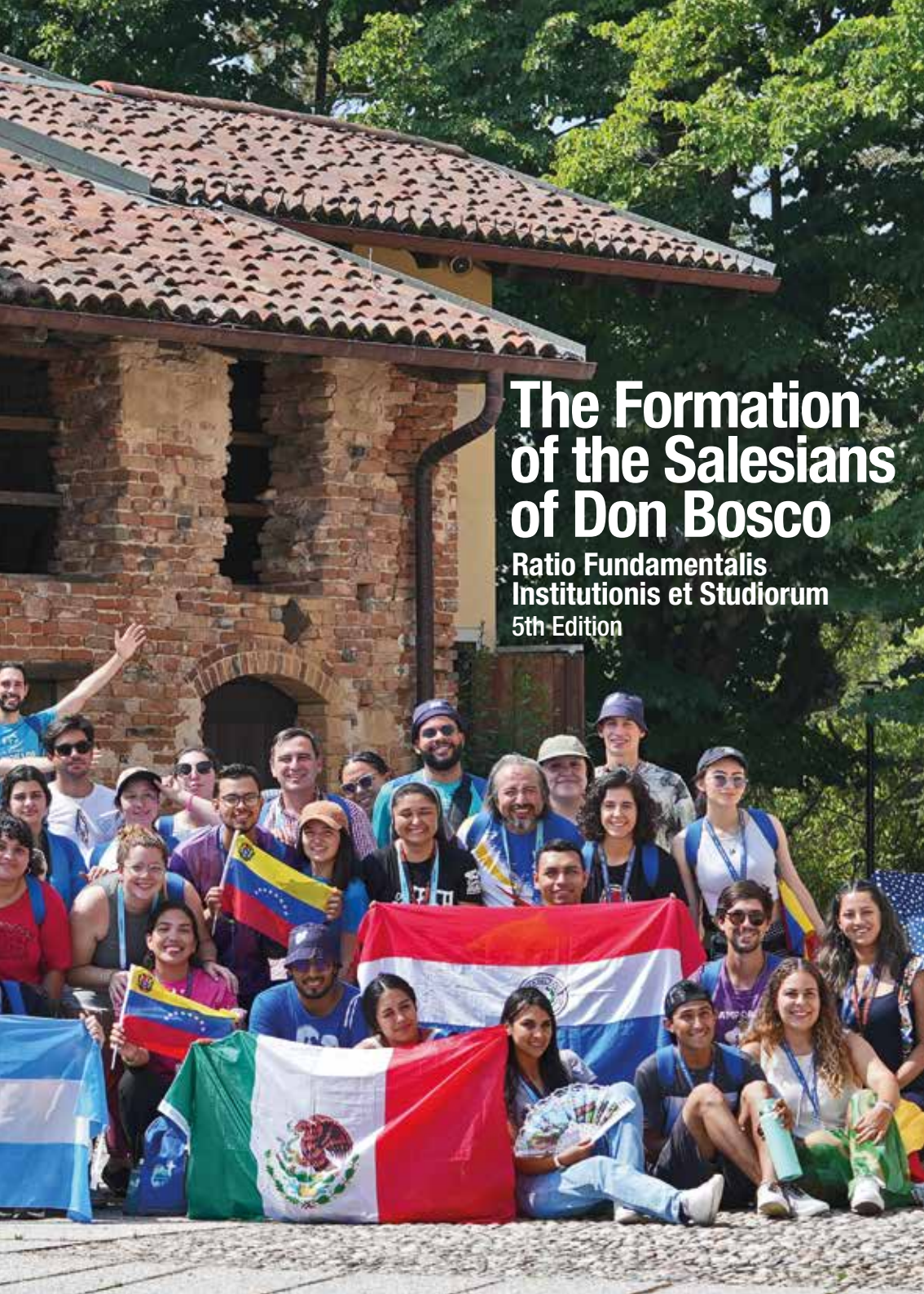




The Formation of the Salesians of Don Bosco

Ratio Fundamentalis
Institutionis et Studiorum
5th Edition



The Formation of the Salesians of Don Bosco



The Formation of the Salesians of Don Bosco

**Ratio Fundamentalis
Institutionis et Studiorum**

Principles and Norms

5th Edition

Rome, Sacred Heart
Salesian Headquarters

26 January 2026

SOCIETAS SANCTI FRANCISCI SALESII

Società Salesiana di San Giovanni Bosco (SDB)

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16 AGOSTO 1815 DON BOSCO 31 GENNAIO 1888

Decree of promulgation

The article in the Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales that begins Part III, ‘Formed for the mission of educators and pastors’, offers us the evangelical, ecclesial and Salesian horizon within which ‘The Formation of the Salesians of Don Bosco – Principles and Norms – *Ratio Fundamental Institutionis et Studiorum*’ is situated and must be understood.

Jesus called his Apostles individually to be with him, and to be sent forth to preach the gospel. Patiently and lovingly he prepared them and gave them the Holy Spirit to guide them into the fullness of Truth. He calls us too to live out in the Church our Founder’s project as apostles of the young. We respond to this call by committing ourselves to an adequate and ongoing formation for which the Lord daily gives us his grace (C 96).

The *Ratio* is a text to be read and understood, but above all it is a process to be entered into and made one’s own, following the example of the first followers of the gospel and those who first accepted and passed on Don Bosco’s charism by embracing Salesian life. Hence the choice of this date, 26 January, for the official promulgation of the document. It is, in fact, the seed from which the process that gradually led to the birth of our Congregation began. This is testified to by the person who would later be called to become Don Bosco’s first successor. On 26 January 1854, when he was just 16 years old, while preparations were being made for the feast of St Francis de Sales, patron saint of the Oratory, which was then celebrated on 29 January, he wrote:

On the evening of 26 January 1854 we gathered in Don Bosco’s room: Don Bosco, Rocchietti, Artiglia, Cagliari and Rua; we were invited to engage, with

the help of God and of St Francis de Sales, in an experiment in the practical exercise of charity towards our neighbour, in order eventually to make a promise and later, if possible and appropriate, a vow of it to the Lord. From that evening the name Salesians was given to those who chose and would in the future choose to engage in such an exercise.

It is a date with strong symbolic value which urges us to resume our formation journey with renewed enthusiasm, whatever stage of life we find ourselves in. That 'practical exercise of charity towards our neighbour', which in fact became a promise and vow to the Lord, has come down to us as the Salesian vocation and mission with all the richness of holiness and history that has marked the decades of the Congregation's existence until today, a day in which we are actors and witnesses.

The impulse that led to the process of revising and rewriting the text of this fifth edition of the *Ratio* was inspired by the same humble yet fruitful origins as in 1854.

In his address to GC28, speaking of the 'Valdocco option,' Pope Francis indicated a clear direction for the future of formation: 'It is important to say that we are not formed for the mission, but that we are formed in the mission. Our whole life revolves around it, with its choices and priorities. Initial and ongoing formation cannot be a prior, parallel or separate instance of the identity and sensitivity of the disciple. The mission *inter gentes* is our best school: beginning with this we pray, reflect, study and rest' [Rome, Lateran, 4 March 2020].

Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, in his action programme for the Congregation following GC28, asked the Formation Sector to carry out 'a serious and demanding work of

updating the *Ratio*, strengthening the aspects that favour integration between formation and mission and prevent a gap from forming between the two dimensions' [AGC 433, p. 34].

Today, the mission is shared with many people who, in various ways, are involved in the same educational passion that Don Bosco continues to convey through his charism. But precisely because of this growing closeness to a large number of lay people and members of the Salesian Family throughout the world, which reflects the synodal and communal ecclesiology that animates the Church, we Salesians are asked for ever greater fidelity and charismatic transparency. Living the 'promise' and 'vow' that distinguish us as consecrated Salesians is the 'form' in which we can best contribute to the mission, renewing it and making it ever more fruitful from within.

The *Ratio* guides us on this journey. It presents the fundamental guidelines and directives for formation in Salesian apostolic religious life. It is the normative document that 'sets out in an integral and instructive way the coherent set of principles and norms concerning formation which are found in the Constitutions, General Regulations and other documents of the Church and of the Congregation' (R 88).

Consequently, having obtained the approval of the General Council on 22 December 2025 in accordance with Article 88 of the General Regulations, and by virtue of my authority, I hereby promulgate today, 26 January 2026, the fifth edition of 'The Formation of the Salesians of Don Bosco – Principles and Norms – *Ratio Fundamental Institutionis et Studiorum*'.

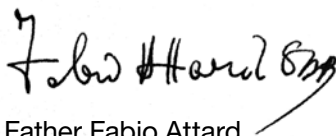
The third part of the text includes the *Criteria and norms for Salesian vocational discernment – Admissions* which had been published separately in the previous edition. They are now rewritten in line with the two previous parts.

The provisions contained in this text come into force according to universal law and must be faithfully observed throughout the Congregation.

The *Ratio* represents an element of cohesion for our Congregation in the great variety of its contexts throughout the world. It is my desire and that of the General Council that this reference text be followed by tools and aids capable of promoting inculturation and the dissemination of formation processes in the different realities and stages of Salesian life.

The new *Ratio* is part of our ongoing response to God's love and is the fruit of the collaboration and generosity of countless confreres and lay people who share our spirit and mission. As it is presented to the Congregation, we invoke the intercession of Mary Immaculate Help of Christians, St Joseph, St Francis de Sales, Don Bosco and all the glorified members of our Congregation, Family and Salesian Movement. May they support us in our commitment to live Don Bosco's dream and to dedicate our lives to the service of those to whom God sends us.

Rome, 26 January 2026



Father Fabio Attard
Rector Major

Acknowledgements

What you will find in these pages is the result of a journey spanning time and space, born of the generous contributions of thousands of people who love Don Bosco and identify with his charism and the Salesian mission. They come from all the regions where the Congregation is present: some with long-standing experience, others with the freshness of the early stages of Initial Formation. Personal contributions and group reflections have come together, including those from numerous Councils of the Educative and Pastoral Communities where lay people and members of the Salesian Family have offered valuable insights for the formation of Don Bosco's Salesians today, which by its very nature paves the way for mission and shared formation.

Throughout the five years of this process of rethinking and rewriting the *Ratio*, right up to its approval, a particularly significant contribution came from the participants in the “focus groups”, which enabled a deeper exploration of the most challenging and relevant issues. A decisive contribution was also made by the members of the two teams who, for several weeks in November 2021 and subsequently in October–November 2024, supported the drafting work, enabling the project to begin on the right footing in 2021 and to set the final phase up effectively in 2024.

Numerous committees oversaw the gradual drafting of the individual chapters and appendices, involving some seventy collaborators, both Salesians and laypeople. Twelve members of the Salesian Biblical Association enriched the text with an introductory *Lectio* for each chapter. An important role in holding the various stages of the process together and ensuring its continuity was played by the members of the Formation Sector.

It would be impossible to present a complete list of the names of all those who took part in this process, to whom our most sincere gratitude goes. Only together was it possible to initiate and carry forward the process that the *Ratio* represents, which is far broader than the written text that expresses and bears witness to it. The fact that this is a great effort of teamwork gives a unique value to what is now presented to us as The Formation of the Salesians of Don Bosco.

To represent each and every one of them, we place before us – expressing our heartfelt gratitude to them – the two successors of Don Bosco who have inspired and guided this journey: the then Rector Major, Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, who, following GC28, gave the mandate that launched this work and followed it closely step by step; and Fr Fabio Attard, who took up the baton upon his election as Rector Major at GC29, overseeing the final stages, promulgating the text and taking to heart its dissemination and implementation – the fundamental goal towards which every previous step was directed.

Finally, sincere thanks to the translators, beginning with the four official translations prepared by Fr Placide-Antoin Carava for French, Fr Julian Fox for English, Fr Antenor José Velho for Portuguese, and Fr José Antonio Hernández García for Spanish, and to all those who will prepare the translations into the other languages to follow.

Abbreviations

- ACG** Atti del Consiglio Generale
ACS Atti del Consiglio Superiore
AGC Acts of the General Council
AL Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* (2016)
AnGC *Animating and Governing the Community: The Ministry of the Salesian Rector* (2020)
ASC Acts of the Superior Council
BM *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco*
C *Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales* (2025)
CC Congregation for the Clergy (today Dicastery for the Clergy)
CCC *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992)
CCE Congregation for Catholic Education (today Dicastery for Culture and Education)
CDF Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (today Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith)
Charter *Charter of the Charismatic Identity of the Salesian Family of Don Bosco* (2012)
Chv Francis, *Christus Vivit* (2019)
CIC *Codex Iuris Canonici – Code of Canon Law* (1983)
CICLSAL Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (today Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life)
DES *Directives concerning the Preparation of Seminary Educators* (1993)
EG Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013)
EN Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975)
EPC educative and pastoral community
FD XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops 2018, *Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment: Final Document*
FLC CICLSAL, *Fraternal Life in Community: 'Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor'* (1994)
For *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference* (2014)
Form. Cel. CEC, *Orientamenti educativi per la formazione al celibato sacerdotale* (1974)
FR John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (1998)
FSDB *The Formation of the Salesians of Don Bosco. Principles and Norms. Ratio fundamentalis...*, 5th edition

FT CICLSAL, *The Service of Authority and Obedience*. Faciem tuam, Domine, requiram (2008)

GC General Chapter

GE Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate* (2018)

Gift CC, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation* (2016)

GS Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965)

Identity CICLSAL, *Identity and Mission of the Religious Brother in the Church* (2015)

LF Francis, *Lumen Fidei* (2013)

LS Francis, *Laudato Si'* (2015)

MB *Memorie biografiche di San Giovanni Bosco*

MR Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes, *Mutuae Relationes* (1978)

NW CICLSAL, *New Wine in New Wineskins* (2017)

OT Vatican Council II, *Optatam Totius* (1965)

PC Vatican Council II, *Perfectae Caritatis* (1965)

PDV John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (1992)

PFC provincial formation commission

PI CICLSAL, *Potissimum Institutioni: Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes* (1990)

PL *The Project of Life of the Salesians of Don Bosco: A Guide to the Salesian Constitutions* (1986)

R *General Regulations of the Society of St Francis de Sales* (2025)

RFC regional formation commission

SA F. Attard and M.-A. García, ed., *Spiritual Accompaniment: An Educational and Spiritual Journey with Young People in the Way of Don Bosco* (Bolton: Don Bosco Publications, 2018)

SEPP Salesian educative and pastoral plan

SDL Salesian Digital Library, <<https://sdl.sdb.org/>>

SGC Special General Chapter (1972)

SS1 ISS, *Salesian Sources. 1. Don Bosco and his Work* (Rome: LAS / Bengaluru: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2017)

VC John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata* (1996)

VDq *Vultum Dei Quaerere* (2016)

VG Francis, *Veritatis Gaudium* (2017)

YSA *Young Salesians and Accompaniment: Orientations and Guidelines* (2019)

The biblical citations are from the *New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)*.



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Part 1

General aspects of our formation

1 'I will run the way of your commands; you will give freedom to my heart' (Ps 119:32)

The Ratio Lectio

Psalm 119:32 underscores a vibrant dynamic between divine grace and personal commitment. "I will run the way of your commands" expresses a deep personal commitment and a proactive pursuit of God's instructions, actively embodying them in one's life in conformity with the divine will. There is a sense of urgency and determination in following God's will. God's commands in the bible are always in the context of a covenantal relationship that God has established freely and gratuitously with human beings.

The Psalmist's enthusiastic response, however, is evoked by God's own initiative: "you will give freedom to my heart". It is significant that the Hebrew text refers to the heart. In fact, there is a recognition of God's action in the psalmist's response and in his plea to expand and open his heart that he may be able to fully embrace and follow God's commands. The heart is often considered the seat of emotions and desires, and in this context, the psalmist is asking God to transform his innermost being so that he can live in docile obedience to God wholeheartedly. It highlights that true obedience is not just a matter of willpower and personal effort; it requires divine grace to inspire and sustain it.

Meditatio

The formative journey of the Salesian outlined in the *Ratio* is to be understood in the context of this profound biblical principle as expounded in Ps 119:32. The idea of "running the way of your commands" is highly

symbolic and it suggests not just a passive following of God's laws, but an active and determined pursuit of them. It implies a commitment to living a life that is aligned with God's will and seeking His guidance in all things. In the same way, the concept of being enlarged actually reflects a deep desire for spiritual transformation and a willingness to be changed by God, for the heart in biblical language represents the innermost being of a person, including his thoughts, emotions, and will.

Psalm 119 is a celebration of God's word and its transformative power in the life of the believer. The psalmist is deeply devoted to the word of God and seeks to internalize it so that it becomes a guiding force in his life. Thus, in the context of Ps 119, verse 32 is a powerful expression of the psalmist's desire for spiritual transformation and wholehearted obedience to God. It encourages us, therefore, to actively pursue God's commandments and align our life with His will. It also reminds us of the importance of allowing God to work in our hearts, transforming us from within and empowering us to live in obedience to Him. The interplay of vocation and response, of God's grace and our commitment, is highlighted in our Constitutions: "Each Salesian accepts responsibility of his own formation. Docile to the Holy Spirit he develops his talents and his gifts of grace in a constant effort of conversion and renewal, as he lives and works for the common mission" (C. 99).

Shaji Joseph Puykunnel, INC - UPS



1. The *Ratio*

1. Formation is a response to the call of God ‘for which the Lord daily gives us his grace’ (C 96) . It is our ongoing effort to enter more deeply into God’s plan for us, which is to live out Don Bosco’s project in the Church at the service of the young ‘in a specific form of religious life’ (C 2).

The *Ratio* is our ‘guide’ (R 88) that directs formation in all its most important aspects; it is a point of reference and an aid in this journey that lasts all our life and involves every Salesian.

1.1 HISTORICAL NOTE

2. The *first edition* of the Salesian *Ratio*, promulgated on 31 January 1981, came in answer to a request made by GC21 (1977–1978).¹ This *Ratio* incorporated the *Ratio Institutionis* formulated by the SGC (1971–1972) in accordance with the praxis of the Church after Vatican II (SGC 658) as also the first draft of the *Ratio Studiorum* (1977), along with the themes discussed by GC21: Salesians evangelizers of the young, the vocation of the Salesian brother, the Opera PAS and the UPS, the revision of the Constitutions and Regulations, and formation to Salesian life (unity, phases and ongoing formation).

After the new Code of Canon Law (1983) and GC22 (1984) which gave us the definitive postconciliar text of the Constitutions and Regulations, came the *second edition* of the *Ratio* in 1985.

The *third edition* of the *Ratio* was promulgated in 2000, following guideline 147 of GC24 (1996). This edition took into account GC23 (1990) on education to the faith, the 1990 synod on the formation of priests with the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (1992), and the 1994 synod on consecrated life with the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita*

Consecrata of 1996. Two partial revisions were carried out in 2009 and 2012 and eventually incorporated into the *fourth edition* of the *Ratio* (2016).

Reasons for the revision

3. On the eve of GC28, there were enough reasons to think of a fresh revision of the *Ratio*. Since the last major revision in 2000, we had the final years of John Paul II followed by the pontificates of Benedict XVI and Francis; within the Congregation we have had four General Chapters, three Rectors Major and important documents from the different Sectors: *Salesian Social Communication System* (2011), *Charter of the Charismatic Identity of the Salesian Family of Don Bosco* (2012), *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference* (2014), *Missionary Formation of the Salesians of Don Bosco* (2014), *Animating and Governing the Community: The Service of the Salesian Rector* (2019), and *Young Salesians and Accompaniment: Orientations and Guidelines* (2019).

4. Along with these stimuli, other factors also provided an important impetus for a revision of the *Ratio*. Among the internal factors we can mention the mission shared with lay people and with the Salesian Family, the increasing recognition of cultural diversity within the Congregation, the growing awareness of the importance of preparing not only teachers but also formators, and the significant increase in interprovincial houses of formation.

This latter factor leads to an increase in the frequency and intensity of changes between the various phases of the formation programme, with different methods of accompaniment, delivery of content and many other variables depending on the different places, structures and experiences. Among the external factors we should note the new cultural and psychological situations of young people beginning the formative journey, the growing attention to the family within the Church, the development and ubiquity of digital culture, the rapid spread of gender ideologies, and the need for more adequate protection of minors and vulnerable adults.

The call for revision

5. GC28 was a Chapter on formation that asked the question, ‘What kind of Salesians for the youth of today?’ After the Chapter, the Rector Major, Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, called for a thorough revision of the *Ratio*: ‘The Formation Sector will carry out a serious and demanding work of updating the *Ratio*, strengthening the aspects that favour integration between formation and mission and prevent a gap from forming between the two dimensions. The Sector will guarantee processes of true growth to maturity and personalization, and accompaniment’ (GC28 p. 34).

Echoing the powerful message sent by Pope Francis to GC28, the Rector Major asked for formation processes capable of touching the heart, insisted on simplicity of lifestyle and on pastoral accompaniment as a fundamental strategy of formation in mission, and called for bold steps in the selection and formation of formators and in rethinking institutional references and formation structures.

The process of revision

6. The process of revision involved periods of study and discussion, a worldwide consultation of confreres, Salesian religious communities and EPCs, and focus groups concentrating on questions needing particular attention.

A group of 21 confreres drawn from all the regions of the Congregation met in November 2021 to digest the feedback received. This group included young people in initial formation chosen by the young confreres themselves. A first draft of the *Ratio* was prepared by these and other confreres and lay persons and later subjected to a prolonged process of redaction by members of the Formation Sector with the help of other confreres and lay persons.

The draft of the *Ratio* was studied by the Rector Major and his Council during the 2023 and 2024 sessions and presented to the new Rector Major Fr Fabio Attard during GC29. It was approved by the Rector Major and his Council on 22 December 2025, and promulgated on 26 January 2026.

Keys to reading the *Ratio*

7. Some of the keys for reading the *Ratio* might be elucidated as follows.

Vocation and formation. We believe we have been called by God to be living memorials of Jesus and sent to the young, especially the poorest. There is an intense unity between vocation, mission and formation which is visible even in the structure of our Constitutions. This is a view that brings together the evangelical counsels, mission and community (mystics in the Spirit, prophets of fraternity and servants of the young, in the language of GC27).

Formation is lifelong. Formation understood as lifelong is first and foremost our daily response to the call (C 98). Initial formation is the time when we begin learning to live in formation every day and all our lives. Initial formation processes would benefit enormously from an insistence on ‘learning from experience’, which is really the permanent attitude of discernment that is the ability to listen to the Spirit in everyday life and ‘to make the best formative use of any situation’ (C 98, 119).

Formation in mission. This is the great invitation made by Pope Francis in his message to GC28. We have been called and sent to poor young people at risk. Like Don Bosco and the first Salesians, we welcome them, form them and are in turn formed by them: without our poor young people we cannot become the Salesians we are called to be.

Charismatic identity in a mission that is shared. God calls many people to follow him in the way traced out by Don Bosco. We Salesians live this call as consecrated persons, and because we share the Salesian charism and mission with many others, we are committed to a shared formation with the members of the EPC and with those groups of the Salesian Family with whom we have special bonds (C 5, R 37–42, 148).

Personalization and participation. If the goal of formation is configuration to Christ, we need a formation that reaches the heart and that will not be satisfied with merely modifying external behaviours or acquiring skills. Dialogue – personal, in group, in community – is the royal road to a formation modelled on the Preventive System.

Such a formation will obviously be participatory and synodal. Our young people in initial formation cannot be seen as passive recipients, they need to be actively involved as agents of their own formation. 'If we journey together, young and old, we can be firmly rooted in the present, and from here, revisit the past and look to the future. To revisit the past in order to learn from history and heal old wounds that at times still trouble us. To look to the future in order to nourish our enthusiasm, cause dreams to emerge, awaken prophecies and enable hope to blossom' (ChV 199).

Unity and diversity. The regions of our Congregation are diverse, not only by way of cultures, religions and socio-political arrangements but also in terms of numbers of Salesians, median age, vocations and rates of perseverance. We need to re-emphasize the fact that we belong to the whole Congregation, and that our heart beats for all young people everywhere, regardless of caste, race or creed. The *Ratio* would like to strongly uphold interculturalism and the fellowship of all human beings which are at the very centre of our faith in one God, Father of all.

The role of the *Ratio* in ensuring a unity in processes of formation around the world is as important as the contextualization of these processes at regional and provincial level. With this goal in mind, our new *Ratio* calls for strengthening of *regional formation plans* drawn up by the regional formation commissions and approved by the provincials concerned.

1.2 NATURE AND OBJECTIVES, CONTENT AND THOSE TO WHOM THE *RATIO* IS ADDRESSED

8. Among the other official documents of the Congregation, the *Ratio* (**The Formation of the Salesians of Don Bosco**) has a unique place. It indicates how to pass on the charism of Don Bosco 'so that it will be lived in its integrity by future generations, in different cultures and geographical regions', and it also explains to Salesians 'how to live that spirit in the different stages of life on the way to full maturity of faith in Christ' (VC 68).

The *Ratio* is an authoritative and binding guide for

formation, with its own intrinsic normative character. It is essential to understand that this normative character aims to overcome a purely legal or prescriptive approach. The intention is not at all to abandon the rules, but rather to reposition them in an essential way: the norms contained in this document are placed at the service of the ‘pedagogy of grace,’ which is the true and profound charismatic norm of our mission. This perspective clarifies the authority of the document and prevents interpretations that could weaken its guiding and formative value.

Purpose

9. ‘The principle of unity in the Congregation is the charism of our founder, which of its richness gives rise to different ways of living the one Salesian vocation. Formation is therefore *one in its essential content and diversified in its concrete expressions*; it accepts and develops whatever is true, noble and just in the various cultures’ (C 100).

From this standpoint the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis et Studiorum* is an instrument for forging vocational identity and a particular service for maintaining unity in diversity of formation (FSDB 273). It ‘sets out in an integral and instructive way a coherent set of principles and norms concerning formation which are found in the Constitutions, General Regulations and other documents of the Church and of the Congregation’ (R 88); it contains the guidelines and general norms that must guide the provinces in laying down how the work of formation is to be carried out, with due attention to the cultural context.

Careful discernment guided the selection of the external documents cited. The choice focused primarily on those references that offer a substantial and directly applicable contribution to Salesian life, mission and consequent formation, so as to provide an authoritative and consistent guide that incorporates the urgings of the universal Church in a relevant way. Its purpose is to consolidate a solid and comprehensive formation programme for Salesians and, through them, for today’s young people.

Contents

10. The *Ratio* comprises three parts.

The first part is concerned with Salesian formation in general and has six chapters: the *Ratio* (chapter 1), our identity in the Church and the way it determines our formation (chapter 2), the principles and methods of formation (chapter 3), the dimensions of formation (chapter 4), the processes of accompaniment and discernment (chapter 5), and the guides and resources relevant to formation (chapter 6).

The *second part* is dedicated to the various periods and phases of formation. Chapter 7 begins with a discussion of initial vocation discernment (the ‘aspirantate’) and goes through the phases of formation to end with preparation for perpetual profession. Chapter 8 discusses specialization. Chapter 9 explores the ongoing nature of Salesian formation, which continues throughout life.

The *third part* incorporates the three chapters of the booklet *Criteria and Norms for Salesian Vocation Discernment. Admissions* (2000): vocational discernment (chapter 10), criteria for discernment (chapter 11), and admissions (chapter 12).

Twelve *appendices* complete the document. The first five offer suggestions for drawing up the formation section of the provincial directory, the provincial formation plan, the community plan, the local formation plan and the personal plan of life. Appendices 6 and 7 outline the journey of growth in the affective-sexual dimension and pastoral accompaniment. Appendix 8 contains guidelines for the programme of studies, and Appendix 9 outlines the programme of Salesian studies. Appendix 10 contains suggestions for the formation of formators, Appendix 11 offers guidelines for the safeguarding of minors and vulnerable adults, while Appendix 12 is a list of documents of the Church and the Congregation pertaining to formation.

Those to whom the *Ratio* is directed

11. Our *Ratio*, while dealing with formation in all its breadth as lifelong, initial and shared, is addressed in a particular manner to *the Salesians of Don Bosco*. Part I is meant for all Salesians. Parts II and III deal extensively with initial formation, but chapters 8 and 9 speak directly to confreres who have completed initial formation. The shared formation of Salesians, lay people and members of the Salesian Family who form part of our EPCs is the responsibility primarily of the Youth Ministry Sector; the *Ratio* speaks about it chiefly in the way it ought to enter the mentality and formation processes of Salesians.

12. The implementation of the *Ratio* engages the three levels of governance of the Congregation, (world, provincial and local) and also the regional and interprovincial levels. In a special way, the *Ratio* is entrusted to the *provinces* and to the *regions* of the Congregation. It directly concerns the provincial and his council, rectors of communities, the provincial formation delegate and the PFC, and those holding responsibility for vocational animation and for initial and ongoing formation. At regional level it concerns the Regional Councillor and the group of provinces, the regional formation commission, and the interprovincial formation structures with their curatoriums.

‘The process of understanding and applying the new *Ratio* requires serious and in-depth study in order to address today’s challenges. The entire Congregation should be committed to taking seriously the various formation processes from the beginning of the vocational discernment process to the prolonged and urgent phase of ongoing formation’ (F. Attard, *Six-year project from 2025-2031*, AGC 446 29).

1.3 PRACTICAL GUIDELINES

13. Formation is **one** in its essential content and **diversified** in its concrete expressions (C 100). Pluralism in the manner of carrying out Salesian formation in line with the needs of a particular cultural context (C 101) requires that the charism be the basis of unity.

The Ratio, which sets out in an integral and instructive way a coherent set of principles and norms concerning formation (R 88), is a document at the service of the unity in diversity of formation in the Congregation. It therefore gives directions, and is normative in its practical indications.

14. Within the context of a province, it is the prime responsibility of the provincial and his council to animate the work of formation. Every province must ensure that formation is carried out in a systematic and coordinated manner as a service that attends to different situations, reflects, plans and evaluates.

Ordinarily, this service will be undertaken by the provincial delegate and the provincial formation commission, in agreement with and under the responsibility of the provincial and his council.

15. The provincial and the provincial formation delegate see to it that all the confreres are acquainted with the Ratio, which should become a constant point of reference for those who, according to their different roles, hold responsibility in the area of formation and vocations (the provincial council and provincial animators, rectors, formators, spiritual guides, confessors, etc.).

16. 'It is the duty of the provincial community, through the various organs of animation and government, to lay down the method of formation according to the needs of its own cultural context and in conformity with the directives of the Church and the Congregation' (C 101).

The **formation section of the provincial directory**, formulated by the provincial chapter (C 171.4) and approved by the Rector Major with the consent of his Council, 'applies the principles and norms of Salesian

formation [set out in the Ratio] to the concrete local situations' (R 88).

Every province evaluates on a regular basis – normally through the provincial formation commission, or if considered opportune, in line with its proper function, through the provincial chapter – the practical implementation of the formation section of the provincial directory. This information will be sent by the provincial to the Councillor for Formation.

17. In conformity with the provincial directory, the provincial sees to the formulation of the **provincial formation plan** as an operational blueprint in the field of initial and ongoing formation. The plan should contain criteria, objectives, strategies and guidelines. It should provide for a sharing of responsibility and a gradual approach at the working level and lay down the procedures for evaluation. It ought to be the fruit of a community reflection on the formation guidelines of the Church and the Congregation.

18. The region will express its responsibility in connection with the Ratio by drawing up the **regional formation plan** with the help of the regional formation commission.

Shared responsibility for **interprovincial formation structures** is exercised by the group of provincials of the region presided over by the Regional Councillor, and at local level by the curatorium of each structure.

The orientations and guidelines are codified in the statute of each curatorium (FSDB 282–286).

1. Notes

¹ GC21 258.259 ; E. VIGANÒ, FSDB (1981) p. 8.



2 '... until Christ is formed in you!' (Gal 4:19)

Our identity in the church

Lectio

In a letter as harsh and hurtful as the one he addressed to the communities of Galatia, it is surprising that Paul interrupts his defence of his apostolic authority (Gal 1:6-2:10) and of the gospel he preached (Gal 2:11-21) with an emotional plea (Gal 4:12-20) in which he reminded them of the very warm welcome they had given him: when he was ill, they welcomed him *'as Christ Jesus'* (Gal 4:13-14); when he was suffering from an eye disease, *'you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me'* (Gal 4:15). That is why he cannot understand how he could have *'become your enemy'* (Gal 4:16). After his harsh rebuke, Paul, who longs to regain the mutual affection and trust of the early days, becomes extremely affectionate: he turns his *'friends [brothers]'* (Gal 4:12) into his *'children'* (Gal 4:19a) and identifies himself as a mother suffering the pains of childbirth, *'until Christ is formed in you'* (Gal 4:19a).

Paul usually prefers to present himself as the father of those for whom *'in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel'* (1 Cor 4:15; 1 Thess 2:11); here he portrays himself as a mother *'tenderly caring for her own children'* (1 Thess 2:7b). While in 1 Thess 2:7 apostolic motherhood is seen as filial care, in Gal 4:19b it is verified as the slow and painful process prior to childbirth. By resorting to motherhood as a metaphor for the apostolic task, in contrast to the image of fatherhood Paul points to a greater and freely given dedication which produces suffering while waiting.

Meditatio

The Pauline quotation that introduces the second chapter of the *Ratio*, '*Our Identity in the Church*', although incomplete, points to two decisive aspects of the Salesian vocation, the knowledge, discernment, and appropriation of which are essential objectives of the formation process, expressly mentioned in Article 19: to be 'living memorials of Jesus' way of living and acting' (VC 22), he who is 'our living rule' (C 196); and in Article 44: 'the vocation of the Salesian consists in allowing himself to be conformed to Jesus.'

Salesian identity, which characterizes our formation, defining 'its tasks and fundamental requirements', 'is the basis of unity and belonging to the Congregation, the fundamental criterion of discernment, the constant point of reference and the goal towards which everything tends.' This identity is achieved by identifying *in a Salesian way* with Christ Jesus, namely, 'spending ourselves for the young as Don Bosco did.'

The Pauline quotation adds an essential feature which sets the limit, the goal, of formation: '*until Christ is formed in you.*' It is Christ who aspires to be allowed to make himself present in the person being formed, any Salesian, whether temporarily or perpetually professed. The meaning of the phrase would have been clearer if its main part had not been omitted: 'My little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth' (Gal 4:19a): the apostle – the formator – is like a mother who suffers as she gives birth *until* Christ is formed in the consecrated life and apostolic action of each Salesian. No more, no less.

Juan José Bartolomé, SSM



2. Our identity in the Church

2.1 FOLLOWING CHRIST AS LIVING MEMBERS OF HIS BODY, THE CHURCH

Jesus Christ our living Rule

19. 'Our living Rule is Jesus Christ, the Saviour announced in the gospel, who is alive today in the Church and in the world, and whom we find present in Don Bosco who devoted his life to the young' (C 196). As consecrated persons, as Salesians of Don Bosco, God makes of us living memorials of Jesus' way of living and acting (VC 22). The vocational challenge for the whole of consecrated life, and especially for us as Salesians, is to become passionate about Jesus, renouncing everything that is not him or that distances us from him (GC29 1).

Love for the Church

20. 'The Salesian vocation places us at the heart of the Church' (C 6) and involves a sense of belonging to it and a sincere spirit of communion with the Pope and with all those who work for the Kingdom. Belonging to the Church is something that is strongly characteristic of our origins. The lived experience of ecclesial mission formed Don Bosco and with him the 'vast movement of persons who in different ways work for the salvation of the young' (C 5).

We build community

21. Don Bosco bequeathed an ecclesial form of life to us that involves creating bonds of communion between Salesians, members of the Salesian Family, lay people, and young people, within a shared charism and mission. This is a direct participation in the mission of Christ who came to bring together the scattered children of God

(Jn 11:52); it is sustained by the Spirit and celebrated joyfully in the Eucharist.

2.2 OUR CHARISMATIC IDENTITY

Our apostolic consecration

22. ‘Our apostolic consecration’ encapsulates the originality of Salesian consecrated life, in which apostolic action ‘belongs to the very nature of the religious life’ and religious life is ‘inspired by an apostolic spirit’ (PC 8). Consecration is the action of God: it is the Father ‘who consecrates us through the gift of his Spirit’ (C 3).

“It is extremely important for us not to forget the peculiar and all-embracing meaning of each of the two terms ‘consecration’ and ‘mission,’ neither of which can be reduced to indicate only one particular sector of Salesian life. Our consecration is, in itself, apostolic; and the mission entrusted to us is, insofar as it is ours, religious.” (E. Viganò, GC22 20)”

When we respond by offering ourselves totally to God, our whole existence in turn becomes a consecrated life.

Our identity is based on the vital rediscovery of apostolic consecration. We are called to deepen the grace of unity ‘by which our Salesian life is at once religious and apostolic’. Don Bosco ‘wanted the active and contemplative life... to go hand in hand through the ardour of charity’ (GC22 20). ‘We need to reach out, almost touch, the inner fire of the *Da mihi animas*, in which prayer and work are united in sharing the pastoral charity of the Risen Lord’ (GC29 17).

The mission is given by God

23. The mission is given by God. The initiative is always God’s and comes to us through Jesus, epiphany and revelation of the mystery of the triune God. Jesus’

mission is to *reveal* the Father (Jn 1:18) and to *gather* into one the scattered children of God (Jn 11:52). The Holy Spirit reminds us of everything that Jesus said and did (Jn 14:25–26) and empowers us to carry out this mission through the different gifts he bestows on each one (GC29 35).

This, then, is our mission: ‘to be signs and bearers of the love of God for young people, especially the poorest of them’ (C 2). As we grow in our vocation, we learn to respond passionately to the love with which we have been loved and to be transfigured into his likeness (2 Cor 3:18) so as to become, like Jesus, the merciful face of the Father to young people.

We share the mission with many

24. The Salesian mission, a gift of the Spirit to the Church through the charism of Don Bosco, is entrusted to the Congregation and is taken up in shared responsibility by the other members of the Salesian Family and by lay people, in the charismatic communion that unites us (GC29, 43).

The EPC is our normal expression of synodality. That is where we share the Salesian spirit, experience the interdependence of vocations and roles, and engage in a programme of shared formation. The Salesian community is a point of charismatic reference in the EPC, and every Salesian is called to be an animator.¹

Following the obedient, poor and chaste Jesus

25. The experience of God that we live in the Salesian Congregation through our consecration is a principle of identity and a formative criterion. Embracing the obedient, poor and chaste way of life that Jesus chose for himself, we proclaim with our very being ‘that God exists, that his love can fill a life completely, and that the need to love, the urge to possess, and the freedom to control one’s own whole existence, find their fullest meaning in Christ the Saviour’ (C 62).

When we enter into this dynamic of our apostolic consecration, a harmony is born and our hearts are unified

by grace. 'The witness of such holiness, achieved within the Salesian mission, reveals the unique worth of the beatitudes and is the most precious gift we can offer to the young' (C 25).

Living and working together

26. Along with the mission and the evangelical counsels, *community life* is also a constituent element of our identity. We are sent to young people as community. We live in community not for strategic or merely organizational reasons but by vocation (C 49).

Don Bosco invites us to build the family spirit. This family spirit is meant to expand and embrace the young as well as those who share the mission with us in different ways. 'All must be reminded that fraternal communion, as such, is already an apostolate; in other words, it contributes directly to the work of evangelization' (FLC 54) through the witness of fraternity.

The grace of unity

27. Don Bosco is 'a living witness to the grace of unity between mission and consecration' (GC22 40). Like him, we too are called to live mission, evangelical counsels and community in the grace of unity (GC29 17, 18).

This grace is the unifying power of God's love in us: we cannot love God without loving those to whom he sends us.

Our apostolic consecration is a meeting of two loves. Far from being an exclusively I-Thou relationship, it opens up of its very nature to embrace those to whom God sends us. 'Apostolic consecrated life has a mission of continuous activity at the service of humankind: it corresponds to a particular kind of contemplation that manages to transform activity into an expression of interiority. This is the "ecstasy of action" that Saint Francis de Sales spoke about, where apostolic ardour becomes the measure of authenticity and of the depth of our contemplation.'²

2.3 SEEING WITH THE EYES OF DON BOSCO

Our reading of the gospel

28. To be Salesian is to see Christ through the eyes of Don Bosco. 'Reading the gospel, we become more aware of certain aspects of the figure of the Lord: gratitude to the Father for the gift of a divine vocation offered to everyone; predilection for the little ones and the poor; zeal in preaching, healing and saving because of the urgency of the coming of the Kingdom; the preoccupation of the Good Shepherd who wins hearts by gentleness and self-giving; the desire to gather his disciples into the unity of brotherly communion' (C 11).

Don Bosco's life itself is paradigmatic for our following of Jesus and for Salesian formation. Don Bosco is for us not merely someone we admire but our pattern of life, a luminous way of following Jesus, one who reveals to us the fatherhood of God and generates us in the *sequela Christi*.³ 'We cannot be satisfied with knowing his history and activities, but we need to rediscover the secret of his continuous union with God, the spiritual path that led him to live the grace of unity. We need to reach out to, almost touch, the inner fire of the *Da mihi animas*, in which prayer and work are united in sharing the pastoral charity of the Risen Lord. This is being passionate about the Lord!' (GC29 17).

Predilection for the little ones and the poor

29. Inspired by his childhood dream, Don Bosco's vocation matured in the bosom of his far from perfect family and the extraordinary influence of his mother. From his early life in Becchi to the years in Castelnuevo and Chieri we see him animated by missionary zeal in catechising his companions. Don Bosco never forgot his humble origins. The memory of the difficulties he faced in his family and the poverty and hardships that marked his student years, became a bridge for him to the experience of the poor youngsters he encountered in Turin.

When he became a priest, he came into living contact with young people in the suburbs and the prisons of

Turin under the wise guidance of Cafasso. This is how providence led him to dedicate his whole life to them, until his last breath. 'Predilection for the little ones and the poor' (C 11) marks Don Bosco's following of Jesus. It is one of the irreplaceable signs of the Salesian vocation.

Zeal in preaching, healing and saving

30. Education, for Don Bosco, was not merely a matter of helping poor youngsters get an education or a livelihood. Religion remained the source and summit of his educational system. He lived and acted in gratitude to the Father for the gift of a divine vocation offered to everyone (C 11) and wanted his young people to be happy in this life and in eternity. We can never forget the extraordinary sanctity that radiated from the Oratory. Don Bosco's pedagogy is a pedagogy of holiness.

To this we must add Don Bosco's tireless commitment to the evangelization of the common people. It is enough to remember the immense number of his publications, at a time when the power of the popular press was just being discovered.

Winning hearts by gentleness and forgiveness

31. The Preventive System is a pedagogy of grace. It has its remote origins in the figure of Mamma Margaret and in models like Don Calosso, thanks to whom Don Bosco developed his way of being close to young people, in contrast to the style of other priests. The Convitto option for the moral theology of Alphonsus Liguori helped consolidate this vision, and the choice of Francis de Sales as his patron symbolized it. Don Bosco learned to replace the gravity that keeps distances with the smiling goodness that became his characteristic.

Gathering disciples

32. But Don Bosco is not only a brilliant educator; he is a founder. Like Jesus, he desired to gather his disciples

into the unity of brotherly communion (C 11). He found help and support in men and women, lay people and clergy, and in the young people themselves. From within this movement of people from different states of life and encouraged by Pope Pius IX, Don Bosco founded our religious Congregation, the Society of St Francis de Sales.

From 1841 to 1850 Don Bosco established the first of his works for the young. From 1850 to 1860, at a time of great danger for the faith of the people, he opened a press and published the *Letture Cattoliche*. After founding the Association of Mary Help of Christians (1869), and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (1872), he sent his first missionaries to South America on 11 November 1875. The missions are the last great wave of the zeal of *Da mihi animas*, the ultimate fruit and most daring manifestation of the dynamism and drive of his pastoral charity. This courageous beginning of missionary expansion was followed by the Holy See's approval of the Association of Salesian Cooperators (9 May 1876) and the start of publication of the *Salesian Bulletin*.

Don Bosco the founder was the formator of his Salesians within a vast movement at the service of poor youth. From the very beginning, Salesian formation was characterized by a mission that is shared, the apostolate of social communication, and the expansion of the charism to the whole world through the *ad gentes* missions.

Mary Mother and Teacher

33. In all this, Mary was never far away, and Don Bosco's devotion to her was intense. When his mother Margaret died, he asked Mary to take her place. 'Now my boys and I are without an earthly mother. You be near us now, be our mother.'⁴ As promised in the dream, Mary became mother and teacher to him and to his sons and daughters. She embodies the universal call to holiness, her vocation is ultimately the vocation of all.

2.4 'FOR YOU I AM READY TO GIVE UP MY LIFE'

Looking at the young with the eyes of God

34. We are convinced that God is present in the lives of the young and that he speaks to us through them. We humbly recognize that young people are holy ground. 'Called to be fathers, pastors and guides of the young, we wish to make this divine way of seeing things our own, aware that in this way we are following in the footsteps of our beloved father Don Bosco, who carried out his work right here at Valdocco, led by the hand of the Help of Christians' (GC28 1).

We are, therefore, able to look attentively, 'to discern pathways where others only see walls, to recognize potential where others see only peril. That is how God the Father see things; he knows how to cherish and nurture the seeds of goodness sown in the hearts of the young' (ChV 67).

The plurality of youth situations

35. Looking at the young people of today, we are careful not to fall into the temptation to make easy generalizations. 'Young people' is not a homogeneous category, 'but is composed of a number of different groups, each with its own life experience' (FD 10). 'Indeed, "youth" does not exist: there exist only young people, each with the reality of his or her own life' (ChV 71).

An age of change

36. Not only are the situations of young people so different among themselves, but also each situation is marked by a vertiginous pace of change. It is no longer possible to think of our mission in terms of 'this is how it has always been'. We are more convinced than ever of what Pope Francis told us in Valdocco on 21 June 2015: 'Your charism is of great relevance today. Look at the streets, look at the children and make risky decisions. Do not be afraid. Do as he did' (GC28 3).

Challenges, old and new

37. It was the plight of poor young people that led Don Bosco to found the Salesian Congregation and Movement. *Poverty* continues to affect many young people around the world. To this we must add now the growing wave of *secularization* and a markedly subjective interpretation of values, ‘a growing deterioration of ethics, a weakening of the sense of personal and collective sin, and a steady increase in relativism’ (EG 64).

Our times present us also with some new challenges to which we are called to respond. The *digital revolution* and the development of artificial intelligence invite us to understand the profound transformations taking place not only in the field of communication, but above all in the way we set up and manage our human relationships. Contact with *young migrants, refugees* and many other young people deprived of their fundamental rights becomes for us a pressing call to invest in socio-political, ecological and financial education and action. The role of *women* in society and in the Church calls for deeper reflection. Issues related to *gender* and *sexual identity* challenge our anthropological perspectives. The painful experience of abuse is a strong call to conversion and to strengthen efforts to safeguard minors and vulnerable adults. Finally, the growing *ecological sensitivity* challenges us to be prophetic through clear and consistent choices (GC29 58, 69; resolutions 22–23).

‘One constant of consecrated life has always been its presence in the frontiers, all the way to the outposts of the mission, assuming the greatest risks with courage and genius. Today, during this time of epochal change, we are called to the same thing. Looking at reality from the peripheries is also the courage to face new challenges, try new ways, to play a part in “elaborating and putting into effect new initiatives of evangelization for present-day situations” (VC 73). We must know how to sense and “to create ‘alternate spaces’, where the Gospel approach of self-giving, fraternity, embracing differences, and love of one another can thrive” (Francis, *Apostolic Letter to consecrated men and women* 21/11/2014, II, 2)” [CICLSAL, *Proclaim*, LEV Vatican Ciy, 2016, 75].

Salesians for the young people of today

38. The young to whom God sends us are part of our identity. As Salesians we form ourselves in and for our mission to young people in different parts of the world. We look at them with hope, imitating the God whose name is 'I am who am', one interpretation of which is 'I am the one who is there for you' (Ex 3:14). Young people are present to us in our prayer and reflection, study and rest (GC28 p. 60). They invite and challenge us to be the Salesians God wants us to be. We discover in them the workings of grace and in turn we become ever more witnesses of God's love for them.

2.5 OUR FRATERNAL COMPLEMENTARITY⁵

One vocation lived in two forms

39. 'Our Society is made up of clerics and laymen who complement one another as brothers in living out the same vocation' (C 4). This is a fundamental aspect of our charism that emanates from our founder in a way that is quite original.

The insistence on our consecration is fundamental, because it is only from this perspective that the specific nature of each form of our vocation can be fully understood and appreciated. Brothers and priests are first of all Salesian religious: they are educators and pastors who follow Christ 'according to the way of the gospel set out in the Salesian Constitutions' (C 24).

The Salesian brother⁶

40. The Salesian brother 'combines in himself the gifts of consecration with those of the lay state' (GC24 154). Living the lay state as a consecrated person, he is an icon of the lay dimension of the Congregation, highlighting the value of work and the need to care for a world that is good because created by God.

The Salesian brother, as brother, is also an icon of communion and fraternity.⁷ His vocation is to expand communion to embrace all people, brothers and sisters in

the family of God. Salesian brothers St Artemides Zatti and Venerable Simon Srugi are great examples of brotherhood. Zatti was described as the 'kinsman of the poor.' Srugi was able to transcend divisions in the community and also to overcome the wounds of history and reach out in radiating love to people in his neighbourhood, making himself neighbour to all.

The Salesian priest

41. The Salesian priest belongs fully and completely to the consecrated life within the people of God (CIC, Book II, Part III). He is ordained for the good of the Church, which expects that he will live 'according to the way of the gospel set out in the Salesian Constitutions' (C 24).

Our educative and pastoral charism radically marks the identity of the Salesian priest, who combines in himself the gifts of consecration and pastoral ministry in such a way that *his particular manner of being a priest and exercising his ministry stems from his Salesian consecration.*

Salesian brother and Salesian priest

42. What, then, is the relationship between the Salesian brother and the Salesian priest? 'The Salesian who is a priest should feel a spontaneous bond of communion with the brother by virtue of their common Salesian vocation, and the lay Salesian should feel the same towards his priest confrere. Our vocation is essentially a community vocation; hence there must be an effective communion that goes deeper than mere friendship between persons' (AGC 335 26).

Brothers and priests are signs to one another within the Salesian community. The brother reminds his priest confreres of the lay dimension of the common vocation. He is, further, a permanent reminder to them of their consecrated identity. In turn, the Salesian priest is a sign and reminder to the brother that he is not merely a professional but above all a pastor and educator in the midst of ordinary life and work – that 'like Don Bosco, we are all called to be educators to the faith at every opportunity', for 'our highest

knowledge... is to know Jesus Christ, and our greatest delight is to reveal to all people the unfathomable riches of his mystery' (C 34).

All of us, priests and brothers, humbly take our place as consecrated persons at the Marian heart of the Church – because our vocation is to be, like Mary, signs of the eschatological destiny of all people.⁸

GC29 has entrusted the Rector Major with the task of initiating 'a serious historical, theological, charismatic, pastoral and juridical in-depth study' of the 'the power to appoint, with the consent of his Council, a non-clerical member as local Superior' (GC29 resolution 20). It is an opportunity for reflection, dialogue and discussion that can enrich our understanding of the unique Salesian vocation in its two forms and how it can best be lived in the many contexts in which we find ourselves.

2.6 OUR FORMATION

The Salesian profile

43. We Salesians are a community of the baptized who carry out Don Bosco's apostolic project in a specific form of religious life: 'to be in the Church signs and bearers of the love of God for young people, especially the poorest of them' (C 2). In Don Bosco and in the Constitutions, we find 'an original style of life and action' (C 10) that we live in a single movement of love towards God and towards our brothers and sisters. In the grace of unity of our apostolic consecration we live the apostolic mission, fraternal community and the practice of the evangelical counsels and find our way to holiness. In Mary we find the teacher and guide who sustains our fidelity and renews our zeal for the mission.

Convinced that God calls many to share Don Bosco's apostolic project, we gladly take our place within educative and pastoral communities and in the Salesian Family, living our vocation as an expression of the synodal form of the Church (GC28 37). Accepting personal responsibility for the common mission, we participate in it with the richness of our gifts and with the lay and priestly characteristics of the one Salesian vocation.

Salesian identity determines our formation

44. The Salesian vocation consists in allowing ourselves to be conformed to Jesus and spending ourselves for the young as Don Bosco did.

Don Bosco was a great formator who was able to inflame his spiritual sons with enthusiasm and joy. He offered them an environment built upon mutual confidence and inner freedom, and accompanied them individually and as a group. Like the first Salesians who ‘found their sure guide in Don Bosco’ we also want ‘to model [our] own lives on his’ (C 97).

Our Salesian identity is the basis of unity and belonging to the Congregation. It is the fundamental criterion of discernment, the constant point of reference, and the goal to which everything tends. In other words, *what distinguishes our formation is our Salesian identity*: it spells out its tasks and fundamental requirements.

The goal of Salesian formation is to discover, appreciate, assimilate and live our charismatic identity. It is through formation that we achieve the identification and the maturity needed to live and work according to our charism. From an initial enthusiasm for Don Bosco and his mission, we arrive gradually at a true conformation to Christ, a deep identification with the founder, the assumption of the Constitutions as our Rule of life and criterion of identity, and a strong sense of belonging to the Church.

All our formation consists in acquiring and realizing this identity as individuals and as community. The efforts of every candidate and confrere, the activity of formators, the whole project of formation, are all directed to this end.

Formation is lifelong⁹

45. Formation does not coincide with the period that precedes perpetual profession or priestly ordination. It is a free and daily response to God’s call that is lifelong and involves the whole of one’s being, heart, mind and soul. It involves a permanent attitude of discernment and dialogue with society, culture and the world in which we live.

Initial formation is already part of formation understood as lifelong, as embracing the whole of life in intensity and duration (AGC 425 25–37). ‘It is a time of dialogue between God, whose initiative calls him and leads him forward, and his own freedom as he gradually assumes responsibility for his own formation’ (C 105). If all formation is fundamentally *learning from experience* (C 98 and 119), we could say that the aim of initial formation is *learning how to learn*.

‘Commitment to formation, therefore, is nothing more than the continuous correspondence to the Lord’s call. In fact, Article 96 of the Constitutions presents it as follows: “We respond to this call by committing ourselves to an adequate and ongoing formation for which the Lord daily gives us his grace”’ (GC29 35).

Formed in mission

46. The early Salesians were formed by living with Don Bosco, and Don Bosco himself was formed by his interaction with the boys and with his young Salesians. Admiration for Don Bosco, the desire to be and work with him, wanting to become like him – all these are the *humus* from which Salesian formation arises.

Here we have a charismatic element that we cannot overlook. Salesian formation is based on the personal relationships established in the daily unfolding of the mission. For the Salesian, therefore, the mission is the source of formation and is itself formation, and formation is not a preparation for mission but is already mission. It is our daily and ongoing response to God who awaits us in those to whom we are sent.

As Pope Francis reminded us, when our whole life, our choices and our priorities revolve around the mission, when the mission permeates our prayer, our reflection, our study, our rest, then we can say that we are being formed in mission (GC28 p. 60). ‘Formation in mission’ does not refer so much to a physical or geographical place as to the way we live our lives.

‘Forming ourselves in the mission means allowing ourselves to be shaped by God’s will for us today, on behalf of young people, especially those who are most abandoned’ (Fabio Attard, AGC 446 31).

An inculturated and contextualized formation

47. The Salesian charism is not something to be guarded like a priceless treasure; rather, it is a talent to be invested, allowing it to produce good fruit in the different contexts in which it takes root.

We are, therefore, open and discerning in the face of the changes taking place in the Church and the world and especially in the lives of young people. We try to understand them and make every effort to read them in the light of the gospel. We are attentive to the evangelization of cultures, the inculturation of the faith, and to ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. We do not forget that inculturation today involves a dialogue with the digital culture.

From our dynamic and ongoing interaction with the gospel and the situations of young people there emerge lifestyles and pastoral methods that, when inspired by the Spirit, are consistent with the founding charism and relevant to those to whom we are sent.

Such pastoral discernment and inculturation are something to be taught and learnt already during the processes of initial formation.

A shared formation

48. The desire of the synodal Church is that formation be the fruit of a journey that Salesians and lay people undertake together for the good of the young. From this springs ‘the gift of our holiness – not only our personal holiness but also that of the EPC and of the Salesian Family: a shared holiness’ (GC24 104).

‘The sharing of the Salesian spirit and growth in shared responsibility require the sharing of certain formation programmes and experiences oriented towards spirituality and mission, obviously without neglecting specific formation programmes for Salesian consecrated persons and lay people’ (GC28 42).

Shared formation is part of our formation right from the initial phases and demands of us an increasing willingness to allow ourselves to be enriched by the encounter with the others who share the mission, overcoming prejudices and partisan views.¹⁰

This formation is entrusted principally to the Youth Ministry Sector. The Formation Sector is responsible for ensuring that the mentality of the shared mission and experiences of shared formation enter into the processes of formation in its initial phases. It is realized especially within the EPC and is directed above all to the members of the animating nucleus. It takes place first of all by reflecting on and learning from the experience of living and working together, because ‘the first and best mode of self-formation to participation and shared responsibility is the correct functioning of the EPC’ (GC24 43). Formation courses and other moments of animation, fraternal relations with Salesian Family Groups, take their place within this context.

The experience of working with lay people and even under their direction, and of being involved in the EPC Council, are valuable moments of formation, especially when they are accompanied by the members of the animating nucleus (GC28 43).

It is not possible to share spirituality and mission without also sharing formation. Shared formation between Salesians and lay people is therefore a priority into which resources and energy must be invested. The final document of the Synod insisted on “the need for a common and shared formation, in which men and women, laity, consecrated persons, ordained ministers and candidates for ordained ministry participate together, thus enabling them to grow together in knowledge and mutual esteem and in the ability to collaborate”, recalling that the formation needed must be “integral, ongoing and shared. Such formation must aim not only at acquiring theoretical knowledge but also at promoting the capacity for openness and encounter, sharing and collaboration, reflection and discernment in common. Formation must consequently engage all the dimensions of the human person (intellectual, affective, relational and spiritual) and include concrete experiences that are appropriately accompanied” (Francis – XVI General Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission. Final Document*, 143). (GC29 49)

2.7 PRACTICAL GUIDELINES

49. Salesian identity is the fundamental reference point for initial and ongoing formation (C 97).

*Called to become like Christ, in the footsteps of Don Bosco, every Salesian nurtures a relationship with our founder, takes the Constitutions as his 'book of life' (C 196), keeps himself attuned to the Congregation's understanding of its charism, becomes acquainted with and follows its guidelines, particularly those of General Chapters and of the Rector Major and his Council, and strengthens his sense of belonging to his province, **to the Congregation and the Salesian Family.***

50. *Particular attention is given to a personal and communityself-examination based on the **Constitutions**, since they 'enshrine the spiritual riches of the traditions of the Salesians of Don Bosco and define the apostolic project of our Society'.¹¹*

51. *In the course of his formation, every Salesian embraces the characteristics of his **specific form of vocation, within the wealth of vocations that have sprung from Don Bosco's charism.***

The animators of pastoral work for vocations and formation delegates see to it that the different ways of living the Salesian consecrated identity – the Salesian brother, the Salesian priest – are made known and appreciated.

The programmes of initial formation ensure that all confreres have 'curricula of equivalent level, with the same phases and similar content and objectives' and confreres pay attention to the necessary differences determined by the specific vocation of each, by his personal gifts and inclinations and by the duties of our apostolate (C 106).

52. *A **change in vocational orientation** – e.g. when a Salesian brother asks to become a permanent deacon or a priest, or an aspirant to the priesthood asks to become a Salesian brother – calls for a new process of vocational discernment.*

In the case of a temporarily professed confrere, the decision is taken by the provincial with his council, according to a process defined by the provincial, including a suitable period of discernment with the help of a spiritual guide.

In the case of a perpetually professed confrere, the request is addressed to the Rector Major, to whom it is sent after being processed by the provincial and his council. Before presenting the request to the Rector Major, it is necessary to ensure that the discernment process undertaken within the province is carried out with due care:

- *the confrere making the request begins a process of discernment with a spiritual guide; should the discernment conclude with a positive indication regarding a change in vocational option, he submits to the provincial a request addressed to the Rector Major.*
- *the provincial and his council proceed to evaluate the request, considering the vocational history, the new factors that have led to the request, the motivations that have emerged, clear signs of a vocation to the Salesian diaconate or priesthood or to the lay form of the vocation to the Salesian consecrated life, the opinion of the rector of the community and his council, and that of the provincial of origin and his council.*
- *the opinion of the provincial and his council, along with all the relevant documentation, is forwarded to the Rector Major and his Council, with whom the final decision rests.*

53. The confreres are called to deepen their understanding of the Salesian spirit and acquire a serious and updated knowledge of the history, spirituality and pedagogical and pastoral patrimony proper to our charism.¹² Those responsible at the provincial level ensure the necessary conditions and promote suitable initiatives for these studies to be done during initial and ongoing formation.

54. *The provincial directory contains general guidelines for **the study of 'Salesianity'** during initial formation, and the provincial formation plan spells out the contents in the form of a gradual and systematic programme.¹³*

Each province or group of provinces provides for the preparation of experts in 'Salesianity,' making use of the services offered by the UPS and by other qualified Salesian centres (GC29 18l, 18m).

Every province ensures a constant updating of the means necessary for knowing, studying and teaching 'Salesianity,' among which the setting up or maintenance of a 'library of Salesianity' that is sufficiently complete and updated.

55. *Each confrere cultivates a **knowledge of and a sense of belonging to the Salesian Family**. He keeps himself open to a formation that is reciprocal and shared and prepares himself for his responsibility as animator in the EPC and within the Salesian Family.*

56. *An esteem for and encounter with **various charismatic families and forms of spirituality** can foster a communion of gifts and help one to grow more deeply in one's own identity as a Salesian.*

During initial formation, while the Salesian grows to maturity in his vocation and in his sense of belonging to the Congregation, he is also provided with occasions for sharing with people belonging to other forms of consecrated life or of Christian commitment. It is not advisable, however, that he take part systematically and habitually in experiences of other spiritualities.¹⁴

Initiatives for inter-Institute collaboration in formation offer a particular experience of communion, provided they maintain a proper relationship between each Institute's identity and communion in diversity and ensure the communication of one's own charism through living experience.¹⁵

2. Notes

¹ GC24 159. The charism of Don Bosco 'is concentrated in the SDB community in a special way by virtue of the force of consecration, the community experience, the plan of life (profession), and total dedication to the mission' (GC24 236).

² E. VIGANÒ, *Apostolic Interiority* (2023) 9.

³ PL 1034–1035; J. E. VECCHI, *Spiritualità salesiana. Temi fondamentali* (Torino: LDC, 2001) 25–26; also available in English and Portuguese on SDL.

⁴ T. BOSCO, *Don Bosco: Una Biografia Nuova* (Leumann: Elle Di Ci, 1984) 264; available in English as *Don Bosco A New Biography*, (Tej-Prasarni 2006) 289; see BM V: 374.

⁵ See AnGC 26–30.

⁶ The Italian text of our Constitutions uses both *salesiano coadiutore* and *salesiano laico*, sometimes in the same article, as in C 45.

⁷ See the whole document *Identity and Mission of the Religious Brother in the Church*, but especially no. 15.

⁸ See AGC 335 24 and CCC 773.

⁹ See FSDB 73–78.

¹⁰ FRANCESCO and XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission: Final Document" (2024) 147.

¹¹ C 192; cf. AGC 365 25; *The Project of Life of the Salesians of Don Bosco* (Rome 1986); SALESIAN BIBLICAL ASSOCIATION, *Parola di Dio e spirito salesiano. Ricerca sulla dimensione biblica delle Costituzioni della Famiglia Salesiana* (1995).

¹² AGC 361 40–41; see Appendix 9.

¹³ See Appendix 9.

¹⁴ FLC 46; AGC 338 39–45.

¹⁵ CICLSAL, 'Inter-Institute Collaboration for Formation' 9.



3 'Have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus.' (Phil 2:5)

The journey: basic options **Lectio**

'Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus': the literal translation permits us to appreciate a concise passage, capable of conveying a message of great significance and vigour.

In the context of the Letter to the Philippians, the exhortation acts as a bridge between the conclusion of the first part of the letter (1:27-30 and 2:1-5) and the well-known Christological hymn (2:6-10): it is therefore to be considered as a call to orient one's path according to the direction already set by Christ. According to Paul's writing and its context, in order to walk in the footsteps of the Lord it is essential to behave 'in a manner worthy of the gospel.'

Paul exhorts us to do so 'whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you', as he writes in 1:27: for it is of no use to please him. What is needed instead is to remain steadfast in the faith, whatever the cost, even persecution. This is another reason why grace has been given to us (1:29). Paul continues by asking the Philippians to make his joy complete (2:1-2a). For this to happen it is essential to choose unity and harmony and be of the same mind (vv. 2b-3), to preserve charity and to opt decisively for humility, which alone teaches us to respect others and to pursue their good, not our own (v. 4).

It is at this point that the exhortation to share the same mind as Christ Jesus stands out. Already appearing in v. 2, the verbal phrase 'to be of the same mind' is

now taken up again in the form of an imperative. The 'being of the same mind' referred to here is not simply experiencing a sentiment, but making Christ's own way of thinking and being one's own. Therefore, what had been offered as an exhortation is taken up and strengthened in the heartfelt invitation to have the same 'mind' as Christ. He is the model to be imitated and gives the Spirit without which no one can take on the mystery of humiliation and exaltation.

Meditatio

Paul, the witness and pastor, outlines some inspiring principles for a simple pedagogy of formation in the life of Christ. It should be noted first of all that in his writing he intends to accompany an entire Christian community. He does so knowing full well the value of journeying together. Only then are the calls for unity and harmony in the way of being, thinking and acting extremely significant. Everything is permeated by charity, without which we would be nothing (1 Cor 13:2) and every journey would be undermined from the outset. Respectful of the Spirit's action, the Apostle knows perfectly well that his task is solely to be a mediator of grace that preserves and increases faith in order to behave 'in a manner worthy of the gospel.' This is certainly to be recognised as an attitude of humility that must always be safeguarded in the actions of those who are responsible for formation. It is a concrete expression of wanting the good of others: this is how the Word becomes a lamp to light the way. As a true teacher of life, he enters into a mutual relationship with his formees, makes himself loved and

becomes totally involved in the journey of faith. He does not impose rules, but prefers to exhort with gentle vigour, motivating and moving others to accept what he proposes out of love and charity. How else could one elicit a free response of acceptance and collaboration, without which there can be no authentic formation for life in Christ? The safeguarding of personal freedom that springs from good interpersonal relationships is the vehicle through which one can contribute to gradually taking on the Lord's way of thinking and living in order to become living imitators of him. In the words of the *Ratio*, the goal is to guide the 'formation of the inner attitudes of the Son in the heart of the consecrated person, sharing his total self-gift to the Father and to his brothers and sisters' (no. 58).

Marco Rossetti, ICP

3. The journey: basic options

57. The Lord ‘calls us too to live out in the Church our founder’s project as apostles of the young. We respond to this call by committing ourselves to an adequate and ongoing formation for which the Lord daily gives us his grace’ (C 96). In Don Bosco’s own experience, vocation, mission and formation are linked in the closest possible way.

The Preventive System is the guiding principle of formation, summed up in two well-known sayings of our father: ‘Strive to make yourself loved’ and ‘It is not enough to love...’. Between the two they encapsulate the precious heritage left us by Don Bosco, which is ‘a spiritual and educational experience’ (C 20). Following the Preventive System is the royal road towards the fruitful integration of the Salesian vocation, formation and mission.

The driving force of this integration is pastoral charity, which is the inner principle, the energy that animates and guides the educational, pastoral and spiritual life of the Salesian in his journey of configuration to Christ.

3.1 FORMATION – A RELATIONAL REALITY

Vocation and formation, call and response

58. Our life is rooted and founded in the Blessed Trinity. In this is love, that God has first loved us (1 Jn 4:10). From this prevenient love flow all the vocations in the Church, including our own Salesian consecrated vocation (VC 14).

Formation should therefore have a profound effect on individuals, so that their every attitude and action, at important moments as well as in the ordinary events of life, will show that they belong completely and joyfully to God (VC 65).

Vocation and formation are profoundly connected. If the consecrated vocation is ‘*a living memorial of Jesus’ way of living and acting*’ (VC 22), formation consists in ongoing conformation and configuration to Christ (VC 65). The *goal* of offering oneself to God in religious consecration is not just any ideal of perfection whatsoever, nor even availability for a particular work, but *the formation of the inner attitudes of the Son in the heart of the consecrated person*, sharing his total self-gift to the Father and to his brothers and sisters.

Formation conceived in this way cannot be a merely human action; it has to be divine. ‘God the Father, through the unceasing gift of Christ and the Spirit, is the educator par excellence of those who consecrate themselves to him’, fashioning the inner attitudes of the Son in the hearts of young men and women (VC 66).

But the divine fashioning is not something that happens without our free response and ongoing cooperation. Formation is the joyful acceptance of the gift of one’s vocation and its actualization at every moment and in every situation.

Our identity nests in a network of relationships

59. Like all vocations in the Church, our identity as consecrated persons following the way of Don Bosco has a fundamentally relational dimension. Our identity and mission cannot be defined except through the rich network of relationships arising from the Blessed Trinity. This means that education and formation are processes that are profoundly synodal. If we fail to nurture deep relationships rooted in the truth of the triune God, we cannot grow in our identity as consecrated Salesians, with all the consequences for the work of education and formation.

Formation takes place in a network of relationships

60. If our identity is relational, formation cannot but be relational and synodal.

The relationship between a formator and a person in formation, far from being a one-way, top-down affair, is *reciprocal* even if asymmetrical. A good formator

recognizes and accepts this reality, while not renouncing his responsibility towards the one in formation and towards the Congregation, the Church, and the many young people and others who will be affected by the quality of our life.

A good formator also recognizes his own *fragility*. The task of growing in authenticity is ongoing and never finished.

Further, all one-to-one relationships in formation always presuppose a network of relationships in the local religious community, the EPC, the province, **with other members and Groups of the Salesian Family**, and so on. Personal formative accompaniment takes place within the context of community accompaniment in which each one contributes to the growth of the other (FD 95–97).

Above all, formators are always aware that they share in the divine action. God is the formator par excellence, ‘but in this work he makes use of human instruments, placing more mature brothers and sisters at the side of those whom he calls’ (VC 66).

The individual himself is ‘a necessary and irreplaceable agent in his own formation’ (PDV 69). The response to God’s call is made by the individual who is called, and no one can replace him in that response. Like God, the formator learns to respect the freedom of those entrusted to his care.

Accompaniment

61. Awareness of the mystery of grace and freedom illuminates the helping relationships involved in formation processes. The mysterious encounter of two freedoms, divine and human, calls for great openness and docility, in those with roles of guidance no less than in those who seek support for their journey.

The risen Christ walking with his two disciples on the way to Emmaus stands before us as a shining and inspiring example of the way God deals with us (Lk 24:13–35). Jesus does not wait for them to approach him (Lk 24:15); he takes an interest in their affairs and listens to them attentively (24:17); he does not silence or dismiss them (24:19); he allows himself to be questioned, but he also knows how to ask questions and explain patiently

(24:25-27); he respects their journey without imposing his own (24:28); he is available, willing to stop and share with them (24:29-30); he is able to open their eyes and make their hearts burn (24:31-32); and finally, he lets them take the initiative for a new journey when they freely choose to return to Jerusalem and recount what they have experienced (24:33-35).

3.2 THE PREVENTIVE SYSTEM, GUIDING PRINCIPLE OF FORMATION

Salesian life resulted from and took shape with the Preventive System

62. ‘The Preventive System must be rediscovered more and more as the principal inspiration and profound soul of our system of formation’ (GC28 23). Starting afresh from the Preventive System – summed up in the phrase ‘reason, religion and loving kindness’ – is not so much a strategy as a process of spiritual renewal. It is going back to our charismatic roots, especially to that most inspiring testament that Don Bosco left us in the letter from Rome of May 1884.

Acknowledging the Preventive System as the guiding principle of formation is also a choice for the mission, because it is only the lived experience of the educative relationship and Salesian spirituality, especially during the initial stages of our journey, that enables us to gradually become educators and pastors after the heart of Don Bosco.

A pedagogy of grace and freedom

63. The Preventive System is a pedagogy of personal freedom that relies on the power of interpersonal relationships. Even better, it is a pedagogy of grace and freedom.

Grace is love calling to love, and the response to grace has to be free, otherwise it cannot be a loving response. Love presupposes freedom. Not even the most powerful grace takes away our freedom.¹ A forced love would not be love at all.

*The logic of love is always the logic of freedom, and Joseph knew how to love with extraordinary freedom. He never made himself the centre of things. He did not think of himself, but focused instead on the lives of Mary and Jesus (Francis, *Patris Corde* 7).*

Francis de Sales intuited well the pedagogical implications of the dynamic of grace and freedom. To Jane Frances de Chantal he wrote in capital letters: DO ALL THROUGH LOVE, NOTHING THROUGH CONSTRAINT.²

With profound respect for the person and their freedom, he never wished to impose his own will but preferred to motivate his directees in such a way that they would arrive at and take the necessary decisions themselves. In this he was imitating God himself.³ 'God himself loved humanity with a chaste love; he left us free even to go astray and set ourselves against him' (Francis, *Patris Corde*, 7).

The dynamic of freedom

64. Formation involves, therefore, a dynamic of freedom. If the aim were only to prepare for a certain type of apostolate or for a certain lifestyle, or to inculcate certain virtuous qualities in view of the ministry, the pedagogical methodology could follow some other path. But if the heart has to be formed so that the young person might have the attitudes of the Son and discover the beauty of the *sequela*, there cannot exist any other way than that of freedom (VC 66).

Since formation is a pedagogy of grace, it can never be first and foremost a matter of rules and standards. Undoubtedly these are necessary, because they safeguard against errors and point to well-established paths, but they do not suffice alone to create the conditions for an authentic experience of formation. We must therefore be careful not to give mainly normative solutions to a challenge that is primarily charismatic and generative (GC28 23).

Where freedom is diminished or even replaced by behaviours that are only external and formal, formation is emptied from within of its meaning and value. Only what is freely assumed becomes conviction and reaches the level of motivation, where the *right intention* emerges – the right intention that is the clear and decisive will to offer oneself entirely to the Lord, to belong to him and serve him in one's neighbour in the Salesian vocation.

The heart cannot be constrained, but it can be attracted. Those in charge of formation will 'above all... disclose the beauty of following Christ and the value of the charism by which this is accomplished' (VC 66; see EG 167). It is by the beauty of their own lives that formators radiate their influence and communicate the joy of the gospel (EG 15, 167). This is the dynamic of example and witness. As the young Don Bosco learnt at the school of Fr Cafasso, fire is lit by fire.⁴

Pedagogical indications

65. Formators must be convinced that formation involves a shift from external conformity to an accompaniment that recognizes the dynamic of grace and freedom. 'The challenge is to strengthen the "inner man", that is, the attitude of continuous conversion, avoiding a sterile formality that does not help one mature' (GC29 31).

This involves shifting from a top-down style that is quick to judge and relies heavily on control and rules, to a synodal style that involves much listening, dialogue, patience and participatory decision-making (GC28 23; GC29 39g). In this synodality, 'the valuable help of charismatic shared responsibility offered by the members of our Family' (AGC 446 33) can be helpful and inspiring, especially where a fruitful interaction of shared formation can be established.

The way to the heart is through authenticity, transparency, listening, friendly presence. Vocational values are best passed on through a genuine family spirit and through the active involvement of younger confreres, enabling them to take responsibility for formative choices.

Formation is essentially permanent, and the first task

of every rector is the animation of the community: he is its formator (C 55).

The Preventive System fosters a style of leadership where trust and confidence are fundamental in the relationship between educator and young people, and equally between confreres within the Salesian community. The role of guidance and animation of those entrusted with a 'service of authority' is by no means diminished. On the contrary: when such role and service is lived according to the Salesian spirit it acquires a greater authoritativeness, much more effective than what can be achieved only by recourse to 'cold rules' (Letter from Rome 1884).

It is interesting to find the same appeal to 'authoritativeness' in the final document of the Synod on young people, the faith and vocational discernment: 'To undertake a true journey of growth, young people need authoritative adults. In its etymological meaning, *auctoritas* indicates the capacity to promote growth; it does not express the idea of a directive power, but of a real generative force. (FD 71).' (AnGC 40)

3.3 THE VALDOCCO OPTION: FORMATION IN A SHARED MISSION

Formation in mission

66. The Valdocco option indicates formation lived in shared mission, according to the style of the first Oratory: an experience typical of a Church that goes forth, in which the mission itself becomes a place of formation (FSDB 46). Formation, therefore, is neither separate from nor prior to mission. Vocation and formation are correlative: just as vocation is not generic, so too formation cannot be generic, but must be oriented toward the mission and within the mission.

'Our apostolic consecration' and 'the grace of unity' do, in fact, imply that formation takes place in mission. The love of God that we call 'pastoral charity' overflows into apostolic activity, and the lives and faces of our youth enter our prayer and our lives.

'Properly understood, [formation in mission] indicates that the mission entrusted to us "sets the tenor" (C 3.) for the entire formation programme, which is aimed at

forming an educator and pastor of young people, and that in our encounters with young people we are called to learn in a concrete way the exercise of pastoral charity and the grace of unity that allows us to encounter God in them and through them. Formation in mission is therefore an element that characterises the entire formation path, not just the initial phase. It is not enough to be among young people with kindness and a philanthropic disposition, but to contemplate the presence of Christ acting in them and among them' (GC29 36).

Pastoral accompaniment⁵

67. The formation that takes place in direct contact with the young is enhanced by pastoral accompaniment. We grow as pastors and educators when we '[learn] by experience the meaning of the Salesian vocation' (C 98). We become attentive to what God is doing in the lives of the young and in our own lives, and we respond with wonder, praise, thanks, petition and intercession (C 95). Going beyond the externals, we touch the inner resources from which we live, accessing the level of our convictions, attitudes and motivations. In the openness of personal sharing, motivations, conflicts, illusions and disappointments and knowledge of one's needs come to light. An effort is made to process our reactions, understand what God is telling us and renew our response (C 119; GC29 39h).

Pastoral accompaniment is therefore crucial to formation in mission (VC 67; GC29 31). It is what Cafasso did with Don Bosco and his priest companions in the *Convitto Ecclesiastico*.

Assimilation of the Salesian model of youth ministry by means of gradual study of the *Frame of Reference* is presupposed.

Pastoral accompaniment is usually done in the friendly talk with the rector (C 70), an *eminently formative dialogue*, and during spiritual accompaniment, but also during moments of community discernment. The local pastoral coordinator, in dialogue with the provincial delegates for youth ministry and formation, would do well to engage in group pastoral accompaniment. The lay members of the animating nucleus of the EPC, *and*

in particular, those belonging to the Salesian Family, also have their own important contribution.

Pastoral accompaniment must obviously become a central feature of the experience of *practical training*. This presupposes familiarity with the processes of pastoral discernment and some preparation for pastoral accompaniment on the part of the rectors and communities concerned.

Option for young people most in need

Our fidelity to young people most in need

68. The option for young people who are most in need is an integral part of the Valdocco option and was one of the strongest calls for conversion issued by Pope Francis during GC28 (GC28 58).

Going out to poor young people is not merely an individual option but a community choice that is as challenging as it is transforming: it demands community discernment, spiritual depth, cultural preparation, willingness to work together, and flexibility in rethinking our lifestyle and our works. Living contact with poor young people is a permanent source of formation for Salesian communities.⁶

We could keep in mind three guidelines for reinforcing the option for young people most in need: (1) the conviction about the infinite dignity of each person; (2) fidelity to presence among the poorest, which itself becomes a source of charismatic renewal for the EPCs; and (3) sustained fidelity over time, so that moments of immersion and contact with situations of youth poverty do not remain isolated experiences during initial formation but become truly life-transforming.

The Lord made clear to Don Bosco that he was to direct his mission first and foremost to the young, especially to those who are poorer. We are called to the same mission and are aware of its supreme importance: young people are at the age when they must make basic life-choices which affect the future of society and of the Church. With Don Bosco we reaffirm our preference for the young who are “poor, abandoned and in danger”, those who have greater need of love and evangelization, and we work especially in areas of greatest poverty (C 26).

Safeguarding

69. Appendix 11 of this *Ratio* deals with the theme of safeguarding, offering more detailed indications about the promotion, prevention and protection to those in the early stages of formation, formators and all Salesians.⁷

The missionary dimension

70. Don Bosco’s choice to work for young people on the margins of society was his missionary option. Like him, we ourselves are changed and formed through our contact with young people in need.

Our founder’s missionary heart expanded to embrace young people on all the continents. There are, in fact, no limits in space and time to the promise of giving oneself to one’s last breath for the young who are poor. Being there for the young across all ethnic and religious affiliations is a missionary responsibility of great weight before Church and world.

This kind of missionary openness is an essential part of our charismatic identity (AGC 419, 22) and therefore a clear criterion for vocational discernment. Those who are not willing to embrace this horizon cannot be part of the Salesian Family.

Formed in mission within the EPC

An ongoing sharing of gifts

71. Given that we were born as a communion of vocations and sharing of gifts, we are not only formed in mission, but in a mission that is shared (cf. *Charter*, 10). We need, therefore, a formation that is shared. 'Formation in the journey of "communion and sharing in the mission and spirit of Don Bosco" (GC24) is not an optional extra but the beating heart of a shared mission that seeks to be authentic and lasting' (GC29 44).

The purpose of this formation is not only the acquisition of theoretical knowledge, but the promotion of skills of openness and encounter, of sharing and collaboration, of reflection and discernment in common, and of theological reading of concrete experiences.⁸

'It should also be honestly noted that sometimes the confreres themselves are not adequately prepared for collaboration with the laity, having not received the necessary tools during initial formation for them to value this essential aspect of contemporary mission. Shared formation must go beyond programmes: it is a journey of shared discipleship that requires a deep personal commitment on the part of both Salesians and lay people' (GC29 34).

Shared formation in mission involves a synodal style that favours *participation* in order to create *communion* in view of a common *mission*.⁹ When shared responsibility and effective participation are accompanied by sharing and learning from experience, a formative path is opened up, and it becomes possible to prevent the establishment of attitudes that contradict Salesian identity and mission. Those responsible for formation will be particularly attentive to manifestations of spiritual worldliness and clericalism.¹⁰

The principal place of shared formation is the EPC. The EPC, which includes Salesians, lay people and sometimes members of other groups of the Salesian Family, is the context that can best foster the formation in shared mission of those in initial formation.

It is important to guarantee the spiritual quality,

educational competence and pastoral passion of the animating nucleus, which is the key to the good functioning of the EPC. Any change in the quality of this nucleus brings about change in the EPC as a whole, and eventually in the territory and in the local Church.

Formation takes place first and foremost in daily life (GC24 43). Learning from experience and community discernment, which the EPC experiences internally, are a natural place for shared formation.

Young people play a critical role in such formation. They make it necessary to face new arenas such as the digital world, stimulate us to ground ourselves better in the Salesian charism and to respond in ways that are ever new and creative.

The EPC is the ideal context for fostering formation in shared mission, especially for those in initial formation, who are introduced to experiences of collaboration with the laity 'both at a directly practical level and in the process of the elaboration of the SEPP' (GC24 53). The experience of working with and under the direction of the laity, and involvement in the Council of the EPC, are valuable moments of formation, especially when accompanied by the members of the animating core (GC28 43). Rectors will take special care to involve Salesians in initial formation, especially practical trainees, in the ordinary and extraordinary moments of shared formation.

The Salesian community within the EPC

72. Charismatic communion among vocations does not imply a levelling or neglect of specific identities. The Salesian community is called to be the charismatic point of reference. Our processes of initial and lifelong formation must, therefore, prepare us for our animating role as guardians of the charism. This animation must be carried out in communion and mutual formative support with those who experience 'a profound sharing of Salesian spirituality (those who, by personal vocation, are part of the animating nucleus of the EPC or the Salesian Family)' (GC29 43). We must not forget the invitation that GC29 addressed to the provinces to find new ways and new forms not only to preserve but also to help grow the

charism in the contexts in which we find ourselves today, experimenting with ‘new forms of community with the Salesian Family, families, and young people’ (GC29 69f). Without this courage and spirit of initiative of the Salesians who preceded us, we would not have the Salesian Family of today nor the wealth of ways in which the Salesian vocation and mission are alive in the world.

3.4 Formation is lifelong

Formation is lifelong in any walk of life

73. The reality to which ongoing formation refers is as old as humanity itself, even though it has only recently become a focus of reflection. Human beings are not somehow ‘already constituted’; they constitute themselves through their concrete life experiences, projects and choices – always, of course, in interaction with other human beings within concrete geographical, social, cultural and historical contexts.

As far as experience is concerned, we can distinguish between the *happening* as such and its *impact* upon the person. In this sense we can talk about ‘experiences’ on the one hand and ‘experience’ on the other, meaning what we learn from the experiences. Turning life into a formative space does not consist merely in ‘experiencing’ many things but rather in ‘becoming experienced’ or learning from what one has gone through.

Formation understood as lifelong does not, therefore, refer to a set of activities organized by an institution for the updating or qualification of its members. Much less does it refer to a phase that begins after initial formation. It is not a natural continuation of initial formation but, rather, the habitual form of living out our vocation. It is a process that lasts all our life (C 98) until the hour comes when it is brought ‘to its highest fulfilment’ (C 54).

‘[By] ongoing formation, we mean an itinerary of the whole of life, both personal and community, “which must lead to configuration to the Lord Jesus and the assimilation of His feelings in His total oblation to the Father” (VDq 13). It is therefore a process of continuous conversion of the heart, “an intrinsic requirement of

religious consecration” (VC 69), and the need for creative fidelity to one’s own vocation. Ongoing formation is the humus of initial formation’ (*Cor Orans*, CICLSAL, LEV, Vatican City 2018, 231).

Vocation, mission, formation

74. Lifelong formation is the mother-idea and organizing principle of all that our Constitutions have to say on formation.

The starting point is always the *call*. Formation is, first of all, response to a *call*: ‘Jesus called his Apostles to be with him’ (C 96).

Next, formation is our *response* to the call of God: ‘We respond to this call by committing ourselves to an adequate ongoing formation, for which the Lord daily gives us his grace’ (C 96).

Our call is *to follow Jesus in a particular way* – as consecrated persons in the spirit of Don Bosco (C 96).

The Lord calls *in order to send*. The mission is the way of living the election, and the formation of the Salesian is oriented and motivated by mission (C 97). The goal is to show God and to see God through those to whom he is sent; the journey is the formation process. We do not have to jump out of life in order to be formed; the point is to get into it properly, to make the shift from simply living our lives to learning from experience. In this way we will live in a ‘permanent state of mission’ that is also a permanent state of formation (EG 25; GC27 74.1).

Formation is not, therefore, a phase or a part of Salesian life, but rather a dimension that embraces the whole of life in such a way that prayer, fraternal life, apostolic commitment and the living out of the evangelical counsels all become formative, a response to the Lord who calls us every day and always (VC 65).

Initial formation gets its identity from formation understood as lifelong, but has its own peculiar characteristics. Its aim is *learning how to learn*. Initial formation ‘cannot be content with forming persons to be docile and in accordance with the sound practices and customs of a group. Rather, it must render a young consecrated person to be truly teachable and formable

[*docibilis*]. This means forming a heart that is free to learn from the history of day-to-day living throughout one's life according to the manner of Christ by placing oneself at everyone's service' (NW 35d). When this learning continues in the rest of life, life becomes formation, an ongoing response to the Lord who never ceases to call and never ceases to love.

Learning from experience

75. Formation is a process that lasts all our lives, keeps pace with our maturing in other ways, and consists of learning from experience the meaning of the Salesian vocation.

When mission is understood as revelation of God's love, and when formation is understood as response, the excitement of being Salesian never ends, for even in old age the dialogue of love between God and us continues, and the Salesian becomes, more clearly than ever, sign and bearer of his love.

We cannot forget that formation and discipleship also mean asceticism. The Salesian icon of the Pergola of roses dreamt by Don Bosco expresses this very well.

All this takes place in a context of faith lived within the Salesian charism: 'Enlightened by the person of Christ and by his gospel, lived according to Don Bosco's spirit' (C 98).

Through this kind of process, the Salesian gradually becomes a pastor and educator of the young.

Discernment as a permanent attitude

76. C 119 reformulates the 'formation experience' in terms of discernment: 'Living in the midst of the young and in constant contact with low-income surroundings, the Salesian tries to discern the voice of the Spirit in the events of each day, and so acquires the ability to learn from life.'

Responding to the will of God that we discern in this way, our ordinary activities become 'effective means of formation'. And when we read our lives in faith, no experience is irrelevant or useless: '[The Salesian] feels it his task to make the best formative use of any situation, and to see it as a favourable opportunity for growing in his vocation' (C 119).

Such discernment, when habitual, is the state of formation as lifelong. With Francis de Sales, we can call it *devotion*: the ability to find God in everything and to live life with freshness and joy.

Community and personal discernment

77. The relationship between confrere and community is a fundamental dynamic of mission and formation, and community discernment is one of its most mature expressions, given that religious are ‘a communion of consecrated persons who profess to seek together and carry out God’s will’ (FT 1).

