fruit of a particular intervention on the part of the Bishops and the Holy Father as, e.g., in the case of Catholic Action or other associations that rose up through the initiative of individual clergy.

The Cooperators arose and were destined to last throughout time by means of a particular act of the Holy Spirit, which, historically-speaking, was manifested first in Don Bosco and in the creation of the distinct Groups of his Apostolic Family and, then, by being accepted and approved by the Church as a new reality, and finally, in the Centenary history of the Salesian Family and, within it, of the Cooperators. This active presence of the Holy Spirit makes the Salesian Group of the Cooperators assume its own physiognomy or identity, and, through their collaboration, renews it so as to attune it to the signs of the times.

#### A. *The Promise*

Official entrance into the Association happens with the making of the *Promise*. It is the prayer of a good Christian who wants to be involved. It is a prayerful, free, and public expression of the Aspirant who "expresses his or her will to live" as a Salesian Cooperator.

It is not a "vow"; it is a simple proposal of one's *conscience* taken in dialogue with God the Father in the communion of the Church through his or her belonging to the Association. By such an act, the Salesian Cooperator freely *commits him or herself* to follow the path chosen and to know and to feel he or she is accompanied by many brothers and sisters and, most of all, strengthened through the mediation of the Church and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Above all, it is the attainment of a joyous goal for one who has passed through a formation process and arrived at the maturation of his or her Baptismal Call according to Don Bosco's apostolic project. It is also the *point of departure* for a life given to Christ for the young and for common folk.

Beyond this, it is a manifestation of a *proposal of fidelity* to God Who called him or her to live the Gospel in a concrete form in the Salesian Family and Who gave birth to pastoral charity in him or her. The Aspirant recognizes this gift and, grateful for it, commits him or herself to make it bear fruit in such a way that his or her life is a witness of operative love – of a love that acts.

It is also a *commitment of fidelity to the Church*, which has welcomed him or her among its members, has nourished his or her Christian life, and now invites him or her to participate co-responsibly in the mission of salvation. By the making of the *Promise* before the Community, the new Salesian

Cooperator joyfully accepts growing in the Salesian experience, which is considered “a specific way of living the Gospel and of participating in the mission of the Church.”

Finally, it is the will *to belong faithfully to the Association* in which he or she takes part by a free decision because it offers him or her a concrete path of Christian life and of apostolate within the context of the Family founded by Don Bosco.

The Association responds to the offer of the Aspirant through a fraternal welcome and a commitment to accompany him or her in one’s formative apostolic task and fidelity to the commitments assumed.

The idea of the “*Promise*” harkens back to Don Bosco himself. In the famous chapter on “the extern members” that one reads in his first drafts of the *Constitutions*, he established the following: “the member ought to make at least a promise to the Rector to commit himself in those things which he shall deem to be for the greater glory of God.” (*Memorie Biografiche* vol. VII 885 – in Italian version only) In the plan entitled Association of Good Works (1875) and in the first editions of the definitive *Rule* of 1876, Don Bosco inserted two declarations that correspond to the present *Promise*, and to the attached Certificate: “To the Salesian Cooperators is proposed the same harvest of the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales, to which they intend to associate themselves.” (*Memorie Biografiche* vol. XI 545)

The entrance of a new Cooperator into the Association and, therefore, into the Salesian Family is reason for great joy on everyone’s part. In Salesian tradition, it constitutes a special occasion for a beautiful family celebration!

Since becoming a Salesian Cooperator is a free choice which defines one's whole life, the *Promise* is to be made only after serious preparation. It is a matter of an act which must not be improvised or be taken lightly or happen for inadequate motives; nor must it be procrastinated indefinitely without serious reason.

### **B. *I Promise***

The act of promising something to God which is pleasing to Him is part of the virtue of “Religion.” This is the virtue directed at making things such that relationships with God are inspired by and correspond to one's situation as His creatures and His sons and daughters. It is rooted in the Theological Virtues and is expressed in external deeds, both individual and social. This is precisely what making a promise to Him is. With this, the Salesian Cooperator manifests his or her firm will to make an effort to respond faithfully to this personal Call received from on high. Such a promise does not bring a new style of life to the Cooperator. It simply expresses before God and before his or her brothers and sisters in the Association that he or she intends to assume the *Project of Apostolic Life* and to fulfill the commitments inherent to it: it is an act of love and of docility to God and is also an act of joy.

