



ASSOCIAZIONE SALESIANI COOPERATORI
Consiglio Mondiale
Segreteria Esecutiva Mondiale



“...I am afraid that if we find that we are so strapped where finances are concerned,
it is because we make too many calculations.
When man mixes himself in these matters,
God retreats.”

(Life of Michael Rua, Don Bosco's First Successor)

SALESIAN COOPERATOR ASSOCIATION WORLD CONGRESS V OCTOBER 25-28, 2018

TALK ON ECONOMIC SOLIDARITY

I wish to begin my talk by considering three questions that I put to myself and that each one of you ought to ask yourself in your heart: Why am I here? Why did I become a Salesian Cooperator? Why do I contribute to the Association of the Salesian Cooperators?

Whenever I ask myself these things - and it is important to do - I take in hand the *Project of Apostolic Life* and I pray to the Holy Spirit to give me the gift of discernment; i.e., the ability to distinguish what is good and beautiful from what is bad and ugly. Above all, though, I pray that He enable me to make correct choices!

For us as Salesian Cooperators, on just what does the correct choice depend? According to me, the answer becomes clear when we make an examination of conscience that begins with Article 41 of the *Project of Apostolic Life* (PVA), “A Way to Sanctity”:

Salesian Cooperators choose to share the Gospel way traced out by the present Project of Apostolic Life. They commit themselves in a responsible manner to this way which brings one to sanctity: the Association of the Cooperators ‘is designed to shake many Christians from the languor in which they lie, and to spread the energy of charity.’ The Lord accompanies with the abundance of His grace all those who work in the spirit of the ‘Da mihi animas, cetera tolle,’ doing good to youth and to ordinary folk.

This article could be considered a summary of Pope Francis’ Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* for it seems that the document was written *ad hoc* for the Salesian Cooperators.



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In fact, reading this article and reflecting deeply on it helps me respond to those questions that I expressed above – especially in moments of discouragement.

- Why am I here? Because I desire to be spiritually enriched so that I might walk the path of sanctity in Don Bosco's style, hand-in-hand with other Salesian Cooperators.
- Why did I become a Salesian Cooperator? Because I intend to live the Gospel Beatitudes in the Salesian way, witnessing to the existence of a sanctity that is made concrete in daily life.
- Why do I give my contribution to the Association? To force myself to carry out my service with humility and meekness so that I can remind myself every day that I am "a useless servant" for my mission must be one of putting Jesus, not myself, into the heart of the young.

These are not easy objectives to fulfill. Indeed, Pope Francis affirms that whoever truly desires to give glory to God with his very life and yearns to sanctify himself so that his existence might glorify the Holy One is called to leave behind comfort and an easy life, to give totally of himself, and to tire himself out in seeking to live the works of mercy.

Many times, I think back to those words in Article 41 of the PVA: "to shake many Christians out of the languor in which they lie and to spread the energy of charity..."

And so, can I state that economic solidarity must be framed within this thought? Must I shake up the "sleeping" Salesian Cooperators? Ought I stimulate their sense of belonging? Do I have to spread this "energy of charity"? Can each one of us do this? Are we able to conquer that "human respect" which makes us lukewarm and does not allow us to shake up anyone – not even ourselves?

Certainly, we can!

But when?

- When we understand that even the monetary contributions that every Salesian Cooperator puts aside to give to the Association allows all of us (we are 30,000 in the world) to grow and to multiply;
- When we believe that the Salesian Cooperator Association's presence in the world makes the world a better place in which to live;
- When we are convinced that without your and my contributions, the Association will be less present, less functional, and less active in the world.

Thus, every Salesian Cooperator, independent of his or her age, or of how effective his or her work is in the Local Center to which he or she belongs, can contribute to the growth of the Association by making his or her annual donation with the charity dictated by his or her own heart. As Mother Teresa says: "We know well that what each one of us does is but a drop in the ocean; but without this drop, the ocean would be one drop less." I ask myself, therefore, how is it that many Salesian Cooperators do not make their annual monetary contribution despite the fact that we request a very low sum? It is probably because many a Salesian Cooperator does not feel any longer that he or she has been called by name, that each one is precious and unique to the Association, and therefore, he or she has lost faith in the Association and maintains that the ocean will be the same even if it is less by one drop. In one word: his or her sense of belonging has weakened and he or she has stopped believing in it!

We are told in Article 41 that we ought to "spread the energy of charity." This is most likely saying to us that it is our task - the service we are called to give - to reinvigorate that sense of belonging among the Salesian



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Cooperators entrusted to us. Our task, in fact, is *not* to tell the Local Centers, the Provincial Councils, or the individual Salesian Cooperators “This is how much you owe/the amount you need to give!” [i.e., ‘dues’] No.

Our task is to help renew in them their love for the Association and to help them understand the importance that every contribution – every donation – has where the concrete initiatives carried out at every level of the Association are concerned. Our task is also to help them understand that their presence in the Association of Salesian Cooperators in today’s world is crucial.