The postconciliar conception of consecrated life ‘has passed from the centrality of the role of authority to the centrality of fraternal dynamics’ (NW 41). The ‘fraternal dynamics’ in question – which is another way of speaking about synodality – are embodied in an exemplary way in the practice of community discernment. ‘Discernment is one of the peak moments in a consecrated community where the centrality of God, that ultimate end of everyone’s search, as well as the responsibility and the contribution of each one in the journey of all towards the Truth, stand out with particular clarity’ (FT 20e).

The personal attitude of discernment directs the decisions of ordinary life and pastoral options, both personal and communitarian. Every confrere and every community is responsible for this constant openness to discernment. The community helps the confrere give unity to his life ‘by the practice of evangelical discernment as an attitude of searching for the will of God through community dialogue and coherent decisional and executive processes’ (GC25 32).

Discernment calls for certain fundamental dispositions and capacities: a faith vision of the events and circumstances of life, openness to the conversion required for discernment, ability to listen and dialogue, capacity for personal and spiritual communication.

Community discernment includes also *pastoral discernment*, which becomes particularly important and relevant in the context of the EPC (C 44).

Learning to be in formation all our lives

78. Being in formation all our lives is something we have to *learn* (C 119), and this learning takes place in a special way in initial formation.

If Salesian life is truly to become a formative space, we must try ‘to grow in our human qualities, to conform ourselves more closely to Christ, and to renew our fidelity to Don Bosco, so that we can respond to the ever new demands arising from the situation of the young and the poor’ (C 118).

The process of discernment is ‘*enlightened* by the person of Christ and by his gospel, lived according to Don Bosco’s spirit’ (C 98). The Word gives us light and strength (C 87), and the Constitutions are our book of life (C 196).

As far as initial formation is concerned, *quality* must prevail over quantity: the point is to learn from experience rather than to merely have many experiences.

We learn to *attend* to our experiences – to dwell before the mystery of life, the beauty of nature, the mystery of the other, whether it is a young person or a confrere or one who shares the mission with us. We need the ‘pastoral look’ and ‘serene attentiveness’ (EG 51; LS 225–226).

Attending to our experiences, we *learn from them* – even when they are negative.

Learning to discern calls for *accompaniment*: there is no learning without a master, without an *expert*, one who is ‘experienced.’

This learning always takes place in the network of relationships that is the *community* – most especially the religious community and the EPC.

We gladly employ the ordinary moments of formation laid down by the Constitutions and Regulations: meditation, listening to the Word, personal and community prayer, the Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation, Marian devotion, the monthly recollection, the friendly talk with the rector, personal spiritual accompaniment, faith sharing, personal reading, the personal plan of life and the community day, together with all the initiatives promoted by the province, the region, the Church and society (GC29 33).

3.5 MARY, MOTHER AND TEACHER

79. Every aspect of formation to Salesian consecrated life can be referred to Mary, ‘the human being who has responded better than any other to God’s call’ (PDV 82). She is our mother and teacher, example and protector of all consecrated life.

Don Bosco felt Mary constantly at his side as a living motherly presence and a powerful helper. She was his mother, the mother of his boys, the mother of the Oratory. She was the helper of the Church and of all Christians in their pilgrimage towards the Lord.

Through her motherly intervention the Holy Spirit raised up Don Bosco and formed in him the heart of a father and teacher (C 1). With her help, the Salesian also gradually becomes a pastor and educator of the young (C 98).

As we respond daily to our vocation, we ‘contemplate and imitate’ Mary’s own response to what God was doing in her life.

We see her *faith* in her welcoming of the Word and pondering it in her heart. In the *Magnificat* that we sing every day, we are moved by her *joy* at the wonders wrought by the Father. As she taught Jesus, we ask her to teach us to walk always before the luminous cloud of the Father’s will.

We see her *concern for the needy* at the Visitation and at the marriage feast at Cana, a concern that is magnified in a thousand ways in the life of her Son. We accept her as the model of prayer and of pastoral charity. We recognize her as the *teacher of wisdom and guide of our Family* and of the vast movement of people who in different ways work for the salvation of the young. We rejoice that she has been given to us as a mother in the journey of our young people to Christ. We ask her to give us courage in the service of our brothers and sisters, that we might become genuine pastors and educators of the young in the lay or priestly state that we have embraced. We are aware that she ‘leads us to the fullness of our offering to the Lord’ (C 92), giving us a body and a heart like Jesus and teaching us to love as she taught Don Bosco.

We see her *fidelity at the foot of the cross* as she says

her Yes to the Father and makes the sacrifice of Jesus her own. Like her we want to become a complete Yes to the Father who consecrates and sends us.

She is our Mother and Teacher above all because she steers us to the living Christ who is at the centre of our formation. Every morning we entrust ourselves to her, place ourselves under her motherly protection and ask that we might serve God 'with fidelity and generosity until death.'

'The Virgin Mary... was for John the teacher who accompanied him on his vocational journey. Under her guidance he learned to obey the Lord with a total "Here I am". We too, following her example, "entrust ourselves to her, the lowly servant in whom the Lord has done great things, that we may become witnesses to the young of her Son's boundless love" (C 8). Only in this way will we achieve an authentic inner synthesis and true charismatic identification' (GC29 36).

3.6 PRACTICAL GUIDELINES

80. *The **Preventive System**, which is a style of relationships that relies on the resources of the heart, is the guiding principle of our formation. It calls for a participatory approach and makes sure that confreres, beginning from those in the initial phases, are actively involved in their own formation.*

81. *'**Formation in mission**' is greatly enhanced by assimilation of the Salesian model of youth ministry, and personal and group pastoral accompaniment. The friendly talk with the rector and personal spiritual accompaniment are opportunities to examine how the mission permeates prayer, the practice of the counsels and fraternal life in community.*

Provincials and curatoriums will take care to prepare rectors and formators for formative, spiritual and pastoral accompaniment.

82. *Care is taken to ensure that confreres in initial formation have adequate contact with poor young people. Pastoral accompaniment is especially attentive to the aspect of growth in the **commitment to poor young people**.*

83. *Daily discernment as individuals and communities is the substance of **formation as lifelong**. This finds expression also in the desire to take advantage of opportunities for theological, pastoral and professional updating.*

84. *The provincial formation delegate collaborates with the youth ministry delegate and the delegate for the Salesian Family, to ensure moments of shared formation during the initial phases of formation (FSDB 858, 864).*

85. *The EPC is the principal place of **shared formation** and the preferred setting for apostolic experiences during initial formation. Rectors will take care to involve Salesians in initial formation, especially during the practical training phase, in ordinary and extraordinary moments of shared formation.*

3. Notes

¹ *Oeuvres de saint François de Sales* (Annecy, 1892–1932) IV 126–127.

² See the Strenna for 2022 in the fourth centenary of the death of St Francis de Sales: Á. FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME, “Do all through love, nothing through constraint” (Saint Francis de Sales), AGC 437 3–48.

³ E. ALBURQUERQUE FRUTOS, ‘Saint Francis de Sales as Spiritual Director’, SA 19.

⁴ G. CAFASSO, *Esercizi spirituali al clero, I: Meditazioni*, Cantalupa, 2003, 641–642.

⁵ See below, Appendix 7.

⁶ GC29 22: ‘We recognise how working with the poor renews the community, brings us closer to God, and strengthens fraternal life.’

⁷ GC29 resolved that every province set up a commission for the protection and safeguarding of minors and vulnerable adults (resolution 22).

⁸ XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission. Final document” (2024) 143.

⁹ ‘Synodality is... a “style” of life and action (*modus vivendi et operandi*) that requires conversion in relationships, implementation of processes and renewal of structures’ (GC29 47).

¹⁰ Cf. EG 93–97; FRANCIS, ‘Letter of the Holy Father to the Priests of the Diocese of Rome’, 7 August 2023; and ChV 98, 102.



4 'And all of us ... are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord the Spirit.'
(2 Cor 3:18)

Dimensions of the journey

Lectio

Contemplating Christ transforms human beings and makes them an image of his glory through the power of the Spirit. In 2 Cor 3:18, Saint Paul explains that, unlike in the Old Testament where only Moses saw the glory of God, this privilege is now granted to all of us, to all believers who, by contemplating the glory of the Lord as if in a mirror, are gradually transformed into that same image, from glory to glory, by the power of the Spirit of the Lord. Here the Spirit offers freedom and continuous transformation through the contemplation of Jesus Christ in order to acquire even greater glory.

This means that believers now experience a transformation into the image of Christ's glory through contemplation. With their eyes fixed on Jesus Christ, focusing on his person and work through faith, believers see the glory of God revealed in them. Thus, they are compared to mirrors that reflect the image of what they contemplate. By contemplating the glory of the Lord, they reflect it. This contemplation is done by faith, through the Word and the Spirit, taking on greater glory. When our being is fixed on the glorious Christ, we are transformed into the very image of his glory. This is the process of sanctification, transfiguration. It is a gradual sanctification, a profound inner change, a radical metamorphosis, becoming more and more like the glory we contemplate. This process of transformation is continuous, gradual and endless. For

Saint Paul, when we are anchored in Jesus Christ, we become like him, moving from a state of glory to a state of greater glory, radiating his image and character more and more in our daily lives.

This change, this transformation, this transfiguration, is not only a human effort but a divine work accomplished by the Holy Spirit, who dwells in us and makes this transformation possible. Saint Paul describes here the dynamic process by which believers, freed by the Spirit, are continually shaped and transformed to resemble Jesus Christ, contemplating his glory in order to reflect that same glory in their lives. All of us, in order to achieve this change, this greater glory, must be docile to the action of the Spirit of the Lord who acts within us. It is the Spirit who transforms us, it is the Spirit who transfigures us, when we allow him to act within us. Our docility to his action makes us become the same image of Christ, an image of greater glory, a resplendent glory; the same as that of Jesus Christ. Such is the purpose of our being rooted in Christ: to be transformed, to become his image and to radiate that image.

Meditatio

The Salesian formation process is a process of transformation. It is a process of being transformed, leaving behind the old self to become a new person who reflects the image of Christ imprinted in us by the action of the Holy Spirit. This transformation takes place in all dimensions of formation, whether human and fraternal, spiritual and intellectual, educational and pastoral, or charismatic. This is the challenge of Saint Paul in this passage from 2 Corinthians 3:18. For Saint Paul, all of us, that is, all Salesians, but especially those in formation, when we fix our gaze on the person of Christ, when we contemplate him in true adoration, have his image imprinted in us, and the power of the Holy Spirit transforms us into the very image of Christ.

Through this, we become *Christ-like* persons, in other words, other Christs. The whole of Salesian formation consists in this transformation. For by contemplating the glory of Christ, the Holy Spirit transfigures our nature, transforms his glory which is in us to make us in the same image of a greater glory, that of Christ. This is what the whole journey of formation, the whole process of our formative growth to maturity, leads to. It is a question of a profound and radical inner transformation. A spiritual and visible metamorphosis that takes concrete form in a change of life. It is a gradual, continuous and never-ending process that takes place in all dimensions of the life of the Salesian in formation (C. 98).

This transformation is not the result of our own merit. It is the work of the Holy Spirit. Those being formed must allow themselves to be transformed into ever greater glory, which comes from the action of the Holy Spirit. This requires docility to the Spirit (C. 2), since it is the Spirit who acts in the heart of the Salesian, to change him so that he may finally be identified with Jesus in his whole life. Don Bosco rightly used *the image of the handkerchief in his hand* when he invited young people to be docile in order to allow themselves to be formed and transformed. In the same way, the invitation extended to all is to have that inner flexibility to allow oneself to be transfigured by the action of the Spirit of God. The power of the Holy Spirit imprints in every Salesian the image we contemplate, and this same Spirit enables us to radiate and make visible what we contemplate in faith. Salesian formation pursues this interior and exterior change in order to be a reflection of the glory of Christ that is in us, in the eyes of the world and in the eyes of young people, our privileged recipients (C. 26).

Paul-Eric Kibamba Kabila, AFC

4. Dimensions of the journey

86. Formation unfolds in a constant dialogue of call and response; it is a way that leads ‘to complete fulfilment in Christ’ (C 22).

The various dimensions in which our vocational growth takes place are the human and fraternal, the spiritual, the intellectual, the educative and pastoral, and the charismatic. The dimension of the charism runs through and unites the others in a process of constant growth that reinforces and gives depth to our apostolic consecration¹ and leads us towards that ‘splendid blending of nature and grace’ that we see so clearly in Don Bosco (C 21).

The dimensions are not exclusive to one stage or moment of life but form part of the entire formation journey.

4.1 Human and fraternal dimension

87. Human maturity is essential for Salesians who are called to be friends, brothers and fathers of the young². Our vocation calls for a personality that can love and make itself loved in an affectionate, balanced and open way. In this we draw inspiration from Don Bosco, ‘deeply human, rich in the qualities of his people’ (C 21).

To speak about the *human and fraternal* dimension of formation is to acknowledge that we are always persons in community, and that no human growth is possible except in interaction with other human beings within the context of society, tradition and history.

In one sense, the human and fraternal dimension is the basis of all formation (PDV 43). The divine call engages and involves concrete human beings in their historical, cultural and social context. Grace does not replace nature; it presupposes, purifies and perfects it, leading it to ‘the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ’ (Eph 4:13).

Health and work

88. One of the aspects of human maturity is learning to accept one's body with its needs. Feeling at ease in one's own skin is about taking care of one's health, knowing that physical wellness is indispensable to one's overall balance, relationships and work.

The Salesian style of life and activity is, therefore, usually associated with good health and physical resistance, together with a great capacity for work. The Constitutions remind us that 'unremitting and self-sacrificing work is a characteristic left us by Don Bosco' (C 78). Our father was an admirable example of a life dedicated to work, and he wanted the members of the Salesian Society to be known for their spirit of enterprise and industry. Valdocco became a school of work where a pedagogy of duty was developed, one that did not shrink from fatigue but became a path of asceticism and a concrete expression of spirituality (GC24 98).

It is part of our way of life to take good care of our health, observe the common rules of hygiene, take sufficient nourishment and set aside enough time for rest and for simple and healthy relaxation. As long as age and physical conditions allow it, the Salesian keeps fit, also making use of physical exercise and games in the company of young people. He loves daily work, both manual and intellectual, carrying it out 'with tireless energy, taking care to do everything with simplicity and moderation' (C 18). While being orderly and self-sacrificing, he avoids the kind of overload that leads to tension and stress.

For its part the community ensures everything that makes for good physical balance.

Psychological balance

What is psychological balance

89. The quality of our religious life and the efficacy of our apostolate calls for adequate psychological balance.

Psychological balance is harmony between the different components of the personality, including needs,

emotions, thoughts and behaviour. It is a condition of mental well-being in which the individual is able to cope with the challenges of life in a healthy and effective manner. It includes feeling good about oneself and benevolent towards others, inner freedom, the ability to recognize and name one's feelings, empathize with others and accurately interpret the feeling component in words and behaviour. It involves the ability to learn from experience and face the challenges of life with proactive tension rather than excessive anxiety, the capacity to establish significant and lasting emotional relationships, openness and sensitivity towards others, the acceptance of diversity, the ability to actively collaborate for the common good and the presence of significant transcendent values.

Achieving psychological balance

90. Factors that can contribute to maintaining psychological balance are: a good relationship with oneself, knowing one's needs, values and goals, and feeling comfortable with oneself; good relationships with others; healthy diet, regular physical activity and adequate rest; ability to handle success and failure; a progressive freedom from rigid positions and inhibitions; a healthy care for oneself that overflows into care for others.

Psychological balance in the life we embrace as Salesians is closely related to life in the Spirit. Each day is illuminated by the belief that God wants the good of everyone and that he welcomes with open arms those who entrust themselves into his hands. The awareness of one's limits goes hand in hand with the conviction that the risen Christ manifests his glory also through our wounds and weaknesses.

One who lives in this way learns to appreciate his community and the support of his confreres. He is an active member of the community, establishes meaningful relationships both within and outside, is open to sharing also on a spiritual level, and overcomes the risks of isolation and lack of communication.

For its part the community offers whatever help is necessary, including the help of specialists, to accompany confreres in their self-development and the achievement

of good psychological balance (see FSDB 723–727).

Particular care and even specialized help should be offered to those with problems related to difficulties in relationships, sexual orientation, self-esteem, discomfort with authority, difficulties in study or at work, or forms of internet addiction, including pornography.

Sexual and affective maturity

Our apostolic consecration calls for affective maturity⁴

91. To live the Salesian vocation in a fraternal community and in an educative and pastoral relationship calls for sexual and affective maturity, which is not unrelated to the loving kindness and the family spirit of our charism³.

The Salesian is inspired by Don Bosco whose love was that of ‘a father, brother and friend, able to draw out friendship in return’ (C 15).

Formation to sexual and affective maturity

92. Education to love and in love is one of the priorities of human, Christian and Salesian formation (GC23 192–202).

Salesian educators and pastors are passionate people who know how to love because we experience what it means to be loved by God and by others. Our model is God himself and his passionate love for his people.⁵ The Salesian is called to reach young people not only in general but in their individuality. At the same time, he tries to be present to them with affection and with respect for their rightful autonomy. He strives to make himself loved without falling into sentimentalism or paternalism.

Formation to sexual and affective maturity is a lifelong concern and touches the sphere of the self, others and God. It involves feeling comfortable with one’s own body, an adequate understanding of sexuality and its languages, awareness of sexual orientation and gender identity, ability to manage fantasies, cultivation of ascetical discipline and freedom from undue shame or guilt.

It involves openness to others, the ability to communicate and enter into healthy and meaningful

relationships, mutual respect, non-possessiveness, and responsibility for one's actions and respect for boundaries.

Honesty and transparency in quiet prayer and in dialogue with one's guides are always helpful, growth-enabling, and even vital. We live the story of our sexuality and affectivity within the larger story of our lives and the social context of our growth. The experience of our sexuality, including the genital component, is part of who we are. Achieving a healthy integration involves being able to revisit, recognize and sometimes achieving healing. Repressing and silencing this part of our history strains the formation of personality and sometimes leads to disturbance.

Consecrated chastity presupposes sound convictions. Being happily married or enjoying an intense relationship with God in celibacy are both experiences of being in love that overflow into the fruitfulness of maternity and paternity, as the testimonies of so many consecrated persons and priests demonstrate.

On the part of the community, it is important to ensure an atmosphere of understanding and trust rather than rigidity and suspicion. 'It is therefore urgent for the Congregation to better prepare formators to accompany this dimension of personal growth and to reflect on the possibility of offering specific tools and paths' (GC29 37).

Family background

93. The impact of the family on our psychological make up and personality cannot be underestimated (see FSDB 749).

Formators and spiritual guides, and in a special way the rector, must be aware that the journey of formation is deeply connected with issues involving the family. It is not so much a question of ensuring that a candidate has a perfect family background, as of creating the conditions that will enable him to process his experiences. Such willingness and transparency are greatly encouraged by a welcoming community atmosphere and the capacity of formators to listen in a non-judgmental way, and by

using community spiritual accompaniment to highlight issues connected to the family.

Freedom and conscience

Growth in freedom

94. To live his vocation, the one who has made a radical choice of consecrated life requires *formation to the responsible use of freedom*. Such formation is especially urgent in contexts where personal autonomy and individualism are glorified.

It is a constant struggle to free oneself *from* whatever in life holds back and enslaves, from passions and sins, selfishness and individualism, so as *to* master oneself, to be open to others and generous in their service, to act according to truth and in accordance with the deep motivations of one's vocation.

These two aspects (freedom 'from' and freedom 'for') lead to real autonomy and the capacity to make choices that are truly free. This is precisely the reason why *conscience needs to be formed* in the values of Christian and Salesian life and of asceticism.

Forming our conscience involves learning to cultivate the very sentiments of Jesus Christ, adopting the criteria behind his choices and the intentions behind his actions (Phil 2:5). It involves the cultivation of interiority through silence, prayerful contemplation of the Word, and the examination of consciousness. It is sustained by the sacraments and the teaching of the Church (FD 108).

'Meeting the Lord gets us moving, urges us to leave aside self-absorption. A relationship with the Lord is not static, nor is it focussed on self. "Because when we put Christ at the centre of our life, we ourselves don't become the centre! The more that you unite yourself to Christ and he becomes the centre of your life, the more he leads you out of yourself, leads you from making yourself the centre and opens you to others"' [Francis, Address to the Participants at the International Congress on Catechesis, Rome, 27 September 2013] (CICLSAL, *Rejoice*, LEV, Vatican 2014, 5).

Formation of conscience

95. The formation of conscience entails a patient work of listening and dialogue. It calls for:

- *putting on the mind of Christ*, adopting the criteria behind his choices and the intentions behind his actions.
- *the ability to allow one's life to be challenged by the gospel and the guidelines of the Church*, so as to be able to discern good and evil, sin and the structures of sin, and God's action in one's personal history.
- *formation in discernment* that enables one to pass respectful and objective judgments on persons and events and take a stand on cultural models and social norms. From this point of view, it is important to be able to look at the media in a discerning way and use them responsibly.
- *the ability to unify one's aspirations, energies and values in a personal life project*, assuming responsibility for one's growth and living to the full the deepest motivations of one's vocation.

The ability to give of oneself

96. The 'gift of self' is the highest expression of human maturity and the ability to relate. It requires that we make room for the other in ourselves. The anthropology of gift enlightened by mission involves going out of oneself, being for others and with others: 'I am a mission' (EG 273).

The Salesian conceives of his life as a gift received that he must pass on to others. Becoming capable of loving freely, establishing positive and authentic human relationships, giving and receiving affection with simplicity, is for him a path of growth, a way to deep and personal love that is sincere, faithful and warm, and to friendships that are not possessive. Even solitude becomes positive if it helps balance emotional involvement with people, especially in educative and pastoral relationships.

The ability to relate

97. Relationship is at the heart of the mystery of the Blessed Trinity, and the capacity for relationship is the most vital and essential characteristic of human beings made in God's image. We are formed by our relationships, and we need others in order to grow.

Don Bosco's way of relating was so rich in humanity that it generated an atmosphere of serenity and welcome even at the first encounter, naturally creating the basis for the next steps, where the pastoral and sacramental component could be gradually enriched. The quality of the educational encounter was at the forefront of his thoughts (GC24 91).

Relationship is, therefore, 'at the heart of every educative approach,' the driving force behind the effectiveness of the EPC (GC24 92), and the foundation of community life. The ability to relate involves communication skills, assertiveness, empathy, active listening, reliability, respect for boundaries, management of cultural differences, flexibility, collaboration, teamwork, fraternal correction and the ability to handle disagreements in a constructive way.

Just as the natural environment for the formation of the human being is the family, so the most suitable environment for Salesian formation is the community and the EPC (GC29 48).

Learning to inhabit the digital world

98. The digital world is a part of everyday life and a new context for formation. It is a context in rapid evolution, as is evident in the strides being made in the area of artificial intelligence. If we want it to be a space of humanization and faith, we must discern its potential and learn to make vigilant, serene and positive use of the new possibilities it offers from the point of view of interpersonal relationships, the building of community and the witness of faith. 'The digital environment presents a challenge to the Church on various levels; it is essential, therefore, to deepen knowledge of its dynamics and its range of possibilities from the anthropological and

4. Dimensions of the journey

ethical point of view. This requires not only entering into it and promoting its communicative potential with a view to the Christian proclamation, but also giving a Gospel flavour to its culture and its dynamics' (FD 145).

Understanding the phenomenon

99. All of us are immersed in the digital world; the question today is no longer whether to make use of what technology offers us, but how to use this opportunity wisely for personal growth and 'for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls'. We recognize the need for digital wisdom, as both young and old, formators and those in formation, will need to adapt to fast moving technological change that will make 'today's world' something of the past for them.

Formative attitudes

100. All of us, young and old, need to ask ourselves what formative renewal would be needed to respond to our vocation in the digital world (AGC 433 p. 129). Our approach to this world is not one of demonization but of discernment. Following in the footsteps of Don Bosco, our general attitude is one of acceptance. Rather than presuming that the situation is problematic, we see it as a *kairos*, a fascinating challenge calling for creative fidelity and a formation that would enable us not only to 'use digital spaces, but to transform them as much as possible into places of truth, authentic encounter and evangelisation' (GC29 68).

The new generation of confreres, 'born digital', are part of the changes that their peers are undergoing while at the same time sharing the Salesian educative mission; therefore their contribution is to be highly valued and properly accompanied. This is a privileged area of joint formation (GC29 63).

Digital presence

101. Our mission calls us to be present in digital space 'with a clear Salesian identity, with the desire to

bring the proclamation of the good news, and simply with the joy and simplicity of disciples of the Lord' (GC28 p. 28).

Knowledge of the dynamics of the internet helps us keep in mind that our digital footprints are not only public but also permanent. No matter at what stage of life or phase of formation, we are called to be authentic, transparent and prudent, because we are not just individuals but members of an institution and ambassadors of God's love.

Presence also involves being attentive to the *habit- and addiction-forming potential* of the new technology (FSDB 768). A degree of technological asceticism and a weaning off device dependence has to be one of the goals of intellectual formation today. As educators we need to grow in the well-ordered desire to know, aiming at compassionate contemplation of the world of the young, and indeed of the great wide world in which the young are called to take their place.

Pastoral creativity

102. The new technological possibilities open up a vast space for evangelical creativity. Young Salesians have the potential to be pioneers in the use of the internet for evangelization and in creating a language that speaks to their peers.

They can make a bridge between the intrinsic beauty of the good news and the possibilities of the digital universe, capitalizing on the fact that the young 'respond with untaught delight to the poetry and the beauty of the new technological environment'.⁶

Artificial Intelligence and Salesian Formation

103. Artificial Intelligence is 'a new and significant phase in humanity's engagement with technology'.⁷

It increasingly shapes the cultural environment in which young Salesians are formed. Young people, Salesians included, encounter AI not only as a technological tool but also as a cultural force, an assistant or a companion that influences how they

study, communicate, think and relate to others. The Salesian Congregation invites ‘conscious involvement by everyone in the advent of artificial intelligence (AI)’ as something that ‘offers us new possibilities to carry out our ministry, communicating and fostering authentic human relationships which are close and real, inspired by the Preventive System.’⁸

AI can be a good support for intellectual formation. It can assist in language study, research, accessing theological, philosophical and other resources, etc. Adaptive learning materials and translation tools can help students move more easily through their studies. At a practical level, AI can also automate repetitive tasks. As a technological assistant AI, if guided wisely, can become an aid that strengthens the formative journey rather than distracting from it.

An unwise use of AI, on the other hand, could encourage superficial learning, where intellectual effort and deep reflection are replaced by quick answers generated by algorithms. From an anthropological perspective, AI, however sophisticated, is only an imitation of human intelligence. It lacks interiority and the ability to introspect, it has no conscience and is incapable of relating to the other, all of which characterize human persons created in the image of God.⁹

It cannot replace accompaniment, interpersonal relationships and dialogue that are essential for Salesian formation. We could say that ‘the lights are on’, but there is ‘no body at home!’¹⁰

For these reasons, Salesian formation advocates a critical, ethical, pastoral and real-world-based approach to AI. It endeavours to integrate it in ways that support study and pastoral preparation without replacing personal effort. It fosters consistent offline time and intellectual discipline, encouraging students to use AI as a support for learning while maintaining habits of study, silence and introspection. Ethical evaluation is also necessary: AI is to be judged through the lenses of human dignity, freedom, grace and the Salesian mission. In practice, this means asking whether AI promotes or undermines the values at the heart of the Preventive System.

Salesian centres at every level, including formation communities, become places of shared reflection and dialogue on AI, drawing from the Salesian charism and the Church's teaching to guide its practical application.

4.2 SPIRITUAL DIMENSION¹¹

104. Life in the Spirit is the central nucleus of our project of life. In one sense the human dimension is the foundation of all formation, but in another and more profound sense the spiritual dimension is also foundational, because the love of God precedes and envelops us.

Our spirituality is that of consecrated persons sent to the young. Education is for us a place of spirituality and a path to holiness, and holiness is 'the most precious gift we can offer to the young' (C 25), the most powerful and adequate way of realizing our mission, and our specific contribution as religious to culture and human promotion (AGC 354 8).

As Salesians, we can be holy only according to the way the Spirit has traced out in Don Bosco. This way is outlined in the Constitutions and consists in living out our apostolic consecration as mystics in the Spirit, prophets of fraternity and servants of the young.

Called and sent

105. As consecrated apostles we know we have been called and sent. 'We live as disciples of the Lord by the grace of the Father, who consecrates us through the gift of his Spirit and sends us out to be apostles of the young' (C 3).

Like Jesus, our mission consists in revealing the face of the Father, especially to poor young people. With Don Bosco, we are sensitive to Jesus the good shepherd, the good Samaritan, the friend of the young (AGC 296 6).

The Holy Spirit who raised up Don Bosco continues to work in our hearts, assisting us not only to imitate Jesus but to be gradually transfigured into his likeness (C 1; 2 Cor 3:18). On our part we give thanks and

respond with daily fidelity to this work of the Spirit. We are also attentive to the ways in which the Spirit works in the hearts of the young and we pray for and cultivate the gifts of the Spirit that our work might bear lasting fruit (C 99).

‘It is about being reborn through vocation. “I invite all Christians... to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day”’ (CICLSAL, *Rejoice*, LEV, Vatican City 2014, 4).

Docibilitas

106. The human and spiritual dimensions of growth are brought together beautifully in the attitude of *docibilitas* (NW 35). *Docibilitas* is a responsive attitude to grace, an openness to the Spirit, the freedom to let ourselves be touched and educated by life, by persons, by existential situations. It is our ability to learn from life. It is not merely docile, obedient and passive acceptance, but the full, active and responsible involvement of the person, a fundamentally positive attitude towards reality, and the inner freedom to let oneself be instructed by any fragment of truth and beauty around oneself.¹²

Encountering God in the young

107. One of the great marks of Salesian spirituality is that we meet God through the young. God awaits us in the young ‘to offer us the grace of meeting with him and to dispose us to serve him in them’ (GC23 95; see C 95) and speaks to us through their creativity and commitment as well as their sufferings and pleas for help (FD 64).

Anyone called to be a parent, pastor or guide to young people must have the farsightedness to appreciate the little flame that continues to burn, the fragile reed that is shaken but not broken (cf. Is 42:3). The ability to discern pathways where others only see walls, to recognise potential where others see only peril.

That is how God the Father sees things; he knows how to cherish and nurture the seeds of goodness sown in the hearts of the young. Each young person's heart should thus be considered "holy ground", a bearer of seeds of divine life, before which we must "take off our shoes" in order to draw near and enter more deeply into the Mystery (ChV 67).

In our ministry we reveal God's love to the young, and in turn find God awaiting us and at work in them.

We strive to work, therefore, with genuine motivations of faith, rising above the level of inclinations, natural preferences and spiritual worldliness, and resisting the attempt to seek our own glory rather than the glory of God.

The Preventive System – spiritual and educational experience

108. The Preventive System involves a spiritual and educational experience that finds its source and centre in the love of God, prepares one to welcome and serve God in the young, and creates an educational relationship to guide young people towards the fullness of life.

The Preventive System is rooted in pastoral charity. Pastoral charity permeates our way of thinking and acting and of relating to one another; it guarantees processes of growth and apostolic fidelity.

The experience of God in community

109. Fraternal life in community is not only one of the pillars of Salesian apostolic consecration; it is also a profoundly human and religious experience. 'Living "mystical fraternity" is an essential element of our apostolic consecration and a great help in being faithful to it. There is a clear link with our mission and with the world of the young thirsting for authentic communication and transparent relationships' (GC27 40). 'Community life not only has a functional and organisational value, but belongs to the soul of Salesian life.'¹³

The Salesian community discerns situations in the light of the gospel and feels jointly responsible for educative and pastoral interventions and their realization. Each confrere in turn helps the community to be a centre of communion that enables the responsible participation of all. In this way, communion becomes mission (VC 46) and a source of spiritual life.

We accept our confreres as a gift from God, love them as Christ taught and make the faith-sharing experience of listening to the Word and celebrating the Eucharist the basis of community life, which thus becomes a 'sign' and 'school' of faith (GC23 216–218). 'Before being the fruit of our efforts, fraternal life in community is a gift of God and a fruit of the Eucharist that we celebrate: "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10:17). This statement of St Paul's reminds us that the communion made possible by the Eucharist infinitely exceeds our best natural dispositions, and at the same time warns us that we cannot delude ourselves that we are united to Christ if we are divided from our brothers' (GC29 23).

The ideal community does not exist, of course. Every Christian reality is built on human frailty. Communities have to learn to build unity through dialogue and reconciliation, forgiveness and prayer.¹⁴

Following Christ obedient, poor and chaste

110. Within the Salesian mission that is given to many, we are consecrated persons, living memorials of the way of living and acting that Jesus chose for himself. By our religious profession we follow Jesus Christ who, 'chaste and poor, redeemed and sanctified men through his obedience,' and we 'share more closely in his paschal mystery, his self-emptying and his life in the Spirit' (C 60).

Growing in our following of Christ, our lives become an educational message addressed especially to the young, proclaiming 'that God exists, that his love can fill a life completely; and that the need to love,

the urge to possess, and the freedom to control one's whole existence, find their fullest meaning in Christ the Saviour' (C 62).

The obedient Christ

111. Obedience to the Father sums up the life of the incarnate Son (Heb 10:7; Lk 23:46). To the consecration on the part of the Father, Jesus corresponds with total availability for the mission of salvation.

As an obedient disciple the Salesian strives to achieve the difficult transition from 'what pleases him' to 'what pleases the Father', making his own the mind of Christ. In imitation of Christ he surrenders mind and heart to the will of God as mediated by legitimate superiors (LG 42; PC 14). 'In a religious Congregation obedience is all', Don Bosco used to say (BM X:463).

The Salesian embraces the Constitutions as his project of life and holiness and accepts the indications of the Church and the guidelines of the Congregation.

He places his whole self at the service of the common mission with initiative and creativity, responsibility and *docibilitas*, avoiding all forms of individualism and worldliness.

He carries out in shared responsibility the work entrusted to him within the EPC.

He seeks the will of the Father through prayer and legitimate mediations such as community dialogue, accompaniment, pastoral discernment and the friendly talk with the superior.

He lives obedience in exercising roles of authority and government, fulfilling them in a participatory way and encouraging collaboration, convergence and the sense of the common mission.

When obedience involves difficult trials of love, he keeps his eyes fixed on Jesus, the obedient Son of the Father (C 71).

The poor Christ

112. The Salesian seeks to be poor like Jesus who emptied himself and became poor for our sake (Phil 2:6;

2 Cor 8:6). In Jesus the Salesian finds his true wealth (LG 42; PC 14); in him he wants to love poor young people and feel solidarity with them.

Poverty is an attitude of heart: 'You cannot practice poverty unless you love it', said Don Bosco (BM V:442).

Salesian poverty is manifested in different ways: in a simple and industrious lifestyle; ready availability for the mission; a serene acceptance of the inevitable inconveniences and renunciations that come our way. Within the community, poverty is shown in the desire to share everything fraternally and in dependence on the community and on the one entrusted with the service of authority (C 76). The Salesian and the community are, in this way, a true prophecy of an alternative society that aims at the common good, respects the value of every individual, builds on criteria of justice and equity and is in solidarity with those who are weak or disadvantaged (AGC 367 10).

In the ministry, poverty is manifested in 'unremitting and self-sacrificing work' (C 78), a 'counter-current lifestyle' (GC29 28o), fidelity to those to whom we are sent, sensitivity to social situations and to the new forms of poverty, and attention to the social doctrine of the Church. We not only work for poor young people but also love them in Christ (C 79). We are particularly attentive to young workers and the world of work, and to people belonging to the disadvantaged sections of society.

We see *education and development* as an important service to the poor. A significant expression of our vow of poverty consists in educating young people to a *culture of solidarity and care of creation*, to critical interpretation of economic and social phenomena, and to involvement in development projects, initiatives and activities of solidarity (GC27 91).

Proper management of resources is also part of our poverty. We adhere with a sense of belonging and responsibility to the finance code of conduct of the province.

The chaste Christ

113. Jesus' choice to remain unmarried (LG 42; PC 14) is a sign of the life of the resurrection, where there will be neither marrying nor giving in marriage (Mt 22:30). Jesus is the Pure

of Heart (Mt 5:8) who constantly beholds the Face of the Father (Mt 18:10). In his presence everyone feels safe.

As living memorials of Jesus, we follow him even in his choice to remain unmarried.

Like Christ, we are able to give of ourselves joyfully, without reserve, in freedom of heart and with loving kindness. We become signs of God's predilection for the young, capable of incarnating the fatherhood of God in such a way that the young know they are loved. We educate young people to true love and purity.

The sad crisis of abuse, involving as it does both sexual abuse, spiritual abuse, abuse of power and other forms of abuse,¹⁵ makes us commit ourselves with greater energy to a sound human and spiritual formation. We integrate our need to love and to be loved into a capacity for friendship and fraternal sharing and into the loving kindness of the Preventive System. Aware of our own fragility we cultivate temperance and self-control, and exercise prudence in interpersonal relationships and in the way we inhabit the digital universe.

Above all we know that unless our hearts are filled with the love of God, we cannot attempt to follow Jesus in his chastity. Solitude is, in fact, fatal for a soul that does not burn with great passion. So we value the time of personal and community prayer. We exercise evangelical vigilance and access the sacrament of reconciliation with gratitude. We open our hearts with simplicity to our spiritual guide, value the help of the community and have filial recourse to Mary Immaculate who helps us to love as Don Bosco did (C 84).

In dialogue with the Lord

114. Docile to the Spirit, we live an experience of humble, trusting and apostolic prayer in which praying and living are united. In personal and community prayer we cultivate, nourish and celebrate the ability to find God in life. From Don Bosco we learn to recognize and give thanks for the action of grace in the lives of the young; we pray for them that the Father's design may be fulfilled in them; we pray with them, becoming thus witnesses of faith and hope, and of that union with God that should

be the characteristic of the sons of Don Bosco (C 95).

Union with God

115. Don Bosco lived a simple, practical and profound relationship with God. He gives us the example of a constantly prayerful attitude, the ability to live and work in the presence of God and to direct all things to his glory.

To find the right “way” of prayer, the Christian should consider what has been said earlier regarding the prominent features of the way of Christ, whose “food is to do the will of him who sent (him), and to accomplish his work” (Jn 4:34). Jesus lives no more intimate or closer a union with the Father than this, which for him is continually translated into deep prayer. By the will of the Father he is sent to mankind, to sinners. to his very executioners, and he could not be more intimately united to the Father than by obeying his will (CDF, Letter... on Some Aspects of Christian Meditation, 1989, 13).

Following the example of our founder, we cultivate union with God, aware of the need to pray without ceasing in a simple heart-to-heart colloquy with the living Christ and with the Father, whom we feel close at hand (C 12).

This union is not so much a matter of feelings as of obedience to the will of the Father, in imitation of Jesus (Jn 4:34; 10:30). Going beyond occasional dialogue, our prayer strives to become *unitive love*: ‘It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me’ (Gal 2:20; AGC 338 16).

Our Constitutions hold before us the possibility of contemplation in action or the ecstasy of action: ‘Attentive to the presence of the Spirit and doing everything for God’s love, he becomes, like Don Bosco, a contemplative in action.’¹⁶

Community and personal prayer

116. In prayer the community ‘deepens its awareness of its intimate and living relationship with God and of its

saving mission' (C 85).

Salesian prayer bears the mark of apostles dedicated to the good of the young. It is *rooted in life*: it precedes, accompanies and follows apostolic activity; it is bound up with the young, for whom and with whom we pray. It is a prayer that is 'joyful and creative, simple and profound. It lends itself to community participation, is drawn from life experience and flows back into it' (C 86).

Our prayer is woven from the recognition of the primacy of grace and is rooted in a personal relationship of friendship with Jesus (*leiturgia*), from the desire to make it apostolic (*kerygma*) and at the service of charity (*diakonia*) through the witness of one's faith (*martyria*) (AGC 394 25). It draws us out of ourselves towards the Father and towards our brothers and sisters in a single movement of love.

'The *Word of God* is the first source of all Christian spirituality. It gives rise to a personal relationship with the living God and with his saving and sanctifying will' (VC 94). It is 'a source of spiritual life, food for prayer, light to see God's will in the events of life, and strength to live out our vocation faithfully' (C 87; cf. *CICLSAL, Keep Watch!*, LEV, Vatican City 2014, 9).

The celebration of the *Eucharist* is the central act of our day. In it we give thanks to the Father, remember the salvation accomplished by the Son, commune with the Body and Blood of Christ and receive the Spirit that makes us capable of fraternal communion and renews us in our apostolic commitment. The Eucharistic presence in the Salesian house is for us a reason for frequent encounters with Christ from which we draw energy and constancy in our work for young people (C 88).

Regular and frequent celebration of the sacrament of Penance, for which one should prepare by a daily examination of conscience, becomes, for the seminarian, an occasion to recognise with humility his own frailties and sins and, above all, to understand and experience the joy of feeling loved and forgiven by the Lord. Moreover, "from it flows the sense of asceticism and interior discipline, a spirit of sacrifice and self-denial, the acceptance of hard work and of the cross" (Gift 106).

The daily commitment to meditation must be taken seriously in every community because this is where the true strength of our consecrated identity lies. Any weakening of this daily experience is an indicator of where our heart lies and of the authenticity of our witness. If our speaking about God is not the fruit and consequence of our speaking with God, everything becomes superficial and artificial. We end up not being credible and not even believed, because we are not authentic believers of and in the Word (F. Attard, Six-year project from 2025-2031, AGC 446 p. 29).

Through Eucharistic adoration and visits to the Blessed Sacrament we nourish ‘our union with God and revive friendship with the Lord’ (GC29 16).

The *Liturgy of the Hours* extends the grace of the Eucharist to the various hours of the day (C 89).

The celebration of the sacrament of *Reconciliation* is the most significant and efficacious expression of our daily striving for conversion. It gives the joy of the Father’s pardon, rebuilds brotherly communion and purifies apostolic intentions.

The sacrament of Reconciliation is not only a magnificent spiritual gift, but also a decisive, essential and fundamental step on our journey of faith. There, we allow the Lord to erase our sins, to heal our hearts, to raise us up, to embrace us and to reveal to us his tender and compassionate countenance. There is no better way to know God than to let him reconcile us to himself (cf. 2 Cor 5:20) and savour his forgiveness (Francis, *Spes Non Confundit*, 2024, 23).

Our daily *meditation* is an essential part of our life of prayer, because ‘it strengthens our intimate union with God, saves us from routine, keeps our heart free and fosters our dedication to others’ (C 93).

Following the example of Jesus and Don Bosco, the Salesian is solicitous about *personal prayer*, from which he draws nourishment for his life and ministry. This personal dialogue with the Lord gives authenticity, depth and quality to community prayer: ‘We can form

praying communities only if individually we become men of prayer' (C 93; AGC 338 14).

Just as interiority is nourished by moments of silence, reflection, personal prayer and meditation on the Word of God, so the discerning attitude is fostered by personal and community spiritual accompaniment, and likewise the contemplative attitude is fostered by the daily examination of consciousness that focuses first of all on the grace that precedes and envelops us. We slowly thus become contemplatives in action.

The presence of Mary Immaculate, the Help of Christians

117. In the charismatic experience of Don Bosco, from the first dream to the vast missionary horizons of later years, Mary was a permanent and decisive presence.

Mary Immaculate, the Help of Christians, appears as an icon of Salesian spirituality, inspiring and stimulating pastoral charity and apostolic interiority. We see in her, as the Immaculate, the fruitful presence of the Spirit, availability to God's designs, the totality of consecration, the break with sin and with all the forces that sustain it. Mary inspires in us openness to the mystery, the pedagogy of grace, delicacy of conscience, and the maternal aspects of educational accompaniment (AGC 354 48–49).

In Mary Help of Christians we contemplate the motherhood of Mary in relation to Christ and the Church, her assistance to the People of God in the vicissitudes of history, her collaboration in the work of salvation and incarnation of the gospel. She keeps alive in us the sense of Church, enthusiasm for the mission, apostolic boldness and the ability to bring together forces for the Kingdom (AGC 354 49).

Devotion to Mary is for us a strong invitation to recognize her as 'model of prayer and pastoral love, the teacher of wisdom and the guide of our Family', and to contemplate and imitate 'her faith, her concern for the needy, her fidelity at the hour of the cross and her joy at the wonders wrought by the Father' (C 92).

Following the example of Don Bosco, we invoke her help every day and we feel committed to spread 'a

strong filial devotion' to her, our mother and teacher, the Immaculate Help of Christians (C 92, R 75).

4.3 INTELLECTUAL DIMENSION

118. Intellectual formation enables us to develop a sound perspective on reality. It helps us to better understand the world of young people and offer appropriate and effective educational and pastoral interventions.

Reason, when open to the mystery of God and directed to Him, allows a solid acceptance of Revelation, seeks a deeper understanding of its contents, and offers instruments and language for its proclamation to the world (Gift 116).

An open vision of culture, anchored in the Word of God, a sense of Church and the guidelines of the Congregation, leads us to a solidly motivated vocational option and helps us live our identity with awareness and maturity, without oversimplification or complexes (AGC 361 38). We must be ready to give an account of our faith to the young (1 Pet 3:15).

Nature

119. Intellectual formation is closely connected to the other dimensions of formation. 'Study and piety will make you a true Salesian', Don Bosco used to insist (BM XV:14).

Intellectual formation takes place first and foremost by learning from life – a learning that is always 'enlightened by the person of Christ and by his gospel lived according to Don Bosco's spirit' (C 98).

Within intellectual formation we distinguish a *basic component* or the studies that form part of the phases of initial formation, *specialization*, and *ongoing formation* in the narrow sense of **opportunities for updating and renewal, and preparation for specific tasks.**

Every Salesian, whether brother or priest, must acquire a sound cultural foundation. The specific form of one's

vocation has an impact on the organization of studies, determining the selection of subjects, levels of qualification, approaches and programmes. For Salesian candidates to the priesthood, the specific curriculum follows the indications of the universal Church, in constant dialogue with the cultural context, and always inspired by the Constitutions: 'The religious and apostolic nature of the Salesian calling dictates the specific direction our formation must take' (C 97). Salesian brothers follow the curriculum indicated by the Congregation in the present *Ratio*.¹⁷ Without forgetting what is necessary in order to grow as educators and pastors, the basic component of intellectual formation takes into account the rich and complex heritage found in each human context with its respective national educational framework, family education background, and ultimately in each individual.

Basic choices

120. The intellectual formation of the Salesian is governed by certain basic choices that must be considered when organizing the period of initial formation.

Salesian quality

There is a close relationship between the charismatic identity and the intellectual formation of the Salesian: 'Our Salesian mission orientates and characterizes at all levels the intellectual formation of the members in a way that is original and unique. Therefore the programme of studies must preserve a balance between serious and scientific reflection and the religious and apostolic dimensions of our way of life' (R 83).

Cultivating our vocational identity, exploring further the charismatic richness of the founder, living in harmony with the mind of the Congregation and its guidelines, and expressing it in a way appropriate to the times and circumstances – all this entails an intelligent, up-to-date and constant study of the spirituality, pedagogy, pastoral approach, history of the Congregation and of the orientations that guide it.

Choices regarding the organization, curriculum and study centres are very significant in ensuring the

pedagogical and pastoral qualification required by the Salesian vocation.

Interaction between theory and praxis

121. Vatican II ‘revolutionized to some extent the status of theology’ by seeking to overcome the ‘divorce between theology and pastoral care, between faith and life’ (VG 2).

Theology emerges from the *humus* of meditation on the Word handed down in the Church, the liturgical prayer of the people of God, and living interaction with people and with their social conditions, cultures and religions. It is called to become ‘a fundamentally contextual theology’ grounded in the lives of people from all parts of the globe and all walks of life.¹⁸

It is constantly characterized by the Salesian charism, particularly in its pedagogical and pastoral aspects, in which formation and mission mutually complement each other. An intellectual formation of this kind prepares one to deal with diverse contexts and historical situations, especially with the condition of youth. It qualifies the Salesian for pastoral discernment and makes him capable of guiding persons, projects and processes in accordance with the objectives of the mission.

Intellectual formation includes initiation to the methodology of apostolic action, or the interaction between theory and praxis summed up in the phrase ‘learning by experience’ (C 98). Study and reflection are motivated and stimulated by real life and praxis is enlightened and guided by reflection and study. This approach must run through all the initial phases of formation.

It is worth remembering in this regard that *Vita Consecrata* speaks of a cultural and professional dimension, where culture and charism meet, creating the conditions for greater fruitfulness and relevance. ‘*The cultural and professional dimensions*, based upon a solid theological training which provides the means for wise discernment, involve continual updating and special interest in the different areas to which each charism is directed. Consecrated persons must therefore keep themselves as intellectually open and adaptable as possible, so that the

apostolate will be envisaged and carried out according to the needs of their own time, making use of the means provided by cultural progress' (VC 71).

Interactive style of teaching and learning

122. Several social and cultural changes, the latest being the digitalized world, affect education and access to knowledge, and make it urgent to adopt a new paradigm of teaching and learning. Our teaching of philosophy and theology may still be operating on the basis of classical rhetoric, where one worked mostly alone and on the basis of memory. The new paradigm asks us to give value to teamwork rather than focusing exclusively on the individual. It invites us to not just memorise contents but to explore, connect and make critical use of the rich information available on the internet. Most importantly, it invites us to recover a fundamental dimension that characterized the formative years of Christian theology and philosophy, where answers arose as responses to concrete questions. In our teaching and learning, then, it would be worthwhile to privilege dialogue or the dynamic of question and answer rather than insist on presenting and committing abstract theses to memory.

A unified yet open proposal

123. The human being is capable of arriving at a unified and systematic vision of knowledge (FR 85). This is a vision of the cosmos as a **network of relationships** in which every living being tends towards other things, a vision of humanity conceived in relational terms – in terms of communion and sharing of goods – building up a civilization of love in the image of the Trinity and leading to a spirituality of global solidarity (VG 2, 4).

This interdependence leads us to think of a world with a common plan, without downplaying its complexity. Our vision must be both unified and systematic, open and incomplete. 'The good theologian and philosopher has an open, that is, an incomplete, thought, always open to the *maius* of God and of the truth, always in development...' (VG 3). We have to learn to treasure

the polarity between the particular and the universal, between the one and the many, between the simple and the complex; to annihilate this tension 'would be to go against the life of the Spirit' (VG 4d).

A transdisciplinary way of doing theology is called for, so that insights from various disciplines are actively integrated into the theological understanding of the 'multifaceted richness of reality'.¹⁹

The ideal is not uniformity but, as Francis de Sales would say, *university*.²⁰

Inculturation

124. Such a unified and systematic vision involves the inculturation of the gospel and the evangelization of culture. Inculturation consists in assuming the criteria of a culture that are consistent with the gospel, purifying those that are not, and recognizing those that are opposed (EG 69). 'Christianity does not have simply one cultural expression, but rather, "remaining completely true to itself, with unswerving fidelity to the proclamation of the gospel and the tradition of the Church, it will also reflect the different faces of the cultures and peoples in which it is received and takes root"' (VG 4).

In '[laying] down the method of formation according to the needs of [each] cultural context' (C 101), care will therefore be taken that inculturation is a permanent criterion in the organization of studies, whether philosophical, pedagogical, theological or charismatic.

In this process, it is essential to maintain a balance between unity and plurality, between the centre and the periphery, recognising that unity is not uniformity, but a generative principle that prevents fragmentation. Similarly, we must not fall into the trap of equating culture, which is limited to the local context, with charisma, whose essence is intrinsically universal.

Philosophical formation will promote a coherent vision of human beings, the world and God that is open and dynamic, and in dialogue with cultures and religions. *Theological formation* will adopt inculturation as the mechanism of every pastoral reflection and methodology so as to prepare educators and

evangelizers to handle the dialogue between gospel and culture in harmony with the Church. Reflection and study also accompany the inculturation of the values of the *Salesian charism and spirituality*; they help to incarnate their substance and typical expressions in the various cultures and point out the ‘different ways of living the one Salesian vocation’ (C 100).

‘Consecrated persons are called to practice “open thought”. Interaction with the cultures and values we are messengers to conditions our life to embrace the differences, and to see in them the signs of God. The intelligent and loving wisdom of contemplation trains for a vision that knows how to evaluate, accommodate, and relate everything to Love’ (CICLSAL, *Contemplate*, LEV, Vatican City 2016, 55).

A solid basic culture

125. To be able to meet and enter into dialogue with people of different experiences and competencies, every Salesian should have as a *minimum* the level of studies required of any person who has completed a normal cycle of education in his country and is capable of organizing his knowledge into a meaningful and communicable synthesis.

Considering the worldwide reach of the Congregation and the composition of the regions, it is important to include a *reasonable knowledge of one or more languages* in addition to one’s own, in order to create possibilities of greater communication and collaboration (AGC 419 25).

Some particular disciplines

126. During basic theological formation, special attention should be given to the *theology of Salesian consecrated life*. The two forms of our vocation are interdependent and complementary, and therefore constitute a common charismatic heritage that *all Salesians* are called to know and deepen.

The *human sciences*, such as sociology, psychology, pedagogy, economics, politics and social communication,

offer a deeper understanding of the human being and of the phenomena and development of society (PDV 52). Their contribution is essential for anyone called by vocation to inculturate the gospel in the life situation of young people. The *educational sciences* are an irreplaceable element of Salesian and professional training and enjoy a privileged position because of their links with the Salesian mission. An adequate *socio-political , ecological and financial education* is also indispensable for helping young people take their rightful place in society (GC29 69i).

Catechesis enjoys its own special place, since the proclamation of Christ to young people is our *raison d'être* as Salesians.

The ever increasing and profound influence of the languages and means of *social communication* and the ubiquity of the digital world makes formation in this field equally necessary. The rapid digital transformations impacting especially the new generations challenge each Salesian to a continuous process of updating and critical confrontation.

Specialization and professional competence²¹

127. In addition to a solid basic qualification, our vocation requires adequate professional competence. The contexts in which we work and the roles we take on not infrequently require *civily recognized qualifications*.

The aptitudes and inclinations of the confrere should be considered in the choice of specialization, although *the fundamental and overriding criterion remains the mission*. Specialization is undertaken with the aim of integrating individual expertise with recognized professional competence in view of the requirements of the various apostolic projects in which the mission is expressed (MR 26).

4.4 EDUCATIVE AND PASTORAL DIMENSION

128. The educative and pastoral dimension is fundamental for the renewal of Salesian formation. We are formed *in* the mission and *for* the mission. Our whole life, with its choices and priorities, revolves around the mission (GC28 p. 33).

By formation in the educative and pastoral dimension we do not mean primarily the need to acquire skills, learn techniques and methodologies, but to become involved in actual pastoral practice, educate oneself in a way of being that orients one's personality in the style of the Good Shepherd, live the Preventive System, purify one's pastoral sensitivity, and discern the best educative and pastoral processes.²²

This is how we put into practice the words of Don Bosco to his young people: 'For you I study, for you I work, for you I live, for you I am ready even to give my life' (C 14).

Practice of the Preventive System

129. The Salesian educator and pastor of young people learns to live the Salesian spirit born of the spiritual and educational experience of Don Bosco in the Oratory at Valdocco. The Preventive System, which encapsulates Don Bosco's educative passion, belongs to the very essence of our mission; it can be considered almost the synthesis of what Don Bosco wanted to be for young people.

Formation in and for the mission according to the Preventive System involves a *spiritual experience*. We learn to recognize that God has first loved us, and that this love transfigures us day by day into sacraments of love for the young, especially those most in need.

The Salesian learns to be an *evangelizer* who draws on the natural and supernatural resources of each young person and engages the young in an educational journey that leads to an original form of Christian life and youthful holiness that we call Salesian Youth Spirituality.

SALESIAN YOUTH SPIRITUALITY

Pastoral and educative charity is the heart of the Salesian spirit. The Preventive System is truly a spirituality for everyone – for Salesians and lay people involved in the spirit and mission of Don Bosco and for families and young people. In his own pastoral and teaching experience, Don Bosco has shown us the path of holiness for young people, and demonstrated its validity

with admirable results. Don Bosco's secret of success as an educator is his intense pastoral charity which united inseparably in him the inner force of love of God and love of neighbour, making it capable of joining his work of evangelisation and his educational activity together as one. Salesian spirituality is the concrete expression of pastoral charity and therefore constitutes a fundamental element of pastoral ministry. Salesian spirituality is the source of evangelical vitality and the soul of pastoral charity. It is the principle of inspiration and identity, and the criterion that guides all our work (FoR p. 100).

The Salesian makes his own a *pedagogical approach* characterized by *friendly and empathetic presence* among the young, unconditional acceptance, the development of the young person's resources through positive experiences of goodness. It appeals to reason by means of proposals suited to age and receptive capacity and treasures the sense of God present in each person, moved by the desire to reveal and lead to a personal encounter with Christ. Educational love promotes growth and evokes a response, together with educators working in a spirit of shared responsibility and the active involvement of the young people themselves (GC28 5).

This model of youth ministry finds expression in different works and services and in the 'new forms of Salesian presence among young people', in particular in the Salesian Youth Movement (FoR Part II).

The practice of the Preventive System is learnt especially within a Salesian community marked by relationships of mutual solicitude and respect, clarity of roles and a service of authority that promotes responsibility and participation. The Preventive System must be rediscovered more and more as the principal inspiration and profound soul of our system of formation (GC28 23).

Salesian Youth Ministry

130. Forming the Salesian educator and pastor calls for developing and cultivating certain characteristic features. A gradual study of the Salesian Youth Ministry

Frame of Reference helps assimilate this educative and pastoral model, while deepening of this grasp takes place in the mission, both by direct experience and by reflecting on this experience. It is basically a question of strengthening the aspects of being, knowing, doing and living together in the pastoral dimension of the Salesian's life.

Salesian Youth Ministry is therefore a systematic activity of the Educative and Pastoral Community which is motivated by a charismatic mission. It seeks to enable young people to grow to maturity, in a religious vocation, and to communion with Jesus Christ in the Church. Christ is seen as the one who gives the fullness of life and is the basis of this fullness. It helps young people, by means of educational activity, to become "upright citizens and good Christians" (FoR p. 41).

Predilection for and presence among young people, especially those who are poor

THE SALESIAN YOUTH MOVEMENT

The SYM is not an association but is made up of young people who belong to various associations or groups animated by Salesian Youth Ministry. Not being an association its doors are open to everyone, since its service is directed to the Church and all young people. This does not stop us from witnessing to Christ, sharing the Mystery with other young people who share the same faith, a joyfully proclaiming it to whoever has not yet heard it. The SYM shares in the Salesian charism and is an expression of it amongst young lay people (FoR p. 173).

131. Being a Salesian means *having a heart for young people*, especially for those who are the poorest, at risk and on the margins of the Church. This is something essential for our being Salesians of Don Bosco (AGC 419 21).

Cultivating the gift of predilection for young people means approaching them in an attitude of friendship, accepting them without prejudices, recognising and valuing what they carry within themselves. It means walking together with them according to their pace and rhythm, helping them grasp the richness of life and its values, giving them the tools to face reality, and making them aware of lasting values. It means being completely at their service; as Don Bosco himself would say: 'Youth are our masters' (SGC 351).

Integration between education and evangelization

132. The service we offer to young people is education and evangelization 'according to a plan for total human wellbeing directed to Christ, the perfect Man' (C 31).

Education and evangelization are not two successive steps. Rather, *pastoral concern is always placed within the process of humanization*, and this process of humanization is always open to the gospel.

Faced with the challenges of the mission to the young and the 'educative' preference of the Congregation, the Salesian feels the need for an adequate qualification and a strong cultural commitment.

The communitarian nature of Salesian ministry

The Church's mission, guided and sustained by the mission of the Holy Spirit, has been fulfilled and is fulfilled in categories of time and space, by inculturation in the lives of people. The New Evangelisation is accomplished by inculturation of the faith. This implies the choice of three strategies: new evangelisation through catechesis and liturgy (evangelising by catechesis); new evangelisation through the integral promotion of peoples, by the poor and for the poor, at the service of life and of the family (evangelising by promotion); an evangelisation committed to penetrating the environments of urban and non-urban culture (evangelising by inculturation). In this age of New Evangelisation our youth ministry must seek at the same time to catechise, promote

and inculturate (cf. Fr Pascual Chávez, AGC 407, “Salesian Youth Ministry”). If New Evangelisation is not translated into human promotion and inculturation it will not be authentic and will not cause the energy of faith to mature in history (FoR p. 63).

The communitarian nature of Salesian ministry

133. Salesian action for the benefit of young people is always a community action, lived in a spirit of shared responsibility within the religious community and the EPC, in the Salesian Family and the Salesian Movement.²³ ‘There is no place in the Salesian community for individualism and for autonomous management of life and work’ (GC29 24).

It is equally important to be in tune with the mind of the Congregation through a good knowledge of the recent General Chapters and of the pastoral guidelines offered by the Rector Major and his Council, by the Youth Ministry Sector and by the province.

An integrated ministry and a planning mentality

134. Salesian youth ministry is a structured proposal. The various activities and interventions aim at the integral promotion of young people and goals and activities are shared within the EPC, and everyone’s contribution is put together in a complementary way.

This calls for a planning mentality, a way of thinking and acting that promotes a convergence of all the persons and elements involved in educative and pastoral activity. The Salesian in formation learns how to develop and promote the SEPP, which involves thinking, judging and acting in shared responsibility; rethinking the style of relationships with the young and among adults; commitment to building something together; and the adequate formulation and planning of interventions.

An animating style

135. Our educative and pastoral activity is marked by a style of animation that requires placing our confidence

in individuals and helping them become the chief architects of their own lives. We encounter them 'at their present stage of freedom' (C 38) and help them open up to new horizons through suitable proposals, within relationships marked by loving kindness. We strive to create a serene and welcoming environment in which individuals feel at ease, are able to express themselves freely, and learn to take responsibility for their growth, making free choices based on sound reasons and values inspired by the gospel.

The above considerations find a special application in Salesian assistance considered as a method, but above all as an attitude. The 'Salesian sacrament of presence' is an expression of a style of friendship that is meaningful as well as discreet, affective and effective.

Educative and pastoral experiences during initial formation

136. The period of initial formation proposes educational and pastoral activities, aiming at a harmonious integration between educational and evangelizing skills and an assimilation of the Salesian educative and pastoral model. Some of the formation objectives of these activities are:

- *growing in sensitivity to the situation of young people* and acquiring the habit of seeing their reality from the point of view of salvation.
- *cultivating educative and pastoral skills*, especially Salesian assistance and group animation.
- *having personal experience of the Salesian mission* in the various works and activities, opening oneself to the horizons of the Salesian Family and the many who, in various ways, feel close to Don Bosco, his charism and his mission, even without formal membership; feel actively involved in and promote the Salesian Youth Movement, progressing in the sense of shared responsibility with lay people and other members of the EPC according to the demands of 'integral pastoral care' and teamwork.
- *dreaming, thinking, living and evaluating the Salesian mission as community* with both Salesians and lay people.
- *growing in one's vocation*, learning to evaluate one's

attitudes, motivations and abilities and making the effort to bring them into harmony with the demands of the mission.

- *integrating the different aspects of the experience* – spiritual, intellectual, emotional and practical – into one's life, seeking a balance between work and prayer, action and contemplation, theory and practice, attending to the individual as well as the group.

Such educative and pastoral experiences should be part of the provincial formation plan, which specifies the responsibilities and activities for the various phases in accordance with a diversified and gradual process.

The local programming, done together with the confreres in formation, should consider the different elements: analysis of the situation, objectives, methods, strategies, time frames, and evaluation.

Above all, *pastoral accompaniment* must be adequately ensured, bearing in mind that there is formation only when the values and contents proposed are experienced and 'relished' by those being formed (FSDB 67, 890–891). The Salesian becomes aware that the mission is not simply the pastoral service he renders but rather a spiritual experience. It is carried out with one's life even before it finds expression in concrete service.

4.5 DIMENSION OF THE CHARISM

The unifying power of love

137. Our apostolic consecration embraces the *whole* of our life. It includes not only the vows but all our being and action, in a relationship to God that marks our deepest personal experience as well as all that we are called to do as pastors and educators. It is a personal experience that begins already before profession when the Lord becomes the centre of our thoughts and affections, and continues up to death, becoming more total and profound as it permeates our whole life. 'There is neither separation nor lack of harmony between consecration and mission, but a "mutual and indivisible

compenetration which makes us simultaneously and in a Salesian sense apostles who are religious and religious who are apostles” (AGC 354 13).

Salesian educative and pastoral action is a constitutive element of our consecration. The grace of unity takes centre stage in the heart of the religious apostle; living in union with God and being dynamic in the apostolate represents a synthesis that unifies the life of the person and is the source of our spirituality.

Attaining the fullness of love: sanctity

138. The perspective just outlined touches the root of our identity and becomes a concrete orientation for our life, with consequences for our way of working, living together, praying. From here comes the consciousness that mission ‘is not simply external action or activity but is a gift of God’: our consecration inserts us into the divine missions and into the mission of the Church. ‘From this stems the special emphasis placed on *interiority* as an essential condition for efficacious apostolic and missionary activity’: ardour in the mission comes from the mystery of God. Ours is a spirituality of active life. We are consecrated – rooted in Christ and his Spirit, in filial obedience to the Father who has called us, and missionaries of the young – sent to communicate Love without boundaries to them (AGC 354 13–14).

Apostolic action lived as the integration of education and evangelization becomes the privileged place of encounter with God, and so a way to holiness, so that we can say that we called to sanctify ourselves by educating (*santificarsi educando*) (AGC 337 40).

The formative power of the grace of unity

139. ‘The Holy Spirit calls the Salesian to an option of Christian existence which is at the same time apostolic and religious. Thus he gives him *the grace of unity* to live the dynamism of apostolic action and the fullness of religious life in a single movement of charity towards God and his neighbour’ (SGC 127).

The grace of unity, which is the unifying power of

divine love in us,²⁴ harmonizes the different dimensions of Salesian formation. We see this in Don Bosco. 'He was deeply human, rich in the qualities of his people, open to the realities of this earth; and he was just as deeply the man of God, filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit and living 'as though he saw him who is invisible.' These two aspects combined to create a closely-knit life project: the service of the young' (C 21).

The different dimensions of formation, in turn, are all aimed at transforming the heart of the Salesian into the image of the heart of Christ. The entire process of formation aims at helping Salesians 'to enter into communion with the charity of Christ the good shepherd' (PDV 57; *Gift* 89).

But human authenticity is never some pure and secure possession. It is a constant withdrawal from inauthenticity to the wholeness and harmony to which we are called, and every successful withdrawal only brings to light the need for further withdrawals. So, in the dynamic of grace and freedom, we experience the slow redemption of our whole being, as all the dimensions of our growth come together and we become a new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17–19), not only as individuals but also as members of one Body and 'members of one another' (Eph 4:25).

4.6 PRACTICAL GUIDELINES

Human and fraternal dimension

140. *Each Salesian religious **community** periodically assesses the style of fraternal life, the family spirit and the quality of life, keeping in mind what R 44 says about a balanced distribution of duties, opportune periods for rest and silence, and suitable relaxation in common.*

141. *Every Salesian recognizes the importance of **communication and dialogue** and takes every opportunity to grow in this capacity (R 100). He sees meetings as moments of communion as well as of formation and takes an active part in them.*

142. *The community 'maintains cordial relations with **each confrere's family**' (R 47). Confreres in initial formation are helped to attain a balance between relations with one's family and a sense of belonging to the community and to the Congregation, in accordance with the principles of consecrated life and the Salesian style of life (R 47).*

143. *The community encourages **dialogue**, brotherly communication and sharing of the experience of the Salesian vocation so as to strengthen family spirit, mutual help and the capacity for fraternal correction.*

144. *The community takes steps to improve the quality of the different forms of **meeting and sharing**, such as an exchange of views on the mission, community discernment, common prayer, the 'community day' (GC23 222; GC29 28g), the drafting of the SEPP, the community plan, the revision of life, the study of the guidelines of the Church and of the Congregation, assessments by the community of its fraternal life, its practice of poverty (R 66), its life of prayer (R 175), its style of life in keeping with the values of Salesian spirituality, moments of fraternal correction, etc.*

The PFC prepares aids for drawing up the community plan, the scrutinies, the evaluations and the monthly recollections.

Spiritual dimension

Salesian obedience

145. *In the spirit of the shared mission, every Salesian takes active part in the drawing up of the local and provincial **SEPP** and strives to prepare himself ever better for working in collaboration with others (GC24 152).*

146. *‘Faithful to Don Bosco’s recommendation, each confrere meets frequently with his superior for a **friendly talk**’ (C 70). ‘During the period of initial formation, once a month the confreres will have the friendly talk with the superior referred to in article 70 of the Constitutions’ (R 80). The provincial and the PFC find ways of encouraging this practice and preparing rectors for this service.*

Salesian poverty

147. *‘The community, whether local or provincial, should **examine** its own state of poverty at intervals it considers opportune, both as regards its collective witness and the services it renders’ (R 66; GC26 88). Like Don Bosco, we live poverty in detachment of heart and generous service of others, with a lifestyle marked by austerity, hard work, much initiative, the concern for justice and peace (C 73) and solidarity with the poor (C 79) and with the sober lifestyle of many of our families, employees and collaborators.*

148. *The community expresses solidarity with the poor through choices that have an impact on the tenor of our lives, educating to the **culture of solidarity** and respect for ethnic and religious difference by helping young people to bring a critical spirit to their interpretation of the economic and social phenomena of our time and involving them in initiatives and projects of development (GC26 91).*

149. *The Salesian communities and the EPCs develop educational models of **care for the environment** so that the Salesian option in favour of creation may be made effective by promoting ecological spirituality (GC28 p. 51; GC29 69g, i) and educating to a sober lifestyle.*

150. *Confreres in initial formation are helped to regard the commitment to study, responsible fulfilment of duties and willingness to perform domestic chores as expressions of poverty. A real love for poor young people is expressed in living a poor lifestyle and direct contact with the world of the poor.*

151. *Already during the initial phases of formation we learn to **use money in a responsible way** and to give accounts of expenses incurred. Confreres are educated to share what they receive with the community and are given opportunities to take part in the administration of the community (GC26 96; GC28 28f).*

Salesian chastity

152. The provincial, the PFC and rectors *encourage confreres to take care of the discipline required by consecrated chastity. They help confreres examine whether their attitudes and behaviour towards others, men and women and the young, are consistent with the demands of Salesian religious life and the witness proper to it (R 69). They remind everyone of the importance of a brotherly atmosphere and family spirit, as also the value of fraternal correction, as ways of promoting the gift of Salesian chastity. They help the confreres acquire a real concern for the protection of minors and vulnerable adults against any form of abuse (GC29 39r).*

153. *Confreres frequent the sacrament of **reconciliation** regularly, invest time in personal **prayer**, and recognize their need for ongoing personal **spiritual accompaniment**. Confreres in initial formation are helped to recognize the importance of personal spiritual accompaniment and transparency with their guide.*

154. *We inhabit the **digital world** with a clear Salesian consecrated identity (GC29 69h). We accept the need for formation in this area and strive to make balanced use of free time and the means of social communication, especially the digital media (R 45). Above all, we learn to make good pastoral use of these. Formators make use of personal*

and community dialogue in their effort to accompany their younger brothers. Rules, where necessary, are generated through the active involvement of all.

155. *From the very first years of formation, through personal dialogue and accompaniment, confreres are **educated to sexual and affective maturity** (GG29 28)). As individuals and as community, we help one another to grow as mature human beings and consecrated persons and to understand the profoundly human and Christian nature of sexuality and its place in marriage and in consecrated life (PDV 50). It is important that confreres esteem and love the consecrated life and develop serene and mature attitudes and relationships with all, men and women.*

156. *All communities and confreres know and study the Provincial Code of Ethics for the **protection of minors** (AGC 430 44–48), so that it becomes a practical guide for pastoral activity. The province ensures that the Code is presented every year to all the educative and pastoral communities (GC29 39r).*

In dialogue with the Lord

157. *With the help of the PFC, the provincial provides ways of helping confreres grow in **personal prayer**, with special attention to meditation, monthly and quarterly recollections, and the annual retreat.*

158. Rectors *exercise their special responsibility to help confreres grow in dialogue with the Lord by means of the community plan and the different moments of community animation. They also give adequate attention to the formation of the animating nucleus of the EPC in this dimension.*

159. *The community favours **moments of prayer with young people and the laity**.*

160. *The methods and styles of prayer, texts and other aids preserve the **Salesian characteristic** of a prayer intimately joined to the apostolic life and the reality of the world; they*

favour a well-balanced spontaneity and creativity and develop a special receptiveness towards forms of prayer that are joyful and appealing to youth and ordinary people.

161. *Through personal, group and community accompaniment, the confreres are helped to attend to their experience of prayer in its personal and communitarian, liturgical and sacramental dimensions, so as to ‘learn by experience’ the meaning of Salesian prayer.*

Intellectual dimension

162. *Studies in the Congregation are governed by:*

- *the relevant documents of the Church.*
- *our Constitutions and Regulations, the General Chapters, the Rector Major with his Council, the present Ratio and the provincial directories.*

163. *In the Congregation intellectual formation – like the whole of initial formation – is the direct concern of the **Rector Major and his Council**. It comes under the specific care of the Councillor for Formation (C 135), assisted by the Regional Councillors in order to fulfil the following tasks:*

- *the fostering of those studies that are called for by the particular characteristics of the Congregation.*
- *concern for the preparation of personnel and verification of the provincial qualification plan.*
- *the care of Salesian study centres and of the personnel working in them.*
- *evaluation of the choice of non-Salesian study centres and of the affiliations of Salesian study centres to Salesian and non-Salesian institutions.*

Appendix 8, ‘Guidelines for the programme of studies,’ and Appendix 9, ‘Guidelines for the programme of Salesian studies,’ provide references and criteria to support the outlined formation programme.

164. *Study centres and faculties of theology, philosophy and education that depend on our Congregation must draw their inspiration, as far as Salesian students are*

concerned, from the criteria and directives of the present Ratio, besides respecting those of the competent ecclesiastical bodies.

165. *The study of **Italian** is encouraged as a means of knowing the sources and reading the documents, and as an element of communication in the Congregation.*

*The study of **other languages** is also to be promoted insofar as they are useful for communication from the cultural, pastoral and Salesian point of view.*

At provincial level

166. *For the purpose of maintaining unity in intellectual formation, the **formation section of the provincial directory** should contain the guidelines and basic decisions concerning the curriculum of studies, keeping in mind the norms of the Congregation, the requirements of the mission and the context of the province. It should also contain directives pertaining to Salesian study centres and indicate steps to ensure the Salesian character of those centres. The **provincial formation plan** should spell out in detail whatever pertains to the curriculum of studies.*

167. *The province draws up its **provincial qualification plan** on the basis of the criteria laid down in the directory and as a part of the provincial formation plan. The qualification plan should be verified and revised every three years and forwarded to the Councillor for Formation.*

168. *Every confrere is offered a **solid theological, pedagogical and professional formation** that follows the norms laid down by the Church and also includes a consideration of the different forms of the Salesian vocation, and of the needs of the mission in the different provinces and contexts.*

169. *Every confrere studies with his superiors the field of **further qualification** best suited to his abilities and to the needs of the province, giving preference to whatever concerns our mission (R 101).*

During initial formation

170. Intellectual preparation forms a unifying element in all the phases of initial formation. It plays an important role in the arrangement of the general programme and in the allocation of time to the postnovitiate (at least two years), the specific formation of Salesians preparing for the priesthood (four years), and the specific formation of Salesian brothers (at least two years).

171. During initial formation a **Salesian complexion** must be given to the programme of studies, taking care of:

- the basic, unifying concern to form a Salesian pastor and educator.
- the correspondence between the arrangement of studies and the needs of Salesian life and mission.
- the presence of suitably prepared confreres who assist the student confreres in grasping the Salesian angle in their studies
- the inclusion of specifically Salesian subjects.

172. Regarding the **specifically Salesian subjects**:

- There should be a gradual and systematic study of Salesian subjects (Salesian history, pedagogy, spirituality and the basic features of Salesian youth ministry), implementing what is laid down in Appendix 9: Guidelines regarding Salesian Studies below.
- When the confreres frequent a Salesian study centre, the responsibility for teaching these subjects is ordinarily divided between the academic authorities and those of the formation community.
- When the confreres frequent a non-Salesian study centre, this responsibility is assumed by the formation community, unless it is discharged by the centre itself.
- In every case, the local formation plan should contain a programme of Salesian studies.

Those responsible

173. The **confrere** in formation considers himself as bearing prime responsibility for his intellectual formation.

Therefore:

- *He is regular in his attendance at lessons, and prepares diligently for his seminars, dissertations and examinations (Gift 93).*
- *He is open to an exchange of views and to group sharing and takes an active part in the academic and cultural initiatives of the study centre.*
- *He makes an effort, with the help of his teachers, to be proficient in the art of reflection and acquire a method of study in keeping with the spirit of ongoing formation.*

174. *The **rector and other formators** take pains to follow up the intellectual formation of the confrere, keep themselves informed, speak with the academic authorities, and carry out an assessment from time to time.*

The presence of qualified confreres, possibly teachers, in the formation community must always be ensured: they can help give unity to studies and the formation experience.

175. *The **confrere who is a teacher** is aware of his specific formative function. Accordingly, he shows interest in the intellectual progress of the students and helps them develop their gifts, keeping in mind the objectives and the pastoral and pedagogical demands of Salesian activity.*

***He gives priority to his formative service** and also keeps himself up to date in his own line of specialization.*

176. ***Non-Salesian teachers** in Salesian centres, whether clerics, religious or lay persons, must be chosen in the light of their scientific and pedagogical preparation, the criteria and conditions laid down by the Church and the Congregation, and in particular, their compliance with Church guidelines and their witness of life.²⁵*

Civil recognition of the basic curriculum and other studies

177. *The studies envisaged by the basic curriculum of the years of initial formation ‘should be so structured as to lead to **degrees and qualifications recognized by the State**, where circumstances allow’ (R 84).*

178. *With regard to the possibility of **pursuing other studies during the period of initial formation**, which are not part of the basic curriculum, also with a view to obtaining degrees, one has to keep in mind the duty of first meeting the requirements of the phase of formation that the confrere is going through and of giving priority to the completion of the basic curriculum. In case of real incompatibility, absolute precedence is given to the demands of formation.*

When it is possible to harmonize the demands of formation and dedication to other studies, the confrere applies himself to them with a spirit of responsibility and sacrifice, and the provincial and the rector see to the required follow-up and periodic assessment.

179. *When confreres in initial formation are allotted a certain number of years for obtaining **qualifications**, whether civil or ecclesiastical, provinces make a prudent choice of the study centre, guarantee the confrere a proper community environment and ensure adequate formative accompaniment.*²⁶

Educative and pastoral dimension

180. *Every community **keeps itself up to date** with regard to Salesian youth ministry and the guidelines of the Congregation and of the Church.*

181. ***Educative and pastoral experiences during the initial phases of formation** take into account the specific vocation of the confrere and the phase of formation he has reached. The confrere is given opportunities for direct acquaintance with the youth ministry in his own province and in the province in which he is undergoing formation, and for participating actively in the mission with lay people and members of the Salesian Family. He is assured pastoral accompaniment both in the EPC and in the formation community, as well as formative assessment of his pastoral experiences.*

Unity and continuity

182. *Given that initial formation increasingly takes place*

*in interprovincial communities often situated in another country, the **unity and continuity of formation** is supervised and accompanied especially by the provincial and the provincial formation delegate.*

Such accompaniment is done also through meetings of formators of contiguous phases and meetings of the RFC, the necessary planning for which is found in the regional formation plan.

The summer or other such holidays are opportunities to know the communities of one's own province and to work alongside the confreres. The provincial ensures that these communities are able to provide the necessary formative accompaniment.

4. Notes

¹ To the four dimensions proposed by PDV, VC 71 had added a fifth charismatic dimension: 'Finally, all these elements are united *in the dimension of the charism* proper to each Institute, as it were in a synthesis which calls for a constant deepening of one's own special consecration in all its aspects, not only apostolic but also ascetical and mystical.'

² P. BRAIDO, *La lettera di Don Bosco da Roma del 10 maggio 1884* (Roma: LAS, 1984) 301.

³ On the theme of sexuality, affectivity and love, see A. SINAGOGA and M.A. GARCÍA MORCUENDE, *A Youth Ministry that Educates to Love* (Madrid: CCS, 2023), esp. chapter 3.

⁴ See Appendix 6.

⁵ See *Message of His Holiness BENEDICT XVI for Lent 2007*.

⁶ MARSHALL McLUHAN and QUENTIN FIORE, *The Medium is the Massage* (Gingko Press, 2014) 100.

⁷ DICASTERY FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH – DICASTERY FOR CULTURE AND EDUCATION, *Antiqua et Nova: Note on the Relationship Between Artificial Intelligence and Human Intelligence* (2025) 4.

⁸ *Project of the Rector Major and his Council for the six-year period 2025–2031* (AGC 446).

⁹ *Antiqua et Nova* 26–35.

¹⁰ Cf. Hab 2:19: ‘See, it is plated with gold and silver, and there is no breath in it at all’.

¹¹ See GC27 64–66.

¹² See PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PROMOTION OF THE NEW EVANGELIZATION, *Directory for Catechesis* (23 March 2020) 135.

¹³ GC29 23. See *ibid*: ‘For us Salesians, the family spirit is the concrete way to practise the fraternal love taught by Jesus and the most eloquent sign of the presence of God in our midst.’

¹⁴ ‘Fraternal life undoubtedly requires adequate relational maturity, which can never be considered a given, be taken for granted or acquired once and for all...

Fraternity is both a gift of God and a workshop of humanity: caring for fraternal life means encouraging balanced and harmonious human growth to maturity’ (GC29 26).

¹⁵ CEI, *La formazione iniziale in tempo di abusi* (2021) 52–66. Spiritual abuse refers to the misuse of religion or spirituality to control, manipulate, or harm individuals under the guise of faith or moral guidance. This abuse could take the form of coercion, prohibiting dissent, ordering compliance to one’s direction, demanding financial contribution, claiming ‘spiritual’ powers, or misusing scripture to justify exploitation. Violating confidentiality for undermining, harming or ostracising a person is also a form of spiritual abuse.

¹⁶ C 12; AGC 338 15–19; AGC 354 33.

¹⁷ See below, Appendix 8.

¹⁸ FRANCIS, *Ad theologiam promovendam* (2023) 4.

¹⁹ VG 4c; FRANCIS, *Ad theologiam promovendam* (2023) 5.

²⁰ F. DE SALES, *Treatise on the Love of God*, part 2, chapter 2.

²¹ See below, chapter 8 Specialization.

²² We need to ‘initiate the candidate into the sensitivity of being a shepherd, in the conscious and mature assumption of his responsibilities, in the interior habit of evaluating problems and establishing priorities and looking for solutions on the basis of honest motivations of faith and according to the theological demands inherent in pastoral work’ (PDV 58).

²³ On the Salesian Movement, see *Charter* 3.

²⁴ ‘The grace of unity is love that permeates us from on high, and constructs a complete synthesis in us of the many elements that accompany pastoral charity’ (E. VIGANÒ, *Apostolic Interiority* 17). The term ‘is understood to indicate precisely the energy of the mutual and dynamic correlation of inseparability between the two poles of pastoral charity: God and neighbour’ (*ibid.* 10).

²⁵ Can. 810 §1; GC24 164; VG 26 §1.

²⁶ See below, chapter 8 Specialization.

Walking together: accompaniment and discernment

Lectio

The verse that heads the fifth chapter of the *Ratio* (Lk 24:32) is practically the climax of the Emmaus story. With extraordinary expressive power, Luke narrates the recognition of that travelling companion as a slow process that ultimately frees the previous cognitive and emotional blocks. To do this, the evangelist involves not only the inner sense of the heart – which becomes increasingly inflamed throughout the experience – but also the external senses of hearing ('he was opening the Scriptures to us') and sight (seeing without identifying the traveller, first; seeing and recognizing Jesus, seated at the table).

The contrast between their slowness to believe (*an-óētoi*: 'without sense'; *bradeîs tēi kardíai*, 'slow of heart') and their inner turmoil (*hē kardía hēmôn kaioménē ên*: 'our hearts were burning within us') places the narrative emphasis on how resistance and emerging faith coexist. The two disciples of Emmaus mirror like few others the paradox of human and religious existence: reluctance to believe and the ardour of faith coexist in the same heart.

Finally, the constant use of the imperfect *kaioménē ên* highlights the enduring nature of the experience: recognition of the Risen One is not immediate but gradual and, indeed, slow. Human processes, particularly those that affect the most intimate dimensions of the person – such as accompaniment – take time.

Meditatio

The words of the disciple who voices his deepest feelings, still seated at the table in Emmaus, are heard and shared only by the other traveller, also a guest at that supper. There is no one else. The Risen Jesus, as soon as he is recognized, disappears from their sight (*áphantos egéneto*), in a way that is as mysterious as a few hours earlier when he crossed paths with two of them along the road.

This may be an apt image of the work of the spiritual guide, as described in the *Ratio*. Discretely and delicately, he walks alongside his confrere and helps him to interpret his entire life and religious experience from a believer's perspective. When the time is right, he also knows how to take a step back and, like the Risen One, disappear. In this way, he helps the confrere to spread his wings and act with full responsibility and freedom.

Gone are the days when accompaniment was carried out in a more directive manner! This is how God wants human beings, created 'to fly, to spread [their] wings in response to the call to love', choosing 'to open those wings to the wind of the Spirit' (Francis, *Apostolic Letter Totum Amoris Est on the fourth centenary of the death of St Francis de Sales*; shortly before, from the *Treatise on the Love of God* [2,9,434], the pontiff recovers a simile about little birds unable to take flight).

This is how the two anonymous disciples react: with hearts on fire and wings spread, they take control of their lives again and, abandoning their flight forward – Emmaus – they redirect their steps back to Jerusalem, 'where they found the Eleven and their companions gathered together' (Lk 24:33), the community. This

is also configured as the privileged subject and sphere for spiritual accompaniment according to the Salesian style, as experienced by the first Salesians and the young people themselves, learning from Don Bosco. Just as the group of believers confirms the faith of the two from Emmaus ('The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon' [Lk 24:34]), it is to be hoped that the religious community and the EPC will be able to strengthen the life and discernment of the confrere.

Miguel Ángel Moreno Nuño, SMX - UPS

5. Walking together: accompaniment and discernment

Formation and accompaniment

183. Vocation is a lifelong process of responding to God's call, in which we are greatly helped by various people who accompany us.

Each confrere is the first and irreplaceable agent of his own formation and no one can substitute him in his freedom and responsibility. Still, formation is not something solitary, and neither is it an exclusively I-thou relationship with God, because God makes use of human instruments, placing brothers and sisters at the side of those whom he calls (VC 66). The journey of formation is always a journey that is *accompanied*. We walk together, and we learn by experience to become fellow travellers for those we will ourselves be given to meet.

The aim of all accompaniment is to put on the mind of Christ, to be transformed and transfigured into Christ – or, as St Francis de Sales says simply, 'to live Jesus'. The aim of Salesian accompaniment is to follow Jesus in the way marked out by Don Bosco, becoming revelations of the Father, signs and bearers of his love to the young, especially those most at risk.

5.1 SALESIAN ACCOMPANIMENT

Originality of Salesian accompaniment

184. Salesian accompaniment involves community, group and personal dimensions. 'There is an inherent complementarity between personal accompaniment and community accompaniment, which every spirituality or ecclesial sensibility is called to articulate in its own way.'¹

The young John Bosco's experience of being accompanied is marked by figures of great importance

(Cottino, Calosso, Maloria, Cafasso...). It was an experience that continued without interruption throughout his life, even after 1860, when Don Cafasso died. His first-hand experience enabled him to become in turn the friend and guide of the young. Don Bosco is an outstanding example of what it means to be a 'guide who himself is guided'.²

While looking after the environment and promoting sodalities (the youth groups of the time), Don Bosco took care to maintain one-to-one relationships in that climate of confidence so well described in the *Letter from Rome of 10 May 1884*. The educational praxis of the Oratory maintained a beautiful balance between the formal approach and the informal one (see 'the word in the ear'), the accompaniment taking place within the environment and that on the individual level.

Today, too, spiritual accompaniment calls for a balance between the communitarian and the personal, the formal and the informal, and involves a variety of agents with differing responsibilities and roles.

The regular and structured approach is more likely to be transformative and fruitful, but it is equally true that without the various informal interventions and the community environment the efficacy of the formal moments would be diminished. 'Formation is not primarily about programmes and structures, but about people: it is a process that aims at the growth of the confreres in their passion for Christ and for the young. Not rigid schemes, but living relationships' (GC29 29).

Don Bosco's praxis of accompaniment

185. Don Bosco added the Salesian element of friendship to the largely Ignatian tradition of spiritual accompaniment that he learned in the Convitto Ecclesiastico. For Francis de Sales there is no spiritual accompaniment without real friendship.³ 'The relationship that is established between the Salesian formator and young people should always have the imprint of "*the greatest cordiality*," since "*familiarity leads to love, and love leads to confidence*. It is that that opens up the heart and the young reveal everything without fear.... They become honest in

5. Walking together: accompaniment and discernment

confession and outside, and they are readily open to all that is asked from them by the one whom they know loves them.”⁴

Don Bosco went a step further: to relationships of friendship and cordiality with the young he added the community and group dimensions.⁵

The centrality of freedom

186. Freedom is central to spiritual accompaniment. It is the only way to access the truth of the person and invite his full involvement in the spiritual journey. Where freedom is diminished or even replaced by behaviours that are only external and formal, accompaniment is emptied from within of its meaning and value. One can be faithful to the moments of personal spiritual accompaniment, but they remain a barren field without any hidden treasure.

