

Art. 6. The Salesian Cooperators: Salesians in the World

*Salesian Cooperators live out their faith in their own secular reality. Taking inspiration from Don Bosco's apostolic project, they have a strong sense of communion with the other members of the Salesian Family. They commit themselves to the same mission to youth and to ordinary folk in a fraternal and united way. They work for the good of the Church and of society in a manner adapted to the educational needs of their territory and to their own concrete possibilities.*¹

CONSIDERATIONS

Core Themes

1. Ecclesial Nature
2. Secular Nature
3. Salesian Nature

Keys to Understanding

The human vocation is to become more human every day and always; the Christian vocation is to become ever more truly a son or daughter of God – another Christ; i.e., to tend to the fullness of Christian life. But since the Church is "in intimate solidarity" with mankind and its story (see *Gaudium et Spes* no. 1), the Spirit of God never ceases to raise up in Her men, women, and Movements to respond to the new needs of the times. We all know that the 19th century was an epic of decisive transformation: the beginning of the industrialization that invaded Europe was accompanied by social and political upheaval and, in particular, by the phenomenon of urbanization. It was at that time that the Holy Spirit raised up Don Bosco and made him "a giant of charity": his vocation would be to dedicate his life to poor, abandoned, and at-risk youth to save them from the material and spiritual misery in which they were living and to assure them of holistic promotion; he would also have to invent an educative method appropriate for them and establish a *vast movement of apostolic forces* which would be capable of assuring the continuity and the spread of his work and of the original spirit by which he wants the work animated. Thus, he would found a group of direct, on-the-spot, collaborators – male and female Religious apostles – and a more flexible group of collaborators: Diocesan Priests and lay apostles inserted into every environment and place. To this immense and united apostolic Family, he gave St. Francis de Sales as inspiration and Patron; *therefore, all the members are Salesians*, vowed to the same basic task and according to the same spirit even if some are Religious Salesians (with Vows: SDB and FMA) and others are "non-Religious" Salesians (without Vows: "Cooperators").

A. The fact that the Salesian Cooperator takes his inspiration "from the apostolic project of Don Bosco" is the global and decisive sign of all the aspects characterizing his or her identity. On one hand, this article highlights those elements which are in common with the other vocational Groups of the Salesian Family: vocation, mission to the young and to common folk, the sense of solidarity and collaboration, working for the good of the Church and of society, and the Salesian Spirit; on the other hand, it also brings to light those aspects which differentiate it: its secular nature, proper to a person who lives in his or her family

¹Pascual Chavez, SDB. *Charter of the Charismatic Identity of the Salesian Family of Don Bosco (Salesian Family Charter)*. Trans. (Rome: Tipografia Vaticana, 2012) 25-26. Print.

and is involved in temporal commitments, his personal gifts – both of nature and of Grace – and his or her specific lay or ordained reality. The common elements make him or her "Salesian"; those specific elements qualify him or her as "Salesian in the world"; i.e., "secular."

B. The article presents the identity of the Salesian Cooperator in the light of Vatican Council II. For the Council, the Church is the fruit of a free *election, vocation, and sanctification*. Constitutionally, it is a Mystery of *communion*, is essentially *missionary*, and participates in the mission of Christ and of His Spirit. It puts into action this mission in *service* to the person, according to the needs of the historical moment and following Jesus' example. By his or her *Promise*, the Salesian Cooperator follows the *impulse* of the Spirit and chooses a way in which to live his or her Baptismal *consecration* and the one made at Confirmation. In the Salesian vocation as a Cooperator, one commits him or herself to Don Bosco's *mission to the young and to common folk* in order to participate in the mission of the Church. He or she carries out the Salesian mission following the dynamic of *communion* within the Association, in rapport with the Salesian Family, and in collaboration with other ecclesial forces.

In their relationships with those who adhere to other religions and with those who belong to Churches and communities which are not Catholic, Salesian Cooperators follow the indications of Vatican Council II and of the successive papal and episcopal Magisterium which concern ecumenical dialogue and the relationship of the Church with non-Christian Religions.

C. The secular character and nature proper to the laity and to Deacons, along with those proper to Diocesan Priests, and their inherent commitments [for those who are laity, the Christian animation of temporal realities (family, work, economy, culture, and politics...)], are part and parcel of the daily life of the Salesian Cooperators and are identified with their Christian mission. The vocation proper to the Salesian Cooperator is to be "a Salesian in the world" without the ties of Religious Vows. Within the Association there are men and women; white collar and blue collar workers; cultured and common folk; young adults; adults; elderly; lay Catholics, Deacons, and Secular Priests; celibate and married; persons who work in civic and ecclesial institutions, as well as persons who work in the sphere of SDB and FMA works or those of other Salesian Groups. In every environment and place, the Cooperators put into effect Don Bosco's apostolic project in a way adapted to their circumstances and to their own concrete possibilities. Such an orientation cuts across the field of the Salesian mission and service to the young, of communion and collaboration, and of formation and organization.

