

## MEMBERSHIP AND FORMATION OF THE SALESIAN COOPERATOR

*«May the Lord make you to increase and abound in charity towards one another, and towards all men just as we do towards you, that He may strengthen your hearts, blameless in holiness before God our Father».*  
(I Thess. 3:12-13)

After having asked God to allow him to return to Thessalonica to see the ones to whom he had written his letter, Paul intercedes for them: “And may the Lord multiply you, and make you abound in charity towards one another, and towards all men: as we do also towards you”. (I Thess. 3:12) They had already given proof of a committed love but there was still a long way to go. The object of this intercession is the growth and the superabundance of mutual love and love for all; as their model, Paul points out yet again his own love for them – one of unconditional dedication and attentive and thoughtful care.

Paul then makes another request which is linked to the preceding one inasmuch as it points out his motivation: "to confirm your hearts without blame, in holiness, before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, with all His saints." (I Thess. 3:13) The gaze is here turned to the moment of the "Second Coming" (the *Parousia*) of the Lord Jesus who will be escorted by His holy ones; that is, by the angelic hosts. Paul asks God, in view of this event, to make firm and irreprehensible in sanctity the hearts of those who have already received Baptism. This must happen "before God the Father." A true fraternal love which is open to all, even to those who are not part of the Community, represents the best preparation and the best guarantee for the decisive encounter of that final day. Waiting for the Final Coming of Christ, then, does not consist of “standing around doing nothing” but of a constant commitment to build new relationships based on love. In this prayer, which closes the first part of the Letter, are noted those attitudes of love, of holiness, and of irreprehensibility.

Also for the Salesian Cooperator, belonging to the Association must trigger a new dynamism which brings one to continual progress in his or her relationship with God and with one’s brothers and sisters. The gift of God, while being completely free, does not exclude, nay, it *requires* man's collaboration. In other words, God does not make use of man as a passive instrument; on the contrary, the fact that He intervenes first serves to enable in man the exercise of his freedom and creativity. Loving and faithful adherence to Christ and to the community is the master road of a holistic development of the human person. All the above requires a journey of formation.

By itself, the Call of the Lord to be a Salesian Cooperator does not mean that one possesses, right from the beginning or in full development, all those things that this vocation requires; nor does it mean that one is already living sufficiently the demands which it brings with it.

The vocation to be a Salesian Cooperator is an invitation to put oneself on a journey to develop little-by-little one’s Baptismal life by committing oneself to the realization of the Salesian mission and by living Don Bosco’s spirit. Such a vocation to be a Cooperator is original in its identity, is rich in its content, and is demanding in its requirements.

Along with the new *Project of Apostolic Life*, the Association revised the *Guidelines and Indications for the Formation of Salesian Cooperators*. Knowing them will reinforce one's sense of belonging. This global vision is to be adapted – whether for persons or for the Association – because the *Project of Apostolic Life* leaves space for local initiatives so that formation programs may respond much more accurately to the accentuated differences in situations. In conclusion, formation is a personal business: each one takes on him or herself the responsibility to be formed in the area of his or her roles and responsibilities. Realistically, it does not demand, even as far as formation is concerned, more than what each one is able to commit to do with generosity.

This chapter illustrates the vocational path that every Cooperator must follow personally so that his or her identity as a secular Salesian apostle might mature. Such a path foresees three successive stages:

- a prior and opportune preparation;
- entrance into the Association by means of making the *Promise*; and
- daily and progressive fidelity to one's vocation and to the commitments it brings with it.

This *iter* is sustained and animated through a lively and profound sense of belonging to the Association.