The foundational dynamic of grace and freedom

187. The dynamic of grace and freedom is at the heart of the process of accompaniment. Accompaniment is nothing if it is not attuned to the dialogue between the love of the Lord and the freedom of the one who is called to respond.

The spiritual journey is the mystery of the ongoing encounter between two freedoms – that of God and that of the person himself. Grace not only speaks to human freedom but also empowers it and makes it ever fuller. Grace it is that enables our response, because it is Love that calls to love.

But there can be no love without freedom, and so even the greatest grace does not take away our freedom. The God who made us free is content in his wisdom to appeal delicately to our freedom,⁶ and formators and spiritual guides follow this example.

Accompaniment is a process that involves the whole person

188. Life in the Spirit involves an ongoing integration of the person in his or her totality. To accompany spiritually

does not mean helping a person grow only in the religious dimension; it involves an integration of all the dimensions of growth, starting from the instance that unifies them: life in the Spirit.

Accompaniment is therefore holistic. The path of true vocational growth lies in the harmonious interaction of all the dimensions of formation. 'In other words, we cannot be satisfied with the formal correctness of behaviours that can be observed from the outside, but we must help each confrere to reread his own experience, to recognise the authentic motivations that guide his daily choices in the light of the Word of God, and to grow in true docility to the action of the Spirit' (GC29 37).

5.2 ACCOMPANIMENT AND DISCERNMENT

189. Formation is a lifelong process that relies, among other things, on a helping relationship (*spiritual accompaniment*) in the service of discernment.

Spiritual guides are older brothers and sisters who are companions on the journey, enabling us to read our experience from God's point of view. They help us 'see' and 'consider' what is not evident, what we are not aware of. They help us clarify and deepen our motivations and sometimes even challenge them.

The gift of discernment helps us mature as consecrated persons, enabling us to read life in the light of the Spirit, and choose, decide and act according to the divine will.⁷ It is especially important when we are at critical points in our lives, or when we have to make important decisions, including the one about our vocation in life. But it is also needed every day, as we listen to the voice of the Spirit and distinguish it from the voices of the world or of evil in all its forms (GE 166), in such a way that the exercise of discernment, both personal and communitarian, becomes a formative space.

Discernment in daily life also helps us 'recognize the concrete means that the Lord provides in his mysterious and loving plan, to make us move beyond mere good intentions.' (GE 169)

This dynamic and holistic understanding leads to certain practical characteristics of accompaniment:

5. Walking together: accompaniment and discernment

- *Collaboration* with God and, therefore, transparency and sincerity on the part of those who accompany and those who are accompanied.
- A *dialogical* way of being and living. The one being accompanied must communicate and open himself authentically and sincerely to the guide who, in turn, must respond without monopolizing or manipulating.
- *Respect* for the sacredness of every human being, for the life journey of each person, for the diversity and uniqueness of those being accompanied.
- *Prayer* of supplication to God for help to accompany and be accompanied, and to allow ourselves to be guided and enlightened by the Spirit; prayer also of contemplation and surrender so that it is God who has the last word.

5.3 COMMUNITY ACCOMPANIMENT

190. Community accompaniment plays a very important role in the living communication of Salesian values.

The community – not only the Salesian religious community but the EPC as a whole – animates and accompanies the vocational journey of the confreres. It is attentive to the relational, charismatic and vocational dimensions of growth.

Daily involvement in the EPC, with the network of relationships and active involvement in drawing up, carrying out and evaluating the SEPP, is a privileged space for genuine growth and intense ongoing formation.

In order to accompany the Salesian religious vocation, the Congregation urges communities to draw up the community plan; it encourages fraternal sharing, engages in community discernment, and promotes the review of life and other structured forms of encounter and participation.

The role of the rector

Guardian of identity

191. The rector is the guardian of the Salesian consecrated identity. His is a service of animation and governance

characterized by the Salesian charism. He knows he has to animate and govern in a collegial and synodal manner, encouraging the active participation of each member of the religious community and of the EPC.

Spiritual guide of the community

192. The rector is the spiritual guide of the community. To those entrusted with the service of authority the Church recommends, in the first place, care for the core values of consecration: ‘In the consecrated life authority is first of all a spiritual authority.... Persons in authority are “spiritual” when they place themselves at the service of what the Spirit wants to realize through the gifts which he distributes to every member of the community, in the charismatic project of the institute’ (FT 13a).

The main task of the rector is to lead the confreres in building a fraternal community in which God is sought and loved above all. The rector ‘must therefore be, above all, a spiritual person, convinced of the primacy of the spiritual, both with respect to personal life and for the development of fraternal life; in other words, he or she must know that the more the love of God increases in each individual heart, the more unity there will be between hearts’ (FLC 50a).

Responsibility for each confrere

193. The rector has direct responsibility for each confrere, whom he helps and accompanies to realize his personal vocation (C 55), and for the EPC, which he animates with fatherly concern so that it may be the propitious space where the specific vocation of each member is fulfilled. The confreres in turn accept his authority in faith, and collaborate ‘by obeying readily and sincerely, “with cheerfulness and humility”’ (C 65).

The rector makes himself available for the *friendly talk* and does his best to facilitate it. He also encourages each confrere to have a stable spiritual guide (GC27 75.2) and leads by example, so that he is a guide who himself is guided.

The rector takes care to be present and available to the confreres.

The formation team⁸

194. Formative accompaniment in communities dedicated to initial formation is the outcome of effective teamwork. The formators accept the rector as leader of the community and its spiritual guide and make every effort to constitute with him a unified group convinced of its common responsibility (C 104). In a world marked by individualism, our young Salesians need to know that working together is possible and beautiful. They need to see their older brothers living and working together.

Guaranteeing the strength and quality of the community as a setting for Salesian formation will have a qualitative impact on the vocation and formation journey of the individual. Thus, *good formation teams*, i.e., well-prepared formators whose contribution varies according to their talents, experience and competence, as also their roles and the kind of accompaniment offered (academic, pastoral, spiritual, etc.), are essential and strategic (GC29 32).

The formators occupy a pivotal position: they determine the spirit and efficacy of the entire work of formation at local and provincial level. The task of formation is their most important apostolate.

In interprovincial formation communities it is important that the formation team be drawn from the different provinces involved.

Group accompaniment

195. It is helpful to have group accompaniment or the accompaniment of smaller units within the larger formation community. This is part of the tradition coming from Don Bosco and a constitutive dimension of Salesian youth ministry (FoR 123, 157–160).

To some extent, group processes of various kinds (year groups, cluster groups whose membership runs across year groups, apostolate groups, etc.) can compensate for and mitigate the difficulties that could be encountered in excessively large communities.

The dynamics of group always have an impact on the members, so the presence of a coordinator with

some preparation for group accompaniment would be of great help.

5.4 PERSONAL ACCOMPANIMENT

196. Personal accompaniment takes on many forms during the processes of initial formation. In this chapter we discuss only the friendly talk with the rector, personal spiritual accompaniment, and the sacrament of reconciliation.⁹

The friendly talk with the rector

A privileged moment of dialogue

197. One of the main tasks of the rector is to encourage, exhort and accompany each confrere in his vocational experience. A privileged moment of interpersonal dialogue is the friendly talk, which is a simple means for creating a sense of family and for helping the confrere grow in fidelity to his vocation.

The term used by Don Bosco, *rendiconto*, has the relational meaning of ‘taking into account’. We could say that it is the rector who has the first responsibility for the friendly talk. It is he who, as a father, is called to be concerned about how his confreres are doing. The fruit of this original charismatic tradition transmitted by Don Bosco is reciprocity, understanding, and enhancement of the family spirit.

The friendly talk with the rector is a living part of our pedagogy of relationship. It is important that relationships are marked by cordiality, because familiarity leads to love and love to confidence. The more the rector patiently builds an atmosphere of mutual trust and generous dedication around the core values of the Salesian charism, the more likely it is that forms of personal support will be sought, without need of much formality or uniformity. What Pope Francis says about youth ministry is also applicable to the friendly talk with the rector: ‘we need to use above all the language of closeness, the language of generous, relational and existential love that touches the heart, impacts life, and awakens hope and desires’ (ChV 211).

In a spirit of humility and service, the rector takes the first step to promote this 'best practice' of the Salesian style of animation and governance. The rector accepts each confrere for what he is. As good shepherd, he is ready to accompany him on the journey of his *sequela Christi*. He keeps in mind the psychological, relational and vocational circumstances of the confrere so as to ensure that the friendly talk is respectful and effective.

The Constitutions ask all confreres to meet their rector 'frequently' for a friendly talk (C 70). The Regulations specify that confreres in initial formation should meet the rector 'once a month' for the friendly talk (R 80).

The friendly talk is covered by a very high level of *confidentiality* (FSDB 707–712).

The smooth running of the community

198. The distinction that young confreres increasingly make a between the friendly talk and personal spiritual accompaniment does not necessarily reduce the value of the friendly talk (YSA 49). On the contrary, it helps it be more focused on its characteristic and original trait as envisaged by Don Bosco: to be one of the most effective means for 'promoting the good running of the community' (C 70).

When confreres meet the rector regularly for the friendly talk, they give him valuable help in the animation and governance of the community. The friendly talk then becomes a way of practising the participatory leadership that is part of the process of renewal of religious life.

Personal spiritual accompaniment

199. The relationship of personal spiritual accompaniment takes place within the context of community accompaniment and warm personal relationships.

In personal spiritual accompaniment every confrere is invited to freely open his heart to a spiritual companion. Such accompaniment 'awakens the desire to respond fully to God's love and to bring to fruition what he has sown in our lives' (EG 171).

Personal accompaniment is a permanent resource for

our human and spiritual growth. It is up to each confrere to seek it and be faithful to it through the course of life.

Qualities required in the guide

200. Like all confreres, those who offer the service of spiritual accompaniment must be ‘guides who themselves are guided’. ‘Today more than ever we need men and women who, on the basis of their experience of accompaniment, are familiar with processes which call for prudence, understanding, patience and docility to the Spirit... *Our personal experience of being accompanied and assisted, and of openness to those who accompany us, will teach us to be patient and compassionate with others*, and to find the right way to gain their trust, their openness and their readiness to grow’ (EG 171–172).

Those offering the service of spiritual accompaniment know the importance of fatherliness, the ability to inspire trust, optimism and hope, and a capacity for a love that is not possessive and does not expect returns. It is useful for the spiritual guide to enjoy a certain standing because of his lived experience, competence in the psychological and pedagogical sciences, ability to read the movements of the Spirit, and capacity to communicate, listen and empathise. He brings into play the very quality of his being – as man, believer, consecrated person and Salesian.

In addition to personal qualities and experience, proper preparation and updating is indispensable. Hence the need to qualify confreres in spiritual accompaniment (FD 103).

Choice of spiritual guide

201. In the friendly talk with the rector the confrere ‘speaks with confidence of his own life and work and, if he so wishes, also of the state of his conscience’ (C 70). The possibility of entering into the characteristic area of spiritual accompaniment is not excluded, but the choice is entirely on the side of the one who confides.

All confreres, including those in initial formation,

have the right to freely choose their spiritual guide.¹⁰ Provincials, rectors and formators ensure real freedom of choice, taking care to avoid any form of coercion, explicit or implicit.

In the spirit of the Preventive System, a good Salesian rector does his best to gain the confidence of those entrusted to his care. 'Strive to make yourself loved' is not only something that characterizes us and that is the badge of our profession, but an art that the rector has to learn day after day. In such a context, many might freely choose him as their spiritual guide, and to these he willingly offers this service.

To facilitate a genuinely free choice of spiritual guide, the provincial (or curatorium) suggests the names of some who could offer the service of spiritual accompaniment. Members of the local council will not be included, but confreres are free to approach them.

Provincials and curatoriums must make arrangements for the preparation of spiritual guides.¹¹

During initial formation, it is ideal that confessors and guides be Salesians, but the individual confrere must be guaranteed the freedom to choose someone who is not a Salesian, provided that person is familiar with our charism and spirituality and that it is possible to meet him or her regularly. Within relationships of mutual trust, the rector and the formation team should be able to gently guide the choices that are made. In the same way, the confrere is required to let his rector know the name of his spiritual guide and the frequency of meetings.

Openness

202. The confrere has the moral responsibility to be transparent and to reveal any matters that might have a bearing on his vocation. 'In the process of formation, it is necessary that the [candidate] should know himself and let himself be known, relating to the formators with sincerity and transparency' (*Gift* 45). Accompaniment and discernment can only be lived in the fullness of truth and docility to the Holy Spirit.

Confidentiality¹²

203. In the relationship of spiritual accompaniment it is important to create 'a sacred space' where one can share intense feelings and experiences, knowing that it is safe to do so. Maintaining confidentiality is an essential condition for such a safe environment. Without mutual trust, it is not possible to get in touch with the truth of the person.

The confidentiality of accompaniment is governed by a professional code of ethics. What is shared within the relationship of accompaniment cannot be revealed unless the one accompanied expressly permits it. Cases where confidentiality needs to give way before a greater good are rare and well delineated in another section of the *Ratio* (FSDB 711–712).

As per our Salesian tradition, the rector participates in the process of admissions at the local level even when he is the spiritual guide of some confreres. He cannot, however, share with the council what he comes to know solely in spiritual accompaniment or during the friendly talk, unless authorized freely and explicitly by the person concerned. He cannot even make use of this information in the secret voting of the council.

Shared vision and objectives

204. Clearly, there is need for a *shared vision and objectives* among the various persons involved in the processes of formation, but especially among the three key figures of rector, spiritual guide and confessor.¹³ The rector has prime responsibility for such unity. It is up to him to find appropriate ways of ensuring a common vision also among those who offer the service of guidance and confession.

The sacrament of reconciliation

205. It should not be forgotten that the sacrament of reconciliation is an experience that is quite different from spiritual accompaniment. As per Salesian tradition, it is appropriate that during initial formation the confreres

have a regular confessor.

When confreres also ask the confessor for the service of spiritual accompaniment, both must take care to distinguish the two moments, so as to ensure that the relationship of spiritual accompaniment is not reduced to a mere formality.

Given the signal importance and widespread appreciation of the role of the confessor, provinces are called to invest in the *preparation and qualification of confreres* for this ministry. Confreres also are invited to see the importance of this role and be ready to offer this precious service.

Confreres should always have the freedom to choose their confessors, whether inside or outside the community. If the regular confessor is not Salesian, he should at least be familiar with our charism and spirituality.

5.5 PRACTICAL GUIDELINES

Community accompaniment

206. *The **provincial / curatorium** has the responsibility of ensuring the quality of community accompaniment by careful preparation and appointment of rectors and other members of the formation team (GC29 39j, m). They also study the local formation plan and ensuring the continuity of the formation process.*

In interprovincial communities, the Regional Councillor as president of the curatorium ensures that formation teams are composed of Salesians from the various member provinces of the curatorium. The provincials should be generous in contributing suitable and well-prepared confreres.

207. *The **rector** is ‘the leader of the community and its spiritual guide’ (C 104). It is his duty to carry out a spiritual, formative and pastoral animation of the community through his presence, paternal exercise of authority, meetings of the council and the assembly of the confreres (C 178–186), conferences and other meetings (R 176), formulation of the community plan (GC25 72) or the local formation plan (C 44b; R 4b, 5), the community day, public and private exhortations, the daily good-night talk (R 49) and the friendly talk (C 70; R 80).*

With the help of the formators, the rector ensures the accompaniment of meetings of the different groups within the formation community.

Personal accompaniment

208. *Each Salesian formulates his **personal plan of life** and evaluates it periodically with his spiritual guide.*

209. *The rector makes himself readily available for the **friendly talk** with the confreres. ‘During the period of initial formation, once a month the confreres will have the friendly talk with the superior referred to in article 70 of the Constitutions’ (R 80).*

210. *The rector ensures true **freedom of choice of spiritual guide**. When requested, he willingly makes himself available for this service. In dialogue with the rector or provincial, the confreres are free to approach other persons for spiritual accompaniment.*

The rector always remains the one with overall responsibility for formation; the individual confrere maintains a relationship of trust and openness with him.

211. *To facilitate the free choice of spiritual guide, the provincial (or curatorium) will present the **names of some Salesians** (priests and brothers) who could be approached for this service. The members of the local council will not be included, but confreres are free to approach them. They could also choose someone else, in consultation with the provincial or rector, provided that person is familiar with our charism and spirituality and that it is possible to meet him or her regularly.*

During initial formation, spiritual accompaniment via internet can be contemplated only as an exception; it should not become the ordinary practice.

212. *The **spiritual guide in the novitiate** is the director of novices (can. 650 §2; C 112).*

213. *As required by canon law, confreres have complete freedom in the choice of confessor. During the period of initial formation, it is recommended that the **regular confessor** be a Salesian; if not, he should at least be familiar with our charism and spirituality.*

214. *The rector and novice director are not to hear the **sacramental confessions** of their novices or confreres in initial formation residing in the same house unless the formees freely request it in particular cases (can. 985).*

5. Notes

¹ FD 95. In his post-synodal Exhortation, Pope Francis observes that the Church is growing in the awareness that it is the entire community that evangelizes the young (ChV 202).

² 'guides who themselves are guided': Pope Francis, homily during Holy Mass on the occasion of the Day for Consecrated Life – 2 February 2015.

³ E. ALBURQUERQUE FRUTOS, 'Saint Francis de Sales as Spiritual Director', SA 19.

⁴ A. GIRAUDO, 'Special Characteristics of the Spiritual Direction that Don Bosco offered to Young People', SA 111.

⁵ See FoR chapter 5: the EPC is animated by means of accompaniment of the environment, of the group, and of each individual.

⁶ FRANCIS, *Totum Amoris Est* (2022).

⁷ CICLSAL, *The Gift of Fidelity and the Joy of Perseverance*. Manete in dilectione mea (*Jn 15:9*). *Guidelines* (2020) 3.

⁸ See FSDB 231–232.

⁹ See FSDB 67 (pastoral accompaniment); 716–719 (periodic personal assessments – scrutinies); and 721–730 (psychological accompaniment).

¹⁰ PC 14. See also SCRSI, *The Contemplative Dimension of Religious Life* (1980) 11; can. 630 §1; and PI 63.

¹¹ See R 79. See also *The Contemplative Dimension of Religious Life*, 11 and PI 63.

¹² See FSDB 707–712.

¹³ See OT 5; PI 32; PDV 66; DES 29–32; *Gift*, Introduction section 3.



6 'If he calls you, you shall say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening".' (1 Sam 3:9)

Walking together in the church and the congregation

Lectio

The calling of Samuel is a story of vocation in which God makes his word heard, in a difficult context, to a young man who did not know him; the young man responds, and thus prophecy is born in Israel.

We know that Samuel was asleep when the Lord called him; he thought it was Eli calling and went to him. Eli realised that it was the Lord calling the young man and advised him to respond and place himself entirely at his disposal. Samuel obeys, saying: "*Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.*"

Samuel did not know the Lord, but that is no impediment to being called. In fact, God called him four times; the first two (vv. 4 and 6) prepare him to know him, the other two (vv. 8 and 10), with Eli's help, prepare him for his encounter and his mission.

Meditatio

The quote "*If he calls you, you shall say: 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening'*" also introduces the section of the *Salesian Constitutions* on initial formation (C 102–108), which addresses the complexity and unity of formation, the forming communities, the role of formators, the formation curriculum, and incorporation into the Society and the periods of formation. For its part, the *Ratio* frames Chapter 6 with this quote, extending the personal and communal meaning of accompaniment to the provincial, regional and global levels of formation within the Congregation and the Church.

Whilst the fundamental attitude of any vocational and formative process is a willingness to listen to God, in the story of Samuel this listening does not arise spontaneously; it emerges from accompaniment, seeking and discernment. Samuel recognises the voice of God thanks to Eli's mediation.

The account shows that God calls a young man, but also calls his companion and makes use of his mediation. From this we can understand that young people need to be accompanied in order to recognise that call, and that this accompaniment is realised through people, processes and interventions. Thus a central truth for the Church and for the Salesian charism is revealed: vocation arises from a process of listening that requires mediation in order to be accompanied and recognised.

The *Ratio* specifies this by reminding us that the Salesian's vocation and path of growth unfold within a network of relationships in the Church and in the Congregation, where each person takes responsibility for their own formation process and allows themselves to be accompanied by others.

Samuel also teaches us that God does not call only those who already know him. Samuel "did not yet know the Lord" when he was called. God's call can arise even in the midst of confusion or searching.

Samuel's response sheds particular light on our mission amongst young people: listening to them, walking with them and helping them to discern their life's path is a central part of the Salesian mission. Today, as in Samuel's time, God continues to call; for this reason, every Salesian is invited to be like Samuel, who listens, and like Eli, who helps others to listen.

Francisco Cervantes Huitrón, MEG



6. Walking together in the Church and the Congregation

215. Besides personal and community accompaniment, there are other forms of guidance and support within the process of formation, whether in the Church or in the Congregation at local, provincial, regional and world levels.

6.1 IN THE BOSOM OF THE CHURCH AND THE CONGREGATION

216. Every vocation and every journey of formation takes place in the bosom of the Church, ‘begetter and educator of vocations’ (PDV 35).

The Salesian makes his profession with reference to a particular province, but knows he belongs first and foremost to the Congregation and pledges himself ‘to live in the Salesian Society in communion of spirit and action with [his] brothers’ (C 24; see *Gift* 126). The formation process is a constant dialogue between the individual and the Congregation in its different expressions.

6.2 THE PERSON

Personal responsibility for formation

217. Each one of us accepts responsibility for our own formation (C 99; PDV 69) in the network of relationships within which formation takes place. We willingly accept those who accompany us, and we know at the same time that we are also partners in the growth of our brothers and for our community.

We accept the Rule of life as our point of reference. We continue to learn more and more about ourselves, develop the different aspects of our personality, and strive to be docile instruments in the Lord’s hands for fulfilling the mission. We accept the asceticism involved and face the struggles entailed by fidelity to our vocation.

The personal plan of life¹

218. Adopting a *personal plan of life* is a way of keeping our vocational response alive, assuming personal responsibility for formation, adhering to the Constitutions and to the various plans that concretize the charism and mission at various levels (GC25 14, 31). Sharing the personal plan with one's spiritual guide or, if one wishes, with the rector of the community, is a way of making it more concrete and effective (GC25 62).

6.3 LOCAL LEVEL

The religious community and the EPC

The Salesian religious community

219. 'The natural environment for vocational growth is the community which the confrere joins with trust and in which he gives his responsible collaboration. The very life of the community, united in Christ and open to the needs of the times, is itself a factor in formation, and hence must continually move forward and be renewed' (C 99).

'The assimilation of the Salesian spirit is fundamentally a fact of living communication' (R 86), the natural context of which is the local and the provincial community. Don Bosco cared much about personal relationships, but he was above all the creator of an environment that abounded in educational relationships and models, programmes and exhortations. The Valdocco community, marked by the Preventive System, was a setting that welcomed, directed, accompanied, encouraged and made demands.

Formation is always relational and reciprocal. The young confreres are not passive recipients but rather active partners in the processes of formation.

The EPC

220. The local Salesian community, itself part of the animating nucleus of the EPC, is called to bear witness to religious life, foster the charismatic identity of the

EPC and promote communion and participation.² The new version of article 5 of the Regulations (GC29 resolution 9) clarifies the position of the Salesian community within the EPC: '[Its] animating nucleus is composed of a group of people who identify with the ecclesial mission, Don Bosco's educational system, and his spirituality. Its charismatic point of reference is the religious community' (R 5). This constitutes for the community a mandate of an eminently formative character, both internally – called to take root and be renewed in the charism – and externally – so as to be an important and effective point of reference.

The EPC plays a significant role in formation. It invites the Salesian to communicate his experience as a consecrated person and at the same time receives the rich witness of the life and faith of lay people. It offers experiences of ongoing formation in its daily life of listening and discerning, planning, implementing and evaluating, as also formal moments of shared formation.

The community plan³

221. Every year the local community draws up its community plan. This plan is a good instrument for giving consistency 'to living and working together, overcoming the progressive separation caused by individual work, with the risk of fragmentation' (GC25 72).

Distinct from the SEPP, the community plan is concerned primarily with the Salesian religious community and is a yearly exercise, focusing on life together and vocational growth. The implementation of the plan should be reviewed periodically, above all at the end of the year.

The local formation plan⁴

222. In initial formation communities the community plan takes the form of the local formation plan. This plan is drawn up in a synodal way by all the members of the community (GE 166–175; GC28 37) and is

approved by the provincial / curatorium. It is reviewed periodically.

It takes into consideration the holistic formation of the Salesian in the various dimensions of Salesian consecrated life in its two forms.

It makes provision for the growth of those in initial formation as well as the formation team and makes room for the contribution of members of the EPC, the Salesian Family and others, religious as well as lay men and women, in the formation process.⁵

The formation community

223. During the period of formation the Church requires that candidates reside in 'communities where there should be no lack of the conditions required for a complete formation: spiritual, intellectual, cultural, liturgical, communitarian, and pastoral' (PI 27) and, as indicated in *Vita Consecrata*, human, charismatic and consecrated (VC 71). 'Initial formation is ordinarily carried out in communities specifically designed for the purpose' (C 103).

A formation community may be provincial, interprovincial or international. When it has an attached study centre, our Regulations refer to it as a *studentate* (R 96, 98).

The formation community, 'more than a place, a material space, should be a spiritual place, a way of life, an atmosphere that fosters and ensures a process of formation' (PDV 42). It is a united family in which those in formation and their formators seek to re-live 'the experience of formation which our Lord provided for the Twelve' (PDV 60), so as to become missionary disciples who will be signs and bearers of God's love for the young.⁶

When a confrere in initial formation (e.g. a missionary *ad gentes*) cannot join a formation community because of special circumstances, the provincial must ensure that he is placed in a community that is able to accompany him to reach the objectives of his particular phase of formation. The provincial must also see that he preferably frequents a study centre used by other religious, and that this arrangement has the authorization of the Councillor for Formation.

The network of relationships

224. The processes of formation take place within a network of mutual relationships that involve formators, peers and others.

The community encourages mature friendships that offer mutual help and support through witness, sharing and service. Multicultural and international communities offer significant opportunities for mutual enrichment.

The formation community also keeps meaningful contact with the families of each confrere, seeking ways to involve them with discretion and delicacy in the work of formation. It cultivates a welcoming and open attitude to the members of the Salesian Family and the EPC.

‘Precisely for this reason, the initial formation of the confreres must already include experiences shared with the laity, proportionate to the objectives of the individual stages of maturation, and encourage the specific contribution that they can give to healthy vocational growth’ (GC29 49).

Conditions for the formation experience

225. The formation community guarantees the conditions needed to personalize the formation experience. It offers different ways and means for this: times of silence and reflection, personal prayer, involvement in drawing up the plan of the formation community, opportunities to take up various types of responsibilities in the community, participation in group work and other helpful forms of encounter, personal accompaniment, and means of self-evaluation.

A community with practical trainees is also a formation community. It is the responsibility of the provincial to guarantee the possibility of adequate accompaniment and other conditions to ensure that the experience is formative.

The daily timetable and distribution of activities are structured with sufficient flexibility so as to lead to a personal appreciation and use of time and to nurture the spirit of initiative.

Size of communities

226. To promote fraternal life and offer quality formation it is helpful for the community to have a certain numerical strength and be neither too large nor too small. However, it is not the number in itself that generates or limits the quality, but rather significant interpersonal relationships, the active involvement of each member, the possibility of regular personal and community spiritual accompaniment, and meaningful educative and pastoral experiences.

Interprovincial formation communities can be a way of meeting these criteria and maximizing resources, ensure quality formation teams and numbers that allow for effective formation.

Periodic personal assessments

227. Periodic personal assessments (*scrutinies*) are a form of accompaniment that is the responsibility of the local council. Progress made is considered and help offered, noting promising aspects of growth and areas that call for attention, encouraging, affirming and correcting with the charity and frankness that are part of the Salesian spirit.

The first one to be involved in this process is the young person in formation himself. The council also finds ways of involving others such as the formation community, the teachers and lay people involved in the formation processes and in the EPC (FSDB 719).

The provincial formation delegate and the rectors will help formators and formees to clearly distinguish these assessments from the juridical process involved in admissions and the judgments connected with them (FSDB 716–719).

In the case of interprovincial formation communities, periodic personal assessments must be the subject of frank and open discussion between the rector and the provincial of the candidate or confrere.

The rector

228. The rector is essentially the animator and formator ‘who presides over the community in love’ (GC21 53).

He maintains a team spirit among the formation guides and coordinates their roles.

Convinced of the formative value of the environment, the rector tries to create an atmosphere abounding in Salesian values. He offers community and personal accompaniment and brings everyone's efforts to converge on a common plan which is in line with the provincial plan.

He helps each confrere understand and make his own the phase of formation he is engaged in. He maintains a frequent and friendly dialogue with the confrere, thus getting to know each one's situation with his strengths and weaknesses. He knows how to offer recommendations that are clear and demanding, propose suitable goals, support and guide him in times of difficulty, and together with him evaluate the progress he is making in his formation.

Together with his council the rector contributes to vocation discernment, especially at the time of assessments and admissions, keeping in mind the difference between the two processes (FSDB 716–719).

Salesian style of authority

229. In the spirit of the Preventive System, the rector exercises the service of authority in a manner that is at once fatherly and fraternal.

To undertake a true journey of growth, young people need authoritative adults. In its etymological meaning, auctoritas indicates the capacity to promote growth; it does not express the idea of a directive power, but of a real generative force (FD 71).

When lived in this way, the service of authority acquires an authoritativeness that is much greater than what can be achieved only by a recourse to 'cold rules' (Letter from Rome 1884).

Authority in the Church is always *potestas*, exercised in the name of another, and never absolute power. 'This

service is directed to fostering charity, coordinating the efforts of all, animating, orienting, making decisions, giving corrections, so that our mission may be accomplished' (C 121).

Friendly talk, personal spiritual accompaniment, formative accompaniment

230. The rector meets confreres in initial formation every month for the friendly talk and is also available for the service of personal spiritual accompaniment if requested.

The rector remains a key point of reference for those engaged in important moments of vocational discernment, even when he is not their spiritual guide.⁷

The formation team

Profile of formators

231. Formators are men of solid Salesian spirituality, with the ability to communicate love and enthusiasm for Don Bosco and for the Salesian vocation in a vibrant way. They also ought to be men of sufficient experience in Salesian educative and pastoral work.

In order to facilitate holistic formation there is need for a well-knit group of formators 'who know how to work in a team under the guidance and responsibility of the Rector' (GC28 27; cf. *Gift* 132). The members of the team complement each other according to their diverse talents, experiences and competence.

The formation team must be conscious of the fact that it is a mediator of God's action, and that formation is relational and reciprocal.

Formators must be capable of 'careful observation refined by a good knowledge of the human sciences so as to go beyond appearances and the superficial level of motivations and behaviour and help [the candidate] to know himself well, accept himself serenely, correct himself and grow to maturity starting from his real, not imaginary, roots, and from the very core of his personality' (DES 57).

They are called to help their brothers discern God's action and the signs of his will, and guide them in the ways of the Lord, both with their words and with the coherent witness of their consecrated life.

They adopt a positive and critical outlook on culture and social problems with a view to contextualizing the formation process in a suitable way.⁸

Constitution of the team

232. Formators are to be chosen with care.⁹ It is not enough to choose a set of gifted and qualified individuals; it is crucial that they are able to blend together into a team that can create a good formative ambience.

An effort is to be made to have both *Salesian brothers and Salesian priests* on the team. Also very important is the presence of young confreres, who make an important contribution in accompanying and supporting the Salesian vocational journey of others after them (cf. C 46) while continuing the initial stages of their formation. In the case of young Salesians who are doing their practical training in a house of initial formation, 'the provincial should make sure to give [them] also another experience, preferably with young people at risk' (FSDB 510).

In interprovincial formation houses, it is desirable to have formators from the different provinces.

Confessors and spiritual guides play very important roles in the processes of formation (FSDB 199–205). They will make every effort to share a common vision of formation under the guidance of the rector and according to the formation plan approved by the provincial / curatorium.

Teachers in our study centres have a vital role in formation. They are not only teachers but also formators.

It is particularly helpful that the formation team in the wider sense include experienced and competent *lay persons*, both men and women,¹⁰ especially mission partners or members of the Salesian Family (GC29 49; see FSDB 249–251).

Formation of formators

233. The rector and the team of formation personnel in our formation communities need to be specifically prepared, above all as regards spiritual accompaniment.

Common sense alone is not enough: what is needed is a capacity for discernment that has been sharpened and refined by a good knowledge of the human sciences so as to be able to go beyond appearances and to help the one in formation ‘to know himself in depth, accept himself with serenity and to correct himself and to mature...’ (DES 57).

The adequate preparation of formators remains a most important concern for the Congregation. Everyone must be convinced of the need to prepare formators specifically for their service. Provincials and curatoriums bear responsibility for such formation, and formators willingly make themselves available to undergo the preparation required.¹¹

Aspects in the formation of formators

234. Called to a delicate service for the benefit of confreres in initial formation, formators, aware of their own fragility, learn to take care of their own formation and all-round growth.

We could distinguish three aspects in the formation of formators: contents, skills and the person of the formator.

As far as *contents* are concerned, besides a sound basic philosophical and theological formation, Salesian formators need to be well grounded in the Salesian charism and have a great sensitivity to the challenges of contemporary culture: the ‘anthropological question’, the phenomenon of migration, the challenges of science and technology, the ecological crisis and environmental problems, sustainable development and lifestyles, human rights and their foundation in the gospel, pluralism and interreligious dialogue, and so on.

As for *skills and capacities*, any courses that help develop and hone skills in listening, feedback, counselling, accompaniment, etc. are valuable. Also

of great importance is harmony with the educative and pastoral mission carried out in the ecclesial and social context where the community is located, and as far as possible in the contexts from which the confreres in initial formation come, in addition to the skills in areas of the Salesian mission acquired in previous experiences.

Above all, however, attention must be given to the *person of the formator*: periods of prolonged formation and of radical review of formation topics, accurate examination of the personality of the formator, processing of the personal, pastoral and formation experience, practical exercises carried out with the help of a supervisor and periods of spiritual renewal (DES 70–71).

The formation of formators does not necessarily call for a university degree, but the courses offered at the Pontifical Salesian University, for example, remain valid offerings.

Emotional and psychological growth

235. Great importance is to be given to the area of *emotional and psychological growth*. Formators need to learn to recognize and handle their emotions by working through their own problems, inconsistencies, self-defeating or immature behaviours, while at the same time enhancing their strengths and competencies. There are few things so life-giving as contact with a formator who is healthy and free. On the other hand, the negative effects generated by favouritism, possessiveness, rivalry, emotional compensation and taking revenge are sadly well known.

The Preventive System

236. Formators are called to live the Preventive System as a pedagogy of freedom. A relationship characterized by fraternity and freedom is established between formators and those in the processes of formation. For the formator, the Preventive System is an exercise in fatherliness that pushes the person accompanied towards increasing autonomy, a healthy spiritual life and maturity. It is a balanced and respectful relationship that

induces the formee to listen, understand and trust what the formator is trying to communicate, even when it is challenging. The one who accompanies has the task of observing, enlightening, orienting, so as to understand where the Spirit is leading, without imposing, always with respect for the freedom of the person.

Respecting cultural differences

237. Interprovincial or international formation structures call for formators who are convinced that Christianity does not have simply one cultural expression but rather reflects ‘the different faces of the cultures and people in which it is received’, while remaining completely true to itself.¹²

The concrete way to such an attitude passes through the person of the formator: if a formator has a certain inner strength, and if he has taken the trouble to process his reactions to what is ‘different,’ he will possess a secure bridge to the experience of the other. His faith will help him grow in the fundamental conviction that we are all brothers, *fratelli tutti*, and with Don Bosco he will be able to say, ‘That you are young is enough to make me love you very much’ (C 14).

The digital world

238. The new and constantly evolving culture generated by digital technology calls for a commitment to inculturation that is also new. If this is true for every area of ecclesial presence and commitment, it becomes inescapable in the field of formation. There are no easy and well-defined paths, and the first ones called to respond are formators (FSDB 98–103; GC29 69h).

Formation of spiritual guides¹³

239. The Congregation commits itself to the formation of spiritual guides. The first and indispensable element in such formation is the formator’s own access to spiritual accompaniment.¹⁴ Practical courses on spiritual accompaniment will enhance what one has already learnt in this way (GC29 29, 39t).

Ongoing formation of formators

240. Formation in daily life is a true school of ongoing formation of formators. It takes place through personal moments of prayer, study and reflection; through interpersonal sharing and the different forms of accompaniment; through the various meetings for planning, reflection and sharing, and so on.

No less important is harmony with and integration within the ecclesial and social world, with the Salesian educational and pastoral sensitivity that characterises the charismatic identity we are called to live and convey. Interest in and familiarity with province and local Educative and Pastoral Plans, experiences of the Salesian Youth Movement, and the shared responsibility of Salesians and lay people engaging with young workers, university students, migrants, and young people in vulnerable situations should be cultivated, depending on the contexts in which we are involved.

Formators seek *supervision*, both as individuals and as a team, in order to be more effective in their ministry. Such supervision is usually done with the help of experts, but it can also be profitably done among peers or in groups.

Psychologists and other experts in the human sciences are good resources for the formation of formators not only individually but as a group.

Specific updating courses are useful from time to time. Sharing one's own experiences with other formators, both Salesians and from other religious congregations, could be of great help.

The provincial and regional formation commissions also make an important contribution to the ongoing formation of formators.

Supervision of spiritual guides and formators

241. Supervision in spiritual accompaniment helps the guide grow in his role, by clarifying aspects to be improved and challenges to be faced, and by looking honestly at the attitudes, habits, and expectations

that shape how they accompany others.

Supervision usually focuses on three main areas: (1) building the guide's skills, confidence, and overall effectiveness; (2) helping the guide keep a healthy balance between life and ministry, making space to process feelings and experiences, and being mindful of things like emotional strain and the risk of burnout; (3) making sure the guide's service stays sound, ethical, and spiritually healthy – acting as a safeguard for the integrity of the work. Particular cases can also come up for discussion, but mostly when the guide feels uncertain or unclear.

Supervision is part of the guide's ongoing growth and formation. There is no need to ask clients for permission, since their identities and personal details are never disclosed.

What is said about spiritual guides here can be applied in much the same way also to formation guides in general.

The study centre

The Salesian study centre

242. A Salesian study centre provides the possibility of an intellectual formation orientated and characterized at all levels by the Salesian mission and is therefore a valuable resource not only for the students but also for the province or group of provinces involved, and for the local Church. As far as possible the centre is also open to externs, religious and lay (R 83–86).

A study centre may or may not have a juridic personality. Canonical public juridic personality is granted by the Dicastery for Culture and Education; the form of governance is indicated by the Apostolic See.¹⁵ A Salesian study centre may either be combined with a formation community or else function independently, under the religious authority of some other community.

When it forms part of a formation community (referred to in the Regulations as a 'studentate': see R 96 and 98) it enjoys legitimate academic autonomy,¹⁶

with full respect for the jurisdiction pertaining to the rector and his council, as also to the provincial and his

council or to the curatorium. Academically the study centre is answerable to the relevant academic authorities (e.g. the university faculty or the Dicastery for Culture and Education) (C 44, 190).

In dialogue with the rector of the studentate and the provincial / curatorium, and in keeping with the *Ratio*, the study centre draws up its own statute and regulations. When the study centre is related to the UPS or to some other academic authority (by way of aggregation, affiliation, or association), this statute is supervised by the relevant faculty and approved by the Dicastery for Culture and Education.¹⁷

243. A Salesian study centre must ensure ‘a systematic study of Salesian spirituality and the history of our Society’ (R 86) and deepening of our consecrated identity.

It is the duty of provincials / curatoriums to look after the study centres, be concerned about their Salesian purpose and the quality of their academic service and furnish them with the necessary means. They plan the preparation of teachers, rational deployment, stability and timely replacement. They ensure that there are qualified teachers in the subjects that give the centre a Salesian complexion. They encourage the teachers to be involved in the processes of study and reflection of the Congregation and of the province / region.

Non-Salesian study centres

244. The criterion of discernment for the choice of a non-Salesian study centre is the possibility of growth in the Salesian identity. For the postnovitiate phase, a centre that integrates philosophical studies with the human sciences and catechetics is to be preferred; for specific formation, a centre that can contribute to the formation of religious brothers and priests who are pastors and educators. Again, a centre run by institutes of consecrated life or else frequented by them is to be preferred over centres with a predominantly diocesan outlook.

When confreres in formation frequent a non-Salesian study centre:

- the possibility of assimilating the subjects within the framework of the Salesian vocation and mission must be guaranteed, both individually and as a group.
- a good relationship is cultivated between the formation community and the study centre.
- intellectual formation is accompanied by a competent Salesian.
- efforts should be made to have Salesians as members of the teaching body and/or of the governing bodies.
- the formation community should ensure the study of Salesian heritage, pedagogy, youth ministry, catechetics, spirituality, social communication, theology of Salesian consecrated life, and the Salesian Family when these are not offered by the study centre.

Teachers

Teachers who are formators

245. The teachers – and in the first place, Salesian teachers – are called to be true formators, even when they deal exclusively with the academic field (*Gift* 142). They work in close collaboration with other formators and within the overall framework of the formation plan. Their teaching goes hand in hand with the witness of their faith convictions and their friendly and educative presence among the young Salesians.

They are mediators of the cultural and spiritual patrimony of the Church and the Congregation, and are models of commitment to study, research, publishing in their field of specialization. They guide personal study in a way that enables learning a method of scientific work and the deepening and application of what has been taught.

Preparation

246. Teachers are adequately prepared for their service. They are called ‘to adhere with complete fidelity to the Word of God, committed to writing in the Scriptures, handed on in Tradition, and authentically interpreted by the Magisterium’ (*Gift* 140).

They are equipped with skills for helping students cultivate a discerning outlook and a mentality of ongoing formation. They are trained in didactic skills and especially in active teaching methods (FSDB 122).

Salesian identity

247. Active interest in the life of the Congregation and contact with the world of the young and of the poor can enable Salesian teachers to establish an effective link between the topics they teach and Salesian apostolic action. Their involvement in educative and pastoral ministry can also offer inspiration, though it should not detract from the requirements of their academic service.

Specialists

248. Salesians and others who possess a specific competence are called to give their specialized contribution in a systematic or occasional manner and in different fields. This contribution to the formation of candidates or confreres can be preventive, pedagogical or supplementary.

When the experts are not Salesian, it is important to ensure that their service respects the characteristics proper to our vocation and is considered within the overall framework of Salesian formation. When their intervention is required for reasons of therapy, it is important that it be proposed and suitably motivated, never imposed.

Specialists limit themselves to their proper field of competence, without making judgments on the suitability of candidates and confreres to the Salesian life.

In the field of psychology, this contribution is valuable both for formators and for those in initial formation principally in two areas: in the assessment of personality, expressing an opinion as to psychological health; and in helping to grow in self-knowledge and human maturity.¹⁸

Lay people

249. Lay people – especially when they are members of the Salesian Family or of the animating nucleus of the EPC – can help Salesians appreciate their consecrated identity more deeply and develop a stronger sense of Church in the interdependence of different vocations and the exchange of spiritual gifts (*Charter* 10).

The laity can also contribute to the formation of Salesians, especially in the area of family spirituality, the social, psychological, economic and political arena and social communication (DES 10–11).

It must be remembered that every person involved in the EPC has a formative impact, including service personnel and other employees, who must therefore be carefully selected. It is important that all the members of the EPC are aware that they are part of a formation experience where everything educates.

Role of women

What would have become of Valdocco without the presence of Mamma Margaret? Would your houses have been possible without this woman of faith? ... Without a real, effective and affective presence of women, your works would lack the courage and the ability to transform presence into hospitality, into a home. Faced with the rigour that excludes, we must learn to generate the new life of the Gospel. I invite you to implement approaches in which the female voice, her outlook and her actions – appreciated for her individuality – finds an echo in making decisions; not simply as a helper but as someone fully involved in your presences (Pope Francis, GC28 p. 62).

250. Women can make relationships and settings more human and personal, and their presence ‘helps to instil a recognition of how men and women complement one another’ (*Gift* 151). They make a special contribution in the field of education and Salesian formation in ways

that are consistent with the values of consecration and with different cultural situations.¹⁹ They can also be ‘an “antidote” against every clericalist and rigorous tendency’ (GC28 p. 62).

Shared formation

251. Confreres in formation are introduced to experiences of collaboration with lay people ‘both at a directly practical level and in the process of the elaboration of the Salesian educative and pastoral plan’ (GC24 53). Keeping in mind the different vocations of Salesians and lay people, and the times needed for human, affective and apostolic maturing, the phases of initial formation have contents and experiences of reciprocal and complementary formation to which lay men and women bring their specific contribution (GC24 138–141).

The family

252. Rectors are asked to ‘take a special interest also in the parents of confreres and consider them united to the community in a special way’ (R 177).

Our family of origin is one of the most significant factors in the development of our personalities, and our vocation usually develops within the context of a community in which one has had a significant experience of faith. The family and the parish of origin, or the parish to which the candidate belongs, and sometimes also other ecclesial communities, can contribute significantly to sustaining and nourishing the Salesian consecrated vocation, not only during the period of initial formation but also in the rest of our lives (*Gift* 148).

At the same time, the confrere in formation must be helped to grow in inner freedom that facilitates proper autonomy in how he lives his religious life, keeping a healthy distance from any unrealistic expectations that some families might have. It is part of our growth to know how to recognize and accept our family situation realistically and with human and Christian maturity, and to deal with challenges that might arise.

Families might also need help to understand and accept the religious vocation of their sons in the particular form they have chosen. Pastoral engagement of the formation community with the families of confreres could contribute also to the Christian development of these families themselves (*Gift* 149).

6.4 PROVINCIAL LEVEL

The provincial

253. Within the province, it is the provincial who has the first responsibility for initial and ongoing formation, exception being made for international and interprovincial formation structures. He exercises *potestas* (authority) in the name of the Salesian Congregation and of the Church.

The provincial takes care to develop personal relationships with each confrere. He carries out his ministry of formation personally and with the help of his vice-provincial, formation delegate and PFC. He guides the drawing up of the formation section of the provincial directory, the provincial formation plan and the provincial qualification plan. He makes sure that the PFC offers help to communities and confreres for drawing up the community plan and the personal plan of life (GC25 16).

He takes a special interest in the formation communities, making sure that rectors and teams are prepared for the service of formation.

He shares responsibility for interprovincial formation structures, participating regularly in the meetings of the curatorium and generously contributing formators.

He also offers his collaboration for interprovincial and congregational formation projects and cooperates willingly with the Salesian Family, other religious congregations and the Church.

The provincial formation delegate

254. The provincial formation delegate works in dependence on and in agreement with the provincial and his council. He “is the one who “gives life” to formation

in the province: he animates it, stimulates it, follows it up and monitors it' with the help of the PFC which he coordinates (AGC 383 42). With this commission he has the task of reflecting upon, planning, programming, coordinating, implementing and verifying the formation initiatives of the province.

The formation delegate usually has a term of three years that can be renewed.

It is desirable that he be a member of the provincial council. While he may hold other responsibilities, he must be ensured sufficient freedom of action and movement to do his work as delegate effectively.

He is a member of the regional formation commission and thus is a link between the region and the province, especially with the provincial and his council.

He keeps in touch with the Councillor for Formation and with the formation delegates of other provinces.

The roles of the formation delegate and of the vice-provincial have great impact on formation, since, where the vice-provincial is concerned, 'The care of religious life and discipline is ordinarily entrusted to him.'...(C 168; GC29 resolution 1) When the two roles are held by different confreres, shared vision and synergy of action are essential.

Tasks

255. The provincial formation delegate animates and coordinates formation according to the indications of the provincial directory and the provincial formation plan.

In his work of animation, the formation delegate is concerned about all the confreres and communities, and in a special way about the confreres in initial formation and formation communities, including those outside the province. He keeps in regular contact with them and visits them often.

He takes special care of the Salesian brothers in initial formation.

He organizes initiatives for the ongoing formation of those who have completed initial formation. He sees to communication and collaboration with other provinces and members of the Salesian Family regarding formation.

In collaboration with the provincial delegate for youth ministry he promotes the mentality of shared mission among confreres in initial formation (FSDB 251, 858, 864).

The provincial formation commission²⁰

256. The PFC is set up by the provincial after hearing the opinion of his council (R 160) and always acts on behalf of the provincial and his council. It is headed by the provincial formation delegate.

Depending on the situation and needs of the province, the commission could have sub-commissions for the initial phases of formation and for the other stages of life ('ongoing formation'). While shared formation may be entrusted to the youth ministry team, it is the task of the PFC to ensure that a correct and dynamic vision of the shared mission is inculcated during initial formation.

The PFC meets at least two or three times a year. Minutes of meetings are kept and archived.

Members

257. The provincial delegate for youth ministry is one of the members of the PFC. It is good that there be some rectors of practical trainees, a Salesian brother; competent lay men and women, especially members of the Salesian Family and an expert in the area of psychology. Representatives of those in practical training and of the other confreres in initial formation could also be invited (GC28 23).

Commission members ordinarily have a three-year term which can be renewed once. Rectors are members for the duration of their term of office. The terms of practical trainees depend entirely on the provincial.

Tasks

258. The PFC animates the province in the area of formation under the direction of the provincial and his council. Such animation involves study, planning, programming, coordinating, implementing and evaluating the formation initiatives of the province.

Study

259. The PFC studies the formation situation in the province, with particular attention to initial formation. It is attentive to the documents of the Church and the Congregation regarding formation and takes care to keep the communities informed. It pays particular attention to the Salesian consecrated identity in its two forms and is concerned to create an environment of vocational fidelity and a desire for holiness.

Planning

260. The PFC assists in preparing and reviewing the formation section of the provincial directory and the provincial formation plan. It helps the provincial prepare the provincial qualification plan, giving due weight to Salesian, philosophical, pedagogical, theological, professional and academic studies (GC25 60) and especially to the preparation of formators and to the specializations of Salesian brothers. It offers help to communities and confreres for drawing up the Salesian community plan and the personal plan of life. It plans and organizes activities for promoting the vocation of the Salesian brother.²¹

It maintains a constantly updated database regarding initial formation in the province and related statistics, and regularly shares such information with the Councillor for Formation.

Accompanying initial formation

261. The PFC pays special attention to the initial phases of formation. It ensures the unity and continuity of the various phases of initial formation, including by involving the formation teams of the different phases of formation, and studies the criteria of discernment outlined in the Constitutions and the *Ratio*.

In collaboration with the province youth ministry team, it accompanies those discerning the Salesian consecrated vocation (aspirants), making sure that they receive adequate help in Christian and human formation

and the necessary vocational accompaniment (AGC 438 88–109).

It ensures that formators receive adequate training in pastoral accompaniment.

It works to make apostolic experiences respond to the objectives of each phase of formation.

It provides initiatives of animation and guidance for those doing practical training, university studies and those preparing for perpetual profession.

It implements a programme of formation to sexual and affective maturity in the light of Salesian consecrated chastity for formators, those in initial formation and those in the quinquennium.

Accompanying ongoing formation

262. The PFC ensures that the provincial formation plan acknowledges and gives due consideration to the formation that takes place in the ordinary life of communities dedicated to the apostolate.

Every year, the PFC arranges programmes of ongoing formation that consider the different situations of the confreres (age, specific vocation, etc.). It gives attention to senior confreres and to those who are sick. It takes particular care of the formation of new rectors. It strives to ensure the quality of the annual retreats of the confreres.

Collaboration and networking

263. The PFC organizes meetings for an exchange of views with the provincial delegates and commissions for youth ministry, social communications, missions, economy and the Salesian Family, and is attentive to the guidelines and documents of these Sectors.

It takes advantage of initiatives at the interprovincial and regional level as well as at the level of the Salesian Family.

It keeps in touch with the regional formation coordinator and the Councillor for Formation.

Formation of formators²²

264. The PFC does its part to prepare confreres for the service of formation and encourages them to take care of their ongoing formation and to avail of supervision.

Assessment

265. The PFC ordinarily evaluates the implementation of the formation section of the provincial directory and the provincial formation plan.

It joins with formation communities and, where necessary, also with study centres, in organizing and evaluating the work of formation (AGC 383 47–48).

In dialogue with the youth ministry team, it evaluates the care of vocations to Salesian consecrated life (the aspirantate experience), the programme of educative and pastoral activities in initial formation, and the programme of shared formation at various levels. It ensures that the two forms of our vocation are adequately presented, especially in the early phases of formation and during vocational animation.

Provincial directory – formation section²³

266. The indications concerning the process of formation in the province, which apply the general principles and norms of Salesian formation to concrete local situations, are set out in the *formation section of the provincial directory* and acquire binding force after the approval of the Rector Major with his Council.²⁴ Only those deliberations of the provincial chapter regarding formation ‘which have a normative and not just a transitory character’ (AGC 365 51), are to be included in the directory; other aspects can be assigned to the provincial formation plan. The principles and norms expressed in the directory are to be revised by the provincial chapter as and when required.

The formation section of the provincial directory must indicate one formation community for each phase of formation. If a province does not have its own formation

community for a particular phase of formation, it must indicate an interprovincial formation community, without prejudice to the possibility of sending some confreres to other formation communities. The provincial has the right and duty to participate in the curatorium of the interprovincial community that has been indicated in the directory. He also has the duty to contribute personnel and finances within the context of a six-year plan worked out in the curatorium, as a way of ensuring that the contribution of personnel is the fruit of planning rather than merely sporadic response to emergencies.

Provincial formation plan²⁵

267. The provincial formation plan is different from the formation section of the provincial directory and deals with matters that are of a more practical and flexible nature. It is drawn up by the PFC, soliciting the contribution of others, both confreres and lay mission partners (AGC 383 45). It is approved by the provincial with his council and evaluated regularly (FSDB 865).

The plan should have sub-sections for the formation of all confreres and for those in the initial phases of formation. It may include a specific scheme for each phase of formation in terms of objectives, strategies, study programmes, animation programmes and evaluation.

Formation in mission: new ways

268. In the variety of contexts and forms that the Salesian mission is assuming, new possibilities of formation are also taking shape, in search of a more intense and fruitful dialogue with the realities in which one is called to live and work, and with the many people with whom one interacts and collaborates.

If a province has the conditions for experimenting with new ways of carrying out the formation journey that fulfil the objectives presented in the *Ratio*, the provincial and his council can draw up a clear and exhaustive project and submit it for consideration by the Formation Councillor and the competent Regional Councillor. If the proposal

is found to be valid and the province is able to supply the necessary conditions, most especially regarding formators, precise time frames for implementation and periodic evaluation can be established, after which the project may be proposed for approval by the Rector Major and his Council.

The periodic evaluations will serve as a reference for possible experimentation in other provinces.

6.5 INTERPROVINCIAL AND REGIONAL LEVEL

269. Collaboration between the different persons and bodies responsible for formation is essential today for reflecting on formation, exchanging experiences and best practices, and making maximum use of resources and personnel. Different forms of collaboration are possible at interprovincial and regional level:

- Interprovincial formation communities and study centres.
- National, regional or interregional formation centres.
- Occasional coordination between provinces.
- Regional formation commissions and other such groupings.
- Issue-based meetings.
- Occasional initiatives such as study seminars.
- Formation experiences offered to various groups of confreres (R 85).

Digital technology offers a wide range of new possibilities for meetings, sharing of materials, and teamwork. Used wisely and creatively, they can make coordination and formation easier, circumventing barriers of geography and cost.

Interprovincial formation community

270. A formation community is considered interprovincial when at least two provinces have opted for it in their provincial directory and it is recognized as such by the Rector Major.

Such communities are a way of ensuring the consistency

in number and quality of those in formation and of formators.

An interprovincial formation community is governed and animated by the rector with the assistance of his council, and by the local provincial in ordinary matters. The member provinces share responsibility for it through the curatorium. An interprovincial formation community should always have a curatorium, for the purpose of sharing, building up a common vision, participating in the mission of the house and contributing formation and teaching personnel.

Formation communities that receive confreres from other provinces, none of which have chosen that community in their provincial directory, are not obliged to have a curatorium, but are free to hold meetings of the provincials involved.

In the case of a studentate, the relationship between the formation community and the study centre is to be defined in the statute of the curatorium and also in those of the study centre.

Change of mentality

271. Interprovincial collaboration calls for a change of mentality. An interprovincial formation community does not belong exclusively to the province in whose territory it is located. Formation and academics are matters for all the provinces involved. A province does not give up its formation responsibilities and obligations when it sends confreres to an interprovincial community; what changes is that these responsibilities are now shared with other provinces (AGC 388 60).

A change of mentality is required also of confreres in initial formation: they are not guests but confreres belonging to a worldwide Congregation doing a particular phase of formation in a particular interprovincial community. Similarly, formation guides and teachers do not look after confreres only from their own provinces but are equally concerned about all the confreres in the community.

Choice of interprovincial formation community

272. The choice of interprovincial community for a particular phase of formation is indicated in the formation section of the provincial directory, without prejudice to the right of the province to send some of its confreres to international formation communities or other formation communities.

Growing in intercultural sensitivity

273. ‘Internationalisation represents a prophetic path for the formation of confreres from different contexts’ (GC29 30).

Multiculturalism is a social category for speaking about the diversity of peoples and cultures; the aim of communities is to grow in intercultural sensitivity. Multicultural communities are valuable opportunities for learning to grow as members of a worldwide Congregation and Church, but also as part of the human family, *fratelli tutti*.

Growth in intercultural sensitivity is not automatic. It presupposes the inculturation of the charism in each of the peoples and cultures of the confreres, making possible a true unity in diversity, while avoiding the dangers of an *integration* that entails the renunciation of one’s own culture, a *ghetto mentality* that leads to closing oneself off in ethnic or cultural groups, and the *melting pot* in which all cultures would merge to give rise to a single new culture – something that is not a utopia but a lie.

Moreover, it is the result of openness and of attitudes favouring integration on the part of individuals and groups, wise and patient dialogue, and community and personal processing of experiences.²⁶ ‘Unity in the roots and diversity in expressions are the great wealth of our Congregation, something that we must safeguard wisely and promote creatively’ (GC29 2).

Interculturalism is the answer to tribalism, casteism, and racism even within the Congregation.

Relationship with the home province

274. Frequent visits by the provincial and others, and regular exchange of information and news, help promote

a healthy sense of belonging to the individual's province of origin. The presence of formation guides and teachers from the province of origin could also be helpful.

Admission to the renewal of vows, ministries and orders is done by the provincial where the formation community is located, having first sought the written opinion of the provincial of origin and his council (FSDB 705).

The management of interprovincial communities is discussed below (FSDB 282–287).

Interprovincial study centre

275. Other things being equal, what has been said about study centres applies also to interprovincial study centres (FSDB 242–243).

In a studentate a single curatorium exercises responsibility also for the study centre, with full respect for its legitimate autonomy (FSDB 282–285). When the service rendered by a study centre goes significantly beyond the formation community, the curatorium will concern itself not with the whole study centre but only with the service rendered to the formation community.

Regional or interregional formation centres

276. Regional or interregional formation centres are set up for the purpose of facilitating ongoing formation of Salesians, lay mission partners and members of the Salesian Family. They mediate between the Formation Sector and the needs of the provinces, with creativity and a sense of communion.

The centres are run by a team consisting of confreres and possibly also members of the Salesian Family and lay persons.

They organize programmes for the preparation or updating of rectors and other groups, prepare and distribute material for the animation of confreres, mission partners and communities, provide for the translation of Salesian resources, etc.

The director of the centre is a member of the relevant regional formation commissions and of the Formation Sector. He is always part of the World

Advisory Council – Formation.

The centre is ordinarily financed by the annual contributions of the member provinces as indicated in the statute of the curatorium.

The Formation Sector promotes communication and collaboration between the different regional centres.

Shared responsibility

277. The centres are set up by a region or regions with the approval of the Rector Major and his Council. Shared responsibility is guaranteed by a governing body organised in a similar way to the curatorium of interprovincial formation houses, although not equivalent, according to a specific statute or set of regulations proposed by the provincials concerned and approved by the Rector Major and his Council. In the name of the Rector Major (FSDB 282), this body is presided over by the Regional Councillor of the region in which the centre is situated. Other Regional Councillors are members as indicated in the statute.

It includes the director of the centre and the members of the team, the regional formation coordinators, and possibly also the regional coordinators for youth ministry, social communications and missions. It meets at least once a year.

The centres also depend on the Councillor for Formation who is a permanent member of this governing body and participates either personally or through a member of the Formation Sector. He accompanies the processes of reflection and the more important decisions.

Part of this body's mandate is the discernment process for finding personnel, under the presidency of the Regional Councillor and in dialogue with the other Regional Councillors and the Councillor for Formation, with details being indicated in the statute.

Regional formation commission

278. The regional formation commission (RFC) is a regional body that is part of the framework of the Formation Sector of the Congregation. It promotes

the formation vision of the Congregation in a specific region and brings what is specific to the region into the global outlook of the Congregation. It serves as a link between the Formation Sector and the region, fosters communion among the provincial formation structures,²⁷ and promotes the inculturation and contextualization of formation in the region. It is a service of discernment and enlightenment for those entrusted with animation and government at various levels.

Structure

279. The setting up of the RFC is entrusted by the Formation Sector to the provincials of the region under the leadership of the Regional Councillor.

The members of the commission are:

- the regional formation coordinator and the assistant coordinator.
- the formation delegates of the provinces, vice-provinces and provincial delegations of the region.
- a Salesian brother proposed by the RFC and appointed by the provincials of the region.
- the director of the regional / interregional formation centre.
- at least one member of the Formation Sector team.

The Councillor for Formation and the Regional Councillor are permanent members of the commission; they participate when they can. Others (e.g. vice-provincials; experts) may also be invited without the right to vote.

One of the provincials of the region could also be a member of the commission. His role needs to be defined in the statute of the Commission.

The RFC is convened **by the regional coordinator for formation, in agreement with the Councillor for Formation**, and ordinarily meets once a year. Proper use of online meetings could help it to be more effective.

The commission draws up its own statute with the help of the Formation Sector. These are then approved by the provincials and by the Councillor for Formation. Besides defining the structure and functions of the commission, the statute should also indicate how the Commission is to be financed.

One of the chief instruments in the work of the RFC is the *regional formation plan* (FSDB 281).

Regional formation coordinator

280. The regional formation coordinator is proposed by the RFC and appointed by the Regional Councillor after consultation with the provincials and the approval of the Councillor for Formation. The coordinator could be proposed even from outside the commission. He remains in office for three years and his term can be renewed. He has the following functions:

- He contributes to the reflection, coordination and animation of the Formation Sector and is a member of the World Advisory Council – Formation.
- He prepares the agenda for the annual meetings of the RFC in dialogue with the Formation Sector, the provincials and the provincial formation delegates.
- He participates in at least one of the meetings of the group of provincials and presents the proposals of the RFC for approval.
- With the help of the regional formation centres he promotes and organizes initiatives for the ongoing formation of rectors and formators.
- He keeps track of the formation statistics of the region and maintains a database of the members of the RFC and of the formation communities.

The costs of his participation as regional coordinator in events and meetings, such as the annual meeting of the Regional Commission and the biennial meeting of the World Advisory Council, are borne by the provinces of the region in accordance with the procedures defined by the provincial conference.

Regional formation plan

281. Given the great increase in interprovincial formation structures and collaboration between provinces, it is useful to have a *regional formation plan* (GC29 39y).

The aim of the plan is to implement the guidelines of the *Ratio* in the context of the region, in the light of the Project of the Rector Major and his Council for the six-year period.

It outlines objectives, needs, priorities and courses of action for the whole region, based on an attentive and up-to-date assessment of the formation situation.

It is formulated at the beginning of each six-year period by the RFC, approved by the provincials, and evaluated every two years.

Where the formation structures are not only interprovincial but also interregional, it is helpful to reach an *Interregional Agreement* regarding these structures. The Regional Councillor of the region hosting the formation structure will take the initiative to initiate the *Agreement*, which will be drawn up in collaboration between the RFCs of the two regions, approved by the Regional Councillor and the provincials of each region, and then by the Rector Major with his Council. It will be reviewed every two years.

Shared responsibility for interprovincial formation structures

The curatorium

282. Interprovincial collaboration for formation structures (formation communities, study centres, regional formation centres) calls for the creation and proper functioning of an entity holding shared responsibility known as the *curatorium*.²⁸

Following the mandate of GC29 (GC29 28, 39 and resolution 17), we specify here the nature, tasks, and responsibilities of the curatorium, to which the individual statute must make reference.

The curatorium is established in communities that have been chosen by two or more provinces as preferred locations for that stage of initial formation in the formation section of their Provincial Directory (FSDB 283).

The Regional Councillor responsible for the territory where the interprovincial structure is located presides over the curatorium with the power of governance delegated by the Rector Major (can. 131 §1) regarding the recruitment, formation and appointment of formation and academic personnel, rectors included.²⁹

The local provincial is the vice-president of the curatorium. In regions with large numbers of interprovincial

structures, the Regional Councillor, in dialogue with the Rector Major, identifies the curatoriums over which he will preside personally; the structures concerned will be listed in the regional formation plan. He remains, however, president of all the curatoriums in his region, with the power of governance delegated by the Rector Major.

When an interprovincial house is open to several regions, the Regional Councillor responsible for the territory always presides, but the other Regional Councillor is also present.

Functions

283. The *member provinces* of the curatorium of an interprovincial formation community are those that have chosen that community as preferential for that particular phase of initial formation in the formation section of their provincial directory.

The curatorium is responsible also for the attached study centre where there is one, with full respect for its legitimate autonomy (AGC 388 62).

The curatorium has the following functions:

- To prepare and contribute personnel through a planning that covers several years, so to allow and favour a fair contribution of the various provinces involved.
- To propose the names of candidates for rector and other key personnel of the formation community and study centre.
- To guarantee financial support and the availability of adequate infrastructure.
- To assess the functioning of the formation community and study centre (the local formation plan, arrangements of studies and academic activities, teaching personnel, students).
- To ensure that the guidelines of the Holy See and of the Salesian Congregation regarding centres of ecclesiastical studies are followed.
- To spell out in practical terms the areas and forms of collaboration between the study centre and the member provinces.
- To examine the annual budget and accounts.
- To maintain contact with the Councillor for Formation,

for example by sending him the agenda and the minutes of the meetings of the curatorium.

- To dialogue with candidates and confreres in initial formation and seek their opinion in matters of importance for the life of the community (GC28 23, 28f).

The governance of interprovincial communities is one of the priorities on the agenda of the Regional Councillor, who, with the authority delegated by the Rector Major, works in close cooperation with the other Regional Councillors who are members of the curatorium, and with the Councillor for Formation, especially regarding the recruitment, preparation and contribution of formators and lecturers.

Structure

284. The curatorium meets at least once a year and is made up of the following members:

- The Regional Councillor (president)
- The local provincial (vice-president)
- Provincials whose provincial directory indicates that interprovincial community as the preferential option
- The rector of the formation community
- The director of the study centre
- The administrator of the formation community
- Other members as defined by the regional formation plan and by the statute, e.g. provincial formation delegates.

Other provincials with students in the community may always be invited to participate without right to vote.

The curatorium functions on two levels: a first level that involves all the members and invitees, and a second level that consists of the Regional Councillor and the member provincials; this second level has the power to make the necessary decisions and to discuss the community more freely.

The Regional Councillor responsible for the territory presides over the curatorium in the name of the Rector Major. If he is not able to be physically present, he will participate online, while the local provincial presides.

The Councillor for Formation is a permanent member

of the curatorium and can always participate, either personally or through a member of his team.

The minutes are sent to the Councillor for Formation and the Regional Councillor, as well as to the other participants of the meeting.

It is up to each region to define in its Regional Formation Plan whether the regional formation coordinator should be a member of the curatoriums of interprovincial structures.

Statute

285. The curatorium draws up its statute which defines objectives and tasks, roles and responsibilities, members and structures in accordance with the *Ratio*.

Among other things the statute defines (1) mechanisms for the preparation and contribution of formators and teachers by the member provinces, (2) the procedure for proposing the rector and other key personnel of the formation community and study centre; (3) financial responsibilities that go beyond the payment of fees (construction and maintenance, library, means of communication, means of transport, etc.); and (4) the role of the local provincial.

The statute states that the local provincial is responsible for the ordinary government of the community. Following the proposal made by the curatorium, he appoints the rector with the consent of his council and the approval of the Rector Major. He is also responsible for the admissions of confreres in the interprovincial community, after having heard the opinion of the provincial of origin and of the rector with their respective councils, and with the consent of his own council.

After being passed in the curatorium, the statute is submitted for approval to the Councillor for Formation.

The curatorium of formation communities directly dependent on the Rector Major

286. Some international formation communities, as stipulated in the statutes of their respective curatoriums, are governed by the Rector Major either directly or through the Councillor for Formation.

The Councillor for Formation is the president of the

curatoriums of these communities.

The statutes of these curatoriums are approved by the Rector Major.

Other ways of promoting shared responsibility

287. The *formation section of the provincial directory* is another instrument for promoting shared responsibility for interprovincial formation structures. In this section the directory not only defines the choice of interprovincial communities but also indicates the nature of the collaboration and shared responsibility that is envisaged.³⁰

Yet another instrument for promoting shared responsibility is the *regional formation plan*.

6.6 WORLD LEVEL

288. Government at world level fosters unity of life and action in different settings and contexts and promotes the constant fidelity of the members to the Salesian charism and mission.

The Rector Major and his Council

289. The Congregation has the primary and ultimate responsibility for Salesian identity and for the unity of formation in the diversity of contexts. Fundamental formation decisions, especially in the area initial formation, are the prerogative of the Rector Major and his Council (AGC 416 4).

The Rector Major, with the assistance of his Council, animates the confreres through his ordinary government, authoritative teaching, contacts, visits and meetings. He promotes creative fidelity to the Salesian vocation.

In carrying out their service, all the members of the General Council give special consideration to formation. The one with the specific task of following up and coordinating the processes of formation is the Councillor for Formation.

The Formation Sector

The Councillor for Formation

290. The Councillor for Formation has the task 'of furthering the integral and ongoing formation of the members. He follows the phases of initial formation with particular care, to ensure that in them the content, arrangement of studies, formation methods and structures provide the conditions necessary for growth in the Salesian vocation' (C 135).

He is assisted by a team of collaborators that is involved in study and reflection on formation, and animation and accompaniment of the regions and provinces.

Since formation is in and for the mission, it is inevitably related to the areas handled by the other Councillors, including those in charge of regions. The Councillor for Formation works, therefore, in close collaboration with all the members of the General Council and with the Delegate of the Rector Major for the Salesian Family.

Formation in general

291. Among the tasks of the Councillor for Formation are:

- strengthening the Salesian consecrated identity of the confreres and creating a mentality of formation as lifelong.
- taking care of the two complementary forms of the Salesian vocation, continuing the reflection on the common vocation to Salesian consecrated life and on the specificity of the two forms.³¹
- accompanying the regional/interregional centres for formation and promoting greater collaboration between them.

Initial formation

292. Some of the tasks of the Councillor for Formation in the area of initial formation are:

- encouraging a return to the Preventive System as the guiding principle of formation, where the Salesian in initial formation is the subject and not simply the object of formation.³²
- checking that formators are qualified not only

academically but also specifically for their service of formation, and that they have a degree of stability in that service (GC27 69.10).

- checking that formation communities are consistent in quality and number.
- following the progress of Salesian study centres, especially their programmes and personnel, and their adherence to the directives of the Holy See.
- ensuring the effective functioning of interprovincial formation communities and their curatoriums.
- accompanying the initial formation of the Salesian brother, with particular attention to his specific formation.
- paying special attention to pastoral formation, where possible in the context of an EPC.
- ensuring the quality of Salesian studies, the Salesian aspect of formation, and the preparation of experts in Salesian studies.

World Advisory Council – Formation

293. An important organ of the Formation Sector is the World Advisory Council – Formation, which animates formation by study and reflection and by promoting collaboration between the regional coordinators, the regional commissions and the regional formation centres.

This Council is convened every two years by the Councillor for Formation. The participants are:

- the regional formation coordinators
- the directors of the regional formation centres
- at least one Salesian brother
- the Formation Sector team
- other members co-opted by the Councillor for Formation in agreement with the Rector Major.

The chief tasks of the Advisory Council are:

- to evaluate the implementation of the six-year plan of the Rector Major and his Council with regard to whatever more directly concerns formation.
- to study and reflect on emerging challenges in formation.

6. Walking together in the church and the congregation

- to study the directives of the Church with regard to formation and explore ways to integrate them into the formation process.
- to plan formation initiatives in keeping with the signs of the times and the six-year plan.

The Pontifical Salesian University (UPS)

294. Among the various Salesian study centres and Institutes of Higher Education (IUS), the *Pontifical Salesian University* (UPS) occupies a privileged place. It is 'the most authoritative cultural voice of the Congregation in the Church' (GC28 27) and has a particular mission for the qualification of personnel. The worldwide expansion of the Congregation, the need to improve the quality of its pedagogical and pastoral effort, the context of the new evangelization and of inculturation, the concern for fostering communion and the regard for the different ways of expressing our charism – all these give great importance and relevance to the function of the UPS within the Congregation and the Church.³³

Being at the service of the entire Congregation is a Salesian mission style that must characterise not only the institution as such but also the quality of the educative and pastoral service of those who are called to be part of it. It requires a broad vision, valuing forms of connection and collaboration with Salesian settings and situations in various regions.

The UPS has a special relationship with some Salesian study centres in the form of association, affiliation, aggregation and incorporation.³⁴

The Vicar of the Rector Major is the delegate of the Rector Major for the *Opera Salesiana UPS* (university and vice-province) and follows up matters entrusted to him by the Rector Major.

He oversees the accompaniment of the Salesian students during their stay in the communities of the Vice-province and ensures that they are formed not only as teachers but also as Salesian formators.

6.7 PRACTICAL GUIDELINES

295. *Each Salesian formulates his **personal plan of life** and evaluates it regularly with the help of his spiritual guide.*

Local level

296. *The local Salesian community draws up its **community plan** every year. In formation communities, this plan is known as the **local formation plan** and is revised every year with the participation of all the confreres, including those in initial formation.*

297. *‘Initial formation is ordinarily carried out in **communities** specifically designed for the purpose’ (C 103). In special cases, and provided formative accompaniment is assured, the Councillor for Formation may permit those in initial formation to form part of other communities.*

298. *Spiritual animation of the formation community is the **primary responsibility of the rector** (C 104). It is his duty to carry out formative and pastoral animation through the paternal exercise of his authority, meetings of the council and the assembly of the confreres (C 178–186), conferences and meetings (R 176), the formulation of the local formation plan (C 44b; R 4b, 5), the ‘community day’, public and private exhortations, the daily ‘good night’ (R 49), the friendly talk once a month (R 80), and recourse to the opportunities offered locally and at provincial level.*

299. *During the period of initial formation, **personal assessments** (scrutinies) are carried out every three months to evaluate and encourage the growth of each confrere. The confrere himself is involved in the assessment in different ways (FSDB 716–719).*

300. *‘The **local community**, since it shares the responsibility for the growth of each confrere, is invited to express its opinion whenever one of its members*

seeks admission to profession or to holy orders. This will be done in the form most in keeping with charity' (R 82). It should be kept in mind that the juridical responsibility for giving an opinion to the provincial belongs to the rector with his council (C 108). These form part of the admission processes even when they happen to be spiritual guides of confreres in initial formation, with full respect for the confidentiality expected of them (AGC 438 81, 82).

301. *When a confrere or a novice experiences **difficulty with regard to his vocation**, the superiors and formators accompany his discernment with special care, helping him clarify his motivations and discover God's plan for his life.*

Provincial level

302. *Provincial councillors have the duty to know the candidates, including those in the interprovincial formation houses in their province, so as to be able to offer a responsible and motivated opinion during the admission process, also through the secret voting (C 108).*

303. *In the **formation section of its directory**, every province indicates the formation community and study centre it has chosen for each phase of initial formation and give reasons for the choice.*

This section is revised at least once every six years by the provincial chapter and approved by the Rector Major and his Council.

304. *The **provincial formation plan** is revised at least once every six years by the PFC and approved by the provincial and his council. A copy of the plan is sent to the Councillor for Formation.*

305. *The **provincial qualification plan** is drawn up by the provincial and his council at the beginning of each six-year period. A copy of the plan is sent to the Councillor for Formation.*

306. *The provincial (or curatorium in the case of interprovincial formation communities) is responsible for ensuring the **consistency of formation communities** in terms of numbers and quality, especially through stable and well-prepared formation teams, the local formation plan and the continuity of the formation process. The formation team should include Salesian brothers who have been specifically prepared to be formators and teachers.*

307. *The provincial (or curatorium in the case of interprovincial formation communities) is responsible for the **prior preparation of rectors and other formators** for the service of formation, especially in the area of spiritual accompaniment.*

308. *The provincial formation delegate makes provisions together with the PFC for the **supervision** of the formation teams of formation communities in the province.*

309. *The **provincial qualification plan** gives primary attention to training in pedagogy, formation methodology and Salesian spirituality for those confreres destined to provide the service of formation: rectors, novice directors, formators, spiritual guides and confessors. At the level of the region and of the curatorium of interprovincial communities, decisions are made regarding the profile of formators and their qualification for the subsequent three years. This becomes the guiding criterion for the provincial qualification plan, bearing in mind first of all the interprovincial formation communities chosen in the provincial directory. The provincial ensures that rectors of formation communities and of practical trainees have a periodic and specific updating. In a similar way, other formators and teachers are also offered opportunities for ongoing formation and further specialization.*

310. *The provincial facilitates the presence of **lay persons, both men and women**, in the processes of initial formation.*

311. *Visits by General Councillors and by provincials and provincial councillors to formation communities, as well as frequent communication, help cultivate a **sense of belonging** to the Congregation and to one's own province.*

312. *Holiday apostolic experiences are planned by the provincial in dialogue with the rector of the formation community.*

Interprovincial and regional level

313. ***Interprovincial collaboration regarding formation structures** (formation communities, study centres, regional formation centres) is translated into a real sharing of responsibility that is expressed through the implementation and functioning of the body known as the curatorium, made up of the Regional Councillor who presides with the delegated authority of the Rector Major, the provincials who have opted for that particular community in their provincial directory, the rector of the formation community, the academic authority of the study centre, the administrator and other members as envisaged in the statute of the curatorium.*

The curatorium also includes within its purview the study centre where present, even though that centre has its own regulations or statute.

The curatorium draws up its statute and submits it for approval by the Councillor for Formation. This statute outlines the way member provinces determine the direction of formation (the formation plan), ensures the conditions and means for realizing it (personnel, structures, finances, etc.) and carries out proper assessments.

Under the leadership of the Regional Councillor, the curatorium is responsible for preparing and providing formators and teachers for the interprovincial structures, making sure these are drawn from the various member provinces. To this end it will prepare a qualification plan, to be revised every three years and shared with the Councillor for Formation.

314. The **regional formation plan** is formulated at the beginning of each six-year period by the regional formation commission and approved by the group of provincials of the region.

Study centres

315. The provincial / curatorium ensure that **Salesian study centres** maintain their excellence in academic matters and are sufficiently staffed by teams of qualified personnel with a degree of stability.

To transfer confreres who form part of the permanent teaching body of a Salesian study centre the provincial / curatorium needs to have an understanding with the Councillor for Formation.

Taking into account the quality and the structure of the centre, the various academic roles and bodies (director, council, college of teachers, assembly of students, etc.) should be defined and enabled to function correctly.

Every Salesian study centre should have its own statute and regulations inspired by the Ratio.

316. As far as possible a Salesian study centre should be also **open to extern students**, religious and lay, as a service to the particular Church (R 85).

317. Close **collaboration** between the formation community and the Salesian study centre must be ensured in order to achieve the common objectives of formation. The most fruitful ways and means of communication should be fostered according to the context, such as meetings between academic and religious authorities, and between teachers and students.

When the formation community has its own study centre (in which case it is called a studentate), the areas of competence of the study centre (regulations, academic bodies, premises, and financing) and those of the formation community must be adequately distinguished one from the other, but harmoniously linked together, according to the norms of the Church and the Congregation.

318. When a study centre belongs to a single province,

*there should also be an 'institutional' **linkage between the study centre, the formation community and the province.** This may take the form of periodic meetings of the director of the study centre, the rector of the formation community and the provincial, to consider important questions concerning the teaching body, programming and execution of study plans, the library, the administrative sector, and the day-to-day functioning of the study centre or studentate. It may also be stabilized in the form of a management committee.*

319. *Under the guidance of the Regional Councillor, there should be serious **collaboration on the interprovincial level to establish Salesian study centres** and ensure that they have all the necessary conditions to function well (R 85).*

320. Affiliations and other forms of connection *of Salesian study centres (such as aggregation and association) with the Faculties of the Pontifical Salesian University are to be encouraged. Such arrangements not only facilitate good administration but also a more serious level of studies, qualification and stability of personnel, dialogue between the different centres of the Congregation, and unity of purpose and collaboration. It belongs to the Rector Major, as Grand Chancellor of the Pontifical Salesian University, to authorize the start of a process of affiliation or aggregation and to forward the official request to the Dicastery for Culture and Education, after the competent academic authorities have completed the required verifications and given their consent.*

The deans of the Faculties of the UPS and those responsible for the aggregated or affiliated centres keep the Councillor for Formation periodically informed about the effective functioning of these forms of union.

321. *The approval of the Rector Major is needed for the affiliation of a Salesian study centre to non-Salesian institutions.*

322. *For a province to take up and share responsibility*

with other ecclesiastical or civil institutions in governing and running study centres, the approval of the Rector Major is necessary.

323. *When it is not possible to frequent a Salesian study centre, a **non-Salesian study centre** may be chosen with the permission of the Rector Major with his Council.*

The choice of such a centre is governed by the criteria of Salesian identity, with preference for centres that are intercongregational or else frequented by religious, rather than diocesan seminaries or centres with a predominantly diocesan outlook.

For the postnovitiate, those non-Salesian study centres should be preferred that better link philosophy with the human sciences; for the phase of specific formation for the priesthood those centres that are best able to contribute to the formation of a priest who will be a pastor and educator. The formation benefits of this arrangement should be periodically assessed.

324. *It is recommended that theological study centres belonging to the dioceses or religious Institutes and frequented by our confreres be affiliated to a Faculty of Theology (VG 63.2).*

325. *When confreres frequent a non-Salesian study centre, the guidelines listed in no. 244 above must be followed to ensure that the formation objectives are attained.*

World level

326. *The **Rector Major** has ultimate responsibility for formation in the Congregation. Fundamental formation decisions, especially in the area of initial formation, are the prerogative of the Rector Major with his Council.*

327. *It belongs to the Rector Major with his Council to approve the creation of **regional and interregional formation centres**. Shared responsibility is ensured by the curatorium presided over by the Regional Councillor responsible for the territory, in the name of the Rector*

Major; the other Regional Councillors participate as indicated in the statutes. These centres also depend on the Councillor for Formation, who is a permanent member of the curatorium and can always participate personally or through a member of his team.

328. *The Rector Major and his Council organize initiatives to **specifically prepare provincials** for their role of animation and government.*

329. *One of the animation structures of the Formation Sector is the **regional formation commission**. Its establishment is entrusted by the Sector to the group of provincials of the region under the leadership of the Regional Councillor.*

The regional formation coordinator is proposed by the regional formation commission and appointed by the Regional Councillor after consultation with the group of provincials and the approval of the Councillor for Formation.

The Commission is convened every year by the Councillor for Formation.

Its statute is approved by the group of provincials of the region and by the Councillor for Formation.

330. *The Councillor for Formation is the president of the curatorium of **international formation communities**. The statute of this curatorium is approved by the Rector Major.*

331. *The **World Advisory Council – Formation** is convened every two years by the Councillor for Formation.*

6. Notes

¹ See below, Appendix 5 for more detailed indications about the nature, contents and drawing up of the personal plan of life.

² GC25 70, 78; FoR 125–126, 275; AnGC 31, 121–122.

³ See below, Appendix 3.

⁴ See Appendix 4.

⁵ *Gift* 125; GC28 43; GC29 39e.

⁶ C 103; EG 120; C 2.

⁷ See FSDB 191–193 and 199–203.

⁸ C 104. Formators must possess ‘skills and a determination to exert an influence, to engage in dialogue with the candidates, to interact in a genuinely evangelical way with the challenges they bring up, without being defensive or resigned. In a word, they are not to be guides who helplessly watch from the sidelines as [the candidates] form their convictions and attitudes. They are not to be silent and detached ‘examples’, but educators who make suggestions and persuade.’ J. Vecchi, ‘I protagonisti della formazione sacerdotale’, E. Dal Covolo and A. Triacca, *Sacerdoti per la nuova evangelizzazione. Studi sull'Esortazione apostolica 'Pastores Dabo Vobis' di Giovanni Paolo II* (Rome 1993) 321.

⁹ OT 5; C 104; *Gift* 132. See GC26 294.

¹⁰ FRANCIS, *Address to participants in the international conference for the ongoing formation of priests sponsored by the Dicastery for the Clergy*, 8 February 2024.

¹¹ AGC 426 34; AGC 416 10; GC29 39j.

¹² JOHN PAUL II, *Novo millennio ineunte* 2001, 40; EG 116; NW 37.

¹³ See FSDB 657–659 and Appendix 10.

¹⁴ CC, *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests* (new ed. 2013) 73.

¹⁵ See CCE, *Instruction on the Affiliation of Institutes of Higher Studies*, 8 December 2020.

¹⁶ ‘When a Faculty is joined to a major seminary or college, the Statutes, while always having due concern for cooperation in everything pertaining to the student’s good, must clearly and effectively provide that the academic direction and administration of the Faculty are correctly distinct from the governance and administration of the major seminary or college’ (VG 21). See also CCE, *Instruction on the Affiliation of Institutes of Higher Studies* (2020) 9.

¹⁷ For interprovincial study centres, see FSDB 275, 282–287.

¹⁸ *Gift* 146. More precise guidelines regarding recourse to specialists in the area of psychology may be found at FSDB 723–730.

¹⁹ AGC 366 26–28; PDV 66; and GC24 Analytical index: Woman/Women.

²⁰ See AGC 383 40–53.

²¹ GC25 16; AGC 382 37, 40.

²² GC28 27.

²³ See Appendix 1.

²⁴ R 88; AGC 365 53–54; C 171.

²⁵ See Appendix 2.

²⁶ AGC 429 42–51; see FSDB 237.

²⁷ 'Formation structures' is a generic term that includes formation communities (C 103 and FSDB 223), study centres (R 85 and FSDB 242–243), regional and interregional formation centres (FSDB 276), etc.

²⁸ See FSDB (2000) 173, 224, 300; AGC 388 (2005) 59–63.

²⁹ GC28 modified R 135 [now R 136 since GC29], asking the Regional Councillor to 'liaise with... formation communities' in his region (GC28 p. 116). As for the delegation of authority from the Rector Major to the Regional who chairs the Curatorium, this will be defined by a specific act of the Rector Major in accordance with GC29 Resolution 17.

³⁰ See Appendix 1.

³¹ GC26 74–78; AGC 424 65–75; AGC 431 54–85.

³² *Message of his Holiness Pope Francis to the members of GC28* (GC28 pp. 61–62) and GC28 23, 28f.

³³ J.E. VECCHI, *Relazione al CG24 del Vicario del Rettor Maggiore* 229 (trans).

Part 2

The formation process

7 ‘When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?” He said to them, “Come and see.” They came and saw where he was staying...’ (Jn 1:38–39)

Initial formation

Lectio

These two verses describe a great event and an important stage in the history of the salvation of every human being. The scene in which this event takes place is generic in terms of time and place. Jesus is on his way, always passing by every person, even in the time of the Church, waiting for someone to recognize his presence. One day, Jesus meets the Baptist, who stares at him and points him out to his disciples: *‘Behold, the Lamb of God.’* The words of the Precursor contain an invitation to follow Jesus. Listening to his testimony prompts the disciples to ‘follow’ Christ. The verb ‘to follow’ (*akolouthéo*) in John’s Gospel means ‘to become a disciple’, ‘to go after the Master’. The two disciples, in fact, leave the Baptist to become disciples of Jesus and follow him in order to have contact with him and begin a journey of discipleship.

But the beginning of the disciple’s journey is the work of Jesus’ initiative, first addressing them with the words, *‘What are you looking for?’* The question prompts a response. It is an invitation to the disciple to clarify for himself what he is really looking for in life. With this simple question, Jesus probes the heart of the future disciple so that he may clarify the ultimate meaning of life, his inner journey. Jesus must be sought because

he gives himself only to those who seek him with all their heart. The disciples respond to Jesus with another question, '*Where are you staying?*' which concerns the mystery of his person. The disciples want to know Someone in order to learn a way of life that will give meaning to their lives. And Jesus invites them in turn, '*Come and see*': it is not a matter of seeing something but of experiencing a Person, entering into intimacy with Jesus. Listening, conversing, living in his intimacy are fundamental stages in the faith and formation of every disciple.