### **C. *The Commitments***

The Christian Vocation is at one and the same time a *gift* and a *commitment* because everyone receives a personal invitation from God to realize him or herself by putting his or her very life at the service of the Kingdom. In the course of one's existence, everyone encounters a set of possibilities

which allow him or her to concretize and to mature such a Call. These possibilities, without excluding one's own initiative, are the fruits of Providence and of Divine Grace which allow us and help us remain loyal to our Faith.

But such a gift also brings with it a *commitment* because God never acts without the consent of the person. This is a call to open oneself and to cooperate with God's transforming action in such a way that one's whole life is guided by the Holy Spirit. This presupposes a preparatory *iter* without which, even if it is simple and adapted to a person's possibilities, would remain a purely ineffectual desire.

When considered in its totality, the commitments that one assumes with the *Promise* consist in living the Gospel project of the Association of Cooperators as it is presented in the *Project of Apostolic Life*. Such a commitment *is specified according to its principal aspects*, each one of which presents, in summary form, the contents of the various chapters of the *Statutes*.

- “*To be a faithful disciple of Christ in the Catholic Church,*” as a Catholic called to be a true Salesian in the world – as a layman or a Diocesan Priest or Deacon – inserted into a Public Association of the Faithful, which is part of the Church. (Chapter I)
- “*To work in Your Kingdom, especially for the promotion and the salvation of the young,*” by carrying out a secular apostolate according to one's specific ministry, in one's family, in one's marriage, in one's work and living environments, and in social and cultural reality, offering a service of Christian education to the young – who are the privileged focus of our work – through typical activities carried out in different structures. (Chapter II)
- “*To deepen and to witness to the Salesian Spirit*”, the precious heritage of the Founder and gift of the Lord to the Church. (Chapter III)
- “*To collaborate in Family communion, in the apostolic initiatives of the Local Church,*” knowing that they are brothers and sisters in Don Bosco, are co-responsible in action, and participate in the life of the Salesian Family: availing themselves of the ministry of the Rector Major, maintaining the particular bonds with the Salesian Congregation and with the other Groups of the one Family; and all done in solidarity with the Local Churches. (Chapter IV)
- “*Belonging to an Association through a Promise*” (Chapter V).

### ***Invocation for Divine Help to be Faithful***

The formula ends with a prayer to the Father and an invocation to Mary. In it, the Cooperator requests the strength of the Holy Spirit from the Father, in Whom alone, there is a sure guarantee to be faithful to the commitments assumed. By such a prayer, the Cooperator, while humbly manifesting that he or she knows him or herself to be incapable of carrying out the promised commitments by his or her strength alone, asks with hope and with filial trust for the abundance of Divine assistance. From Mary, Mother of Tenderness and of Faith, he or she asks assistance and guidance along this path which leads to love for She is *the* model of every believer who acts with charity. Besides this, it declares his or her generous will to be faithful to the *Project of Apostolic Life* which he or she has chosen in full freedom.

## References

Bosco Giovanni, *Il giovane provveduto* (1847) 77.

Cf. *Memorie Biografiche* VII 885; XI 545.

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

**Art 49.** Aspirants are encouraged to make a spiritual retreat before writing their request and/or making the Promise of the Salesian Cooperator.

**Art 51.** Each Local Center establishes a day, preferably on a Salesian Feast, when all its Members come together to celebrate their vocation as Salesian Cooperators through the renewal of their Promise. It may also take place at a gathering of the larger Salesian Family on the Feast of St. Francis de Sales, of St. John Bosco, or of Mary Help of Christians, e.g. The moment takes place by preference within the context of Holy Mass at the local parish connected to a Salesian work or in their local Diocesan parish as a means to spread awareness about the Association and encourage others who feel called to discern their possible vocation. Ideally, this is followed by a gathering with refreshments and time to share in the joy of these Members on the renewal of their commitment.

**Art 52.** Special care and attention is given by each Local Center, in the same manner as described above in Article 51, to the making of the Promise on the part of the Aspirants who have been approved by the Local and Provincial Councils.

**Art 53.** The Secretary of the Local Council (or of the Provincial Council if the Aspirant/Promised Member is attached to it due to great distance from any Center, or for any other reason), will note in the appropriate register the date of the renewal of the Promise on the part of the Members, noting also any Members who were absent, and the date of the making of the Promise on the part of the Aspirants.