

Introductions

Encountering the *Project of Apostolic Life* with a Renewed Pedagogical Vision

The Association of Salesian Cooperators at the world level has identified the following three objectives as being fundamental to the formation of Salesian Cooperators:

- To tend towards human maturity
- To tend towards sanctity
- To acquire understanding of one's own Salesian vocation and to "work" for its realization

Human maturity, Christian sanctity, awareness and realization of one's own Salesian

Human maturity, Christian sanctity, awareness and realization of one's own Salesian vocation: these are, therefore, the three horizons, or the three "dimensions" of the formative experience. With the goal of re-planning initial and ongoing formation and that of the leadership and of the Formators, one must ask, then, what is important *to know*, what is worthwhile *to know how to do*, whom does one need *to know how to be* and what that means, and what does one need in order *to know how to live in communion*¹, concretely-speaking, for each of these three dimensions.

These three objectives or fundamental dimensions of formation (HUMAN, CHRISTIAN, SALESIAN) have been elaborated upon by the world team that prepared the new *Guidelines and Orientation for the Formation of Salesian Cooperators*, according to the four pillars or modalities of learning: to know, to know how to do, to know how to be, and to know how to live in communion. *The team retained it important to specify that "this distinction has the purpose of rendering the planning of individual formative encounters more orderly, and as regards the particular objective to be followed, the need to diversify them should not, however, have us forget the profound unity of the PERSON and the complementarity of the different levels and dimensions."*

from *Guidelines and Indications for the Formation of Salesian Cooperators*

¹ This last *pillar* (renamed to be in keeping with Salesian Spirituality) was added to the classic triad (*To Know, To Know How to Do, To Know How to Be*) beginning in 1996, at the suggestion of a UNESCO committee, presided by Jacques Delors, France's ex-Economic and Finance Minister, when called upon to reflect on the topic of education in a changing world. The "Delors Report on Education for the XXI Century" was addressed to governments and, more generally, to all those who are responsible for devising and implementing plans and initiatives in the area of formation. Highlights of it have been published in *Learning: The Treasure Within*.

And a New Method for Forming Adults: The “Workshop Method”

1. A Proposal

This method will help adult men and women approach and understand the full message of the *Project of Apostolic Life* and help them live out their vocations according to this way of Salesian sanctity for the laity and for Diocesan clergy.

It is marked by 2 hallmarks in the realm of adult education:

- It proposes a unified instrument
- It insists on a *new pedagogical method* for the formation meetings, bearing the title “workshop”.

The objective is to respond in a systematic way to the widespread need for serious Human, Christian, and Salesian formation on the part of the Members of the Salesian Family – in this case, the Salesian Cooperators.

2. A “Grown-up” Pedagogy for Adults

- Speaking to adults is not like speaking to children! We cannot be content with developing sessions that only explain something: true acquisition demands a conversion, a modification of one’s way, and the adult truly “takes it in” if he or she grows in his/her way of being, in conformity with the Faith. The “workshop” method, therefore, follows these important pedagogical lines and didactic methods in accompanying adults in their human, Christian, and Salesian formation as true Disciples and Apostles of Christ.
- Before all else, an adult is capable of directing himself and, therefore, when helping an adult have a significant experience in the area of personal growth and maturity in his or her vocation, one *must be sure to leave space for his or her being personally responsible for his or her own vocational growth and development; i.e., he or she must be the first person responsible for his or her formation.* Therefore, the relationship that the Formator establishes with the Aspirant or the Promised Cooperator is defined as “a helping relationship” and his or her role is that of “accompanying” and not “instructing”.
- Second, adults learn by beginning from their own experience; therefore, to help an adult make significant progress in the maturation of his or her vocations, *reference needs to be made to his or her personal experience.* Thus, the Formator will adopt those attitudes and means which manifest to the Aspirant or Promised Cooperator that his or her experience is truly acknowledged and valued.
- Furthermore, adults also seek to learn about what is a need or an interest for them. In order to help them, travel a path of vocational maturity, then, *the Formator must take into account and keep in mind the needs and the interests of the formandi as regards the Salesian Cooperator vocation, the phase of formation, and their stage of life and particular circumstances.* This means that formation will be all the more fecund the more the formator values persons rather than the content or the instruction.
- Finally, adults need to see the utility in what he or she does: *this desire must be respected. The formator must commit to and put in the effort necessary to make obvious the existential importance and concrete applications of what is being presented.* It is equally important to determine with clarity before beginning, the time that needs to be invested in one’s formation, the true and full nature of the Call, and the

requirements of full participation in the life of the Center, of the apostolate, of the Association, and of the Salesian Family – all of which are inherent in becoming a Promised – for life! – Salesian Cooperator.