Meditatio

The encounter between the disciples and Jesus symbolizes the Christian vocation and Salesian Initial Formation. The fundamental condition for the formation journey is to understand that we are not dealing with something but with Someone, the Living One. Even when we seek him, like the two disciples, it is Christ who comes to us first, seeks us, and surprises us. If Jesus takes the initiative in the encounter, he is the centre of life, he leads the vocational experience, and 'following' begins when we have the capacity to be amazed before a God who loves us and turns our lives upside down. Another necessary aspect of the formation journey is the recognition of Jesus expressed in the words, '*Where are you staying?*' The request expresses the disciple's willingness, the ability to step outside of himself, to live in an attitude of discernment open to the Spirit, to give of his freedom by surrendering his heart and existence so that Christ may be the only Master. In the stages of formation, giving oneself freely to Jesus means changing one's life, giving oneself a new beginning, allowing a new story to be born in the heart of the disciple so that he may courageously allow himself to be affected and transformed by him every day, as Don Bosco did and lived in his formation. Then one understands Jesus' invitation: '*Come and see*'. In the

logic of formation, first comes the entrusting of one's freedom by surrendering oneself to the Master, and then comes the 'seeing'. To each person in formation Jesus offers a lesson in life that is 'believing in order to see': first by witnessing to the truth of God, convinced that the Christian faith is linked to the experience of the first disciples who encountered Jesus and allowed themselves to be formed by him.

Giorgio Zevini, UPS

7. Initial formation

332. God's initiative is permanent and so is our vocational response: 'Father, may your grace, the intercession of Mary Help of Christians, of St Joseph, of St Francis de Sales and of St John Bosco, together with the assistance of my brother Salesians keep me faithful day by day' (C 24). Formation is our personal and community commitment to correspond ever more fully to the grace that day after day invites, precedes and sustains us.

The stages through which Salesian life unfolds are the fruit of the experience of the Church and the Congregation. They are never points of arrival but successive stages of a preparation in which we learn to live, like Don Bosco, in a permanent attitude of discernment, attentive to the voice of the Spirit and allowing ourselves to be configured every day to Christ, so that we become more and more signs and bearers of God's love for young people.

7.1 VOCATIONAL ANIMATION AND DISCERNMENT

Vocational culture and the Salesian vocation

Vocational culture

333. In every Salesian setting we need to promote a vocational culture that encourages a vision of life as gift and service and proposes values, attitudes and experiences that foster vocational development, even leading to an explicit proposal of consecrated and priestly life. It is important that all communities develop this sensitivity, this genuinely Salesian way of thinking and seeing the young people they meet every day (AGC 438 90, 107).

Different ways of living the baptismal vocation

334. Within a vocational culture, youth ministry pays attention to the different ways of following Christ. In this regard, Fr Vecchi distinguished four objectives: '[1] the guidance offered to all young people within the educational programme; [2] the constant effort to discover and accompany with differentiated and appropriate initiatives vocations of particular commitment in society and in the Church; [3] special attention to vocations of service to the Church...; [4] a particular responsibility towards the Salesian charism in its many forms, through discernment and fostering of the seeds of the Salesian vocation, both consecrated and lay, present in young people' (AGC 373 13). The fourth category includes the great variety of vocations in the Salesian Family.

Youth ministry and vocational animation

335. Vocational animation is the crown of all our educational and pastoral activity (C 37). It is not so much a final moment of the journey of faith as 'an element always present, and one that must characterize every stage and every area of intervention' (GC23 247; AGC 438 93). The phases of vocational growth in the young are the discovery of their own possibilities, training in generosity, the

vocational suggestion, the explicit invitation, discernment and initial choice (GC23 151–156; cf. AGC 339 31).

The starting point

336. The real starting point of every vocation journey is ‘the call of the Friend’ (ChV 287–290) – Jesus. Vocational discernment is not merely an ethical choice or a question about the best thing to do, but an encounter with a Person.

Explicit vocation proposals

337. The vocational possibilities open to young people are many and different. However, without an explicit invitation ‘to commit themselves to a certain kind of life as lay Christians, religious or priests’, many would be unable to interpret the call (GC23 154), either because of timidity or feelings of inadequacy. A direct and explicit approach is needed, following the example not only of Don Bosco but of Jesus himself as seen in the Gospels.¹

The best conditions for the vocational proposal

338. Vocation proposals regarding Salesian consecrated life are best done in the context of familiarity with the Salesian mission. We have to be careful, however, to respect each individual’s freedom and avoid methods that lead ‘to forms of dependence or, worse, of domineering.’²

On the other hand, an attitude of *docibilitas* (NW 35) is an indispensable element in vocational discernment.

The witness of the Salesian religious community is of paramount importance. All, including the elderly and the sick, are called to be credible witnesses and to accompany vocation ministry with prayer and presence among the young.

Constant accompaniment

339. Attentive and friendly accompaniment must follow the explicit invitation (AGC 339 33). The young person is helped to assess himself and his gifts in relation to the suggestions made to him and to the services and

ministries with which he is familiar (GC23 155).

All the elements of the spiritual life are helpful in the process of discernment, but some have special weight: knowledge of Jesus and the gospels, prayer and meditation, personal spiritual accompaniment, apostolic commitment.³ Discernment calls for prolonged silence 'to interpret the real meaning of the inspirations we believe we have received... and to see the whole of our existence afresh in his own light'.⁴

A setting for Salesian vocational discernment ('aspirantate')

An environment for discerning the Salesian vocation

340. A suitable environment and conditions are offered to those who wish to gain a closer knowledge of Salesian life, to enable them to discern their vocation and mature as human beings and as Christians (AGC 438 88). The Regulations refer to this experience of accompaniment as an 'aspirantate' (R 18).

Aim

341. The main aim of this first moment of acquaintance is to make the Salesian consecrated life and mission known in an experiential and not only theoretical way, promote self-knowledge and carry out a vocational discernment with the help of a Salesian community, personal and community accompaniment, and accompanied experiences of Salesian youth ministry (PL 819–820).

Different forms

342. Given the diversity of contexts, increasing secularization and longer processes of maturing, the experience of the aspirantate has taken on new and different forms in the Congregation.

Some provinces offer community and personal accompaniment to young people involved in Salesian youth ministry. Those who wish to continue their journey of vocational discernment are offered a live-in

community experience (e.g. the 'Comunità Proposta' in certain provinces). The experience is not limited only to those who are already familiar with Salesian youth ministry but is also open to those who are attracted by Don Bosco's charism.

Some provinces have residential or scholastic aspirantates. In these settings, many young people who have not yet experienced an EPC can have an experience of Don Bosco's charism.

It is up to each province to determine the kind of accompaniment needed for responding to the different needs of young people who wish to know the Salesian life better.⁵

An experience presupposed by the prenovitiate

343. Whatever the form chosen, it is important and necessary to offer a serious experience of accompaniment and discernment for young people who come from a variety of contexts, with very different ages, family situations, levels of personal maturity and experiences of life, faith, culture and contact with Don Bosco and the Salesian reality. Only when the candidate has made an option for Salesian life – even if preliminary – and shows, in the judgment of those responsible, a corresponding human, Christian and Salesian maturity, can he be admitted to the prenovitiate.⁶

Duration

344. The duration of this time of proximity between young people in search of their vocation and Salesian communities is variable, depending on the age of the young person, his previous experiences and the traditions of the province.

The daily timetable and the general programme should be flexible and not overly structured. It is not unusual to have candidates who continue with their studies or previous work commitments.

Sector responsible

345. The experience of the aspirantate is animated by the Youth Ministry Sector in close collaboration with the Formation Sector (AGC 438 108). These arrangements for working together could change according to contexts and must be specified in the provincial directory.

Essential elements

Entry profile

346. The first condition for taking part in the aspirantate experience is that the young person must have expressed the desire to discern God's plan for him in Salesian consecrated life and be willing to discern whether that initial attraction is really a call from God and whether he has the basic conditions for accepting it.

Given this premise, the entry profile could be outlined as:

- a healthy lifestyle (physical and psychological).
- a level of education proper to the age and place of origin.
- a personal experience of God that has enabled the candidate to recognize life as a vocation, in a progressive dialogue of call and response, growth in faith and service.
- openness to personal accompaniment.
- commitment and fidelity demonstrated in work (personal study, apostolic activity, service to the community).
- ability to interact and relate with others in a positive manner.
- availability for apostolic work with young people, especially the poorest.

With regard to age, approaches vary according to social and ecclesial contexts, with provinces that accompany young people over the age of 18 and others that follow adolescents between the ages of 14 and 17. A personalized process with adequate discernment should be proposed to candidates over the age of 35 (AGC 338 98–99).

Style of formation

347. Of great importance is a community that offers young people adequate conditions for discerning the Salesian vocation: the family spirit lived in a lively, open and simple way, with relationships inspired by the Preventive System; possibility of active involvement and sharing of responsibility; emphasis on internalization of motivations and building of convictions rather than mere performance of tasks; sharing of some moments of prayer and activity while keeping in mind that the young people in question are not consecrated persons.

Formation in mission

348. When the aspirantate is part of an apostolic community, the choice of that community is important, although sometimes conditioned by the needs of the candidates themselves in terms of study or work. The preferred option would be a community that is part of an EPC, so that candidates have easy contact with Salesians, lay mission partners and other young people.

Formation in mission is essential for vocational discernment: without Salesian pastoral experiences, an essential part of the aspirantate experience would be missing. It would be good also to include apostolic activities in missionary situations. Such experiences must be accompanied, so as to help candidates understand the meaning of the Salesian vocation (FSDB 66, 889–894).

Relations with the family

349. One of the most critical points in the candidate's discernment and vocational growth is his relationship with his family. Each family has its own way of understanding and supporting the life choices of their children, so it is important for the young person to communicate honestly and maintain a cordial relationship with them as a son and brother.

Formators endeavour to get to know and establish good relations with the families. Parents could be encouraged to visit the Salesian community and participate in some

meaningful events so as to be able to interact with their sons and with other members of the community.

Guides, resources and conditions

350. In terms of guides and resources we could talk about:

- the rector and a small team to accompany the young people.
- if the rector is not directly in charge of the candidates, a confrere in the community designated as a reference point, with adequate definition of his role vis-à-vis the rector.
- at least one formal monthly meeting between each young person and the one responsible.
- continued spiritual accompaniment with one's guide, if the person has already begun this process, or initiation of such accompaniment.
- where appropriate and possible, a family in the EPC as an additional reference point for those undergoing the experience.
- frequent contacts between the provincial vocation animator and those responsible for the aspirantate.
- the presence of Salesian brothers and priests in the community.

The aspirantate could be in the same community as the prenovitiate, provided that formation programmes are different. This arrangement could facilitate continuity of accompaniment and consistency of the team of educators.

The formation of those who follow this first phase of orientation towards Salesian life and accompaniment in their discernment and vocational journey is as important as it is for the subsequent phases (see Appendix 10). There are specific courses at the Pontifical Salesian University, in the vocational pedagogy curriculum, for acquiring the necessary skills in the field of orientation, animation and education and vocational formation.

Dimensions of formation

Human and fraternal dimension

351. Human maturity will include:

- knowledge of oneself and one's history with its gifts and limitations.
- serene attention to the experience of one's family and its dynamics.
- experience of community life, development of relational skills, and knowledge of self in relation to others.
- attention to the needs of others, generosity, a spirit of service.
- willingness to process one's experiences.
- the gradual healing of wounds and overcoming of unhealthy habits.
- growth in inner and outer freedom.
- ability to make conscious, free and responsible decisions.
- purification of motivations.
- ability to express thoughts, ideas and reflections in a positive way.
- cultivation of moral qualities.
- ability to live in multicultural and multi-religious settings.

Spiritual dimension

352. The spiritual dimension of formation is essentially Christian and Salesian formation:

- Familiarity with the Word of God, catechesis, deepening of the cognitive and affective experience of faith.
- Personal and community prayer.
- Regular and joyful experience of sacramental life.
- Discovery of Don Bosco and his spiritual and educational experience.
- Involvement in the Salesian educative and evangelizing mission.
- Knowledge of the different vocations in the Church and in the Salesian Family, and in a special way of the Salesian consecrated vocation in its two forms.
- Ability to make faith-filled decisions (discernment) in the context of vocation and mission.

- Gradual appreciation and growth in the virtues that characterize the Salesian spirit.

All this presupposes openness to personal spiritual accompaniment.

Intellectual dimension

353. It is desirable that the young person aspiring to be a Salesian consecrated person, educator and evangelizer of the young has an adequate educational-cultural foundation. Therefore, he is seriously committed to the completion of pre-university or university studies, acquires habits of study, reflection and sharing, develops a taste for reading, and cultivates a balanced approach to the digital world and social communication.

Educative and pastoral dimension

354. The young person forms himself to be generous and available, learns to see life as a gift to be given and grows in the awareness that his vocation involves the whole of his person – his preferences, his relationships, his energies. He learns to listen to the needs of the young, gets to know Don Bosco and the basics of the Preventive System, and discovers the characteristics of the Salesian animator. He is initiated into educative and pastoral service, love for the Church and its evangelizing mission, and teamwork and collaboration.

Accompaniment and discernment

Community and personal accompaniment

355. Discernment of the Salesian consecrated vocation is done through accompaniment that is both communitarian and personal.

Community accompaniment involves a favourable environment characterized by Salesian pedagogy, as well as moments of animation in community or in group.

As for personal accompaniment, it is a ‘vocational dialogue’ that touches each of the dimensions of

formation, facilitating identification of the goals of growth and awareness of what it means to live the Salesian consecrated vocation. It includes purification of vocational motivations (the needs, desires, interests, internal and external impulses that incline the young person towards this choice) and draws attention to the skills and abilities needed to live the Salesian consecrated vocation.

Guides who have been prepared

356. Those who accompany the journey of vocational discernment should be able to listen patiently and be sensitive to the *person* being accompanied and to the ultimate intention of the heart (ChV 294, 298). They should be well prepared for accompaniment and Salesian vocational discernment.

Admission to the prenovitiate

357. Admission to the prenovitiate is done by the provincial to whom the candidate addresses his request; it presupposes that the candidate has made an option for Salesian life, even if preliminary, and that he shows, in the judgment of those responsible, sufficient human, Christian and Salesian maturity. The procedures in this regard may be found below in 12.2 Admission to the prenovitiate (FSDB 812–815).

PRACTICAL GUIDELINES

358. *The experience of discerning a possible Salesian consecrated vocation is known by **various names**: aspirantate, 'Comunità Proposta', etc. It is up to each province to choose the most suitable name and form and describe it in its provincial directory.*

359. *This experience is a **prerequisite for being admitted to the prenovitiate**. The details regarding this experience are defined in the provincial SEPP or else in the provincial formation plan within the parameters indicated by the Ratio.*

7.1 Note

¹ AGC 373 18; AGC 339 30–32; AGC 438 90.

² FRANCIS, 'Address to Participants in the Congress for the Pastoral Care of Vocations in Europe', 6 June 2019.

³ GC23 155. In some regions, where many candidates come from remote areas and often not from our own settings, this kind of accompaniment of the beginnings of a special vocation is carried out through apostolic schools, which are quite distinct from aspirantates (GC19 51–52). The Congregation has called for a verification and renewal of apostolic schools (AGC 438 95–96).

⁴ ChV 283. Especially useful is the 'discernment of friendship' (ChV 287) outlined by Pope Francis: see D. FARES, 'Il discernimento spirituale in "Christus vivit". Tra Ulisse e Orfeo,' *Civiltà Cattolica* 4052 (2019) 118–132.

⁵ Among the types of aspirantate are the following: scholastic aspirantate; university aspirantate; *Comunità Proposta*; vocational volunteer service; external aspirantate; aspirantate for indigenous vocations. It may be that these different experiences overlap and intersect: in this case, due importance should be given to the age group of the candidates involved, so that the proposed paths are as appropriate as possible for each individual and the interactions are mutually beneficial.

⁶ ASC 276 63–64; GC21 267.

7.2 PRENOVIATE

Nature and objectives

Preparation for the novitiate

360. The prenovitiate is the first formal phase of formation. It is ‘a period of special preparation... immediately prior to the novitiate’ that is meant to help the candidate to deepen his vocational response, orientate himself to the Salesian consecrated life and verify his suitability for beginning the novitiate (C 109). It should be conceived as a catechumenate, at the end of which one makes major life choices – the centrality of Christ, the sacramental life, the ability to develop friendships and contribute to fraternity, a pastoral heart – in such a way that, whether one proceeds to the novitiate or not, one has made an option for Christ that marks one’s life.

Objectives

361. The prenovitiate has the following specific objectives that need to be known by the candidate and pursued by way of concrete formative steps:

- Maturing as a human being and as a Christian.
- Acquiring adequate information regarding the vocation to the consecrated life with particular attention to the Salesian charism and mission.
- Having a community and apostolic experience and reflecting seriously on the Salesian life and mission.
- Getting to know his vocation and deepening the motivations of his vocational choice.
- Arriving at a conscious and informed decision, free from internal and external pressure.

Discernment and the decision about the Salesian consecrated life take place in the prenovitiate and not in the novitiate (AGC 438 68).

The prenovitiate allows the Congregation to assess the suitability and maturity of the candidate for entering the novitiate.

Duration

362. The importance of the prenovitiate requires that it ‘usually last a year and not be ordinarily inferior to six months’¹, though individual situations and processes of vocational growth could well call for a longer period.

The formation experience

363. The nature of the prenovitiate calls for a personalized formation of the candidate with particular attention to human and Christian growth, so as to ensure sufficient maturity for the novitiate.

Human and fraternal dimension

364. A first requirement of formation is to develop a solid human foundation in the candidate. Human maturity is the basis for an authentic development of a vocation in view of the new demands and change in lifestyle coming from community life, educational and apostolic relationships and the evangelical counsels (FSDB 87–103).

For this task that belongs more to the prenovitiate than to the other phases of formation, it is very useful to have the services of a professional psychologist, not only in order to verify whether the prenovice has the human basis presupposed by Salesian consecrated life, but also to help him acquire self-knowledge, self-esteem, emotional stability, affective and sexual maturity, and the ability to relate to others.

Physical condition and health

365. Salesian life and mission require good health and physical resistance, as well as a capacity for sacrifice and for a demanding life. The prenovice is taught to take reasonable care of his health, regulate his diet and sleep, and engage in physical exercise and sport. The experience of manual labour and the ability to handle multiple tasks efficiently and serenely enable the prenovice to become familiar with our style of life and help him in his discernment.

During the prenovitiate a check should be made of the physical condition and state of health necessary for observance of the Constitutions of the Salesian Society (R 91).

Affectivity

366. Becoming aware of the value of sexuality and affectivity is part of the growth process of the prenovice, favoured by healthy relationships within the community and mutual trust. When the prenovice feels safe and accepted, he is more likely to relate serenely to his sexuality and affectivity and to seek counsel and support. He is more likely to grow in acceptance of the other and learn to appreciate his own feelings, drives and motivations, seeing them in the light of a vocation to celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom. It becomes possible for him to expand his perception of being loved and of being able to love.

The bonds of affection with the family should also be nurtured, seeking to build relationships marked by simplicity and gratitude. At the same time, to be a prenovice means to have a true sense of belonging to the community and to mature in a sense of freedom and detachment from ties that limit one's autonomy and interfere with the realization of one's vocation.

Anything related to sexuality, previous affective experiences, the affective world and sexual orientation is part of the process of basic human growth and the progressive development of a mature and balanced personality and is obviously very relevant to discernment about basic and permanent life choices. The process of discernment is particularly delicate during this phase, and must be handled, when necessary, with the help of appropriate professionals, according to the criteria established by the Church and the Congregation (FSDB 756–775; 815).

Ability to relate

367. The prenovice is encouraged to develop good relationships with companions and formators, with the different members of the EPC. He learns to relate maturely with men and women of all ages, cultures and

racess, and to offer himself generously for service. He learns to work with the laity, recognising and valuing the specific gift of each state of life and their contribution to the common mission. He learns to listen, be well-mannered and treat everyone with kindness, avoiding prejudices and attempts to manipulate.

Sense of responsibility

368. Fidelity to one's duties, a sense of responsibility and the ability to work with dedication are fundamental aspects of human development that are cultivated in the prenovitiate. In his journey towards Salesian life, the prenovice learns to make his own the love for work that Don Bosco passed on to us, be diligent in his studies, and carry out community services in a spirit of availability. He learns to make good use of his time and the qualities he has received from God, and to make daily choices motivated by the free gift of self.

Formation of conscience

369. With the help of his guides the prenovice develops an upright conscience. He discovers the Spirit at work in creation and in the events of human history, strengthens his moral convictions and develops an intelligent and critical attitude towards the cultural models offered by society.²

Openness to reality

370. The formation process promotes openness to social and cultural realities and to the world of social communication from which the prenovices come and in which young people live. Evidence of real growth in Salesian values can be seen when a prenovice becomes sensitive to the problems of poor and marginalized young people and to situations of poverty, injustice and exclusion, feels challenged by the cultures and needs of peoples not yet evangelized, grows in a sense of compassion and solidarity and manifests it through a simple life.

Community life

371. Through his contact with the Salesian confreres the prenovice is led to understand that community life is an essential part of the Salesian vocation. He learns to see it as a value and assimilates elements of the family spirit. Far from being a passive spectator, he becomes a proactive member of the community, and the community in its turn facilitates such participation (GC28 5, 23; ChV 174, 202–207). He learns to express himself and to communicate, to work in team and to accept responsibility for decisions. He tries to live serenely and with generosity, gradually moving away from tendencies to individualism, competitiveness and self-sufficiency.

Knowing oneself and making oneself known

372. With the help of the community, specialists and his spiritual guide, the prenovice continues the journey of knowing himself better. He begins to see the positive side and also the unanswered questions, struggles, shadows, paradoxes and mysteries of his life.

The experience of one's own family is of fundamental importance in the construction of the personality. Formators will help the prenovice revisit personal and family history, convinced of the healing power contained in the simple process of listening with compassion.

The digital world

373. The digital habitat and how one positions oneself within it profoundly marks the lifestyle not only of young people but also of those who plan to devote their whole life to them. The world of the Internet and all that is connected to it is therefore obviously part of the process of growth. It is important to be able to share one's experience in this field and make choices that are increasingly consistent with the values of the vocation of educator and pastor one wishes to be. There will be important yes's and no's to be dealt with, opportunities to make creative use of the formative and apostolic possibilities offered by digital communication, and also moments to exercise one's freedom, 'disconnect'

and invest in other ways of communication, such as silence, listening and dialogue.

Formators recognize that in this delicate and complex area it is much better to educate rather than to impose rules, to generate solutions through dialogue rather than to lay down regulations, to help build convictions rather than rely on control.

The related issue of pornography is addressed by considering its repercussions on self-care, openness to others, implications for the vocational option being considered, as well as for morality and human and Christian growth.

Spiritual dimension

Relationship with the Lord

374. Given that a vocation is always a faith response, the prenovice is guided to a living experience of faith and a profound relationship with the Lord Jesus.

The experience and knowledge of the faith cannot be taken for granted: we need to insist on initial proclamation (EG 165; ChV 214).

The prenovice is initiated into a life of prayer and sacramental life and is helped to deepen his faith through catechesis. He learns to discover the role and presence of Mary in the Church, in the life of Don Bosco and in his own life.

In all this, the experience of regular spiritual accompaniment, as well as the friendly talk with the one responsible for the prenovices, play a fundamental role.

Salesian consecrated life

375. The prenovice learns that the mission, the evangelical counsels and living and working together are the three essential elements of Salesian consecrated life, that this vocation makes deep demands on his humanity, and that it is lived also in the little things of daily life.

Thus, *obedience* is experienced in the readiness to accept the opinions of others and the roles played by them, the willingness to be of service, the ability to work

together. *Chastity* is seen as the horizon within which to grow ‘in a single movement of love towards God and towards our brothers and sisters’ (C 3). *Poverty* finds expression in a simplicity that does not seek what is superfluous, an ability to give without expecting anything in return, selfless motivations, detachment, the practice of self-control and fidelity to the tasks entrusted to one, but also the acceptance of one’s own limits and vulnerabilities.

By means of living contact and guided reading, the prenovice is introduced to the two forms of the one Salesian consecrated vocation, that of the Salesian brother and that of the Salesian priest.

Intellectual dimension

376. The Salesian vocation and the mission to the young require sound intellectual preparation. Before beginning this phase, the prenovice should have already acquired ‘a general cultural foundation which should correspond to what is generally expected of young persons who have achieved the normal education of their country’ (PI 43).

Sufficient intellectual capacity is required in someone desiring to become an educator and pastor in one of the two forms of our vocation.

It is also important to acquire habits of study and reflection and strengthen scholastic foundations, especially when candidates come from fragile educational backgrounds.

Contents

377. Among the topics to be considered during the prenovitiate are:

- relationships and interpersonal communication, together with aspects of self-knowledge and sexual and affective maturity.
- introduction to the study of Sacred Scripture.
- deeper knowledge of the faith and of Christian morality, with the help of *YOUCAT: Youth Catechism of the Catholic Church* (FSDB 903);
- the different states of life in the Church and Salesian consecrated life in its two forms, along with models of Salesian life.

- the new youth cultures.
- an educational approach to the digital world.
- learning the language to be used in the novitiate, or other useful languages.

Other studies may be contemplated, provided they do not interfere with the primary objectives of this phase of formation.

Educative and pastoral dimension

378. The prenovice engages in apostolic experiences proportionate to this phase of formation. These experiences are indispensable in the discernment of the Salesian consecrated vocation.

The province ensures that these experiences are carried out within a Salesian EPC. The prenovice experiences the Preventive System in action by working for and with poor young people alongside lay mission partners and members of the Salesian Family. Pastoral accompaniment helps him attend to these experiences and learn from them.

An integral part of vocational discernment is also the awareness of the work of missionaries in one's own province, the local Church and the Congregation. This offers the prenovice an insight into the *ad gentes* mission in different contexts and makes him aware that 'the Salesian Congregation... relives the ideal of Don Bosco, who wished that the work of the missions be a permanent concern of the Congregation, to the extent of being part of its nature and end' (GC19 p. 178).

Dimension of the charism

379. The dimension of the charism enters all the other dimensions as the unifying factor. The prenovices should experience this unification initially as a deep desire. When fraternal life and personal growth, deepening of faith and a more mature perception of oneself, together with a clearer understanding of Salesian life and direct service to young people, begin to converge in a unified lifestyle, this integration becomes a decisive element for vocational

discernment. If, on the other hand, one has excellent gifts in one or two dimensions but little or no interest in others, there is need for attentive discernment to distinguish between the growth that can still be achieved and deep lack of predisposition towards the Salesian way of life.

On the part of those accompanying the prenovices, Salesian apostolic consecration and the grace of unity are not so much subjects to be taught as the witness of a life that communicates the 'splendid blending of nature and grace' (C 21) characteristic of Don Bosco. A formator who lives his vocation joyfully and with a certain unity and harmony becomes a credible witness to those who need to see what it means to be Salesian.

Ensuring the necessary conditions

The experience of community

380. The prenovitate is preferably located in a Salesian community engaged in the mission and able to provide the necessary formative accompaniment. The presence of Salesian brothers is warmly recommended.

When there are many prenovices, the prenovitate can form an autonomous community, always making sure that there are sufficient opportunities for Salesian apostolate.

In any case, the prenovitate should offer a real experience of a Salesian community that lives the values of the charism with a climate of openness and cordiality that invites familiarity and trust. This depends greatly on the formation team and its ability to work together.

It is important to accustom the prenovices to a simple lifestyle.

Formative and spiritual accompaniment

381. With a view to vocational discernment, the key element of this phase is a systematic experience of community and personal accompaniment.

When the prenovitate is part of a Salesian apostolic community and the rector is not in a position to follow up the formation of the prenovices, the provincial appoints

a Salesian directly responsible for the prenovices. This confrere is then primarily responsible for accompanying the prenovices and is the point of reference for their formative journey.

The quality of personal spiritual accompaniment will have a significant impact on the prenovices and will deeply affect all the subsequent phases of formation. For some prenovices it will be a continuation of an already consolidated experience, while for others it will be the first experience.

The prenovice learns to open himself with confidence to his spiritual guide, but also to the one in charge. The provincial will indicate to the prenovices the delicate role of the one in charge with regard to vocational discernment. A basic trust in the formator goes hand in hand with the freedom given to the prenovice to choose a different spiritual guide.

The one responsible for the prenovices must be properly prepared for his task. The challenges of formation in the prenovitiate are often greater than those in the novitiate.

The periodic personal assessments are part of the help offered by the formation team to the prenovices (FSDB 716–719).

Instruments for aiding self-discovery and self-disclosure

382. The prenovitiate is a privileged time for coming to a better awareness of one's own history and processing it in the light of faith. There can be various instruments for aiding such self-discovery and self-disclosure, among them also the so-called 'autobiography'.

Formation team

383. The formation team is one of the most important components in the formative process. The prenovices perceive whether their formators live and work together (C 49) much before this is mentioned in conferences and readings.

The formators are in constant contact with the prenovices, sharing in the rhythm of their daily life, dialoguing with them and helping them to grow. They

encourage the prenovices to be open and to take responsibility for their own formation.

The formators make every effort to become familiar with the criteria and norms of Salesian vocation discernment, so that they can arrive at a balanced assessment of the suitability of the prenovices.³

When the prenovices are inserted into an apostolic community, the group of Salesians who are part of formation team should be properly defined in the local formation plan, along with their roles and functions.

The presence of at least one Salesian brother in the team allows the prenovices to have direct knowledge of the two forms of the Salesian vocation.

It is highly beneficial to have a confessor in the community.

The prenovices and formators should be accompanied by experts in the psychological sciences who cannot, however, be considered part of the formation team in the strict sense (*Gift* 192).

Ensuring continuity

384. Since initial formation increasingly takes place in interprovincial communities, it is important to ensure continuity between the prenovitiate and the subsequent phases. Some ways of ensuring continuity are:

- presenting the different phases of formation to the prenovices.
- frequent contacts with prenovices and formators on the part of provincials and their formation delegates.
- passage of basic information, periodic personal assessments and the judgments of admission to the novitiate to the provincials concerned (FSDB 705, 807).
- dialogue between the prenovitiate and novitiate formation teams, the provincials involved and their formation delegates.

The involvement of the Regional Councillors and the Formation Sector can facilitate a common vision and shared praxis.

Discernment and admission to the novitiate

385. The prenovitiate is above all a time of discernment. The prenovice:

- is helped to know himself better, discern his vocational choice and personalize his formation through regular dialogue with the rector or the person in charge and through spiritual accompaniment.
- receives advice from his confessor in the sacrament of Reconciliation.
- knows and studies the criteria and norms of Salesian vocation discernment and uses them, together with his spiritual guide, as criteria for discerning his vocation.
- works with his spiritual guide to draw up and evaluate the personal plan of life.
- makes use of retreats and monthly recollections to deepen his vocational motivation.
- receives assessments through which the formation team helps him become aware of the lights and shadows in his journey.
- acquires practical knowledge of the two forms of the Salesian vocation in view of the discernment to be made in the novitiate.
- has a meaningful experience of Salesian community life (with formators, the greater community to which the prenovitiate belongs, and the EPC).

386. For their part, the formators in the prenovitiate:

- maintain contact with Salesians who have previously guided the prenovice.
- get to know and interact with the family and the social and ecclesial environment from which the prenovice comes.
- encourage deeper understanding of the criteria for discerning between the two forms of the Salesian consecrated vocation.
- help the family accept their son's vocational choice and become involved in his vocational growth.

387. The phase of prenovitiate formation achieves its objectives when:

- the prenovice brings his vocational search to a close, feels confirmed in his idea that God is calling him to

Salesian life and asks to be admitted to the novitiate; or else sees that God is calling him to some other vocation in the Church.

- the Salesian Congregation, through the local and provincial community, carries out its own discernment process, verifies the suitability of the prenovice, and recognizes that the prenovice shows authentic signs of a Salesian vocation and has the basic requirements to begin the novitiate.

388. When a prenovice realizes that the Salesian life is not meant for him, or when the Congregation comes to a similar conclusion, it is important for the provincial and the formators to act with transparency and charity. We accompany those who opt for a different way of life with the same care that we accompany those who wish to begin the novitiate, convinced that this is a moment of finding one's vocation rather than losing it.

389. Admission to the novitiate is made by the provincial of origin with the consent of his council, after hearing the opinion of the rector of the prenovitiate community with his council (C 108), and this even when the prenovitiate is interprovincial (FSDB 816).

Admission is done on the basis of positive signs that indicate the prenovice's aptitude for Salesian life:

- Right intention (see FSDB 784–790).
- A positive experience of Christian life.
- Love for Don Bosco and the Salesian mission.
- Good relations with young people and a genuine concern for poor youth.
- Sufficient health.
- Serene and balanced affectivity.
- Ability to make decisions based on authentic motivations and a sense of duty and responsibility.
- Basic general culture and intellectual qualities appropriate for becoming an educator and pastor.
- Ability to live in community with generosity and a spirit of faith.
- Propensity to simple living, initiative and hard work.
- Commitment to his own formation.

PRACTICAL GUIDELINES

390. *The prenovitiate is either established **within a suitable apostolic community** or else is an autonomous community, but one that is distinct from the novitiate or postnovitiate. As in the case of every other activity or work in a province (C 132 and 165), the establishment or transfer of the prenovitiate phase is approved by the Rector Major with his Council, upon the request of the provincial and his council.*

391. *The provincial takes special care to select and prepare team members, and to ensure that they work together.*

392. *‘Immediate preparation for novitiate customarily shall last one year and shall not ordinarily be less than six months’ (GC21 270; see R 89). It is preceded by an adequate experience of aspirantate.*

393. *Ordinarily there is only one prenovitiate in each province; in case of necessity, the authorisation to have more than one prenovitiate will be given by the Rector Major with his Council.*

394. *The **beginning of the prenovitiate** is decided in the light of the Code of Canon Law, which requires that the candidate shall have completed his seventeenth year of age for valid admission to the novitiate.⁴*

395. *During the prenovitiate, it is necessary to undergo a **medical check-up and a psychological examination** in order to verify the existence of basic human qualities and aptitudes requested by the criteria and norms of Salesian vocation discernment in order to begin the Salesian formation journey. That these might serve as an aid to growth, and so as to facilitate accompaniment, a written report must be provided, and the results communicated in good time during the prenovitiate (FSDB 720–730).*

396. *The details regarding the **prenovitiate formation plan** are to be laid down in the provincial directory (R 89).*

7. Initial formation

397. *‘When the candidate considers himself ready and sufficiently prepared he makes his **request** to begin the novitiate.’⁵*

398. *For the eventual acceptance of **candidates who have freely withdrawn from or been sent away from a seminary or other Religious Institute**, it is mandatory to request adequate information in advance and in writing. In particular, besides the documents mentioned in can. 645 §1,⁶ it is also necessary to request, under grave obligation,⁷ ‘the testimony of, respectively, the local ordinary, the major superior of the institute or society, or the rector of the seminary’ (can. 645 §2–3). Direct contact and frank dialogue between the provincial or his delegate and this superior are recommended, to guarantee the best possible discernment in the interest of the candidate himself and of the Congregation: ‘Superiors can also seek other information, even under secrecy, if it seems necessary to them’ (can. 645 §4).*

On our part, we have the obligation to furnish similar information to other Institutes or seminaries. Such information must respect the confidentiality of the internal forum, the right of individuals to their good name, and the safeguarding of their privacy (cf. can. 220), but at the same time, for the good of the persons concerned and of the Church, it must not hide or dissimulate the state of things insofar as this is known in the external forum.

7.2 Notes

¹ GC21 270; see R 89.

² Useful here is CCC Part Three: Life in Christ.

³ See below, chapter 11 Criteria for Discernment.

⁴ See can. 643 §1.1; 656.1; R 91.

⁵ R 91. Regarding admission to the novitiate, see FSDB 816–820.

⁶ ‘Before candidates are admitted to the novitiate, they must show proof of baptism, confirmation, and free status.’

⁷ CCE, *Instruction to the Episcopal Conferences on the Admission to Seminary of Candidates Coming from Other Seminaries or Religious Families* (9 October 1986 and 8 March 1996); CCE, Circular Letter *Ci permettiamo*, to the Pontifical Representatives Concerning the Admission of Ex-Seminarians in Other Seminaries (9 October 1986), referred to in *Giff* 189.

7.3 NOVITIATE

Nature and objectives

399. The novitiate is the fundamental phase of initiation into Salesian religious life (can. 646). It consists of a twelve-month period during which the novices deepen their understanding of the call of the Lord Jesus to follow him more closely in the way of the gospel set out in the Salesian Constitutions (C 24). It is a decisive time of discernment in view of first profession.

400. The formation team, which is defined by the provincial / curatorium, consists of the director of novices, who is the one with primary responsibility, other confreres and those lay people who take part in the life of the novitiate. The team is committed to fostering the objectives of the novitiate, taking care to involve the novices, who never cease to be the ones with the first responsibility for their own formation.

Objectives

Deepening the call of the Lord

401. Each novice is helped to become aware of the fundamental motivation of his vocation to the consecrated life – which must be Christ and his Kingdom (PC 2) – and to move towards making the covenant with the Lord Jesus that is the centre of the life of every Salesian of Don Bosco.

Suitability for Salesian consecrated life

402. The novice is helped to deepen his understanding of Don Bosco's charism and the traits of Salesian religious life. He is helped to purify his deepest motivations and recognize whether he has the human and spiritual resources and a sufficient degree of freedom to embrace Salesian life by religious profession.

Internalizing the values of Salesian apostolic spirituality

403. On the basis of the experience of Salesian life during the years of aspirantate and prenovitiate, novices are guided to understand pastoral charity in the Salesian charism as a single movement of love towards God and neighbour (C 3), and to live the grace of unity. ‘When novices have learned to live the “grace of unity”, we can state that the religious initiation of active life is assured of its growth.’¹

A conscious and responsible attitude towards one’s formative journey

404. At the end of the novitiate, the newly professed should have grown in the desire to form himself and to allow himself to be formed all through life, and should manifest the following dynamics of growth and vocational fidelity:

- He is aware that his loving response to the Lord is expressed in the desire to have the mind that was in Christ Jesus (Phil 2:5), the Eucharist and daily meditation on the Word of God; he feels the need to periodically approach the sacrament of Reconciliation, seeing it as a privileged means of conversion and growth; he nurtures tender devotion to *Mary*, as a son of Don Bosco.
- He adopts *personal spiritual accompaniment* as a permanent support in his journey and as something that prepares him for the mission, which requires that Salesians become ‘guides who themselves are guided’.
- He has deepened his commitment to the study of *Salesianity* and the practice of the *Preventive System*; he sees the Salesian charism as a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church and has grown in his love for it.
- He has begun to make a preferential option for poor youth.
- He has grasped in the *Da mihi animas* the urgency of working for the *evangelization* and salvation of the young, and values collaboration with the members of the EPC.
- He has shown himself capable of establishing *fraternal*

relationships; he has learnt to listen and confront, to give and receive fraternal correction, to build relationships that are deep and open.

- He shows his belonging to the Salesian Congregation, the Salesian Family and the universal Church in his readiness to live the Salesian mission at the service of the young without conditions of place or role and with deep love for the Pope and his teaching.
- He sees the need to learn from every encounter with the young and every life situation, facing the insecurity of what is new and unexpected and listening to the voice of the Spirit.
- Reading the story of his life in the light of the Word of God and in dialogue with the director of novices, he draws up a simple personal plan of life which he considers a privileged tool for helping him live in an attitude of ongoing formation.

The formation team

Director of novices

405. ‘The director of novices is the spiritual guide who coordinates and animates all the formative action of the novitiate’ (C 112; can. 650 §2). With his help, ‘the novice examines carefully the motives for his choice, makes certain of his suitability for the Salesian calling, and prepares himself to give his all to God for the service of the young in the spirit of Don Bosco’ (C 110).

The director of novices fosters the creation of a community marked by the family spirit and encourages sharing of responsibility between the different formators and among the novices.

His first task is to pray for his novices, that they might be open to what God is asking of them. He regularly accompanies each one of them to live a personalized and Salesian formation experience.

He ‘must be a man of prudence with spiritual and Salesian experience and an up-to-date knowledge of practical psychology and youth problems. He should be able to relate easily to people, engage in dialogue, and inspire confidence in the novices by his kindness’ (C 112).

He nurtures a deep love for Don Bosco. He shares the life of the novices as much as possible, even in the informal moments of daily life.

Other Salesians

406. The members of the formation team take care to be present among the novices, creating familiar and relaxed relationships with them. It is important that there be a Salesian brother among them. The 'socius' is the first collaborator of the director of novices, taking on the responsibilities of an organizational, animating and accompanying nature that the director sees fit to entrust to him.

Lay people

407. It is advisable for some lay people to participate occasionally in the processes of formation. These are people with a serious spiritual journey who identify with the Salesian charism (especially members of the Salesian Family and of the animating nucleus of the EPC) and have direct contact with the novices. It would be important to also ensure the presence of one or more women, consecrated or lay (GC29 39e, 49).

Supervision

408. The director of novices turns to experts in consecrated life and psychology for supervision of his way of accompanying the novices. He also facilitates the supervision of the formation team.

The formation experience

409. The novitiate calls for a journey that does not only provide instruction but aims at the configuration of the person to Christ. A living encounter with the Lord Jesus is fundamental, leading the novice to get in touch with his most intimate motivations and feelings, and giving him the courage to recognize and reject those that are inauthentic and inconsistent.

Human and fraternal dimension

410. Novices are empowered to live and work together among themselves and build relationships of communion with the members of the EPC.

A healthy community atmosphere in which one has no fear of expressing and revealing oneself favours the process of growth in human maturity.

Work and temperance are proposed as a way of being genuinely close to the young, maturing as men of relationships, and growing in a self-giving free of all forms of possessiveness.

Temperance, as a radical attitude of freedom and openness to others, is especially relevant to the journey of sexual and affective maturity. The novices are invited to re-read their journey and to open their hearts to the novice director with simplicity and trust. The journey of growth in emotional and sexual maturity already begun in the prenovitiate (FSDB 366) continues and deepens, with reference to biblical anthropology and always in accordance with the requirements of the Salesian vocation (FSDB 756–775).

Spiritual dimension

411. The centre of the journey of formation is the personal encounter with Jesus Christ. The novice gradually enters into the following of Jesus obedient, poor and chaste, integrating his humanity in him, in harmony with the Salesian charism.

Formation purifies and consolidates the initial attraction to Don Bosco and Salesian life and makes it concrete through a process of assimilation of the charism as expressed in the Constitutions. The witness of faith, prayer and apostolic dedication of so many figures of holiness and heroism in the Salesian Family is illuminating.

What I am before the Creator, that is my prayer. The light-giving gaze of God penetrates to where no other glance can reach. He sees me and teaches me to see myself as I

am. To pray, therefore, is to feel and welcome this paternal gaze of God, without obstructing it in a vain effort to do everything by myself (J.E. Vecchi, AGC 374 19).

The life of prayer is grasped as the heart of religious consecration and apostolic interiority, the way to self-knowledge and the maturing of one's human and religious identity. The novice is helped to move from a rhythm of prayer to the spirit of prayer that encompasses the whole of existence.

The novice director introduces the novices to meditation and accompanies them both personally and in a group. Salesian meditation, rooted in an understanding of prayer as friendship with Christ, encourages us to focus on the person of Jesus, especially his passion. The fruits are seen in daily life and in the ministry.

The adoption and deepening of the characteristic features of Salesian prayer is also done in the celebration of the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours.

Intellectual dimension

412. The overriding objective of studies in the novitiate is the development of a deeper life of faith, a loving knowledge of God and a deeper familiarity with the Salesian consecrated life. The local formation plan should therefore contain a precise programme which includes contact with the Word of God, presentation of the theological basis of religious life, and study of the Constitutions, the life of Don Bosco and the Salesian tradition (R 92).

The novice learns to see study as an integral part of the Salesian mission (C 14). The programme that is envisaged opens up a broad even though initial vision of the Salesian Congregation and Family in its history and presence in the world.

The reading of spiritual authors is encouraged, as is also the study of languages, particularly Italian and those required for the apostolate.

Educative and pastoral dimension

413. Formation in mission is the indispensable school for the journey of growth of consecrated persons. While the

novitiate guarantees special times and spaces for silence and contemplation, it can never lose direct contact with the young.² In all the pastoral experiences during the novitiate the central objective remains that of fostering a unifying understanding of our being ‘consecrated in mission,’ that is, ‘really competent people who are able to combine an interior Salesian gospel way of life with their own rich humanity, [and] are able to see their commitment to education as an aspect of their mission’ (FoR 128).

Dimension of the charism

414. The novice is helped to see that the different dimensions of formation find their unity in the Salesian religious vocation that is at once apostolic and consecrated. He grows in the conviction that community life and fraternity is essential to our vocation, that the mission is entrusted to the community. He becomes aware that we are first and foremost consecrated apostles, and that the two forms of our vocation are lived within this identity. He allows Don Bosco to inspire and lead him in an ever more fervent response to the call of the Lord, and he invokes the assistance of Mary every day, that he might grow in the grace of unity and in the fullness of his vocation.

Opportunities to meet and get to know the different groups of the Salesian Family are encouraged and valued, so that the novices become aware of the breadth and depth of Don Bosco’s charism.

Discernment and admission to first profession

Time of discernment

415. The novitiate year is a time of intense vocational discernment carried out in an atmosphere of faith and openness, and with the help of systematic accompaniment. As he experiences Salesian consecrated life, the novice evaluates his situation before God: the place that Jesus occupies in his life, his assimilation of vocational values, motivations, formative journey. Accompanied by the director and with the help of the community he arrives at a degree of serenity and clarity concerning God’s will

for him. Significant moments in this process are also the periodic assessments, where the novice can compare his daily experience with Salesian identity and its demands.

The two forms of the Salesian vocation

416. A special moment is the discernment *on the part of every novice* regarding the form of the Salesian vocation to which he is called. Along with other criteria, it is a matter of discerning whether the novice has a greater inclination towards '[the] lay status, which make[s] him in a particular way a witness to God's Kingdom in the world, close... to the young and to the realities of working life' or towards '[the] ministry, which makes him a sign of Christ the Good Shepherd, especially by preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments' (C 45).

Given the unique vocational history of each candidate, the option for one of the two forms may already be clear at the time of the first profession, or else it may require a further time of discernment during the years of temporary profession, in view of a definitive orientation before perpetual profession.

Temporary profession

417. The novice is admitted to first profession by the provincial of the province in which the novitiate is located, with the consent of his council and after consultation with the candidate's own provincial and the rector of the community with their respective councils. Religious profession publicly sanctions the beginning of the covenant that God, the Church and the community establish with the newly consecrated individual. The community recognizes him as capable of living this vocation and welcomes him as a confrere.

418. The Church in its wisdom and its long experience has established a period of temporary profession during which the religious studies his ability to live his vocation before making a definitive choice. Accepting the dispositions of the Church, the candidate makes temporary profession, but with the clear desire to give himself completely for the

rest of his life, knowing that ‘one does not give one’s life to Christ on a “trial” basis’ (PI 55).

PRACTICAL GUIDELINES

419. *‘To be valid, a novitiate must take place in a house which is duly designated for this purpose’ (can. 647 §2; C 111). It belongs to the Rector Major with the consent of his Council to erect or suppress a novitiate house, and to approve its transfer or its establishment alongside another suitable community (C 132 §1.3; can. 647 §1).*

420. *‘The house of novitiate should be in contact with social and apostolic realities of the neighbourhood’ (R 90). The contact with the neighbourhood, if done in a way that respects the formation objectives of this phase, can enrich the work of formation, keep it in touch with reality and allow for the realization of the required pastoral activities (R 87; can. 652 §5).*

421. *The provincial in whose jurisdiction the house of novitiate lies ‘can allow the group of novices to reside, for a certain period of time, in another specified house of the Institute designated by the superior’ (can. 647 §3). If the house chosen belongs to another province, he must have the agreement of the provincial concerned. For the sake of clarity:*

- *the designation of the house is to be made by a written decree.*
- *the novices must be accompanied by the novice director and the formators.*
- *the period of time must be clearly stated in the decree.*
- *the religious house must be exclusively Salesian and canonically erected (ibid.).*

422. *Under the following conditions a candidate can make his novitiate in some other house:*

- *in very special cases and by way of exception, and only by concession of the Rector Major with the consent of his Council.*
- *under the direction of a capable Salesian who takes the place of the director of novices, and is appointed by the provincial with the consent of his council and*

- approved by the Rector Major in each individual case.³
- in a Salesian house that is canonically erected.

423. *‘The **director of novices is the spiritual guide** who coordinates and animates all the work of formation of the novitiate’ (C 112; can. 650 §1). ‘He must be perpetually professed and is appointed by the provincial with the consent of his council and the approval of the Rector Major. He remains in office for three years, and may be reappointed’ (C 112; can. 651 §1). The Rector Major’s approval is necessary both for the first three-year period and for successive ones (ASC 276 68).*

424. *In novitiate houses destined exclusively for the purpose it is opportune that the director of novices also be the rector. In other cases, the provincial will ensure that the conditions in which the director of novices functions – whether he be rector or not – are the most appropriate for realizing the objectives of the novitiate (ASC 276 68).*

***The formation team** should be of the right size and calibre. There should be a variety of people and roles; in particular, every effort should be made to see that there are also Salesian brothers.*

425. *‘In accordance with canon law, **the novitiate lasts twelve months**; it begins when the candidate, after being admitted by the provincial, enters the canonically erected novitiate house and places himself under the guidance of the director of novices. The novitiate is invalidated by an absence of more than three months, continuous or broken. An absence of more than fifteen days must be made good.’⁴ For the reckoning of time, reference should be made to what is laid down in the Code of Canon Law.’⁵*

426. *In special cases the provincial **may prolong the novitiate**, but not beyond a further six months in accordance with can. 653 §2 (R 94).*

427. *‘The novices are to make a **retreat** at an appropriate time at the beginning of the novitiate, and again before making vows’ (R 93).*

428. *One of the indispensable tasks of the director of novices is to accompany the experience of **prayer**. Special attention is to be given to the daily meditation, recollections and annual retreats.*

429. *The **pastoral experiences** draw their inspiration from the norms given above (FSDB 136). They are carried out in a graded manner and according to the character of initiation of the novitiate; they must be prepared, followed up, evaluated and accompanied within the novitiate community (R 87). The director of novices is the first one responsible for them, especially for their accompaniment.*

430. *'Studies during the novitiate should be carried out seriously and follow a precise programme which forms part of the overall plan of studies. They should have as their overriding objective initiation into the mystery of Christ.... A sound theological basis for the religious life should also be presented. The Constitutions, the life of Don Bosco and our traditions should be studied' (R 92).*

431. *During the novitiate any **official curriculum of studies** (including those of philosophy and theology) is interrupted, even though it may have formed part of a course for obtaining academic qualifications or for preparing for apostolic work (ASC 276 70).*

432. *Every three months, the director of novices with the local council will make a careful **assessment** of the maturing of each novice in his vocation, who in turn is invited to reflect on and evaluate the past months with serenity and realism. The novices themselves should be trained to make a constant discernment on their own account, so as to come to perceive God's will and purify their own motivations.*

433. *Each novice is called upon to make a choice of a specific vocational orientation as a Salesian brother or as a Salesian priest/permanent deacon, before applying for admission to profession. This is one of the most important discernment processes of the novitiate, carried out in dialogue with the novice director.*

The vocational orientation ought to become definitive, for all, before beginning specific formation or before

7. Initial formation

perpetual profession, should this precede specific formation (FSDB 680).

If there is the custom of giving the cassock to Salesian clerics during the novitiate, this should be transferred to the conclusion of the novitiate, so as to favour proper discernment and to highlight the one Salesian consecrated vocation.

434. *'The novice may freely **leave** the Institute during the novitiate' (R 94; can. 653 §1).*

*The eventual **dismissal** of a novice, during the novitiate or at its end, belongs to the provincial of the province in which the novitiate house is situated;⁶ if the novice belongs to another province, the provincial of origin should be informed in advance about the ongoing discernment and possible decision.*

435. *The candidate is **admitted** to temporary profession after he has made the necessary request and has been considered suitable.⁷*

*The purpose of the **period of temporary profession** is to enable the candidate to reach the Salesian spiritual maturity required for perpetual profession.*

436. *Since it is a temporary profession, the first profession should be a modest **celebration**, without the solemnity due to the perpetual profession.⁸*

7.3 Notes

¹ VIGANÒ, *Apostolic interiority* 10.

² In the original Constitutions Don Bosco had only one article on the novitiate: it was 'the test' about how the novice related to the young.

³ C 111, 165 §3; can. 647 §2.

⁴ C 111; *Juridical Elements* 55–56.

⁵ Can. 201 §1; 202 §2; 203 §1,2.

⁶ R 91; can. 653 §1,2.

⁷ R 94; can. 653 §2. See below, 12.4 Admission to first profession (FSDB 821–830).

⁸ PI 56; CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP, *Ordo professionis religiosae* (1975). For the Salesian celebration of the temporary and perpetual profession, see *Rite of Religious Profession, Society of St. Francis de Sales* (Rome 1990).

7.4 POSTNOVITIATE

Nature and objectives

437. Article 113 of our Constitutions tells us that the first profession ‘marks the beginning of a period of consecrated life.’ It also indicates the *objective* of this period: the confrere ‘completes his maturing process with perpetual profession in view, and develops the different aspects of his vocation as a lay Salesian or as a candidate for the priesthood.’

The postnovitiate is the first phase of this period of temporary profession. It is situated between the novitiate and practical training and is organically linked to them: it ‘continues the formative experience of the novitiate’ and ‘serves as a preparation for practical training’ (C 114).

Continuing the formation experience of the novitiate

438. *To continue the formation experience of the novitiate* means to deepen the Salesian religious identity. The expression ‘formative experience’ goes beyond the simple acquisition of contents or doctrines, and echoes C 98, which in fact bears the title ‘The formation experience’.

Four aspects can be identified in this experience:

- Strengthening the life of faith.
- Deepening the spirit of Don Bosco.
- Adequate philosophical, pedagogical and catechetical preparation.
- Dialogue with the prevailing culture.

Preparation for ministry

439. These aspects are also a preparation for practical training and for the Salesian mission. The preparation consists of acquiring the knowledge, attitudes and skills needed for being an educator and pastor for the young people of today, and also taking part in educative and pastoral activities, carried out as far as possible within an EPC.

Integration of faith, culture and life

440. The *specific objective* of this phase of formation is a progressive integration of faith, culture and life (C 114). This simply means that Jesus and his gospel, as lived by Don Bosco, permeate the life of the young Salesian in such a way that they become the fundamental principles of his life and the basis of his way of thinking, judging and acting.

It is essential that the nature and purpose of this phase be a constant point of reference for the concrete choices that characterize it.

The formation experience

Learning by experience

441. The formation experience consists of learning by experience the meaning of the Salesian vocation (C 98). This is a question of daily discernment: this is how one's ordinary activities become effective means of formation and ongoing formation becomes a permanent personal frame of mind (C 119).

The individual is not alone in all this. *Community* accompaniment is done by the rector and by the members of the formation team, but also by the confreres among themselves. *Group* accompaniment is important, especially in large formation communities. *Personal* accompaniment includes the monthly talk with the rector, frequent celebration of the sacrament of Reconciliation with a stable confessor, and regular meetings with one's spiritual guide. Besides these, there is pastoral, intellectual and psychological accompaniment.

The style of formation

442. Formation involves personalizing values, building up genuine convictions, and learning to take responsibility. The formation team, led by the rector, does everything possible to ensure that the *Preventive System is truly the style of formation*, so that relationships are governed by familiarity rather than by mere recourse

to rules, young confreres are given responsibility and feel actively involved, and discernment becomes a way of life for the community.

Salesian brothers and candidates for the priesthood

443. Since clerics and brothers share in the same Salesian consecrated vocation, it is envisaged that they live together in the same community during this phase of formation. This does not mean that their programme of studies coincides in every way. They should 'normally have the same initial formation and follow a curriculum of equivalent level, with the same phases and similar content and objectives', the necessary differences being determined 'by the specific vocation of each one, by his personal gifts and inclinations and the duties of our apostolate' (C 106).

Human and fraternal dimension

444. The postnovitiate is a time in which the confrere concerns himself in a practical way with integrating the elements of Salesian consecrated life into his personality.

The postnovice continues to work at self-knowledge, self-acceptance and self-esteem, reconciling himself with his past and integrating it into his present. He becomes capable of loving with gratitude, establishes positive, mature, transparent and genuine human relationships, and develops an affectivity that is aware of the value of the body, recognizes the value of human sexuality and values friendship. Aware of his responsibilities as an educator and pastor of young people, he is attentive to the need to protect minors and vulnerable adults and strives to avoid any attitude that is ambiguous or open to misinterpretation. He cultivates healthy relationships with the lay people who work in the house and with those with whom the mission is shared.

Within the daily life of the community, he learns to combine his sense of freedom and personal responsibility with a sense of belonging to the community and its project. He cultivates serenity of spirit and is ready to perform domestic chores. He learns to accept people unconditionally and contributes to community animation.

He is faithful to his duty, applies himself to his studies, develops a sense of discipline, communication, dialogue and discussion, organizes his time well and learns to use communications media wisely.

He looks after his health through a balanced diet, exercise and adequate rest at night.

Spiritual dimension

445. With the help of spiritual accompaniment, the postnovice seeks to deepen his vocation through reflection on experience and assimilation of Salesian values.

The rector and the spiritual guide help the postnovice ‘to make the best formative use of any situation, and to see it as a favourable opportunity for growing in his vocation’ (C 119). They assist him to grow in the practice of daily meditation, nourished especially by the Word of God and by continued reading of the Constitutions. They also help him to grow in personal prayer, improve his participation in community prayer, the Eucharist and the sacrament of reconciliation, and grow in filial love for Mary.

Intellectual dimension

446. Intellectual formation, which is the distinguishing characteristic of this phase, is oriented to and characterized by the Salesian mission (R 83).

The choices that govern our intellectual formation are the Salesian complexion, contextualized interaction between theory and practice, unity and comprehensiveness, continuity and inculturation.

The postnovice who interacts with philosophy, the human sciences and the cultural context is always a believer and never ‘brackets’ his faith. Deeply rooted in his Christian and Salesian identity, he learns to enter into dialogue with other worldviews and attitudes to life, knowing that he is called to minister to youth in the real world in which they live.

Inculturation

447. The postnovice strives to attain a mental framework that is consistent with his fundamental options and

enables him to continue interacting with cultural contexts, the world of youth and the problems of education in a Christian and enlightened way. He does this through persevering study of and dialogue with the great minds of the past and present, and with the many and complex elements that constitute the socio-economic and cultural dynamics of the present day and especially of the context in which his province operates (*Gift* 116).

The study programme offered to the postnovices will be especially sensitive to the question of inculturation: the philosophical, pedagogical and catechetical preparation takes place in dialogue with the prevailing culture. The study of philosophy in the Church is always at the service of the reflection on faith that is theology. The first great inculturation of the faith took place in the West; it is now time for new efforts at inculturation in other regions of the world (FR 72; see EG 116).

Pastoral discernment

448. Intellectual formation aims at preparing the postnovices for *pastoral discernment*, which is the ability to read situations in the light of faith through prolonged interaction with the challenges presented by the many worldviews of our time, the natural and human sciences and technology, and contemporary globalized culture. Teachers will not, therefore, be pure academics but people capable of pastoral discernment, with the ability to ‘make philosophy come alive’ by allowing it to ‘light up’ the experience of their students.

Pastoral preoccupation and pastoral discernment are in turn enhanced by pedagogical and catechetical preparation, which are the other two components of the postnovitiate programme. If the philosophical and human sciences provide the postnovice with a worldview open to the faith, pedagogy and catechetics prepare him to be an educator in the faith, whose ‘highest knowledge... is to know Jesus Christ’ and whose ‘greatest delight is to reveal to all people the unfathomable riches of his mystery’ (C 34).

Studies

Philosophy

449. The study of philosophy leads the Salesian to a sound and coherent vision of the human being, the world and God that is ‘rooted in “the eternally valid philosophical heritage”, developed over time and, at the same time... open to accepting the contributions that philosophical research has provided and continues to provide.’¹

Such study adopts an approach that tries to be both critical and comprehensive, with an ability to dialogue with the human questions of different times and cultures. It takes its stand on the human ability to transcend empirical data ‘in order to attain something absolute, ultimate and foundational in its search for truth’.² The study of philosophy is a necessary part of the preparation not only of Salesians who are candidates to the priesthood, but also of Salesian brothers – given that all are called to be educators and pastors of the young people of today.

The programme of philosophical studies is structured in accordance with the recent indications of the universal Church, both in terms of the philosophical disciplines to be covered and the other subjects.³

Care will be taken to include not only elements that have contributed to the first great inculturation of the faith but also those of the other cultural areas in which the Church now finds itself (FR 72).

The human sciences and pedagogical preparation

450. Closely connected with philosophy are the human sciences (cultural anthropology, psychology, pedagogy, sociology, social communication, etc.) which make it possible to have a better understanding of the human being and the evolution of society. In their specific areas of competence, they offer an indispensable contribution by way of their own characteristic viewpoints (*Gift* 163).

Education to the faith and catechetical preparation

451. The vital synthesis that this phase seeks to form

has faith for its basis; this faith needs to be strengthened through a deeper study of the Christian mystery (R 96) and the way of communicating it in catechesis (C 114).

These studies, however, are not to be identified with the institutional curriculum of theology proper to specific formation to the priesthood. They are more of an initiation geared to forming a sapiential synthesis. Together with a positive presentation of the history of salvation, they aim at fostering an ability to teach catechism and are directly concerned with strengthening and enlightening the person's growth in faith.

Salesian studies

452. In view of a more mature knowledge and assimilation of the charism, studies during the postnovitiate will show particular interest in Salesian youth ministry and pedagogy, and seek to reinforce an educative outlook and the value of Salesian assistance. In continuity with the preceding phases of formation, courses are envisaged on Don Bosco the educator, the history of the Congregation, the Preventive System and the outlines of Salesian youth ministry. The principal characteristics of the groups of the Salesian Family found in the province or region are also studied.⁴

In addition to these studies there is a need also for a reflection on the Salesian experience of the individual, the province and the Congregation.

Civil recognition of postnovitiate studies

453. 'During the years of initial formation the studies should be so structured as to lead to degrees and qualifications recognized by the State, where circumstances allow' (R 84). Where it is not possible to have such recognition, different solutions may be adopted, provided that in every case the Salesian characteristics of the studies and the attainment of the specific objectives of the postnovitiate phase of formation are diligently safeguarded.

Curriculum for Salesian brothers

454. The studies of the postnovitiate will consider the

characteristics proper to the vocation of the Salesian brother.⁵ Because of the importance of philosophy in forming and preparing a religious who is an educator and pastor, the Salesian brother, too, studies it in the manner and to the extent appropriate to his specific vocation. The aim will be to acquire a knowledge of God and a Christian vision of the world in dialogue with the different cultures and the outstanding questions of our time so as to see the harmony between faith and reason, and to avoid rationalism on the one hand and pietism and fundamentalism on the other (PI 61).

The programme of studies also includes training in pedagogy, elements of pastoral formation and catechetics, and socio-political education based primarily on the social teaching of the Church and geared to preparing the brother for specific educational activity in the world.

Brothers must be offered 'a formation programme that is serious but also flexible and adapted to the nature of their various responsibilities as well as to their actual possibilities' (GC21 301). Where possible, they could profit from a bachelor's degree programme in religious studies of the kind offered in ecclesiastical faculties, which would open the possibility of obtaining a master's degree in religious studies during the phase of specific formation.

455. So as to be able to begin or continue qualification in the professional field preferably before practical training, the length of philosophical and pedagogical studies for the Salesian brother postnovices should not ordinarily be more than two or three years (FSDB 465).

Qualification in the professional field regards the competencies needed to fulfil the various tasks and roles that will be entrusted to the brothers.

Educative and pastoral dimension

456. The postnovice acquires the attitudes he needs for his vocation of educator and pastor, above all by progressively striving to integrate faith with life and culture.

Study and pastoral experiences, community reflection and spiritual accompaniment are the means that enable him to interpret history and culture in a Christian way,

and to understand events in the Church and in the world, issues concerning youth, the ways young people express themselves and the languages of social communication. In this way he develops and nurtures the ‘pastoral charity’ (C 10) that is at the heart of our spirit and that becomes the soul of our daily activities, even when we are not in direct contact with the young.

His application to study becomes an expression of his love for the young, as he needs competence and professionalism to put himself at their service.

457. The postnovice also takes part in educative and pastoral activities that are properly organized and evaluated and carried out to the extent possible as a group activity in a Salesian institution, or even in experiences of missionary work. The purpose of such activities is to:

- acquire sensitivity to the work of education and a pastoral mentality by reflecting, making personal contacts and studying the guidelines of the Congregation.
- have first-hand exposure to the Salesian mission by being involved in concrete experiences of educative and pastoral service within the context of the SEPP and by participating in an EPC.
- engage in the animation of young people, and above all, in Salesian assistance.
- learn to work as part of a team with Salesians and lay persons, acknowledging the different roles and respecting them with a sense of shared responsibility.
- become familiar with pastoral accompaniment and evaluation.
- gain a deeper knowledge of, and contact with, the pastoral life of the province.

458. The provincial formation plan should promote graded apostolic experiences for postnovices. The pastoral coordinator should ensure that these experiences ordinarily take place in the context of an EPC, so that the shared mission is a reality that is experienced and not just talked about. Above all, the pastoral coordinator should be capable of accompanying the pastoral experiences in the postnovitiate.

Discernment of the *ad gentes* missionary vocation

459. The postnovitiate is the phase where charismatic identity is deepened, and where one can ask about one's particular mission in the Church and in the Congregation. It is, therefore, the most suitable phase in which to begin discernment of an *ad gentes* missionary vocation (AGC 437 62).

The rector, in particular, will draw attention to this topic, especially through community spiritual accompaniment. Every postnovice will be helped to discern whether the Lord is calling him to this vocation within a vocation.

Dimension of the charism

460. The postnovice is helped to grow in his Salesian consecrated vocation in the grace of unity as a mystic in the Spirit, prophet of fraternity, and servant of the young (GC27 p. 89), with special emphasis on the intellectual dimension.

The progressive blending of the spiritual-charismatic, intellectual-cultural and human-fraternal dimensions flows into the pastoral dimension, the service of young people, especially those who are poor.

Attending to his experience and responding daily to God's call, the young confrere allows Jesus and his gospel to permeate and transform his life, after the example of Don Bosco.

Some formation requirements

The formation community

461. The postnovitiate needs a setting that is supportive of formation and markedly Salesian, one that mirrors the values and attitudes that the confreres in formation have to assimilate.

The formation community receives the confrere with an open heart and introduces him to a network of fraternal relationships permeated by respect and trust. It offers an environment and style of formation conducive to growing in responsible freedom and personalizing discipline. The spirit that reigns is one of zeal and enthusiasm for the

Salesian mission and is based on motivations of faith and love for Christ rather than on external factors.

The moments of prayer and community reflection lead one to consider the world with a discerning mind, see it with the eyes of God, and commit oneself to its transformation.

It is desirable that Salesians preparing for the priesthood and Salesian brothers live a common life in the same formation community, learning to appreciate the two forms of the one Salesian vocation (GC21 303) and growing in complementarity.

The task of building the community hinges on the participation and shared responsibility of all its members and extends to all aspects of its life and activity (C 103). Therefore, an adequate formation environment must be ensured in which the postnovices are seen and treated as confreres and not only as candidates or students.

Excessively large postnovitiate communities make personal accompaniment difficult and should therefore ordinarily be avoided. The provision of an adequate number of formators and spiritual guides and the setting up of various kinds of group processes can be helpful as ways of ensuring formative accompaniment.

The study centre

462. The formation community can either have its own study centre, in which case it is referred to as a *studentate*, or else the student confreres can frequent an external study centre, whether Salesian or otherwise.

Salesian study centres are called to promote a cultural and religious synthesis and insist more strongly on connecting philosophy and the sciences of education and integrating them with typically Salesian subjects.

Various reasons may counsel the choice of a non-Salesian study centre. In such a case, there is the duty of ensuring the time, the programmes, the teachers and the formation guides that will take care of the essential and specific aspects of this phase (FSDB 244).

Relationship with other communities

463. Within the comprehensive framework of the process

of initial formation, those responsible for formation ensure that there are links between the postnovitiate, the novitiate and practical training. These phases work together to ensure the continuity of formation, while maintaining the distinctiveness of each phase.

The link with the local Church and the insertion into the cultural context serve to foster living contact with the world and its many needs.

Formators

464. Those responsible for formation must be spiritual people who are deeply Salesian. It is vital that they are familiar with the formative criteria outlined in the *Ratio*. They must also be familiar with the problems studied and experienced by their confreres so as to be capable of entering into dialogue with them in a meaningful and enriching way. They must be attentive to the need for personalized accompaniment.

The delicate nature and importance of the postnovitiate phase requires continuous effort on the part of the province or curatorium to build a team of confreres who have a broad culture and are qualified for formation, spiritual accompaniment, teaching, the organization of community life, pastoral work, and the animation of liturgy and prayer.

It is particularly important that *Salesian brothers* be present on the postnovitiate formation team, 'not merely through cultural and technical formation duties, but above all through responsibilities of formation to the religious and Salesian life' (GC21 305).

By means of periodic personal and community assessments, the formators evaluate, encourage and guide the formation process.

The rector

465. The rector continues the action of the director of novices, animating the life of the community, following up and helping the postnovices especially through the friendly talk, regular conferences, and if the young confrere so wishes, also personal spiritual accompaniment. He helps

to keep the vocation alive in each one, to strengthen the motivations of the Salesian lay and priestly consecrated life, and to foster everyone's participation in the work of formation.

In addition, under the responsibility of the provincial, the rector accompanies each Salesian brother postnovice in discerning the profession to which he feels called in the light of the needs of young people and of the Congregation, so as to be able to undertake, after philosophical and pedagogical studies, an appropriate period of studies of a technical, scientific or professional nature, in view of a professional qualification (FSDB 482, 542).

The local formation plan

466. At the beginning of each year, the rector sees to the drawing up of the local formation plan, with explicit attention to the programme of Salesian studies and the ongoing assimilation of the Constitutions and Regulations.

Others involved in the formation process

467. In this phase *teachers* wield great influence. It is their task to help develop knowledge that becomes wisdom, the formation of a critical spirit and discerning mind for the interpretation of reality and situations, and the ability to form a synthesis. The new digital culture makes it imperative that teachers develop interactive and communitarian methods of teaching and learning.

It is important to elicit the contribution of the *laity* and the members of the *Salesian Family* in the formation of the postnovices, profiting from any possible professional competence and from their Salesian experience.

Interprovincial collaboration

468. Being a delicate and important phase with characteristics of its own, the postnovitiate requires a number of conditions that cannot always be met by every single province, either with regard to the community or with regard to the study centre. It has therefore become increasingly necessary to set up interprovincial formation structures.

New situations

469. In some regions there are candidates who join us after having completed ecclesiastical studies in theology.

Given that the postnovitiate is not equivalent simply to the study of philosophy, we have to ensure that these confreres have an experience of the postnovitiate: they must be able to continue the formative experience of the novitiate and also prepare for practical training (C 114).

The provinces concerned will have to work out a programme for these confreres that meets these objectives in a serious and adequate way. One possibility is to frequent a two-year programme at the UPS with pedagogical, catechetical and Salesian studies components, while forming part of a postnovitiate community. Alternatively, the provinces will have to draw up and implement a suitable programme along the same lines.

When those in question are aspirants to the priesthood, undue haste in arriving at priestly ordination should be avoided, given that the primary goal is growth in the Salesian consecrated vocation. A good curriculum would therefore be two years of postnovitiate, two years of practical training, and two years of specific formation. During these years the candidate engages in deepening the theology of the Salesian consecrated life in its two forms, fulfils the relevant Salesian studies, receives the ministries and prepares for the diaconal and priestly ordination. Perpetual profession will ordinarily take place after the normal period of 6 years.

Civil studies during initial formation

470. If the works of the province require civil qualifications, and it is not possible to obtain civil recognition of the postnovitiate programme of studies, a certain number of years may be allotted, either before or after practical training, for obtaining a civilly recognized basic university degree. This involves a certain extension of the years of initial formation, so that perpetual profession is often made before beginning the phase of specific formation.

The provisions for Salesian brothers have been indicated above (FSDB 454–455, 465).

ACCOMPANIMENT BY THE PROVINCE

471. Personally and through others, the provincial takes care of confreres in initial formation sent for civil studies, first of all by inserting them into a community capable of providing adequate formative accompaniment. The provincial formation plan and the local community plan indicate ways of accompanying these confreres.

PRACTICAL GUIDELINES

472. *‘Immediately after the novitiate all confreres must continue their formation for at least two years in formation communities’.*⁶

473. *The postnovices ordinarily live together in a **specific and homogeneous community**, distinct from the communities of confreres in other phases of formation. Each of them chooses a spiritual guide (C 113) and meets him regularly.*

474. *It is desirable that during the postnovitiate **confreres preparing for the priesthood and brother confreres lead a common life** in the same formation community where they may gain an appreciation of the two forms of the one Salesian vocation.*

475. *The rector continues the **accompaniment of prayer** begun in the novitiate. He also ensures that there is **pastoral accompaniment**, both individually and in group.*

476. *The last year of the postnovitiate is a year of immediate preparation for practical training. The efforts of the formation team are reinforced by initiatives taken by the provincial delegates for formation and youth ministry.*

477. *The rector helps every postnovice to engage in discernment about a possible **ad gentes missionary vocation**.*

478. *During this phase the confreres in formation are not entrusted with tasks or studies that distract them and hinder the attainment of their objectives (can. 660 §2).*

479. *From the intellectual point of view, the essential, specific and priority aspect of this phase lies in its nucleus of humanistic and philosophical disciplines linked with the sciences of education, training in catechesis and Salesian studies.*

480. *With the help of the PFC, the provincial and his council give particular attention to planning the various elements of the **formation programme for the Salesian brother**, making them a part of the provincial formation plan. A personalized formation programme is drawn up for each Salesian brother.*

481. *The philosophical and pedagogical studies for the **Salesian brother** during the postnovitiate last at least two years but do not ordinarily go beyond three years, so as to allow the possibility of beginning or continuing qualification in the professional field before practical training.*

482. *The general criteria established in the Ratio for the initial formation of the Salesian brother must be applied through a personalized process of initial formation for each brother, covering the postnovitiate, professional qualification, specific formation and specialization. This process is elaborated during the postnovitiate phase by the provincial, in dialogue with the confrere and his formators, taking into account the needs of the province and the abilities and inclinations of the confrere.*

483. *The arrangement of the intellectual formation in this phase and the delicate process of forming a 'cultural and religious synthesis' demand a **wise choice of a study centre** offering an apt programme for vocational growth. Where a choice must be made for a non-Salesian study centre, we have a clear preference for centres that are intercongregational or else frequented by religious, rather than diocesan seminaries or centres with a predominantly diocesan outlook; and to those that best link philosophy with the human sciences. It is the duty of the formation community to meet the other requirements of the postnovitiate.*

484. *Studies are structured so as to lead to **degrees***

and qualifications recognized by the State⁷ ‘whenever that is possible’ (R 84), provided it is compatible with the formation requirements of the phase. In case of real incompatibility, even if it is a matter of qualifying young confreres in view of the services they will have to render during practical training, an absolute preference must be given to the requirements of formation and to the studies proper to the postnovitiate (GC21 440).

485. For those newly professed candidates to the priesthood who have already **completed part or all of the philosophical studies** required for priestly ordination, the province will ensure that they have a community experience of postnovitiate formation for at least two years, drawing up a programme of formation that ensures growth in the Salesian charism and consecrated life, pedagogical and catechetical preparation, accompaniment and an experience of the shared mission especially among very poor youth.

486. When confreres in initial formation are asked to pursue studies in view of **basic civil qualifications**, the provincial ensures that they are placed in communities able to guarantee the necessary formative accompaniment. Salesian brothers begin or continue qualification in the professional field preferably before practical training, so as to be able to exercise the qualification during that phase.

The formation section of the provincial directory establishes criteria regarding university and other such studies to be undertaken during initial formation, and the formation conditions to be guaranteed.

7.4 Notes

¹ CCE, *Decree on the Reform of Ecclesiastical Studies in Philosophy* (2011) 11.

² CCE, *Decree on the Reform of Ecclesiastical Studies in Philosophy* (2011) 4, citing FR 83.

³ CCE, *Decree on the Reform of Ecclesiastical Studies in Philosophy* (2011).

⁴ See Appendix 9.

⁵ See *The Salesian Brother: History, Identity, Vocational Apostolate and Formation* (Rome, 1989) pp. 209–214.

⁶ R 96; see can. 250 and 659 §1.

⁷ Cf. PC 18; GC21 440.

7.5 PRACTICAL TRAINING

Nature and objectives

Essential features

487. From the Salesian point of view, practical training is the most characteristic phase of initial formation. The model to which it refers is Don Bosco's experience with the young people of the first Oratory. 'During this time the young confrere gets practice in the Preventive System, particularly in Salesian assistance. With the support of the rector and the community he is able to integrate his activity and the fundamental values of his vocation' (C 115).

The text of the Constitutions focuses on the intense educative and pastoral experience of interaction between the Salesian, the young people and those who share the same mission. The focus is not so much on the activity as on the formative value of attending to it and learning the meaning of the Salesian vocation and mission.

Objectives

488. Practical training has three main objectives:

- *Growth in the Salesian vocation*, seeking to 'integrate his activity and the fundamental values of his vocation' (C 115).
- *Assessment of vocational suitability* through a personal and community experience of the Salesian mission in view of perpetual profession.
- *Formation in mission* through reflection on the educative and pastoral experience and the enhancement of the ability to work together with Salesians and lay people in the shared mission.

Duration

489. The practical training phase ordinarily lasts two years and is carried out in a community that can provide whatever is necessary for the validity of this experience (R 97), especially by way of adequate accompaniment.

The formation experience

Human and fraternal dimension

Development of personality

490. The direct experience of the Salesian educative and pastoral mission, especially in an EPC, is a journey of vocational growth that strengthens our Salesian identity and is a unique opportunity for strengthening and developing aspects of our personality in harmony with the Salesian charism.

Immersion in the mission and constant contact with the young, their families, lay mission partners and Salesians make us conscious of attitudes that are either consonant with or else unsuitable for the mission, of our assets and our deficits, of gifts to be celebrated and developed and aspects to be corrected or changed. Such learning by experience (C 98, 119) is greatly enhanced by pastoral accompaniment.

Practical training is a phase in which we learn to manage the rhythm of life in a more autonomous fashion, balancing moments of immersion among people and moments of solitude. The cultivation of self-giving, kindness and patience allows one to grow, to form a solid personality, and to develop the ability to face the difficulties that come one's way.

Work and temperance

491. Don Bosco's motto, 'work and temperance', becomes a way of life when we are able to combine the spirit of initiative with the patience that the educative relationship always requires. We learn to sow without immediately seeing the fruits, adjusting to the pace of those with whom we share the journey. We are engaged in a practical exercise of collaboration and shared responsibility; reflecting, planning, organizing and evaluating; bringing our specific contribution while also being open to learn from those who have more experience and to be corrected by them.

The ability to relate

492. The presence of confreres in practical training within the Salesian community is a gift that is an opportunity for everyone to grow in the ability to relate and to engage in intergenerational dialogue.

The EPC is the place for learning to relate with Salesians, lay mission partners and young people and their families.

In dealing with young people, the practical trainees will be helped to be especially attentive to the issue of the protection of minors, also by making them aware of the province Code of Conduct.

Spiritual dimension

Union with God

493. Practical training is a great opportunity for growing in Salesian apostolic spirituality. The practical trainee ‘continually reminds himself of the divine dimension of his work: “Apart from me you can do nothing”’ (C 12). He learns to find God through those to whom he is sent (C 95). He knows his experience is a training ground for the ‘single movement of love towards God and towards our brothers and sisters’ (C 3) in which the consecration of the Salesians of Don Bosco is embodied. He tries to grow in the conviction that ‘by carrying out this mission we find our own way to holiness’ (C 2).

We are dealing here with a ‘practical training’ that invites one to make progress in the ‘way that leads to Love’ (C 196).

When the pace of activity is intense and at times extremely demanding, the practical trainee realizes that it is only the personal relationship with the Father, the Son and the Spirit that is the anchor and compass, and the constant source of grace that motivates, forgives, nourishes, propels and consoles.

Dialogue with the Lord

494. Already in the early phases of initial formation we have grown in fidelity to those moments and events that most intensely nourish our dialogue with the Lord, such as daily meditation on the Word, sacramental encounter

in the Eucharist and Reconciliation, in personal prayer and active participation in the rhythms of community prayer, filial love for Mary. Now it becomes all the more necessary to allow ourselves to be nourished daily by these personal and community expressions of our relationship to the One who calls and sends.

Discernment

495. Practical training is an intense apprenticeship of discernment, where the confreres learn to recognize God's presence in faces and events and to listen to his voice even when it is hidden behind life stories marked by suffering, such as those one always encounters when one dedicates oneself to the service of the poorest among the young. Together with the EPC, he learns also to engage in educative and pastoral discernment, seeking the best way to be a pastor and educator in the concrete situation in which he finds himself.

Faced daily with the challenges of being signs and bearers of God's love, it becomes important to treasure the experience of spiritual accompaniment. Here Don Bosco sets us a wonderful example: at the height of his apostolic activity, he always has guides like Fr Cafasso at his side.

Difficulties or moments of failure in dealing with community and pastoral reality become occasions for renewing and developing the motivations that sustain one's vocation (C 119). At such times, above all, one gains a special appreciation of the help afforded by personal spiritual accompaniment.

Evangelical counsels

496. The experience of immersion in the mission casts new light on our way of living the evangelical counsels.

Obedience is shown in service to concrete individuals, the sacrifices involved, the willingness to make oneself available to mediations of authority, but also in the willingness to accept and commit oneself to a common educative and pastoral plan. We learn the meaning of the promise 'to work always for the greater

glory of God and the salvation of souls’.

Poverty takes on the tangibility of self-sacrificing work, simplicity of life, and willing acceptance of the hardships involved in devoting ‘all my strength to those to whom you will send me’ (C 24).

Chastity is lived ‘in mission’ and involves an intense period of learning how to love everyone, and to do so with that transparency of heart that we contemplate in Jesus.

Spiritual growth and mission

497. This journey of spiritual growth is born as mission and leads to it. Far from being exclusively intimate and private, it is an experience of communion with God that opens the heart to others. This is particularly true of practical training, which provides opportunities for sharing one’s faith and supporting the spiritual journey of others, through explicit forms of proclamation and catechesis in some contexts and through silence and the witness of life in others, provoking questions and touching the hearts of our fellow travellers.

Whether in community or among the young, we always communicate who we are before communicating what we know.

Being in union with God and being signs and bearers of his love belong to a single movement of love (C 3).

Intellectual dimension

‘Learning by experience’

498. Reflection on experience is the principal path of intellectual growth for the practical trainee. Such reflection is supported by moments of sharing, in-depth reading of the reality in which one is working, teamwork and accompaniment of various kinds.

Together with the other confreres, the practical trainee participates actively in the reflection and planning process of the community and EPC. He develops thus an educative and pastoral mentality and learns pastoral discernment.

Other opportunities

499. Learning by experience in daily life can be enhanced by short programmes and courses of a pedagogical, methodological, catechetical or specifically Salesian nature, whether at local or provincial level. Many of these can also be moments of shared formation with the laity.

The educative and pastoral experience of the practical trainee is illuminated by the *Salesian Youth Ministry Frame of Reference*, to which he turns often with the help of his guides.

During practical training or in the final year of postnovitiate in preparation for it, it is important to promote an adequate understanding of the dynamics and organisations that are part of the shared mission. One gradually becomes familiar with the basic tools used to build and implement the Salesian Educative and Pastoral Plan of a work, in harmony with the Overall Provincial Plan, forming the planning mentality that is fundamental for integration into the life of the Educative and Pastoral Communities.

There are specific skills inherent in projects and interventions (such as elements of strategic planning, project writing, monitoring and evaluation, human resource management, economic aspects and related responsibilities, sustainability...) that can be acquired, albeit at an initial level. Some contexts favour this type of interaction and gradual familiarity during the years of training, others less so. When planning a province, it is important to anticipate when this level of competence - even beyond this phase - will become part of the training programme, valuing “capacity building” interventions that organisations such as PDO (Project Development Office) or DBN (Don Bosco Network) can promote, either in person or remotely.

This kind of formation is pastoral because it allows us to recognise and appreciate the contributions that we make together to the mission. Understanding aspects of management and administration, legal and civil, social and cultural, allows us to respect and value the skills of others and, at the same time, to love and not neglect what is most our own, as custodians and animators of the Salesian charism.

The practical trainee may engage in further academic

studies only by way of exception, if the provincial considers it compatible with the specific objectives of the practical training phase. The study of an additional language, when possible, would be of particular value.

Along with the others in the EPC, the practical trainee is keen to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to be an educator and pastor in the digital world, and to be able to dialogue with young people.

Educative and pastoral dimension

Incorporation into the EPC

500. During the phase of practical training, the educative and pastoral dimension involves being an active member of the EPC.

Under the leadership of the rector, the members of the animating nucleus welcome those who come to live the formative experience of practical training. They create the conditions, offer opportunities, and provide the necessary guidance and accompaniment so that the experience might be as fruitful as possible.

The SEPP can be especially helpful to the practical trainee to find his bearings, get to know the territory and the direction to be followed.

The quality of accompaniment or mentoring is what gives most value to the experience of this phase.

Option for poor youth

501. A distinguishing mark of our charism and our *raison d'être* in the Church and the world is the preferential option for the poorest of young people. The practical training experience must be characterized by this option. There may be very different ways for this to happen, but it is important that everyone, beginning with the practical trainee himself, is very clear about this option, has it at heart, and does not leave it unaddressed.

Assistance

502. Assistance is the name given to our educative

presence among the young. It involves ‘empathy with the young and a willingness to be with them’ (C 39). It is a presence that is brotherly rather than institutional or authoritarian, an animating presence that treats the young not as objects but as active and responsible subjects of our pastoral work among them. It is a witnessing presence that knows how to listen, appreciate and dialogue. It is what Don Bosco pointed out in such a heartfelt way in his letter from Rome in 1884 and which recent General Chapters have reiterated with growing intensity.¹

Motivations

503. Doing everything out of love for God (C 12) is the way to becoming contemplatives in action like Don Bosco. Practical training is a good time to heighten the exercise of evangelical vigilance, becoming aware of the constant temptation to work for oneself and for one’s own interests or to gain esteem, and trying instead to do everything for the love of God and for souls, thus making our activity a real means of sanctification (PL 178–179).

The examination of consciousness lived as a daily reflection on one’s educative and pastoral experience is fundamental as a way of learning to live the Preventive System as a spiritual experience. Such personal reflection is enhanced by the friendly talk with the rector, pastoral accompaniment and personal spiritual accompaniment.

Missionary dimension

504. Another distinguishing feature of our charism is the missionary dimension. The practical trainee learns to give attention to this dimension and also to ask himself about a possible *ad gentes* missionary vocation.

Some provinces have ‘mission areas’ within their confines, and these are possible options for the placement of practical trainees. ‘Missionary experiences’ outside the province are another possibility. Such experiences foster openness of mind, intercultural and interreligious sensitivity and, ultimately, the Salesian missionary spirit.²

The two forms of our vocation

505. The experience of practical training is a time for further discernment about the specific form of the Salesian vocation: it helps the confrere confirm his choice or else better discern the form to which he is called.

The provincial will do his best to ensure for Salesian brothers a practical training experience in line with the professional qualification he has obtained (FSDB 454, 486). Those aspiring to holy orders are invited to make every effort to grow in their form of the Salesian vocation, especially by dedicating themselves to the Christian initiation of the young that is one of the characteristics of the priesthood as lived by Salesians (AGC 431 67–71).

Discovering personal gifts

506. Another aspect of discernment regards personal giftedness. Practical training is a privileged phase for strengthening personal gifts and investing them for the good of the community and the mission. The provincial and his formation delegate value these gifts in view of the provincial qualification plan.

Dimension of the charism

The unifying role of the mission

507. During the phase of practical training, priority is accorded to formation to youth ministry. This in turn stimulates and enriches the other aspects of formation, giving them new energy and substance. The mission *inter gentes* becomes ‘our best school’, the source and subject of our prayer and reflection, our study and rest; our whole life ‘revolves around it, with its choices and priorities.’³

Direct and daily involvement in the lives of young people and their families, along with those who hold responsibilities in the EPC, becomes an appeal to live and bear witness to the Salesian consecrated identity. Who we are as Salesians of Don Bosco is the great talent we are called to invest in the mission. Our other skills and abilities become meaningful to the extent that

they are expressions of our total dedication to God and to those to whom he sends us.

Community and unity of life

508. This unity and harmony of life is a grace that needs to be constantly nurtured. If the shared mission and formation motivates us to greater authenticity, it is fraternal sharing with our Salesian confreres that assists us daily and helps us to be faithful.⁴

Some requirements for formation

The community

Choice of community

509. The practical trainee is assigned to a Salesian community capable of offering him the conditions for a valid and fruitful experience. The life and vocation of a confrere can never be the subject of management concerned solely with responding to emergencies or to other interests.

