

ASSOCIATION OF SALESIAN COOPERATORS

Project of Apostolic Life

Diverse are the paths offered to Christians for living out their Baptismal faith. Some, through the urging of the Holy Spirit and attracted by the person of Don Bosco, realize their ideal of “working with him” while remaining in the world. These persons are called to live out, in the lay or clerical state, the same charism as the Society of St. Francis de Sales.

From the very start, Don Bosco thought about organizing the “co-helpers” of his work. He invited lay people, men and women, and members of the diocesan clergy to “cooperate” in his mission of salvation of the young, especially of those who are poor and abandoned. In 1876 he clearly defined their project of life in the *Regulations for the Salesian Cooperators* which he himself wrote and which were then approved by the Church.¹ Today Salesian Cooperators are spread throughout the world and work at that level.

The present text describes the *Project of Apostolic Life*. It offers an authentic path of sanctification, “to exercise charity by working for the salvation of souls.”² Salesian Cooperators³ trust in the fidelity of God the Father, Who called them.

from The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco

[h]e [Archbishop Magnasco] issued a decree on December 15, 1877, confirming the approval given prior to May 9, 1876, reviewing it most explicitly and assigning the association a central headquarters for the territory under his jurisdiction. This very telling document reads as follows:

SALVATORE MAGNASCO
By the Grace of God and of the Apostolic See
Archbishop of Genoa
Abbot in Perpetuity of St. Sires
and Overseas Legate, etc.

As far back as 1874, Father John Bosco presented us with a project entitled "Association of Salesian Cooperators" whose main objective was to promote education and Christian instruction, especially among poor and abandoned youth. The sacredness of this objective as well as the regard for ecclesiastical authority embodied in the association's rules so favorably impressed us that we readily approved and commended it. Now, considering the advantages which this pious association offers our archdiocese in religious instruction, especially at St. Vincent's Hospice in Sampierdarena, and wishing to promote catechetical instruction everywhere—in view too of the fact that the Roman Pontiff has already enriched this association with spiritual favors—we have decided to approve it within our archdiocese. The present declaration constitutes formal approval. We hereby also establish

³ Salvatore Magnasco. “Decree of December 12, 1877.” *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*. Eugenio Ceria, SDB. Diego Borgatello, SDB, ed. Vol. XIII. (New Rochelle: Salesiana Publishers, 1983) 467- 468. Print.

⁴ Giovanni Bosco. *Salesian Cooperators: A Practical Way of Contributing to Public Morality and the Good of Society*. Trans. Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco. Introduction: “To the Reader”. n.d. Web 30 Nov. 2013. <http://cooperatori.sdb.org/cooperatori/files/regvitaaping.pdf>

⁵ Eugenio Ceria, SDB. *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*. Diego Borgatello, SDB, ed. Vol. XI. (New Rochelle: Salesiana Publishers, 1964) 73-75. Print.

its central headquarters in the aforementioned St. Vincent's Hospice, provided that this organization remains always subject to our ordinary jurisdiction.

Given at Genoa, the Archbishop's Residence,
December 15, 1877.
+ Salvatore, *Archbishop*
Fr. Luigi Rossi, *Secretary*

from the *Original Rule of 1876* by St. John Bosco

TO THE READER

From the very beginning of the work of the Oratories in 1841, there were enthusiastic and keen priests and laymen who came forward to help - for there was a great harvest to be reaped among boys in danger of losing both faith and morals. These co-helpers, or Cooperators, were to be found throughout our history to support and sustain the works God gave us to do. All endeavored to work and fit into our way of life and customs, but there was a general request for a set of Regulations that would serve as a basis and a bond to help preserve uniformity and the spirit that prevailed in our institutes. We hope that this desire will now be satisfied by the present booklet. These are not rules for the Festive Oratories or for educational institutes (which can be found elsewhere): they are a bond by which Catholics who so wish may join the Salesians and work according to a uniform and stable pattern (thus preserving these qualities in the scope and traditional practice of their work).

In this booklet you will find:

1. The petition to the Holy Father and the Brief granting the special indulgences to the Salesian Cooperators.
2. A list of these indulgences.
3. The Regulations for the Cooperators.

Thus those who wish to practice charity in working for the salvation of souls will have the great reward promised by St. Augustine, "By saving a soul you have predestined your own"; they are also assured of a great spiritual treasure in these holy indulgences. May God, so rich in grace and blessings grant many favors to all those who help to win souls for our Divine Savior, doing good to young people so much in danger, preparing good Catholics for his Church and good citizens for society, so that all may one day find themselves eternally happy in heaven. Amen.

Turin, 12 July 1876.

JOHN BOSCO.

from *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*

THE SALESIAN COOPERATORS

The history of the Salesian Cooperators dates back to 1841 when a start was made in gathering together poor homeless boys in the city of Turin. The gatherings were held in churches or other places where the boys were given instruction and prepared for a worthy reception of the Sacraments of Confirmation, Penance and Holy Eucharist. They were also entertained with wholesome recreation. A few laymen joined

together to perform the many varied tasks [connected with these boys] and they contributed to the support of the so-called Festive Oratories either by their personal services or with donations. They were known by the name of the office they held but as a rule they were called benefactors, promoters, and also Cooperators of the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales.

