

## **Art. 33. The Reasons for This Organization**

*Salesian Cooperators, called to live their apostolic Vocation in society and in the Church, have an appropriate organizational structure. The Association of which they are part is the means to live out mission and communion according to this Project of Apostolic Life.*

### **CONSIDERATIONS**

#### **Core Themes**

1. Spirit and Purpose of This Organization
2. Organizational Aspect in the Light of the Magisterium of the Church
3. Principles Which Govern the Organizational Aspects of the Association

#### **Keys to Understanding**

Don Bosco, as a zealous and realistic man concerned with the logical union of forces for good and seeking great efficacy, wanted the Cooperators to form, right from the start, an "organized" Association. With mental agility and practical spirit, he delineated the major infrastructure of his organization: these are described in chapter V of the *Rule* of 1876.

He wanted such an organization that would be appropriate for many and various local realities and that would be at the service of the Local Churches. He was, however, aware that an organization on an international Level was important for the Church Universal so he gave the Cooperators, through his Congregation already at work in different nations, the same international scope and an ampler organization than that of a local group. Such an organization was established, in substance, by the Decurions and by the Salesian directors who were *representatives*, on a local Level, of the one central Superior; i.e., of Don Bosco himself.

This is not the place to reconstruct the history of the Association with all its structural modifications as introduced from time-to-time. The *Project of Apostolic Life* is limited to indicating the spirit and purpose of the present organization and also its configuration.

#### **A. Spirit and Purpose of This Organization**

The article presents the necessary infrastructure of the Association in view of the fulfillment of its specific purpose under two aspects: personal and communal. In fact, communion ties the Salesian Cooperators among themselves in all that concerns the life of the Association including, therefore, the norms also. These establish some fundamental aspects through which the Cooperator realizes his or her own personal formation – both initial and on-going – through the means and the structures furnished for him or her by the Association and through fraternal communion with the other Cooperators according to the *Project of Apostolic Life*.

Collaboration, then, necessarily requires organization. Without it, the Association would have no concrete efficacy. The infrastructure of an Association such as that of the Cooperators is not an end in itself but is instituted precisely so as to render the achievement of the purposes of said Association simpler. And this is not in the form of a spontaneous group but of a union of persons who are animated by the same

spirit and are involved in achieving a common objective using the same means. This does not eliminate or preclude individual or group initiatives but, rather, makes them easier and gives them strength by inserting them into the action of the Association in a harmonious manner.

Concretely-speaking, this communion and this collaboration are manifested through an essential availability to live some irreplaceable moments prescribed in the *Regulations* with one's brothers and sisters, according to the availability permitted by one's own work, family situation, and apostolic commitments. The organization must, therefore, motivate, coordinate, and support the "availability" of its own members.

## **B. *Organizational Aspect of the Association in the Light of the Magisterium of the Church***

Catholic Associations make reference to the authoritative pronouncements of Vatican Council II, as contained in the decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*. According to number 18 of this *Decree on the Lay Faithful*, its group apostolate sinks its roots deep into the very nature of the Church, the People of God, the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Holy Spirit: "The group apostolate of Christian believers then happily corresponds to a human and Christian need and at the same time signifies the communion and unity of the Church in Christ, who said, 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them'." (Matt. 18:20) Such an apostolate has many positive effects on the members of the Association and on those to whom their ministry is directed.

The group apostolate is very important also because the apostolate must often be performed by way of common activity both the Church communities and the various spheres. For the associations established for carrying on the apostolate in common sustain their members, form them for the apostolate, and rightly organize and regulate their apostolic work so that much better results can be expected than if each member were to act on his own.

