

## SO, YOU'VE BEEN APPOINTED COOPERATOR DELEGATE?

To be asked to act as Delegate to your local Centre is an honour, a trust you hold in the name of the whole community. It probably also means extra work for you – work that others may not always appreciate.

This little booklet is meant to inspire and sustain you. It is not a “manual”, and you will need to look elsewhere to find the details of your task.<sup>1</sup> The author hopes it will help you come to your task – and remain! – with joy and a spirit of service.

III

### What Are You?

According to the PVA:

- ◆ Every Center has a Delegate and every Province has two.
- ◆ Delegates are *spiritual animators, responsible especially for Salesian and apostolic formation.*
- ◆ Delegates are *ex officio* members of their Council
- ◆ Delegates are appointed by their respective Provincials – SDB/FMA – in consultation with the Council of the Center concerned, and with due sensitivity to the needs of that Center.

So, you are an animator, a formator, a full member of Council. The Cooperators of your Center's Council have had a hand in your appointment, so that the bond of mutual trust might be real and strong.

You can see already that your task has several facets, each one important.

### The Delegate as **Animator**

Your primary role, the most precious thing you have to offer your Cooperators, is to be an *animator of the group* – always in harmony with the role of animation of the Council.

Just what is animation?

Fr Joseph Aubry (= 1994) was a Salesian who wrote a great deal on the spirituality of the Salesian Cooperator. In his book on the Renewal of Salesian Life, vol. II, Conference 15, he wrote some beautiful reflections on the role of animation of the Salesian Rector. Some ideas have been extracted from these pages to help make clear just what is involved in animation. There are no direct quotes in what follows.

- ◆ The word is somewhat overworked, but it has a precise meaning. To ‘animate’ is to give to a body its own soul, its own life, and so restore its identity and activity. It is precisely the opposite of imposing from the outside.

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<sup>1</sup> *Project of Apostolic Life (PVA)*, Statutes, art. 26, and Regulations, art. 23; *Commento Ufficiale*, in *English soon*.

- ◆ Animation is not running round in circles, getting worked up. It implies rousing and coordinating the energies of the members, each one according their own gifts and duties.
- ◆ Animation promotes a sense of belonging, and so of being co-responsible. This in its turn means being capable of an adult evaluation of the work, which is never confused with carping criticism. Good animation sharpens the focus, arouses new energies, and creates enthusiasm.
- ◆ Don Bosco said of his Preventive System that it was “based wholly on reason, religion, loving-kindness” – mind, revelation, heart. A good animator believes in the inner resources of people, and has the skills to release them, and set them to work for the common good.
- ◆ The supreme animator is the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who raised up Don Bosco, gifting him as father, teacher and founder. The animator is supremely sensitive to the work of the Holy Spirit in each individual, in the group, in the Association, in the Salesian Family, in the Church. This kind of sensitivity demands prayer, humility, trust.
- ◆ The Spirit blows where it wills. Being open to the Spirit will at times mean being open to change, to new ways of thinking and doing. The good animator helps people overcome their fear of the unknown, their need to cling to the past for reassurance.
  - ◆ The roles of the animator have a certain order:
    - first, to preserve the *Salesian Identity* of the Association;
    - then, that of guiding the *Salesian Mission*;
    - thirdly, giving direction and purpose to the various initiatives.

### III

#### **The Delegate as Agent of Formation**

The Delegate’s Primary task of animation – a task carried out together with the Formation Councilor – concerns “Salesian and Apostolic Formation”.

*Christifideles Laici*, Pope John Paul II’s statement on the identity and mission of lay people in the Church, says that Christian formation is a right and duty of all (#63). Taking a lot of trouble with the processes of formation is the best proof we can offer to Cooperators that they have a beautiful and important calling in the Church

In the **first stages** formation helps aspiring members

- *understand* the call arising from their being baptized and anointed, to proclaim the Good News and make disciples for Christ;
- *refine* that call by giving it a Salesian substance and direction;

- *specify* the call to be a Salesian in the world, by *discerning* the candidates suitability to be a Salesian Cooperator,

This is the task of the ***Initial Formation Program***.

Going on from there, formation aims to:

- heighten the individual's awareness of being Church;
- bring to focus the sense of *communion*, of being one in Christ;
- deepen the life of prayer;
- impart apostolic skills and sensitivity;
- increase understanding of the life and teaching of the Church;
- extend knowledge of Don Bosco, Maria Mazzarello, Philip Rinaldi; of Salesian Educational Spirituality, and of the wider Salesian Family;
- provide and teach a Salesian context, or 'style' to apostolic work;
- offer encouragement and affirmation in Salesian apostolic work;
- favor the personal and collective human and spiritual growth necessary to make all these things possible.

These are the objects, aims and outcomes of the *Ongoing Formation Program*. To carry them out calls out many skills from the Delegate. Chief among these is the role of Teacher, in the sense of one who opens up truth to another.

III

### **The Delegate as Teacher**

#### *A Teacher of Salesianity*

Do not assume that all Cooperators have an equal knowledge of Don Bosco, Mary Mazzarello, and generally of the history of the Salesian Family. We must go on telling the stories that are our Salesian heritage, that show what gifts the Spirit has showered on his Church for the salvation of young people.

Build up a small, easily-accessible library of Salesian books and periodicals. See to it that every Cooperator receives the *Salesian Bulletin*.

Experience shows that many Cooperators know their PVA only in general terms, and often regard it as "book of rules". The Delegate will draw on lived experience to help our Cooperators 'decipher the code', so as to reveal the full inspirational potential of the Regulations of Apostolic Life.