Given all the above, what is necessary in order to be a Cooperator?

Above all, one needs to be convinced that "*the Spirit of the Lord fills the universe*": The Holy Spirit does not content Himself with inspiring Vocations only to the Priesthood and Religious Life: He "calls" every baptized person to find his or her original place in the Church and to fulfill his or particular task within the common mission:

- to have a *taste and a desire for an authentic Christian life* when faced with so many baptized people who seem to ignore completely the responsibilities inherent to their Baptism;
- to desire to *flee from mediocrity* and from "formula piety" so as to take the Gospel seriously and to attempt to live the formidable adventure of an incarnated Faith and of a life given to others;

- to be *sensitized to and concerned about the problems of youth and the poor* and to take conscious awareness that these are the most decisive problems in our world and of the world to come and, therefore, to sympathize with the youth and with the poor and to wish to help them to assure their human and Christian promotion;
- to know *Don Bosco* and to realize that he himself, *his work*, his realistic and dynamic spirit, and his educational method correspond to certain traits of our own character. To follow him and to work with him, therefore, will develop our natural and supernatural gifts for the good of the Church; and
- to have a *sense of fraternity*, to love meeting with others, to love working with others, to accept the values of co-responsibility and of collaboration and, therefore, a certain discipline of action.

The young adults and the adults who, in saying "YES" to this invitation of the Holy Spirit, commit themselves and their entire life to live a holistic Christianity in the spirit of Don Bosco and to educate the young become Salesian Cooperators. "We need to become clearly aware that to commit oneself as a 'Salesian Cooperator' is to respond to a true 'call'; therefore, it is to accept an authentic Salesian apostolic vocation." (see *Acts of the Special General Chapter XX* no. 730)

References

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Cf. L 15.

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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. 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.

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. 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.

from the Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco

Vol. XIV, pp. 75-77. Until then [1879] the conferences of Salesian cooperators had always been personally planned and chaired by Don Bosco, as in Este, Rome, Turin, Marseille, Nice, Alassio and Lucca. Now, however, he learned from a newspaper article dated March 25 that a conference of the Modena cooperators was held in the usual form in the Church of Our Lady of Paradise. This was a noteworthy event, marking the first time that the cooperators in a metropolitan area organized on their own initiative—a clear indication of how firmly established they were—and we will dwell upon it.

Archbishop Joseph Guidelli, a Salesian cooperator for several years, sent his vicar general, Monsignor Prospero Curti, to represent him. The prior of St. Agnes Church, Father Henry Adami, was the keynote speaker. After citing the new perils threatening young people, he hailed Don Bosco as a man sent by God to save them through the Salesian Congregation, whose history he briefly outlined. He went on to talk about the Salesian cooperators and their work. He answered questions such as: "Did Modena have places caring for boys of working families? Did it have zealous laymen willing to help the clergy? Why, then, this new association?" His answer was: "The Association of Salesian Cooperators aims at inviting you to join forces in a holy league so as to make your efforts more effective. It also offers you spiritual benefits in recompense for your work; it begs you to do your best for the welfare of boys by encouraging others to join you in supporting, promoting and fostering with all your strength our city's educational institutions." He closed with a rousing appeal to his listeners' goodness, urging them to do their bit as individuals and, as Don Bosco stressed, by joining forces with others. A telegram from Cardinal Nina brought the Pope's blessing, as it stated, on "that first meeting of Salesian cooperators."

Don Bosco was thrilled by all this, but his words of special praise were prompted by the conclusion of the newspaper report that properly grasped the spirit which should inspire the Salesian cooperators. It read:

In keeping with the regulations, Don Bosco was always to be considered as their superior. The local officers, approved by Don Bosco and by the bishop, were as follows: Monsignor Severino Roncati, president; the pastor of St. Peter's Church and the prior of St. Barnabas Church, vice presidents; Dr. Louis Marchia, secretary, and Marquis Julius Campori, treasurer. The secretary then read an appendix to the regulations for the Modena chapter of the cooperators, and there followed a brief discussion of the chapter's promoting of Christian education of youth. It was agreed that, in keeping with the regulations, a donation was to be sent to the superior in Turin for Salesian houses and missions at least once a year; also that members should actively volunteer to teach Christian doctrine in parishes and festive oratories, and that the Modena chapter's funds should be used to support the Sons of Mary Program, a free popular library for the young, recreational activities on Sundays and holy days, and the maintenance of a meeting hall. Meanwhile, a fund-raising drive was to be started with a lottery, a collection at every meeting, and the payment of monthly dues of at least twenty-five centesimi from benefactors among the cooperators.

The meeting ended with the singing of *Iste Confessor* and a blessing with a relic of St. Francis de Sales which had been venerated on the altar with a picture of the saint.

Vol. XIV, pp. 95-98. Don Bosco's talk in substance followed the same pattern: new foundations of that year in Italy, France and South America; the role of the cooperators and encouragement to continue their help. He particularly singled out the Church and hospice of St. John the Evangelist, with a stress on their beneficial purpose...