In the present-day situation, group apostolate is presented, under many aspects, as the only manner in which to have a Christian impact in the various environments. The document states further in number 18:

In the present circumstances, it is quite necessary that, in the area of lay activity, the united and organized form of the apostolate be strengthened. In fact, only the pooling of resources is capable of fully achieving all the aims of the modern apostolate and firmly protecting its interests. Here it is important that the apostolate encompass even the common attitudes and social conditions of those for whom it is designed. Otherwise those engaged in the apostolate are often unable to bear up under the pressure of public opinion or of social institutions.

From among the multiple forms of group apostolate, Vatican Council II attaches particular importance to certain ones in number 19 of *Apostolicam Actuositatem*: "Among these associations, those which promote and encourage closer unity between the concrete life of the members and their faith must be

given primary consideration.” Finally, the same document of Vatican Council II, again in number 19, underlines the unique role that lay organizations which operate on an international Level can play in the universal mission of the Church – precisely what the Association of Cooperators is. “Now, in view of the progress of social institutions and the the [*sic*] fast-moving pace of modern society, the global nature of the Church's mission requires that apostolic enterprises of Catholics should more and more develop organized forms in the international sphere.”

### ***C. Principles Which Govern the Organizational Aspect of the Association***

In the post-conciliar period, all Catholic associations underwent a crisis – some more, some less profound – and made considerable efforts to reorganize and revitalize themselves for the purpose of putting into effect the directives of Vatican Council II and of responding better to the challenges placed before them by the rapid social and ecclesial changes. The Association of Salesian Cooperators also participated in an ample and serious way in the work of organizational renewal. The present draft of Chapter VI reflects such a prolonged labor. In it, the irrevocable principles of Don Bosco are retained; indeed, they were re-proposed by the Special General Chapter of the SDB. Some are, for example: the principles of unity, flexibility, and adaptability. Moreover, the importance of the Local Center was confirmed for it is the foundational nucleus of the Association’s organization and is to be the privileged Provincial reality in respect to the national Level which now may be present in more than one Province.

Then followed the Vatican Council II directives concerning the principles of subsidiarity, which take away any rigid and pyramidal aspect from the Association – and articulate, in a timely way, the responsibilities of the various Levels – Local, Province, and World – while leaving ample "freedom of movement" to the Local Centers so as to foster their vitality and creativity.

Finally, the determinations expressly required by the new *Code of Canon Law* – above all, as regard the composition and competencies of the Councils, direction of centers, the juridic figure of the Delegates, and the administration of the goods of the Association – were inserted.

### **References**

Cf. *Apostolicam actuositatem*.

Cf. *Christifideles Laici*.

## ***from The Identity of the Salesian Cooperator***

### **2. One organization**

The group apostolate of Christian believers then happily corresponds to a human and Christian need and at the same time signifies the communion and unity of the Church in Christ... the associations established for carrying on the apostolate in common sustain their members, form them for the apostolate, and rightly organize and regulate their apostolic work so that much better results can be expected than if each member were to act on his own. In the present circumstances, it is quite necessary that, in the area of lay activity, the united and organized form of the apostolate be strengthened. In fact, only the pooling of resources is capable of fully achieving all the

aims of the modern apostolate and firmly protecting its interests.  
(*Apostolicam Actuositatem* 18a,c, d)

### ***Don Bosco wanted a trim and efficacious organization***

Concerned with the coherent union between the forces of good and the seeking of an ample efficacy, Don Bosco, as a zealous but realistic man, wished from the very start that the Cooperators should form an “organized” Association. With intellectual agility and a practical spirit, he laid the foundations of the major structures of this organization: these can be found in Chapter V of the Rule of 1876.

Don Bosco has faith in the young: it is worth the effort to recall that he accepted boys and girls 16 years of age as Cooperators! There was one condition: that they had sufficient maturity to allow them to have the “firm will to conform themselves to the proposed rule.” (ch. V, 1) For certain, he awaits one of the most precious contributions to his mission from their dynamism: youth for youth.