Statutes Articles 24 and 35, and Regulations Article 30 of the PVA recognize the special ministry to the Association of the Rector Major. Delegates render a great service in making his writings – together with those of the Mother General – known and appreciated.

Delegates do their Cooperators a great favour if they introduce them to their own religious communities, and to the apostolic work they do. Cooperators should be made to feel welcome, especially through the celebration of Eucharist and a friendly meal together, from time to time.

### *A Teacher of **Salesian Spirituality***

Our spirituality is a vast area of study: here we can do no more than remind ourselves of its main elements. What follows is taken from the *Acts of the 24<sup>th</sup> General Chapter*, pages 86 – 99, pages recommended to your personal reading.

1. A preferential love for the young, especially the poorer ones
2. A spirituality of relationships : the family spirit
3. Commitment in the Church for the world.
4. A spirituality of daily life and work
5. The Preventive System: constant listening to God and our fellow human beings (reason, religion, loving-kindness)
6. Living together Don Bosco's Mission and Spirit

Each one of these is commented on briefly in the pages indicated above. What a marvellous resource for talks, meditation, prayer, formation!

### *A Teacher of **Prayer***

I imagine most Delegates will find this a daunting task.

Prayer is God's gift – we cannot give it to anyone. But what we can do is to offer **authentic experiences of prayer**. Well - prepared Masses, homilies that are firmly based on the Scriptures; varied, prepared prayers to open and close meetings, at times of Reconciliation, recollection or retreat: these all become a true school of prayer.

The key is thoughtful preparation.

The Delegate does not need always to lead the prayers; but Delegates can and should guide, teach, model good prayer, and good prayer leadership.

For those inevitable moments when inspiration fails or time is simply not there, prayers and prayer services may be borrowed from the numerous collections available in any good Catholic bookshop. Every Delegate should have a fat 'prayer file' as a resource.

Sometimes we can talk and act as if prayer were a difficult and complicated thing. Listen to Don Bosco, writing for adults:

*To pray means to raise one's heart to God, and to spend time with him by means of holy thoughts and devout sentiments. For this reason, every thought of God and every glance directed at him is prayer...*

*Therefore, whoever thinks of God and about his infinite perfections, and finds in these thoughts feelings of joy, reverence, love, admiration: that person prays. Whoever considers what great benefits have been received from the Creator, Preserver and Father, and feels moved to gratitude, that person prays. Whoever in moments of danger...aware of being weak, begs for the Lord's help, that person prays. Finally if one in the sorrow of his heart turns to God mindful of having assaulted one's own Father, offended one's own Judge, lost one's own supreme Good, and begs pardon and proposes amendment, that person prays.*

*So you see, prayer is something very easy.*

#### A Teacher of **How to be Church**

The local Centre is part of the local Church, that is, the Diocese. Cooperators need to be aware of what are the anxieties, hopes and aims of the local Church, with its Bishop. The Delegate should be aware of the initiatives the Diocese has in hand to further these aims.

In particular, since the Salesian Cooperator is by vocation involved in the mission of the Church, they should be encouraged to report back on initiatives at Diocesan or Parish level in which they are involved, so that they might be encouraged and supported.

Papal and other official Church documents which especially concern us should be brought to the attention of the members, where necessary, with summaries or explanations. The Delegate's attention is especially drawn to pronouncements concerning social justice.

The same may be said for books, reviews, articles.

Every Delegate needs to know *Christifideles Laici* well, and be dedicated to its ideals.

#### A Teacher of **Apostolate**

By very calling and life, the Delegate is a "professional" in the apostolate, having a wealth of experiences, successes and failures. The Delegate can share those experiences, and the insights they bring, with the Cooperators. Many an aspiring athlete found success after meeting a professional player who said, "Have you tried this way?"

The Delegate's experience is real. The sharing of it is not a matter of never-ending moralising, so much as the occasional story, perceptive comment, or helpful suggestion.

The Spirit breathes where it will. Many of our Cooperators also have a deep apostolic experience. The Delegate will draw that out, dispelling the notion that clergy or religious have a monopoly of apostolic experience. For example, parents know a great deal about educating the young!

Working together with Cooperators in carrying out apostolic initiatives, is a wonderful sign of partnership in the life of the Church.

### ***A Guide of the Spirit***

The Delegate will be generous in being available for the spiritual direction of those Cooperators who request it. The Delegate will be equally aware that this is an art requiring knowledge and virtue – in particular humility...

The Delegate who is a priest will obviously include the ministry of confessor in that availability.

In general, the Delegate will try to be a wise and caring counsellor.

There are other important ways of being a spiritual guide:

- Good Preaching, based on the Word, avoiding all moralising, lamenting, recalling past (imagined?) glories
- The traditional Salesian “Good Night” is still commonly in use in Cooperator Centres (not, of course, exclusive to the Delegate!)
- The occasional word in a moment of need – not unlike Don Bosco’s “word in the ear”
- Personal letters: thanks, appreciation, encouragement, recognition, condolence, congratulation
- One-to-one friendship

**The Delegate is one who empowers, who enables, who sets free.**

**The Delegate is in the business of “letting the Spirit loose” in people’s lives, then respectfully following its growth.**

**The Delegate is not “in charge”, commands no one. The Delegate is the servant of the Cooperator community.**

NB. This booklet is a personal contribution by a Delegate to the life of the Association.

It has no official status.