Our strength rests precisely in the fact that we are a worldwide Association; therefore, we absolutely must preserve and cultivate the world dimension lest we be squashed under the weight of those theories prevalent in the world which demean and seek to eliminate our Christian values and suffocate our Salesian Charism. How quickly our Salesian charism will spread throughout the world and in our societies depends upon us! (If we do not sustain our Association monetarily, in a co-responsible and autonomous manner, then neither can we take for granted its very existence in the future!) The Association’s future, maturity, and autonomy depend upon economic solidarity.

During the last meeting of the World Council, we decided to take on the following three lines of action to reinvigorate the sense of belonging among the Salesian Cooperators, as expressed through their economic solidarity:

- 1. Compose simple financial reports**
- 2. Improve communication**
- 3. Increase the visibility of the Association**

Today, here, these three lines of action have been translated into concrete and functional tools!

COMPOSE SIMPLE FINANCIAL REPORTS

It is necessary to be clear and transparent when one speaks of economic solidarity, using simple language and simple financial report forms so that everyone can understand the handling of the funds and the fruits generated therefrom.

It is also necessary that we share these financial reports (both the budget and the annual year-end ones) with the governance levels below and above ours, with a view to co-responsibility; thus, all will know what is the financial situation of one’s Center and Province as well as that of the World Level. All are called, in this way, to feel responsible for the running of one’s Center, of the Province, and of the World Level.

Moreover, sensitizing the Cooperators to economic solidarity can be carried out even through the organization of formation days at the Local and Provincial Levels because this topic is an integral part of the full formation of a Salesian Cooperator, even during one’s Aspirancy. Speaking of economic solidarity, in fact, helps the Aspirant translate into a functional way the concepts of solidarity and of fraternal communion which are clearly expressed in PVA Article 21 (“united with one heart and one soul alone” they live their communion with those bonds characteristic of Don Bosco’s spirit”).

Taking into account these criteria, we have revised the document called ***Animating Economic Solidarity (ASE)***, simplifying both its terminology and content. You can find this document in the bag that you received when you registered. It is easy to read because it is only 10 pages long and is the guide for the Treasurers of every level to follow: Local, Province, and World. Those Treasurers whose term is coming to an end must also pass on *this* document when they hand over everything else to the incoming Treasurer. It is also important that the experienced, out-going, Treasurers spend some time (a maximum of 6 months) beside the newly-chosen Treasurer as a guide lest there be negative consequences on the Local, Province, or World Levels.



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Simple financial reports, shared with the Councils of the other two Levels, will give each Salesian Cooperator the possibility of being informed as to how their personal annual donation/contribution is utilized and enable them to put a spark under the “sleeping” Cooperators to make their own little contribution for the good of the Association also.

IMPROVE COMMUNICATION

It is important for every and all Local and Provincial Councils to update their contact information - above all their email addresses for this is the principal channel of worldwide communication. Therefore, when a newly-elected Provincial Council begins its term, their first thought must be to communicate the data (again, above all, the email addresses) of the new Council members to the World Executive Secretary (SEM), sending them to: cooperatori@sdb.org. If emails return to you or if an email sent by the SEM receives no response, then communication has been interrupted. Do you know what it means when that happens? There is no more union among the Salesian Cooperators in the world and one begins to think that the Association finishes with one's own Local Center and there is nothing beyond it. Actually, the Local Center *would come to an end* if there were no worldwide structure that kept the Association whole and united!!! So, let us not neglect this important task!!! Let us always remember what Don Bosco said: three separate strands break rather easily but when united, they are strong and no one can break them! And we, what kind of strands do we want to be? Thus, staying in communication will help us feel united and as one heart and one soul alone. This will reinvigorate the sense of belonging among the Salesian Cooperators entrusted to us!

INCREASE THE VISIBILITY OF THE ASSOCIATION

This aspect is of primary importance: the good that is done needs to be shared and made known – only in this way will it multiply. The good is to be shared aloud with great energy and strength in a world where only situations of death and destruction make the news. We need to break through this darkness with shouts of joy! Spreading the news of the Association's activities, the seeds of good deeds spread by the Association of Salesian Cooperators at every level must be communicated to all the Salesian Cooperators so as to render them part of a story that looks at every one of us as main actors. You see, even now we wanted to share, via social media, all the happenings at the Congress. Why? Because here, today, the entire Association is represented. All the Salesian Cooperators who are here present can interact and rejoice with and embrace one another. But we can also break down the geographic distances, thanks to technology, which, when used well, is a huge resounding chamber whose voice is heard throughout the whole world and which reaches those Salesian Cooperators who are not able to be here present physically.

To give greater visibility to the activities of the Association means that we help all the Salesian Cooperators understand well what the Association does with the annual contribution that is sent to us. The goal that we set for ourselves as the World Council is the animation of the Association at the World Level, with the guarantee of the presence, at least, of our World Coordinator at the Regional Congresses, as representative of all the Salesian Cooperators of the entire world. Animation of a worldwide Association cannot, in fact, prescind from encounters and from a presence which becomes an embrace and a support which spread enthusiasm and energy. It is by means of the meetings of the World Council, the World Congress, and the Regional Encounters that we are able to confront the situations of the various Regions so as to understand what difficulties there are and draw from among the best practices that exist so we may reflect on them and find new operational strategies which are able to help nourish the charism and raise up a sense of belonging.

