

Lesson 22 – Membership & Formation (Session 2)

Objectives

1. To understand the spiritual sources that should be used in the formation of Salesian Cooperators.
2. To understand that the formation process accompanies the Cooperator throughout his or her lifetime.
3. To understand how participation in the life of the center forms an integral part of initial formation.
4. To know that Salesian Cooperators may be asked to offer their resources and abilities in the service of animation and responsibility.

Reference: The Salesian Cooperator, Joseph Aubry, SDB, pp. 145, 146, 147-148

The last chapter of the 1876 Regulations shows Don Bosco's concern that the Cooperators receive moderate, *balanced and regular spiritual nourishment*. Each day an Our Father and Hail Mary for the Holy Father's intentions. Each month the *Exercise for a Happy Death* (day of recollection) with the same requirements as the Salesian religious: confession, Communion, "as if it were in reality the last day of their lives." This practice was for him a serious and important matter, a kind of key to the spiritual life. Finally, *each year* he advised (without obligation) "at least a few days of *spiritual retreat*." Apart from these three spiritual activities, Don Bosco recommended to his Cooperators (as he did to his religious and boys) "to approach the sacraments of confession and Holy Communion more often than is ordinarily prescribed." This close involvement in the sacramental life is one of the characteristics of Salesian piety.

There are *three* spiritual sources we should consider:

1. *"The twofold table of sacred Scripture and the Holy Eucharist"*

"Of all spiritual helps, those acts are outstanding by which the faithful receive nourishment from God's Word at the twofold table of sacred Scripture and the Eucharist" (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 18). For the children of the Church, the Word of God is "the support and energy of the Church, the strength of the faith for her sons, the food of the soul, the pure and perennial source of spiritual life" (*Dei Verbum*, n. 21); hence meditation on the Word of God is explicitly recommended to lay apostles (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, n. 4). A Cooperator must therefore become familiar with Holy Writ, especially the Gospels; the Sunday Liturgy of Word should be a real meditation and should color his whole week following.

Then there is Mass and Communion. "This life of intimate union with Christ in the Church is nourished by spiritual aids which are common to all the faithful, especially active participation in the sacred liturgy" (AA, n. 4). "The most blessed Eucharist contains the Church's entire spiritual wealth, that is, Christ Himself, our Passover and living bread. Through His very flesh, made vital and vitalizing by the Holy Spirit, He offers life to men" (PO, n. 5).

2. *Sacrament of Confession*

The sacrament of Penance [brings] the pardon of sins committed, full reconciliation with God and his Church, and also (perhaps mainly) "the necessary turning of the heart toward the love of the Father of mercies" (PO, n. 18), that is, ardent enthusiasm to love more and more.

3. *The two devotions: Mary and Don Bosco*

"The perfect example of this type of spiritual and apostolic life (in the lay Christian) is the most Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Apostles. While leading on earth a life common to all men, one filled with family concerns and labors, she was always intimately united with her Son and cooperated in the work of the Savior in a manner altogether special. Now that she has been taken up into heaven, 'with her maternal charity she cares for these brothers of her Son who are still on their earthly pilgrimage....' All should devoutly venerate her and commend

their life and apostolate to her motherly concern.” Devotion to Mary Immaculate, the Help of Christians, is one of the characteristics of the Salesian spirit.

Don Bosco also directed the devotion and prayers of his Cooperators to *St. Francis de Sales*. He must not be neglected: he is our patron, an appealing character, inspiring his own Salesian joy and kindness; the teacher of charity. Yet now that he has for his companion in holiness our Founder himself, perhaps it seems natural to address ourselves more directly to Don Bosco as “the father given us by God and by the Church” (SDB Const. 1972, n. 49). *Don Bosco must always* be an object of our admiration; and this admiration should engender in us a desire to imitate him: “Lord, give me souls: all else is naught.”

Reference: PVA Regulations, Chapter IV, Article 15

Initiatives for Initial Formation

1. The process of formation accompanies the members along their entire life because the Lord always calls us through the continuous evolution of personal situations and of one’s environment.
2. To accompany the aspirant’s process of discernment, the Association promotes formative paths which are both structured and flexible, whether communal or personal. These include the study and the analysis of some formative themes as regards the human, Christian, ecclesial, and Salesian spheres, taken from:
 - the Word of God
 - the documents of the Church
 - the life and work of Don Bosco
 - the Preventive System of Don Bosco
 - the *Project of Apostolic Life* of the Association
 - the documents of the Rector Major
 - the documents of the Association
 - Salesian spirituality and sanctity
 - the history and development of the charism of the Salesian Family
 - the life and work of the saints, the blessed, and the venerables of the Salesian Family
3. An integral part of initial formation is an apostolic commitment and, ordinarily, participation in the life of the center.