### ***The principles which regulate the organizational aspect of the Association***

In the Post-Conciliar period, all Catholic Associations have been touched by a more or less profound crisis and have carried out notable efforts to re-organize and to revitalize themselves for the purpose of putting the Council’s directives into effect and to respond better to the challenges coming from the rapid social and ecclesial changes. The Association of the Salesian Cooperators has participated in a great and serious way in such work of organizational renewal. The Council’s directives have been followed concerning, e.g., the principle of subsidiarity – which removes from the Association any rigid and pyramidal aspect, opportunely articulating responsibilities at the various levels; local, provincial, and world – leaving ample space for movement to the Centers, so as to foster their vitality and creativity.

Finally, those directives expressly required by the new Code of Canon Law have been inserted; above all, where the composition and the competencies of the Councils, the establishment of the Centers, the juridical figure of the Delegate, and the administration of the goods of Association are concerned.

## ***from the Charter of the Charismatic Identity of the Salesian Family***

### **Art. 2. The development of the Family**

On account of his stature as «a great man with a charism» and as a saint, Don Bosco takes his place in a singular manner among the Founders of Institutes of consecrated life, religious and secular, and of Apostolic Lay Associations in the Church. To our amazement and gratitude, in fact, that first seed has grown until it has become a flourishing tree.

To the first four Groups founded by him, numerous other Groups have been added in the course of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the new millennium. From the Founder some of his spiritual sons have drawn inspiration and guidance in order to give life, in the different continents and in various social-cultural contexts, to new Groups, sometimes begun in collaboration with the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and with the support of the Salesians-Cooperators and the friends of the Salesian work.

Many of these groups have been officially recognized as belonging for various reasons to the Salesian Family. While having specific vocations they recognize in Don Bosco the common «Patriarch», they feel themselves animated by his spirit, which they live out according to their own characteristics, and they find themselves with the common mission of serving the young, the poor, those suffering, as well as those people not yet evangelized.

Other groups are in the process of moving towards a possible aggregation to the one large Family in a significant sign of the perennial vitality of the Church.

In the implementation of the renewal promoted by the Vatican Council II, the awareness of belonging to the single spiritual and apostolic Family has grown more and more; the animating role of the Salesians has been clarified, reaffirming the Rector Major as the essential point of reference; exchanges between the Groups have been exploited, arriving at an ever more fraternal communion and a sharing which is ever more convinced of both the formation project and the missionary activity.

### **Art. 3. Institutional structure**

The term family describes the link which connects the various Groups, though to different degrees. It is not simply a matter of closeness or of friendly rapport, but the formal expression of a communion that is interior, charismatic and spiritual; it will help, therefore, to explain the different levels of belonging to the Salesian Family.

This belonging draws on a common spirit which is the foundation of the mission inspired by the charism of Don Bosco, while respecting the particular and specific characteristics of each group. This demands a wise process of discernment, that can lead to official recognition.

Therefore there are different titles for belonging. The first is that enjoyed by the Salesians, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, the Cooperators and the members of the Association of Mary Help of Christians: these are the first four Groups established by Don Bosco and the direct heirs to his work. To these all the other Groups need to refer and make comparisons as regards the spirit, the field of mission, the methodology of pedagogical and apostolic activity.

A second title to belonging is that of the numerous Groups of consecrated life, both religious and secular, as well as some Catholic Associations which have come into being through the creative efforts of some of Don Bosco's sons. They enrich with particular charismatic and spiritual forms of expression the common patrimony of the Family.

A third level, finally, is constituted by particular titles to membership which is constituted by the circle of people who form part of the vast Salesian Movement and find in the Salesian Family their animating nucleus. This is formed by the Friends of Don Bosco, by the Salesian Youth Movement and more in general, by Salesian Voluntary social service and by an extensive category of men and women educators, catechists, adult professionals, sympathetic politicians, co-workers, even those belonging to different religions and cultures, who are working in the five continents.

The juridical title to belong is conferred by the official letter of recognition which the Rector Major sends in reply to the request made by the individual Groups.