

Art. 34. Flexible Organization

Faithful to the will of the Founder, the Association has a flexible and functional structure, established on three levels of government: Local, Provincial, and World.

The efficacy of the Association's action in its area, and its openness to the universality of communion and of mission, are assured through this structure of organization.

CONSIDERATIONS

Core Themes

1. Flexibility
2. Functionality
3. Three Levels of Government

Keys to Understanding

A. *In order to render communion effective and collaboration efficacious, the Association... has a flexible organization adaptable to the various area and ecclesial situations.* This foundational statement allows us to see the spirit that animates the entire chapter, which is characterized by a more markedly juridic-positive intonation. It clearly indicates the double purpose of the organization: to make collaboration efficacious and to confer concrete effectiveness upon the work of the Salesian Cooperators among themselves and with the other apostolic forces of the Salesian Family and of the Church.

The article states that the Association has a *flexible and functional structure*. This characteristic is due to the fact that the specific vocation of the Lay Faithful involves him or her in diverse social, cultural, and religious contexts. It is also so due to the fact of the international physiognomy of the Association which works in religious and cultural contexts which differ greatly among themselves.

This concept of flexibility demands reflection on the part of the Salesian Cooperators present in religious contexts which differ, but are not hostile to, the Catholic Church (the Orthodox Christians of the Middle East, for example). The Cooperators, even in these contexts of today, represent more than ever before an indispensable support for the maintenance of the mission in that territory – to the point that the very SDB and FMA Religious, urged on by this motivation and by the tangible fruits of the collaboration which already exists, consider it necessary to count much more on such a figure.

There is great interest in establishing closer contact to gather materials, documents, and whatever else might be of use to reinforce the Cooperators already in existence or to promote the profile of the Cooperator in those Houses in which the Cooperators are not officially present today, but where there do exist laity who work like Cooperators. The following are the advantages of a flexible organization:

- creativity to set in motion contact through the various spiritual itineraries with the young and adults;
- adaptability so as to invent manageable and realistic plans and projects; and
- the ability to exist in structures and manage situations better – in the measure in which interpersonal abilities and systems are reinforced.

Excluded from this, however, is an interpretation of flexibility and functionality understood in terms of "approximation" or "superficiality." Both the one and the other are to be understood, rather, as "what is possible and doable" even in precarious or difficult situations. In other words, respect for persons is reiterated here so that they can find a way to put Don Bosco's apostolic project into motion even while living in very disparate social conditions, environments, areas, political situations, and ecclesial structures – with a minimum of the forms of the Association and its representative bodies. This explains why the organization of the Association foresees three Levels of government – Local, Province, and World.

B. *The Three Levels: Local, Provincial, and World*

The sphere that assumes the greatest importance is the Local Center because on it the vitality of the Association depends. It is defined as “The fundamental nucleus of the Association is the Local Center... [which] gathers together Salesian Cooperators who work within a specific territory... near a Salesian work – either of the Salesians of Don Bosco or of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.” (*Statutes* Art. 36 §1)

In effect, the Center is an indispensable structure; the cell vital to the achievement of the goals of the Association; the nucleus and the foundation of the Association, inasmuch as it gives it energy and support; and the basic unit of operation. The other bodies of the superior Levels (Provincial and World) are at their service: these motivate, empower, and help them along their path while respecting their autonomy – not to be confused with “independence” – because they foster their communion with the entire Association and with the other Groups of the Salesian Family and with the Supreme Moderator and Superior, the Rector Major. Therefore, not only the personal bond of the Salesian Cooperator to a certain Center for a variety of reasons – from the formation received to tradition or something else – takes on considerable importance but, also and above all, the finding oneself in the same territory commensurate with the ideal frontiers in which the Religious Communities of the SDB or the FMA work: this due to the life of communion and collaboration with them and, also, through the solidarity of the Salesian Cooperator with the Local Churches.

One area of notable organizational importance is the "grouping of the centers" on the *Provincial* Level. Such a grouping is to be retained necessary. The purpose of such a grouping is to allow the centers to develop and grow through the increase in the number of Cooperators and of the centers themselves. Moreover, this grouping allows them to work in a wider and more concrete way. This is so thanks to the relationships of communion and collaboration established precisely on the Provincial Level.

When considering the different situations of the Association in various countries, wherever this Provincial Level does not exist, the establishment of such is requested – not necessarily immediately – but as soon as possible. This is an example of the application of the principles of adaptability and flexibility as regard the organization of the Association.

The *World Level* underlines the universality of the Association's communion and its mission. Yet again, this sense of organizational structure at the Local, Provincial, and World Levels is the same: each is at the service of unity and of communion within the Association of Salesian Cooperators – who are workers in the Vineyard of the Lord so as to render the Salesian Mission concrete and efficacious in the world.

References

Atti del Capitolo Generale Speciale, 172-176.

Chavez V. P., *Carta d'identità Salesiana*.

Brocardo P., *Don Bosco, profondamente uomo, profondamente santo*, LAS, Roma 2001.

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

Art. 14. A charismatic mission in the Church and for the Church

The mission of the Church flows from the free initiative of the Father, passes through the mandate of Jesus Christ and is perpetuated by the work of the Holy Spirit.¹ It is one and is entrusted to all the members of the people of God, on account of their Baptism and Confirmation. Particular charisms of the Spirit, however, mean that the mission is carried out in different ways according to the different persons or groups to whom they are sent.²

The mission of Don Bosco and of his spiritual Family is part of the common Christian vocation to the apostolate. But because it is in response to a spiritual gift, its *origin* is *charismatic*: it is the Spirit of the Father and of the Risen Lord who, as in the past he sent Don Bosco to the young and to the working classes, in the course of history continues to send his spiritual sons and daughters to perpetuate the apostolate to the young, the working classes and the missions.

This particular mission is *influenced by and responds to*, among other things, the signs of the times.³ For us, the needs and the expectations, the aspirations and the spiritual requirements of the young, especially the poor ones, of ordinary people and of peoples not yet evangelised, are signs through which, as times change and in different social and cultural contexts, the Spirit calls and *sends* the various Groups of the Salesian Family to carry out their mission. This mission being carried out in the Church and for the Church is subject to its approval, authority and legislation, so that the charismatic mission takes its place in the harmonious carrying out of the Church's activity at various levels.

Then, the charismatic mission finds its *practical application* in the *particular law* of each Group of the Salesian Family. Within the Society of Saint Francis of Sales, the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the other religious Institutes, the ones who send or mandate are the legitimate Superiors respectively. In each case the subject who sends is *collegial*: this happens for example, in the election of the members of the General Council by a Chapter Assembly.

In the case of the Volunteers of Don Bosco and of the other Secular Institutes, as also with the Salesians-Cooperators, the Damas Salesianas and the other Salesian lay Associations, there is no one in authority who *sends*. The individual, however, is bound to follow faithfully the indications regarding the mission contained in their own Statutes, which specify, on the basis of particular law, the practical exercise of the Salesian apostolate in the world.

¹ Cf. LG 2-4; AG 2-4; UR 2.

² Cf. LG 9b 13ab 17 32; AA 2a; AG 2a 5 6 10 35-37.

³ Cf. GS 11.