Reference: PVA Regulations, Chapter IV, Article 17

Formation to the Service of Leadership

1. The service of animation and of leadership in the Association is an apostolic one, by means of which the Association grows and matures in communion, in the spiritual life, and in the Salesian mission. It may be requested of any and all the Salesian Cooperators to offer their energies and abilities for a determinate amount of time in the service of animation and of leadership.
2. The Salesian Cooperators welcome with availability the time of leadership service requested of them, live it with discernment and synergy, and deepen the specific formation which is necessary to qualify them for their task according to the established programs of the Association.

At the end of their period of service they give witness to their belonging with attitudes of simplicity and availability for the Association.

3. The Salesian Cooperator who has a role of responsibility in the political sphere is invited to suspend temporarily his/her role as coordinator of the Association at whatever level, in order to avoid any interference.

Reference: PVA Statutes, Chapter V, Article 27

Entrance into the Association

1. The commitment to become a Salesian Cooperator demands a personal, free, gradual, and motivated choice which matured under the action of the Holy Spirit and the accompaniment of those who have this responsibility.

The person who desires to become part of the Association accepts a formation process, which must cover the fundamental points of the *Project of Apostolic Life* and which takes into account the aspirant's personal experience. In this way, a proper institutional formation is guaranteed while still being personalized. This personal plan of formation will be adapted by those who are responsible to carry out this role in the Association.

2. When the aspirant has reached a sufficient assimilation of the Salesian charism, as recognized by those who are in the position of responsibility in the local center, he or she shall present a request for admission. The aspirant must have reached legal age.
3. Membership in the Association begins with the pronouncement of the personal Apostolic Promise, by which the aspirant expresses his or her will to live his/her baptismal commitments in the light of the *Project of Apostolic Life*.

Suggested Reading

In the Footsteps of Don Bosco; pages 153-155.

Lesson 22: Membership & Formation (S2) – Questions for Reflection

1. What are some of the sources used in formation? How would you apply them to your formation process?
2. Why do you think the formation process covers your entire lifetime? Explain.
3. Why do you think participation in the life of the center is an integral part of your formation? Explain.
4. What type of gifts do you think you would bring to the Association?

Prayer Experience

Spend time during your Rosary asking the Blessed Mother to help better form you in your Salesian Cooperator vocation.

Benefits

The Salesian Cooperators share in all the spiritual graces and indulgences granted to the Salesian religious except those referring to the common life.

They will likewise share in all Masses, prayers, novenas, triduums, retreats, sermons, and catechetical instructions and all the works of charity of the Salesian religious in any place in any part of the world.

They will likewise share in all the Masses and prayers offered every day in the sanctuary of Mary Help of Christians in Turin, imploring blessing from heaven upon their benefactors, their families, and especially upon those who make some moral or material offering to support the Salesian works.

On the day after the feast of St. Francis de Sales, all Salesian priests shall celebrate Holy Mass for deceased members. (This Mass is now celebrated on November 25, on the anniversary of Mama Margaret's death.) Those who are not priests will receive Holy Communion and pray five decades of the Rosary.

When a member falls sick, let the superior be told about it promptly. He will immediately order special prayers to be said for him or her. The same will be done at the death of any Cooperator.

Religious Practices

No specific devotions are prescribed, but so that the life of the Salesian Cooperator can in some way be like that of the Salesian religious, it is recommended:

They be modest in dress, chaste in speech, exact in the duties of their state in life, taking care that their dependents observe and keep holy Sundays and days of obligation.

Every year, they are advised to make at least a few days of spiritual retreat. A plenary indulgence can be gained.

The last day of the month or some other suitable day will be the occasion of making the Exercise of a Happy Death, by going to confession and Communion as if it were in reality the last of our lives.

They will try to go to Mass and Communion as often as possible and go to confession more often than prescribed.

Care for Poor and Needy Children

At the beginning of 2018 (the most recent numbers published), there were almost 28,000 Salesian priests, brothers, and sisters working in 135 countries, continuing the work of their founder. They work in approximately 3,000 schools, 200 orphanages, 850 nurseries, and 200 hospitals or clinics.

There were 450 Salesians working in the U.S.A. and Canada, in 29 schools, 12 youth centers, 25 parishes, and other ministries; numbering 1 bishop, 175 priests, 65 brothers, and 209 sisters.

Salesians have been taught by St. John Bosco to lead a life of prayer, teaching, and work, in support of the needs of the Church, especially of the young.

How can you assist them? By prayer, by sharing your time, your skills, and your finances.

Your bishop and pastor have need of volunteers!

Prayer of Blessed Philip Rinaldi on the occasion of the beatification ceremony of St. John Bosco in St. Peter's Basilica

That we may be devout, to the Blessed Sacrament and to Mary Help of Christians,
O St. John Bosco, pray for us.

That we may love the young as you have loved them,
O St. John Bosco, pray for us.

That we may constantly work for souls as you did,
O St. John Bosco, pray for us.

That we may be like you, ever united with God,
O St. John Bosco, pray for us.