3. The “Workshop” Method

This pedagogical method has come to be called in this way for, by using it, the person takes to him or herself particular content and re-elaborates it with a view to put it to practical application. Such a method rises above the idea that “education” equates to *information* (in order to know how to do something, theoretical content is insufficient). It also shows that *becoming skilled* involves more than a “technique” or “technical learning” for it proposes formation as a *transformation* – a “crossing over” to a new form of **being, doing, and knowing how to do**.

- First of all, the “workshop” gives the *possibility for personal interiorization*. It makes one enter into a relationship with the content matter which then serves as a stimulus to compare oneself and one’s life with what one is studying. It calls forth the person’s abilities and capacities in things such as: experience, convictions, and imagination. It renders the formandi responsible participants since they do not leave to others the task of their formation, but calls them forth to take charge of themselves and their own formation process.
- On the level of relationship – of **living in communion** – the “workshop” is important as a space for listening, proposing, and mediation because *it puts people in communication with other* persons and permits them to seek and to find together.
- Finally, on the concrete, operative level, the “workshop” is a *place of creativity* for it requires that a task be accomplished with the educative and formative one in mind. Each person must make a productive synthesis of all that is lived and learned so as to open up new vistas. It encourages a different form of learning and formation. Participation in the mission and the various activities of the Center will help the formandi concretize in their life and actions among the young and the poor what they study in the formation meetings and in their self-formation readings.

4. The Structure of a Formation Gathering

The sample lesson plan outlined below is a model for developing formation meeting lessons. It indicates a path to follow and is meant to be a “travel companion”. It initiates in a most Salesian way with a Welcome to everyone and a chance to greet each other and come to know each other.

Three moments follow the Welcome:

- a. *introductory phase* - to enter into the topic: seeking to explore and re-read one’s personal experience
- b. *analysis phase* - to go deeper in one’s reflection: the reading of the pertinent formation material and its commentary propose “something” new which touches the adult and requires its reception and a response.
- c. *re-elaboration phase* - taking the message of the lesson for one’s own: putting the emphasis on interiorizing what is newly acquired to transform it then into action in one’s life.

This method permits the adults to deepen the understanding of their vocation and to put it into effect in their own life, while, at the same time, having the continual assistance on the part of the animators who

guarantee a serious and respectful reading of the *Project of Apostolic Life*. In this way, the risk of listening to the explanation of the text or speaking only from one's own experience while using the Articles only as a *pre-text* are avoided.

The decisive element is the application of the method. If applied well, in fact, the workshop shows itself to be an excellent instrument for forming men and women to be fully human, Christian, and Salesian.

Welcome (10 min.)

- **Opening Prayer**
- **Presentation of the Lesson:** *topic and methodology*
- **Goals of the Encounter:** *Statement of the desired outcome in the lives of the formandi from this meeting*

1. Entering into the Discussion (20 min.)

Questions designed to elicit experiences lived that relate to the topic:

- *Personal Reflection and Sharing in a small group (10 min.)*
- *Large group sharing (10 min.)*

Reading in Common: the Article(s) of the PVA

2. Going Deeper into the Reflection (60 min.)

Sharing on the Meaning and Impact of the Text on one's personal life (30 min.)

- The Formator invites all to reflect on certain particulars
- He/she proposes questions useful to aid the reflections

Exegesis and Reflection Elements (30 min.)

The formator puts the text into context with the Salesian charism and being a baptized member of the Church. The Compendium articles will be of help here but the Formator need not be limited to it. He/she is encouraged to do extra reading to prepare for the lessons.

3. Making the Theme One's Own (30 min.)

This is the most important phase. From reflection on the text should come a desire to put what it means to one's vocation into effect in one's life. The apostolic involvement or experience should reinforce the understanding and meaning of this formation lesson.

Closing Prayer

Homework: A Proposed Commentary – A reading given to the formandi to help them deepen their understanding of their Call in light of today's formation meeting topic.