The Superior of these Oratories was the Rev. [John] Bosco who operated under the immediate supervision of the Archbishop and with his authorization. The necessary faculties for the exercise of his duties were granted to him both orally and in writing. Whenever any difficulties arose, the Ordinary would deal with them through the Rev. [John] Bosco.

The faculties to administer the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist, to fulfill the Easter precept, to admit children to First Communion, to preach, to hold triduum, novenas, and spiritual retreats; to have benediction of the Blessed Sacrament; and to celebrate High Mass were the first ones to be granted by Archbishop Fransoni.

The so-called Salesian promoters and cooperators banded together in a regular Congregation known as the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales, first received a few spiritual favors from the Holy See in a Rescript dated April 18, 1845 and signed L. Averardi, Substitute for H. E. Card. A. del Drago. This same Rescript also granted several faculties to the Superior, among others that of imparting the apostolic blessing and plenary indulgence to fifty promoters to be selected by the Director.

On April 11, 1847, Archbishop Fransoni approved the Sodality of St. Aloysius founded within the Salesian Congregation and endowed it with favors granted by him as well as by the Holy See.

In 1850 Don Bosco informed His Holiness that a Congregation had been legitimately established in the city of Turin in the name and under the protection of St. Francis de Sales and implored more extensive favors on behalf of its members besides other spiritual benefits for the non-members.

These favors were granted in a Rescript dated September 28, 1850 and signed Dominic Fioramonti, Secretary of Latin Letters to His Holiness.

The Congregation of Salesian Promoters was thus established *de facto* in the eyes of the local ecclesiastical Authority and the Holy See. In view of the vast number of boys already attending, it was found necessary to open new schools and Oratories in other parts of the city. To assure unity of spirit, of discipline, and of administration, and to establish the Oratories on a firm basis, the Ecclesiastical Superior named the Rev. [John] Bosco as Director and granted him all necessary or proper faculties in a decree or certificate dated March 31, 1852.

After this declaration the Congregation of Salesian Promoters was always considered as canonically instituted and all its negotiations with the Holy See were always conducted by its Superior.

Several favors and spiritual benefits were granted to it between the years 1852 and 1858 when the Congregation was divided into two branches, or rather, families. Those who believed they had a vocation and were unimpeded, joined together to live in community in the same buildings that had always formed the Motherhouse and Headquarters of the association called the Pious Society of St. Francis de Sales as

suggested by the Holy Father himself, and as known to this very day. The rest continued to live in the world with their own families but went on working on behalf of the Oratories, still retaining the title of Union or Congregation of St. Francis de Sales, Promoters or Cooperators. However, they were subject to the members [who had embraced the religious life] and worked jointly with them on behalf of destitute boys. In 1864 the Holy See commended the Pious Salesian Society and appointed its Superior. In the decree of approval [of the Salesian Society] there was also a section concerning the non-religious members who were always referred to as promoters or benefactors and finally as Salesian Cooperators. The original members of the Salesian Congregation [in its early beginnings] were always considered as promoters and cooperators in the enterprises undertaken by the religious members; they helped in the classrooms, in church, in the playgrounds, and in other fields of apostolate among the faithful. For this reason, on July 30, 1875 the Sacred Congregation of Briefs empowered the Superior of the Salesian Society *indulgentias et gratias spirituales societati ipsi a S. Sede Concessas insignibus benefactoribus communicandi perinde ac si tertiarii essent, ifs exceptis quae ad vitam communem pertinent*. [to grant the indulgences and spiritual favors proper of the Salesian Society to his first benefactors, as if they were tertiaries, with the exception of those favors that pertain to the common life.]

These benefactors are none other than those who were always known as promoters or cooperators. In the first Salesian Constitutions a chapter is dedicated to them under the title of Non-religious Members.

For this reason, therefore, when the Holy See graciously granted new and more generous favors to the Salesian Cooperators and reference was made to the *pia Christifidelium Sodalitas canonice instituta, cuius sodales praesertim pauperum ac derelictorum puerorum curam suscipere sibi proponunt* [the pious Association of the faithful, canonically erected, whose members have as their special aim the care of poor and neglected boys], this reference was to be understood as applying to:

1. The original promoters who for ten years were accepted and considered de facto as genuine cooperators in the Work of the Oratories, work formally recognized by the decree of 1852.
2. To this work they continued to give [of their time and effort] as laymen even when some of the cooperators in 1858 began to live a community life under their own rules.
3. The religious members, that is, the Pious Salesian Society which always regulated the activities of these benefactors. In compliance with the rules given them, the latter offered themselves with zeal and charity to give moral and material assistance to the religious members.