WE ARE ALL IN AGREEMENT ABOUT THIS, NO???

Okay, so then we need to realize that to do all of this has a cost which needs to be covered and which should be seen not as some useless expense but as a form of investment in the growth and the fortification of the



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Association at the world level. This Congress, itself cost more than 50,000 Euros!!!! But these expenses are blessed and will bring the fruits of sanctity, of growth, and of enrichment for all the Salesian Cooperators. If we return home with a renewed heart and reinvigorated spirit and ready to dedicate ourselves to the good of the young, then the Grace of Our Lord – i.e., His Providence – will never lack or diminish! (But don't forget that we need to help Providence, eh! Everyone must do his or her part!!!)

As you can see in the document being projected on the screen - **the financial report of December 31, 2017** - from the contributions received last year, we were able to close the accounts **with a surplus of 8,849.96 euros** - as compared with 2016 when there was a **loss of 9000.00 euros** (which had to be covered by the savings!) So give yourselves a huge round of applause because you did a great job in sensitizing your Local Centers about economic solidarity - and the results are visible to all!!! Bravissimi!!! Certainly, this important result is also the fruit of the enormous work carried out by those who preceded me – I am referring to Oliviero Zoli and Giorgio Signori, who, with a great spirit of service, worked so that the Association might grow.

But now we need to continue this work begun by them because we are still a long way away from the goal that had been set in 2017 and has been renewed now in 2018. Indeed, one can see when looking at the **budget form from 2018**, so that it can manage to cover its costs, the Association must take in **36,000.00 euros!!!** This number seems so very high, and yet, in reality it would be easily met if each Salesian Cooperator were to give to the World Council his or her annual minimum offering that ranges from 35 centesimi (35 euro cents) to 3.5 euros annually!!!

The problem rests in the fact that there are some Salesian Cooperators who do not cooperate because they do not hand in their donation/contribution. It is for this reason that some of the Provinces have difficulty with sending to the World Council the sum requested of them. But I say to you with insistence: let us call each and every Salesian Cooperator entrusted to us by name so that he or she feels loved by the Association, a vital member of his or her own Local Center, and an integral part of the activities of the Center and of the Province. Let us speak to the heart of the Salesian Cooperators and let us maintain contact with each one of them. I am sure that we will succeed in a short time to bridge the divide with those who now seem so far away!

As to what regards the contributions sent in 2018 until now, we have noted on the books an intake of _____ euros.

The Provinces who have sent in their contribution are the following:

As you can see, the contributions received have been utilized, above all, for the carrying out of the principal activities of the Association on the world level – i.e., the animation of the entire Association, as is requested in PVA Article 35 of the Statutes (“the governance and animation of the Association is entrusted to its own Local, Provincial, and World Councils”).

But if each and every Salesian Cooperator would begin to help the Association financially - with the charity dictated by their own heart - we could finally give life to the dream with which we left that last World Council: to work in such a way that the Association at the world level might be able to commit itself earnestly to do concrete planning. For example, by contributing financially with the Provincial Center, a Local Center might help realize projects for the good of the young and of little children to help them become “good Christians and upright citizens”! Behold, this dream will begin to take concrete form beginning in 2019. In fact, the ASE booklet also contains a small **regulation which indicates the guidelines to be followed when presenting planned initiatives for the review of the World Council** so that the annual contributions received from the



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Provinces might be also utilized for the concrete realization of a project presented by you through your World Councilors.

This is economic solidarity! This is how it is expressed!

Through concrete planning, we can approach the young, help them fall in love with Don Bosco, and help them make the vocational choice to become Salesian Cooperators so as to help the Association grow.

By informing all your Provincial and Local Centers that the contributions sent in will also be utilized for concrete projects, all the Salesian Cooperators will feel that they are involved in this work, even if they are on the other side of the world from where the work is being carried out.

And so, the Salesian Cooperators need to understand that by giving 2.10 or 3.5, or even .35, euros a year, they are not paying dues or a tax, but, rather, they are giving a smile, a hug, and hope to someone who has none - simply by their donation to these projects!

So that the Association would be enabled to realize these concrete projects in an autonomous way, in 2017 it undertook the long and painstaking path to receive civil recognition. **Thanks to those labors, today the Association has the legal classification of a civilly-recognized ecclesial body, with its own fiscal code, its own headquarters, and its own bank account!** This will give the Association the future possibility to ask to belong to international organizations such as the United Nations (ONU), for it is good to be represented in such realities so that Jesus' voice, in the language of Don Bosco, might be heard through us - there where the future of humanity is decided!

We need to pursue this path for the good of the young and with the knowledge that today we are the guarantors of the future of our young people.

We need to go forward together, holding each other by the hand, and united like those little strands of which Don Bosco spoke.

If each one of us does his or her part, working in the spirit of the DA MIHI ANIMAS CAETERA TOLLE, then, as Article 41 of the PVA says, the Lord will accompany us with the abundance of His grace and we will truly run together along the path of sanctity traced out for us in our PVA!

Grazie

Cinzia Arena
ASSCC World Treasurer