The community welcomes him warmly, involves him in its life and mission, and is conscious of the role it plays in his formation. The practical trainee needs to be flanked by confreres who model an identification with the two forms of our consecration, from whom he can learn ‘how to be a Salesian’, and with whom he can exchange views routinely and freely.

Involvement in a significant EPC is another essential condition for a good experience of practical training.

If for some reason a Salesian house does not guarantee the necessary conditions, it is the moral responsibility of the provincial and his council not to expose a practical trainee to a situation where the risks are greater than the opportunities for vocational growth.

Settings

510. The settings to which a practical trainee is sent differ widely and may include boarding schools, centres for youth at risk, oratories and schools. The contexts

also vary, from traditional Christian ones to those that are largely non-Christian, post-Christian and multicultural.

A confrere may also be assigned to a residential aspirantate or to a formation community. However, the provincial should make sure to give him also another experience, preferably with young people at risk.

Roles and responsibilities

511. The community assures the practical trainee of ‘pastoral work proportionate to his preparation and his capabilities’ (GC21 287) within the community plan. It gives him real room for decision-making.

The criterion that guides the choice of roles and responsibilities is ‘the development of an apostolic spirit and of the educative and pastoral potential’ (R 87). In planning, accompaniment and evaluation, the EPC and the confrere are both called to make choices consonant with these formative needs. The rector, in particular, has the moral responsibility to intervene if the situations being experienced are no longer in line with this priority.

No less relevant are the criteria of diversification and gradualness (R 87), which call attention to the overall span of the practical training experience.

Formative accompaniment

512. Every living contact with young people is formative for the Salesian but is greatly enhanced by good processes of accompaniment provided by the Salesian community and by the EPC of which it forms a part.

Those accompanying are aware that the trainee is having his first experience of full inclusion in the community’s mission and that the apostolic community environment is quite different from that of the formation community from which he has come.

They are also aware that the great formative potential of the practical training phase is not realized automatically, just because one is part of a community engaged in various educational and pastoral activities. The process of growth must be planned, taken on, carefully carried out, checked and redirected when necessary.

Fraternal accompaniment, made up of understanding, encouragement, support and even correction when necessary, become especially important when practical training coincides with preparation for perpetual profession.⁵

EPC members, especially those who are part of the animating nucleus, also take on the responsibility of formation and become part of the Salesian growth journey of the confrere.

The rector

513. The key formative role belongs to the rector, who is responsible for the vocational growth of each confrere, and all the more so of those who are experiencing a potentially very fruitful but also delicate phase of their initial formation (C 55). It is he who helps the practical trainees experience the values of the Salesian vocation (C 98). He also ensures that the practical trainees can have a good rhythm of prayer, both personal and in community, and the opportunity to approach the sacrament of Reconciliation regularly.

Formative commitment, discernment and vocational growth are greatly supported by the monthly *friendly talk with the rector*. This aspect of our tradition is of the utmost relevance during practical training and is to be taken up with the best dispositions by both the rector and the practical trainees.

The provincial formation delegate and his commission are responsible for the formation and coordination of the rectors of practical trainees.

Personal responsibility

514. For his part, the practical trainee is invited to talk about himself and his growth confidently and openly, outlining especially with the rector the goals to be reached and the conditions necessary.

He also treasures other forms of accompaniment, such as the meetings with his spiritual guide and with his confessor.

He updates his personal project of life, checking it periodically and achieving a personal rhythm and pedagogy that allow him to give quality to his experience

of practical training and to live it in a unified way.

Peer accompaniment and support

515. Peer accompaniment and support are relevant in all the phases of formation, and no less so during practical training. For this reason, provincials are asked to do everything possible to ensure the presence of more than one practical trainee in a community, or at least the presence of other young confreres. It is also important to promote effective communication and to foster meetings and exchanges among practical trainees in the province in ways that are best suited to the different contexts.

Evaluation and assessment

516. One of the objectives of the practical training phase is the assessment of vocational suitability in view of perpetual profession.

The practical trainee is accompanied in various ways by those with whom he spends this time. The community assists the practical trainee to evaluate his experiences and to 'integrate his activity and the fundamental values of his vocation' (C 115), always attentive to his rhythm of growth.

The *periodic personal assessments* are a privileged form of community accompaniment, especially if lived out by everyone involved in the spirit and manner that a genuine Salesian formation process requires.⁶

The first one is obviously the practical trainee himself, who is called upon to stop, reflect and evaluate himself and his experience during the preceding months. His perception of himself and that of the community together give depth and perspective to the path of vocational growth.

Suitable moments of orientation and updating for the house council members could help them make the most of these opportunities for accompaniment.

The provincial

Role of the provincial

517. The provincial knows that formation is a service

that takes precedence over any other immediate urgency or need. He therefore carefully chooses the community to which he sends practical trainees, making sure it can guarantee the formative quality of this phase. If the practical trainee is a Salesian brother, he is also careful to choose a community where the brother can make fruitful use of the professional training he has undergone.

The provincial points out to the rector the aspects to be taken care of in formative accompaniment, maintains contact with the practical trainee and accompanies him with interest, either personally or through his formation delegate or his vice-provincial, and follows up the periodic assessments made by the community and by the practical trainees themselves. In view of the provincial qualification plan, he is also attentive to the manifestation of personal gifts that emerge during practical training.

Provincial formation commission

518. Appropriate initiatives of animation and accompaniment for practical trainees and support for communities are ensured with the help of the PFC, according to an appropriately designed programme. These initiatives are opportunities for sharing of experiences and mutual support.

Overall evaluation

519. There should be an overall evaluation of the whole experience and vocational journey at the conclusion of the practical training phase. Such evaluation is done by the provincial, the community and the practical trainee himself.

The evaluation should also include the results of the process of discernment and consolidation of the specific form of consecrated Salesian vocation to which each person feels called, and, if it should be the case, of a missionary vocation *ad gentes*.

PRACTICAL GUIDELINES

520. *‘Practical training lasts ordinarily two years and is carried out before perpetual profession in a community*

that can provide whatever is necessary for the validity of this experience' (R 97).

521. *The **formative purpose** of practical training is the first criterion in choosing a community. This community, and especially the rector, must be able to ensure the necessary conditions for formation, especially by way of proper accompaniment.*

522. *Practical training is carried out in groups if possible, so as to ensure the best conditions for formation (SGC 696; GC21 285).*

523. *In **choosing educative and pastoral activities**:*

- *the vocational and formation situation of the confrere and his abilities are taken into account.*
- *a diversified programme of activities is planned, keeping in mind first of all the needs of daily educative and pastoral work and the possibility of interaction in shared responsibility with other members of the EPC.*
- *the quality of accompaniment is ensured by those who most closely share the educative and pastoral experiences in which the confrere in formation is directly involved.*

524. *The province code of conduct for the **protection of minors** (AGC 340) is brought to the attention of the practical trainees every year.*

525. *The **provincial** maintains contact with the practical trainees, assisted also by the provincial formation delegate and or others.*

He takes special care of ad gentes missionaries doing practical training in his province.

526. *With regard to **intellectual formation**:*

- *In this phase, the main form of intellectual formation consists in reflecting on and learning by experience, both personally and in community.*
- *Much learning takes place also by being involved in discernment, planning and evaluation, and in formation processes carried on in the Salesian community and in the EPC.*

- A proposal for studies compatible with the nature of this phase could be devised, for example the learning of additional languages relevant to the life and mission of the province.
- The involvement of the practical trainee in university or other studies is permitted only when it is compatible with the main purpose of this phase. Such studies should never become the main focus of the practical trainee's concern.

527. Periodic personal assessments are a privileged form of community accompaniment and express the formative role and the responsibility of the local council, which evaluates the confrere's educative and pastoral experience and growth. The rector shares this assessment with the confrere, who at the same time also presents his own evaluation of his experience.

528. At the provincial level, care is taken to provide **formation for those accompanying practical trainees**, especially rectors and their councils and other members of the animating nucleus of the EPC.

529. At the end of practical training, there is an **overall assessment** of the whole experience carried out by the provincial, the community and the confrere himself. This assessment also includes reflection regarding the specific form of the Salesian consecrated vocation.

530. The **provincial formation plan** offers indications for the practical training phase of formation.

7.5 Notes

¹ GC25 37–48; GC26 14, 31 and p. 91; GC27 72 and p. 109; GC28 pp. 25–29.

² See AGC 437 56–58 for the distinction between the missionary spirit and the *ad gentes* missionary vocation.

³ Message of his Holiness Pope Francis to the members of GC28 (GC28 p. 60).

⁴ See the formula of profession in C 24.

⁵ See below, 7.8 Perpetual profession.

⁶ See FSDB 716–719 and AGC 438 83.

7.6 SPECIFIC FORMATION OF THE SALESIAN BROTHER

Nature and objectives

531. According to the Constitutions, ‘the specific formation of the lay Salesian offers him the opportunity to deepen his knowledge of the spiritual heritage of the Congregation. He receives an adequate theological preparation appropriate to his consecrated lay status, and completes his formation with a view to the educative and apostolic work that awaits him’ (C 116).

Consecrated life, predominantly lay in its beginnings, proposes as a fundamental objective, the cultivation of the collective Christian treasure, which is contained and given to all the faithful in the sacraments of initiation. Certainly it accomplishes this in a special way, seeking to imitate Christ in his way of living: chaste, poor and obedient....

The current context of Church-Communion facilitates and demands more than ever that Religious Brothers reaffirm, with renewed vigour, this original purpose of consecrated life, not only within their communities but in the whole Church community (Identity 9-10).

The Salesian vocation is made concrete and specific in its two forms, lay and clerical, which represent a permanent perspective of formation. Discernment and initial vocational maturation can take different lengths of time (FSDB 416, 505), gradually leading to a clear orientation and decision about the lay or clerical form that will characterise one’s Salesian life. We therefore understand the value of a phase of ‘specific formation’ in which, after his practical training, the Salesian educator-pastor ‘completes his initial formation’ (C 116) and aims to illuminate the theological and Salesian foundation of his vocation.

Objectives

532. The objectives of the specific formation of the Salesian brother are:

- putting on the mind of Christ and living it in his ministry, especially to needy youth.
- growing in his ability to be educator and pastor after the heart of Don Bosco.
- acquiring a theological formation that enables him to deepen the faith and the Salesian consecrated life in both its forms, and prepares him for his ministry as educator and pastor, in interaction with life and with young people, especially those on the margins.
- strengthening his ability to share the mission with lay people and members of the Salesian Family.
- learning to live in the permanent attitude of discernment that is lifelong formation.

Seen within the context of a definitive option for Salesian life, the phase of specific formation is an opportune time for the Salesian brother to evaluate his vocation journey, reaffirming his identity which he lives in complementarity with the Salesian priest, further clarifying his motivations, and deepening his understanding and living out of the Salesian consecrated life.

Duration

533. Ordinarily, the phase of specific formation of the Salesian brother takes place in interprovincial formation communities set up for this purpose and lasts two years.

The formation experience

534. It is necessary to ensure that specific formation is an integral community experience in the company of other Salesian brothers. It should also have a more practical orientation, aiming at the consolidation of the brother's vocational identity and the development of pastoral and educative capacities.

The definitive option for Salesian life that is perpetual profession could take place at the end of specific

formation. However, the years dedicated to the acquisition of a professional qualification could require that the perpetual profession take place before the beginning of specific formation. The period of temporary profession does not necessarily coincide with initial formation.

Human and fraternal dimension

Icon of communion and fraternity

535. The Salesian brother is an icon of communion and fraternity. His special way of being a living memorial of Christ is to ‘make visible in the Church the face of brother Christ, “firstborn among many brothers” (Rom 8:29), creator of a new brotherhood which he established with his teaching and with his life’ (*Identity* 15). This is a brotherhood that, far from being shut up in itself, is meant to expand in ever widening circles.

[The brother] lives in constant fidelity to his specific vocation and becomes, together with his confreres, a sign of that new and permanent brotherhood established by Christ (GC21 176).

Growth in humanity

536. During the phase of specific formation, the brother strives to deepen how he understands and lives out his identity through personal prayer and reflection, study and discussion with his formators and peers, and the different forms of accompaniment.

He is attentive to daily contacts in the community and grows in a fraternal relationship of complementarity and interdependence with the Salesian priest in a mutual exchange of gifts. He takes care of the affective dimension of his life and his ability to meet and work with different kinds of people in his educative and pastoral work, with special attention to the lay people in the EPC and members of the Salesian Family. He pays attention to a style of relationships marked by simplicity,

delicacy and serenity, and to the social virtues, including the ability to listen and to communicate, to give and to receive feedback. He develops a deep sensitivity to the world of work and culture, and an ability to evaluate situations objectively.

He knows the value of friendships and learns to recognize the limits to be set in personal and educative and pastoral relationships. He has a special concern for those who are poor or disadvantaged, especially if they are young.

Spiritual dimension

537. The Salesian brother verifies his experience of consecration and his way of walking in the Spirit, following the basic features of Salesian spirituality.

He participates in the pastoral charity of Christ the Good Shepherd, and in his life and activity strives to grow in his attachment to the person, the style and the spirit of Don Bosco, his founder and model. He consolidates his attitudes and motivations through reflection, prayer and fraternal sharing.

He learns how to join the characteristics of his lay state with the pastoral sense and cultivates those aspects that allow him to accompany young people in their spiritual growth.

He deepens his appreciation of his identity as a Salesian brother in the context of the common spirituality of the Salesian Family.

He learns to discern the voice of the Spirit in the events of life, finds strength to live out his vocation faithfully and to respond to the signs of the times. He thus grows in prayer and develops the attitude of discernment. In this he is greatly helped by regular personal spiritual accompaniment.

He develops an attitude of offering to God the whole of himself, his apostolic undertakings, his daily work, and the very difficulties he encounters. In this way his life takes on a filial and priestly character by virtue of baptism, which makes him a sharer in the one priesthood of Christ.

Intellectual dimension

538. Specific formation offers the Salesian brother a sound and updated intellectual formation. It comprises 'a serious theological, Salesian and pedagogical preparation' (R 99) to help him grow in the experience of his vocation and mission. It reinforces the habit of combining reflection with work (C 98 and 119).

The intellectual dimension of formation in this phase is guaranteed by the study centre as well as by the formation community itself. The program of studies offered by the study centre requires to be complemented by initiatives and inputs ensured by the formation community itself, details of which should find a place in the local formation plan.

The study of theology

539. The 'adequate theological preparation appropriate to his consecrated lay status' (C 116) is meant to strengthen and illumine the brother's Christian faith and consecrated life and help him in the work of education and evangelization.

Special attention must be given to the theology of Salesian consecrated life and to the two forms of living our vocation.

Among the various topics that form part of this theological programme, the following should be included without fail: biblical and liturgical deepening, current issues of Christian morality, elements of pastoral theology, catechesis, and the social doctrine of the Church.

With regard to the level of theological knowledge, it should be 'proportionate to the grade of culture attained in other branches of study and qualifications' (SGC 688).

Salesian studies

540. Deepening the knowledge 'of the spiritual heritage of the Congregation' (C 116) includes a study of Don Bosco as founder, the emergence of the two forms of our vocation, the history of the Salesian brother, his spirituality, some significant figures who have embodied the Salesian heritage, the theoretical and practical framework of Salesian youth ministry and pedagogy,

the guidelines of the Congregation and the reality of the Salesian Family.

Education in the social field

541. In keeping with the lay dimension of his vocation, the Salesian brother prepares himself, through study and reflection, to take his place as educator and pastor within the complex world of work, technology and economy, social communication and the human sciences. He builds on his ability to deal with social and political situations and with young people who are disadvantaged and on the margins of society. The social doctrine of the Church, especially as related to his professional field of work, is an area in which he should become a true expert.

Specific formation, professional qualification, specialization

542. The phase of specific formation is distinct from the time given to professional qualification and to specialization and should not be substituted by these (AGC 376 46). At the same time, the great variety of personal and regional situations needs to be taken into consideration. It falls to each province, therefore, to work out a process for the Salesian brother that envisages professional qualification and specialization, while ensuring the time for his specific formation. This process is elaborated during the postnovitiate phase by the provincial, in dialogue with the confrere and his formators, taking into account the needs of the province and the abilities and inclinations of the confrere (FSDB 465, 482).

It is significant, however, that specific formation is somehow connected to, or at least not too distant from the perpetual profession, where the choice to be a Salesian brother is solemnly confirmed.

Educative and pastoral dimension

Salesian pastoral sensitivity

543. The Salesian brother develops a Salesian pastoral sensitivity, acquiring the values, attitudes and skills

necessary for pastoral discernment and action.

He deepens his understanding of Salesian youth ministry and spirituality, the foundation of his educational activity among young people.

He attends to the aspects that refer to the mission of the Church in the world, the evangelization of culture and the role of the laity, and deepens the prophetic and intercultural aspects of his identity.¹

He identifies himself ever more deeply with the mission of educator and evangelizer of young people, especially those who are poor, according to the perspective of his specific vocation and in complementarity with the Salesian priest.

He grows in his conviction about the shared Salesian mission and develops his ability to animate, plan and work in a team within the EPC, collaborating willingly with lay people and with members of the Salesian Family. He accepts the possibility of working under the direction of lay people.

Interculturalism and the missionary spirit

544. Experience in interprovincial and international formation communities, and interaction with young people in settings with a strong missionary dimension, foster openness of mind, interculturalism and the Salesian missionary spirit (AGC 429 48–51).

Dimension of the charism

545. Living out his apostolic consecration in its lay form (C 3), the Salesian brother becomes *an icon of the lay dimension* of the Congregation.²

The Salesian mission determines the way of being of the brother as a lay consecrated person who is an educator and pastor.

As a consecrated person the brother is a sign of the life of the resurrection offered by Jesus to everyone. His affective maturity, human warmth and tangible joy become manifestations of his consecrated chastity. He is an eschatological sign, a reminder that all human beings are called to share in the life of the resurrection

and communion with God the father of all.

St Joseph is a patron and model for the Salesian brother. Like Joseph, the brother is called to exercise his fatherhood as educator and pastor of the young. From Joseph he learns to be tender and loving, obedient and welcoming, creative and courageous, hardworking and humble.³

Inspired by saintly Salesian brothers such as Artemides Zatti, Stefan Sándor and Simon Srugi the brother learns to grow in the grace of unity, in an increasing harmony between the different aspects of his vocation so that life becomes prayer and he begins to taste the meaning of union with God and contemplation in action.

Some requirements for formation

Conditions

546. The specific formation of the Salesian brother calls for a structured programme of formation. To ensure a good formation experience, some practical conditions have to be guaranteed, especially in places where it is not possible to offer a stable structural solution (a house, a community, a centre and study-programmes) because of a small number or for other reasons.

It is important to take care of:

- a Salesian context.
- a community environment where ‘the significant and complementary presence of clerical and lay Salesians in the community constitutes an essential element of its make-up and of its apostolic completeness’ (C 45).
- planning, animation and guidance.
- a specific programme of study.
- sustained attention to one’s lived Salesian experience to learn from it.
- a formative experience in the mission that is educative and pastoral in approach.
- the availability of prepared formators who are convinced of the importance of this phase of formation, have a good knowledge of formative criteria, and are able to work collaboratively both at local and provincial and regional / interregional levels.
- the presence of Salesian brothers in the team.

7. Initial formation

- the availability of men and women teachers and formators, both lay and consecrated.
- enough time to learn the language, if specific formation is done in an unknown language.

To ensure these conditions, the provinces must continue to give a responsible and persevering collaboration in this field. Such collaboration is especially important for the interprovincial communities dedicated to the specific formation of Salesian brothers.

Variations in duration

547. The specific formation of the Salesian brother ordinarily lasts *two years*. However, in dialogue with their provincials, brothers are free to take advantage of the longer degree programmes offered by some study centres, focused on areas and topics that are part of specific formation, especially when the degrees have civil recognition in their own countries. Such programmes could be considered as part of specialization (FSDB Chap. 8). If these courses take place outside the Specific Formation Centres for Salesian brothers active in the Congregation, the provincial must draw up a personalised formation plan for the confrere concerned, to be submitted for approval to the Councillor for Formation.

Curatorium

548. Shared responsibility for the interprovincial formation community for the specific formation of Salesian brothers is ensured through the curatorium. The president is the Regional Councillor responsible for the territory, with the participation of the other regionals when the community is interregional.

All provinces in the region or regions are automatically members of this curatorium, regardless of whether or not they have confreres in the centre in a given year. However, provinces that have confreres who are students and members of the interprovincial community are expected to attend the curatorium meeting in person.

In its task of setting up a good formation team, the

curatorium will do all it can to ensure the presence of Salesian brothers prepared in the area of Salesianity and in the theology of the Salesian consecrated life.

PRACTICAL GUIDELINES

549. *It is the responsibility of the provinces to ensure that brother confreres receive, after their practical training, the specific formation laid down by the Constitutions and General Regulations.*

550. *The years dedicated to the acquisition of a professional qualification may require perpetual profession to take place before specific formation. However, the connection between specific formation and perpetual profession remains important, since the latter marks the definitive 'yes' to this lay form of living the Salesian vocation, whether as its preparation or its crowning.*

551. *The local formation plan contains a **structured programme of specific formation** outlined in all its details.*

552. *Ordinarily, the specific formation of the Salesian brother takes place in interprovincial formation communities set up for this purpose and lasts **two years**.*

553. *The **formation team** consists of adequately prepared formators and teachers, Salesians and others, men and women, consecrated and lay (FD 163–164). It is especially important to ensure the presence of formators and teachers who are Salesian brothers.*

554. *All provinces of the region or regions are automatically members of the **curatorium** of the specific formation community for Salesian brothers, whether or not they happen to have confreres in some particular year. Attendance at the curatorium meeting is required for provinces that have confreres who are student members of the community. One of the primary responsibilities of the curatorium is that of preparing and contributing formators and teachers, among them*

especially Salesian brothers (AGC 428 22).

555. The **rector** or the one in charge has particular responsibility for the formation of Salesian brothers in their specific vocation. He takes care of the spiritual animation of the community and of individuals: regular conferences, good nights, the monthly personal talk, the moments of discernment prior to admission, the preparation for perpetual profession, the recollections, and the annual retreats.⁴

556. The Salesian brother may make his request for the **permanent lay ministries of lector and acolyte**, to be lived in harmony with his vocation as a consecrated lay Salesian and his way of being educator and pastor. Such a request may be made after perpetual profession. He needs to undergo the proper formation prior to receiving these ministries. Furthermore, there should be an interval of at least six months between the conferring of the ministry of lector and of acolyte.⁵ The formal request is to be addressed to the local provincial, after hearing the opinion of the provincial of origin with his council.

557. If a candidate, after interrupting his specific formation should subsequently ask to continue the phase interrupted, the provincial and his council will check whether the conditions for resuming have been met before making a decision.

7.6 Notes

¹ On the prophetic and countercultural aspects, see *Identity* 37.

² AnGC 27; cf. AGC 424 67.

³ FRANCIS, *Patris Corde*, 8 December 2020, 1–7.

⁴ C 55, 70; R 50, 80, 176.

⁵ PAUL VI, *Ministeria Quaedam*, (15 August 1972); can. 230, 231; FRANCIS, *Motu proprio Spiritus Domini* (15 January 2021).

7.7 SPECIFIC FORMATION OF THE SALESIAN CANDIDATE FOR THE PRIESTHOOD

Nature and objectives

Nature

558. ‘The specific formation of a candidate for the priestly ministry follows the norms and directives laid down by the Church and the Congregation, and has for its scope the preparation of a priest who will be a Salesian pastor and educator’ (C 116).

The specific formation of the Salesian priest or permanent deacon is aimed at preparing him for the mission among young people. His pastoral charity finds expression in ministering to God’s people, mindful of the priestly model of Don Bosco and of the many who found their way to holiness in his footsteps.

Given the very small number of permanent deacons in the Congregation, the similarity of their formation to that of future Salesian priests, and the fact that it depends on the norms of the Church, no separate presentation is made here.

Identity

559. The identity of the Salesian priest flows from his religious and priestly consecration, in such a way that his particular manner of being a priest and exercising his ministry stems from his Salesian consecration.

For the Salesian priest, the exercise of Holy Orders is not an external element added on to an already complete religious life. This fact is of great importance in formation. Therein lies the great responsibility of maintaining harmony between formation to the priesthood and formation to religious life according to the identity and charism of the Institute.¹

Objectives

560. The objectives of the phase of specific formation of the Salesian candidate for the diaconate and priesthood are:

- putting on the mind of Christ the good shepherd and living it in his ministry, especially to needy youth.
- growing in love for the Word and the Eucharist, and experiencing the ministries of lector ('reader' in some places) and acolyte, of deacon and/or priest within the context of Salesian life.
- thinking with the Church: embracing the priestly identity in relationship with the other states of life; living and working in communion with the Pope and the bishops.
- growing in pastoral charity after the heart of Don Bosco the priest.
- growing in the awareness of the way the priestly ministry is coloured by the Salesian apostolic consecration.
- acquiring a solid and up-to-date theological formation in vital interaction with life and especially with the situations and needs of poor young people.
- learning to live in the permanent attitude of discernment that is lifelong formation.
- learning to share the mission with lay people and members of the Salesian Family.
- acquiring the skills necessary for the ministry, especially the spiritual accompaniment of young people and adults in the EPC and the Salesian Family.

Duration

561. Ordinarily, the specific formation of aspirants to holy orders takes place in formation communities and lasts four years (R 98; can. 250).

The formation experience

562. The formation of the priest, which must preserve the breadth of vision of the universal priesthood and unity with the local presbyterate, happens within a Salesian perspective and takes place by degrees and progressive moments, which include the conferral and exercise of the ministries of lector and acolyte and the conferral and exercise of the order of diaconate.

In some provinces this formation partly coincides with the period of preparation for perpetual profession, which again is a moment for bringing about harmony between religious consecration and ordained ministry.

Human and fraternal dimension

563. Aware that the efficacy of his priestly ministry depends to a great extent on his personal maturity and good relations with others, the future Salesian priest *strives to reflect, as much as he can, the fullness of humanity* that shines forth in Jesus Christ and that he finds in Don Bosco.

He therefore fosters in himself the human qualities that attract others to him and endow him with greater credibility, such as kindness, affability, loyalty, fidelity to his word, respect for persons, openness to the ideas of others, restraint, discretion and the joyful approach to life found in the optimistic humanism of St Francis de Sales (C 17). He develops the qualities that facilitate dialogue with others, such as humility, kindness, trust, a willingness to listen, empathy, understanding and charity in conversation.

He grows in a fraternal relationship of interdependence in the mission with the Salesian brother, as also with lay people and members of the Salesian Family who share the mission. Knowing he is called to the exercise of spiritual fatherhood, he learns to walk the fine line between such fatherhood and paternalism. He tries to correct clericalist attitudes he finds in himself, accepts brotherly feedback regarding his way of handling authority, and makes every effort to grow in a participatory style of animation and governance, aware that the ministerial priesthood is a service.

Having before him the example of Don Bosco himself, he knows the importance of cultivating friendships. At the same time, he learns to recognize the limits to be set in pastoral relationships and involvement in the lives of people. He cultivates a positive, balanced and prudent pastoral interaction with men as well as women. He grows in deep concern for those who are very poor and those who suffer.

Spiritual dimension

Configuration to Christ the good shepherd

564. Priestly or diaconal ordination is a special moment in the ongoing work of the Spirit configuring the Salesian to Christ, establishing a new and personal bond with the Lord. To bind himself to Christ with sentiments of close

friendship is the heart of all his preparation for ordination and of all his ministry.

Identifying himself with ‘the mind... that was in Christ Jesus’ (Phil 2:5), he grows in love for the Father of all and for every brother and sister in the human family.

From Christ he learns the pastoral charity that is the basis of his whole life and of his service. Moved by the *Da mihi animas*, he learns to look at each person and event from a pastoral perspective. Along with his brothers and sisters in the EPC, he commits himself ‘to educational and pastoral services for the purpose of rendering our charges capable of celebrating the liturgy of life’ (AGC 335 38).

Identification with the Church, the Body of Christ

565. The growing configuration to Christ on the part of the future priest translates into *identification with the Church, the Body of Christ*.

The Salesian who is going to be a priest loves the Church, meditates on her in faith, and lives in communion of mind and heart with her pastors. He is loyal to the Pope and faithful to his teaching, after the example of Don Bosco, and takes care to be familiar with the documents of the Church.

He cultivates a pastoral and missionary zeal and makes his contribution towards building up the Church. He finds in the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, to which he is solemnly bound,² nourishment for his personal prayer and a way of giving expression to his sense of Church.

This love for the Church becomes effective in the endeavour to relate to the local Church, with the bishop, the priests, the religious and the laity.

Spiritual discernment

566. The ongoing transformation of the mind and heart enables the Salesian to ‘discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect’ (Rom 12:2). ‘Indeed, the gradual inner growth along the journey of formation should principally be aimed at making the future priest a “man of discernment,” able to read the reality of human life in the light

of the Spirit. In this way he will be able to choose, decide and act according to the will of God' (*Gift* 43).

Intellectual dimension

567. The intellectual formation of the Salesian priest has as its aim the acquisition of a broad and solid theological preparation, a firm grounding in Salesianity, and a lively interest in general culture suited to the needs of the times, so as to enable him to engage in dialogue and pastoral discernment, guide and help build the Christian community, and proclaim the gospel message in an appropriate way especially to the young people of today.

Studies are integrated into a spiritual journey marked by personal experience of God. The candidate for the priesthood goes beyond a purely notional kind of knowledge; he gives solid foundation to and nourishes his faith, arrives at wisdom of the heart, and becomes accustomed to reflection, study and sharing as an attitude of formation as lifelong.

Intellectual formation during this phase requires time and dedication, love and a spirit of sacrifice. It is the result of an interdisciplinary approach and a methodology of active involvement.

The scientific rigour of the studies will be balanced by their pastoral purpose (PDV 55), confronting today's pastoral problems, especially the challenges of evangelizing cultures and inculturating the gospel. This task, inspired by the Church's guidelines, entails an intelligent and responsible contextualization of reflection.

Studies must enable the future priest to communicate the faith to young people in their socio-cultural situation and to enlighten and guide their spiritual life. 'Our mission sets the tenor of our whole life' (C 3), including our intellectual and academic commitments. What St Joseph Cafasso used to recommend to the newly ordained Don Bosco and his companions, that study is like an eighth sacrament for a priest, is even more true today, in a world that is becoming increasingly more complex.

The study of theology

568. The study of theology aims at equipping the

candidate for the priesthood with an overall and systematic view of the truths revealed by God in Jesus Christ and the faith experience of the Church, so that he might be able to interpret the complexity of human life in the light of Revelation.

On the one hand, theology has as its point of reference the Word of God, celebrated and lived in the Tradition of the Church: hence the study of Scripture, the Fathers of the Church, the liturgy and the history of the Church. On the other hand, theology is addressed to the priest who is called to believe, live and communicate the Christian faith: hence the study of systematic theology, Christian anthropology, moral theology, spiritual theology, canon law, and pastoral theology.

The relationship between faith and reason needs to be addressed, as also the topic of Christian revelation and its transmission in the Church: hence the study of fundamental theology.

Mariology deepens an essential component of our faith and ecclesial life, and for us also of our charismatic, eminently Marian heritage. Theological reflection will discover the deep roots of the filial devotion that always accompanies us.

In addition to the theological topics and courses required by the universal Church, there could also be some courses dealing systematically with contextual theological topics.³

Theology is also concerned with the social and cultural situation: hence the study of the social doctrine of the Church, missiology, ecumenism, non-Christian religions (cf. PDV 54) and of the various ways in which religion finds expression.

‘Revealed truth must be considered also in connection with the scientific accomplishments of evolving time, so that it can be seen “how faith and reason give harmonious witness to the unity of all truth.” Also, its exposition is to be such that, without any change of the truth, there is adaptation to the nature and character of every culture, taking special account of the philosophy and the wisdom of various peoples. However, all syncretism and every kind of false particularism are to be excluded’ (VG 71§1).

Today we are not only living in a time of change, but a real change of epoch, signalled by an overall ‘anthropological’

and ‘environmental’ crisis (VG 3). The latter is of particular significance today (GC28 pp. 49–51; LS 217). It is necessary, therefore, for future priests ‘to be highly sensitive to this theme and, through the requisite Magisterial and theological guidance, helped to “acknowledge the appeal, immensity and urgency of the challenge we face”’ (*Gift* 172).

All these aspects of theology must converge harmoniously in a vision of the history of salvation that God is realizing in the life of the Church and in the world (*Gift* 165–175).

The Salesian aspect

569. Within the context of the fundamental plan of priestly formation promulgated by the Church, the specific Salesian vocation leads to an emphasis on the mission to the young and to ordinary people, and also on the service of authority within the Salesian community.

This entails a Salesian sensitivity in the way topics are handled and their pastoral significance within the theological disciplines themselves.

It also entails the study of certain specifically Salesian subjects pertaining to the priesthood or areas directly related to it, such as Don Bosco’s priestly experience, youth ministry, catechesis (particularly of the young), Salesian spirituality, sanctity for youth, the spiritual animation of persons, groups and communities, knowledge and animation of the various vocations within the Salesian Family, a pastoral profile of the various types of Salesian works and the figure of the priest or deacon in them, etc.

Formation to youth ministry

570. The specific formation of the Salesian ***candidate for the priesthood*** in the area of youth ministry concerns the mentality, the pastoral criteria, attitudes, methodology, skills and the manner of being a Salesian priest within the pastoral context of an ecclesial community.

Ministerial subjects

571. Special emphasis is placed on acquiring skills in

‘ministerial subjects’ in view of future Salesian pastoral ministry: the *ars celebrandi*, homiletics, the ministry of confession, popular piety, pastoral counselling and spiritual accompaniment of young people and of adults identified with the Salesian spirit, the administration of material goods, sacred art and beauty, social communications, and the promising area of new evangelization found in the ‘new media’ (*Gift* 176–184).

Educative and pastoral dimension

572. The formation of the Salesian ***candidate for the priesthood*** is particularly attentive to the educative and pastoral dimension.

The priest or deacon is called to be ‘a manifestation and image of the good shepherd, who gives life’ (PDV 49). His humble and disinterested service of the people of God is a natural overflow of his growing configuration to Christ and identification with the Church.

He knows that the main purpose of his ministry is not self-fulfilment, and not even the successful outcome of all his ventures but a spending of his life for others with all the love and sacrifice it entails, knowing full well that in this way he is working for the One without whom we can do nothing.

With an undivided heart and inner freedom, the Salesian lives in an attitude of joyous and gratuitous service to his confreres and youngsters. In this way he develops ‘constant readiness to allow oneself to be taken up, as it were “consumed”’ (PDV 28) by the demands of the mission.

Collaboration with the laity

573. Aspirants to the Salesian priesthood or diaconate are helped to grow in their convictions about the shared mission, their attitudes and ability to interact with our lay mission partners, and to accept the possibility of working under their direction.

The different moments of the priestly formation experience

574. On the path to the priesthood, the ministries of lector and acolyte and the order of diaconate have a

pedagogical significance. They help the future priest experience and grow in the values and attitudes characteristic of the Salesian priestly vocation and to acquire the abilities and skills needed.⁴

Becoming a lector: love for the Word

575. Becoming a lector means growing in love and knowledge of Sacred Scripture and the ability to proclaim it. The lector's role is to proclaim the Word of God in the liturgical assembly.⁵

The pedagogical value of a year where the main focus is listening to the Word must be emphasized. Proclaiming, explaining, breaking the Word to those who are beginning their faith journey will be the evangelizing mandate of a Salesian priest for the whole of his life. All that characterizes the service to the Word proclaimed during the liturgical celebration is true if it is the crowning point of a welcoming of the Word in the hearts and lives of those preparing themselves for the ministry of lector.

Becoming an acolyte: love for the Eucharist

576. As an acolyte the confrere takes on the task of looking after service at the altar, helping the deacon and the priest in liturgical services, especially in the celebration of the Eucharist, distributing Holy Communion during liturgical celebrations and taking it to those who cannot attend, such as the sick, and exposing the Blessed Sacrament for adoration by the faithful.

This service at the altar and to the Christian assembly must be one of the visible expressions of the profound Eucharistic life that characterizes the identity and mission of the Salesian priest. The acolyte learns, however, that the Eucharist is meant to overflow the altar into the whole of life, so that service at the altar is intimately linked to the service of human beings and of the world.

Becoming a deacon

577. The diaconate – for those preparing for the priesthood

– has a pedagogical significance. The exercise of this order fosters the maturing of some specifically priestly aspects.

The candidate is prepared for his service to the ecclesial community in different ways:

- *The proclamation of the Word of God*: he gains experience in preaching the Word of God.
- *Liturgical animation*: he cultivates continuous prayer through his commitment to the Liturgy of the Hours; he grows in his understanding of the theological and pastoral contents of the Lectionary, the Missal and the Liturgy of the Hours. He engages in the exercise of the diaconal ministry in the liturgical field both within his own community and in pastoral activities in the local Church.
- *The ministry of the sacraments and preparation for the sacrament of Reconciliation*: he is gradually introduced to the ministry of the sacraments and is oriented for his future ministry as confessor and guide of souls. With the help of confreres experienced in the moral field and in the ministry of confession, he acquires the ability to guide persons in this sacrament; he learns how to combine sensitivity, clarity regarding the criteria to be applied, and a capacity to form others, and to take account of the progressive nature of personal growth. All this presupposes sensitivity and the ability to read human situations and evaluate them according to the criteria of faith.

The diaconate also marks the beginning of the official duty of celebrating the Liturgy of the Hours in the name of the Church.

Most important of all, the deacon is reminded that he is *an icon of service* – a reminder to his brothers and sisters of their belonging to a Church where all are called to serve like the Master.

Becoming a priest

578. The apostolic consecration of the Salesian priest colours the three *munera* of the ministerial priesthood (AGC 431 67–71):

The *ministry of the Word* (*munus docendi*), through

which the Salesian priest is at the service of the Word to bring it most especially to the young, illuminating their experience, giving direction to their lives, and accompanying them in the transformation of their existence. The Salesian priest is deeply aware that first proclamation can never be taken for granted (EG 165; ChV 214). He knows how to meet the young at their present stage of freedom (C 38). Adapting himself to the young is the first and most basic form of Salesian inculturation.

The *ministry of sanctification* (*munus sanctificandi*): the Salesian priest is a specialist in the service of initiation to life in Christ in the liturgy and the sacraments, especially those of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. He feels challenged to find new ways of exercising this ministry of initiation (rather than merely ‘administering the sacraments’) in favour of young people, with a creativity that emerges from deep within his own life of faith, hope and charity.

The *ministry of animating the Christian community* (*munus regendi o pascendi*) is oriented to the service of unity and to a new way of exercising authority that gives emphasis to the dynamic of fraternity (NW 41) and that involves the ability to listen and the practice of community discernment. The *munus regendi o pascendi* of the Salesian who a priest is strongly marked by our charismatic identity and mission (AGC 431 65–71). If the whole of Salesian life is a way of growing in this direction, all the more so are the years that immediately prepare confreres to take responsibility as true shepherds.

Dimension of the charism

Our mission sets the tenor of the Salesian priesthood

579. The Salesian who is a priest assumes the *ministerial priesthood*, clearly understanding it as a service to the baptismal priesthood, and lives it from within his Salesian consecration. The mission sets the tenor of his life. The EPC is the primary context in which the gift of self, which Salesian deacons and priests are called to live, is exercised and at the same time continually formed and made fruitful.

The Salesian priest is an eschatological sign

580. As a *consecrated person*, the Salesian priest is an eschatological sign. In his celibacy, he is a sign of the life of the resurrection that Jesus offers everyone. His affective maturity is a limpid expression of his celibacy, and his passion for the Lord translates into a joy that is visible and contagious ‘as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.’

As an *eschatological sign*, the Salesian priest bears witness to the fact that God is our final destiny, and that all of us are God’s children, brothers and sisters, *fratelli tutti*, called to live in justice, peace and joy. But faith in eternal life also gives us ‘the courage to love our earth ever more intensely and to work in order to build a future for it, to give it a true and sure hope’,⁶ so the Salesian priest, as a consecrated person and as an educator, is also a sign of the value of creation and of the call to care for our common home (LS 217; *Gift* 172).

Priestly ministry is mediated by the community

581. As a *religious*, the Salesian priest’s ministry is always mediated by the community (C 44). This means that his apostolic choices cannot be merely individual choices according to his likes and dislikes. Again, it means that the Salesian priest is called to work in essential complementarity with the Salesian brother (C 45), recognizing that the priestly dimension is not exclusive to priest confreres and that the lay dimension does not pertain only to the brother confreres.⁷

The communitarian dimension of the Salesian priesthood is lived as an intense and constant service of animation of confreres, young people, mission partners, members of the Salesian Family and people at large. It is first and foremost a service of communion and the ability to bring people together, given that communion is the only fruitful way to foster the Salesian mission for the salvation of youth. It becomes evident how important it is from the earliest phases of the vocational journey to nurture intensely all that favours the capacity of becoming more and more builders of community.

Priestly ministry mediated by the charism

582. As a *Salesian*, the priest confrere's ministry is always mediated by the *charism*. The religious priest finds in his founder an original way of following Christ. Don Bosco felt called to incarnate in works and institutions his new pedagogy of grace that was his way of being present among young people.⁸ The apostolic choices of the Salesian priest are always mediated by Don Bosco's educative and pastoral charism for young people, most especially those at risk.

The grace of unity

583. The unity of life of a Salesian priest is a human and spiritual reality in conscious and ongoing construction. 'The Holy Spirit infuses the desire, the taste and the energy to live the Salesian vocation in its totality.... But unity is also the response of the Salesian, of the communities, and of the Congregation itself. It calls for attention, discernment, a radical approach, revision and conversion' (AGC 354 40). Helped by a clear understanding of his vocation as a Salesian consecrated priest or deacon, and by his daily and ongoing response to the love of God that he experiences every day, the Salesian priest or deacon will hopefully experience the unifying power of love more and more every day. From that inner unity will flow the fruitfulness of his ministry.

Essential conditions

584. Some of the conditions for achieving the objectives of the specific formation of the Salesian ***candidate for the priesthood*** are:

- a good *lived experience of Salesian community*, with an environment that is conducive to the formation experience, characterized by respect for the person and his freedom; one that values and promotes the active involvement of all and engages in *community discernment* (C 66).
- a solid *formation team* consisting of Salesian priests and brothers who have pastoral experience and have been prepared specifically for formation.

- *community accompaniment*, in which emphasis is given to the Salesian priestly identity, and to the sharing of our mission and spirit with lay people and others.
- *group accompaniment* of various kinds, especially when the community is large.
- *personal spiritual accompaniment*, with the availability of well-prepared and experienced spiritual guides.
- *pastoral experiences* suited to specific formation and adequately accompanied (GC28 p. 34).
- a *study centre* that allows for a good level of theological formation with a Salesian sensibility and attention to the theology of consecrated life.
- a *programme of Salesian subjects*.⁹

PRACTICAL GUIDELINES

585. *The specific formation of the confrere preparing for holy orders requires from each candidate an explicit intention to embrace the ministry as a priest or deacon. Therefore, at the time of his acceptance for this phase of formation, a **declaration of intent** is required of him, through a request to the provincial to undertake the study of theology.*

586. *'The specific formation of a candidate for the priestly ministry follows **the norms and directives laid down by the Church and the Congregation**' (C 116). 'Members who are preparing for the priesthood must receive, over a minimum period of four years, a more intense and specifically priestly formation in formation communities' (R 98; see can. 250 and GC21 295, 44). During this time priority must be given to the obligations of this phase of formation; other studies or activities are permitted only if they are compatible with this objective.*

587. *In faculties with a three-year institutional course ending in a bachelor's degree, all Salesian students do a fourth pastoral year of theology (VG 76 §2) while residing in a community that guarantees adequate formative accompaniment. They may also begin studies for a licentiate, provided the formative year has a clear pastoral orientation and the requirements of the pastoral*

year in matter of specific courses are respected. In faculties with a five-year integrated course of philosophy and theology ending in a master's degree, all Salesian students do an additional pastoral year.

588. *'There must be a serious theological and pastoral formation by means of the studies prescribed by the Church' (GC21 295). These studies are 'arranged and carried out according to the **specific objectives of our vocation**. In particular, Salesianity studies are provided, with explicit reference to the figure of Don Bosco, the priest' (GC21 295).*

589. Theological studies are carried out seriously, preferably in Salesian centres (R 98). When it proves impossible to frequent a Salesian study centre, preference is given to a study centre that is able to contribute significantly to the formation of a **Salesian candidate for the diaconate and/or priesthood, a religious, an educator and pastor**, and to centres that are inter-congregational or else frequented by religious rather than diocesan seminaries or institutes with a predominantly diocesan orientation. It is up to the formation community to fulfil the other requirements of Salesian formation (FSDB 244).

590. *What is required in general concerning human and spiritual qualities, doctrinal, psychological, pedagogical, Salesian and pastoral preparation, an appropriate previous apostolic experience and an effort to keep up to date, is the norm and criterion for entrusting a confrere with **responsibility for formation** in communities of priestly and/or diaconal formation (SGC 684–686).*

591. *The **rector** has a particular responsibility in the formation of future priests. He takes care of the spiritual animation of the community and of individuals by means of regular conferences, good night talks, the monthly friendly talk, periodic personal assessments, moments of discernment prior to admissions, preparation for ministries and ordinations, monthly and quarterly recollections, and the annual retreats.*¹⁰

592. The **ministries of lector and acolyte** prescribed for those preparing for holy orders, are conferred during the specific formation of the Salesian candidate for the priesthood.

593. In conferring the ministries and in ordaining to the diaconate and the priesthood, **the norms of the Church and of the Congregation** are followed. In particular:

- ‘For the candidates to the diaconate and the priesthood... the conferring of the ministries of lector and acolyte is an obligation; its dispensation is reserved to the Holy See’ (ASC 293 27).
- These ministries must be exercised for a suitable length of time to enable the candidate to become better and more specifically prepared for the service of the Word and the altar.¹¹
- The exercise of these ministries ‘for a suitable length of time’ implies that between the conferring of the ministry of lector and that of acolyte the period established by the Holy See and by the Episcopal Conferences must be respected. Between the conferring of the ministry of acolyte and the diaconate there is an interval of at least six months (can. 1035 §2).
- The conferring of the ministries of lector and of acolyte, without there being between them an interval of some months, is illicit and irregular, and causes the pedagogical aim of these ministries to be lost. The same may be said of too short an interval between the ministry of acolyte and the diaconate.¹²

594. Concerning **the criteria and modalities of admission** to ministries and orders, reference should be made to what has been said about vocation discernment.¹³ Admission to the diaconate and the priesthood is made with particular diligence and seriousness, and is based on an assessment of the entire formation experience.

In interprovincial and international communities, the opinion of the candidate’s provincial and his council must be requested in writing before admission.

595. Ordination to the diaconate may take place ordinarily only after the third year of theological studies has been concluded (can. 1032 §1; AGC 312 56).

After his diaconal ordination, without interrupting the prescribed studies, every deacon exercises his ministry in liturgical and pastoral functions proper to it, systematically and with proper guidance and assessments on the part of those in charge of formation (AGC 312 57).

The ‘appropriate time’ referred to in can. 1032 §2 is to be measured with respect to both the individual candidate and the characteristics of our Congregation, which already provides for a previous solid pastoral preparation.

596. Priestly ordination is conferred upon completion of the fourth year of specific formation.

When serious reasons counsel anticipating the priestly ordination to a moment during the final semester of the fourth year of theological studies, the decision is taken by the provincial with the consent of his council, and ensures in every case that the studies of theology are completed according to ecclesiastical norms (can. 250; 1050 n.1). The same applies to an anticipation of the diaconal ordination.

The provincial keeps the Rector Major duly informed through the Councillor for Formation.

597. If a deacon, after completing the normal formation curriculum, should ask for a longer time before seeking priestly ordination, the motives of his request are clarified, and the objectives, length of time envisaged and conditions for ensuring that this is a formative experience are spelt out.

598. If an aspirant to holy orders, after interrupting his specific formation, should subsequently ask to continue the phase interrupted, the provincial and his council will check whether the conditions for resuming have been met before making a decision.

599. The preparation of **permanent deacons** follows, as a matter of principle, the directives of the local Church

where they are to exercise their ministry (ASC 267 52). They are attached to the formation communities and Salesian study centres of the place for the period of their formation.

600. A Salesian permanent deacon, in addition to observing the provisions of the proper law, must obtain permission from the local Ordinary to exercise the ordained ministry (can. 678 §1).

601. Considering the importance attached to choosing a vocation, a Salesian permanent deacon who wishes to become a priest must first obtain the approval of the provincial and his council and then make his request to the Rector Major. These requests will be the subject of particular discernment, with all due consideration and reserve.

7.7 Notes

¹ See JEAN JÉRÔME HAMER, *L'Osservatore Romano* (12 October 1990) 6, cited in AGC 335 14.

² See PAUL VI, Apostolic Letter *Ad Pascendum* (1972) VIII.

³ See FRANCIS, *Ad theologiam promovendam* (2023) 4, 8.

⁴ See PAUL VI, Introduction to *Ministeria quaedam* and *Ad Pascendum*, (1972).

⁵ See PAUL VI, Introduction to *Ministeria quaedam* and *Ad Pascendum*, (1972).

⁶ BENEDICT XVI, General Audience, 2 November 2011.

⁷ AGC 335 27, AGC 424 66–68, AGC 431 63.

⁸ See BOZZOLO, *The Dual Form of the Salesian Vocation* 34, 36–37, 41–42. See also AGC 431 65.

⁹ See Appendix 9.

¹⁰ See C 55, 70; R 50, 80, 176.

¹¹ See PAUL VI, Apostolic Letter *Ad Pascendum* II (1972).

¹² Cf. ACS 293 26 = ASC 293 28.

¹³ Cf. chapter 12 Admissions.

7.8 PERPETUAL PROFESSION

Nature and objectives

602. During the journey from first to final profession, the confrere and the Congregation have time to discern the authenticity of the call and of the individual's response to it (C 107). At the end of these years, an appropriate moment of preparation close to final profession is necessary to evaluate the process of growth, make an assessment of the journey and gauge the internalization of the characteristics of totality and perpetuity which perpetual profession seals (C 113, 117).

This moment of immediate preparation has the following aims:

- The verification of the vocation in the light of lived experience.
- The maturing of a new personal synthesis.
- A definitive option motivated by and based on God's grace.

The verification of the vocation in the light of lived experience

603. The confrere evaluates before God the story of his vocation and the soundness of his motivations at various moments of his life. The local and provincial community accompany him, gauging with him his suitability for definitive commitment to the particular form of life that is Salesian, the consistency of his motivations and convictions, and the human and spiritual maturity that is required.

All this takes the form of a dialogue between the candidate, the community and the various accompanying individuals (superiors, formators, spiritual guide, confessor, specialists, etc.). The aim is to discern the consistency of right intention, in particular the clear and decisive willingness to offer oneself entirely to the Lord and to belong to him in a bond of undivided love lived in the Spirit, above and beyond the immediate dimension of educative and pastoral service and a simple inclination or attraction to work among young people.

The maturing of a new personal synthesis

604. By re-reading his experience over the years of temporary profession with the help of a guide, the confrere asks himself whether the values of Salesian consecrated life have become a personal requirement for him or are still tied to the outward rhythms of formation houses. It is a sign of readiness for perpetual profession if these values are felt at a deeper personal level and have been assumed with conviction.

This is also an opportune moment to reformulate the personal plan of life, taking care to deepen and strengthen the attitude of formation as lifelong.

A definitive option motivated by and based on God's grace

605. The confrere concludes his discernment with the decision to permanently embrace Don Bosco's apostolic project as a life in the Spirit at the service of the young, following the path of holiness traced out in the Salesian Constitutions. Conscious of the implications of the definitive commitment he is about to assume, he relies on the fidelity of God who has loved him first. He is sustained by love for the young and the support of his confreres (C 195).

It is also possible that a confrere, in dialogue with his spiritual guide and with the provincial, considers it better to prolong the period of temporary vows, which can never exceed nine years (C 117), or else reaches the conclusion of not continuing in Salesian life.

The formation experience

Nature of the preparation

606. The proximate preparation for perpetual profession brings to a close the process of understanding and assimilating Don Bosco's vocational project. Since this preparation is one of the high points of the entire formation process of initial formation, the Church requires that it be a time of particular spiritual intensity (PI 64). It is, therefore, a time of strong spiritual endeavour, sincere

assessment of one's situation, awareness of the gift received and deep identification with it, reaffirmation of basic motivations, and formulation of a pedagogy of life that enables one to live it with faithfulness and joy.¹ All this is done in dialogue and fraternal exchange between the candidate, the community in which he lives, the various accompanying individuals and his companions who are making the journey of preparation towards the same goal.

It would also be opportune to have some topics taken in common with other religious preparing for perpetual profession, so as to have a better appreciation of the definitive commitment one is about to make in relation to other forms of consecrated life.

Programme

607. This preparation must translate into a programme lasting at least a year. This year is lived out in the ordinary commitments of Salesian life, while being marked by particular personal and group occasions together with appropriate accompaniment by the local community and the support of the provincial community. It is important to ensure adequate spaces and periods for silence, study, reflection, prayer and discernment, so as to arrive at a personal synthesis commensurate to the commitment one is going to undertake.

The careful planning of this time of preparation must therefore lead the candidate to consider the experience he has lived so far in consecrated life as viewed through the Salesian project and the spirit of the Congregation. In particular it should explore more deeply the following topics:

- Human maturity in adult life.
- Sexual and affective maturity and celibate consecrated life.
- Maturity in faith hope and charity.
- The life of prayer (liturgy, meditation on the word of God, personal prayer, Marian devotion, Salesian devotions...).
- Personal and community discernment.
- The personal plan of life and the sacrament of reconciliation, days of recollection, retreats, formative accompaniment and personal spiritual accompaniment.

- The sense of Church and belonging to the life of the Church.
- Knowledge of the canonical and civil responsibilities following upon the new condition.
- Contemporary challenges to consecrated life.
- An updated understanding of the evangelical counsels.
- The vocation to fraternal communion in community.
- Belonging to the Salesian charism today.
- The Salesian mission to the young.
- The two forms of the Salesian vocation.
- Fidelity and perseverance in one's vocation.
- Ongoing formation throughout life.
- The rite of perpetual profession.

It would be advisable to draw up a detailed organizational chart of these contents, ensuring that there are two high points: a period at the beginning of the year of preparation, and another before the celebration of the profession, each of which will include some days of recollection aimed at internalizing the contents.

In addition, there could be days of recollection in the remaining months that allow space for synthesizing and assessing the progress made in gaining a deeper understanding of the topics, in order to highlight the level of maturity and personal conviction achieved.

Accompaniment

608. It is important to ensure accompaniment throughout the year through a competent and experienced guide who follows the individuals and the group. Such accompaniment helps the confrere reread his life experience from the novitiate onwards, grasp the level of maturity in his surrender and configuration to Christ and his personal identification with the values of Salesian life. It also helps him focus on possible shortcomings and immaturity with respect to the demands of perpetual profession.

Interprovincial collaboration

609. It would be advisable that this time of preparation be a collaborative venture between a group of provinces

or the provinces of a region. This allows for better organization of initiatives and greater quality in the formative experience, as regards numerical consistency of the group, wider choice of guides, and richer sharing of experiences.

PRACTICAL GUIDELINES

610. *‘Perpetual profession takes place ordinarily **six years after the first profession**; if he considers it opportune the provincial can prolong this period, but not beyond nine years’ (C 117). The appropriateness of extending the period of temporary profession depends on a judgment based on sufficient and reasonable grounds.*

611. *The perpetual profession may be made at the expiry of the time of temporary profession (can. 657 §1; C 117), or up to three months earlier (can. 657 §3).*

This last possibility requires that there be a just cause, to be assessed by the provincial with his council.

In the exceptional case of anticipating perpetual profession beyond three months before the expiry of the six years of temporary profession, the request is addressed to the Rector Major.

612. *The **preparation for perpetual profession** comprises the period of evaluation and discernment in view of the request, the process of admission and the preparation for celebrating the act of profession. It is not limited to preparing for the ceremony after admission has taken place.*

During the period of preparation careful attention is given to discernment concerning the two forms of the Salesian vocation, ministerial and lay, in view of a definitive choice. The same careful discernment is undertaken before the start of specific formation, should this precede perpetual profession. This discernment is to be undertaken not only by the one in formation but also by the provincial with his council.

613. *The province or group of provinces establishes a **programme of preparation** for perpetual profession*

which spells out the manner, contents, duration and the persons responsible, and includes also the retreat preceding the profession. This programme is included in the regional formation plan, the provincial formation plan and reflected in the local formation plan.

614. *The preparation for perpetual profession involves the responsibility of the confrere, the province and the local community.*

615. *About a year before the expiry of the period of his profession, the temporarily professed member explicitly makes known to his provincial, in a way that is considered most appropriate, his **desire to begin preparing for the perpetual profession**.*

616. *During the preparation for perpetual profession, particular attention is given to the liturgical aspect of religious consecration, drawing upon the various elements offered by the rite.*

*The **liturgical celebration** of the perpetual profession has a solemnity that clearly distinguishes it from the first profession and successive renewals. The elements found in the Ritual are carried out, together with the adaptations envisaged.²*

617. *‘A member makes his perpetual profession when he has reached the level of Salesian spiritual maturity commensurate with the importance of such a step’ (C 117). In his **request** he must indicate:*

- full awareness of the definitive act he is about to make.
- full freedom in doing so.
- the express will to continue in the Salesian life on which he has already embarked.
- his having had a dialogue with his rector (see FSDB 803).
- his having made a discernment and requested the opinion of his spiritual guide and confessor.

618. *The **admission** to perpetual profession is made on the basis of an assessment of the entire process of initial formation, an evaluation of the candidate’s motivations, and his assimilation of the Salesian vocation project.*

In interprovincial and international communities, the opinion of the candidate's provincial and his council must be requested in writing before admission.

619. *'When a religious in perpetual vows asks to **pass from his own institute to our Society**, he must undergo a period of trial of at least three years' duration in one of our communities, so that he may assimilate our spirit. At the end of this time he may make formal request for admission, and if he is accepted may make his perpetual profession in accordance with canon law.'*³

7.8 Notes

¹ See CICLSAL, *The Gift of Fidelity The Joy of Perseverance* (2020) passim.

² See *Ordo Professionis Religiosae* (1975); for the Salesian celebration of profession, cf. *Rite of Religious Profession, Society of St. Francis de Sales* (Rome 1990).

³ R 95. See can. 684–685 and *Juridical Elements* 89 for details. For a professed member in temporary vows who wishes to enter another institute, the normal procedure for admission to that institute is followed, the dispensation contemplated by can. 688 §2 having been obtained, with the subsequent period of the novitiate or of temporary profession (*Juridical Elements* 88 note 1).



'To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom...'
(1 Cor 12:7–8)

Specialization

Lectio

Jesus who grew in wisdom and found favour with God and man (Lk 2:52) was acclaimed even by his hostile contemporaries as a teacher with authority. Jesus taught, preached, healed (Mt 4:23) and went around doing good (Acts 10:38) to usher in God's kingdom. The knowledgeable Apostle Paul, educated at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), wanted Timothy too, to be a *competent teacher* (2 Tim 2:24). Paul was ever aware that the Holy Spirit is the source of all gifts, and spoke extensively on this theme (1 Cor 12-14).

The Apostle Paul stated non-ambiguously that the gifts are *for the common good* (1 Cor 12:7). The original word in Corinthians (*sympherō*) contains rich nuances – to bring together, to help, to suit best, for the benefit or advantage of the other, expedient, beneficial, etc.

In addition, the word of *wisdom* and *knowledge* (*logos Sophias ... gnōseōs*, 1 Cor 12:8) find a preferred place among the gifts! The Corinthians, drawing inspiration from Paul's metaphor of *one body* with different functions (12:14-26), will avoid discord and usher in harmony. All will use their gifts for the wellbeing of others, and not for mere self-advancement. For the Christian and the Salesian in particular, not to develop or utilize the gifts is not in tune with God's design (see also the Parable of the talent / pound).

Paul sandwiched his description of charisms with his

celebrated hymn on love with a tenfold mention of *agapē* (1 Cor 13). This intercalation indicates that to love is more than an obligation or a fulfilment of the law. *Agapē* is a gift. It is a charism. Love is essential for one's wellbeing and for the welfare of others. It is imperative that our *wisdom and knowledge* should be at the service of the mission. It should bring the beneficiaries of our apostolate to Jesus – teacher and Lord (Jn 13:13) and Lord and God (Jn 20:28). Therefore, *the charism of love* makes us place all our gifts at the disposal of the community. What we are and what we become will make us effective and useful in communities.

Meditatio

The proposal of the congregation regarding *specialization*, outlined in the *Ratio*, is to be understood in the context of the extensive teaching of Paul on charisms (1 Cor 12-14; see also Rom 12:4-8; Eph 4:11-16), and also the mind and praxis of Don Bosco. Don Bosco made phenomenal efforts to train his co-workers. Our expertise, cultural and professional competence, and pastoral skills are a *sine qua non* for apostolate. We recall Don Bosco's words: "*For you I study...*" (Constitutions 14). Specialization and study enable us to connect and get related and become fecund.

We acknowledge that our *competence comes from the Lord* (2 Cor 3:5-6). It is the path to holiness (AGC 361,7). It facilitates our maturing in humanity. In humble gratitude we accept the Spirit-given Gifts. We continuously utilize the opportunities for *aggiornamento* and specialization that the Congregation offers us. The Spirit enables us to make *agapē* our aim in life (1 Cor 14:1). By placing our health, talents, energies, time, and the fruit of our study at the disposal of the young, we strive to offer the young a competent and laudable service! The young whom we have vowed to serve have a right for such a competent ministry!

Jose Varickasseril, INS



8. Specialization

8.1 NATURE AND OBJECTIVES

The need for specialization and professionalism

620. Living the Salesian project of consecrated life at the present day calls for greater spiritual strength, a qualitative leap with regard to our preparation to be pastors and educators, and new cultural, professional and pastoral skills (GC24 239, 242). Together these elements depict the nature and characteristics of our holiness. (AGC 361 7)

Cultural and professional competence often calls for specialization, which could be defined as the process of concentrating on and becoming expert in a particular area by obtaining a higher civil or ecclesiastical degree or equivalent certification.

Specialization builds on a person's gifts in view of his apostolic activity, enabling him to avoid improvisation and superficiality and render a service marked by professionalism and competence.

The province ensures that the confreres qualify themselves to the extent needed for the tasks of education and evangelization and for the roles entrusted to them, including those of animation, government or formation in the local or provincial community.

The specialization can be carried out in one's own province or region, depending on the availability of specialized study centres, whether ecclesiastical or civil. Priority should be given to the opportunities for specialization offered by the Pontifical Salesian University, as well as the other ecclesiastical universities in Rome. Particular consideration is to be given to opportunities for specialization in the digital and communication fields.

The example of Don Bosco

621. From the very beginning of the Valdocco Oratory, the mission in favour of needy youth required people who would be able to respond adequately to the ever new and growing demands of the young. The workshops needed trained people, and after many experiments Don Bosco decided to specialize his coadjutors. His fledgling schools needed legally qualified people, so he asked his Salesians to obtain the necessary civil qualifications. In spite of the poverty of the beginnings, in just a few years the boys of Valdocco, many of them now Salesians, flourished in the professional, artistic and literary fields, their gifts completely at the service of the mission (AGC 361 8–11).

The Congregation has continued to develop along these lines, with all the differences within an ever greater geographical distribution, but always, like Don Bosco, with the needs of young people in mind.

The fundamental criterion is the mission

622. In choosing specialized studies, consideration must be given to the aptitudes and inclinations of the confrere, but the fundamental criterion remains the Salesian mission: ‘For you I study...’ (AGC 361 37–38).

The mission is always entrusted to the community. Specialization is not an individual choice, even though personal capacities, inclinations and gifts are surely part of the discernment process. The choices are mediated by the community and its mission, and the community relevant to the question of specialization is the provincial community. This must be made clear right from the early years of initial formation.

Needs of the province and of the region

623. The province reflects on the way of carrying out the Salesian mission in the territory entrusted to it, the principal expression of its reflection being the provincial chapter. The deliberations of the provincial chapter concerning specialization are crystallized in the overall provincial plan and the provincial qualification plan.

Besides preparing confreres for the concrete expressions of the mission in the province, some confreres will have to be prepared also for formation and for the teaching of philosophy, theology and allied subjects during the course of initial formation.

With the increasing number of interprovincial formation structures, provinces today have the serious obligation to prepare confreres as formators, teachers and animators to serve in these realities, according to the commitments made in the respective curatoriums.

‘The qualification of people, the consolidation of centres and teams, the fostering of a certain cultural sensitivity in the Province, cannot be the result of brief periods, restricted by the deadline of the end of a six-year period or by limited calculations. Continued governmental action and long-term vision are indispensable. A province that launches a plan for the qualification of its personnel knows already that it will reap the benefits in due time. But it would be sad to lose the “capital” of qualifications thus acquired with sacrifice through failing to exploit the investment previously made or to let it lapse.’ (J.E. Vecchi, AGC 361 25).

In the provincial qualification plan, the province identifies the areas and priorities for specialization and spells out how they are to be realized. This plan is sent periodically to the Councillor for Formation, who accompanies the process with the help of his team.

After his specialization the confrere receives from the province a certain *continuity and stability* in the activity for which he is prepared, and also the possibility of updating himself. On his part, he puts his qualification generously at the service of the common mission.

Needs of the Congregation

624. Besides preparing confreres to serve in the province and the region, provinces must also keep in mind the needs of the Congregation as a whole (AGC 361 35).

In the Congregation today, there is a special urgency to specialize confreres (and others) as experts in Salesian studies (history, pedagogy, spirituality). There is need to prepare confreres also for the UPS and for the international formation communities.

A qualification plan for the six-year period will be worked out by the General Council as part of the Project of the Rector Major and his Council for the six-year period following the General Chapter. The plan will identify the needs for specialists in the Salesian charism and for other needs in the Congregation. It falls to the Councillor for Formation to identify confreres who are available or can be prepared for these needs, in dialogue with the Regional Councillors and the provincials. The necessary formalities are done by the Vicar of the Rector Major or else by the Councillor for Formation with authority delegated by the Rector Major.

8.2 THE SALESIAN BROTHER AND THE SALESIAN PRIEST

The Salesian brother

625. The choice of specialization for Salesian Brothers stems from their Salesian consecration, which integrates the richness of consecrated life in its lay form, the charism of Don Bosco developed from its origins to the present day thanks to the splendid and holy figures of Brothers in every region, and the breadth of the apostolic field in which this vocation is professionally placed alongside the working classes and the daily life of young people.

Salesian consecration in lay life translates into a mission that is exercised in many sectors, each of which requires specific preparation: the world of work and vocational education, schools and universities, social communication, the human sciences, social services, administration and management, and even spiritual accompaniment. The Salesian Brother can also qualify in fields such as catechesis, pastoral, spiritual and charismatic animation.

These formation courses must ensure that the confrere has a solid preparation comparable to that of those who work in the same roles in civil society

or in ecclesial contexts, including relational skills that enable him to dialogue effectively, for example, with the business world and other sectors of civil and social life.

Given that Salesian brothers are called to form part of the teams of formation houses, provinces must provide Salesian brothers with the qualifications necessary to serve as formators and teachers.

Discernment regarding professional qualification or specialization is done during the postnovitiate, in dialogue with the rector and, in the final analysis, with his provincial.

The basic professional qualification is best acquired before practical training, so as to give the brother the possibility of exercising this qualification. Further levels of specialization may be acquired after specific formation.

The Salesian priest

626. As far as the Salesian priest is concerned, the choice of specialization is determined by his identity within the Congregation and his way of participating in the Salesian mission of education and evangelization.

His vocational profile is deeply shaped by the educative and pastoral charism which decisively informs his identity. The grace of Salesian consecration and the gift of priestly ministry converge in him, but it is the former that imparts the original way in which he lives the priesthood and embodies its ministerial style. He can specialise in areas that express and strengthen his educational and evangelising service. These areas include youth ministry, catechesis, liturgy, vocational pedagogy, pastoral communication, the formation of formators, Salesian studies and other areas that foster a ministerial presence rooted in the charism.

Specialization ordinarily takes place at the end of the phase of specific formation.

However, it is possible to advance one's qualifications even while engaged in apostolic activity, by drawing on flexible pathways, short courses and opportunities for further study that are now accessible through digital technology. If there is a keen interest, there are many ways to engage in meaningful formation processes that are consistent with the mission.

8.3 THE FORMATION EXPERIENCE

Human and fraternal dimension

627. Our encounter with the people, mostly young, with whom we share the journey of specialization can become a stimulus for us to grow in humanity and strengthen our vocation as Salesian consecrated persons.

Within the religious community to which one belongs, attention should be given to the risk of a double individualism, with the confrere isolating himself in his study and the community tending to leave him alone.

A good number of confreres pursuing specialization find themselves in communities that are international and multicultural. These are opportunities for mutual enrichment and growth in fraternity and must be actively welcomed as such, in the conviction that we are called to be prophets of fraternity.

Long years of intense study can easily become a mental, psychological and emotional challenge. The confrere needs to develop sane rhythms of work, prayer, spiritual reading, exercise and relaxation. It is helpful also to invest in healthy friendships and maintain contact with confreres and family.

The time of specialization is not a hiatus in one's religious life, even when one is not living in one's own province. Learning to feel at home in the community to which one is assigned is a great gift and a strong support in vocational growth. Generosity towards the community and confreres, and the extension of support to other confreres who might be engaged in specialization, is also something that contributes to mutual well-being.

One of the great services on the part of the provincial is regular contact and communication with the confrere concerned. He will encourage him to make the most of his friendly talk with the rector.

Spiritual dimension

628. The Salesian lives the time of specialization as a consecrated person and in view of a mission. As in every season of Salesian life, he is called to maintain

the rhythms of personal and community prayer, takes special care of the sacrament of Reconciliation, the friendly talk with the rector and the dialogue of spiritual accompaniment.

Especially in this time dedicated to specialization, the Salesian is called to live poverty as transparency and trust in providence, but also as generosity with one's resources, gifts and time. Obedience in this phase will include investing in study to the best of one's abilities, but also maintaining contact with those to whom one is answerable at local, provincial and interprovincial levels, and being transparent with them about the progress of studies. Living the vow of chastity will certainly involve the ability to manage relationships as well as the long periods of solitary work and perhaps loneliness, entrusting oneself constantly and with simplicity into God's hand, cultivating good friendships and availing of the different forms of accompaniment.

Intellectual dimension

629. The intellectual dimension takes the lion's share of time and energy during the time of specialization.

Those specializing will try to make the best of the opportunities they encounter, benefitting from the expertise of teachers and building networks of relationships with peers, also in view of their future ministry.

The purpose of study is the service of young people: 'For you I study'. The confreres strive, therefore, to harmonize their studies with the other dimensions of life, knowing that they find their proper place within the Salesian consecrated identity.

Specialization is only one aspect of the intellectual dimension of formation. As Salesians we are called to find time for other formative reading. Specialization should not make us super-experts on isolated details. It must become a window that makes us more capable of a universal outlook, without losing the ability to adhere to the concreteness of the situations and the people with whom we live and to whom we are sent. This is how the art of discernment is refined, where theoretical

frameworks and the concreteness of experience must necessarily be compared.

On their part, the provincial and his formation delegate take care to prepare the confrere for the task before him and provide him with sufficient opportunities for mastering the necessary languages. They accompany the confrere, also with the aim of pre-empting unnecessary prolongations of the period of study.

Educative and pastoral dimension

630. From the point of view of its educative and pastoral finality, the time of specialization can be very enriching. The stimuli, challenges and even provocations that come from the many people one encounters can push one to refine, develop and redefine the way of understanding education and evangelization.

At the same time, it is helpful for the one specializing to engage in some concrete Salesian ministry. It is always enriching to have an experience of the youth ministry models of the province or country in which one is studying.

Such apostolic commitments must be taken up in dialogue with the rector and community. Some confreres will have to be careful not to take up commitments to the detriment of their studies, while others are invited to wisely balance the commitment to study with the experience of ministry, so as to not lose sight of the ultimate reason for study, and to maintain the vital connection between theoretical reflection and the concreteness of human contexts.

The community in its turn will be proactive – especially where there are several confreres engaged in specialization, as in Rome – by helping explore and proposing significant pastoral possibilities.

Dimension of the charism

Called to be fully oneself

631. Specialization is an area where the grace of unity is more essential than ever. Here, as always, the Salesian

is called to be fully himself. Specialization will require him to frequent institutes of higher learning where he will be one of the students, many of them somewhat younger than him. It is a great opportunity for him not only to acquire a specialization but also to interact with his fellow students as an equal, while maintaining his identity as a pastor and educator who lives the passion of *Da mihi animas*.

Integrating specialization within one's life synthesis

632. The time of specialization is also a moment when one's personal synthesis of faith, culture and life is challenged to expand, while in turn one's basic commitments might lead to questions about the object of study and the cultural horizon from which it emerges. The advent of digital technology has triggered a change that is unparalleled in intensity, pervasiveness and speed. Specialization places us in direct dialogue with this constantly evolving process. It can become a formidable stimulus for the Salesian mission, but could also have the opposite effect of dispersion and loss of motivation. It then becomes all the more necessary to grow in the grace of unity that enables us to live every aspect and season of life as apostolic consecration.

The support that comes from one's community and from spiritual accompaniment is vital during this time.

8.4 SOME CONDITIONS

Provincial qualification plan

633. One of the tasks of the provincial and his collaborators is to prepare a long-term and short-term qualification plan in keeping with the overall provincial plan.

The shared mission demands that planning for specialization should be carried out within a broader collaboration involving the youth ministry and formation provincial commissions in dialogue with confreres and lay mission partners.

'The qualification of personnel must constitute a priority governmental commitment: we seek to govern by forming those who animate and direct, we orientate by giving a better preparation to those working in the different sectors. An indication in this regard is provided by all organizations. Qualification of top management, of those responsible at intermediate level, and of the workers at shop-floor level has always been given attention by directors. In our case, an action at provincial level which is programmed and constant must therefore be added to the personal and communal responsibility already spoken of.' (J.E. Vecchi, AGC 361 33).

The province commits itself to implement this plan resolutely. The plan pays special attention to the preparation of experts in Salesianity and the core areas of the charism (AGC 361 36–37). It makes sure that qualified confreres are able to make their contribution in the field of their specialization. If destined for the service of initial formation, it ensures that they are adequately prepared for this service.

Role of the local community, the province and the region

634. Local communities with confreres engaged in specialization are called upon to guarantee an environment that is conducive for their Salesian life and for the commitments related to their studies.

It is not possible to define *a priori* the modalities to be followed, since each path of specialization has its own peculiarities. For this reason, a good exercise of discernment is required, involving those who are engaged in specialization, the rector and his council, and those responsible at the provincial level.

The provincial formation plan and the regional formation plan define ways of accompanying the phase of specialization, particularly with regard to those situations that arise from interprovincial collaboration, such as the temporary transfers of confreres for studies or the preparation of formators and teachers for interprovincial formation communities.

The Councillor for Formation

635. The Councillor for Formation collaborates with the Vicar of the Rector Major in implementing the qualification plan for the six-year period (FSDB 624). He also has the task of supervising the efforts of provinces and regions to specialize confreres, especially by periodic verification of the provincial qualification plans and constant dialogue with the Regional Councillors.

He accompanies the phase of specialization also through the regional formation commissions and meetings of groups of provinces.

In a special way, he accompanies those confreres pursuing specializations in the UPS or in the other ecclesiastical universities in Rome, whether they are being prepared for eventual insertion into the UPS or for service in their own provinces and regions.

The Councillor will also assure a flow of information to the regions and provinces, offering timely and updated awareness of the formative and academic possibilities found in Rome and in other parts of the Congregation.

He will encourage provinces and curatoriums of interprovincial houses to prepare confreres specifically for the service of formation and for the service of teaching.

The confrere

636. The confrere who is called to specialize himself is the first one responsible for his own formation.

The time of specialization can be a very fruitful season of life but also a very challenging and difficult one. For this reason, support and wisdom of a person in whom one can confide is of vital importance.

8.5 PRACTICAL GUIDELINES

637. *The province prepares a plan for the qualification and specialization of confreres (**provincial qualification plan**) on the basis of the criteria laid down in the provincial directory and as a part of the provincial formation plan. This plan is drawn up by the provincial formation commission and youth ministry team in dialogue with other Salesians and lay mission partners. It is finalized and approved by the provincial and his Council and forwarded to the Councillor for Formation. It is examined, evaluated and updated every three years following the same process.*

638. *The **formation section of the provincial directory** indicates choices and methods to be used in the qualification of confreres, and for the drawing up of the provincial qualification plan.*

639. *If necessary, the provincial can appoint a confrere, perhaps the vice-provincial or the provincial formation delegate, to be the point of reference for those who are pursuing specializations.*

640. *The **Councillor for Formation** has a special concern for the preparation of personnel. He collaborates with the Vicar of the Rector Major in implementing the qualification plan for the six-year period and carries out a periodic verification of the provincial qualification plans.*

641. *The Councillor for Formation also takes special care to accompany the confreres pursuing specializations in the UPS and in other ecclesiastical universities in Rome.*



**‘I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.’
(2 Tim 1:6–7)**

The stages of life

Lectio

In the Second Letter to Timothy, the apostle Paul addresses a beloved disciple who bears the weight of pastoral responsibility and the challenges of mission. The tone of the letter is deeply personal: Paul recalls the faith that has been received, gives thanks for the gift of vocation, and encourages Timothy not to lose heart. At the centre of his exhortation we find a striking image: “I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you” (2 Tim 1:6). The verb used by the apostle evokes the act of fanning into flame a fire that risks growing faint. It is not about lighting something new, but about rekindling what has already been given.

The gift to which Paul refers is connected with the laying on of hands. It is therefore a gift received in the Church and for the mission. Vocation does not arise from a personal project, but from a call of the Lord that comes through an ecclesial mediation and opens one to responsibility for others. For this reason Paul invites Timothy not to be dominated by fear. God does not give a spirit of timidity, but a Spirit “of power and of love and of self-discipline.” These three words outline the face of Christian maturity: power that

sustains in times of trial, love that gives evangelical quality to self-giving, and self-discipline that enables one to discern the will of God in the situations of life.

Meditatio

Paul's invitation sheds light on the journey described in this chapter of the *Ratio*, dedicated to the stages of life. The Salesian vocation, like every Christian vocation, is not a static reality. It is a gift that accompanies the whole of one's existence and that must be continually welcomed and renewed. The Lord continues to call us day after day, and our response takes shape in daily fidelity.

The life of the Salesian passes through different stages. Youth is marked by enthusiasm and the desire to give oneself generously to the mission. Adulthood brings responsibility and offers the opportunity to live spiritual fatherhood toward the young with greater maturity. Old age becomes a time of wisdom, witness, and the offering of one's life to the Lord. In each of these stages the gift received must be rekindled, because vocation does not live on past achievements but grows through listening to the Spirit and through daily fidelity.

To rekindle the gift means allowing oneself to be formed by the Lord in the ordinary life of the mission, in the fraternity of the community, and in the encounter with the young. It is in daily life that we learn to discern the voice of the Spirit in events, in the joys and the fragilities that we encounter along the way. In this sense, ongoing formation is not simply a series of initiatives or programs, but an attitude of openness to the grace that works within personal and communal history.

To rekindle the gift received means to safeguard the Lord's call and to allow oneself to be guided by the Spirit of power, love, and self-discipline, so that in every stage of life the Salesian may grow in fidelity to his vocation and become a sign of God's presence among the young.

Joel Camaya, FIN - UPS



9. The stages of life

Lifelong fidelity

642. Vocation is something ongoing: the Lord continues to call us day after day. The response to the call is, therefore, also ongoing or lifelong – and in this dialogue of call and response we have the fundamental meaning of formation.

Formation, understood in this way, includes the initial phases as well as all the seasons of life that follow it. The latter is commonly referred to as ‘ongoing’ formation.¹ Ongoing formation, in this narrower sense, is the journey of persevering fidelity in the years after the initial phases of formation.

Daily life and special moments

643. Ongoing formation takes place *primarily in daily life*. Immersed in work and in constant contact with the young and their families and with the many lay people who share the mission, we learn to discern the voice of the Spirit in the events of each day. We come in contact with our own fragility and that of others, but we also experience the joy of responding to the Lord’s call.

The experience of ongoing formation is not solitary: we are always part of a *community* – the religious community, the EPC, the Salesian Family present in the area. It is in community that we attend to our experience, discern and respond to the Lord who calls. That is where we share our perception of the divine work in the lives of the young, thank the Lord for the traces of his presence and invoke his assistance upon his people.

Our experience of formation is intensely marked by the *stages of life*. It is essential for all of us, confreres as well as those entrusted with the service of authority at different levels, to give adequate attention to the different seasons that mark the passing years.

This daily and communitarian experience of formation is supplemented by the *special moments*, ordinary and extraordinary, organized at provincial, regional and world level. We participate gratefully in these, taking them as an opportunity to interact with and learn from our brothers and sisters, and to become aware of developments in the Congregation, the Church and the world.

9.1 THE STAGES AND SITUATIONS OF SALESIAN LIFE

The stages of life

Youth, adulthood and the senior years

644. Human existence is a journey marked by a tension between individual identity and ongoing changes in the psychophysical features of life. Still, becoming implies permanence. There is a self that remains, a singular and irreplaceable person who must gradually develop and bring together in himself a unique sense of life and the world. The spiritual life is not just a cladding over psychic and biological life, nor is it a life parallel to these; it consists in taking on all of human reality and allowing it to be gradually unified in Christ.

The course of human existence is often structured in terms of three periods: youth, adult age and senior years.

In *youth* the individual of faith strives to find a specific way of being, serving and loving inspired by his love and enthusiasm for Christ.

The adult years involve personal growth thanks to the various experiences and the responsibilities one assumes. This is the season where the fatherliness of the Preventive System can flourish. It could, however, also entail certain risks, such as the tendency to forms of individualism, a sense of inadequacy, and phenomena of rigidity, closure and slackening off. One experiences a second call in this period, a call to re-embrace one's original option, seeking what is essential to it and giving it new motivation that will allow one to live more fully the experience of spiritual fatherhood.

The *senior years* bring with them a gradual withdrawal from activity, and in some cases illness and forced inactivity. The challenge is to grow old gracefully, find joy and meaning in becoming an elder, acknowledging one's experience and wisdom and using them for the benefit of others, without imposing or being invasive, with the possibility of becoming a serene model and mentor. One allows himself to be shaped by the paschal experience of the crucified Christ (VC 70).

Formation in each stage

645. Each stage of life calls for adequate formation. We cannot presume that the preparation and tools acquired during initial formation are sufficient for dealing with the various situations and demands of life.

It is important to identify significant moments along the life cycle that should be taken care of in a particular way: the transition from initial formation to the rhythm of life in communities fully involved in apostolic activity; after ten years of perpetual profession or ordination, with the possibility of heroic dedication to the mission but also the danger of habit without enthusiasm; the years of full maturity, with a call to new levels and forms of self-giving but also the danger of accentuated individualism; the times of crisis that can be overcome only by rediscovering the way forward as individuals and communities; and the final withdrawal from activity and the hour of fulfilment (PI 70).

The provincial and the PFC have a special responsibility for taking care of this formation that embraces the whole arc of life, especially by means of meetings and programmes according to age groups.

It is useful for the provinces of a region to come together to offer formation experiences for groups of confreres who are experiencing similar situations, because of age or for other reasons.

The Congregation itself offers formation experiences and courses in settings that are particularly significant, such as the principal Salesian places and the Holy Land; these can become fruitful renewal experiences for groups of confreres.

The personal plan of life serves as a guide to the confrere in his vocational journey, giving unity to the experiences lived in each stage and continuity to the development of the different dimensions of his formation. The plan needs to be revised especially during the transitions between stages, as one of the means of guaranteeing the formative dispositions and conditions required to live the new stage of life.

Quinquennium

The early years in ministry

646. The transition from initial formation to full immersion in ministry, for brothers as well as priests, is usually known as the *quinquennium*. This is the time for creatively using the gifts the Lord has entrusted to us for the Salesian mission, in communion with many lay people and youth. One should of course expect to face challenges. One may sometimes feel inadequate for the tasks assigned, particularly when they do not correspond to the expectations and models of Salesian life one had imagined. Moreover, one often moves from a relatively structured life to one in which so much is entrusted to one's personal responsibility. This change can be challenging, but it is also an opportunity to put into practice the skills acquired during initial formation and to develop personal autonomy and responsibility.

Provincials will see that the insertion and entrustment of responsibility is gradual, like what happens in the case of lay collaborators.

This is why it is of special importance to look after the vocational journey of confreres in the first five years of full immersion in ministry after the initial phases of formation. The aim will be to consolidate vocational motivations and the sense of belonging to the Congregation and the Salesian Family. Support could be given in two ways: guaranteeing the possibility of serious personal accompaniment, mentoring, supervision; and instituting a sufficient number of group meetings, especially at province level, for sharing of experiences, inputs and moments of animation and of silence, prayer and relaxation.

Particular situations

647. Sometimes in the life of confreres there are moments of difficulty linked to physical health or to a crisis in the way one sees one's Salesian consecrated life. Instead of giving rise to negative judgments or exclusion, the fragility of the individual should strengthen the attention and loving support of the rector and the community, and that of the provincial and the province.² 'It is important that at least at the provincial level there are people prepared for the accompaniment required by more marked immaturity and that communities do not give up on helping those who are going through difficult situations' (GC29 26).

9.2. DIMENSIONS OF FORMATION

Human and fraternal dimension

648. The natural setting for vocational growth is the community. The quality of fraternal life has a strong impact on the perseverance of consecrated individuals. In a truly fraternal community, each one feels responsible for the fidelity of the other and is ready to help, especially if a confrere is going through difficult moments. This, however, is not spontaneous and cannot be improvised.

'... for a true life of communion not only is prayer essential, but so is the perseverance of the individual members of the community in their personal journey of adhesion to Christ, which is also realized through the care of community relationships. It is also noted that the perseverance of each one is in a reciprocal relationship with the perseverance of the community' (*Gift* 35).

The province ensures that rectors take care of this dimension of formation by:

- ensuring the quality of the elements of community life that systematically contribute to ongoing formation: a fraternal, friendly and serene atmosphere; a reasonable and balanced timetable; personal prayer and *lectio divina*; sharing and exchange of pastoral, congregational, ecclesial and civic/social experiences; the good night talk; well-chosen interventions and

materials for community spiritual reading; the weekly 'community day'; etc.

- promoting the practice of community discernment in the light of the Word of God and the Constitutions, seeking together the will of God in important matters in fraternal and patient dialogue (C 66).
- drawing up the community plan each year, as a useful tool for animation and vocational fidelity. This plan must necessarily be in dialogue with the SEPP.

Spiritual dimension

649. At these stages of life, the confrere will have developed a personalized way of being permanently in formation. He makes the effort to discern the voice of the Spirit in all that happens to him, especially through contact with the young, and to respond daily to this call.

After the example of Don Bosco, and mindful of the call of recent General Chapters (GC26 20; GC27 67.2), he continues to avail himself of personal spiritual accompaniment so as to become ever more open to what the Spirit is telling him and the community, and more generous in responding to these promptings. Having a personal plan of life is a great help in this regard. It can become material for dialogue and discernment with his spiritual guide.

Accompanied by Mary, he welcomes the grace of each day and grows into the fullness of his consecration.

Intellectual dimension

650. The intellectual aspect of ongoing formation is above all a help to advance in wisdom in order to be able to live a deeper life of consecration and accomplish the mission with the necessary competence in various circumstances and situations and in different roles.

It is best seen in the ability to combine work and reflection in a way that makes it possible to face the various situations of life openly and intelligently and to have sound criteria of discernment that are coherent with the Christian faith, the Church's guidelines and the Salesian charism.

Care is also to be taken of doctrinal and professional updating, a knowledge of the local cultures where one is living and working, and new professional and technical training (C 91) in order to be able to set about the educative and pastoral service in a suitable way, animating and guiding persons, projects and works.

Ongoing formation finds its path and stimulus in the impetus given by the universal and the particular Church, by the experience and the guidelines of the Congregation.

The updating must consider the Salesian's age, since every stage of life has its own spiritual susceptibilities, pastoral concerns and intellectual pursuits which, if cultivated properly through study and reflection, sustain the confrere, enhance his experience and increase the efficacy of his apostolic life.

Educative and pastoral dimension

651. The formation of those who share the Salesian mission in the EPC is essential if we are to truly serve those to whom we are sent.

The moments of analysis, reflection and discernment in the EPC councils are real spaces of ongoing formation for the Salesians and lay people involved.

Special moments of shared formation are also required, especially for those who form part of the animating nucleus.

Dimension of the charism

652. As he works for the salvation of the young, the Salesian grows in his experience of the fatherhood of God. With the Word of God daily in hand and meditating frequently on the Constitutions, he learns to see the Spirit at work in the lives of the young, shares their joys and their sorrows, and prays for them. Through the ups and downs of his own life he experiences God's mercy, allows himself to be configured to Christ, and becomes more and more a sign and bearer of God's merciful love to the young. Incorporating his life daily into the self-offering of Christ, he learns to live the Eucharist and grow in the grace of unity.

