

Lesson 9 – Communion and Collaboration (Session 2)

Objectives

1. To reflect on the importance of familial support in the Salesian spirit.
2. To understand how all the groups of the Salesian Family work together for one common goal.
3. To understand how meetings and mutual exchange will give a chance for each group to exchange its riches.
4. To understand how the Cooperators are autonomous and assume their own responsibilities.

Reference: The Salesian Cooperator, Joseph Aubry, SDB, p. 111-112, 116, 117

To a certain extent one could apply to the Salesian Family the analogy St. Paul uses when speaking of the Church (1 Cor 12). It is one body made up of different members. St. Paul insists on two things: the care that must be given to unity in the body, and the importance that each member perform its proper function well for the good of the other members and the general good of the body as a whole. “If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing.... The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’” (1 Cor 12). It is important for the other Salesian Family groups and for the Family as a whole that the Cooperators have their own particular character and that they be responsible for their own proper part in the fulfillment of their mission.

All this presupposes a true autonomy which allows the Cooperators to govern themselves and to assume their own responsibilities – always bearing in mind, of course, that they work “in common.” They lean on the Salesian Congregation, and this gives them their stability; and they receive spiritual nourishment from it. But they should not *depend* on it in the field of either administration or (except in exceptional cases) apostolic activities. Their work is for the total Salesian mission (and through this for the Church), not for the Salesian religious as such, nor merely for their particular section of that mission. Don Bosco had already taken into consideration that the Cooperators would have their own activities, supported by “their own material means or by help received from others” (1876 Reg., VI, 2-3). . . . One could sum up this autonomy, then, as a freedom to decide and act, with an independence that is relative, not total. This freedom accepts the bonds of unity, and pleasures in them.

Regular and occasional contacts, meetings and mutual exchange will give a chance to each group to communicate its riches “so that they may become the riches of all” (GC20 #174). The Salesian religious bring to the Cooperators their “witness” proper to consecrated religious at the service of the Salesian mission (cf. GC20 #740). The Cooperators on their part bring to the SDBs and FMAs the stimulus of their example and enthusiastic projects, “a more realistic outlook, so that the efficiency of pastoral work may be increased” (GC20 #741).

The field of Salesian activity constitutes a vast area for collaboration. At the moment, the most immediate and most common is educational and pastoral work, and the material help given by the Cooperators to the Salesian religious men and women *in their various enterprises*. “You are our first and essential collaborators ...: ‘You are our collaborators in whatever is to be done for the glory of God, but especially where we lack personnel or material means’ (GC1, 1877).” (GC20 #733; cf. #153)

Reference: PVA Regulations, Chapter II, Article 6

Family Spirit

1. To make the sense of belonging to the Association grow, Salesian Cooperators support each other through the sharing of spiritual goods.
2. They show their human and Christian solidarity in a concrete way to those Salesian Cooperators who are ill and in difficulty, accompanying them also with their affection and their prayer.

3. In communion with the deceased Salesian Cooperators and benefactors, and grateful for their witness, they continue their mission with fidelity. They pray for them, in particular, in the celebration of the Mass in memory of Mama Margaret.
4. In fidelity to the Magisterium of the Church, and to her pastoral guidelines concerning family issues, the Association gives attention to those members who are undergoing the consequences of separation and/or divorce. The Association accompanies them along this difficult life and faith journey which they are traveling. Such an attitude will be met with a similar one on the part of the member, with the commitment to live one's present condition trusting in the infinite mercy of the Father, and maintaining a tenor of life which is coherent with the commitments assumed with the Promise.
5. In keeping with the Family Spirit, the Association shows itself open to former religious of the Salesian Family who have legitimately left their Institute, and who feel themselves forever tied to the spirit of Don Bosco.

For these persons, official entrance into the Association requires accepting the *Project of Apostolic Life*. If the person requests it, he or she agrees with the delegate on a formative itinerary. He/she will also decide as to the manner of the making of the Promise, whether it will be public or private.

Reference: PVA Regulations, Chapter II, Article 9

Particular Bonds with the Society of St. Francis de Sales and the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians

1. Relations with the SDB confreres and the FMA sisters develop in a climate of reciprocal trust. The animation of the centers which are established at Salesian works involves the delegates, in particular, their respective provincial, and the local religious community. These have the task of contributing in various ways to the formation of the members so that they might promote and give witness to the Salesian charism, above all in the lay environment.
2. The SDB and FMA provincials, with the collaboration of the animators and directors, guarantee unity in communion and in the mission. They commit themselves to promote the spiritual growth of the centers and to involve the religious communities in witnessing to the values of sanctity and in the generous service of animation.

Reference: PVA Regulations, Chapter II, Article 10

Ties with the Groups of the Salesian Family

1. The Salesian Cooperators, recognizing the common spirituality and mission which unite them to the other groups in the Salesian Family, work in solidarity and in synergy in confronting the pastoral challenges of the Salesian mission.

The ties with the groups of the Salesian Family are expressed particularly in apostolic co-responsibility. This requires, in some cases, the mutual commitment to carry out common objectives, to share educational concerns, and to make the Preventive System known.

Each and every Salesian Cooperator is personally responsible for animating and promoting the spiritual inheritance received.