A new first was a conference for Salesian women cooperators on the eve of the feast of Mary, Help of Christians. Two hundred ladies were present. The procedure was the usual one, except that the reading from the life of St. Francis de Sales was replaced by a reading from the biography of St. Jane Frances de Chantal that described her husband's tragic death and her heroic patience as she dedicated the rest of her life entirely to God's service and to works of charity. In his address, Don Bosco told them that in planning the Association of Salesian Cooperators he had at first intended to limit its membership to men only, but that Pius IX himself, wishing to extend its spiritual favors to women, had personally added these words to

his rescript: "To all the faithful of both sexes." He then went on to acquaint them minutely with what the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians were accomplishing—under the guidance of the Salesians—on behalf of girls with God's grace and the help of women cooperators. After describing the frightening perils to which girls were exposed in Italy and particularly in South America, he urged his listeners to aid the Salesians and Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians in bringing the benefits of a Christian education to an increasing number of girls. How was this to be done? Here are a few suggestions Don Bosco offered to them.

First, make great efforts kindly to instill love of virtue and horror for sin into your children's hearts and those of your neighbors, relatives, friends and acquaintances. If you come to know that some young girl's morals are being threatened, promptly strive to save her and put her beyond the reach of rapacious wolves. Should you know or hear that some family has boys or girls of school or work age, be quick enough to suggest, advise and exhort their parents or family to place them in schools or shops where, as they learn knowledge and skills, they may also absorb the holy fear of God in a morally safe environment. Bring Catholic books and publications into your own homes, and when the family has read them, pass them on to as many people as you can. Give them as gifts to boys and girls who faithfully attend catechism class. Above all, whenever you come to know that a girl can be saved from moral dangers only by placing her in a boarding school, make every effort to do so.

I most earnestly commend to your care well beloved, pious boys who give signs of a priestly vocation. Yes, esteemed ladies, take these hopes of the Church to your hearts and do all you can—even the impossible, I'd say—to cherish and bring to blossom the precious seed of a vocation in their young hearts. Direct them to a school where they can continue their studies and, if they are poor, help them with whatever means Divine Providence has put into your own hands, or as your own piety and love for souls suggests to you. How fortunate you will be if you provide the Church with priests in these times when they are so scarce that some of our own villages have no Sunday Mass or worship service. You will have the thanks of God, His angels, the Church and the souls you have saved for your noble efforts, and even here on earth your action will be rewarded a hundredfold with God's blessings in anticipation of the glorious crown which He keeps in trust for you in heaven.

Some might say, "But money is needed to do all these things, and I am not in that position." My answer is that a pious woman who loves God, His Church and souls can always find a way to contribute to works of mercy. I realize that you are doing so and that you give evidence of it every day. But let me deplore—in fact let us all deplore—the utter blindness of many people in this day and age. They can always find money for a pleasure trip, for fine clothes or whatever will enable them to shine at some party or other. They have wealth enough to buy not one but two or more teams of fine horses and magnificent coaches, but when they are asked for a donation to build or restore a church or an orphanage, to feed and clothe destitute youth or to provide one more priest for the Church, they have a thousand excuses at hand and end up doing little or nothing for the Church or to relieve human suffering.

Some time ago someone threw a party here *in* Turin. One person told me that it was stupendous, magnificent, princely. "How much did it cost?" I asked. "Seventy thousand lire." Seventy thousand lire for one evening! What blindness! That money could have sheltered and educated seventy boys, and possibly have even provided seventy priests who, with God's grace in due time, could have saved thousands of souls. Note, too, that just weeks before that same person had been asked to fund the board

and tuition of a poor boy for three months, and he refused! God will certainly in His time ask him for an account of that party. This is an excellent example of how some people become deaf to the call of charity.

What I have said about squandering God's gifts on a large scale is true also on a smaller scale. If repeated often enough, it will have the same effect: it will keep families from supporting institutions and activities most beneficial to the Church and society.

My dear cooperators, I do not mean to raise scruples in your minds and tell you that it is wrong to live in a manner befitting your station. I only wish to urge you not to let the deadly scourge of luxury pervade your hearts and households in greater or lesser measure. Shun that scourge, and you will always have something to contribute to charitable endeavors, to dry compassionately the tears of many a poor family, and to save many lads who have found refuge in institutes supported by your charity.

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

Salesian Cooperators in Their Socio-Cultural Reality

Art 8. Salesian Cooperators witness to Christian values in our society through the tenor, choices, and actions of their daily lives.

Art 9. Salesian Cooperators support with prayer and participate in events and initiatives that promote the culture of life and seek to bring an end to abortion and all other offenses that violate the right to life or that promote a culture devoid of Christian ethics and morality.

Art 10. The members of the Association educate themselves and others on the stance of political candidates in regards to Social Justice issues. They participate through their vote and the rights of the Democratic system of government to influence the legislators of this nation to:

- pass legislature which is in keeping with God's Commandments
- halt changes in legislature which oppose them
- work toward the repeal of such laws already in existence.