9.3 MOMENTS OF RENEWAL

653. The gift of fidelity and the joy of perseverance are embodied in the ongoing tension between the treasure that is our vocation and our experience of fragility. Each one has his own journey of growth for which he is the first one responsible. The community at different levels, local, provincial and world, does all it can to foster such growth, always with respect for each one's history and with the patience of accompaniment.³ To this end, we can distinguish three levels of action.

Ordinary moments of renewal

654. First, there are the ordinary renewal opportunities for individual confreres and for the community such as the liturgical year, the annual retreat, recollections, the provincial assemblies and meetings, the *scrutinium paupertatis*, *orationis* and *vocationis*, the community meetings and the exercise of community discernment, lived with the commitment and importance that Don Bosco attributed them. The annual retreat should be a time of evaluation of one's individual vocational journey that produces a qualitative leap in one's life, with the help of the personal plan of life, a valuable tool of spiritual pedagogy.

Special opportunities for updating

655. Secondly, there are opportunities for renewal and updating of the charismatic, pastoral, spiritual and professional dimensions of the shared mission, so as to ensure ongoing reflection on apostolic work and carry out youth ministry with the required competence in different situations and roles. Openness to the stimuli that come from current cultural challenges, the Church and the Congregation is a great help in this regard.

This cannot be carried out today without engaging in a fruitful dialogue with those who share the Salesian spirit and mission as lay partners, members of the Salesian Family and even people beyond our structures. The way to be professional and relevant as educators

and pastors is through networking. We can contribute the richness and insights coming from our charism and at the same time welcome what other people can offer in terms of perspectives and competence, values and insights. Such openness to dialogue is an attitude that must be constantly nurtured and permanently formed, beginning from the early phases of initial formation and with much more insistence when the sharing of time, activities and spaces with so many other collaborators becomes more intense.

Extraordinary moments offered to individual confreres

656. Third come the extraordinary moments offered to each confrere (R 103). These are moments of special vocational grace, perhaps on the occasion of some jubilee of profession or ordination or at a time of crisis and difficulty, for which a greater reference to the fundamental values and to the motivations of one's choice of life is required. These could well consist of prolonged periods of time in which to distance oneself from ordinary activity in order to re-read life in the light of its evolving dynamics, but above all in the light of faith as a story of salvation.

Such moments could also be an opportunity to renew one's missionary ardour and discern a possible *ad gentes* missionary vocation.

These opportunities are to be facilitated and encouraged both at the local level by the rector and at the level of the province. At the regional level, provinces are encouraged to collaborate in formulating initiatives, internships and courses of ongoing formation and charismatic, spiritual, and educational and pastoral updating for the different stages of life. The Salesian places (Valdocco – Chieri – Colle Don Bosco – Rome) are a privileged point of reference for this service at the level of the entire Congregation.

9.4 FORMATION OF RECTORS, FORMATORS AND SPIRITUAL GUIDES

Selection

657. Being a rector, formator or spiritual guide calls for certain characteristics that cannot be disregarded:

- Human maturity, a balanced temperament, a capacity for listening and dialogue, a welcoming attitude and good relationships, ability to serve and to lead the community and the EPC.
- An intense spiritual life; ability to animate confreres, laity and the young with docility to the Spirit.
- Adequate preparation in theology and Salesian spirituality; sensitivity to contemporary culture, especially that of youth.
- Passion for the Salesian mission in the variety of its expressions, backed by sufficient pastoral experience.
- Love for Don Bosco and the Salesian charism.

Formation, supervision, evaluation

658. Together with personal gifts there is need for formation. Specific courses must be provided at world and regional levels for rectors, formators and spiritual guides.

As they begin their ministry these confreres are invited, at least during the first three years, to refer frequently to experienced and competent persons – confreres and others – who will act as supervisors and help them reflect on their service and learn from the experience, so as to make the necessary adjustments. It would be appropriate, especially at the end of each year, to carry out an evaluation, one that could be shared with the provincial.

Animating and governing

659. *Animating and Governing the Community: The Ministry of the Salesian Rector* (Rome 2020) is a useful tool in the formation of new rectors and the updating of those already in service.

9.5 PRACTICAL GUIDELINES

660. *The commitment of the **Salesian** to ongoing formation is given concrete form in his personal plan of life, periodically renewed and discussed with his spiritual guide.*

661. *The **rector** gives priority to the spiritual guidance and pastoral animation of his community and of the EPC. He encourages the active and animating presence of the Salesian community in the EPC.*

662. *The rector makes sure that the **community plan** includes a programme of ongoing formation and shared formation.*

663. *The **provincial** is the first formator in the province. He ensures that his council has moments of formation, with attention to the documents of the Church and of the Congregation, taking particular care to update them regarding their responsibilities in areas of initial formation such as admission procedures regarding professions, ministries and orders. Personally and through his formation delegate and the PFC, he animates the confreres and communities, with special attention to the formation communities in his province, including those communities with practical trainees.*

664. *The **provincial formation delegate** and the PFC provide help to confreres for drawing up their personal plan of life, and to communities for the community plan.*

665. *The **provincial formation plan** includes a plan for ongoing formation with a view to spiritual and charismatic renewal, pastoral preparation and educational-professional competence (GC23 223). When formulating it, attention must be given to the different roles, age groups, situations and stages of life.*

666. *The provincial formation plan includes guidelines for personal and group accompaniment of confreres in the **quinquennium**.*

These confreres are encouraged to avail of personal spiritual accompaniment and supervision.

In the quinquennium, confreres should be given the possibility of living the Salesian mission to the full without as yet taking on major administrative responsibilities.

667. *The province takes special care of confreres who are **sick and aging**, as also of confreres in special situations. Where possible, the province establishes a community or person(s) at the province level who could provide this service (GC29 28d).*

668. *As part of the provincial qualification plan, the province identifies and **prepares confreres for the service of animation and governance** in various roles.*

Confreres appointed as rectors undergo a period of formation before undertaking their service. Where possible and convenient, such formation could be offered at the interprovincial level.

The qualification plan also identifies confreres to be prepared for the service of formation, spiritual accompaniment and confession.

669. *The province organizes a **meeting of rectors** at least once a year, but preferably more often. These meetings have an important formative value, besides being occasions for dealing with issues of administration. They are valuable spaces for sharing, fraternity and discernment regarding different situations in the province.*

670. *The local community takes care of **ordinary moments of renewal** such as the seasons of the liturgical year, the scrutinium paupertatis, orationis and vocationis, and monthly and quarterly recollections.*

The province takes special care of moments of renewal that the local community cannot normally provide; this also helps create a sense of belonging to the province. For reasons of distance, cost, etc. such events can be held according to areas of geographical proximity or even online.

671. *Every confrere has the right and the duty to care for his vocation at every stage of life. The provincial gives the confrere opportunities for **personal renewal**, which he willingly accepts. Renewal programmes in regional formation centres are given priority (GC29 39n, 39w).*

672. *Every region is responsible for running a **regional or interregional centre for ongoing formation**.*

It belongs to the Rector Major and his Council to approve the setting up of these centres. Those responsible for these centres depend on the Councillor for Formation and on the Regional Councillor/s.

The local provincial is responsible for the ordinary governance; his role is specified in the statute of the centre.

The centres provide various formation programmes to provincials, confreres, lay mission partners and members of the Salesian Family. The provinces take full advantage of the programmes, including those for rectors, formators and confreres in the quinquennium.

673. *The Rector Major and his Council offer moments of **formation to provincials** at the beginning and during their term of office. Team Visits by the Rector Major and his Council, regional level meetings of provincials, etc. are also moments of formation*

9. Notes

¹ In this sense, ongoing formation is understood as the path of fidelity and constant renewal in the years following the phases of initial formation, without interruption in this one unbroken movement of vocational response.

² See the concrete suggestions offered in AnGC 94–100.

³ CICLSAL, *The Gift of Fidelity, The Joy of Perseverance* 45.

Part 3

Criteria and norms for discernment, and admissions

10

'We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.'
(Rom 8:28)

Vocational discernment during initial formation

Lectio

In Rom 5-8, Paul explains the current and future state of those baptized and justified by God's saving act in Christ (cf. 3:21-26). In 8:1-30, the pericope containing our verse (v.28), Paul extensively discusses God's divine intervention on behalf of humanity, focusing on their glorification. Specifically in v.28, the Apostle explains how God acts according to His eternal plan, guided by wisdom, to orient everything for the greater good of humanity. In this process, the Almighty is portrayed as a partner in a relationship with human beings, taking the initiative for their salvation, the ultimate good.

Believers are defined as those who love God and are called by Him (v.28). This definition highlights both divine and human aspects, emphasizing the relationship between God and humanity. The purpose of this calling is to guide people towards being transformed into the likeness of His Son, Jesus (v.29), allowing them to truly become divine children through Him. The love that justified humans have for God (v.28a) is based on God's loving call and prior choice of them (v.28b), which greatly surpasses human love.

Meditatio

The initial formation of a candidate or a Salesian in temporary profession can be understood through the lens of Rom 8:28. It demonstrates that every vocation

is a divine act, shaped by God's wisdom; therefore, it should be valued and nurtured. Accordingly, it is essential to cultivate a deep faith perspective: God is the one who calls individuals, choosing whom He wants, when He wants, and in the manner He desires. Therefore, every vocation is a grace bestowed by the Father, who "loves the congregation, desires to see it vibrant for the good of the Church, and continually enriches it with new apostolic energy" (C. 22). The process of discernment involves identifying the signs of God's will by carefully examining the specific aspects of a candidate's situation. To fulfil this responsibility for the benefit of the Church and our Congregation, and to help shape our candidates in the image of Jesus (Rom 8:29) as expressed in our Salesian charism, ongoing spiritual accompaniment is essential.

The call of God (Rom 8:28) reveals the nature of God's involvement with humanity, highlighting the personal relationship that starts with God Himself. Consequently, it is only by responding in friendship and relationship with Jesus that an individual can recognize his vocation. The processes of calling, election, and his ultimate fulfilment in glorification are not automatic; they depend on how a person responds to divine grace in his life. (Rom 8:28-30).

Herein, vocational discernment is crucial, involving the candidate's cooperation in evaluating his suitability for the Salesian mission, as well as the guidance of the formation team. To effectively support young people, it is essential to have a deep understanding of their human experiences and personal histories. Moreover, effective discernment requires a climate of communion and trust within the formation team. However, we must affirm that the discernment of vocation, while not excluding human wisdom and science, transcends them.

Jinca George, INK - UPS

**"FOR YOU I STUDY
FOR YOU I WORK
FOR YOU I LIVE
FOR YOU I AM READY
EVEN TO GIVE MY LIFE
DON BOSCO**



10. Vocational discernment during initial formation

674. This chapter deals with *vocational discernment during the initial phases of formation*, and more specifically discernment in view of *admissions*. Such discernment is seen as a service to the candidate, to the Congregation and to the Church.

10.1 VOCATIONAL DISCERNMENT

Discerning the call to Salesian life

675. Every person has a vocation, indeed, is a vocation. If he wants to be guided by the Spirit, he must go through a process of discernment of his vocation. The present chapter talks about the process of assessing whether the seed God has placed in one's heart is that of the Salesian consecrated life.

Our Constitutions present Salesian life as a continuous dialogue of call and response,¹ in which God calls whom he wants, when he wants and as he wants, and the person responds in the concreteness of his whole self, with his culture, family history, the vision of life he is slowly forming.

The starting point

676. The starting point of all discernment is our *relationship with the living Lord*, nourished in prayer, meditation on the Word, the celebration of the sacrament of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. It is only within this friendship with Jesus that vocation can be discerned.²

Discernment calls for something more than intelligence or common sense. It is a gift to be implored, a spiritual skill to be cultivated through prayer, reflection, reading and appropriate help. It calls us to examine what is within us (our desires, anxieties, fears, expectations) and what is happening around us (the signs of the times). It leads us

to recognize the concrete means that the Lord provides in his mysterious and loving plan to make us move beyond mere good intentions. This discernment does not exclude the contributions of human wisdom and science but transcends them. It implies acceptance of the logic of the cross (GE 166–175), and the willingness to seek spiritual accompaniment.

The people involved

677. Vocational discernment involves the person discerning the gift of vocation as well as the ones helping him, including those who have different levels of responsibility on behalf of the Church and the Congregation.

In the initial phases of formation, this is a particularly demanding process involving the free option of the person who feels called and the responsibility of those who, in discerning, must ultimately express assent or deny it, in the name of the Church and the Congregation.

Salesian vocational discernment

The purpose of discernment

678. *Salesian vocational discernment* refers to the process of becoming aware and evaluating those elements in a person's life in which one recognizes positive signs of a call to Salesian life: facts of one's history, aptitudes, desires and so on. Discernment is aimed at grasping whether in all this there are the conditions for choosing Salesian life and living it to the full. Above all, attention is given to motivations and what most deeply sustains them, namely the 'right intention'.

The question for discernment, then, is whether there are the basic conditions to support the choice of Salesian life, and living it consistently. All that defines the life of the candidate and his experience as a Christian comes into play. It is a matter of realistically evaluating a possible future life as a Salesian, first and foremost in the interest and for the good of the one aspiring to it. It is not, therefore, a question of making a moral judgment about the person or conducting a psychological diagnosis, nor

of limiting oneself to considering the presence or absence of counter-indications. It is rather a matter of discovering together the signs of God's will through an enlightened interpretation of the elements of the concrete situation.

Discernment of the Salesian vocation

679. We are referring here not to vocational discernment in general but to *discernment of the Salesian consecrated vocation*. Its fundamental criterion is Salesian identity, with its constitutive elements, requirements and the conditions for living it. Its normative points of reference are the guidelines of the Congregation, which the Church, through the approval of the Constitutions, recognizes as the custodian and guardian of the charismatic identity.

The candidate gradually discovers and makes his own the deepest instances that sustain Salesian life and mission, until he arrives at a reasoned and prayerful conviction that he can live the spirit and mission of the Congregation coherently and joyfully. The Congregation, in accompanying and verifying, is called to arrive at the moral certainty, based on positive grounds, that he possesses the qualities necessary to follow the way chosen. Of course, one is always faced with the primacy of grace and its workings that surpass our ways; but this does not detract from the value of the mediation one is called upon to make, looking at the person's resources, the path travelled, and his ability to responsibly take on a life project like that of the Salesians of Don Bosco. Trust in grace and concreteness in reading reality are together part of the discernment that all those involved here are called to carry out.

Discernment of the different forms of the one vocation

680. Within the one Salesian vocation, vocational discernment helps one understand the form to which one is called, lay or clerical. The Salesian vocation is not abstract and generic but concrete and specific. God makes us understand that the call is specifically oriented towards the realization of Don Bosco's project as a lay

religious or as a religious priest or deacon (GC21 173).

As far as vocational discernment is concerned this means that:

- the criteria for discernment are fundamentally valid for all candidates.
- the perspective of Salesian life embodied in one of the two forms always accompanies vocational discernment and growth, and not only at the beginning of the journey or during the phase of specific formation.
- it is best that the choice of the form of vocation be clear already at first profession; in any case, it must be clear before beginning specific formation or before perpetual profession, should this precede specific formation.

Discernment during the initial phases of formation

A constant attitude

681. The whole formation process is lived in a constant attitude of discernment. Learning by experience the meaning of the Salesian vocation (C 98), the candidate or confrere comes to a deeper knowledge of himself and becomes capable of giving a mature personal response.

The phases of initial formation are pedagogically ordered to this end. Before being definitively incorporated into the Society, the candidate or confrere passes through different periods of formation. 'These periods are necessary for both the candidate and the community, so that they may work together to discern God's will and correspond with it. The candidate gradually gets to know the Society, and the Society in turn can evaluate his suitability for Salesian life' (C 107), especially his motivations and right intention.

The attitude and practice of discernment must accompany the Salesian all through life.

Criteria of suitability and of growth

682. In the process of initial formation, we can distinguish between criteria regarding basic suitability and criteria for evaluating progress and growth. Once the basic suitability

and the absence of absolute counter-indications have been established, it is necessary to ascertain, between the beginning and perpetual profession, growth in knowledge and freedom, the maturing of suitability and deepening of motivations. Starting from the presence of fundamental dispositions, which are aptitudes not yet fully developed, it is a question of *evaluating* – in the various admissions and on other occasions of discernment – whether the candidate has reached the maturity necessary for making the corresponding commitments in the journey of Salesian consecrated life.

The specific nature of formation phases

683. Discernment during initial formation is attentive to the specific nature of the different phases of formation. The indicators in the novitiate, for example, are not the same as those for the phase of practical training. It is a question of evaluating the type of growth and the challenges to be faced, making sure that the objectives for each phase have been achieved, with particular attention to the moments of transition from one phase to another. This also means that, while keeping in mind that vocational values are assumed gradually, we should avoid prolonging problematic or indecisive situations that offer no serious prospects of those changes that would make the continuation of the journey fruitful. Knowing how to say an honest ‘no’ when necessary can be a gift for the future of the person and the community, while saying ‘yes’ without serious discernment can hurt everyone involved.

The unity and continuity of formation

684. Vocational discernment is not reserved to a particular moment and is not carried out all at once, but progressively and continuously, in the same way that the formative process proposed by the Church and the Congregation is gradual. It should be carried out also from the perspective of the unity of the person and his experience, and of the continuity of the formation process. It implies a unified vision of formation, continuity of formation methodology, knowledge of the individual,

and an approach that is personalized and contextual.

The dimension of the charism

685. Following Christ as Don Bosco did is the charismatic dimension of our following, central to Salesian life. We look at Don Bosco as father, teacher and guide, nourishing an affective bond with him and experiencing an intimate consonance of values and ideals. It involves discovering the charism in the concrete experience of the mission. It is also important to accept the directives and urgings of the Congregation, a community embodying the Salesian charism, as it continually seeks to be faithful to Christ, the Church and the genuine thinking of Don Bosco.

Particular moments and admissions

686. Accompaniment and discernment are constant features of the whole process of formation, with specific emphases during the different phases: in the evaluation of basic suitability, at the moment of the first vocational response, in the admissions that constitute focal points of synthesis during the vocation journey.

The periods preceding first profession, in other words *the prenovitiate and the novitiate*, are of particular importance (C 109, 110). Special attention needs to be given also to discernment of the spiritual maturity required for *perpetual profession*, given the importance of such a step (C 117). It is indispensable to verify the consistency between what is already being lived and the promise to practise it all through one's life. The seriousness of the discernment process is proportionate to the seriousness of the definitive commitment one makes before God and the Church.

Even after the initial phases of formation, situations and challenges may arise that call for deeper discernment and more thoughtful evaluation.

Discernment and admissions

687. Admissions to various commitments during the vocation process are particularly important moments of

discernment. They sum up and express the interpretation and evaluation of the signs that motivate both the candidate's formal request and the judgment of those responsible regarding the suitability that corresponds to the commitment that is being assumed (C 108).

The request freely presented by the candidate is based on the discernment he has made with the help of those who accompany him and of the community, and remains open to the mediations that the Church has put in place to reach a final decisive word.

Admission is always a moment that requires a great sense of responsibility, first of all on the part of the person making the request, and then also on the part of those called to examine and express themselves. It entails doing everything possible to understand the situation presented, enlightened by the criteria of the Church and the Congregation and attentive to the uniqueness of each person and life history. One looks at the formation experience as a whole, at the dynamics of human and spiritual maturity, with particular attention to what is most relevant to the Salesian charism. The seriousness of discernment is equivalent to the seriousness of the love one has for the person and at the same time for the Congregation.

Readmission

688. What is said about discernment in view of admissions is kept in mind also in cases of readmission of those who may have left the Congregation legitimately during the novitiate or after profession (can. 690 §1).

Those who have been dismissed from the Congregation in accordance with the law are not readmitted to Salesian life without a thorough discernment, a suitable probationary period, and the absence of scandal especially among confreres and members of the EPC (see FSDB 830).

10.2 CONDITIONS

689. In order to discern adequately, certain convictions, attitudes and conditions are indispensable, such as an attitude of faith, a vocational perspective, a pedagogical

and formative sensitivity and confidentiality.

A faith outlook

690. Vocational discernment is, first of all, a spiritual discernment. Therefore:

- A. A faith perspective must be intensely cultivated, in the conviction that it is God who calls, and that vocation is a grace from the Father who ‘loves the Congregation, wants to see it vibrant for the good of the Church and never ceases to enrich it with new apostolic energy’ (C 22).
- B. Those responsible for discernment are attentive and respectful mediators of the divine action, collaborators and not masters of the Lord’s plan, guarantors of the quality of the vocation so that it is lived in fidelity to the Spirit. We are moving at the level where ‘God alone is the master (of the heart) and we will not be able to succeed in anything if God does not teach us the art and provide us with the key.’³
- C. We need to live in harmony with God and be docile to the Spirit in order to understand what God desires for his sons and to interpret his language.

Vocational perspective

691. Each one’s life is a vocation and should be understood, accepted and fulfilled as such.

Signs of a vocation can be identified first of all in the life of the person being accompanied. It is therefore necessary to know him in depth, in his human reality and his history.

Vocation can be recognized through everyday signs. The Spirit does not usually follow extraordinary ways but speaks through the attitudes and aspirations, intentions and motivations that are perceived in the daily rhythm of life, in interaction with people, in dealing with reality, in the ordinary course of events and in the ability to face and overcome difficulties, in fraternal life and participation in the shared mission, and in the daily experience of prayer.

The Salesian vocation, as a specific form of religious life, can be recognized through those signs that indicate an increasing convergence between the gifts, aspirations,

deep desires of the heart and what is proper to the Salesian spirit and the way of life of the Salesians of Don Bosco.

Pedagogical sensitivity

692. Formators are called to cultivate a pedagogical sensitivity that:

- Requires and encourages a climate of freedom that presuppose a sense of responsibility and consistency and is free from impositions and pressures of any kind; a family atmosphere of mutual acceptance and welcome, which is the style of relationships typical of the Preventive System.
- Encourages a real and profound knowledge of the individual and requires a commitment to acquire this through personal contact, formative and spiritual accompaniment and other ways of interpreting experience, such as the family situation, knowledge of the cultural and youth context, and the use of the human sciences.

Makes us attentive to the nature of the formation process, which leads us to take into account the rhythms of the person's growth to maturity.

Prudence and sound judgment

693. The interpretation of vocational signs is closely linked to the spiritual life, experience and formation of the people involved.

An enlightened prudence that is able to discern the signs of vocation in the concrete flow of each individual's life is indispensable. Such prudence is above all a gift to be implored from God, that is developed through experience and is greatly assisted by a preparation that combines a good theoretical framework with learning from experience, all the more valid when shared and accompanied.

On the *theoretical* side we can include knowledge of the guidelines of the Church and of the Congregation, the theology of vocation, and the contribution of the human sciences. The latter can enable us to understand the developmental processes connected with intellectual, emotional, personal and interpersonal life.

On the *practical* side, formators and those with

responsibility for discernment need periods of formation that favour ‘an accurate examination of the very personality of the educator, his ministerial commitment, and his way of understanding and living his own mission of formation’, ‘practical exercises carried out with the help of a supervisor’ and ‘prolonged periods of spiritual renewal’ (DES 70–71; AGC 426 41–42).

It should be noted that two conditions are presupposed in the process of discernment: that formators are able to listen to the candidate with respect and patience, understand him and help him to grow in the human and spiritual dimensions of his vocation; and that the environment, characterized by the style of the Preventive System, fosters mutual trust, so that the candidate can know himself, open himself and make it possible for the formators to understand and help him.

Discernment also calls for time and patience: in the logic of God’s heart, the signs of vocation manifest themselves in the flow of history and in the events that mark the lives of his children.

Good discernment presupposes a climate of communion and trust within the formation team, with full respect for the difference of roles and a great capacity for mutual acceptance. *Supervision* of the team is an effective tool for fostering growth in the formative task entrusted to it. With the help of an expert from outside the formation team and community, chosen by the rector in dialogue with his council and with the provincial, the following can be examined: relationships among the formators, the freedom necessary for formulating judgments, respect for the differing roles and responsibilities for discernment and admissions, and safeguarding of the internal forum.

10.3 THOSE INVOLVED IN VOCATIONAL DISCERNMENT

694. In discernment regarding final decisions, important choices and admissions, all those involved in the formation process, with their different roles and responsibilities, are called upon to express their opinion.

Discernment presupposes a deep sense of responsibility and honesty and takes place in close collaboration between

the candidate and the community – the religious community as well as the EPC – through a dialogue marked by mutual trust, in order to understand God's will and recognize the signs given.

The candidate

695. The task of vocational discernment belongs primarily to the candidate to Salesian life or the confrere in the initial phases of formation (C 99). He therefore cultivates an openness to the voice of God and to the action of formators, directs his life according to a perspective of faith, and examines himself in the light of Salesian vocation criteria. He seeks to truly know and accept himself and to make himself known. He makes use of all the means and instruments that the formation experience offers him, in particular the friendly talk with the rector, spiritual accompaniment, the personal plan of life, community sharing and discernment and the sacrament of Reconciliation.

Accompaniment is an indispensable aid for growth in the human, Christian and charismatic dimensions, a privileged means for arriving at a deeper knowledge of oneself and for orienting one's life according to God's will. In dialogue with the rector, the candidate chooses a spiritual guide whom he can meet at least *once a month*. This guide is usually a Salesian, but if not, he or she must be sufficiently familiar with the Salesian charism and the formative characteristics of the relevant phase of formation.

The community

696. Vocational discernment is a service both to the individual and to the charism. It helps the *individual* understand his vocation, the inspirations driving him and the signs of the Spirit relating to his vocational choice. It serves the *Salesian charism* by evaluating and determining whether a person is truly suitable and called to live the project of Salesian consecrated life. While it is in the interest of the person to be helped to orientate his future with the objectivity that comes from the confrontation and mediation of a community, equally this approach becomes

a wide-ranging and long-term service for the community itself, at the local level and that of the entire Congregation. Assessing correctly whether a candidate is truly called and suitable to live the project of Salesian consecrated life is an act of charity in truth among the most demanding but also among the most important.

At local level

The religious community

697. The *family spirit* is a basic condition for a good formation journey and is the first thing to take care of in the Salesian religious community (C 16). Trust and familiarity are favourable conditions for the acquisition of the values of Salesian life and for discernment.

In the same way, a cohesive and united *formation team* is essential to the process of formation, which is not so much the result of the heroic effort of some gifted individual as the outcome of effective teamwork.

The educative and pastoral community

698. The *EPC collaborates in vocational discernment* by ensuring a formative environment that helps engage with the criteria of Salesian identity through the apostolic mission, mutual witness, the practice of fraternal correction, evaluations and the expression of an opinion at the time of admission to profession, ministries and holy orders.

Especially when the lay members of the animating nucleus have a significant relationship with candidates or with confreres in initial formation, it is essential that they be called upon to share the responsibility of vocational discernment, through prudent and appropriate contributions solicited by the rector.

The formation process is enriched when it includes people from the three states of life, lay, consecrated and priestly; of special importance are the contributions of women and married couples (FD 163–164).

The rector

699. The rector's role is decisive. He accompanies the confreres in initial formation, animates and coordinates the work of the local council, and maintains a dialogue with the provincial and his council. As in every Salesian community, also in this case the rector 'has a direct responsibility toward each confrere, [helping] him realize his own personal vocation' (C 55). This presupposes attention to the formation journey of each one, the ability to be close, to accept the confrere and to guide. He does this especially through the friendly talk.

The rector is also available for personal spiritual accompaniment when freely requested by a confrere (FSDB 201).

The rector (and analogously the one in charge of prenovices or of confreres doing higher studies during the period of initial formation) continues to be part of the admission process at local level even when he is the personal spiritual guide of some candidate or confrere (FSDB 203).

The house council⁴

700. Members of the house council accompany the growth process also through the periodic assessments, which must be drawn up together. These are a means for knowing the individual confreres or candidates better, and an opportunity to provide encouragement, reinforce and also correct specific elements in each one's journey.

At the time of admissions, the house council is called upon to participate both by the formulation of a judgment and by secret vote, which are then sent to the provincial.

It is important that confreres in initial formation be members of communities with the regular number of confreres as indicated in R 151: 'The number of perpetually professed confreres in a house shall ordinarily not be fewer than four.' (GC29, Resolution 4; AGC 455 59), so as to make both the quarterly evaluation and the opinion that

the local council is called to offer at the time of admission effective and faithful to their true meaning. Ensuring these conditions is the direct responsibility of the provincial and his council.

It is very important to keep in mind the core perspective governing the process of discernment at the level of the house council. The overriding question to be answered in the secret of the conscience is: from an overall perception of the candidate's way of life and journey, is he called to what he is applying for, and is he suitable? This is not the moment to address some specific problem or to correct a particular defect – that must be done by means of fraternal correction in the course of daily life and through the periodic assessments. The moment of admission is a demanding discernment before God about the overall vocational journey of one of his children, a responsibility that involves the Church, the Congregation and the candidate/confreere himself.

After the members have expressed their opinions and considerations about the suitability of the candidate, they are called to formulate a common judgment that is synthetic but also exhaustive. There follows the secret vote, which expresses the seriousness of the contribution that each individual is called to make, with full freedom of conscience.

The role of the local council regarding admissions is *consultative*. However, membership of the council carries with it also the obligation on the part of each councillor to express his opinion. 'All whose consent or counsel is required are obliged to offer their opinion sincerely... moreover, the superior can insist upon this obligation.'⁵ Abstentions, in other words, are not possible. The rector also participates in the secret vote.

The practice of deciding in advance how to vote is prohibited, because it invalidates the whole reason for the secret vote.

Spiritual guides and confessors

701. The spiritual guide and the confessor have a significant moral responsibility regarding vocational discernment. They have a decisive function in clarifying

motivations and the acquisition of moral values. Hence the individual must consult them and in conscience take account of their advice.

Confessors are always bound by the seal of confession and personal spiritual guides are bound to secrecy by virtue of their office. Both confessors and spiritual guides must act only in the internal forum to guide and, if necessary, to exhort those who are considered not suitable to withdraw from the journey they have begun. However, their role is not to command but to enlighten the conscience and facilitate personal discernment and decision. It is their duty to know and adopt the criteria of discernment indicated by the Church and the Congregation as a binding point of reference in their service.⁶

Experts

702. People with a special competence in some particular area may be called upon to make a specific contribution to the process of vocational discernment. When these *experts* are not Salesians, it is important to make sure that their service respects the characteristics proper to our vocation and is seen within the overall framework of Salesian formation. They can enlighten discernment as to the absence of counter-indications, but it is not within their competence to make conclusive statements regarding the presence of a vocation (FSDB 724).

At provincial level

The provincial

703. The provincial community carries out its task regarding admissions through the various individuals who are responsible.

The task of admitting candidates – whether to the novitiate, profession or orders – belongs to the provincial with the consent of his council (C 108; 165.1). At the time of admissions, it is always up to him to make a definitive pronouncement; this is a responsibility he cannot abdicate.

Assisted by his council, the provincial is the guarantor

of vocational discernment; his responsibility is not limited to the final decision.

He ensures the unity of criteria for discernment and admission. He promotes an adequate knowledge of the candidates, both on the part of the members of the provincial council and on the part of those responsible for the different phases. He ensures that all the steps involved in the process of accompaniment and discernment, including that of communicating the outcome (though not of the voting) of the process of admission, are carried out in the best possible way.

The provincial or curatorium is also responsible for indicating to the confreres in initial formation the names of some Salesians (priests and brothers) particularly suitable for providing the service of spiritual accompaniment.

The provincial council

704. Each member of the provincial council is called upon to reflect and come to his own judgment on what the candidate asks, which takes into account the whole of his journey in relation to the step he is asking to take. There is a clear distinction between what the local community is called upon to do during the periodic assessments, as support for growth, and the overall view that is required at the time of admission (FSDB 700). The question to be answered before God and the Church is whether this person is called and fit for what he is now asking. This is one of the highest responsibilities one assumes by joining a provincial council.

It is part of the service of truth in charity that the provincial and his council are called upon to perform in the admission process to come to the conclusions that are deemed most correct. Delaying or procrastinating can become a disservice with very negative consequences for the person and the Church.

At interprovincial level

The interprovincial formation community

705. While the curatorium shares responsibility for

the interprovincial formation community, admissions to renewal of vows, ministries and orders are the responsibility of the provincial where that community is located. Before proceeding with the admissions, however, the rector formally asks, in the name of the local provincial, the written opinion of the provincial of origin and his council. In the event of difficulties or differences of opinion, prudence suggests that the local provincial makes the decision in dialogue with the provincial of origin.

When a young Salesian is sent to an interprovincial formation house, his provincial provides the local provincial with a copy of the last two judgments of admission and other information considered important (e.g. what is mentioned in FSDB 742–748); the confrere himself is encouraged to share these with the rector. This is meant to assure continuity over formation phases, allowing the new persons responsible (the local provincial and the rector with their councils) to know the candidate's vocational history, and to ensure continuity of discernment. It would be important, however, to distinguish clearly between the periodic assessments that are meant as a help to growth, and the judgment of admission that is a juridical act (YSA 168; AGC 438 86–87).

In his turn, the rector of the formation house is required to communicate the periodic assessments to the young Salesian and to send them to his provincial.

At world level

706. *At world level*, it is the responsibility of the Rector Major with the consent of his Council to promulgate the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis et Studiorum*, to establish the criteria for vocational discernment and to see to it that they are known, accepted and applied in the provinces, especially at the time of admission.

A note on confidentiality

The sacrament of reconciliation

707. *The sacramental seal* of the sacrament of reconciliation

is absolute and never admits of exceptions.⁷ Not even the candidate can release the confessor from the sacramental seal.

Personal spiritual accompaniment

708. Insofar as it deals with the internal forum, even if non-sacramental, personal spiritual accompaniment enjoys a very special confidentiality, ‘a certain secrecy *ad extra*, which is inherent in the content of spiritual conversations and derives from the right of every person to respect for his or her own privacy (cf. can. 220 CIC),’⁸ with the exceptions mentioned in FSDB 711–712 below.

Can. 240 §2 forbids the seeking of the opinion of the spiritual director on the occasion of admission to Orders or dismissal from the seminary.⁹ In our own tradition the rector continues to be part of the processes of admission at local level, even when he is spiritual guide of those being admitted. Apart from certain specific exceptions (FSDB 711–712), he cannot divulge anything he has learnt in this capacity to anyone without that person’s free and explicit consent. He cannot even make use of such information in the process of arriving at his own judgment and in the voting of the house council.

The friendly talk with the rector

709. In our tradition, the friendly talk with the rector is protected by a high level of confidentiality.¹⁰

With regard to the ‘professional secret’, apart from the exceptions listed below (FSDB 711–712), it should be remembered that the rector cannot make use of what he comes to know solely through the friendly talk, even in the secret voting of the house council. He may make use of it only if the confrere freely and explicitly gives his consent, which the rector can also ask in writing (AGC 438 81–82).

Respect for confidentiality creates the conditions within which it becomes possible to say with frankness what one considers to be the greatest good for the life of the one being accompanied, even when it is not to his liking. In certain circumstances, doing so promptly can be a clear moral duty.

The friendly talk and the rector's interventions

710. The rector can and sometimes must act on the basis what he learns during the friendly talk, for the good of the confrere and the community, but cannot reveal what he has learned without the consent of the person concerned.¹¹ Consider, for example, health problems or family situations that involve or require changes in the ordinary rhythm of life and in the distribution of tasks within the community.

In the case of situations that are known externally, concerning relationships, religious commitments, the community or the mission, it is the rector himself who must often take the initiative to speak about it, making explicit the fact that it is something known externally.

The fact that the rector 'has a direct responsibility toward each confrere', helping him 'realize his own personal vocation and carry out the work entrusted to him' (C 55) also implies a duty on his part to correct and intervene for the good of the person concerned and for the common good, always respecting confidentiality.

Here one sees the difference between the friendly talk with the rector, which can have an impact on what happens outside, and spiritual accompaniment, which focuses on what is shared at the moment of the meeting: each contributes to the good of the person, but in ways that are distinct.

The obligation to report

711. Except for what has been learned by clerics in the sacramental internal forum, rectors as well as spiritual guides, whether clerics, consecrated persons or lay, are obliged to report to the competent authorities, ecclesiastical as well as civil, whenever they learn, or have well-founded motives to believe, that one of the acts referred to in *Vos estis lux mundi* (2023) art. 1 have been committed.

Other exceptions to confidentiality

712. There are also, however, other circumstances in which a higher good takes precedence over confidentiality,

such as risk to the life of the person involved in the confidential dialogue or to the lives of others, or the risk of sexual abuse of a minor or of other vulnerable adults. In these cases, and after suitable discernment, the rector or spiritual guide must make the matter known to the competent superior.¹²

In other cases, such as the impediments to admission and profession listed in can. 643 §1, the rector or spiritual guide are morally obliged to accompany the candidate or confrere to reveal the situation to the provincial responsible for admissions.

When the circumstances do not involve the extreme situations of abuse or danger to life, the spirit of the law is to preserve as much as possible the value of confidentiality, which consists in safeguarding the dignity of the person and the fundamental trust implied in relationships that demand confidentiality.

10.4 MEANS AND PROCEDURES

713. Once the conditions indicated have been met and the established criteria adopted, one gradually arrives at a convergence of the elements of knowledge and experience that make it possible to formulate the kind of judgment required of those involved in discernment with a view to admissions. Various means and procedures serve this purpose.

Knowledge gained in daily life

714. The normal and friendly Salesian life in common ordinarily enables formators to have a good knowledge of the candidate or confrere, giving them a fair idea regarding his physical health, intellectual capacity, will and affectivity. Contributing to the effectiveness of this experiential knowledge are:

- *The animating presence* with which the vocational experience is accompanied.
- *Attention to* the external circumstances that may be relevant and significant for the candidate.
- *The help given to* the candidate to grow in self-awareness, self-knowledge, evaluation of his attitudes

and progress, and self-expression.

- Different kinds of *personal and formative relationships*.
- Attention to the candidate's insertion into pastoral activity, his involvement with young people, his ability to work in team.

Knowledge of the family of origin

715. During the aspirantate and in the early phases of formation, knowledge of the candidate's family of origin is fundamental. Even in subsequent phases, knowledge of the family can help formators and the candidate himself understand certain of his relational dynamics, fundamental beliefs and emotional and behavioural patterns, as well as reinforce positive attitudes and cope with possible difficulties.

Visits by formators to the families and of families to the formation communities can be very helpful and useful.

Periodic personal assessments

Purpose

716. *Periodic personal assessments* ('scrutinies') are carried out by the local council in order to accompany and help the candidates grow in their vocation, evaluating together with them the path they have taken and the steps still to be taken.

The assessments are not a discernment process linked to the admission of a candidate (FSDB 227, 700). Admissions are juridical acts that involve the province and not only the house council, while the main purpose of the periodic assessments is to foster the vocational growth of the one receiving it. When done well, however, assessments are a valuable help in the ongoing process of vocational discernment and as a preparation for the key moments of profession, ministries or orders.

Used during initial formation to personalize the formative process, the assessments can also be an instrument of considerable help to the rector and the spiritual guide in their work of spiritual accompaniment.

Aspects to be assessed

717. A good scheme for the aspects to be assessed is that of the five dimensions of formation: human and fraternal, spiritual, intellectual, educative and pastoral, charismatic. Another possible scheme is that provided by our Constitutions: Salesians in the Church – sent to the young – in communities – following Christ obedient, poor and chaste – in dialogue with the Lord – formed for the mission of pastors and educators.

Confidentiality

718. In the tradition of Salesian accompaniment, the rector participates in the exercise of the periodic personal assessments even if he is spiritual guide to some of those being assessed. He cannot share the information received during the friendly talk (or spiritual accompaniment) with the other members of his council, nor even use this information to make personal judgments or draw conclusions when decisions have to be made (FSDB 707–712).

Modalities

719. During the period of initial formation, personal assessments must be conducted every three months. This ensures integration between the journey of the candidate or confrere and the objectives of the formative phase, with an emphasis on the continuity of the process with reference to previous evaluations.

The *personal involvement* of each candidate and confrere in the process of evaluation is essential. The individual's own perception about his vocational journey is put together with that of the community to generate confidence in the formative experience and a realistic approach to areas needing improvement and growth. The modalities for such involvement are worked out, with indications and examples for the different contexts and phases of formation, in the regional formation plan and in the provincial formation plan.

Ways of involving the members of the *Salesian community* in these assessments, and of promoting

fraternal communication between peers, are worked out. It is very important that it be completely separate and distinct from the periodic personal assessments, even in terms of timing.

It is important to listen to and in some way involve our *lay mission partners* in the periodic assessments (FSDB 698).

The rector shares the assessments with the candidate or confrere concerned, who in turn has devoted time and energy to evaluating his own journey. This is a good opportunity for fruitful formative dialogue in a fatherly atmosphere, so that the young confrere is helped to grow in his vocation.

In addition, the candidate or confrere is encouraged to share the assessments with his spiritual guide and with his new rector when he changes community.

The assessments form part of the 'passage of information' when a candidate / confrere in the initial phases of formation moves from one phase or community to another, whether in his own province or elsewhere (FSDB 705, 807).

Assessment of physical health

720. An assessment of physical health involves a medical examination during the prenovitiate, carried out by a doctor who is familiar with the requirements of Salesian life; a written report should be provided (can. 642; R 91; FSDB 365, 395).

A documentation of illnesses, operations undergone or specific therapies that have been administered in the past must be collected.

Assessment of psychological aspects

Roles and responsibilities of formators

Rector and formators

721. The unity of formation is ensured by formators who meet regularly to interact and exchange views. Under the guidance of the rector, the formation team accompanies the candidate or confrere in formation in the area of human and psychological maturity. The

double concern is to care for the concrete person and to keep in mind the good of the young people to whom we are sent.

Formators are invited to have a good knowledge of the human person and an adequate psychological preparation,¹³ but above all to take care of their own human formation and keep growing. They learn to be attentive to the dynamics of transference and countertransference and to their own inner world, so as to be able to understand both themselves and the young people in formation. They also have a good knowledge of the criteria and norms for Salesian vocational discernment.¹⁴

Formators strive to create a serene and open environment in which it becomes possible to discuss and deal with the themes of human maturity and consecrated chastity. Living alongside the candidates and confreres in different situations, they learn how to perceive the abilities, habits and difficulties of the candidates that could have a significant impact on their consecrated life.

When a formator perceives some sign of psychological fragility in a formee, it would be best to communicate his impression to the rector, with the aim of finding the most appropriate ways to help the formee.

It is important that the rector knows how to identify the most appropriate time for referring a formee to a specialist for diagnosis and therapy.

The use of specialist psychological or psychotherapeutic techniques should be reserved for professionals who possess these skills.¹⁵

Spiritual guides

722. The spiritual guide has a privileged access to the interiority of the person in formation. His task is to help him know himself and to discover how grace is already at work and, at the same time, to identify wounds and fragilities that need to be addressed, if necessary with the help of the psychological sciences. All this must help the young person to live the gift of himself to God with coherence and freedom, according to Don Bosco's charism.

Recourse to the psychological sciences

Assessment of mental health in the service of vocational discernment

723. A first recourse to the psychological sciences involves psychological diagnosis, carried out by competent individuals, as part of the process of vocational discernment. This contribution allows the character and personality of the candidates to be known better and enables formation to be more fittingly adapted to the needs of the individual. It has been found to be of considerable help to formators in their task of vocational discernment (*Gift* 192). However, it should be seen as an aid to ascertain the absence of counter-indications, not to ascertain the presence of a vocation.

Professional psychological accompaniment

724. A second recourse to the psychological sciences consists of professional psychological accompaniment. The psychologist helps the formee be aware of his vital strengths as well as of his deficiencies and possible emotional blocks. He assists him to become aware of himself, accept himself, and assume responsibility for his own life and formation. He aims at the enhancement and intensification of the good qualities he already possesses.

The psychologist must not only be known for his or her professional skills but must also subscribe to an anthropology that is respectful of and in harmony with the Christian vision of the human person and the vocation to the priesthood and consecrated life.¹⁶

It is therefore recommended that those who offer professional help be familiar with Salesian formation and to know its criteria.¹⁷ He cannot, however, be part of the formation team (*Gift* 192) and it is not up to him to give judgments or orientations regarding the vocational discernment process or take a position for or against a candidate's option for Salesian life.

Psychological accompaniment is an important resource during the initial phases of formation, to be

used as ordinary help and not only for difficult situations (SGC 673a).

725. During the prenovitiate there must be a psychological examination to verify the existence of the human basis and the suitability requirements to begin the Salesian formation journey.¹⁸

The candidate is required to express in writing his consent to the medical and psychological tests, and to the fact that the results will be made available to the individuals indicated in FSDB 730 below.

726. 'As a rule, candidates will not be admitted... who suffer from any pathology, be it manifest or latent (for example, schizophrenia, paranoia, bipolar disorder, paraphiliae, etc.), that could undermine the discretion of judgment of a person and, consequently, his ability to assume the obligations of the vocation and of the ministry' (*Gift* 191).

727. In an atmosphere of mutual trust and openness that is essential to the process of vocational discernment, candidates to Salesian life must inform the one in charge of the prenovitiate or the provincial himself about any past psychological problems and therapy received (*Gift* 193).

The role of the individual

Consent

728. Recourse to experts in the psychological sciences can be carried out only when the person concerned has given 'his previous, informed and free consent, in writing.' On the other hand, a candidate or confrere in initial formation 'cannot impose his own personal conditions, but must accept with humility and gratitude the norms and the conditions that the Church herself places, on the part of her responsibility' (*Gift* 194).

It is recommended that formators speak appropriately about the need for psychological testing and accompaniment from the very beginning of the process of discernment,

so that candidates are well aware of the implications and requirements – such as the one presented here about consent – and that they do not come as a surprise once the path has been embarked upon.

Choice of specialist

729. To protect his privacy, ‘the candidate will be able freely to approach an expert who is either chosen from among those indicated by the formators, or chosen by the candidate himself and accepted by the formators. According to the possibilities, the candidates should be guaranteed a free choice among various experts who possess the requisites indicated’ (*Gift* 194). Such freedom is a prerequisite for any psychological-therapeutic accompaniment, otherwise the whole process risks being thwarted.

Communication of the results

730. The results of the psychological examination are communicated only to the candidate and to those authorized to receive this information, by reason of office and with the previous written consent of the candidate. In accordance with his evaluation and competence, the expert will indicate foreseeable possibilities as regards the growth of the candidate’s personality, also suggesting, if necessary, forms or ways of psychological support.

Those authorized to receive information from the expert are the provincial of the formation house to which the candidate belongs, the candidate’s own provincial, the rector of the formation house, and the novice director or rector of the next phase of formation. The candidate is invited to communicate the results also with his spiritual guide.

Each province or group of provinces will establish the way psychological evaluations are carried out and how long the relevant documentation is to be conserved (*Gift* 195–196).

10. Notes

¹ See C 2, 23, 105, 117, 119.

² ChV 287; FSDB 336.

³ *Epistolario di Don Bosco*, ed. EUGENIO CERIA (Torino: SEI, 1959) IV:209.

⁴ AGC 438 82–83, 86.

⁵ Can. 127 §3 cited in AnGC p. 217, with note 3: ‘On the basis of this norm, abstention is not legitimate.’

⁶ See FSDB 707–712.

⁷ See details in ‘Nota della Penitenzieria Apostolica sull’importanza del foro interno e l’inviolabilità del sigillo sacramentale’, 29 June 2019, section 1: Sigillo sacramentale.

⁸ ‘Nota’ section 2.

⁹ In addition, the Instruction *Sanctorum Mater* (2007) prohibits not only confessors but also spiritual directors from giving their testimony regarding what they have learned in the forum of conscience outside of confession (‘Nota’ section 2).

¹⁰ See the *Manuale del direttore* di don Albera 131; *Il direttore salesiano* (1986) 264; GC19 ch. VIII 11; AnGC 74.

¹¹ We remember that every person has the right to safeguard his or her good reputation. This is associated with respect for privacy which is increasingly protected in civil law and also in canon law: ‘No one is permitted to harm illegitimately the good reputation which a person possesses nor to injure the right of any person to protect his or her own privacy’ (can. 220).

¹² This discernment will always involve a tension between respecting the sacredness of each one’s conscience and safeguarding the good of the Congregation and the Church. At the same time, we must also recognize that the law will never be able to encompass all the variables presented by real life. The roots of the term ‘jurisprudence’ and ‘jurisdiction’ indicate, in fact, this constant need for mediation and discernment in order to say what is right (*juris-prudentia*, *juris-dicere*) by drawing inspiration from the norm and evaluating the situation being confronted in all its concreteness. See AGC 438 77.

¹³ CCE, *Guidelines for the use of psychology* (2008) 3–4.

¹⁴ See below, chapter 11 Criteria for Discernment.

¹⁵ CCE, *Guidelines for the use of psychology* (2008) 5 and 14 (regarding spiritual guides).

¹⁶ Cf. CCE, *Guidelines for the use of psychology* (2008) 6 and *Gift* 192.

¹⁷ Cf. CCE, *Guidelines for the use of psychology* (2008) 6.

¹⁸ In the climate of mutual trust and openness of heart that should characterize the occasion of request for admission to the novitiate, the prenovice is requested to make any previous psychological problems known to the provincial and the rector of the prenovitiate – including attempted suicide, homicide or collaboration in abortion – as well as if he has had recourse to periods of therapy. These will then be elements to be evaluated together with the other qualities required. In any case, it will be convenient for a psychological evaluation to be carried out before admission to the novitiate and at a later time, when this seems useful to the formation directors. See *Gift* 193, and *Guidelines for the use of psychology* (2008) 1.

**‘Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.’
(Rom 12:2)**

Criteria and signs for discernment

Lectio

In Romans 12, Paul presents an exhortation: seek the best in yourself to be pleasing to God and to people. The proposed verse offers three beautifully linked sentences. The first sentence is a negation with the verb in the imperative mood (– συσχηματίζω, *syschēmatidsō*, is a compound of the preposition *syn* + *schēmatidsō*, which gives us the verb *con-form*). Christians should not conform to the things of this age (world), which do not help them to live life in Christ intensely.

Hence, they must ‘know’ which people and realities of this world connote malice. The second sentence is also presented in the passive imperative (– μεταμορφόω, *metamorphoō* – also a compound verb *meta+morphoō*, to change form, to transform, to transfigure). The follower of the Gospel cannot, by his own strength, bring about the renewal (ἀνακαίνωσις – *anakainōsis*, renewal, in the sense that something becomes new in its entirety) of the mind – the νόος *nóos*, the highest part of the human spirit, comparable to the biblical term ‘heart’; in order to be transformed in the mind, he first needs the Inner Teacher who instructs the disciple in the evangelical values that lead to the most vital choices, and he needs the brothers of the community, who are indispensable because in charity they promote the most authentic values for the faithful following of Jesus. The third

sentence is in the infinitive, which marks the purpose of the two preceding sentences. The disciple is now in a position to ‘discern’ (– δοκιμάζω *diokimadsō*, ‘to test to see if something is *dokimos*, that is, acceptable’) what his calling is to do God’s will, which consists in following the highest path in which the human conscience undergoes various trials until it reaches the point where one can ‘*be perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect*’ (Mt 5:48).

Meditatio

Someone who considers following Jesus in a consecrated lifestyle, in this case the Salesian lifestyle, knows that they must leave behind very good things as well as those things that hinder Christian life and therefore consecrated life. Not ‘conforming’ to realities and people that hinder a life dedicated to Jesus Christ and the Salesian mission is a very challenging task. From the beginning, one must develop a response that allows one to live freely. This life of freedom involves the arduous task of allowing oneself to be transformed in one’s mind by the Gospel and by the brothers who walk this path. To make a new mind according to Jesus Christ is to recover the original state of bliss. In this development of making a ‘new mind’, the disciple discovers the purpose of his calling, which is to discern God’s will for his life. The question always arises: is this the path that God wants for me? The answer is found in the extent to which what is good, pleasing, and perfect becomes a full and happy life. It should not be forgotten that this is a process of ongoing growth which at times may be clear and at other times obscure. The challenge is to strengthen one’s faith in charity, which seeks in hope the promise of a faithful God.

Octavio Peveraro, ARN



11. Criteria and signs for discernment

11.1 DEFINITION AND TYPES OF CRITERIA

Criteria for discernment

731. *Vocational discernment* involves grasping the signs in a person's life that enable his vocation to be known: the direction in which it is leading, the suitability for living it, the desire to live it.

The criteria for discernment are points of reference that allow one to pick up signs that are consonant or discordant with respect to a specific vocation, and of the suitability of responding to it. One can speak of *positive criteria or requirements*, and of *negative criteria or counter-indications*.

Positive criteria

732. *The positive criteria or requirements* enable one to identify the conditions, dispositions, aptitudes necessary for establishing vocational suitability proportionate to the age and commitment involved. These qualities may be physical, intellectual and moral, and may be either of nature or of grace. In greater detail one can speak of:

- *positive but non-specific criteria*: the fundamental elements that indicate basic suitability but whose presence does not by itself provide an unambiguous sign of God's call. They indicate that the personality and the character of the candidate could sustain the Salesian vocation but not necessarily that this is really the vocational option of the person concerned.
- *positive and specific criteria*: these refer to the most characteristic and indispensable sign, the right intention. They converge on indicating a genuine interest in and inclination for the Salesian mission, a real spiritual motivation, and above all the concrete ability to make a personal decision for Christ in the Congregation.

Negative criteria or counter-indications

733. *Negative criteria or counter-indications* help identify situations and attitudes that raise questions or doubts regarding vocational suitability or rule out the possibility of the Salesian consecrated life.

Absolute counter-indications are linked to situations which radically contradict vocational suitability.

Relative counter-indications are those that offer some possibility of change and recovery, for example, situations that denote a certain affective immaturity but still leave room for a well-founded hope that they can be overcome within a timeframe that does not compromise the process of vocational growth.

734. In the area of counter-indications there is a whole range of situations before which one is doubtful and perplexed. It is therefore necessary to assess the degree of compatibility between the counter-indication and a sufficiently serene Salesian life capable of responding positively to the demands of the mission. In some cases, one finds oneself faced with situations that need to be examined and understood with the help of experts and specialists.

The criteria indicated by the Church and the Congregation are the result of reflection on the significance of certain features. They are drawn from the centuries-old experience in the Church and authentic Salesian tradition, and are supported by doctrinal principles and the findings of the human sciences.

Some requirements and counter-indications are laid down by the Code of Canon Law, or are found in the Constitutions and General Regulations, and as such must be accepted and applied: these are *norms of a juridical nature*.

Others are not expressly codified but arise from experience, science and prudence, both on the part of the competent authority (found in ecclesiastical documents or in the *Acts of the General Council*) and on the part of whoever is called to take decisions: these are *indications of a prudential nature*.

11.2 APPLYING THE CRITERIA

Situation and conditions

735. The application of the discernment criteria which are now being described needs to take into account the situation and conditions indicated in the previous chapter:

- knowing how to distinguish between criteria regarding basic suitability and criteria of growth and maturity, allowing for the progressive nature of the formation process.
- evaluating the different elements in the individual as a whole, and not as a set of separate circumstances.
- responsibly ensuring the conditions required for a genuine and positive vocational experience without deluding oneself or being deceived, and not forgetting that the uniqueness of each person flourishes when one lives the Salesian vocation intensely, enriched by the variety of personal characteristics and gifts that each one brings.

From this point of view, one will understand that the purpose of presenting positive aspects or requirements is not so much to present an ideal picture of what is expected of those who enter the Congregation, but to shed light on those constituent aspects of suitability and aptitudes that could be called fundamental and characteristic. In addition to these, other elements are also included, whose presence is not necessary and which do not in themselves constitute a requirement, but can enrich and influence the development of a person as a Salesian.

Positive indications of suitability

736. The Constitutions state that for ‘admission to the novitiate, to temporary or perpetual profession, to the ministries and to holy orders... the superiors base their judgment on *positive indications of the candidate’s suitability*’ (C 108).

The absence of counter-indications is not a sufficient criterion for admission. It is necessary to verify the presence of the required characteristics in the candidate¹ and this

judgment must reach the level of moral certitude.² If doubt prevails and positive signs are not clearly perceived, it is better not to proceed with admission.

Other considerations

737. The requirements and counter-indications should be considered in relation to the formation phase the candidate is in, and also in relation to his age and level of maturity.

Particular attention should be paid to the situation of candidates who come with a longer experience of life and often also of work. The examination of the personality should be carried out carefully, avoiding being carried away by haste or arriving at the admission without sufficient evaluation.

While at the beginning of a particular phase of formation it may be sufficient to ascertain the concrete possibilities of the individual's vocational development for the journey that lies ahead, at the end of that phase or at the time of vocational transition (professions, ministries, ordinations), we need to verify that the candidate has developed the qualities and maturity corresponding to that stage of the journey, albeit with the pedagogical gradualness that is always present in growth processes.

For candidates with good overall prospects but with some as yet unresolved difficulties, or who are passing through disturbed periods, the possibility of postponing the admission while waiting for the anticipated growth in maturity should be prudently examined, and a personalized process worked out, keeping in mind, however, what has been said regarding extensions of time (FSDB 597, 610).

Personal issues and environment

738. In the process of discernment, we need to bear in mind the possible relationship between the emergence or disappearance of certain issues and the particular circumstances of the environment. Certain counter-indications may temporarily disappear in the presence of new, atypical or somewhat artificial conditions or intense positive stimulation. Problems apparently

overcome tend to re-emerge when the individuals are put under pressure or experience loneliness.

The novitiate, for example, can induce an atmosphere of strong spiritual and ascetic tension, without producing a personal and deliberate response on the part of the candidate. Similarly in practical training or some other phase of deep involvement in Salesian activity, the positive energy experienced could bring out the best in the person, so that certain previous issues might no longer be as disturbing as they once were.

It would be wise not to interrupt any path of healing integration. External conditions can change and become very challenging again, and what has remained unfinished can then return in heavy, difficult and frustrating forms. Commitment, patience and realism are needed to take care of oneself and to continue the journey of conversion and growth.

Discernment regarding relative counter-indications

739. The presence of *relative counter-indications* should be prudently evaluated. The recognition of the presence of only one relative counter-indication cannot be sufficient reason to form a negative judgment regarding the journey of vocational discernment and growth. On the other hand, if such a counter-indication is not sufficiently integrated into the personality, or if there is a convergence of several different counter-indications or of some particularly serious ones, the resulting situation could indicate a level of maturity quite insufficient for the vocational journey or the step one intends to take.

Assessment of overall growth

740. In practice, it is not possible to draw up an accurate list of every single aspect of Salesian maturity to be verified at each phase of formation. It is, however, possible and necessary to evaluate the candidate's growth journey as a whole. The main areas that characterize living as a Salesian serve as focal points that together provide an overall picture that allows recognition of progress and suitability.

More than the results, what counts is the candidate's

openness to growth, and the courage to see the aspects that hinder growth and demand processes of healing and integration.

In any case, faced with a systematic lack of growth in some significant area, those concerned with formation should assess the actual possibility of vocational success.

Discernment must lead to a positive attestation of the qualities and characteristics that show consonance and suitability for Salesian life. Even in the absence of counter-indications, the lack of positive elements proving the candidate's suitability indicates that one should not proceed to admission. The first responsibility of those who accompany these processes is to serve the charism, ensuring that the conditions for a genuine Salesian vocational experience. This is the greatest good for those who embark on this journey, for young people, for the Congregation, for the Church.

11.3 AREAS OF DISCERNMENT

741. Bearing in mind the dimensions of formation proposed earlier in chapter 4, we indicate here the elements constituting the suitability of a candidate for the Salesian vocation, pointing out the positive aspects and requirements to be considered, and the difficulties and counter-indications to be evaluated. These constitute the parameters of discernment.

Even if, for practical reasons, the dimensions are presented separately and successively, discernment takes place to the extent that the one carrying it out is capable of making the connections and recognising the mutual influence between them. In fact, the dimensions are not separate, they are interdependent. A coherent perception that considers the different aspects in an integrated manner is therefore necessary.

Each life story must be considered in its uniqueness. Vocational aptitudes manifest themselves in a concrete individual and hence are of value only when considered within the overall picture grasped when looking at each face and each name.

Human and fraternal dimension

Physical health

742. The Salesian style of life and action calls for good health and physical resistance; it has its fair share of sacrifice and is demanding. Being in good health also contributes to harmony between the different dimensions of the individual.

Absolute medical counter-indications

743. *Absolute medical counter-indications of a physiological nature* are linked to serious symptoms that could prejudice community life and the carrying out of the apostolate:

- Serious chronic ailments.
- Chronic ailments which, although cured, might have left considerable debilitating after-effects.
- Serious or total physical disabilities, insofar as they hinder the normal carrying out of Salesian educative and pastoral activity.

HIV/AIDS

744. Given the nature of the Salesian mission, being a carrier of HIV or suffering from AIDS³ is an absolute counter-indication. Hence, in accordance with local legislation, it is necessary to require an HIV test before admission to the prenovitiate. This should be carried out with the necessary prudence and with the necessary preparation of the candidate.

Can. 656 no. 4 is to be applied if a confrere contracts HIV through his own fault during the period of temporary profession, does not duly notify the competent authority, and is thus guilty of deceit.

Relative medical counter-indications

745. *Relative counter-indications* are partial physical disabilities that need to be considered in the context of the candidate's personality, and of the awareness of possible consequences for the individual in the surroundings in which he lives (inferiority complex, fear of the judgment

of young people, or alternatively, unaffected acceptance, spontaneity, serenity).

Apparently slight disorders

746. In addition, attention should be given to apparently slight disorders that are, however, unresponsive to medical treatment, such as persistent headaches, insomnia, constant and disproportionate tiredness, and all the manifestations of hypochondria. These are often symptoms of difficult situations and conflicts that do not always have solutions within the normal framework of consecrated life.

In such cases, it is necessary to get to the root of the problem and not be content with external appearances. Before a definitive admission it is necessary to observe, the significance, the consequences and the overcoming of such conditions. The opinion of a doctor who has practical knowledge of our life should be sought.

Habitual substance abuse

747. Habitual abuse of substances that alter the psyche (like drugs and alcohol) in the past life of a candidate is a counter-indication in so far as the dynamics that led to these experiences are generally linked to serious personality problems. It is possible that the effects of abuse have not yet manifested themselves, but the dynamics that caused them need to have been overcome.

Occasional use of such substances needs to be evaluated in the context of the candidate's total personality and the time that has elapsed since those incidents. Our work with young people calls for the assurance of a good equilibrium in this area, and therefore at the moment of admission solid evidence should be sought that a proper process of growth and healing in this area has actually occurred, as an indispensable condition for moving forward in the Salesian life.

Medical and psychological tests

748. During the prenovitiate there should be a *medical check-up* and a *psychological examination* that certify

general good health, the absence of the physical problems mentioned among the counter-indications, and psychological health. Any documentation relating to illnesses, operations undergone or specific medical or therapeutic treatments that have been necessary in the past should also be collected.⁴

Family background

749. In the discernment process, the *impact of experiences in the family* on the human development of the candidate needs to be carefully considered, to ascertain the way in which these experiences have influenced his human and spiritual growth.

A wholesome family atmosphere that upholds family values and encourages autonomous development, good relationships, open communication and education in human and Christian values, is helpful to vocational development.

Other family situations, such as an environment that devalues the person and is characterized by conflicts, separations, health problems, economic difficulties, could have a negative impact on personality development. Alcoholism in the family, for example, can have serious effects, often translating into negative attitudes towards authority. The important thing is to assess how the candidate has dealt with these challenges and acquired the maturity necessary to live his vocation in truth and serenity.

In any case, careful and personalized discernment is required, avoiding hasty judgments based solely on the family situation. Accompaniment must help the candidate reread his personal history with lucidity and position himself responsibly in the face of his call.

Psychological balance and relationship skills

Positive aspects and requirements to be considered

Psychological balance and relationship skills

750. Psychological balance and good relationship skills are essential requirements for the Salesian vocation. They can be considered to be present when the individual shows

proof of emotional equilibrium, ability to choose freely, openness to others, signs of a genuine capacity to love.

Emotional balance is manifested in various ways, among them an increasingly open attitude towards one's internal and external experience without distortion or denial, tolerance of frustration (knowing how to deal with one's own mistakes or those of others with a certain equanimity), a daily life free of rigidity or disproportionately extreme reactions (such as violent expressions of anger and physical violence), stability of mind even in moments of difficulty. Someone who has acquired such an equilibrium shows himself to be increasingly flexible, creative and optimistic, and maintains a basic self-control. Some attitudes such as self-centredness or lying (e.g. about one's university degrees) hide issues that need to be recognized and addressed.

Ability to make free choices

751. Ability to make free choices in the light of motives that are genuine and coherent with one's state of life. This presupposes:

- A. Sufficient internal and external psychological autonomy that makes the person independent of outside pressure and inwardly free, so as to be able to place his gifts at the service of the life project one has chosen.
- B. The ability to take initiatives that are thought out and coherent, making good use of freedom and accepting responsibility for the choices made. This presupposes an active, creative and persevering attitude that is not discouraged by difficulties.
- C. A correct perception of one's own worth, limits, emotions, impulses and tendencies, and at the same time a healthy self-confidence.
- D. An ability to make sacrifices, even great ones, when one's own responsibilities, the needs of others, or educative and pastoral service are at stake, without giving way to frustration.
- E. Inner freedom where one's family is concerned.

Openness to others

752. ‘Openness to others’ sums up a whole series of attitudes that have as their common denominator the ability to relate to others on an adult level, free from infantile dependency or rebellion. This implies:

- A. Knowing how to communicate: the art of conversation; openness to other people; capacity for sympathy and for establishing and maintaining relationships; considered judgment regarding the opinions of others; the ability to overcome prejudices and excessive emotional reactions.
- B. Knowing how to listen and to dialogue, in order to promote good human relationships, build community and contribute to the common good.
- C. The ability to open oneself: knowing how to express oneself and state one’s position, overcoming excessive reserve; knowing how to accept formative accompaniment.
- D. The ability to build and cultivate healthy friendships.
- E. A sense of belonging, through which the individual sees himself as an active member of a community, willingly and realistically accepting it and participating with conviction and dedication in its mission.
- F. Collaboration: knowing how to work with everyone out of conviction and a sense of duty, in a spirit of sharing and of acceptance of authority.
- G. Working in a team: the ability to know how to work ‘with’ and ‘for’ others within a common project. One who is growing in this area accepts being challenged, respects the opinion of others, shows loyalty in carrying out common decisions even when they are contrary to his own point of view.

Capacity for true personal love

753. Capacity for true personal love that is expressed through:

- A. Familiarity, respect, concern, friendliness towards those with whom one lives.
- B. Unconditional acceptance of and respect for everyone, overcoming rigid and defensive attitudes, genuinely

giving of oneself, showing special concern for those most in need.

- C. A mature affectivity that unifies and directs the individual's energies in practical and significant ways: unselfish and creative service in the community and in the educative and pastoral mission; openness towards others.
- D. The ability to form and cultivate friendships.
- E. Knowing how to take the first step towards others; the ability to forgive.
- F. Knowing how to accept genuine expressions of affection, the ability to 'make oneself loved' according to the style of the Preventive System; knowing how to gratuitously show affection in the context of the community and the educative mission.

Difficulties and counter-indications to be evaluated

Absolute counter-indications

754. Psychological and relational counter-indications must be identified and addressed with particular care. We are dealing with *absolute counter-indications* when faced with personality disorders that reach the level of serious psychopathology.⁵ A careful and professional evaluation is essential to determine whether certain personality traits, present in pronounced form, constitute personality disorders – recurring patterns in inner experience and external behaviour that make a person unsuited for Salesian life.

Counter-indications that may be absolute or relative

755. Certain signs of immaturity in the area of *relationships* make it very doubtful that the candidate has the necessary qualities to be a Salesian. The following attitudes or habits can be considered *absolute or relative counter-indications*, depending on the extent of their influence within the individual's overall experience and how deep-seated they are:

- A. An idealised conception of oneself and a lack of self-criticism; excessive care of oneself and one's physical appearance, or else an exaggerated distrust

11. Criteria and signs for discernment

- of oneself; an excessive need for attention, or, conversely, a fear of drawing attention to oneself out of a tendency to avoidance in the face of changing or challenging situations.
- B. Being habitually closed towards others, lacking in contact with and understanding of others; insensitivity to one's own surroundings, both social and ecclesial.
 - C. Habitual lack of sincerity and openness, and failure to keep one's word; inconsistency between words and deeds.
 - D. Lack of openness and a willingness to learn, a habit of non-conformity, a constant attitude of confrontation, a 'contradictory spirit,' an excessive tendency to independence; or else, an excessive dependence on the surroundings, family, group, or on other people.
 - E. Notable difficulty in relating to the group or to the wider world of young people; the inability to forge an educative relationship.
 - F. Resistance to working in teams and collaborating loyally; the inability to take responsibility and carry out projects; individualism in thought and action; the lack of a sense of friendship.
 - G. Persistent aberrations and lack of self-control; verbal aggression and physical or psychological violence; lack of balance and exaggerations that are characteristic of people who are excessively mortified, with a purely external virtue that does not spring from a sincere love of the good and of others but may be the result of internal compulsions, mostly unconscious, stemming from fear.
 - H. A possessive attitude towards people and things; envy, jealousy; an abnormal attitude towards material possessions, characterized by an excessive need for them and a lack of understanding of their use as means to an end.
 - I. Indulging in spiritual abuse that uses faith, religion, or spiritual beliefs to exert control over, manipulate, and harm individuals, with harmful effects on their well-being, sense of self and relationship with God.

Affective and sexual maturity

General guidelines for discernment

756. The area of sexual and affective maturity has a profound influence on the development of religious life in general and the practice of consecrated chastity in particular. To make a discernment about the sexual and affective maturity of an individual and the consequent suitability for Salesian religious life and consecrated chastity requires a complex discernment process that considers three aspects at some depth: the personality structure and life experience; comparison between the personal characteristics and the charism of the Congregation; and the setting in which the Salesian mission to youth is carried out.

Overall personality structure and the experience of life

757. First, discernment regarding sexual and affective maturity considers the overall personality structure and the experience of life as a whole. Elements to be taken into account are temperament, the affective element in family relationships, childhood experiences, inner strength and determination, motivations, the handling of guilt feelings, the approach to prayer and the spiritual life; the steps taken and the results obtained.

Serenity and equilibrium in the candidate augurs well for a positive judgment. On the other hand, psychological disorders, moral weakness over a period of time, actual light-headed behaviour with other people (men, women, young people) and anxiety or scruples, raise serious questions about the real possibility of a positive outcome regarding the vocational journey. Other negative indicators are selfishness, a closing in on oneself, a habit of daydreaming, the avoidance of everyday tasks, the search for immediate satisfaction, a tendency to isolate oneself instead of making contacts, the fear that prevents plans from being implemented.

Often, failures in the area of chastity indicate not so much a sexual problem as a much deeper personality problem. In fact, sexual and affective disorders can be

the tip of the iceberg of personal disturbances.

It is also true that many personal disorders, such as possessiveness, harshness in judging or the taking of extreme positions, and also certain unusual forms of spirituality, are not infrequently only the external manifestations of sexual-affective repression or defects.

Therefore, in this area, it is essential to seek the underlying motivations behind a person's lifestyle and history. In this way a fruitful path of growth can be worked out, starting with a realistic acceptance of one's situation.

Compatibility with the Salesian project of life

758. Second, discernment compares the personality structure and life experience with the project of life of the Salesians of Don Bosco. The Salesian consecrated identity is the fundamental formation criterion for one who wishes to enter the Congregation.

It is important to ascertain that candidates have a clear sexual identification and the sexual and affective maturity necessary for living the Salesian vocation with serenity and coherence. These are essential conditions for one who is called to live a chaste life in the educative mission and to express it in the style of the Preventive System, which is based on loving kindness and openness.

Past weaknesses as well as particular personal inclinations and habits can, in fact, obstruct the full adoption of Salesian vocational values, and hence deserve special attention. Often, at the time of the request to enter, candidates themselves might hardly be aware of the real significance of their previous experiences or of certain persistent habits and deep-seated tendencies for the vocational journey.

On the other hand, as the Constitutions point out, 'the educational and pastoral demands of our mission and the fact that the observance of perfect continence touches some of the deepest drives of human nature, require of the Salesian psychological balance and affective maturity. Don Bosco used to warn: Whoever has not a well-grounded hope of being able, with divine help, to preserve the virtue of chastity in word, in deed

and in thought, should not make profession in this Society, for he would often find himself in danger' (C 82).

The context of the Salesian mission

759. Third, in discernment attention is given to the setting in which the Salesian must carry out his mission. In fact, the context of the education of youth and pastoral relationships presents special requirements in the area of sexual and affective maturity. The ability to live with ease and operate in mixed environments, interacting with men and women, boys and girls, must be verified. At the same time, it must be borne in mind that a Salesian's experience takes place in male communities and that boys and young men are those to whom the mission of the Congregation is principally directed (R 3).

In some contexts marked by moral degradation, not a few young men may have been exposed to early sexual experiences in a promiscuous environment.

Difficulties and counter-indications to be evaluated

760. In the area of sexual and affective maturity, we need to *ascertain in the personality and in the previous experience* of the individual the existence of situations or factors that could raise problems from the point of view of formation, or could be considered counter-indications from the vocational standpoint.

Certain situations, even though not constituting absolute counter-indications in the judgment of the Church, need to be evaluated in themselves and also in relation to future commitments, since they may reveal an inability to live the Salesian life in a correct and fruitful way.

It will be the task of discernment, with the help of specialist assistance when necessary, to clarify whether such situations or conditions can be changed by the formation experience or by psychotherapeutic measures, so as to make it possible to meet vocational requirements and the integration of sexuality with regard to Salesian consecrated chastity.

Counter-indications that may be either relative or absolute

Different personal situations and attitudes

761. In the area of sexual and affective maturity, the following situations should be considered as either *relative or absolute counter-indications, depending on whether or not they can be overcome, and whether the candidate can attain that level of personal integration and basic human and Christian maturity that is needed for a fruitful journey of growth within Salesian life:*

- A. Certain closed and insensitive temperaments, very self-controlled and extremely harsh in their judgments of others; often linked to internal mechanisms of repression.
- B. A habitual over-sensitivity that is constantly in need of giving and receiving signs of affection; excessive affective attachments.
- C. Heightened sensuality manifested in different ways, such as excessive sexual interest, unhealthy introspection, gluttony and extreme laziness.
- D. Contempt or fear of what is connected with sexuality, or on the contrary, excessive attraction and interest.
- E. Sexual tendencies that are not controlled and are inclined to accept, or worse, create, imprudent and risky situations with others.

Experiences prior to beginning the formation process

762. Experiences prior to the choice to begin the journey towards Salesian life always have an impact on the path to follow, and this is particularly true in the case of extra-conjugal complete sexual acts. The seriousness of the path of discernment and accompaniment, first and foremost for the good of the candidate himself, implies a serene and serious evaluation, of the impact that this experience has had and possibly continues to have, and how it can be integrated into the new course towards which one is now moving, that of consecrated chastity lived as a Salesian. This process calls for great trust, transparency and the utmost respect for confidentiality:

- A. Knowledge of the person's overall background and strengths, and the influence of the experiences in question on the person at the present moment in his journey.
- B. Recognition of the openness on these issues with those who are accompanying the person.
- C. The significant factors in accompanying, discerning and evaluating the path of integration between past and present toward the life project one intends to follow: the spirit of faith expressed in personal and communal prayer; perseverance in the commitments of common life and mission, even when they involve sacrifices and renunciations; and the strengthening of motivations, in growing harmony with the Salesian charism.
- D. The time factor that plays a significant role in determining the impact of experiences in the sexual realm. The duration, frequency and time elapsed between the last of these events and the present, all of these must be considered carefully. Likewise, the outcome of commitments made in this area in relation to the Salesian vocational choice is very important: since when, for how long, how one has remained faithful to them. The way of living these commitments becomes an indication of the future, which should not be naively imagined as free of trials and difficulties. Looking ahead, a healthy realism is necessary, primarily for the person's own good.
- E. What has been said so far becomes even more relevant for adult candidates. The path of spiritual accompaniment and discernment must be given all the time needed and must never be hurried for reasons of age. If the sexual experience involves events and situations with a particularly strong impact on the person and implications for a future Salesian life, the person accompanying must ask that the candidate discuss this also in the external forum with those responsible for the process of discernment.

The phenomenon of masturbation

763. Sexuality is a fundamental element of personality, one of its modes of being, of expressing oneself, of communicating with others, of feeling, expressing and living human love. In an integrated and broad vision of sexuality, in accordance with the values of Christian anthropology and the indications of Catholic morality, the practice of masturbation, in and of itself, does not correspond to a harmonious experience of one's sexuality. The significance and import of this experience, like any other, depend on the circumstances, awareness, age, and the degree of inner freedom of the person involved. It is important to understand, from this point of view, that adolescence is a particular stage of life in which this phenomenon may appear as an expression of the challenging journey toward maturity, and often as a reflection of the inner conflicts typical of that age.

From the moral point of view, great prudence is required in order to establish a person's subjective responsibility (CCC 2352). Given the difficulty in providing objective norms that are universally applicable, personalizing the journey of growth and accompaniment becomes the most effective approach to follow.

764. Some elements for evaluating and discerning, accompanying and instituting paths of growth could be:

- A. Certain factors affect this phenomenon and the possibility of its gradual overcoming, especially when it tends to become compulsive. These include the human qualities and strengths of the individual; sexual and affective maturity shown in other ways; the quality of spiritual life and openness to personal accompaniment; responsibility in assuming the growth commitments typical of the age, role and phase of vocational development.
- B. Masturbation is often a symptom of something deeper, and the help offered is all the more effective the more one is able to trace the underlying causes or forces. These commonly include frustrations related to tensions, humiliation, fears, personal dissatisfaction, and difficulties in relationships. If

there is a tendency towards isolation, these internal pressures become even stronger. The masturbatory phenomenon thus becomes a way of discharging anxiety and tension, escaping the discomfort of loneliness, compensation for frustrations, or even a spontaneous reaction to physiological changes that occur beyond the person's control.

C. Undoubtedly, the intensity and frequency of the phenomenon, as well as the way the person deals with it, have significance and therefore relevance in the process of accompaniment and discernment.

765. The more one arrives at an overall vision of the journey that the one being accompanied is making, the more the evaluation of certain sexually related behaviours can be of help, looking not only at the immediate but also at possible future developments.

Another aspect that should capture the attention of those accompanying vocational discernment and growth is a complete absence of this phenomenon, whether during adolescence or in later stages. This cannot be considered a sign or guarantee of maturity or absence of issues. Rather, it may indicate rigidity or else an overly detached approach to situations and people.

The approach to masturbation requires compassion, prudence and an individualized evaluation. The objective is to accompany candidates towards an affective and spiritual maturity that enables them to live their vocation to Salesian consecrated life with authenticity, freedom and serenity.

Addictions of different kinds

766. An area that requires great sensitivity and attention is the digital habitat. Besides its undoubted benefits, the digital world may unfortunately have also a major negative impact, especially on the sexual and affective maturity and lifestyle of people at every age, especially when it leads to addiction and creates dependence (ChV 74, 86–90). Addictions to digitally based gambling, gaming and pornography are damaging not only to the subject but also to others, and not easy to overcome.

No less harmful and incompatible with a path towards Salesian life are contacts and ties with the world of the occult.

When one of these addictions is present, it constitutes a counter-indication for beginning the Salesian vocational journey.

767. Pornography is a major challenge to our educative and pastoral commitment, since it gradually leads to a distorted and oversexualized perception of other people (ChV 90; CCC 2354), especially the young, perceived, even unconsciously, as objects of satisfaction, dangerously creating preconditions for manipulation and abuse. Besides visual, verbal and audio pornography, digital technology now makes possible other forms. Digital pornography is highly addictive, not only because it creates a pleasurable feeling that draws users on, but also because of the ‘triple A’ influence: accessibility, affordability and anonymity. Addiction to pornography is a counter-indication regarding the Salesian vocation.

768. When digital and other addictions emerge during the initial phases of formation, an attentive discernment is carried out and professional help sought. In this type of behaviour, one always evaluates the phenomenon in the context of the whole personality and studies it as a symptom of something deeper. Only when a serious process of healing, clearly desired and thoroughly followed up by the person involved, has resulted in significant recovery, can the possibility of continuing the Salesian vocational journey be considered.

Like the other forms of addiction mentioned above, digital addictions can occur also later in the journey of Salesian life, with no less damage and danger to the person and to the mission. Whatever one’s age or role, everything possible must be done by the community, both local and provincial, to activate processes of healing and support. These are not easy paths to freedom, and they are effective to the extent that those in need are the first to seek help and collaboration.

Absolute counter-indications

769. Some situations, events or habits that of their very nature constitute a *serious and absolute counter-indication* and a clear impediment for the Salesian vocation need to be highlighted *from the very beginning of discernment*.

- A. The fact of having been the *active partner in a situation of pederasty or paedophilia*, or of having assisted in any way in the sexual exploitation of children, adolescents or young people of either sex. Even independently of the actual conduct of the person, the occurrence of such activities in the past (which in many countries is open to criminal proceedings without any time limit, once accusations have been made) is a serious danger to the good of young people, to the practice of our style of consecrated chastity and to the good name of the Congregation and of the Church. In accordance with the legislation of different countries, when it is considered necessary, a request for a 'declaration of innocence' should be made of the candidate with regard to this kind of behaviour.
- B. The possession, downloading, divulcation or any kind of involvement in digital material concerning the sexual exploitation of minors or of persons who habitually have an imperfect use of reason is treated by many codes of civil law and by Canon Law with the same gravity as direct physical involvement with such persons for the same purposes (can. 1398). This must be taken, definitely and without compromise, as an absolute counter-indication.⁶
- C. Acts of incest, violence or sexual abuse committed against others; work or involvement in the field of pornography or immoral shows; the exercise or exploitation of prostitution; conduct that can be considered a form of sexual harassment.
- D. Paraphilia (frotteurism, exhibitionism, voyeurism, masochism, sadism, paedophilia, fetishism, transvestism) and paraphilic disorder.
- E. More or less protracted cohabitation implying sexual activity (can. 695, 1395); separation or divorce (even only in the civil court); sexual contacts with prostitutes;

multiple sexual relationships with different partners (FSDB 815 footnote).

770. The '*peccato grave cum alio/a*' (grave sin against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue, see can. 695 and 1395) *after admission to the Salesian formation process* is an absolute counter-indication, especially if the acts have been repeated with awareness that one is grossly going against public commitments that have been freely undertaken.

Such acts create an interior moral divide marked by the co-existence of parallel contradictory ways of acting (the 'double life') and therefore it is necessary to act strictly according to the norm. If it is a question of a prenovice or a novice, these situations lead to the interruption of his journey towards Salesian life. If the confrere is temporarily or perpetually professed, depending on the seriousness of the situation the provincial may in some cases or is obliged to in others, to initiate the procedure for dismissal (can. 695). In the case of an ordained minister, the case may lead to a request for dispensation from the clerical state, or the initiation of proceedings for dismissal from that state (can. 1395).

A different approach is required for cases of isolated acts, in themselves grave, that have not provoked scandal, being isolated and sometimes resulting from ingenuousness, inexperience or deception. If there is recognition on the part of the one concerned, along with a serious desire to break away from that kind of behaviour and a firm will to change, a serious and careful assessment can lead to the estimation of the possibility of a genuine recovery.

The question of 'gender'

771. While affirming respect for every person, regardless of sexual orientation, and rejecting every sign of unjust discrimination, the Church highlights definite critical issues in gender ideology, among them, that it denies the sexual difference of male and female.⁷

In the light of this, subscribing to gender ideology and efforts to promote it constitute an absolute counter-indication

in the process of Salesian vocational discernment, as also claims to a 'liquid' or flexible sexual identity.

Vocation discernment and homosexuality

Homosexual orientation

772. Here we spell out the criteria that guide Salesian vocation discernment regarding homosexuality.

The way homosexuality is defined varies greatly according to the context of values in which it is understood and the different ideological currents and views of sexual anthropology in which it is framed. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes it in this way: 'Homosexuality refers to relations between men or between women who experience an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction toward persons of the same sex' (CCC 2357).

We need to make a distinction between homosexual impulses (attraction and desire between persons of the same sex), occasional incidents of homosexual behaviour, and a persistent and predominant attraction towards persons of the same sex. There is also a distinction between personal condition / homosexual orientation and homosexual acts or behaviour. Again, homosexuality cannot be regarded as a homogenous condition.

Absolute counter-indications

773. Bearing in mind the demands of the Salesian consecrated life and the mission that is part of it, the absolute counter-indications for suitability involve those who:⁸

- A. have engaged frequently in homosexual behaviour, regardless of whether they perceive themselves as preferentially heterosexual or bisexual, or predominantly / exclusively homosexual.
- B. are not able to control the exercise of sexuality in view of the choice of celibacy, placing themselves in increasing tension and contradiction between their attitudes and behaviour and what is required by the consecration they aspire to.

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- C. promote, support or vindicate gay culture, or harass peers in different ways, including pressure to enter into homosexual relationships.
- D. present deep-seated homosexual tendencies.⁹ The type of community life and mission that one must be ready for when becoming Salesian demands an equilibrium in the affective-sexual sphere that is incompatible with these tendencies.

Candidates with *transitory* homosexual tendencies (experiences linked to age, curiosity or inexperience, e.g. in adolescence) may be admitted to the formation process. They are called to a process of integration whereby what they experience in the psycho-sexual sphere and their adherence to the demands of Salesian life are increasingly harmonized. The tendencies in question are required to have been overcome at least three years before perpetual profession (*Gift* 200).

If a confrere declares publicly that he is homosexual ('coming out'), it would mean that by his own admission he has a deep-seated tendency and would be subject to the provisions set out in can. 696.¹⁰

Discerning between deep-seated and transitory tendencies

774. Formators are faced with the task of distinguishing between homosexual tendencies that are deep-rooted and those that are transitory, and of discerning whether the latter have been overcome. The following considerations could be of help:

- A. The way of living sexuality cannot be isolated from the life of the person as a whole and from the uniqueness of each one's history. The personality as a whole must be kept in mind in order to be able to understand and accompany the process of growth in the area of sexuality. It follows that vocational authenticity is to be discerned, as also in the case of heterosexual persons, not on the basis of any single parameter, but from a consideration of the candidate's personality in all its different dimensions.
- B. Suitability for Salesian consecrated life is always to be evaluated on how the demands of consecration,

community life and mission are being assumed and harmonized in the candidate's growth process.

- C. There is a difference between someone who is willing and open to receiving the help of formators and spiritual guides and one who is not. Vocational discernment presupposes openness on the part of the person, who is called to take part in the process with transparency and trust, welcoming the support of his confessor, spiritual guide or formator (*Gift* 200).
- D. Formators and guides have a precise responsibility to fulfil, each according to his role (*Gift* 200). They are called to accompany each candidate 'at their present stage of freedom' (C 38). They will be attentive to the level of awareness, self-acceptance and the ability to speak about oneself, the degree of responsibility in making choices and being faithful to them, the general equilibrium of the person, his capacity to integrate his sexuality with the demands of the Salesian religious vocation. If the person is able to control the exercise of sexuality, he can go ahead in his vocation. If, on the contrary, the urges to exercise homosexuality prevail, it follows that he is unsuitable for the Salesian consecrated vocation (in the same way as a heterosexual person who cannot control the exercise of his sexuality).
- E. One understands the importance of evaluating carefully, also with the help of people competent in the field of mental health, how the candidate functions, how he behaves in relationships with men and with women, in the community and outside the community, how he lives and manages the burden of sexual and affective loneliness.¹¹ Knowing how to interpose adequate time and reflection between desire/impulse and concrete action is an important aspect of adult maturity, whereas affective instability and impulsiveness are considered prime traits of certain personality disorders (*DSM-5*).
- F. If, after a careful analysis of the formation journey, the doubt remains that the person may not be able to correspond to the requirements of the Salesian vocation, he should not be admitted.¹²

Victims of abuse

775. When someone who suffered some form of sexual abuse as a minor shows interest in the Salesian life, or when one who has already begun the journey of initial formation remembers such abuse and begins to share it in confidence with those who accompany his process of growth, the first attitude is the one the Church has decisively taken in its universal magisterium and in the consequent action: respect, solidarity, support for the victim, safeguard for the right to privacy and confidentiality, and adoption of those measures required by ecclesiastical and civil law when the case demands such a response.

Concerning the accompaniment for vocational discernment and growth, concern for the present and future condition of the person is the leading factor. The integration of the painful experiences of the past in a balanced process of growth is a positive outcome that suggests the possibility of living a Salesian life that is fulfilling for the person concerned and beneficial to the community and to young people. If, on the other hand, there are persistent signs of lack of trust, inability to establish serene relationships, increased distress and pain, and the risk of abuse of others is high (the abused becomes an abuser), it is not appropriate to favour a choice of the Salesian life.

Spiritual dimension

Some aspects to consider

776. We discuss here some attitudes, conditions, situations that allow for the assessment of the spiritual suitability of candidates for Salesian religious life.

We group them around the following central points: Christian life and Salesian features, community life, the evangelical counsels, and signs of a specific vocation.