2. In order to realize this communion with the groups of the Salesian Family in a concrete way, the Salesian Cooperators are called to participate actively in encounters and celebrations; days of formation and of

updating; moments of animation, friendship, and familiarity; and days of prayer, retreats, and spiritual exercises.

3. They are particularly open to collaboration with the Salesian lay associations while respecting their diverse identities.

Suggested Reading

In the Footsteps of Don Bosco; pages 130-131.

The Sons of Mary

St. John Bosco set up a second living monument in honor of Mary Help of Christians by means of a work which was, as he himself wrote, “directed to the general welfare of the Church.” Within his schools and among his boys, Don Bosco’s principal thought was always to find ecclesiastical vocations and to develop them.

For a number of years, from 1848 onward, it was difficult for boys to follow their religious vocation because either seminaries were being closed or religious orders were being suppressed; but, worst of all, compulsory military service was ruining many vocations.

One day, Don Bosco told Father Julius Barberis, “It is all very well to say times are bad, but let us hope that before long they will change for the better. Then we shall have a greater number of vocations.... Let us have courage; the harvest is great, and we have a little something with which to build up a great victorious monument.” That “little something” to which the saint referred was the Work of Mary Help of Christians for late vocations to the clerical state.

One day in 1875, while hearing confessions, Don Bosco found himself as though in a dream. He was presented with the register of all those who were in the house. He heard a voice say: “Do you want to know how to increase immediately the number of good priests? Have a look at that register, and you will find out what is to be done.” He thought it over and went through the old admission registers. He discovered that, out of the many boys who were studying in our schools for the priesthood, not even two out of ten received the cassock. The rest had all left for various reasons. Instead, nearly all of those who came as adults – that is, eight out of ten – received the cassock and finished the seminary course in less time and with less fatigue. Don Bosco then decided to seek ways and means of cultivating these vocations.

When he petitioned Pope Pius IX about his plan for late vocations, the Pope praised and recommended this work in a brief dated May 9, 1876, and enriched it with many indulgences. Don Bosco recommended this work to the piety of the faithful even before he founded the Pious Union of Salesian Cooperators. He also made good use of the words of Pope Leo XIII, “If you come across individuals who are willingly interested in this work, tell them that they are not helping you or me, but the Church.”

The following advice was left by Don Bosco to the Salesians: “Cultivate the Work of Mary Help of Christians according to the method you already know. Never refuse to accept a young man who shows signs of a good vocation merely because you lack means. Spend all you have, even go and beg and, if after that you still find yourself without means, don’t hesitate, for the Most Holy Virgin will, in some way or other, even miraculously, come to your assistance.”

So clear was our Lady’s help that young men with late vocations soon became known as the Sons of Mary. In a memorandum to the cardinal prefect of the Congregation for Propagation of the Faith, Don Bosco wrote: “Upwards of 200 young men are in residence in the one house of San Pierdarena, under the title of the Work of Mary Help of Christians. All these young men give us hope that, with God’s help, each year we may be able to send forth an expedition to the foreign missions, comprising skilled tradesmen, catechists, and priests.”

In 1885, concluding the narration of a dream he had had regarding the extraordinary growth the Congregation was experiencing in the missions, Don Bosco said: “The Salesian Society will prosper materially, if we endeavor to support and extend the *Salesian Bulletin* and the Work of the Sons of Mary Help of Christians. We shall extend them. These young men are doing excellently. This work is producing splendid confreres, sound in their vocations.”

“The Sons of Mary,” wrote Father P. Grisar, S.J., in 1915, “are of inestimable worth in all the Salesian mission fields because usually they are men of robust health, accustomed to hard work who, in order to follow their vocation, have for the most part already had to make heavy sacrifices.”

The Association of Mary Help of Christians

The Association of Mary Help of Christians may be regarded as the third living monument raised up by St. John Bosco in her honor and for the good of souls.

Don Bosco informed Pope Pius IX that he had in mind, “in order to foster and increase the devotion of the faithful to the Mother of God and to the Holy Eucharist, to institute in the Church of Mary Help of Christians at Turin, a pious society to be known as the Association of the Devout Clients of Mary Help of Christians. The members would have as their principal object the promotion of devotion to the Immaculate Mother of God and to the Blessed Sacrament.” The Pope, in a brief dated March 16, 1869, granted rich indulgences for a period of ten years, and in the following year these were confirmed in perpetuity.

On April 18, 1869, the archbishop of Turin approved the rules presented by Don Bosco, and declared the Association of Devout Clients of Mary Help of Christians canonically established in the sanctuary of Valdocco.

On April 5, 1870, Pope Pius IX raised the Association of the Devout Clients of Mary Help of Christians to the dignity of an archconfraternity.

On January 18, 1894, Pope Leo XIII granted to Father Michael Rua, the Rector Major of the Salesian Society, and to his successors, the faculty to establish in all Salesian churches and public oratories the Association of the Devout Clients of Mary Help of Christians, and to affiliate it to the archconfraternity established in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Turin.

On February 25, 1896, Pope Leo XIII granted to the Rectors Major of the Salesians the faculty to affiliate other associations of any church or diocese throughout the world with the same Archconfraternity of Mary Help of Christians already established in the basilica of Turin, under the same title and scope.