Christian life and Salesian features

777. With regard to a relationship with Christ and the decision to follow him for the building up of the Kingdom

in accordance with Don Bosco's charism, the following aspects should be assessed and cultivated:

- A. A relationship of friendship and intimacy with the Lord, nourished by the Word of God and by the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation, by liturgical and personal prayer, and by daily contact with young people.
- B. Identification with the *Da mihi animas cetera tolle*, manifested in apostolic zeal towards the young, the readiness to respond to pastoral needs, and a capacity for sacrifice.
- C. Openness to formative and spiritual accompaniment and collaboration in the work of discernment.
- D. A conscious choice and a decision to build one's life around the values of Salesian consecration.
- E. Growth in human and Christian virtues and in the pedagogical and pastoral approaches proper to the Preventive System.
- F. An adequate knowledge of Don Bosco, the Congregation and its spiritual and pedagogical patrimony.
- G. A sense of the Church manifested in pastoral communion, fidelity to the magisterium of the pope and of the universal Church, and involvement in the local Church according to personal capabilities and the charism of the Congregation.

Community life

778. With regard to Salesian community life, besides the elements mentioned in the area of 'capacity for relationships,' we have the following indicators:

- A. A clear reference to the fraternal style Don Bosco wanted in the concreteness of daily life and activity; referring to one's community and to the province when making decisions and plans; a sense of belonging to the Congregation and the Salesian Family.
- B. An attitude of acceptance and cordiality in relationships according to the family spirit; the ability to share one's vocational experience and to attend to the processes and dynamics of living in community.
- C. The ability to build fraternity in the religious community

11. Criteria and signs for discernment

and in the EPC, taking up the community plan with loyalty and generosity and contributing to it with one's gifts.

- D. Showing personal responsibility in carrying out the tasks assigned without the need for constant pressure from outside, using one's gifts and accepting one's limitations.
- E. The ability to exercise and promote shared responsibility in the EPC, welcoming each one, accepting their roles, especially those of leadership.

The evangelical counsels

779. With regard to the evangelical counsels, the following can be considered as indicating suitability for the Salesian life:

- A. A positive attitude in the area of interpersonal relationships; adopting the community project and working with a vision and mentality of collaboration.
- B. A free and serene acceptance of authority in positive openness to obedience, free from either passive dependence or systematic opposition.
- C. The commitment to work in the service of the community, freely putting one's skills, strengths and experience at its disposal, so that the Congregation might fulfil its mission.
- D. A proper Salesian understanding of the relationship between austerity of personal and community life and the quality of equipment and means for effective service.
- E. An effective dependence on the community and the superior, ability to share goods received, moderation in lifestyle and in the use of personal things; a sense of responsibility and care of material things.
- F. The ability to genuinely love the people with whom one is living; to extend preferential love for the young people to whom we are sent, with particular attention to the poorest, less privileged and those in greater difficulty; to live friendship in a serene, mature manner that is consistent with our vocation.
- G. An attitude of prudent and respectful esteem for women, with an uncomplicated attitude of self-control, emotional

poise and a capacity for friendship; natural spontaneity in expressions of affection, in keeping with one's commitment to consecrated life.

Signs of a specific vocation

780. Vocational discernment between the figures of the Salesian brother and the priest starts from a full willingness to accept God's desire for one's life, and first takes into consideration some essential common signs. The more the Salesian charism enters deeply into one's life ('friar or no friar, I will stay with Don Bosco!' – see BM VI:181) the more the specific form to which one feels called within the Salesian vocation becomes a response to God.

It is necessary to give particular attention to one's desire to live the apostolic mission, fraternal community and the practice of the evangelical counsels as inseparable elements of our consecration (C 3), and to do so by contributing the personal talents and gifts that are an integral part of the call of every baptized person in the Church. Without this foundation, the house cannot be built.

Educational mission. Commitment to the educative and pastoral mission is at the centre of every Salesian's life. Brothers and priests are together called to incarnate Don Bosco's Preventive System and to care for the integral growth of the young, especially the poorest and most vulnerable. Witnessing to the Gospel through a life of service lived 'in a single movement of love towards God and towards [their] brothers and sisters' (C 3) is their daily response to the call.

Fraternal community. Community life is a central element for both. Together they participate in building the Salesian community as an evangelical space, promoting solidarity and the growth of the young people and of those who share the mission.

Obedience, poverty and chastity in the Salesian charism: Religious profession marks for each one the beginning of Salesian life and the identity of the consecrated person in the Church. 'The offering of his freedom through obedience, the spirit of evangelical poverty and the love which becomes a gift in chastity, make the Salesian a sign

of the power of the resurrection... they transform him into an educator who proclaims to the young “a new heaven and a new earth,” awakening in them hope and the dedication and joy to which it gives rise’ (C 63).

In the intense consonance with the Salesian spirit lived with growing conviction and dedication, one gradually identifies preferences, accentuations, personal gifts, events and encounters in one’s own history that lead one to assume with ever greater clarity and adhesion of heart one of the two forms, lay or clerical, of the Salesian vocation. It is a gradual process where what counts is not clarity from the start but the intensity of one’s correspondence to what God’s grace never ceases to offer.

It is worth remembering that certain signs orienting us towards the lay or clerical form are specific but not exclusive and will only become clear in the living out of our consecration.

Candidates need sufficient information about the two ways of living our vocation and living contact with Salesian brothers and Salesian priests, in order to be able to perceive Salesian life in all its beauty and charismatic intensity. A guided reading of Don Bosco’s life and the lives of Salesian brothers and priests is of great help in illuminating vocational choices.

Being a Salesian brother: signs and emphases

781. The signs that characterize the life of the Salesian brother derive from his identity as a consecrated person and lay person, in the context of the Salesian charism. Listed below are some aspects that can be illuminating:

- A. *Vocation and consecration in everyday life.* The brother is called to live the religious life in daily life. He is at ease with ordinary people and is close to them, sharing with them ‘the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties’ (GS 1) of their existence.
- B. *Witness to fraternity.* The brother is a witness to human fraternity and is capable of building healthy relationships both inside and outside the community. By his secularity he has the possibility of forging relationships with many who are not close to the life of the Church. His fraternity becomes mission, with

a surprising evangelical fruitfulness. This attitude is embodied in the lives of exemplary figures such as Saint Artemides Zatti and Venerable Simon Srugi.

- C. Social commitment and desire to sanctify the world of work.* The brother is sensitive to social issues, both local and global, and lives the Church's social doctrine with competence and passion. He feels close to the world of work, whatever his professional qualification. He values manual work, collaboration, organization and is available for service. He uses his skills to support young people in their formation. It is a sensitivity that also makes him very close to the lives of families, starting with the simple people to whom the Salesian mission is preferentially addressed.
- D. Catechesis and prophetic ministry.* The brother participates in the prophetic mission of the Church as a consecrated lay person, with a keen interest in catechesis. This is an area of evangelization that many lay people carry out in the Church and which qualifies our Congregation in its origins. The zeal to bring the Gospel to the poorest and most distant has stimulated the inventiveness and creativity of great missionary brothers, paving the way for the birth of new Christian communities. Being at once lay and consecrated, especially in the digital world, opens up formidable opportunities for proclamation for those who, as Salesian brothers, live the apostolic thrust of the *Da mihi animas*.

Living the ordained ministry as a Salesian: signs and emphases

782. The Salesian priest or deacon combines in himself the gifts of Salesian consecration and those of the ordained ministry, but in such a way that his particular manner of being a priest or deacon is shaped by Salesian spirituality and way of life. The following are some signs and emphases that could be illuminating:

- A. Priority of the mission to youth.* Ministry with young people is his main area of action, developed through preaching the Word, catechesis and introducing young people to sacramental, apostolic and missionary life in

the Church. It is an apostolate he lives as a Salesian both in a more formal and organized manner and in many informal spaces and unstructured meetings. Like Don Bosco, we could say that he is a priest everywhere, in the Church as in the playground, an expert in meeting young people where they are to bring them to the Lord rather than waiting for them to come.

- B. *Sensitivity to the educational environment.* He sees his mission as an integral part of the EPC, adapting himself in a spirit of service to the concrete needs of young people. He distances himself from all forms of clericalism. Collaborating with all those who share the mission, starting with the young, and creating synergy and communion is a hallmark of the Salesian way of being a good shepherd. He does this as a priest, helping the community and groups to walk together towards God, father of all, even where the faith is shared explicitly only by few.
- C. *Service of the sacraments.* As a Salesian, he engages in sacramental ministry, offering pastoral service to the community through the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Reconciliation. He offers himself with generosity and competence for the personal accompaniment of young people. Don Bosco the priest is the model of how the Eucharist, Reconciliation, and being a guide for young people should transform the existence of a Salesian ordained minister.
- D. *Love for the Church and adherence to the Magisterium.* He nurtures a sincere love for the Church and adheres to the Magisterium of the Pope and the Bishops, participating in the life of the diocese with availability for the universal mission. The intensity of dedication to the Church and love for the successor of Peter strongly characterized Don Bosco's priesthood.
- E. Today there is an even greater gift and mission that qualifies living the priesthood as Salesians: having a widespread presence in all continents. This makes and asks us to be credible signs of the universality of the Church in a way that is both local and globalized.

Discernment of an *ad gentes* missionary vocation

783. ‘The foreign missions have always been a cherished concern of the Salesian Congregation’, said Don Bosco in a memorandum of 1880 to Pope Leo XIII (BM XIV:501). It was his wish that his Congregation should be truly missionary *ad gentes* (AGC 336 8). The SGC insisted that ‘the missions are an object of general interest to the whole Congregation. Every confrere therefore is in one way or another connected with this work’ (SGC 480).

In the different initial phases of formation, all are encouraged to keep the *missionary spirit* alive as an essential element of our charism.¹³

At least from the postnovitiate onwards all confreres should be encouraged to undertake a discernment of a possible *ad gentes* missionary vocation. The *ad gentes* missionary vocation needs careful discernment. This is a gradual and progressive process involving the harmonious interaction of all the dimensions of formation, and it occurs simultaneously within an environment and on an individual level. Personal missionary discernment is carried out at three levels: with the help of the spiritual guide, the rector and the formation team; with the provincial and his council; with the Councillor for the Missions and the Rector Major (AGC 437 53–68).

Motivations and the right intention

784. One who feels called to the Salesian life and asks to be admitted, hopes to choose a style of life and a set of values that he considers to be in tune with himself and his aspirations, while realizing that it is a desire that will require a long journey of growth.

The first step in vocation discernment consists in verifying *the presence of the appropriate requirements and the absence of counter-indications*. All the same, even if these are important and necessary signs in discovering a genuine call from God, they are not enough.

785. It is necessary to go further, identifying and assessing the source of this inclination or orientation.

We must understand the needs, desires, interests, and positive or negative and internal or external dynamics that form the basis of this choice and give it consistency. In other words, it is necessary to *identify the deepest motivations* for the vocational choice. The formation process will contribute to making these motivations adequate, real and genuine so as to arrive at the fundamental positive sign, the right intention.

Right intention

786. *The right intention* is the clear and decisive desire to offer oneself entirely to the Lord, to belong to him and to serve him in one's neighbour according to the Salesian vocation. It is the sincere, well-motivated will that is expressed and shown through an authentic way of living and total openness to formation. The right intention is quite different from a simple natural attraction or a generous desire for service, or from other aspects of the Salesian vocation, however important, such as, for example, a liking for being with young people, availability for educational work or admiration for the social role that Salesian life has in its context. The right intention is rooted entirely in the faith, hope and charity that make existence Christian. It is the offering of oneself for a mission perceived as coming from the hand of God, through the Church, and accepted as such.

An interest and inclination that are genuine and directed towards the Salesian mission and a true supernatural motive are the essential components of a right intention. It is the indispensable sign of a vocation that provides a solid foundation for the other elements of suitability.

Different kinds of motivations

787. *The discernment of motivations* is a decisive factor of the formation process. Motivations are complex and to a large extent unconscious, just as a person is complex, since the conscious and subconscious, psyche and spirit interact in an indissoluble unity, the meeting place of grace and freedom.

For the discernment and evaluation of motivations it is good to distinguish *different kinds and levels*. Motivations may be:

- A. *conscious and unconscious*: those which the individual manifests in his words and believes he has, and those for which he acts and lives, while not being aware of them.
- B. *dominant or simply present*: those which in fact direct a person towards certain choices, and others which accompany the choices without being decisive.
- C. *convergent or divergent*: those which are consistent with the vocational inclination, as for example, a personal desire to work for young people and the desire to give oneself totally to God in building the Kingdom; and motivations that are divergent and produce inner inconsistency, such as the desire to become a religious with the intention of climbing the social ladder.
- D. *genuine or apparent, adequate or inadequate, valid or invalid*: those that have been internalized or those that are only apparently adopted by the individual; those that lead the individual towards other people and their well-being and direct the whole person towards God, his kingdom, his plan, or else those that centre on the subject, on the satisfaction of his needs or desires.

Quality of motivations

788. Discernment ought to be able to distinguish *the quality of the motivations*:

- A. A *genuine, adequate and valid motive* that can sustain the choice of Salesian consecrated life is based on essentially religious values, on the love of God and one's neighbour, and succeeds in directing the energies of the individual towards these ends. It can be recognized by the consistency between the values expressed and the life lived, by the serenity and the joy with which the candidate lives his daily life. This is the specific motive that coincides with the right intention: it is the fundamental motive that touches the essence of the vocation. Such a motive

is capable of purifying, unifying and consolidating other conscious and unconscious motivations.

To identify a vocation successfully, discernment and the formation process need to ascertain whether the candidate has a genuine motive, or whether he is capable of acquiring one through the normal formation process.

- B. *An inadequate motive* is based on sound values that are appropriate in a vocation but are not fundamental and are, to a certain extent, marginal or peripheral, such as pleasure in the success achieved in teaching, enjoyment of youth work, satisfaction in using one's abilities in a significant way, helping the poor, a taste for social work, a passion for study, the pleasure of a life of friendship. When these motivations, valid in themselves, are seen to be dominant, and not yet integrated into the 'right intention' born of faith, they are not sufficient as the basis of consecrated life or of fidelity to it. They will fade away if they are not solidly and firmly rooted in a sense of being called to bear witness to the primacy of God and accepting the central place of Christ in the planning of one's life.¹⁴ With the help of formation they can be purified and integrated with genuine religious motivations.
- C. *An invalid motive*, even though it may appear externally religious, is in fact based on a multiplicity of subjective needs and interests, such as the need for security, self-affirmation or a seeking for affection, and is incapable of providing the necessary support for a vocational choice, the formation process or perseverance.

Discerning motivations

789. *Recognizing a genuine motive*, capable of sustaining Salesian life, is always a delicate task. Motivations are never in a pure state. Even when the sincerity of the candidate has been established, one cannot presume the existence of the right intention. One may find it mixed with egocentric motivations that are often subconscious.

By means of discernment, therefore, one should discover the conscious motivations, and in so far as is possible, move to identifying the unconscious ones too,

making use of the help offered by the human sciences, especially when the person has not reached a good level of integration. It is a question of understanding the person's fundamental attitude, his values, needs, weaknesses and possible defensive mechanisms.

The more the one being accompanied and the guide together recognize the dominant motivations, the more we open the way to a process of purification and integration that can mature and strengthen those motivations that are closest to the 'right intention'.

What is required, therefore, is the candidate's commitment to entrust himself to a sensitive and discerning spiritual guide.

Understanding and evaluation of the motivations is in a special way the task of the spiritual guide and of the confrere himself, even though the rector and his council must always keep in mind the motivational background on which the truth and fruitfulness of the Salesian way of life depends.

Purification of motivations

790. As regards the formation process, one should be aware that *motivations lend themselves to growth in maturity and a gradual and continuous purification*. The candidate often begins with an inadequate dominant motive, but the formation process can help transform it, pointing it in a more authentic direction. The active involvement and commitment of the person concerned is vital. Rather than direct interventions, the formators can help by creating safe spaces that foster self-knowledge and identification of personal motivations, thus opening up the way for a process of purification and growth on the part of the individual.

In this way formation can lead the candidate gradually towards understanding, with greater clarity and depth, that it is the Lord who calls and motivates the choice to serve him with all one's heart, soul and strength, and to go in his name to all those to whom one will be sent.

Intellectual dimension

Positive aspects and requirements

Intelligence, capacity for reflection and judgment

Intellectual ability

791. *Intellectual ability* is not an isolated aspect of the personality. It is found within a context (temperament, mental outlook, environmental factors) and needs to be evaluated in that context.

On the one hand, one needs to discover whether *the candidate's intellectual capacity is adequate and is integrated with the rest of his personality*, and whether he is able to recognize his limitations and remedy the gaps through study and preparation. One needs to find out whether he knows how to attend to himself and his environment and has sufficient capacity to grasp, understand, get the point, formulate what he has understood and express himself adequately.

On the other hand, it is important that *the intellectual capacity is proportionate and relative to the type of commitment* that one lives in a Congregation called to an educative and pastoral mission, which is translated in a variety of ways and is carried out collaboratively through several different roles and functions. It is not a question therefore of an ability to accumulate knowledge but rather of a sound capacity to think, understand and discern.

Common sense

792. It must be borne in mind that a limited capacity to learn from life, as also mental closure and a lack of honesty in facing the truth, are sometimes linked to difficulties of a psychological nature such as fears, anxieties and defence mechanisms that hinder openness to others and to the world. All this has a major impact on what Salesian life requires.

Therefore, in discernment, it is not enough to refer solely to scholastic or academic achievement. It is necessary to consider the *practical intellectual capacity*

to understand and face up to everyday problems, the ability to listen to and understand other opinions and integrate other points of view, and the sense of realism that leads one to avoid naïve idealisations.

Someone who has not had great success in his studies may be quite capable of solving practical problems in a satisfactory manner, prudently assessing situations, intervening effectively in resolving them, and interacting constructively with others.

Someone who has been very successful in studies, on the other hand, could be overly attached to his own view of things and find it difficult to accept a community plan, be docile to simple but urgent requests, and can become someone who systematically opposes everything.

Willingness to grow

793. Intellectual ability is an *aptitude* that needs to be continually developed. It needs a constant will and an ability to concentrate, the presence of genuine cultural interests, a commitment to maintain the Salesian vocation as the criterion for directing one's efforts and making choices for updating oneself and developing intellectually.

794. *In brief, the intellectual capacity of the Salesian* should be sufficient to complete the studies that are necessary and face future commitments with serenity and competence, whether as a Salesian brother or as a Salesian priest or deacon. and to have a good knowledge of the nature of the vocation and of its requirements (VC 98; PDV 51). It ought to include the ability to reflect and judge needed in those who are educators and pastors, in order to cultivate the cultural, formative and pastoral sensitivity characteristic of our presence in the Church, and that allows them to live attentive to the signs of the times, discern the voice of the Spirit and acquire the ability to learn from life (C 19, 98, 119).

The necessary qualification

795. Every Salesian ought to reach a level of studies that puts him in a position to fulfil a useful role in the community in view of the Salesian educative and pastoral mission. During the formation process the Salesian should obtain the study qualifications laid down in the provincial formation plan.

In order to be able to live and share Salesian values and the Preventive System, it is necessary to have an adequate knowledge of Don Bosco and his history, of the experience, reflections and guidelines of the Congregation and of the different groups of the Salesian Family.

In addition to everything that takes place on the study side, it is essential to take advantage of the daily process of learning through community dialogue and reflection on the pastoral and educational work, which in the EPCs can become a workshop of shared formation in mission. When there is openness to this type of reflection and good accompaniment, daily experience becomes the most effective school for learning the art of discernment lived according to the Salesian spirit.

Difficulties and counter-indications to be evaluated

796. Some *signs of the absence of suitability* for Salesian life could be:

- A. Weak or poor judgment and lack of common sense.
- B. Inability to reach the basic level of studies required by the Church and the Congregation (FSDB 125), despite efforts to remedy objective limitations regarding language, poor schooling, etc.
- C. Lack of commitment to personal qualification, study, interest in cultural and professional updating – indispensable requirements for the roles of animation and responsibility that Salesian life demands.
- D. A superficial lifestyle full of activities that is not interested in the quality of the experience and of the work, that does not know how to make time for reflection and does not appreciate the opportunities for sharing and interpreting the situation.

Educative and pastoral dimension

Positive aspects and requirements

797. The qualities appropriate to a Salesian educator and pastor are *signs of suitability* to be assessed and cultivated during formation. In particular the following should be noted:

- A. The ability to undertake the Salesian mission for reasons of faith, as a true spiritual experience, integrating spirituality and pastoral activity, education and evangelization, translating pastoral zeal into initiatives, generosity and sacrifice.
- B. A special concern for poor and abandoned youth and for low-income areas; solidarity, the ability to keep in touch with the world of youth and to incarnate oneself in unfamiliar settings.
- C. An ability to accept and appreciate the values of one's own times, the capacity for a critical understanding of the languages of social communication and with culture, and openness to new ideas.
- D. An adequate pastoral sense and acceptance of the Preventive System as guiding principle and a spirituality; the ability to bear witness through a set of values in harmony with the Salesian educative and pastoral project.
- E. Educative and pastoral competence that involves knowledge, especially about Salesian youth ministry, practical skills and the pursuit of qualifications. The best expression of this is the constant attention to educational problems, to different forms of communication and to new ways of proclaiming the Word to young people.
- F. The ability to animate and guide individuals and groups, promoting a human and Christian programme of high quality.
- G. A sense of the provincial and local mission, demonstrated through participation in planning (SEPP), respect for the common programming and reference to the ones in charge, collaboration in its execution, and a positive relationship with laypeople and members of the Salesian Family.

- H. The habit of reflection on praxis in the light of the teaching and guidelines of the Church, the criteria of pastoral theory and guidelines of Salesian Youth Ministry.
Living the mission as a process of formation.

Difficulties and counter-indications to be evaluated

798. *The counter-indications* can be identified in the lack of or disharmonious development of the elements mentioned above:

- A. Little sensitivity for or interest in those to whom our mission is primarily directed, and weak attention to local culture and to one's own locality.
- B. Superficiality in educative and pastoral practice; purely material execution of educative and pastoral activities, without constant reflection and analysis; little attention to the pastoral guidelines of the Church and of the Congregation.
- C. Evident difficulty in assuming the Preventive System as the ongoing criterion of life and action; a secularized view of educational and pastoral activity, based only on work and action without the energy of the *Da mihi animas*; or an outlook on things that does not integrate the educative and pastoral dimension.
- D. Individualism in the apostolate, lack of communication with other pastoral agents and those responsible for the common mission, a weak presence in the EPC, difficulty in building relationships.
- E. Lack of commitment to becoming qualified for the mission.

Dimension of the charism

Positive aspects and requirements

799. The dimension of the charism runs through and unites the other dimensions in a synthesis that must be constantly deepened. The unifying power of divine love in us – the grace of unity of our vocation – leads us gradually to the splendid blending of nature and grace that we find in Don Bosco (C 21). Obviously,

therefore, many elements of this unity and the relevant criteria for discernment have already been anticipated in our discussions of the human and fraternal, spiritual, intellectual and educative and pastoral dimensions. Here we concentrate on the unifying force of the charism.

The Salesian brother or the one aspiring to the Salesian priesthood must have grown sufficiently in the grace of unity as to be able to live the dimensions of his vocation in a unified way. Some of the signs of this unity are:

- A. A relatively clear understanding and the conviction that one is called to live the lay dimension or the ministerial priesthood as a Salesian consecrated person.
- B. The awareness that the choices related to the educative and pastoral mission are mediated by the community, and the willing acceptance of such mediation.
- C. A growing loving kindness in one's lifestyle, giving to one's relationships the affability and gentleness characteristic of the Preventive System.
- D. The effort to live fraternal life in community, in communion of spirit and action with the other form, lay or clerical, of living the one Salesian vocation, and with those who form part of the EPC.
- E. The commitment to live the vows as a Salesian, as expressed in the Constitutions, so that the following of Jesus obedient, poor and chaste makes one a sign to young people of the fullness of life to which all are called.
- F. The conviction that God calls many to share the Salesian spirit and mission, and that the EPC is our way of being a synodal Church.
- G. The ability to read experiences in the light of faith and make every encounter and event an opportunity to grow in that 'single movement of love towards God and towards our brothers and sisters' in which our consecration consists (C 3).
- H. Evidence of growing joy and serenity in one's vocation.

Difficulties and counter-indications to be evaluated

800. Among the signs of a weak charismatic identity are:

- A. Inability to live the form of one's vocation from within the Salesian consecration.
- B. Individualism in the apostolate and resistance to the mediation of the community.
- C. Traits that show scant appreciation of the Preventive System: arrogance, habitual impatience and disrespect for people, clericalist attitudes.
- D. Persistent signs of lack of fraternity, and lack of esteem for the Salesian priest / brother.
- E. Rejection of the shared mission and resistance to shared formation.
- F. Lack of genuine concern for disadvantaged youngsters.
- G. Inability to live chastity, poverty, obedience in a Salesian way and in relation to mission and to fraternal life in community.
- H. Tendency to activism and efficiency, with no real interest or signs of love for God and closeness to one's brothers and sisters.
- I. Persistent signs of dissatisfaction and a fragmented way of life.

11. Notes

¹ See can. 1029; *Gift* 206; C 108.

² See can. 1052 §1; *Gift* 206.

³ HIV = *Human Immunodeficiency Virus*. AIDS = *Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome*.

⁴ See *Gift* 190–196, and FSDB 720, 723–730. On the obligation on the part of the candidate to bring the relevant information to the notice of the relevant superior, see *Gift* 193 and FSDB 727.

⁵ The classic description of personality disorders may be found in *DSM-V Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (AMERICAN PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION, Washington, DC, 2013) 645–646. These personality disorders can occur on their own or combined with others, and they often involve physiological changes (psychosomatic disorders).

⁶ “A cleric is to be punished with deprivation of office and with other just penalties, not excluding, where the case calls for it, dismissal from the clerical state, if he... immorally acquires, retains, exhibits or distributes, in whatever manner and by whatever technology, pornographic images of minors or of persons who habitually have an imperfect use of reason.” (Can. 1398 §1, 3°, from the revised Book VI of the CIC. Cf. FRANCIS, Apostolic Constitution *Pascite gregem Dei*, 23 May 2021)

⁷ Declaration *Dignitas infinita* on Human Dignity (2024) 55–59; AL 56, 58, 425.

⁸ See *Gift* 200; CCE, *Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies in view of their Admission to the Seminary and to Holy Orders* (2005) 2–3.

⁹ ‘If a candidate practises homosexuality or presents deep-seated homosexual tendencies, his spiritual director as well as his confessor have the duty to dissuade him in conscience from proceeding towards ordination’ (*Gift* 200).

¹⁰ CCE, *Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies in view of their Admission to the Seminary and to Holy Orders* (2005) 3.

¹¹ *Effeminacy*, in the sense of having or showing qualities that are regarded as more suited to women than to men, is not necessarily an indication of homosexual tendencies, and has never been declared as a disorder or impediment to the consecrated vocation or to Holy Orders. Formators and guides will have to discern whether, in any particular case, there would be difficulties in carrying out the Salesian mission.

¹² ‘When we see candidates with neurosis or with strong imbalances, who are difficult to guide even with therapeutic help, we cannot accept them to the priesthood or to consecrated life. We need to help them go to another place, but we cannot abandon them. We must orient them, but we must not admit them. We must always bear in mind that they are people who will live in service to the Church, to the Christian community, to the People of God’ (Francis, *The Strength of Vocation: Consecrated Life Today. A conversation with Fernando Prado, CMF*. Bangalore: Claretian Publications).

¹³ MISSIONS DEPARTMENT – FORMATION DEPARTMENT, *Missionary Formation of the Salesians of Don Bosco* (Rome 2014) 13–21.

¹⁴ See J.E. VECCHI, *Address of the Rector Major at the conclusion of GC24* (GC24 240); and AGC 365 10–11.

**'Then they
prayed and said,
"Lord, you know
everyone's heart.
Show us which one
of these two you
have chosen..."'
(Acts 1:24)**

Admission Lectio

The choice of Matthias as an apostle (Acts 1:12-26) takes place between the Ascension and Pentecost, a period in which the emerging Church must make decisions on its own responsibility, without the physical presence of Jesus and awaiting the Holy Spirit. The disciples travel the opposite route to that of Holy Thursday: they return from the Mount of Olives to the 'upper room' in Jerusalem (Lk 22:12; 24:50). However, they are no longer the same: they return after the Easter experience of the Master. As at the time of the first call, the list of apostles is presented again (Lk 6:14-16; Acts 1:13), with the significant absence of Judas Iscariot.

The number of the Twelve – corresponding to the twelve tribes of Israel – expresses the vocation of the People of the New Covenant. The absence of one calls into question the fullness of this communal vocation.

Therefore, while waiting for the Holy Spirit, the whole community – not just the eleven – remains united in prayer (Acts 1:14). In this context, Peter emerges as a figure of authority (cf. Luke 22:31-32), urging the choice of another apostle. Peter interprets reality from Scripture inspired by the Holy Spirit, specifically some psalms (Acts 1:16-20; cf. Ps 41:10; 55:13-15; 69:26; 109:8).

A clear criterion for selection is established: having accompanied the group of disciples while the Lord Jesus lived with them. The community proposes two candidates: Joseph Barsabbas and Matthias.

The decision is made by ‘casting lots’ using a kind of ‘dice’ (*klēros*) used for divination. Far from being understood as a game of chance, this resource represents an objective means, external to subjective judgment, of discerning the divine will. Thus, human choice and divine choice are combined, all within a strong framework of prayer (cf. Lk 6:12-13). The term *klēros* is related to the term ‘inheritance’ (*klēronomos*), that is, we are talking about the transmission and sharing of goods and traditions (cf. Ps 16:6; Col 1:12).

Thus, Matthias is finally ‘counted among’ (*synkatapsēphisomai*) the Twelve. His election is not a matter that concerns only him, but the entire community. This call restores the number of the election and heals the vocation of the People of the New Covenant.

Meditatio

As in the biblical account, the admission process is revealed as a community event in the broadest sense: it involves the candidate, those responsible, and the entire Christian community (cf. n. 811). It is a process that requires serious discernment, sustained and nourished by prayer: just as the disciples reread their history in the light of Easter, so too the candidates and those who accompany them are called to review their own vocational journey from the perspective of faith. This same faith illuminates human frailty and recognizes that even though a new stage in formation is being entered, personal histories and community relationships remain that need to be integrated and healed. For this reason, the *Ratio* contemplates the assimilation of Salesian life as a progressive journey (cf. no. 801).

As in the apostolic community, figures of authority emerge here who encourage and regulate admissions (cf. nn. 804-807). These brothers, like Peter, are called to interpret the reality of the candidates and the community by listening to the Word of God and asking

for the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

Today, the gesture of casting lots is no longer used; however, the criteria established for admissions continue to serve the function of providing an objective framework in which to discern God's will. These criteria are intended to guarantee the charismatic heritage that the candidate is called to embrace, to live in community, and to pass on in mission.

The criteria for admission are not limited to technical parameters; they need to be made concrete in the candidate's life with the community, where he can share the experience of a living encounter with Jesus Christ. As the candidate progresses through the various stages, mutual knowledge between him and the community must be deepened as a condition for good discernment (cf. n. 823). This is because admission implies integration into a group, being counted among the confreres: it is not an individual achievement, but an invitation to walk together (C 22).

Finally, although not all candidates are chosen to be counted as confreres committed among the Salesians of Don Bosco (cf. no. 808), each of those who pass through our formation houses continues to be called to be part of the Christian community, to proclaim the salvation received in other settings and in other ways (cf. Lk 8:38-39).

Francisco J. Enríquez Zulaica, MEG - UPS

12. Admissions

801. *The significance and the importance of the admissions* in the long and delicate process of vocational discernment have already been highlighted. They are times of synthesis and of special responsibility in decision-making and offer a valid pedagogical help in the guidance of the candidate towards a response that is more convinced and mature. For this reason, the admissions ought to be seen from the perspective of a process in which it is necessary to distinguish clearly between the process of growth in maturity on the one hand, and unsuitability for Salesian religious life on the other (SGC 697), between the basic criteria and the criteria for growth. We do well to always remember that admissions are moments of ecclesial discernment, not just processes or procedures.

Given the consequences of admissions for the candidate and for the community, the decisions *must be based on positive indications of suitability*, as the Constitutions explicitly state (C 108). The one who admits has the foremost duty of ensuring that the conditions necessary for a genuine vocational experience are in place; when there is doubt regarding suitability, prudence and experience counsel against proceeding with the admission.

12.1 THE REQUEST, THOSE RESPONSIBLE AND ADMISSION PROCEDURES

802. We do not repeat here what was said regarding the nature, conditions and criteria for discernment. We direct our attention specifically to the admissions and to the judgment regarding the vocational suitability of candidates or confreres in initial formation.

The formal request

Admission follows upon a formal request that has been freely made by the candidate. (C 108) The admission is not

a step that is taken automatically, as the conclusion of a period of formation or at a fixed date in the calendar. What is said in the Constitutions about perpetual profession applies analogously to every phase of formation: the candidate makes his request 'when he has reached the level of Salesian spiritual maturity commensurate with the importance of such a step' (C 117).

A formal request is required for admission to the novitiate, to temporary or perpetual profession, to the ministries, to the diaconate and to the priesthood. There are also requests of a different kind, such as those for the prenovitiate, for the specific formation of candidates to the priesthood, and for preparation for perpetual profession.

The request for admission is addressed to the provincial with jurisdiction over the community to which the candidate belongs.

803. While respecting its personal nature, the signed *request* addressed to the provincial and handed over to the rector, should contain the following elements for its validity:

- The name and surname of the one making the request and the date on which it is made.
- The purpose of the request, expressed clearly (entry into the novitiate, first temporary profession or its renewal, perpetual profession, ministries or orders); in the case of renewal of vows, the period of time for which renewal is requested must also be indicated (one, two or three years).
- The fundamental motivation behind what is being requested.
- Declaration that this is a free act.
- Declaration of awareness of the public nature of the act one intends to perform.
- Statement that, in the discernment undertaken, the candidate has consulted the rector of the community in which he lives,¹ the spiritual guide and the confessor.

Role of rector and council regarding the request

804. The one intending to apply for vows, ministries or orders asks the opinion of his rector, spiritual guide and confessor before presenting his request, and states in his request that he has done so; but he is not obliged

to state the contents of the dialogue. The onus of the decision to present the request is placed on the person concerned and not on the ones consulted.

The rector and the others, on their part, aware of their responsibility before the Church, whose good combined with the good of the person is the ultimate criterion for ongoing discernment, must give their honest opinion to the candidate.

If, before the session of the house council dealing with admissions, the rector judges that an individual is not suitable for admission, or that he is not prepared at that moment for presenting his request, he is obliged in conscience to say this with clarity and charity to the one concerned.²

He cannot, however, prevent the individual from making his own decision and presenting his request. Should the request be presented, the rector cannot divulge in the council the advice given to the person concerned and must act as in every other case. He can neither divulge nor make use of what he knows solely through the friendly talk or spiritual accompaniment, not even in arriving at his judgment during the secret voting of the house council or of the provincial council if he is part of it, unless explicitly authorized by the person concerned, preferably in writing.

Those responsible

805. Those responsible for the admissions, at different levels, are *the provincial with his council and the rector with his council*. The Constitutions state: ‘admission to the novitiate, to temporary or perpetual profession, to the ministries and to sacred orders, is made by the provincial with the consent of his council after hearing the opinion of the rector of the community with his council’ (C 108).

The authority of admission is not collegial, it remains vested in the person of the provincial. It is a formal act of his personal authority and not of the council, though the consent of the latter is necessary.³

The juridical responsibility for admissions therefore falls in the first instance on the provincial and then on his council, which intervenes by expressing a judgment and a secret vote (the provincial does not vote since he is the one who admits the candidate and asks for the

council's consent). Through discernment and voting, the provincial and his councillors assume the legal and moral responsibilities associated with their function.

The rector and the members of the local council offer their opinion through a judgment and a secret ballot (the rector also votes). The vote of the local council is consultative. Through the judgment and the vote, the local council assumes moral responsibility for the act. It is important that in this process there are opportunities to foster discernment and sharing of criteria and to avoid differences or disagreements in evaluations and decisions.

Since this is one of the highest responsibilities that one assumes, special formation sessions must be offered to enable those called to perform this service to have the necessary competence.

Please note what was decided by the Dicastery for Consecrated Life in the 'Circular Letter on the Use of Information Technology' (*Prot. n. Sp. 2452/20* - 19 March 2023), which states that admission to perpetual profession and holy orders 'requires the convocation of the General/Provincial Council or similar bodies'.

Local council

806. The request is considered at two levels: by the council of the house to which the candidate belongs, and by the provincial council on which the community depends.

At local level, the *rector and the members of his council*, who ordinarily have the closest contact with the candidate and direct knowledge of his vocational situation, are called upon to give their own opinion and their consultative vote. The rector also takes part in the vote, and the majority is to be calculated on the basis of the number of those present.⁴

Provincial council

807. At provincial level, the Constitutions state: '*The provincial must have the consent of his council in the following cases: admissions to the novitiate, to profession, to ministries and to sacred ordinations*' (C 165). For admissions to the prenovitiate, it is enough

for the provincial to have consulted his council.

The members of the provincial council cannot simply defer to the judgment of the local council. They must form a personal and preferably direct opinion of the candidates; they seek to know them and follow their preparation, making use of those forms of contact and acquaintance that will enable them to give a judgment that is motivated and based on knowledge. This kind of knowledge is greatly facilitated by ordinary contact and interaction between councillors, the local community and candidates. The written observations of the local council, including those prior to the current admission process, are also made available, since they can help better understand the journey of growth, especially important in relation to definitive commitments. In the face of possible doubts, they should strive to arrive at a better understanding of the situation through dialogue and the addition of further information, also by inviting the rector concerned to present the candidates to the provincial council.

Especially at key moments such as perpetual profession and ordination, the council must carry out a discernment that looks at the whole arc of Salesian life and the formation journey of the person concerned. To facilitate this, when a candidate / confrere moves on to another phase of formation, whether in his own province or elsewhere, his provincial will pass a copy of the last two judgments at the time of admission, and other information that may favour the knowledge and accompaniment of the candidate / confrere concerned, to the rector and provincial in question.

Admission and exclusion

808. When a candidate submits a request for admission to the renewal of temporary profession, perpetual profession, ministries, or Holy Orders, two scenarios may arise.

The first is the one covered by can. 657 §1, which governs *admission*. This occurs when the provincial *has the intention of admitting* the religious. According to the law, he must obtain the consent of his council. Thus, the provincial presents the candidate's request and opens the discussion in the council. Once the discussion

concludes, he seeks the council's consent for the candidate's admission. The council may refuse consent. In such a case, the provincial cannot admit the candidate.

The second scenario is the one described in can. 689 §1, which governs *exclusion*. In this case, the provincial is aware of *just causes for excluding* the religious. He may disclose these causes to the council but he is not obliged to do so, especially if he has gained knowledge of them confidentially. These causes, however, must be legally verifiable in the event of an appeal to higher authority against the provincial's decision. The provincial presents the candidate's request and opens the discussion in the council and, after having sought the opinion of the councillors, if necessary by secret vote, he makes his decision.

The procedure outlined in can. 689 §1 must also be followed if, after obtaining the council's consent for admission (under can. 657 §1), new elements (even if known only to the provincial) emerge that constitute just reasons for excluding the candidate. In such a case, he will reconvene the council and follow the procedure for exclusion.⁵

Consent and opinion

809. The admission strictly so called is the juridical act of the provincial (can. 124); he does not, therefore, take part in the voting (can. 127). As regards the vote for admission, the *relationship between the provincial and the council* is governed by the following norms:

– *If the consent of the council is necessary* (as is the case for admission to the novitiate, profession, ministries and orders), the obligation of the superior to follow the vote expressed means that he may not admit a candidate for whom the council has voted negatively. However, he is not obliged to admit a candidate for whom the council has voted positively. He may refuse admission in a case in which there is a grave cause of which he is aware in the external forum. The act of admission is the prerogative of the provincial, who is not obliged to justify his final decision, which could be tied to situations in the external forum that he feels best not to reveal. In case of strong uncertainty, it is always possible to interrupt the process

for the sake of seeking additional information. A straw vote can also be used as a further aid to discernment.

– *If the opinion of the council is asked for*, for validity the provincial must hear the opinion of all the councillors, which must be minuted. Then, whether they are favourable or not, he may act with complete autonomy according to his own conscience. However, he should not act contrary to that opinion, especially if unanimous, without a reason which, in his judgment, is overriding (can. 127 §2, 2°).

Voting in the council

810. *In the vote of the council* the majority is calculated based on the number present (not on the number of valid votes), keeping in mind that the provincial does not vote. If the votes are equal, the provincial may not proceed.⁶ No member of the local or provincial council should give way to force or pressure of any kind or coming from any source when it is a question of giving one's own vote about the suitability of a candidate. By reason of the mission entrusted to each councillor, whether local or provincial, each one is obliged to vote, and no one can abstain from voting (can. 127 §3).

The practice of deciding in advance how to vote is not allowed because it invalidates the reason for the secret vote. The voting is done only once; the practice of repeating the vote when the result is not the expected one is prohibited. In cases of necessity, however, a straw vote may be taken.

In all these matters, including the straw vote, the obligation of secrecy must be kept in mind.

The procedures

811. The following steps should be followed in the admission process, allowing for different situations:

- A talk with the rector, confessor and spiritual guide and the submission of the request (see FSDB 802–803).
- The opinion of the laypeople and families with whom the candidate shares his life and pastoral activities, especially when they are members of the animating nucleus of the EPC, obtained by the rector in a suitable way.

- The opinion of the religious community to which the candidate belongs (R 82).
- The opinion of the provincial of origin and his council (for a candidate who resides outside his own province) (FSDB 274).
- The opinion and vote of the rector of the community with his council.
- Admission by the provincial of the religious community to which the candidate belongs at the moment, with the consent of his council (C 108).

12.2 ADMISSION TO THE PRENOVITIATE

812. Admission to the prenovitiate is made by the provincial of the candidate concerned, in dialogue with his council and those responsible for vocational animation and for the aspirantate.

In the admission to the prenovitiate, *careful consideration should be given to the variety of situations and personal experiences* from which the candidates come and which they bring with them, regarding age, studies, life experience and family situation, Christian life and knowledge of Salesian life, etc.

In applying the criteria set out above concerning aptitudes and dispositions, motivations and counter-indications, *consideration must be given to the objectives of this phase of formation and hence the suitability and maturity it requires.*

Elements to be considered

813. At the beginning of the prenovitiate 'it certainly is not required that a candidate for the religious life be able to assume all of the obligations of the religious life immediately, but he or she should be found capable of doing so progressively. The possibility of making such a judgment justifies the time and means employed in reaching it. This is the purpose of the stage preparatory to the novitiate' (PI 42).

Documents

814. The documents required for admission to the prenovitiate are:

- Birth certificate
- Civil or religious marriage certificate of the parents (if applicable)
- Baptism certificate
- Confirmation certificate
- Certificate of higher secondary (or tertiary) education
- Updated military status (if applicable)
- Civil attestation of not being prohibited to work with minors (due to conviction or civil criminal procedure), where required
- Civil attestation of not having been charged with a crime (criminal record)
- Document declaring absence of financial debts
- Confidential letter about the candidate and his family from the parish priest or someone else who knows the candidate and his family
- HIV test (FSDB 744).

With regard to the applicant's state of health, each region (or province) could make a list of the documents required, as for, example, a general medical certificate.

Requirements

815. Some of the requirements judged necessary for admission to the novitiate should also be borne in mind for admission to this phase (see, e.g. situations which would make admission to the novitiate invalid).⁷

If the candidate comes from a vocational experience in another religious institute or has been in a diocesan seminary, the provincial requests confidential written information from the competent authority of the religious institute or diocesan seminary before admission to the prenovitiate (*Gift* 198).

The most important requirement is the following: 'Only when the candidate *has made the option for Salesian life* is he in a position to begin immediate preparation for the novitiate.'⁸

12.3 ADMISSION TO THE NOVITIATE

816. Admission to the novitiate is made by the provincial of origin with the consent of his council (FSDB 389), after hearing the opinion of the rector of the prenovitiate community with his council (C 108), and this even in the case of an interprovincial prenovitiate.⁹

Aptitude for Salesian life

817. *Admission to the novitiate means that the candidate is judged to be suitable to begin the Salesian religious experience* (C 109). According to the Regulations ‘he must be free from the impediments listed in canon law (can. 643–645 §1), show the aptitudes and maturity necessary for entering upon the Salesian life, and his health must be such as to enable him to observe all the Constitutions of the Society’ (R 91).

Salesian religious experience begins with the novitiate. The candidate undertakes to begin this experience because he believes it corresponds to his personal call. An authentic, adequate, valid motivation is fundamental to give direction and energy to the entire journey that follows; on it is focused the attention both of those who begin the journey and of those who accompany it.

If this right intention or basic motivation is lacking, the novitiate runs the risk of becoming a merely artificial and external experience that in time proves to be an imprudent undertaking on the part of the candidate, given the demands that will be made of him, and of having a negative influence on the formation environment.

Conditions, impediments and juridical requirements

818. Can. 642 states: ‘Superiors are to be vigilant about admitting only those who, besides the required age, have *health, suitable character and sufficient qualities of maturity* to embrace the particular life of the institute; this health, character and maturity are to be attested to, if necessary using experts, with due regard for the prescription of can. 220.’

An assessment of physical health and a psychological personality assessment are needed for admission to the novitiate. These are carried out during the prenovitiate according to the provisions mentioned earlier.¹⁰

Impediments

819. The *impediments* referred to in R 91 are presented as follows in Canon Law:

As per can. 643: 'The following are admitted to the novitiate invalidly:

1. one who has not yet completed seventeen years of age;
2. a spouse, while the marriage continues to exist;
3. one who is currently bound by a sacred bond to some institute of consecrated life or is incorporated in some society of apostolic life, without prejudice to the prescript of can. 684;
4. one who enters the institute induced by force, grave fear, or malice, or the one whom a superior, induced in the same way, has received;
5. one who has concealed his or her incorporation in some institute of consecrated life or in some society of apostolic life.'

As per can. 644: 'Superiors are not to admit to the novitiate secular clerics without consulting their proper ordinary nor those who, burdened by debts, cannot repay them.'

Juridical requirements

820. The *juridical requirements* for admission to the novitiate are that the candidate:

- is free from the impediments mentioned above.
- is admitted by the legitimate superior.
- provides the documents prescribed:
 - the request
 - certificate of free status
 - for someone who has been incorporated in a religious institute or a society of apostolic life, the confidential written testimony of the major superior of the institute or society (can. 645 §2–3; *Gift* 189)

- for secular clerics, evidence of the last ministry or ordination and the confidential testimonial letters of the local ordinaries of the dioceses in which, after the conferral of the ministry or ordination, they have been for more than a year (can. 645 §2–3; *Gift* 189).

Those who receive this information have the strict obligation to preserve *confidentiality* regarding the information and the persons providing it. Local legislation regarding privacy should also be observed when seeking the advice of experts.

12.4 ADMISSION TO FIRST PROFESSION

821. Admission to first profession is made by the provincial with the consent of his council, after duly hearing the provincial and council of the candidate concerned, and of the rector and council of the novitiate. Admission is made by the provincial of the province in which the novitiate is located, even if the candidate belongs to another province.¹¹

‘By first profession a member is enrolled in the juridical circumscription (Province or Vice-Province) for whose service he asked to be admitted’ (C 160).¹²

The definitive transfer of a member from one circumscription to another, or to a house directly dependent on the Rector Major, is decided by the Rector Major.¹³

Aptitude for Salesian life

822. During the novitiate, with the help of the director of novices, the candidate ‘examines carefully the motives for his choice, makes certain of his suitability for the Salesian calling, and prepares himself to give his all to God for the service of the young in the spirit of Don Bosco’ (C 110). The superiors should base their judgment for admission to the first profession on positive indications of the candidate’s suitability, confirming that the objectives proper to the novitiate have been achieved (C 108; can. 657 §1). The mere absence of negative or problematic elements is not enough. A clear distinction is to be made between the maturing process and the lack of aptitude for Salesian religious life. Those who do not give hope of ever being admitted to perpetual profession should not be admitted

to temporary vows either (SGC 697b).

The criteria for admission mentioned in chapter 11 above assist the identification of the elements that establish the *suitability of the novice* for the Salesian life; among these:

- sufficiently good health and an adequate preparation.
- a normal development in the capacity for relationships.
- a sound and well-balanced affectivity.
- a deep Christian experience and a faith motivation.
- adequate knowledge and assimilation, albeit gradual, of the Salesian spirit, and identification with the mission of the Congregation, characterized by pastoral charity and a special love for young people that is lived in the style of the Preventive System.

Community life

823. Life and experience in community require especially:

- A. the ability to become part of a community, overcoming any tendency to isolation and individualism, learning from different points of view and fostering unity, even at the cost of personal sacrifice.
- B. an affective capacity that leads to communication, sharing of prayer and experiences, and fraternal correction.
- C. a sense of belonging, shown in availability, dedication, and the sense of responsibility for the community mission.
- D. an attitude of openness and welcome towards people who come in contact with the community.

Evangelical counsels

824. Experience of life according to the evangelical counsels implies that some attitudes have been sufficiently internalized:

- A. Regarding obedience: accepting positively and responsibly the directions from the formators and community as well as fraternal correction; being open with those responsible for formation; showing a capacity for collaboration and initiative with regard to the community plan and the SEPP.

- B. Regarding poverty: being committed to a sober and austere style of life; being easily satisfied and flexible with regard to one's own needs and tastes in the matter of food, clothes or other things; having a love for work, and generously offering one's services as required; being able to share one's own things with others; being concerned about situations of poverty and injustice, and the conditions of those to whom the Salesian mission is directed.
- C. Regarding chastity: being at ease with the sexual and affective dimension of one's life; adopting a correct and serene view of celibacy as a specific value in one's life; making oneself sufficiently known to the spiritual guide; being able to give and receive signs of brotherly affection and live a life of friendship; cultivating the capacity for asceticism in daily life.

Juridical requirements

825. The request for first profession follows the indications given in FSDB 803, with the following peculiarities:

- The intention to make a lifelong commitment is to be expressed, and at the same time, in compliance with what the Church requires, the duration of the temporary profession now requested.
- In referring to the discernment made and who was consulted, the figure of the novice director here takes the place of the rector and spiritual guide; therefore, mention will be made of the novice director and confessor.
- An indication of the form of vocation to which one feels called, that of the Salesian brother or of the Salesian priest. If discernment is still ongoing, a commitment is made to continue it in dialogue with the provincial and with formative accompaniment (FSDB 416).

Conditions for validity of profession

826. Having satisfied the necessary requirements for admission to the novitiate, *can. 656 stipulates that for the validity of temporary profession:*

- the candidate shall have completed at least the eighteenth year of age.

- the novitiate has been validly completed.
- admission has been freely granted by the competent superior with the consent of his council in accord with the norm of law.
- the profession be expressed publicly and made without force, grave fear or fraud.
- the profession be received by the legitimate superior personally or through a delegate in the presence of two witnesses.

Length of the novitiate

827. As regards the *length of the novitiate*, what is said in art. 111 of the Constitutions should be recalled: 'In accordance with canon law, the novitiate lasts twelve months; it begins when the candidate, after being admitted by the provincial, enters the canonically erected novitiate house and places himself under the guidance of the director of novices. The novitiate is invalidated by an absence of more than three months, continuous or broken. An absence of more than fifteen days must be made good.'

By absence is meant actually leaving the house of the novitiate for a time with or without a justifiable motive, with or without permission. When as a complete group the novices go to live in another house of the institute designated by the provincial according to can. 647 §3, this is not an absence.¹⁴

The provision regarding 'periods of apostolic exercises to be spent outside the community of the novitiate' that can. 648 §2 speaks about does not apply to our Congregation, because it would have to be outside the mandatory period of twelve months, as the same canon specifies.

Duration of temporary profession

828. As far as the *duration of profession* is concerned, bearing in mind what is prescribed in can. 655, our Constitutions state: 'During the first three years of this period, profession may be either triennial or annual; in the next three years it will ordinarily be triennial' (C 113). However, there is nothing to prevent its being biennial. To choose from among the various possibilities one must have motives of formation in mind and must consider

the progressive and serious nature of the commitment. The decision will depend on the request made by the novice or temporarily professed member and by the provincial who admits him.

The period of temporary profession ordinarily lasts six years; if he considers it opportune, the provincial can prolong it, but not beyond nine years (C 117).

Absence from the religious house ('absentia a domo') because of a vocational crisis is ordinarily not to be granted to confreres with temporary vows.

Readmission of one who left lawfully

829. The Rector Major with the consent of the council can readmit without the burden of repeating the novitiate one who had legitimately left the institute after completing the novitiate or after profession (at the expiry of vows, by dispensation or by secularization) (can. 690 §1).

The request for readmission will be addressed to the Rector Major, giving the reasons for such a request. The provincial, having evaluated the reasons together with his council, will submit the request to the Rector Major, with a detailed report of the case (detailed *curriculum vitae* of the applicant, reasons why he did not make profession or decided to leave, those for which he now asks to be readmitted, etc.).

It is up to the Rector Major to establish an appropriate probationary period prior to temporary profession and the duration of temporary vows before perpetual profession (can. 690 §1).

Readmission of one who was dismissed

830. A confrere who was dismissed from the Society can be readmitted to the Society by the Rector Major with his Council, but in this case the Rector Major cannot dispense from the obligation to repeat the novitiate.¹⁵

A confrere who was dismissed should not be readmitted if it has been established that criminal acts have been committed by him, or that he has outstanding financial debts.

12.5 ADMISSION TO RENEWAL OF PROFESSION

Aptitude for Salesian life

831. 'The first profession marks the beginning of a period of consecrated life. In this period the confrere... completes his maturing process with perpetual profession in view, and develops the different aspects of his vocation as a lay Salesian or as a candidate for the priesthood' (C 113).

The criterion of judgment for admission to the renewal of profession consists in the progressive attainment of this objective, both in the postnovitiate phase (C 114) and during that of practical training (C 115).

832. After ascertaining his suitability for the Salesian life and after deepening the motivations for his vocational choice, two objectives of the novitiate which continue throughout the period of temporary vows, the professed member lives successively the phases of the postnovitiate and practical training, which have as their objectives:

- *the postnovitiate*: to 'dispose the young confrere to a progressive integration of faith, culture and life' through a 'deepening of the life of faith and of the spirit of Don Bosco, together with an adequate philosophical, pedagogical and catechetical preparation that interacts with the prevailing culture' (C 114).
- *practical training*: to help the confrere 'to integrate his activity and the fundamental values of his vocation' in a 'deeper living experience of Salesian educative and pastoral action' by getting 'practice in the Preventive System, particularly in Salesian assistance' (C 115).

Juridical requirements

833. The renewal of temporary profession takes place when the period of time for which the profession was made is completed.¹⁶ The precise date on which the profession lapses is the day following the one on which the profession was made.

Renewal is obligatory also in the case when only a short period may intervene before perpetual profession, which for reasonable motives one might wish to postpone

briefly until a particular occasion. In this case temporary profession will be renewed for the period of time that separates it from perpetual profession. Nevertheless, an interruption due to oversight or negligence does not invalidate or render unlawful the subsequent profession.

The renewal must be public, that is, received by the competent superior. It should be celebrated 'without any particular solemnity' (PI 56), but this should in no way lessen the awareness of the commitment entailed.

12.6 ADMISSIONS DURING SPECIFIC FORMATION OF THE SALESIAN PRIEST

834. Admissions to the ministries and to holy orders are times of discernment, option and decision that occur during the phase of specific formation of the Salesian priest. *The criteria for discernment and the requisites for acceptance* should be seen in the overall perspective of the identity of the Salesian priest, described in the *Ratio* and recalled here in some of its main elements.

What needs to be especially considered is that for someone directed towards the priesthood the perspective of priestly formation is present *throughout the formation process* and not only during the phase of specific formation.

In fact, while Salesian formation ordinarily follows a single model with the same phases, with similar objectives and contents, there are some differences based on the specific vocation of each one. For this reason, the whole of initial formation offers the Salesian candidate for the priesthood the opportunity to develop the various aspects of his vocation as 'a candidate for the priesthood' (C 113).

835. The specific formation of the candidate to the priesthood, which is carried out either in part or totally after perpetual profession, completes initial formation. This formation follows the norms and guidelines laid down by the Church and the Congregation and aims at preparing those who will be ordained ministers to be genuinely Salesian pastors and educators (C 116).

The progressive shaping of the future priest to Christ

the shepherd is rooted in the initiative of God who calls, enables and sends. It is expressed through a gradual process, above all in those events that even outwardly manifest and signify the call and response, the conferring of grace and the mandate for service.

The conferring of the ministries of lector and acolyte and the ordination to the diaconate that lead up to the priesthood, are significant moments within the journey of specific formation. The exercise of these ministries and of the diaconate, although each of them has its own content and objectives, has a prevalently formative purpose (spiritual, ascetical, liturgical) in view of priestly ordination.

836. Admissions to the ministries and to orders have as their fundamental criterion the identity of the Salesian priest. In fact, it is on this basis that the growth of the candidate in suitability and maturity is judged. For this reason, in speaking of the ministries of lector and acolyte we shall not delay over explicit references to the positive criteria of suitability with regard to these ministries; one should refer to what is said regarding the diaconate and priesthood.

Admission to ministries

837. The ministries of lector and acolyte, which are prescribed for pedagogical and formative reasons, are to be conferred during the period of specific formation.

The request for admission to the ministries follows the procedure already outlined above (FSDB 803).

Some aspects typical of the ministry of lector and acolyte conferred in view of the sacrament of Orders should be borne in mind, such as the time interval to be respected in order to live to the full the formative purpose inherent in the ministries themselves: 'the conferring of the ministry of lector and acolyte without there being between them an interval of some months, is illicit and irregular. The meaning of these ministries is lost. The same may be said of too short an interval between the ministries of acolyte and diaconate.'¹⁷

Admission to holy orders: diaconate and priesthood

838. *The criteria for deciding on the fitness of a Salesian candidate for the diaconate and the priesthood are based on the identity of the priest in the Church, bearing in mind that the specific Salesian vocation imprints particular characteristics on the ministerial priesthood in its three degrees.*

In fact, the model of Don Bosco the priest inspires and guides the vocation and the formation process of the Salesian priest. The Salesian charism marks him as a priest who is an educator and pastor, in a specific form of consecrated life, and distinguishes him from the spiritual and pastoral point of view.

The criteria for assessing his maturity and development in the area of the fundamental roles of the ordained ministry should also be seen in this perspective. These criteria are valid in an analogous way for admission to the diaconate and the priesthood.

In addition to providing an opportunity to deepen and synthesize some facets of the journey of specific formation, *the experience as a deacon* is a particular preparation for entering into the specific way of living the ordained ministry as Salesians, especially in what is most characteristic of *diakonia*, namely the spirit of service. In the Salesian charism, service of the community is first and foremost service of unity, becoming builders and experts of communion wherever one is sent. The proclamation of the Word, which as a deacon is also expressed through preaching, is done with a special dedication to young people. Liturgical animation, catechesis and the ministry of listening are lived in the spirit of Salesian youth ministry.

Admission to the priesthood should take account of the results of the diaconal experience.

Aptitude for the Salesian exercise of the ministry

839. Without repeating the fundamental criteria for discernment, we now mention the factors that indicate the suitability of the candidate for the ministerial functions assumed in keeping with the Salesian consecrated identity, and that provide evidence of the appropriateness of his motivations.

With regard to the ability to undertake priestly duties

840. *In the service of the Word (munus docendi)*, the candidate should demonstrate:

- a lively adult faith based on a serious personal interior conviction regarding the Christian message.
- love and veneration for the Word of God.
- a capacity for right judgment and spiritual and pastoral discernment, with the sensitivity typical of the Salesian educator and pastor.
- a docile spirit in harmony with the teaching of the Church and the guidelines of the Congregation in the exercise of the ministry (MR 33).
- the ability to listen and communicate especially in the world of the young, starting with those at the beginning of their journey of faith, and the ability to adapt to different circumstances for the good of those they are called to serve.
- a theological and pastoral synthesis solid enough to serve as the basis for an effective transmission of the gospel message and its inculturation, with the creativity that the mission to youth requires.

841. *In the service of the liturgy and sacraments (munus sanctificandi)*, the future deacon or priest is called to live and bear witness to:

- a Salesian and priestly understanding of religious consecration: experience of God and vocation lived as the motivating force of one's life; the grace of unity between the consecration lived with joy and the mission of sanctifying, which among the young is primarily by attraction and the witness of life.
- a faith experience fostered and supported by a practical and constant spiritual pedagogy, expressed in personal prayer and the sharing of one's own experience, as also in living the liturgical prayer of the Church with conviction and dedication, and in becoming an expert in initiating children and young people into the life of prayer.
- the ability to provide guidance in the spiritual life especially for the young, and to prepare them for the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Reconciliation;

the willingness to meet and to listen, whether in terms of time or in acquiring the needed preparation.

842. *In the service of animating the Christian community (munus regendi o pascendi), through animation for communion and the educational and pastoral service to the young, the candidate is called upon to develop the human maturity required of a Salesian priest in his educational and pastoral mission especially:*

- strength of character and stability, acceptance of the personal and community discipline needed for the priestly life.
- good judgment, based on prudence, with the ability to assess situations objectively.
- a personality that is affectively mature, with a good self-image, capable of establishing positive pastoral relationships with both men and women, showing real interest in them and being closely involved, while keeping an appropriate balance (a capacity for empathy combined with mastery over one's feelings).
- Salesian sensitivity in being open to problems of people, especially those of young people most in need, of the neighbourhood and of the times.
- exercise of the ministry in a fraternal and synodal manner, open to critical observations from the community rather than from a position of 'power.'
- willingness and ability to collaborate with lay people and respect their competencies and roles, working under their direction whenever required in the EPC or in other contexts.
- respect for the physical and mental integrity of people, their emotional space and their privacy.
- maintain healthy relational boundaries, both physical and emotional, with adults, young people and especially minors.
- adherence to the guidelines of the Church and the province for the protection of minors and vulnerable adults.

843. Candidates are also called upon to make their own an adequate appreciation of the particular role of the Salesian priest:

- in relating to the new generations and their languages.
- with a sense of belonging to the Congregation and identifying with its particular mission.
- in appreciating the Salesian brother in the complementarity of roles.
- in the Salesian community and the EPC, and in spiritual accompaniment of the Salesian Family and of lay people.

844. The ability to be a member of the EPC is of great importance, expressed through particular skills, such as:

- providing support for individuals and groups through spiritual accompaniment and pastoral dialogue.
- sharing the Salesian spirit and educative pastoral work with lay people.
- ability to lead the community in a participatory way, but also the full and proven willingness to work under the direction of lay people.

Other typical aspects of living the priesthood as Salesians

845. The following aspects need to be emphasized:

- an attitude of formation as lifelong and a contemplative approach to life or the union with God typical of the Salesian spirit (C 12).
- overcoming of the tendency to simply respond to one's own needs, growth in interior freedom and unity of life, consolidation of one's sense of vocation and of the supernatural motivations that help one face serenely the inevitable trials of life.
- giving proper place to fraternal sharing, to a frank and cordial relationship with those entrusted with the exercise of authority within and outside the community, and to spiritual accompaniment and pastoral discernment.

846. The priesthood lived by Salesians is characterised by a keen sense of the Church and of its presence and mission in the world of today, some of the indications of which are:

- apostolic zeal, concern for the needs of the Kingdom, openness to the brotherhood of all human beings.

- a convinced acceptance of the identity of the priest and of his ministry as they are presented by the Church, and acceptance of the directives of the Pope and Bishops as a dimension of the Salesian charism (C 13) as well as a commitment freely assumed at ordination.
- an awareness of the place of the priest in communion with the other members of the ecclesial community.
- a specific way living one's ministry as a Salesian religious priest in the local Church (MR 30, 33).

847. In the daily rhythm of community life, the following are significant indicators of progress and confirmation:

- the ability to live 'in a priestly way' in the different works through which the Salesian mission is realized, accepting with generosity any service or role entrusted by the community and required by obedience as, for example, spiritual guide, administrator, parish priest, formator, educator of street children, communicator...
- Living the priestly ministry as a spiritual experience that fills and gives meaning to Salesian life in the form one has chosen, and not as merely a functional role in a given structure.

Juridical requirements

848. The following juridical requirements are needed in one who, having completed the three years of specific formation in the case of the diaconate and the four in the case of the priesthood, asks to be admitted to ordination (FSDB 593–596):

- A request in the way indicated already (FSDB 803 and can. 1036).
- To have received the ministries of lector and acolyte, having observed the period of time prescribed: a suitable period, at least of several months, between that of lector and that of acolyte, at least six months between the ministry of acolyte and the diaconate (can. 1035 §2) and between the diaconate and the priesthood (can. 1031 §1).
- To have taken perpetual vows in the Salesian Congregation (can. 1037).
- To be free from the irregularities and impediments mentioned in can. 1040–1049.
- To have presented the required documents: (1)

certification of studies duly completed, according to can. 1032 (three years of theological studies for the deacon, four years for the priest); (2) if referring to ordination to the priesthood, certification of having received the diaconate; (3) if referring to ordination to the diaconate, certification of baptism and of confirmation and of having received the ministries mentioned in can. 1035.

When the admission to the diaconate or to the priesthood has taken place according to the procedure set out in the Constitutions (C 108; R 82), the provincial issues the dimissorial letters mentioned in can. 1019 §1, in view of the ordination.

12.7 ADMISSION TO PERPETUAL PROFESSION

849. The aim of the period of temporary profession is to complete the ‘maturing process with perpetual profession in view’ (C 113). Therefore, the admission to perpetual profession constitutes the point of arrival of the process of Salesian vocation discernment. This requires an appropriate period of proximate preparation and a particular effort in applying the criteria so far described.

Chapter 7.8 above emphasizes the importance of *the process of preparation for perpetual profession*, which comprises the period of verification and discernment in view of the request, the process of admission and the preparation for celebrating the act of profession.

About a year before the expiry of the period of his profession, the temporarily professed member should explicitly make known to his provincial, in the manner indicated in the provincial directory, his desire to begin preparing for his perpetual profession (FSDB 615).

The rector of the formation community gathers in an appropriate manner the opinion of the laity and families with whom the candidate shares pastoral life and activities. The opinion of the Salesian religious community to which the candidate belongs is also sought.

Aptitude for Salesian life

850. Admission to perpetual profession implies that the member has reached ‘*the level of Salesian spiritual maturity commensurate with the importance of such a step*’ (C

117), which becomes 'the yardstick and the criterion of discernment for every subsequent choice' (ASC 295 19), and particularly that he shows *the appropriate motivations*.

The aptitudes for Salesian life already mentioned ought to be considered from an overall point of view, in their totality and harmony.

851. More particularly, and above all on the basis of the experience of practical training, it is necessary to verify with regard to:

- *apostolic life*, whether in his educative and pastoral relationships the candidate has shown sufficient human maturity, the basis of every other maturity, proportionate to his age; whether the practical training experience has been lived with zeal, as a commitment and vocational response or merely as an activity or an opportunity for self-expression, with a balanced attitude and serenity in success as well as failure, ready to adapt to places, circumstances and different apostolic tasks; whether in this he has shown a special love for young people, particularly the poor; whether he has practised the Preventive System with enthusiasm and fidelity; whether he has lived the mission in a community spirit.
- *community life*, his ability to live with other confreres including those of a different age and way of thinking, whether it was one of openness, collaboration, willing and active involvement in shared initiatives.
- *living the evangelical counsels*, whether there was an attitude of discernment and availability, a capacity for initiative and shared responsibility; a witness to poverty in the style and criteria of life, in carrying out the mission and a commitment to work; sufficient balance and maturity in interpersonal relationships, in contact with young people and with lay people; a capacity for communicating and making friends, for prudence and asceticism.
- *a personal experience of prayer, spiritual accompaniment, spiritual sharing, formation as lifelong*: whether the confrere has acted with commitment and constancy; whether he has demonstrated an active attitude towards formation and has made good use of spiritual guidance; whether he has shown an openness to culture and updating.

Juridical requirements

852. Besides taking account of the requirements and the prudential counter-indications already mentioned for the first profession, the following *are required for perpetual profession*:

- for validity:
 - a period of trial after first profession, which, according to the norms of the Code of Canon Law, should not be less than three years and not more than nine.¹⁸
According to our Constitutions (C 117), the time of trial for us is six years. In special cases and for a just cause recognized as such by the provincial and his council, perpetual profession can be anticipated by up to three months. To anticipate perpetual profession in exceptional cases by a period beyond three months, before the expiry of the six years of temporary profession, the request should be addressed to the Rector Major (FSDB 611).
 - being free from military service, either because of having completed it or because of being declared unfit or exempt for life.¹⁹
- for lawfulness: the observance of the rite prescribed.

Each one of us is called by God to form part of the Salesian Society. Because of this God gives him personal gifts, and by faithful correspondence he finds his way to complete fulfilment in Christ.

The Society recognizes his vocation and helps him to develop it; as a responsible member he puts himself and his gifts at the service of the community and of its common tasks.

Every call is an indication that the Lord loves the Congregation, wants to see it vibrant for the good of the Church and never ceases to enrich it with new apostolic energy (C 22).

12. Notes

¹ The expression ‘and to his agreement with its being made’ was deleted by the Rector Major and his Council: cf. F. CEREDA, Letter of 24 July 2007, prot. 07/0505, and AGC 438 78–80.

² ACS 281 49. Note that the official English translation (ASC 281 45–46) reads somewhat differently.

³ See can. 641, and also PL 811.

⁴ See AGC 438 70–71 and 82–83. The rector (and analogously others) will take part in the discernment and voting, even if he is the spiritual guide of some particular candidate.

⁵ These procedures imply that once the request for admission has been received, the provincial cannot make a decision on his own but is obliged to involve his council in one way or another as described here.

⁶ See can. 127 and the official interpretation given by the Commission for the interpretation of the CIC in AAS 1985, p. 771, cited in *Juridical Elements* 18.

⁷ See can. 643–645 §1 and FSDB 818–820. To be made known to candidates are also the impediments to ordination listed in can. 1041. In particular, it should be noted and pointed out what the canon indicates as the fourth impediment: ‘4) one who has committed wilful homicide, or one who has actually procured an abortion, and all who have positively cooperated.’

⁸ GC21 267. NB: the official English translation has been modified in accordance with the Italian original: ‘Soltanto quando il candidato *ha fatto l’opzione per la vita salesiana* è in grado di incominciare la preparazione immediata al noviziato.’

⁹ See *Juridical Elements* 133.

¹⁰ See FSDB 720, 723–730, 748.

¹¹ See *Juridical Elements* 62 and 133.

12 This request to be admitted for the service of a particular province is defined as being made and accepted in the process of admission to the prenovitiate, which is always done by the provincial of origin: ‘[By first profession] the member is therefore incardinated in the Province (or Vice-Province) whose Provincial admitted him to the Novitiate, admitting him from that time for the service of the Province (or Vice-Province); this is also the case even if the first profession is made in another Province (something common in inter-provincial novitiates)’ (*Juridical Elements* 133).

¹³ *Juridical Elements* 134.

¹⁴ In can. 647 §3 one reads: ‘A major superior can permit a group of novices to reside for a certain period of time in another house of the institute designated by the superior.’

¹⁵ FRANCIS, MOTU PROPRIO *Competencias quasdam discernere* (15 February 2022). The Rector Major no longer needs confirmation from the Holy See.

¹⁶ Can. 657 §1; *Juridical Elements* 64.

¹⁷ ASC 293 28; see can. 1035 and *Gift* 207.

¹⁸ See can. 658, 2°; 657 §2.

¹⁹ See SACRED CONGREGATION FOR RELIGIOUS, Decree *Militare Servitium* (de religiosis servitio militari adstrictis), 30 July 1957 (AAS 49); *Juridical Elements* 53, 73.

Appendices



Appendix 1.

The provincial directory – formation section

1. NATURE

853. The formation section of the provincial directory is a ‘practical guide for formation... at provincial level’ (R 88). It is an inculturation and contextualization of the *Ratio* at the level of a province. It applies the principles and norms of Salesian formation contained in the *Ratio* to the concrete local situations (R 88).

‘It is the duty of the provincial community, through the various organs of animation and government, to lay down the method of formation according to the needs of its own cultural context and in conformity with the directives of the Church and of the Congregation’ (C 101). It is the responsibility of the provincial chapter ‘to formulate and revise the provincial directory in matters left to be decided at the provincial level’ (C 171.4).

As an integral part of the provincial directory, the formation section is part of the particular law of our Society (C 191).

The formation section of the provincial directory provides a normative framework for the drawing up of the provincial formation plan (FSDB 266). The distinction between these two documents must be kept in mind. The former is juridical in nature; it is drawn up by the provincial chapter and becomes law when approved by the Rector Major with his Council; it enjoys, therefore, a certain stability. The latter is a concretization of the norms, is drawn up by the PFC and approved by the provincial with his Council and enjoys a much greater flexibility (*The Salesian Provincial*, 1987, 366).

While formulating the formation section of the Directory, we would do well to keep in mind certain basic principles:

- The action of the Spirit determines our conformation to Christ, in, through and beyond the codification of norms and the establishment of processes.

- Every formation choice must be guided by a clear perception of our charismatic identity.
- The processes of formation need to be inculturated and contextualized (NW 37).
- The quality of youth ministry conditions the processes of formation (YSA 91–94, 106–107).
- The culture of the province conditions the formation of all confreres and in any stage of life.
- The synodal path of the Church is in great consonance with the Preventive System that is our style of formation.
- The mission shared with lay people and members of the Salesian Family, which is part of the synodal way that we live in the Church, is the context in which formation takes place.
- The province has the duty to ensure formation of formators and to contribute formators to interprovincial houses.

While drawing up the formation section of the provincial directory, the regional formation plan – which is itself an effort to contextualize the *Ratio* and implement the Project of the Rector Major and his Council within a particular Region – must be taken into account.

2. USEFUL REFERENCES

854. In formulating the formation section of the provincial directory, the following provisions of our Constitutions and Regulations must be taken into account.

Art. 88 of the Regulations:

The practical guide for formation at world level will be the Salesian '*Ratio* fundamentalis Institutionis et Studiorum', and at provincial level a directory approved by the Rector Major with the consent of his Council. The '*Ratio*' sets out in an integral and instructive way a coherent set of principles and norms concerning formation which are found in the Constitutions, General Regulations and other documents of the Church and of the Congregation.

The provincial directory applies the principles and norms of Salesian formation to the concrete local situations.

Art. 101 of the Constitutions:

The provincial community welcomes and follows up the vocation of every confrere, sees to the preparation of formation personnel, provides formation structures, and makes each local community aware of its obligations in the formation sector.

It is the duty of the provincial community, through the various organs of animation and government, to lay down the method of formation according to the needs of its own cultural context and in conformity with the directives of the Church and of the Congregation.

Art. 171.4 of the Constitutions:

It is the task of the provincial chapter:

4. to formulate and revise the provincial directory in matters left to be decided at the provincial level.

Art. 107.4 of the Regulations:

... the Rector Major requires the consent of his Council:

4. for the approval of provincial formation directories [R 88].

Cf. also above, Provincial directory – formation section (FSDB 266).

3. CONTENTS

3.1 General indications

855. Among the general indications to be given are:

- the responsibilities of the *provincial and his council* regarding formation: drawing up the provincial formation plan and the provincial qualification plan; adoption of decisions taken in the curatoriums of interprovincial communities chosen in the directory, especially regarding contributing formators, teachers and finances; adequate communication and contacts

with those in initial formation, especially those in other provinces (FSDB 253)

- the tasks of the *provincial formation delegate* (FSDB 254–255)
- the composition and tasks of the *PFC* (FSDB 256–265).
- initial and ongoing formation of formators (FSDB 233–240)
- arrangements for ensuring the continuity of the process of initial formation (FSDB 182)
- decisions regarding the passage of information regarding the situation of confreres in initial formation, especially on the occasion of their moving from one phase or community to another; the periodic assessments; the conservation of documentation (FSDB 705, 807); the involvement of the Salesian community and the EPC in expressing an opinion regarding the admissions (FSDB 300, 698)
- regulations regarding security and privacy of access to data.

Interprovincial collaboration

- adoption of the indications regarding collaboration and shared responsibility at interprovincial level in the area of initial and ongoing formation, in particular those of the curatoriums of interprovincial communities (FSDB 269–287; 705).

Formation in shared mission

- guidelines for the involvement of lay persons, both male and female, and the family of origin, in the initial phases of formation (FSDB 249–252; 698; 811)
- the arrangement of a programme of pastoral activities during initial formation, and guidelines for pastoral accompaniment (FSDB 67, 889–894).

Study centres belonging to the province

- decisions for ensuring the quality of these study centres and the soundness and continuing stability of the teams (FSDB 242–243; 315–322)

Salesian studies

- general provisions for the study of ‘Salesianity’ during initial formation as required by the *Ratio* (FSDB 243–244)
- decisions regarding qualification of teachers and animators in the area of Salesianity (FSDB 624)
- a sufficiently complete and up to date ‘Salesianity library’ in the province (FSDB 54).

Missionary formation

- Arrangements to involve the provincial formation delegate and the delegate for missionary animation to ensure that the missionary dimension is actively present in the provincial formation plan, both for the initial phases and as an element of ongoing formation for all communities (FSDB 70).

3.2 INITIAL PHASES OF FORMATION**856.***Aspirantate / Comunità Proposta*

The manner of accompanying young men who show an inclination to the Salesian consecrated life involves:

- the kind of aspirantate / *Comunità Proposta*
- location and community
- duration
- those responsible at provincial and local level
- procedures for admission to the prenovitiate.

Prenovitiate

- choice of preferred formation community
- if the chosen prenovitiate is interprovincial: participation in the curatorium and reception of its decisions
- duration
- formation team, or contribution to it, if interprovincial
- decisions regarding the medical and psychological tests required by the *Ratio* before or during the prenovitiate

- procedures for admission to the novitiate
- documents required, including the information and documents required if the candidate withdrew or was dismissed from a seminary / religious institute.

Novitiate

- choice of preferred formation community
- if the chosen formation community is interprovincial: participation in the curatorium and reception of its decisions
- formation team, or contribution to it, if interprovincial
- procedures for admission to the first profession
the way of celebrating first professions.

Postnovitiate

- choice of preferred formation community
- if the chosen community is interprovincial: participation in the curatorium and reception of its decisions
- formation team, or contribution to it, if interprovincial
- duration
- study centre
- arrangements regarding the programme of studies in the postnovitiate, indicating particularly how their Salesian pedagogical, catechetical and philosophical character is to be ensured, above all if a non-Salesian study centre is being frequented
- arrangements regarding Salesian studies and ongoing study of the Constitutions
- a formation curriculum for Salesian brothers, adapted both to the specificity of their vocation and to individual needs.

Practical training

Indications for ensuring the formation aspects of the practical training phase at local and provincial level are:

- the kind of community
- possibility of formative and spiritual accompaniment
- provincial initiatives
- assessments, especially the one at the end of the practical training phase

Civil studies

- choices and methods to be used for the qualification of confreres and for the drawing up of the *provincial qualification plan*
- choice of community or communities and other guidelines for ensuring formative accompaniment of those in initial formation.

Specific formation

Decisions regarding the specific formation of the *Salesian brother* are:

- the declaration of intent prior to beginning the phase
- choice of preferred interprovincial formation community for the specific formation of the Salesian brother
- participation in the curatorium, and reception of the decisions of the curatorium
- contribution to the formation team
- studies of Salesianity and theology of consecrated life.

Decisions regarding the specific formation of the *Salesian priest* are:

- the declaration of intent prior to beginning the phase
- choice of preferred formation community
- if the chosen community is interprovincial: participation in the curatorium and reception of its decisions
- formation team, or contribution to it, if interprovincial
- study centre
- studies of Salesianity and theology of consecrated life
- arrangements regarding the fourth ‘pastoral’ year of theology.

Perpetual profession

- the criteria, choices and conditions for the programme of preparation for perpetual profession
- details regarding the declaration of intent to begin preparing for perpetual profession (FSDB chapter 7.8).

3.3 Ongoing formation

857. This section outlines:

- the role of the PFC in drawing up a *plan of ongoing formation*
- guidelines for drawing up the *provincial qualification plan*
- the responsibility of the rector to draw up the *community plan*
- guidelines regarding monthly and trimonthly recollections and the annual retreat
- guidelines for the formative accompaniment of confreres in the *quinquennium*
- decisions regarding moments of formation for groups of confreres according to roles or age-groups (FSDB chapter 9).

Shared formation

858. This section gives indications about how the provincial delegates for formation and for youth ministry collaborate to promote the mentality of shared mission and to ensure moments of shared formation during the initial phases of formation (FSDB 84). The primary responsibility for shared formation belongs to the provincial delegate for youth ministry and his commission.

4. EVALUATION

859. This section could indicate the manner and frequency of the evaluation of the implementation of the Directory. Such evaluation can be carried out by the PFC and by the provincial chapter. Information should be sent to the Councillor for Formation.

Modifications of the Directory by the provincial chapter are to be sent to the Rector Major and his Council for approval (FSDB 16).

Appendix 2.

The provincial formation plan

1. NATURE

860. The formation section of the provincial directory and the provincial formation plan are different in nature and scope.

The **formation section of the provincial directory** is the most authoritative response to the obligations laid by the Constitutions on the provincial community, entrusting it with the duty to provide adequate formation processes and structures (C 101). It is not the task of the directory to give a detailed presentation of all the arrangements regarding formation.

The **provincial formation plan**, working within the parameters of the directory and the other documents of the Congregation, provides an organic view and a detailed presentation of all the arrangements within the province regarding formation. It takes the cultural context into consideration and offers more specific and complete contents that are practical and easily adaptable. It specifies the way formation should be carried out.

The provincial formation plan is the direct responsibility of the provincial and his council. It keeps in mind that formation is often not done exclusively within the province but also in other provinces, and not only in communities and structures that are provincial but also interprovincial.

2. Process

861. The provincial formation plan is the fruit of a synodal process of reflection and discernment on the part of the whole province, including members of the EPC. It is good that those in the initial phase of formation are also involved in this process through their representatives, in a manner determined by the provincial. Where there are interprovincial formation communities, the plan must

take into account the directions given by the curatorium of those communities. What follows is an example of the process of drafting of the plan.

2.1 Discernment

862. The provincial formation delegate and his Commission decide the steps to be taken to ensure participation of the maximum number of confreres and other members of the EPCs.

They request all involved to engage in a process of prayerful discernment, involving the three steps of recognizing or taking note of the situation, interpreting it in the light of the Word of God and the documents of the Congregation, and choosing.

Recognizing, or ascertaining the state of formation, both initial and ongoing, could well be done by using SWOT analysis: identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats regarding formation in the province or region. It would involve noting the phases of formation that are carried out within the province, and those that are carried out outside. It would be important also to identify the dominant style of formation and the current praxis regarding formation of formators, the qualification and specialization of confreres, ongoing formation, and shared formation. Above all, it would be important to identify the various expressions of the mission in the province and how these affect the processes of formation.

Interpreting would involve asking what kind of Salesians God is calling us to be today in the social and ecclesial context of the communities. What has emerged in *recognizing* is now made the object of reflection in the light of the Word of God, the Constitutions, the orientations of the Church and the Congregation, including the *Ratio*, the regional formation project and the provincial directory. We ask about the kind of Salesians we must be as a community, so as to be the face of Don Bosco in the reality in which we are inserted. Competences and skills give concreteness to this profile.

Choosing emerges from the process of recognizing and interpreting. The value of the choices lies in their

concreteness, the clear assignment of responsibilities, planning within a realistic time frame and above all verifiability.

2.2 Those involved

863. Salesian communities and EPCs are asked to give their contribution regarding the profile of the Salesian, the situation of the province and the major challenges that need to be addressed.

The formation communities present in the province, whether provincial or interprovincial, are asked to reflect on the various phases of formation: the style of formation, the curriculum of studies, the programme of Salesian studies, the programme of educative and pastoral activities.

The PFC, along with the province youth ministry team when needed, studies some specific aspects of formation like the preparation for perpetual profession, continuity in formation, ongoing formation at the individual, community and province level, formation in and for the shared mission, and the provincial qualification plan.

The PFC puts together the contributions received into a draft document.

The draft document is presented to groups like the rectors, formation personnel, young confreres and competent lay persons for their comments and observations.

A final draft is prepared. This is then studied and approved by the provincial and his council.

3. Contents

864.

3.1 Formation situation

This section considers issues such as:

- the phases of formation that are carried out within the province, and those that are carried out outside
- the dominant style of formation in each of the phases
- formation in mission
- current praxis regarding formation of formators
- current praxis regarding other qualifications and specializations

- the state of formation of confreres and communities within the circumscription, and their readiness to live in an attitude of ongoing formation (C 119)
- attitudes towards the shared mission
- interprovincial collaboration in formation communities, regional formation centres, regional formation commission, etc.

3.2 Options, priorities, objectives

This section contains indications regarding:

- profile of the Salesian
- style of formation
- formation in and for shared mission
- formation of formators
- personal spiritual accompaniment
- pastoral accompaniment
- protection of minors and vulnerable adults
- continuity, gradualness and coherence among the initial phases of formation.

3.3 The initial phases of formation

For each phase of formation within the province this section includes:

- objectives to be met and skills to be acquired, keeping in mind the five dimensions of Salesian formation and the profile of the Salesian defined by the previous provincial chapter
- the curriculum of studies
- the programme of Salesian studies, organization, resource persons
- the programme of educative and pastoral activities.

For each phase of formation outside the province this section includes:

- the formators and teachers contributed to these communities, and those in preparation (FSDB 243, 283, 313, 315)
- ways of keeping in touch with those in formation.

3.4 Ongoing formation

This section contains:

- lines of action at personal, local and provincial level
- initiatives at provincial level, especially for the formation of rectors, making use of the suggestions made in AnGC 107–112.

3.5 Shared formation

This section contains guidelines at local and provincial level for promoting the mentality of shared mission among Salesians. It also indicates a programme of shared formation during the initial phases of formation (FSDB 84, 858).

4. REVISION AND EVALUATION

865. It would be advisable that the provincial formation plan be revised after the General Chapter, keeping in mind the Project of the Rector Major and his Council, the regional formation plan and the formation section of the provincial directory.

The evaluation of its implementation is done at the end of each academic year by the Formation Delegate with his Commission and shared with the provincial and his council.

Appendix 3.

The community plan¹

1. NATURE

866. Each Salesian community seeks to live the Salesian consecration and implement the Salesian mission of being ‘signs and bearers of the love of God for young people, especially those who are poorer’ (C 2) in a specific context. The community plan is an effective means for strengthening the confreres’ ability ‘to live and work together’ and ‘to become saints together’. It helps them to move from simply ‘being in community’ to ‘being in communion’, and in this way to avoid individualism and fragmentation.

The drawing up of the community plan should involve all the confreres of the community. It should also provide a clear direction for the journey of the community in the year ahead, so that all its energies are directed towards the same goals, and that every confrere be aware of the commitments taken and sacrifices involved.

The community plan is different from the SEPP. In addition to the spiritual life, fraternal life and apostolic commitment, the community plan deals with the review of community life and the moments of relaxation. The SEPP is the general plan of action that guides the implementation of the local educational and pastoral commitment and directs all initiatives and resources toward the proper realization of the Salesian mission in the EPC.

The community plan is also distinct from the annual programme of the community.

2. SUGGESTIONS FOR DRAWING UP THE COMMUNITY PLAN

867. The plan serves its purpose if it is the fruit of the convinced and generous participation of the confreres and is not reduced to a formality. It may be helpful to have a community meeting to consider why a community plan

is needed and why all should be committed to drawing up and implementing it.

Recognizing

It is necessary to start by taking stock of the real situation of the community. A good way to begin is by recognizing the strengths of the community and the resources at its disposal. The next step would be to identify the things that need to be improved in order to achieve the objectives and respond creatively to the main challenges/priorities. It would be good to focus on a few central points rather than being dispersed in too many issues.

Interpreting

It is important for the community to ask itself, in a context of prayer, what God wants of it. Here the focus is on how this community *should be*, not what it needs to do. The community reads its situation in the light of the Word of God and the Salesian documents. The following aspects could be considered: fraternal life, evangelical witness, animating presence among the young, animation of the community, presence and role in the EPC. Each one could share his vision and his expectations in an attitude of faith.

Choosing

Based on the discernment carried out in the first step (*recognizing*) of what God is asking of it in the present situation, the community draws up guidelines for the coming year.

The guidelines could refer to:

- *fraternal life*, paying attention to communion, communication and sharing
- *evangelical witness*, giving due consideration to the primacy of God, the Salesian way of living obedience, poverty and chastity, the grace of unity (bringing God to ministry and ministry to God), and the radical following of Christ
- the *animating presence* among the young, showing due regard for the EPC, the Salesian Family, the local Church and the neighbourhood

- *formation*, ensuring an annual programme of ongoing formation of the community and of formation together with the laity, making daily life efficacious for formation, and paying heed to the animating role of the community and of the rector
- The guidelines could be expressed in terms of *objectives* to be achieved, *strategies* (procedures) to be followed, and *interventions* for achieving the objectives (GC25 74). E.g. **objective**: improve meditation; **strategy**: learning more about the Salesian style of meditation; **intervention**: we will invite NN to conduct 3 sessions on the Salesian style of meditation, on (date) at (time)
- It would be best that the interventions be few, with priority to those that will have a significant impact on the community, those that can be achieved within the year, and those that can be verified according to a timeframe
- The community plan should also be accompanied by the *programme for the year*.

Formulating the plan

The plan is to be put down in writing, shared in the community and then approved by the rector with his council. It is presented to the provincial and his council who will follow up its implementation by the community (GC25 16, 74).

It would be useful to preface the plan with a brief description of the historical context and geographical situation of the community, the composition of the community, the roles and duties, and the major activities of the community.

3. EVALUATION

868. The plan could be assessed towards the middle and the end of the year to determine what has been achieved and what still needs to be done. A new year will require an updated community plan, making it a source of inspiration and direction for what lies ahead.

Notes

¹ See FSDB 221.

Appendix 4.

The local formation plan

1. NATURE

869. The local plan in initial formation communities is a tool that helps live each stage of consecrated life with ever greater maturity, depth and awareness. It transforms what is proposed by the Constitutions into a journey of growth and is, therefore, a point of reference for the formation process in a house of initial formation.

The local formation plan will focus on the five dimensions of formation: human and fraternal, spiritual, intellectual, educative and pastoral, and charismatic. Special care should be taken to ensure that the Salesian charismatic dimension and our identity as consecrated persons permeate all the other dimensions, giving the correct tone to the year ahead.

2. A SUGGESTED PROCESS

870. The process for drawing up the local formation plan is same as that proposed for the community plan above: recognizing, interpreting, choosing.

All the members of the community are to be involved in the process, those in initial formation, members of the formation team and others.

The plan could be structured according to the five dimensions as applied to the particular phase of formation represented in the house, using the relevant chapter of the *Ratio* as an inspiration, and the concretization of the *Ratio* in the relevant provincial or interprovincial documents.

The plan should take care to make provisions not only for initial formation but also for the ongoing formation of all, members of the formation team as well as other Salesians in the community.

3. A SUGGESTED SCHEME

871. *What are the characteristics of the formation community?*
In the opening section, the formation community

is described: its historical and geographical context, whether it is provincial or interprovincial, the formation team and their roles, the composition and structure of the community (e.g. number of year groups), the timing of the periodic personal assessments, the timing and the method of community assembly, the relationship with the Salesian or non-Salesian study centre.

Recognizing

How does the community live out the Salesian vocational identity, the specific goals of the relevant phase of formation, and the five dimensions of formation? The SWOT analysis or some other method could be used.

Interpreting

In the light of the Word of God and the relevant Salesian documents, what does God want from this community in the new educative and pastoral year?

Choosing

What steps should the community take in the current year?

These could be arranged according to the five *dimensions of formation*, each one being expressed through objectives, strategies and lines of action.

Some *requirements* regarding the formation experience might need to be explicitly presented. When Salesian studies and considerations about Salesian consecrated life have to be seen to in the formation community (e.g. when confreres frequent a non-Salesian centre), the programmes must be elaborated in detail (courses / methods of learning, teachers / guides, timings, etc.).

The *programme for the year* should be drawn up, setting out the timing, the means and the persons responsible for various aspects of the life of the community.

4. EVALUATION

872. The implementation of the plan is to be assessed during the community assemblies in the middle and at the end of the year.⁸⁵²

Appendix 5.

The personal plan of life¹

873. ‘The *personal plan of life* [has] become for many confreres a great resource for personal renewal, an effective antidote to the temptation of spiritual superficiality’ (GC27 5). Following the example of these confreres, we could strengthen our daily response to our vocation that amounts to remaining in a constant attitude of formation. Making use of the personal plan of life helps us keep alive the desire to become more and more Salesians after the heart of God and of Don Bosco.

Drawing up a personal plan of life is part of our spiritual tradition, going back to the annual retreat and the concluding resolutions made by Don Bosco and the early Salesians. Through their resolutions they were doing what the personal plan of life asks of us today – to assume personal responsibility for our spiritual growth and take concrete steps in this regard.

1. SOME CONSIDERATIONS

874. A good personal plan of life has a long gestation period. It is rooted in one’s dreams, which are anticipations of the future. If desires give force and energy to dreams, the personal plan of life adds concreteness to desire, thus becoming a bridge between present and future.

We could say that a personal plan of life is necessary for growth and maturity, for ensuring a clear direction in one’s life without being at the mercy of our impulses and the conditionings of our social and cultural environment.

The plan is an aid to a person’s *holistic growth*. It contributes to a deep awareness of one’s vocational identity. It involves knowledge and acceptance of oneself, the clarification of a set of values, the ability to plan, and the ability to decide.

It is also a means of *unification*, directing everything

toward one goal so as to continue growing in one's vocation.

Finally, it is a means of *conversion and renewal* and leads to greater authenticity and fidelity to vocation. It encourages and orients toward responsible freedom.

One begins with a *grateful look at the story of one's life*. Writing one's autobiography is almost essential if one wants to draw up a serious personal plan of life, making the effort to pass from the anecdotal to a grasp of the meaning of one's life, identifying the most relevant and significant points in three areas: 'this is how I am' (a new knowledge and acceptance of oneself); 'this is what I am made for' (a new awareness of one's vocation and mission); 'these are my relationships' (a new awareness of my relationship with myself, with others, with God).

Reflecting on my life in faith, I realize that my life is not a series of coincidences but that it is linked to God's providence. God wants to manifest himself in my life so that it becomes part of the history of salvation. The gateway of the mystery is Christ: freely I am called to accept Christ and build my life on him who is already its foundation. I realize that, with my free and ongoing response, it is the Spirit who conforms my life to Christ. Thus it is that God gradually becomes the ordering centre of my life. In my journey of healing and of growth, all the aspects of my life find integration in Christ.

2. AN APPROACH

875. Drawing up the personal plan of life, however, is not just a question of having clear ideas about it. We suggest here an approach that permits a good balance between long-term goals and the daily commitment to them.

One needs *to live the present well*. This involves slowing down from the usual frantic pace of life to get in touch with what one thinks and does, with the persons and things one encounters. We have to convert time if we are to convert ourselves to a sane daily realism.

One needs *to learn the art of continuous discernment*, which is the ability to see life critically in the light of the gospel, weigh the situation and arrive at decisions. The needed context and points of reference are given by

the 'ordering centre of one's life', while the objects of discernment are actions, motivations, attitudes towards oneself, others, God. A habit of daily encounter with the Word of God and with mature persons, most especially among one's confreres, is extremely helpful.

It is helpful to *meditate in writing*, to take notes, to put in writing what one has glimpsed in the Spirit as a life project. Writing is a means not to remain on the surface, to help reflection and prayer, to reach the depths of our lives.

One also needs to *refer constantly to guides* in the spiritual and the human dimensions of our life. This is especially important at the beginning of one's journey, but not only. It is dangerous to walk alone, without a guide. Our guides help us overcome a subjective perception of ourselves and of reality. One who does not open up to a guide runs the risk of becoming a slave of unconscious conditioning, whether personal, social or cultural.

3. DRAWING UP THE PLAN

876. The annual retreat could be a good moment for actually drawing up the personal plan of life. A good personal plan could have two poles, one regarding areas that call for healing and the other dealing with areas of growth. It is also worth reflecting on how to harmonize the personal plan with the community plan. The formulation will be simple, according to each one's style. Above all, the lines of action will be concrete and easily verifiable. Times and dates for the evaluation need to be indicated.

The annual retreat is also a good moment for a revision of the plan. One takes time to look at and evaluate one's life so as to grasp the progress that has been made, wounds that remain open, blocks or resistances on the way to growth.

It would be important to share and evaluate the personal plan of life with one's guides, and to schedule such sharing into the plan.

4. A SUGGESTED SCHEME

877.

God's Call

What does God want from me in the circumstances in which I find myself?

- During a time of quiet, for example the monthly recollection or the annual retreat, open your heart to the Lord, asking for light and strength.
- In the presence of the Lord ask yourself what he wants of you. To make it practical, examine different aspects of your life as a consecrated Salesian apostle as they are described in the Constitutions:
- *'sent to the young'* – the mission to youth: for example, your knowledge and practice of the Preventive System;
- *'in fraternal communities'* – the life of communion with confreres in the community: for example, your active and wholehearted presence at community meetings; your readiness to share;
- *'following Christ obedient, poor and chaste'* – the practice of the evangelical counsels of obedience, poverty, chastity;
- *'in dialogue with the Lord'* – community and personal prayer, union with God;
- *'formed for the mission of pastors and educators'*
- *'committing ourselves to an adequate ongoing formation'* – personal commitment to ongoing formation: your human, spiritual, pastoral and cultural maturity.
- Identify the two or three main aspects of your life and ask what the Lord wants from you in each of these areas. These are to be your goals.

Your actual situation

Where are you in relation to God's call?

- In each of the areas, identify two or three significant points of 'success' or favourable aspects of your life.
- In a similar way, identify in each of the areas two or three significant points that need attention, improvement or

change in your life.

- Another way of looking at our life is the *confessio laudis*, i.e. confession of praise, where one looks with gratitude at the gifts received and the positive steps taken; *confessio vitae*, i.e. confession of life, or a serene and realistic look at one's limitations, mistakes, wounds (and sins, if one is in the sphere of sacramental confession); *confessio fidei*, i.e. confession of faith or trust, where one's gaze is projected forward, and with hope one looks at the path of conversion one intends to take.

Lines of Action

What steps do you intend to take? By what ways and with what means?

- In the light of what has emerged in the previous stages select the lines for action most appropriate for reaching your goals, with the necessary objectives, strategies and activities.
- Determine when and how you intend to assess the progress made in carrying out the lines of action and in the achievement of your goals.

Notes

¹ See FSDB 218, and G.M. ROGGINA, *Il progetto di vita personale*, in: P. GAMBINI, M.O. LLANOS e G.M. ROGGINA (a cura di), *Formazione affettivo-sessuale. Itinerario per seminaristi e giovani consacrati e consacrate*, (Bologna: Edizione Dehoniane, 2017) 341–347

Appendix 6.

Guidelines for a journey of growth in the affective-sexual dimension

Basic assumptions

878. What is presented here is a model that needs to be adapted to specific contexts in the process of designing programmes to be proposed at provincial or local level. The ones to whom it is addressed are formators, who have the task of adapting it and designing programmes.

There are some assumptions we make for all phases of formation:

- Growth in the affective-sexual dimension is a lifelong task.
- Formees are committed to work on themselves in order to give themselves totally to Christ and serve his people.
- Formators are inspiring, caring and available.
- Formators are adequately trained for personal and affective-sexual accompaniment, particularly in the area of affective and sexual growth and consecrated chastity lived according to the Salesian charism.

Affective maturity

879. Maturity is not something easily identifiable, and therefore not easily measurable. Like all personality traits, it is more a process than a structure. It corresponds to a set of dynamics that characterize the individual not as isolated but in his context. Any discussion about affective maturity in view of a choice such as that of consecrated celibacy must take into account the ways in which the context receives, favours, hinders and misrepresents it.

By affectivity we intend our emotions, attitudes and things related to them, and by sexuality we mean the reproductive and relational capacity of human beings together with the organs, orientations, emotions, and behaviours related to them.

The sexual-affective journey is constituted by one's relationship to oneself, to God and to others. With regard to the self we focus mainly on education to affectivity, sexuality and health. With regard to God we indicate some practices for spiritual growth. With regard to others we touch upon family relationships, relationships in community and pastoral relationships.

Although sexual and affective growth has its own specific dynamics and manifestations at different phases of formation, there are certain common dynamics that operate at every phase. A spiral approach that repeats certain themes in ways appropriate to one's age or stage in life is therefore appropriate. At the same time, it is important to assure that formees have assimilated the relevant information and worked on themselves at each phase of formation.

Structure

880. For each phase of formation we present objectives, the principal themes to be dealt with, and some practices to be cultivated (e.g. personal prayer) or used (e.g. group therapy) for assisting growth and facilitating assimilation. The practices are meant to lead to relevant and healthy habits necessary for healthy sexuality and consecrated chastity.

1. ASPIRANTATE

881.

Objectives

- A. Awareness of one's family history
- B. Learning and reflecting on one's affective-sexual development, paying special attention to infancy, puberty, adolescence and youth
- C. Acquiring the capacity to share personal experiences and emotions
- D. Learning to appreciate one's body
- E. Learning to organize one's daily life
- F. Responsible use of digital media
- G. Evaluating and appreciating one's emotional

connection to the family as well as growing in healthy autonomy

- H. Focusing on the importance of interpersonal relationships, developing the ability to recognize the other from oneself and to have good and meaningful relationships, especially with peers
- I. Fostering the ability to re-read one's own biography from a theological-spiritual perspective.

Themes

- A. Genogram (Family Tree): relations with one's family, lifecycle of the family, sexual roles and gender relations
- B. Human body – male and female
- C. Emotional and sexual dynamics of infancy, puberty, adolescence and early adulthood
- D. Sexual desire: meaning, fulfilment
- E. Friendships
- F. Relationships in intercultural and multicultural contexts
- G. Awareness of the way one uses digital media
- H. Understanding and learning to deal with masturbation and pornography
- I. Sexual abuse and healing from its effects
- J. Different vocations: married, consecrated, ordained ministry
- K. Vocational discernment.

Practices

- A. Meaningful and joyful experience of prayer, especially the Eucharist and Reconciliation
- B. Devotion to Mary and the Saints as models of purity and holiness
- C. Sharing in groups
- D. Interaction with young men and women of one's age
- E. Spiritual accompaniment suited to one's age
- F. Engaging in healing processes
- G. Contact with one's family.

2. PRENOVIATE

882.

Objectives

- A. Learning to appreciate and talk about one's sexuality and sexual identity
- B. Understanding and managing one's emotions
- C. Healing of wounds in the area of sexuality and affectivity
- D. Responsible use of digital media
- E. Focusing on the importance of interpersonal relationships, developing the ability to recognize the other from oneself and to have good and meaningful relationships, especially with peers
- F. Having an experience of a happy celibate life in community
- G. Learning to see celibacy and marriage as two ways of living sexuality.

Themes

- A. Growing in self-awareness, self-acceptance and self-appreciation
- B. Understanding emotions and their healthy integration
- C. Handling negative emotions (anger, fear, shame, guilt, jealousy, loss, sadness)
- D. Stress and ways of handling it
- E. Sexual attraction and infatuation
- F. Healthy relationships: friendships, empathy, learning to love, learning to forgive
- G. Psychosexual issues of later adolescence and early adulthood: sexual orientation, heterosexuality, homosexuality
- H. Understanding deviant sexual behaviours
- I. Gender identity and gender roles
- J. Responsible use of digital media
- K. Understanding marriage as a way of living one's sexuality
- L. Understanding consecrated life as a way of living one's sexuality

- M. Protection of minors and vulnerable adults
- N. Discernment of suitability for the Salesian consecrated life.

Practices

- A. Spiritual accompaniment
- B. Personal plan of life
- C. Opportunities for counselling and therapy
- D. Meaningful celebration of the sacraments
- E. Personal prayer
- F. Group processes and community building exercises
- G. Writing the autobiography
- H. Medical examination
- I. Psychological assessment
- J. Group therapy
- K. Workshop on psychosexual and celibate integration
- L. Working on emotional management
- M. Supervised training regarding personal competencies (e.g. self-awareness, self-control) and social competencies (e.g. listening, empathy, negotiation)
- N. Contact with one's family.

3. NOVITIATE

883.

Objectives

- A. Deepening one's love for Jesus Christ
- B. Deepening one's understanding of oneself in relation to one's vocation
- C. Realistic and positive understanding of the vow of chastity
- D. Internalizing the Salesian way of living of one's chastity
- E. Understanding self-care and its importance.

Themes

- A. Meaning and demands of a life of consecrated chastity (vow and virtue)

- B. Motives for choosing a life of consecrated chastity and celibacy
- C. History of consecrated chastity and celibacy in the Church
- D. Centrality of one's relationship with Christ
- E. Capacities and conditions for a happy celibate life
- F. Don Bosco's teaching and example with regard to the healthy living of one's sexuality and affectivity
- G. Attitudes and emotions that assist or hinder the living of the vows
- H. The process of decision-making
- I. Basics of self-care
- J. Checking the quality of interpersonal relationships from a psychological and spiritual point of view, the ability to recognize the other from oneself and to have good and meaningful relationships with other people, especially peers
- K. Protection of minors and vulnerable adults
- L. The importance of unity of life, in contrast to the assumption that a fragmented identity is normal.

Practices

- A. Frequent and regular meetings with the novice director
- B. Personal plan of life
- C. Guided readings and discussions
- D. Working on the findings of the psychological assessment done in the prenovitiate
- E. Deepening of personal prayer
- F. *Lectio divina*, gospel sharing
- G. Initiation to Journaling
- H. Training in decision-making
- I. Guided initiation into youth ministry
- J. Interaction with a happily married couple and listening to their sharing about chastity – the beauty of premarital chastity and the joy of living chastely in marriage.

4. POSTNOVITIATE

884.

Objectives

- A. Growing in one's interior life and intimacy with Christ
- B. Experiencing a joyful and loving life of celibacy in community
- C. Personalizing one's understanding of the celibate way of life and verifying one's capacity to live it
- D. Deepening one's understanding of affective-sexual development and issues related to it
- E. Practical guidelines for personal and ministerial relationships.

Themes

- A. Psychosexual integration – suppression, repression, gratification, sublimation, integration
- B. Different types of relationships. Checking the good quality of interpersonal relationships, the ability to recognize the other from oneself and to have good and meaningful relationships with others
- C. Healthy celibate friendships with men and women
- D. Boundaries in relationships
- E. Responsible use of digital media and artificial intelligence
- F. Protection of minors and vulnerable adults
- G. Introduction to listening and communication skills
- H. The Preventive System and psychosexual integration.

Practices

- A. Spiritual accompaniment
- B. Personal plan of life
- C. Workshops/seminars on the topics concerned
- D. Guided readings and one-to-one or group sharing
- E. Film/digital media reviews and appreciation
- F. Group therapy/counselling/sessions with therapists
- G. Growing in contemplative prayer

- H. Deepening sacramental life
- I. Sharing by couples and women religious regarding their commitment
- J. Reflection on the family dynamics experienced during holidays with one's family
- K. Training in skills for expressing one's ideas, opinions, requests, emotions, disagreement, do's and don'ts, criticism; communication – sending clear and convincing messages; leadership – ability to inspire and guide groups and people, change management, conflict management, bonding, collaboration and cooperation, teamwork
- L. Assessment and processing of affective-sexual and other experiences during weekend and summer ministries
- M. Interaction with families in the EPC, with the possibility of families accompanying the formees.

5. PRACTICAL TRAINING AND CIVIL STUDIES

885.

Objectives

- A. Integration of spiritual life and Salesian educative and pastoral commitment
- B. Strengthening apostolic generosity and generativity
- C. Growing in the 'sequela Christi' and the 'grace of unity' in everyday life
- D. Learning to integrate the impact of other people's sexuality on oneself
- E. Learning to work as a team.

Themes

- A. Celibacy and prayer.
- B. Importance and need for personal accompaniment and supervision
- C. Preventive System as a spirituality
- D. Affective-sexual challenges faced by young religious
- E. Responsible use of social media and artificial intelligence

- F. Self-management and time management
- G. Conflict resolution
- H. Addictions
- I. Growing as interdependent adults – exercise of responsibility
- J. Protection of minors and vulnerable adults
- K. Meaningfulness and rationale of commitments for life (permanent commitments).

Practices

- A. The friendly talk with the rector, personal spiritual accompaniment and the sacrament of Reconciliation
- B. Personal plan of life
- C. Journaling
- D. Processing one's interaction with peers and lay people
- E. Making time for personal prayer
- F. Workshop on responsible use of digital media and artificial intelligence
- G. Exercises in assertiveness and conflict management
- H. Being accountable regarding use of time, money, media
- I. Systematic preparation and discernment before perpetual profession.

6. SPECIFIC FORMATION: SALESIAN PRIEST / SALESIAN BROTHER

886.

Objectives

- A. Deeper grasp of one's clerical or lay religious identity and commitment
- B. Facing the relational challenges in pastoral ministry
- C. Personalizing one's celibate commitment through prayer, reflection and guidance
- D. Growing in 'nuptial'/intimate union with God
- E. Deepening one's understanding of the Church's stand on human sexuality and related issues
- F. Acquiring basic competence in accompanying others.

Themes

- A. Religious and clerical celibacy: meaning, value and current debates
- B. Male and female experiences of sex and love
- C. Sexual and emotional dynamics in pastoral ministry
- D. Different helping ministries and their requirements
- E. Formation of conscience and ethics in ministry
- F. Integrity, authenticity and respecting boundaries in ministry
- G. Responsible use of social media
- H. Challenges in doing collaborative ministry with men and women, lay and religious
- I. Characteristics of an affectively and sexually mature person
- J. The importance of meaningful interpersonal relationships from a psychological point of view and from a spiritual point of view
- K. Protection of minors and vulnerable adults
- L. Spiritual abuse
- M. Basic skills in counselling and spiritual accompaniment.

Practices

- A. Counselling / personal spiritual accompaniment
- B. Personal plan of life
- C. Guided reading and preparation of short research papers
- D. Strengthening appropriate ascetic practices in daily life
- E. Growing in contemplative prayer
- F. Guided retreat
- G. Practising helping/counselling skills under supervision
- H. Processing and evaluation of the experiences in pastoral ministry
- I. Sessions led by psychotherapists on the communication and relational dynamics of communities (communication styles, conflict management, personal and social skills).

7. ONGOING FORMATION

887.

Objectives

- A. Assuming responsibility for one's ongoing emotional and sexual growth with the help of a guide
- B. Making one's celibate commitment happy and fruitful
- C. Keeping abreast of the new developments in the field of sexuality and spirituality
- D. Acquainting oneself with the challenges faced by the young in the areas of sexuality and affectivity and ways of meeting them adequately
- E. Learning from and responding to the challenges of the adult life span.

Themes

- A. Spiritual paternity and pastoral fecundity
- B. Active listening and empathy
- C. Qualities needed for relationships in the educative and pastoral mission in a synodal way
- D. Facing vulnerability and disillusionment and making the ministry a learning experience
- E. Responsibility and boundaries in relationships
- F. Mature affectivity (competence and skills in this area) at the service of ministry
- G. Prudent and discreet use of the means of communication
- H. Affective-sexual issues in early midlife
- I. Community mission, interdependence and personal role
- J. Spiritual abuse
- K. Protection of minors and vulnerable adults
- L. Acknowledging others and recognising their importance.

Practices

- A. Self-care – taking responsibility for one’s physical, affective-sexual, intellectual and spiritual health
- B. Personal plan of life
- C. Seeking supervision in the educative and pastoral ministry, especially in helping relationships (e.g. spiritual accompaniment)
- D. Fostering the habit of regular reading and updating⁸⁵²
- E. Faithfulness to the practice of personal prayer
- F. Regular spiritual accompaniment
- G. Participating in renewal programmes
- H. Building one’s capacity for dialogue
- I. Monitoring one’s communication and relational dynamics (communication styles, conflict management, social skills) with the help of a competent guide.

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 - Volume 2: Pre-Novitiate/Postulancy
 - Volume 3: Novitiate
 - Volume 4: Post-Novitiate 1: Ecclesiastical and Secular Studies
 - Volume 5: Post-Novitiate 2: Practical Training/Regency/Juniorate/Studies
 - Volume 6: Theological Studies/Tertianship
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Appendix 7.

Pastoral accompaniment¹

889. Pastoral accompaniment is ‘a fundamental strategy for formation for and in the mission’ (GC28 pp. 33–34; GC28 29e, h; GC29 31).

Chapter 4 of the *Ratio* elaborates on the nature, foundations and objectives of the pastoral formation of the Salesian. The whole of formation in its various aspects must have an essential pastoral character, but preparation for Salesian apostolic service requires also a *systematic specific pastoral formation* (FSDB 128–136).

The specific pastoral formation of the Salesian includes gradual study and assimilation of *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference* and its updates. Deepening of the grasp of this model takes place in the mission, both by direct experience and by reflection on this experience. It is a question of strengthening the aspects of being, knowing, knowing how to, and knowing how to be with. ‘Pastoral accompaniment’ is part of this process. What follows are some clarifications and guidelines in this regard.

Involvement in educational and pastoral ministry leads to personal vocational growth among young people: it is discernment, reflection and community projection of Salesian youth ministry, which young people, lay people and Salesians experience together. It is also an experience of faith and prayer which recognises God as the One who calls each individual according to a specific vocation, and who sends them and accompanies them in their mission.

At the same time, it becomes a journey of deepening one’s roots in the charism: focused on young people, implemented through relevant community processes (plans) and constantly nourished by a profound spirituality.

It is pre-eminently ongoing formation: in every season of life we live our vocation by being with young

people, planning with and for them, and encountering God together with them and through them.

1. WHAT IS PASTORAL ACCOMPANIMENT?

890. We accompany pastoral experiences so as to help our confreres know, assimilate and practise the Salesian way of doing youth ministry, and to put on the mind of Christ the Good Shepherd. The confrere is helped to become aware of the gift of *pastoral charity* that is part of his vocation and to grow in it, so that mission and service, spiritual and charismatic experience flow together and are mutually enriched.

The Salesian educative and pastoral dimension is based on a number of fundamental formative axes which should not be understood as successive stages, but as intertwined dynamics that run through the entire formation process, both initial and ongoing.

First of all, systematic formation in Salesianity is essential. It roots us in the charism and makes us increasingly capable of embodying it faithfully and creatively. This is accompanied by formation in mission, lived together with young people, because it is with them and among them that our vocation takes concrete form. Finally, solid theological and spiritual formation is indispensable, lived from the perspective of Salesian Youth Spirituality. It is not just a matter of offering it to young people, but of living it ourselves first, as a source that nourishes our mission.

These three axes converge towards a greater identification with Don Bosco, a more lively and daily presence among young people, and a more intense and regular encounter with the Word of God. These are paths that do not alternate but intertwine: they form us as we live, pray and walk with young people, allowing our vocation to be realised at the very heart of the mission.

It is clear that at the heart of pastoral accompaniment **lies the 'experience' of the values** of the Salesian vocation, that is, discerning and responding to the voice of the Spirit in the experience of ministry (C 98, 119). We grow as educators and pastors by reflecting on pastoral experiences in a spirit of faith. We become attentive to

what God is doing in the lives of the young and in our own lives, and we learn to respond with a contemplative attitude, with wonder, praise and thanks, lifting up each one in prayer. Going beyond externals, we touch the inner resources from which we live, accessing the level of our convictions, attitudes and motivations. We become aware of our faith or lack of it, the many voices that play in the depths of our being, the quality of our relationships and our responses, our lights and our shadows. We are thus helped to discern the love with which we have been loved, the voice of the Spirit inviting us to grow in our vocation of self-giving for the benefit of the young.

891. Learning from experience or pastoral discernment can be done by the individual himself in his moments of prayer and reflection, but is greatly enhanced with the help of others. Pastoral accompaniment can thus be done by the community, in a group, or personally with the help of a guide. The different kinds of pastoral accompaniment complement one another, and their interaction is important and valuable.

If the mission is with and for young people, and if it is communal – shared between Salesians and lay people – then being formed for the mission means entering into a circle of mutual formation. It is a living dynamic in which Salesians and lay people form young people, young people and Salesians form lay people, and young people and lay people form us Salesians.

Forming oneself for the mission, therefore, means allowing oneself to be shaped by the mission itself, where it takes substance: in the community, among young people, in the Word, in life.

The religious community and the EPC provide pastoral accompaniment in many different ways. Such *community pastoral accompaniment* is done indirectly through pastoral planning that clarifies the objectives of pastoral action, the horizon within which it moves, the organizational details, etc. Community accompaniment is first directed to the more external aspects of pastoral activity such as organization, coordination, processes of formation, information and communication, the

involvement and participation of all the stakeholders in the educative process, respect for specific roles, functions and contributions. This is not enough, however. The confrere in the initial phases of formation needs to be accompanied by significant persons and to establish relationships with them that are formative. Such relationships make encouragement and fraternal correction possible, as also 'a word of incentive, wisdom and encouragement' (ChV 84) and occasional interactions and exchanges that are often more precious than a thousand meetings.

Group pastoral accompaniment is profitably done under the guidance of an experienced member of the EPC. Such accompaniment can be very helpful, especially when the pastoral guide has been prepared for his task.

Personal pastoral accompaniment often takes place in the friendly talk with the rector and in the course of personal spiritual accompaniment. The pastoral coordinator of the formation community can also offer this type of accompaniment. His specific role, however, is to accompany the confreres as a group or as a team working in the various realities to which they are sent, taking care not to duplicate the moments of personal accompaniment already underway with the rector and with the spiritual guide.

The confrere is encouraged to talk about his pastoral experiences with simplicity and transparency. The guide on his part will help him move from a simple reporting of activities to an exploration of feelings, motivations, convictions, attitudes, with the aim of being attentive to the voice of the Spirit and growing in his Salesian vocation and mission.

2. GENERAL CRITERIA REGARDING EDUCATIONAL AND PASTORAL EXPERIENCES

892. Here we list general criteria regarding educational and pastoral experiences during initial formation:

- It is important to ensure that the apostolic experiences are well cared for and adapted to each phase of formation. Formation plans are useful to the extent that

they acknowledge the formative value of the educative and pastoral dimension in its different expressions, and favour its integration in the life of the young Salesian. In other words, the primary purpose of educative and pastoral activities during initial formation is formative. It is *pastorally* formative, forging an apostolic spirit and participating in planned and systematic pastoral activity. It is *spiritual*, insofar as it is an experience of living and praying in mission and beginning from it. It is *communitarian and participatory*, in the sharing of plans and activities with the Salesian community and with the whole EPC, and taking personal responsibility for the shared mission with the availability, creativity and initiative this entails. It is *charismatic*, insofar as it inspires, motivates and gives meaning to every other commitment.

- The formators have the task of discerning the settings and contexts in which to carry out the educative and pastoral experiences, taking into account the formative needs and personal journey of each candidate and confrere (age, origin, particular gifts and vocational maturity). The same concerns will govern the planned process of such experiences during the different phases of formation, favouring integration with the journey of vocational growth.
- The pastoral insertion of the confrere in a local reality is progressive. Leadership responsibilities are assigned not at the very start but gradually and pedagogically. Even if his contribution is limited and marginal in comparison to what others are doing, understanding how one's work is part of a larger design gives the right formative value to one's experience and enables one to have the same community and planning approach for the future.
- The first pastoral experiences help the confrere open up to new realities and discover a perhaps unfamiliar world. This too has an important formative value in view of the variety of contexts of the Salesian mission to which the confreres will be exposed in the future. *Contact with poor young people* helps the confrere examine his attitudes and mature in preferential love for them, become aware of the gift of pastoral charity and

grow in it, overcome temptations to self-centredness and the desire to shine, and live pastoral dedication not for reasons of efficiency or self-seeking but out of faith and evangelical love.

- It is important to foster dialogue and synergy between the formation houses and those in charge of the centres where the educative and pastoral activities are carried out, so that formation and mission are increasingly integrated, starting from the concreteness of local contexts and situations. The guides participate by accompanying the confreres through visits and moments of sharing and verification, encouraging reflection on the experience. The criterion of evaluation is always the formation of the confrere. Care will be taken to ensure that the pastoral setting is well integrated into the pastoral plans of the province or of the local church, and that those responsible can provide adequate accompaniment and are willing to collaborate in the formation of the confreres entrusted to them. The coordinator visits the different settings, and also invites those in charge of the EPCs (or diocesan realities) for a meeting with the formation team, with the aim of improving the pastoral experiences of the young Salesians and ensuring that they are formative.

3. ATTITUDES TO BE CULTIVATED

893. Pastoral accompaniment is attentive to certain attitudes to be cultivated in the Salesian educator pastor:

- The *habit of being contemplative in action*, seeing God in all things and persons and especially in the young to whom we are sent, discerning the voice of the Spirit in the events of every day, doing everything for love. It is not enough to reduce reflection on pastoral experience to an account of the activities carried out. It is important to be able to grasp the needs, evident or hidden, to which the activities respond, and the call of God in the people one meets and in one's own experience. One gradually learns to live in an attitude of constant and serene attention to and discernment regarding one's attitudes, motivations and feelings.
- The *purification of educational and pastoral involvement*.

By attending to and reflecting upon apostolic experiences, motivations and convictions, enthusiasms and disappointments, conflicts and inner resistances, knowledge and the ability to handle difficulties come to light. We cannot take it for granted that young confreres automatically benefit from pastoral activity, learning from their successes and failures. The apostolate can be the sounding board that allows us to discover precious gifts for the mission and also to pick up traces of immaturity and adolescent attitudes, such as the desire to show off, emotional attachments and dependence, the presumption that one is in possession of the truth and the consequent rigidity, etc.

- *A sane balance between the different aspects of one's life:* educational pastoral action, cultivation of the spiritual life, the demands of fraternal life and of study, and so on.
- *A genuine and growing love for poor young people* regardless of colour and race, religion and caste, expressed in apostolic work and service, in the way they become present in prayer, etc.
- *The habit of 'pastoral prayer'*, in which the confrere learns to recognize the fruits of the Spirit in the lives of the young, give thanks and invokes the light and strength of God's presence upon them (C 95). Before the Lord he becomes aware of his own experiences and feelings in the apostolate, deepens their meaning, analyzes his driving motivations, evaluates the fruits, and envisions the future.
- Keeping in mind these attitudes and habits, pastoral accompaniment, whether personal or in group, consists of helping confreres attend to their experiences and to express themselves with humility, honesty and simplicity. A trained guide can help confreres go deeper and identify the assumptions, convictions and motivations from which these experiences spring, so as to become aware of what God is communicating to them and the directions in which they are called to grow.
- Finally, we must never forget the ultimate horizon in which everything related to accompaniment is situated: in the Salesian formation journey it is precisely while being accompanied that we learn to accompany young people. It is a gradual but essential learning process:

accompaniment is not only a skill to be acquired, it is a fundamental practice that shapes our pastoral identity.

- This is why it is important that young Salesians, from the early stages of their formation and according to their age and experience, gain concrete practice in accompanying young people, their groups and their formation processes.
- It is there, in personal encounters with young people, that we are formed. It is there that we really get to know them, that we offer them an integral journey, that we help them to draw closer to God – and that through them we allow ourselves to be drawn closer to God.
- Being Salesians for life means being companions to young people for life. Accompaniment is a permanent vocation, a way of life, fidelity to the heart of the charism.

4. TOOL FOR EVALUATION

894. The confrere and the guides engage periodically in an evaluation of educational-pastoral activity. The following points could be helpful especially for the evaluation at the end of the formation year:

- How has this year's experience contributed to my vocational growth and to my involvement in the Salesian mission?
- Which attitudes of the Salesian educator and pastor have been most consolidated or developed during this year? Which ones need further development?
- To what extent has integration taken place between pastoral activity and fraternal and religious life?
- What can be said about my style of relationships with the lay members of the EPC?
- What was my level of participation (willingness, commitment, personal initiative, responsibility...) in the proposed activities?
- What capacities and gifts have I discovered?
- What limits have I experienced?
- Was I able to bring the apostolate into prayer? Did I find this possible, or was it difficult? Why? How can it be improved?
- How has pastoral activity helped me grow in the preferential option for the poor?
- Among the opinions gathered from the EPC leaders,

lay people and the young, which points can become an important help for my growth?

Such an evaluation that covers the whole year is one more element in the essential aspect of ongoing formation that is the ability to learn from pastoral experience. With the help of the community and the formators, the confrere is helped to reflect on his experiences, become aware of his abilities and limitations and deepen his living out of the Salesian vocation.

Notes

¹ See FSDB 67.

Appendix 8.

Guidelines regarding the programme of studies

1. INTRODUCTORY NOTES

895. The guidelines presented here refer to the studies intended for all Salesians; they do not deal with civil studies, specialization or the studies that form part of the provincial qualification plan.

It is the task of those in charge to translate the suggestions into a programme that ensures a presentation that is gradual and of high quality, avoiding unnecessary repetitions or anticipations.

The two forms of our vocation

896. Salesian brothers and future priests and deacons 'normally have the same initial formation and follow a curriculum of equivalent level', with differences being determined 'by the specific vocation of each one, by his personal gifts and inclinations and the duties of our apostolate' (C 106).

The arrangements proposed in this Appendix take into account the particular requirements of the specific vocation of the Salesian brother and that of the Salesian priest, but they also call for further adaptation.

Perspectives

897. The guidelines here are drawn up also in the light of what the *Ratio* says about the intellectual dimension of formation in chapter 4 and in the chapters dedicated to the different phases. Our vocational identity and mission characterize our intellectual formation in a way that is original and unique (R 83).

The *pastoral perspective*, formation *in mission*, the viewpoint of *inculturation* and of *communication* and other aspects should constitute constant features of

intellectual formation rather than just being translated into topics or particular courses.

Plurality and complexity characterize the intellectual and cultural ethos of our society. In this context using an *interdisciplinary approach* in teaching and learning will assist in acquiring a better understanding of reality (VG 4c).

Subject areas

998. The presentation within each phase is subdivided into *areas*: Salesian subjects,¹ humanities and education, the Christian mystery or theological studies. The emphasis varies according to the phases. In some cases, the expression ‘the area of the Christian mystery’ has been preferred to ‘theological studies’ because it is not really a question of the formal teaching of theology, which has its own particular methodology and presupposes the adequate assimilation of philosophy and pedagogy.

Methodology of teaching and learning

999. The *methods* used for teaching should be interactive and must facilitate autonomous learning, critical thinking, personalization, and skills in collaboration and communication (FSDB 122). Thus lectures must be accompanied by personal reading, group work, workshops, discussions and debates, situation analyses, written assignments and research, just to mention a few.

Contextualization

900. The *situations and the contexts* in which Salesian intellectual formation takes place are many and varied. This variety also impinges on the *organization of studies* and requires a serious, competent and flexible approach in order to translate these directives into a gradual, organic and complete programme.

The different basic circumstances of the candidates, the diversity of the cultural needs of different contexts and countries, and the fact that the studies can be undertaken in Salesian centres or in centres that do not depend on us, means that there is also variety in the structuring of some of the phases; for example:

for the prenovitiate: in some cases, it is a question of individuals continuing pre-university or university studies and at the same time participating in 'ad hoc' study programmes for the prenovitiate; in others of following a full-time special course for the prenovitiate within a centre; in others again of beginning the philosophical and pedagogical curriculum.

for the postnovitiate: there are differences in the number of years, in the way the philosophical and the educational courses are integrated; in not a few cases it is a question of studies which are officially recognized and successfully completed with a degree.

for theology: there are courses of varying durations, with annual courses or cycles. The 4 obligatory years are covered in different ways: in 3 years follow by a fourth pastoral year; in 4 years with the pastoral courses integrated; in a 5 year integrated course of philosophy and theology, followed by a pastoral year. There are studies that are officially recognized by the Church and/or by the state, and those that are not.

2. THE ORGANIZATION

2.1 Prenovitiate

901. The organization of studies in the prenovitiate ought to take into account the different backgrounds of the prenovices with regard to their educational, Christian and Salesian preparation, as also the great variety of arrangements for studies in this phase (FSDB 376–377).

Salesian subjects

902. It is important to have a presentation of Don Bosco and the Salesian Congregation appropriate to this phase of formation. The reading of a few well-chosen texts would be sufficient, accompanied by reference to the current Salesian situation.

- Don Bosco – life and vocation
- The Salesian Congregation today
- Salesian consecrated life and its two forms
- Salesian vocation: significant figures.
- *Ratio* 7.2 Prenovitiate.

The area of the Christian mystery

903. An introduction to some aspects of the Christian vocation, based on the presentation in the Catechism for youth (*YOUCAT: Youth Catechism of the Catholic Church*), with its direct language and its synthetic and systematic vision:

- Introduction to reading and listening to the Word of God through liturgical texts, and presentation of the history of salvation in connection with the liturgical year (the special seasons, solemnities and feasts; the biblical books used in the liturgical texts).
- The profession of faith (*YOUCAT* Part one: What we believe).
- Life in Christ, mission and witness of the Church, the different vocations in the Church (*YOUCAT* Part three: How we are to have life in Christ).

Human maturity

904. Bearing in mind the different backgrounds and level of preparation of the prenovices, the following could be emphasized:

- Self-knowledge.
- Relationships and interpersonal communication.
- Affective and sexual maturity.

Other areas

905. Some other areas could be:

- Social communication and the challenges of the digital world.
- The language used in formation; if this is well known, some other language.
- The study of music, the ability to play some musical instrument, acquisition of theatrical skills.

2.2 Novitiate

906. The General Regulations indicate the *purpose* and some *of the areas covered* by studies during the

novitiate: ‘they should have as their overriding objective initiation into the mystery of Christ, so that the novice by means of contact with the Word of God may develop a deeper life of faith and a loving knowledge of God. A solid theological basis for the religious life should also be presented. The Constitutions, the life of Don Bosco and our traditions should be studied’ (R 92).

Salesian consecrated life

907. The following topics are covered through the daily conference by the novice director and by means of classes / workshops.

- The project of life as presented in the Constitutions and the General Regulations.
- The Salesian consecrated vocation and its two forms.
- Sexual and affective and maturity, and consecrated celibacy.
- *Ratio*: Part One (General aspects of our formation); 7.3 Novitiate; Appendices 5, 6 and 11.

The area of the Christian mystery

908. For a deeper and more conscious ‘sequela Christi’ as Salesian consecrated persons:

- Introduction to meditation and *Lectio divina*, accompanied by a general introduction to the Scriptures and the reading and understanding of biblical texts in the liturgy.
- Fundamental aspects of faith and spiritual life. Introduction to liturgical life and prayer.
- Some topics of fundamental morality (covenant, conscience, laws, virtues and sin) and of social morality.
- For the area of the Christian mystery and the specific topics of the novitiate, the two parts of *YOUCAT* not covered in the prenovitiate become an important aid, offering an element of continuity with the previous phase: *YOUCAT* Part two: How we celebrate the Christian mysteries; *YOUCAT* Part four: How we should pray.

Salesian studies

909. For a knowledge of the Salesian vocation as seen in our founder, in the Constitutions and in the experience of the Congregation, some central ideas should be presented that are based on serious and up-to-date sources:

- Don Bosco – founder and teacher of consecrated life.
- Salesian holiness.
- An overview of the Salesian Family and of the Salesian Movement.

The humanities and educational sciences

910. These topics can be covered also through workshops:

- Interpersonal communication, ability to relate, listen, dialogue.
- Social communication in Salesian life, in Don Bosco and in the Congregation. A Salesian approach to music, singing and drama: theoretical and practical aspects.
- The study of Italian and other languages, especially those needed for the apostolate.

2.3 Postnovitiate

911. We recall that the postnovitiate ‘continues the formative experience of the novitiate’ and also ‘serves as a preparation for practical training’ (C 114). Within the overall objective of growth in the Salesian consecrated life ‘with perpetual profession in view’ (C 113), the specific objective of this phase of formation is to orient the confrere ‘to a progressive integration of faith, culture and life’ (C 114). The intellectual component of this experience consists of an ‘adequate philosophical, pedagogical and catechetical preparation in dialogue with the prevailing culture’ (C 114).

For Salesian aspirants to the priesthood as well as for Salesian brothers, this complex objective must constantly be kept in mind: the deepening of the Salesian consecrated life with practical training as the

proximate goal and perpetual profession as the overall goal confirming one's journey in Salesian life, and with special place to the intellectual dimension in the terms described above.

Obviously, within this vocational perspective, the directives of the Church regarding the study of philosophy and the humanities for those preparing for the priesthood must also be borne in mind.

As mentioned already, our Constitutions do not insist that brothers and aspirants to the priesthood follow exactly the same postnovitiate programme of studies. During this phase, the programme of Salesian studies, the human and educational sciences and catechesis are common, while the study of philosophy must be oriented towards more precise objectives with regard to the formation of the brother: developing a basic cultural formation, open-mindedness and multidisciplinary thinking, critical thinking and the capacity for analysis, etc.

Salesian studies

912.

- Don Bosco the educator – the Preventive System.
- History of the Salesian Congregation and Work, with special attention to the history and development of the Salesian presence in one's region and province.
- *Ratio*: 7.4 Postnovitiate; 8 Specialization; Part Three (Criteria and norms for discernment, admissions); Appendix 7.
- Salesian Youth Ministry I (fundamental elements).
- Groups of the Salesian Family, especially those present in one's own province / region.

The human and educational sciences

913.

A. Pedagogical disciplines

- General pedagogy and Christian pedagogy.
- Elements of pedagogy and didactics of teaching religion in formal and non-formal settings.

B. Psychological disciplines

- General and developmental psychology.

C. Sociological disciplines

- General sociology: sociological aspects of the family, youth, school, the world of work and technical education, with special attention to human rights; sociology of religion, with particular reference to the world of youth.

D. Social communication

- Social communication and the Salesian mission. Psycho-social problems. Impact of digital technologies.

E. Artistic formation

- Art and the Salesian mission. Theory and practice of artistic expressions (music, painting, theatre...) in relation to catechesis, pastoral care, education and liturgy.

F. Methodology and complementary subjects

- Methodology of study and research, reading, historical criticism.
- Elements of economics and administration.
- Study of Italian and other languages necessary or useful for the mission; study of Latin for candidates for the priesthood (VG, *General Norms* 66).

The area of the Christian mystery

914. The organic and fundamental presentation of the Christian mystery begun in the preceding phases is continued. The presentation should highlight the connection with the Salesian consecrated vocation and our educational and pastoral mission. It should include:

- Introduction to Sacred Scripture with a view to the spiritual life and catechesis.
- Elements of sacramental liturgy from a pedagogical-catechetical point of view.

The pedagogical-catechetical orientation of these introductory courses, distinct from what has already been done in the prenovitiate and novitiate, is important. The preparation for practical training must be kept in mind, with

the practical skills for pastoral animation that will be required.

Philosophical disciplines¹

915. Where possible, a distinct programme of philosophical study should be worked out for Salesian brothers, keeping in mind that the study of philosophy is relevant for them not so much as a preparation for the priesthood but for their identity and mission as Salesian educators and pastors called to live and work in the contemporary world at the service of young people. The history of human thought ('philosophy') has certainly contributed to making the world today what it is, and the competent educator and pastor would do well to learn from it all that he can, on the basis of his personal gifts and always in view of the mission.

In this kind of programme for Salesian brothers, and speaking only of the classical philosophical treatises, it might be possible to omit logic, philosophy of nature and metaphysics, but not philosophy of knowing, anthropology, ethics and philosophy of God, at least in their essentials.

For both groups of students, but especially for Salesian brothers, an active method of teaching and learning would be extremely helpful and relevant, so that what is taught does not remain in the form of abstract theses but begins to be seen as answers to the ongoing questions of humankind as also to the emergent new questions, such as those raised by artificial intelligence.

- Introduction to philosophy: philosophy in the development of humankind (origin, nature, relationship with other disciplines, autonomy; problems, indispensability and inadequacy). The relationship between reason and Christian faith.
- Philosophical anthropology: the human person (the fundamental anthropological dimensions and structures of the personal universe; Christian personalism, humanism in dialogue; philosophy of history and culture).
- Logic and the philosophy of knowing (gnoseology): the problem of truth (the structure and validity of human knowing in its different domains such as the exact disciplines, the empirical sciences, and everyday

life; the relationship between knowledge and belief; hermeneutics, philosophy of language).

- Philosophy of being (metaphysics): knowing, being, meaning and values; society, culture, history; the emergence of certain metaphysical insights in the effort to think out the Christian faith; the relevance of metaphysics for Christian theology.
- Philosophy of nature: the problem of the cosmos and science (intelligibility of material reality; scientific cosmology and philosophical cosmology; scientific knowledge and philosophical knowledge; the problem of epistemology). Ecosophy: the world as a combination of the three areas of environment, social relations and human subjectivity; integration of environmental ecology, social ecology and psychological ecology; caring for our 'common home'.
- Philosophical theology: the mystery of God (possibility and legitimacy of natural knowledge of the Absolute; philosophical issues about the existence and nature of God; relationship between reason and faith, and between philosophy and theology; contemporary atheism; phenomenology, philosophy and history of religion).
- Moral philosophy: principles and dynamics of human conduct considered in terms of acts, habits, character, society, culture and religion; human conduct in relation to God; conscience and freedom; economics and law; problems of bioethics; new problems raised by the digital world and artificial intelligence.
- Socio-political and economic philosophy: fundamental principles; ways of 'reading' a social order; socio-political syntheses in dialogue with those of Christian inspiration; international relations and world community; economy and economic philosophies; the social doctrine of the Church.
- Philosophy of education: the ultimate foundations of education; various systems of education; the philosophical bases of the Preventive System.
- Aesthetics: art and other human activities; taste and aesthetic judgment; art and morality; art and education; art and religion.

The history of human thought and philosophy

916. Given that we belong to a worldwide Church and Congregation, it is important to have an idea about key points in the emergence and development of human thought in the different regions of the world. The emergence of Western thought has a particular importance for Christians because the first great inculturation of the faith took place in the West. However, all of us are now faced with the next great wave of inculturation in the other parts of the globe, both in the great traditional cultures of the East and of Africa, and in the regions of the Americas (FR 72). In all these areas, a multidisciplinary approach would need to be developed, so that the emergence of thought is always seen in the context of the socio-economic, religious and other conditions of its possibility as well as in the consequences of thought for these areas of human existence.

- Western thought: Greek-Hellenistic, patristic, medieval philosophy; the turning points of modern philosophy; the emergence of contemporary Western philosophy and culture from this history.
- The great currents of Eastern thought.
- African thought; wisdom traditions of the African peoples.
- Wisdom traditions of the peoples of the American and other continents.
- Historical and theoretical characteristics of local culture. The most significant authors and texts in the country or region.

2.4 Specific formation of the Salesian brother

917. The specific formation of the Salesian brother, which ordinarily lasts two years, comprises ‘a serious theological, Salesian and pedagogical preparation’ (R 99) that is at the service of his vocation and mission, and reinforces the habit of learning from experience.

The study programme should have a more practical character, aiming at growth in the Christian and Salesian vocation and the development of pastoral-educative

skills, in constant dialogue with the socio-cultural context, with special attention to poor young people and the world of work.

Salesian studies

918.

- Don Bosco founder and model of the Salesian pastor-communicator-missionary.
- Salesian spirituality.
- The Salesian consecrated vocation in its two forms.
- *Ratio*: 7.6 Specific formation of the Salesian brother; 7.8 Perpetual profession; 9 (The stages of life); *Ratio* Appendices
Salesian youth ministry II (works, animation, planning).

The area of the Christian mystery

919. The aim is to deepen the understanding of Christian life in today's world, and the Salesian consecrated vocation in both its forms, lay and clerical. To this end the following areas are suggested:

- Introduction to Sacred Scripture (Pentateuch; Historical books; Prophetic and sapiential books; Synoptics and Acts; Johannine corpus; Pauline letters, Hebrews, the Catholic epistles) and an in-depth study of the central themes of salvation history for spiritual and pastoral purposes.
- Theology (revelation and faith; the mystery of the triune God; the mystery of Christ; the mystery of the Church and of Mary; the mystery of the human being and of our final destiny; liturgy; history of the Church).
- Moral theology (fundamental moral theology; sexual and family morality; social doctrine of the Church).
- Spiritual theology; theology of the states of life in the Church (lay, priestly, consecrated).
- Pastoral care in the world of work; elements of pastoral and catechetical methodology in relation to the recipients of the mission; missiology, theology of religions, theology of culture; interreligious and intercultural dialogue.

Other areas

920. Service to the world and to young people in terms of today's culture calls for a consideration of other content areas:

- Socio-political education: elements of sociology; the world of work (politics, market, trade unions...); social promotion; elements of economics and administration; lay collaboration
- Social communication in the educational and pastoral field; social communication in a digital world: educational and pastoral use of new languages; artistic expressions (music, painting, theatre...) as a resource for evangelization and pastoral work.

2.5 Specific formation of the salesian priest

921. 'The specific formation of a candidate for the priestly ministry follows the norms and directives laid down by the Church and the Congregation, and has for its scope the preparation of a priest who will be a Salesian pastor and educator' (C 116). The studies too are planned from this perspective.

Theological studies must last four years. In faculties with a three-year course, a fourth pastoral year must be added. Other ecclesiastical studies may be begun in this year without detriment to the obligatory requirements of the pastoral year.

Whether spread out over a four-year programme or concentrated in the fourth year, the pastoral courses must enable the students to engage in a Salesian theological reflection on their experiences of ministry, and to deepen their capacity for pastoral discernment.

The study of theology cannot consist merely of studying abstract formulae and schemes of the past. It will involve an appropriation of Scripture and tradition in dialogue with one's own lived experience of the faith and in living interaction with the contexts in which we are called to live and work. It is theologizing in mission, and takes place in profound contact with the lives of the young, their families, the situations in which they live and the cultural trends by which they are affected – whether it be the all-

pervasive digital world, or the ecological crisis, or the dramatic rethinking of sexuality and family and the great challenges in which it is involved, the pervasive influence of gender ideology, or the wholesale jettisoning of values in favour of feelings and gratifications, or the refuge in varieties of fundamentalism or tribalism, or poverty, lack of access to education, employment, dignified standards of living, or the dramatic effects of war and hatred. It is a synodal theology that moves within a culture of dialogue and of encounter with different traditions, disciplines, Christian confessions, religions, and with people who do not profess any religion. 'Scientific reason must expand its boundaries in the direction of wisdom, so as not to dehumanize and impoverish itself. In this way, theology can contribute to the current debate of "rethinking thought", showing itself to be a true critical knowledge – a sapiential knowledge that is neither abstract nor ideological but spiritual, elaborated on its knees, pregnant with adoration and prayer; a transcendent knowledge that is simultaneously attentive to the voice of peoples, thus a "popular" theology, mercifully addressing the open wounds of humanity and creation and within the wounds of human history, to which it prophesies the hope of an ultimate fulfilment.'³

Salesian studies

922. The phase of specific formation aims at a deeper theological foundation of the charism; a pastoral mentality; an appreciation of the two forms of the one Salesian consecrated vocation; and a 'Salesian' reading of theological topics.

- Don Bosco founder and model of the Salesian pastor-communicator-missionary.
- Salesian spirituality.
- The Salesian consecrated vocation in its two forms.
- *Ratio*: 7.7 Specific formation of the Salesian priest; 7.8 Perpetual profession; 9 (The stages of life); *Ratio* Appendices.
- Salesian youth ministry II (works, animation, planning).

Theological studies

923. The theological disciplines are here grouped around some fundamental methodological units. Where possible, the four-year course could be structured according to themes: e.g. the mystery of Christ (1st year), the mystery of the Church (2nd year), the mystery of human beings redeemed by Christ (3rd year), a theological and pastoral synthesis (4th year).

A. Sacred Scripture: general introduction to the OT and the NT; further study of some books: exegesis and understanding of their message in their historical context with a clear reference to contemporary issues. How Sacred Scripture is the source and basis for theology and pastoral practice.

B. Church History – universal (ancient, medieval, modern and contemporary) and local; introduction to patrology. International and interprovincial study centres should find a way, perhaps by means of group study, of making it possible for students to study the Church history of their places of origin.

C. Fundamental theology: introduction to theology; revelation and its transmission through the inspired scriptures, tradition, and the living magisterium of the Church; the credibility of the Christian revelation; Christian revelation and other religions; revelation and inculturation of the faith (VG 71.1).

D. Systematic theology: the mystery of the triune God; the mystery of Christ; the mystery of the human being: creation, sin, grace and the theological virtues; the mystery of the Church; the mystery of Mary; the sacraments; Christian eschatology.

E. Liturgical theology:

- fundamental notions and principles; inculturation of the liturgy
- the Eucharist and eucharistic worship; the celebration of the other sacraments, the sacramentals and

paralitururgical services

- the pastoral theology of the sacraments with special reference to the sacrament of reconciliation, the sacrament of God's mercy and love
- the sanctification of time: the liturgical year and liturgy of the hours
- the place of devotional practices.

F. Spiritual theology: theology of Christian experience; the sources of spirituality; different kinds of spirituality; the main currents of Christian spirituality. Apostolic spirituality, lay spirituality, spirituality of the consecrated life. Spiritual accompaniment and spiritual pedagogy.

G. Moral theology. Fundamental moral theology; special moral theology: the social teaching of the Church, morality and economics, sexual and family morality; bioethics; ecological concerns.

H. Pastoral theology: general pastoral theology, fundamental pastoral theology; general and special catechetics; homiletics; vocational youth ministry; pastoral psychology, pastoral counselling; ecumenism and interreligious dialogue; missiology; communications ministry and pastoral use of the media; homiletics; processing of pastoral experiences in the light of theology.

I. Canon Law:

- historical outline of the Code and a brief presentation of the general norms (Book I) for a correct understanding of the fundamental concepts and the juridical–canonical terminology
- parts I and II of Book II 'The people of God'; from Book III the role of teaching and the ministry of the Word, missionary activity, the Catholic school, means of social communication
- Book V – The Temporal Goods of the Church; Book VI – Sanctions in the Church; Book VII – Certain Canonical Processes
- the section on Institutes of Consecrated Life with constant reference to our own particular law.

- Sacramental Law in Book IV – Office of Sanctification with special focus on the Sacrament of Marriage and Holy Orders
- the complementary legislation of episcopal conferences.

J. Music and Sacred Art:

- the role of song and music in the liturgy, various kinds of music in the liturgy and their function, concrete examples
- artistic expression as a part of the didactic role of the liturgy; the theological, catechetical and pastoral value of gestures and posture, the essential signs of the liturgy, places of worship, and icons with their theological, spiritual and catechetical significance.

The study of biblical languages, at least for those who are proceeding towards academic degrees, and, according to possibility and convenience, of other languages among those more useful and widely diffused.

Notes

¹ What is said here must in every case be complemented with the programme of Salesian studies in Appendix 9.

² VG, *General Norms* 66.

³ See FRANCIS, *Ad theologiam promovendam* (2023).

Appendix 9.

Guidelines regarding Salesian studies

924. ‘The assimilation of the Salesian spirit is fundamentally a fact of living communication. But for this vital experience to be really efficacious it should be accompanied throughout the whole process of the initial formation by a *gradual and systematic study* of Salesian spirituality and the history of the Society’ (R 86).

To ensure a real and continuous commitment to the study of Salesianity, GC29 adopted specific measures, including the following:

Let the Province:

l. place value on the study centres at the UPS and in the IUS for theological and spiritual research on Don Bosco’s experience;

m. ensure that there is at least one Salesian with a Licence in Salesian spirituality, for the animation of the confreres and the educative and pastoral communities. (GC29 18)

A few *methodological considerations* are appropriate as a preface to these Guidelines,

Salesian studies should be included as *formal* courses in the regular programme of the formation phase or study centre, with their own hours of class, trained and qualified teachers, evaluations and examinations like all other disciplines. Salesian studies are essential in the overall plan of intellectual formation.

Although we are dealing with formal courses, they should include not only lectures but also personal study, group study workshops, practical assignments, etc. It is important that these courses be done in such a way that they are engaging and exciting for young Salesians. It is therefore important that they be linked to the Salesian experiences that form part of the integral programme of initial formation.

Our guidelines present a programme of *Salesian*

studies spread over the various phases of formation. Each section begins with a brief introduction that attempts to capture the meaning of the particular phase of formation, highlighting also the values to be assimilated. This is followed by a table indicating objectives, values, attitudes and achievement indicators. Finally, in congruity with the purposes of the formation phase, the programme for each course is presented, along with some sources, texts and useful aids.

These guidelines are *meant for the whole Congregation*. Each province is free to add aspects it considers more important for an understanding of the province or the region.

In addition, we note that the courses presented here could provide a framework for the shared formation of Salesians and lay mission partners, with opportune adjustments.

1. PRENOVIATE

925. The prenovitiate is the period of formation in which the prenovice deepens his vocational option, concentrating on human and Christian maturity, enriching his knowledge of Don Bosco and having a more immediate contact with the Salesian Congregation, so that at the end of this phase he might find himself sufficiently prepared to begin the novitiate.

Within this framework, Salesian studies aim to bring the prenovices to know and admire Don Bosco, his charism and his mission. Don Bosco continues his presence and action in the *Salesian Congregation*; this is why the prenovice is offered a look at the Salesian mission today and Salesian work in the world, especially in his own Region.

In order to support his *vocational discernment*, the prenovice is helped to see his own vocation story in the light of that of Don Bosco, the life of the Congregation today, and the figures of significant Salesians, highlighting the two forms of the Salesian vocation, where he can get an idea of what it means to follow Don Bosco and his mission. Our charism is learnt first and foremost by vital communication and attraction (C 104).

Objectives

First approach and reflection on Don Bosco and the Congregation.

Learning about Don Bosco's own vocational discernment and assimilating the human and Christian values present in him.

Getting to know the two forms of the Salesian vocation and significant examples of these.

Values

Knowledge and love for Don Bosco and the Congregation, and devotion to him. Human values found in John Bosco: work, self-improvement, perseverance, friendship, trust.

Christian values found in John Bosco: charity, Eucharistic and Marian piety, trust in God, obedience, apostolic zeal.

Attitudes

Letting oneself be accompanied in vocational discernment.

Concern for doing good to others, especially the young.

Attitude of service and fulfilment of duty.

Willingness and interest in one's own formation.

Achievement indicators

The prenovice:

- develops a method of study of Salesianity,
 - reads Don Bosco's Life,
 - develops devotion to Don Bosco,
 - compares his own vocational history with that of Don Bosco,
 - makes contact with Salesian Family groups in his area,
 - can present the development of the Congregation in the world,
 - gets to know and frequent the Congregation's website.
-

1.1 Don Bosco – life and vocation

This is about offering *basic knowledge of the person and the life of Don Bosco*, particularly of the early years in which his vocation blossomed and became a reality.

TEXTS:

- J. BOSCO. *Memoirs of the Oratory* (SS 1:1323–1479) (it, en, es, pt).
- T. BOSCO. Don Bosco. *Una biografia nuova*. Torino: LDC, 2017. DON BOSCO: *A New Biography*. Mumbai: Tej-prasarini, 2011. In es: *Historia de un cura*. Madrid: CCS, 1997.
- D. AGASSO, R. AGASSO and D. AGASSO Jr. *Don Bosco. Una*

storia senza tempo. Torino: LDC, 2014.

- C. SCHAUMONT. *Da mihi animas. La vita di Don Bosco tra scelte, sfide e passione*. Leumann: LDC, 2012. *Da mihi animas. Don Bosco, ses choix et sa passion de prêtre éducateur*. Eckbolsheim: Éditions Du Signe, 2012.
- R. SCHIÉLÉ. *Petite vie de Don Bosco*. Paris: Desclée De Brouwer, 1992.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR THE TEACHER:

- P. BRAIDO. *Don Bosco prete dei giovani nel secolo della libertà*. Roma: LAS, 2003 (en and pt available in the SDL library).
- A. LENTI. *Don Bosco History and Spirit* (it, en, es, pt).
- F. PERAZA LEAL. *Conociendo a Don Bosco*. Quito: Centro Salesiano Regional de Formación, 1999.

1.2 The Salesian Congregation Today

Drawing material from various resources, the teacher offers a *first approach to the works of the Congregation* in the world, along with a summary overview of its mission. Contact with the most characteristic works of the province as well as some indications regarding the Salesian Family would be important.

TEXTS:

- *Charter of the Charismatic Identity of the Salesian Family of Don Bosco*. Rome 2012.
- Salesians Don Bosco. General Administration website <<https://sdb.org>>
- ANS website, <<https://infoans.org>>
- Salesian Digital Library <<https://sdl.sdb.org>>.
- Salesian Online Resources <<https://www.salesian.online>>
- Search engine <<https://donbosco.info>>
- Bollettino Salesiano Online <<https://donbosco.press>>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR THE TEACHER

- P. CHÁVEZ. Circular Letters on the regions of the Congregation. AGC 385, 387, 389, 391, 393, 395, 397, 399 (Available in 6 languages on SDL in the 'Headquarters' collection, 'RM Letters')
- Rector Major's Report to the last General Chapter on the state of the Congregation.

1.3 Salesian Consecrated Life and its two forms

The Salesian consecrated life and the two forms in which it is lived are presented in a comprehensive, clear and engaging manner, so that the prenovices are able to begin discerning the form to which God is calling them.

RESOURCES FOR THE TEACHER:

- A. BOZZOLO. 'Salesiano prete e salesiano coadiutore. Spunti per una interpretazione teologica'. *Sapientiam dedit illi. Studi su don Bosco e sul carisma salesiano*, ed. A. Bozzolo. Roma: LAS, 2015. 317–373. *The Dual Form of the Salesian Vocation: A Theological Interpretation*. Bengaluru: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2019.
- I. COELHO. 'Renewed attention to the Salesian Brother'. AGC 424 (2016) 65–75.
- I. COELHO. 'Living the priesthood as Salesians'. AGC 431 (2019) 54–85.

1.4 Salesian vocation: significant figures

Some historical figures and significant contemporary examples of Salesian life – priests, brothers (Srugi, Zatti, Sándor), lay people and missionaries – could be presented, making use of popular material by Salesian publishers in various countries and also through direct contact with particularly significant living Salesians, especially from one's own province.

TEXTS:

- P. CAMERONI. *Come stelle nel cielo. Figure di santità in compagnia di don Bosco*. Gorle (BG): Velar, 2015. *Like the Stars in Heaven: Sainly Figures in the Company of Don Bosco*. Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti, 2022.
- Resources on the figure of the Salesian Brother: <https://coadiutoresalesiano.net>
- *Conoscere i religiosi salesiani laici. Raccolta di documenti sul Salesiano coadiutore*. Ed. Marco Bay. Roma: LAS, 2022.
- Popular biographies in the area of Salesian holiness.

2. NOVITIATE

926. Given that the novitiate is the beginning of the Salesian religious experience, formation at this phase focuses on the internalization and convinced practice of the values of Salesian consecrated apostolic life as the path to *holiness*.

Hence, Salesian studies focus in the first instance on a solid knowledge of *Don Bosco and his charism*, from the beginnings of the Oratory up to the foundation of the Congregation and the Salesian Family. It is above all a question of exploring the vision that Don Bosco had of the *consecrated Salesian in two vocational forms*.

The next objective is to know the elements of the Salesian apostolic project found in the *Constitutions and Regulations*, so that the novice can strengthen his motivations, imbibe apostolic interiority and take on the commitments of Salesian consecrated life at his first profession.

Special attention is directed to the Salesian consecrated vocation in its two forms.

Some of the figures and characteristic traits of *Salesian holiness* are also presented. Hagiography based on a solid theology of consecrated life is a good way to spiritually deepen the characteristic core elements of the charism.

Finally, novices must be given a basic and direct understanding of the various expressions of the *Salesian Family and the Salesian Movement*.

Among the experiences that accompany these studies, personal reading and the study of some of the fundamental texts collected in the *Salesian Sources 1* are recommended. To encourage a vocation and nourish prayer, direct knowledge and reflection on the situation of poor young people is of great help; so is information about the pastoral work of the province, the experience of the Congregation, the missions and new mission frontiers. Especially through pastoral accompaniment, this study can be connected with the pastoral experiences of the novitiate programme.

Objectives

To understand the Salesian vocation and mission, establish convictions in this regard, grow in total self-giving and related behavioural choices.
To deepen knowledge of the two forms of the Salesian vocation.

Values

Don Bosco's reflection, contemplation and commitment to his own life and action.
Oratory life as an educative proposal and a pedagogical spirituality.
The preferential option for the young who are poor.
The grace of unity and the apostolic interiority of Salesian pastoral charity.
Salesian youth spirituality.
Love for the Congregation and sense of belonging.

Attitudes

Satisfaction with the Salesian option as taken up, known, deepened and gradually experienced.
Interest in reading and studying Salesianity.
Oratory style in daily life, interpersonal relationships, prayer life and responsibilities.
Care and attention to apostolic practice and reflection.
Expressions of a life according to the grace of unity: the apostolic interiority of pastoral charity.

Achievement indicators

The novice:

- has an appropriate understanding of the Project of life outlined in the Constitutions and Regulations,
 - assimilates the spiritual values of Don Bosco's Preventive System,
 - studies and meditates on Don Bosco's *Memoirs of the Oratory*,
 - understands his own vocational history with reference to Don Bosco's vocational history and his oratory-style pastoral work,
 - manifests devotion to Don Bosco,
 - shows a keen interest in the youth reality surrounding the novitiate and that of his own country,
 - is attentive to daily life: community, responsibilities assigned, prayer and liturgy,
 - prepares for first profession as a Salesian with a broad vision of the Salesian Family.
-

2.1 Don Bosco – founder and teacher of consecrated life

The figure of Don Bosco in his mission as charismatic founder of consecrated communities is examined in depth. After briefly presenting the events relating to the

foundation and approval of the Salesian Congregation and the other branches of the Salesian Family founded by Don Bosco (FMA; ADMA; Cooperators) the focus is mainly on the model of the Salesian, priest and brother, and the characteristic features of his spiritual identity as found in Don Bosco's teaching, highlighting the documents contained in *Salesian Sources* 1.

SALESIAN SOURCES:

- J. BOSCO. *Salesian Sources* 1. The first Constitutions (SS 1:872–908); To the Salesians (SS 1:845–871); Circulars to Salesians (SS 1:935–960).

TEXTS:

- E. CERIA. *Don Bosco with God*. Bengaluru: Kristu Jyoti, 2014.
- P. STELLA. *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*. Vol. I: Vita e opere. Roma: LAS, 2018². *Don Bosco: Life and Work*. New Rochelle: Salesiana Publishers, 2005. Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7.
- P. BRAIDO. *Don Bosco prete dei giovani nel secolo della libertà*. Roma: LAS, 2003. 1:10–359, especially chapters 1, 2, 7, 8, 9. (Available at SDL 'Don Bosco' collection in en and pt).
- P. BRAIDO. *Don Bosco Fondatore: 'Ai Soci Salesiani.'* *Introduzione e testi critici*. Roma: LAS, 1995.
- A. LENTI. *Don Bosco History and Spirit*, vol. 4 (on the Constitutions).
- A. CAVIGLIA. *Conferenze sullo spirito salesiano*, ed. A. Giraudo. Torino: Centro Mariano Salesiano - Istituto Internazionale Don Bosco, 1985. *Conferences on the Salesian Spirit*, ed. A. Giraudo (available at SDL). This is a classic text concerning the Salesian spirit, which serves as an excellent presentation of the characteristics of Salesian holiness.
- G.B. LEMOYNE, A. Amadei and E. Ceria. *Memorie Biografiche di Don (del Venerabile/del Beato/di San) Giovanni Bosco*. 19 volumi. S. Benigno Canavese: Scuola Tipografica e Libreria Salesiana – SEI 1898–1939. G.B. Lemoyne, A. Amadei and E. Ceria. *Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco*. 19 volumes. New Rochelle: Salesian Publishers, 1965–2003.

- SECRETARIAT OF THE SALESIAN FAMILY. *The Salesian Family of Don Bosco*. Salesian Generalate, Rome 2020.

2.2 The two forms of the Salesian vocation

Given that novices have to discern the two forms of the Salesian vocation and gradually orient themselves towards one of them, it is essential to present them the two forms, clerical and lay, in a clear and simple manner.

RESOURCES FOR THE TEACHER:

- A. BOZZOLO. 'Salesiano prete e salesiano coadiutore. Spunti per una interpretazione teologica'. *Sapientiam dedit illi. Studi su don Bosco e sul carisma salesiano*, ed. A. Bozzolo. Roma: LAS, 2015. 317–373. *The Dual Form of the Salesian Vocation: A Theological Interpretation*. Bengaluru: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2019.
- I. COELHO. 'Renewed attention to the Salesian Brother'. AGC 424 (2016) 65–75.
- I. COELHO. 'Living the priesthood as Salesians'. AGC 431 (2019) 54–85.
- M. VERHULST. *Le salésien-prêtre aujourd'hui, à la suite de don Bosco-prêtre. Une spiritualité sacerdotale spécifique*. Lubumbashi, 2015–2016. Pro manuscripto.
- M. VERHULST. *La figure du Salésien Coadjuteur dans la Congrégation, hier et aujourd'hui*. Cours d'initiation. Noviciat de Chem-Chem (Ruashi) 2016–2017. Pro manuscripto.
- *Conoscere i religiosi salesiani laici. Raccolta di documenti sul Salesiano coadiutore*. Ed. Marco Bay. Roma: LAS, 2022.

2.3 Salesian holiness

Starting from St Francis de Sales' proposal of sanctity in the *Introduction to the Devout Life*, the characteristics of holiness in Don Bosco and some prominent figures of Salesian holiness are explored.

TEXTS:

- F. DE SALES. *Introduction to the Devout Life*.
- G. BOSCO. *Vite di giovani*, ed. A. Giraudo. LAS, Roma, 2012.

- A. RAVIER. *St Francis de Sales*. Torino: LDC, 2021. (Available at SDL in it, en, es, fr).
- A. BOZZOLO. 'La forma di santità di don Bosco'. *Sapientiam dedit illi. Studi su don Bosco e sul carisma salesiano*, ed. A. Bozzolo. Roma: LAS, 2015. 9–90.
- P. BROCARDO. *Don Bosco profondamente uomo, profondamente santo*. Roma: LAS, 2001. *Don Bosco: Deeply Human, Deeply Holy*. Madras: Don Bosco Publications, 1984. *Don Bosco profondamente humano, profondamente santo*. Madrid: CCS, 2001. (Available at SDL in en, it, pt, ko).
- One or two lives of Salesian Saints and Blesseds, for example Bl. Rua, Bl. Rinaldi, St Mary Mazzarello, St Artemides Zatti.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR THE TEACHER:

- E. VIGANÒ. 'Don Bosco saint'. AGC 310 (1983) 3–22.
- P. CHÁVEZ. 'My dear Salesians, be saints'. AGC 379 (2002) 3–37.
- L. CASTANO, *Santità salesiana. Profili dei Santi e Servi di Dio della triplice Famiglia di San Giovanni Bosco*. Torino: SEI, 1966.
- A. CUA. *Sulla via della santità. Linee di spiritualità nel Proprio liturgico per la famiglia salesiana*. Torino: SEI, 1996.
- P. CAMERONI. *Come stelle nel cielo. Figure di santità in compagnia di don Bosco*. Gorle (BG): Velar, 2015. *Like the Stars in Heaven: Saintly Figures in the Company of Don Bosco*. Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti, 2022.

2.4 Salesian Family and Salesian Movement

A general idea of the Salesian Family is presented, followed by the characteristics of the groups founded by Don Bosco: Salesians, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Salesian Cooperators, ADMA. Finally, a general look is taken at the other groups, illustrating in particular the characteristics of the groups present in one's own province and region.

TEXTS:

- DICASTERO PER LA FAMIGLIA SALESIANA. *Don Bosco*

Fondatore della Famiglia salesiana, a cura di M. Midali. Roma: Editrice SDB, 1989.

- SECRETARIAT OF THE SALESIAN FAMILY. *The Salesian Family of Don Bosco*. Salesian Generalate, Rome 2020.
- *Charter of the Charismatic Identity of the Salesian Family of Don Bosco*. 2012.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR THE TEACHER:

- E. VIGANÒ. 'The Salesian Family'. AGC 304 (1982) 3–48.
- J.E VECCHI. 'The Salesian Family is 25 years old!' AGC 358 (1997) 3–43.
- P. CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA. *La Famiglia salesiana oggi*. Pro manuscripto. Lyon, 2004.

3. POSTNOVITIATE

927. The postnovitiate is the period in which the newly professed internalizes, further explores and matures in his Salesian religious consecration and prepares for practical training. He learns to gradually integrate faith, culture and life; he discovers the world of the culture in which he lives and compares it with his faith and his vocational option as a Salesian consecrated person in the lay or clerical form.

The study of education proper to this period requires a systematic approach to *Don Bosco the educator*, a profound understanding of his Preventive System and an analysis of the pedagogical texts contained in *Salesian Sources 1*. At the same time the postnovice is helped to develop a strong sensitivity for the Salesian mission, its educational and pastoral method and a keen sense of belonging to the Salesian Congregation, seen in its historical development from Don Rua until our own times.

There is also a presentation of the first elements of *Salesian educational and pastoral practice today*. It is not only a matter of qualifying postnovices in Salesian pedagogy and pastoral care, but also of inculcating in them the values and skills that support them: love for the young, apostolic interiority, dialogue, openness, a sense of responsibility, self-discipline and organization.

Objectives

To deepen the Salesian religious life through lived experience, reflection and assimilation of the values of Salesian culture and spirituality.
 To become qualified in Salesian youth ministry and pedagogy.
 To consolidate the convictions about Salesian assistance.
 To deepen the understanding of the Salesian missionary vocation.
 To grow in the understanding of the various expressions of the Salesian vocation in the Salesian Family.

Values to be emphasized

Research.
 Assistance (educational and evangelizing presence among young people).
 Dialogue (with the community, with the young, with science, with the environment).
 Discipline and sacrifice in the exercise of responsible freedom.
 Flexibility, *docibilitas* and cultural openness.
 Apostolic interiority and the grace of unity.
 Austerity and work.

Attitudes

Spirit of research.
 Openness and availability.
 Spirit of organization, consistency and responsibility in time management.
 Spirit of collaboration and the ability to work in a team.
 Kindness.
 Faith and prayer.

Achievement indicators

The postnovice:

- is more familiar with the Constitutions and Regulations,
- is able to present the Preventive System in its pedagogical, philosophical, anthropological and Salesian aspects,
- knows and lives the model of Salesian Youth Ministry,
- has read a critical work on Don Bosco,
- demonstrates Salesian skills for the animation and management of groups,
- has mastered an artistic skill: music, singing, theatre, painting, among others,
- is capable of interpersonal relations and teamwork,
- is willing to ask for help and makes regular use of personal accompaniment,
- has regularly reviewed his personal plan of life.

3.1 Don Bosco the Educator – the Preventive System

The figure of Don Bosco the educator and his educational work in the cultural context of the 19th century is presented.

Don Bosco's Preventive System is illustrated. A brief presentation is made of the educational practice of the first Salesians. Some of Don Bosco's pedagogical writings are studied, along with an introduction and commentary, among which *The Preventive System in the education of youth*, *The 'General articles' of the Regulations for the houses*, *The Preventive System applied to youth at risk*, *The Letter from Rome of 1884*.

SOURCES:

- J. BOSCO. *Salesian Sources* 1. Part Two: 'Writings and Testimonies of Don Bosco on Education and Schooling' (SS 1:409–684).
- G. BOSCO. *Il Sistema Preventivo nella educazione della gioventù*. Introduzione e testi critici. Ed. P. Braido. Roma: LAS, 1989.
- P. BRAIDO. *La lettera di don Bosco da Roma del 10 maggio 1884*. Roma: LAS, 1984.
- Sources and studies available on the salesian.online website.

TEXTS:

- G. BARBERIS. *Appunti di pedagogia (1847–1927)*. Ed. José Manuel Pallezo. Roma: LAS, 2017.
- P. BRAIDO. *Breve storia del Sistema Preventivo*. Roma: LAS, 1992.
- P. BRAIDO. *L'esperienza educativa di Don Bosco*. Roma: LAS, 2000.
- L. CIAN. *Educhiamo i giovani d'oggi come Don Bosco*. LDC, 1988.
- L. CIAN. *El sistema educativo de Don Bosco. Las líneas maestras de su estilo*. Madrid: CCS, 2001³.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR THE TEACHER:

- J.M. PELLEZO. *Valdocco fra reale e ideale*. Roma: LAS, 1992.
- P. BRAIDO, ed. *Don Bosco educatore. Scritti e testimonianze*. Roma: LAS, 1992.
- 23rd General Chapter of the Salesians of Don Bosco. 'Educating Young People to the Faith'. *Capitular Documents*. Rome, 1990.
- F. PERAZA LEAL. *Seis escritos de Don Bosco*. Quito:

CSRFP, 1999, 2012².

- F. PERAZA LEAL. *Iniciación al estudio de Don Bosco*. Quito: CSRFP, 2001¹, 2010⁵.
- F. PERAZA LEAL. *El sistema preventivo de don Bosco*. Quito: CSRFP, 2001¹, 2010⁴.

3.2 History of the Salesian Congregation and the Salesian Family

The aim is to begin to get to know, in a systematic manner, the relevant points in the history of the Congregation: its origins, its missionary expansion in the world, the figures of the Rectors Major, and the General Chapters. Particular attention will be given to the missionary nature of the Congregation and to the development and characteristics of the identity of Salesian educational institutions and the corresponding pedagogical reflection over time. Space is also given to reading and deepening the teaching of the Rectors Major on the spiritual life proposal for the Salesian educator.

The Salesian Congregation is also seen within the Salesian Family and in relation to the different forms of the Salesian vocation within the Family.

SALESIAN SOURCES:

- E. VIGANÒ. 'Reading the Founder's Charism Again at the Present Day'. AGC 352 (1995) 3–35.
- Circular letters of the Rectors Major.
- Acts of the General Chapters.

TEXTS:

- M. WIRTH. *Da don Bosco ai nostri giorni*. Roma: LAS, 2000.
- M. VOJTÁŠ. *Pedagogia salesiana dopo don Bosco*. Roma: LAS, 2021 (available at SDL in en).
- A. MARAVILLA. 'The Salesian Missionary Vocation: Reflections, processes and operational guidelines'. AGC 437 (2022) 53–68.
- *Charter of the Charismatic Identity of the Salesian Family of Don Bosco*. Rome, 2012.
- Secretariat of the Salesian Family. *The Salesian Family of Don Bosco*. Salesian Generalate, Rome 2020.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR THE TEACHER:

- MISSIONS SECTOR. *Salesian Missionary Animation: Manual of Provincial Delegate for Missionary Animation*. Rome 2019.

3.3 Salesian Youth Ministry I (fundamental elements)

In the first reflection on Salesian Youth Ministry some elements, works and important points are presented. The *fundamental elements* of Salesian youth ministry: the Salesian educative and pastoral mission, the relationship between education and evangelization, the EPC and the SEPP. Youth Ministry *settings*: oratory, school, technical and vocational training, boarding, parish, communication, social works, university level institutions. *Attention to matters of a particular and practical nature*: Salesian animation of groups and of the Salesian Youth Movement (SYM), education to the faith and catechetical programmes, Salesian presence in one's own context.

TEXTS:

- SALESIAN YOUTH MINISTRY DEPARTMENT. *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*. Rome, 2014. Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR THE TEACHER:

- *L'accompagnamento spirituale. Itinerario pedagogico spirituale in chiave salesiana al servizio dei giovani*. Ed. F. Attard e M.A. Garcia. Torino: LDC, 2014. *Spiritual Accompaniment: An Educational and Spiritual Journey with Young People in the Way of Don Bosco*. Ed. F. Attard and M.A. Garcia. Bolton: Don Bosco Publications, 2018.

4. PRACTICAL TRAINING

928. The phase of practical training does not have a specific programme for Salesian studies. It is suggested that the province organize meetings or seminars for study and reflection on topics that concern the actual life of the practical trainees as well as on some of the documents of the Church and the Congregation. Personal readings

should also be suggested; these could be followed up by the rector.

The personal plan of life is a useful tool in the meetings with the spiritual guide and, if the confrere so wishes, also with the rector.

Participation in the life of the province provides further opportunities to become familiar with the Salesian life and work in the area.

The rectors of practical trainees have the important task of ensuring that there is pastoral accompaniment. Such accompaniment could be done by the rector himself or else by the local pastoral coordinator. The practical trainees need to be helped to learn by experience the meaning of the Salesian vocation (C 98, 119).

Objectives

Compare the theory of the Preventive System with is being experienced. This is when the experiential methodology, reflecting on praxis, is most emphasized.

Values to be emphasized

Spirit of work.

A joy that can be seen.

Constant creativity for the sake of the young people.

Sense of community.

Ability to work with lay people.

Ability to reflect on his experience with the help of his formators.

Grace of unity.

Attitudes

He always makes the most of his time for the benefit of young people.

He enjoys being among the young.

He makes use of his free time to serve young people, even those who do not strictly belong to the work entrusted to him.

He has a friendly and fraternal relationship with each of the confreres in his community.

He has friendly and cordial relationships with the lay people and other members of the EPC.

Achievement indicators

The practical trainee:

- is always there among the young,
- shares his experience of the Preventive System in community meetings,
- has frequent formative meetings with his rector,
- knows how to unify spiritual and apostolic work in his life,

- lives his dedication to young people with pleasure and joy,
 - knows how to work with the laity and the Salesian Family,
 - works within the community plan,
 - he is willing to seek help and makes regular use of personal accompaniment.
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TEXTS:

- E. VIGANÒ. 'We are Educator-Prophets'. AGC 346 (1993) 3–39.
- J.E. VECCHI. 'Experts, Witnesses and Craftsmen of Communion'. AGC 363 (1998) 3–44.
- P. Braido. *Prevenire e non reprimere. Il sistema preventivo di don Bosco*. LAS, 1999. *Prevention, not Repression: Don Bosco's Educational System*. Bengaluru: Kristu Jyoti, 2013. (Available at SDL 'Don Bosco' collection in en).
- F. CEREDA. 'Ongoing Formation. The personal plan of life. A process of creative faithfulness towards holiness'. Letter to provincials and provincial councils, provincial formation delegates and provincial formation commissions. Rome, 21 June 2003.
- F. CEREDA. 'Initial formation. The personal plan of life. A process of identification with the Salesian vocation'. Letter to rectors, members of formation communities, provincials and provincial formation delegates. Rome, 5 July 2003.
- F. CEREDA. 'The formative experience of practical training'. Letter to confreres in practical training. Rome, 17 February 2010.
- I. COELHO. 'The educative and pastoral experience of practical training'. Letter to provincials, provincial formation delegates, members of the provincial formation commission, practical trainees and the rectors and confreres of their communities. Rome, 15 October 2019 (prot. 19/0430).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS:

- F. PERAZA Leal. *El sistema preventivo de don Bosco*. Quito: CSRFP, 2001¹, 2010⁴.

5. SPECIFIC FORMATION

929. Specific formation is the period in which there is a deepening of the basic formation of the Salesian educator and pastor, in line with his vocation as a priest or consecrated layman.

The Salesian in this phase is assisted in broadening his understanding of *Don Bosco in his mature years* and is helped to acknowledge and develop his *vocational identity*, according to the profile of the two forms presented by the Salesian Congregation. He comes closer to the spiritual experience of Don Bosco, who, inspired by St Francis de Sales, positioned himself in the Church as the initiator of a school of a distinctive youth and apostolic spirituality. He becomes qualified in pastoral activity directed to young people, learning to reflect critically and plan in order to face up to *new pastoral challenges* and to animate and accompany educative and pastoral communities.

Objectives

To enlighten the preparation for perpetual profession according to the profile of the Salesian brother and Salesian priest.

To develop the capacity to approach pastoral and theological disciplines with a Salesian sensibility.

To explore the pastoral experience of Don Bosco, particularly in the following areas: spiritual accompaniment, youth ministry, catechesis, relationship with the Church, spirituality, option for poor youth, spiritual animation of individuals and groups and of the various vocations in the Salesian Family.

To understand the pastoral nature of Salesian works and the animating role of brothers and priests.

Values to be emphasized

Da mihi animas: pastoral charity, apostolic depth, primacy of God, urgency of mission, dedication, whole-hearted self-sacrifice, self-forgetfulness, industriousness, affectionate and supportive closeness, practicality and creativity. Grace of unity.

Communion: ability to work in groups, complementarity of the two forms of the Salesian vocation, working within the EPC.

Discernment and spiritual fatherliness.

Attitudes

Capacity for discernment and spiritual fatherliness.

Growing awareness of one's priestly or lay Salesian identity.

Taste for reading and reflection for the updating of one's ministry as a

Salesian priest or Salesian brother.

Appreciation of the sacramental, catechetical, vocational, community and Marian dimensions.

Openness to dialogue and complementarity with the laity.

Willingness to grow in pastoral commitment.

Achievement indicators

The Salesian:

- has been trained in a methodology of reading theological and pastoral subjects from an educative and pastoral perspective,
 - has acquired a new synthesis of his vocation by rereading his own history in Salesian terms, comparing it with Don Bosco's experience,
 - has drawn up his personal plan of life modelled on the image of Christ the Good Shepherd and Don Bosco the shepherd for the young,
 - is willing to seek help and profits from regular personal accompaniment,
 - has prepared for personal accompaniment of the young,
 - has produced a written assignment on some aspect of how Don Bosco lived his priesthood or on some aspect of how he thought of the figure of the Salesian brother,
 - has participated in a pastoral project of the local or national Church.
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5.1 Don Bosco founder and model of the Salesian pastor-communicator-missionary

Don Bosco is seen as a founder in the ecclesial and social context of his time. He founded the Salesians of Don Bosco, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, the Salesian Cooperators, the Association of Mary Help of Christians. He is presented in the main lines of his pastoral action: preaching, catechesis, devotion to Mary Help of Christians, social communication, the formation of pastors and saints. His missionary commitment is given special attention.

SALESIAN SOURCES:

- J. Bosco. *Salesian Sources* 1. *To the Salesian confreres* 1875–1885 (SS 1:845–871); *Confidential reminders for the director* (SS 1:478–485); *Spiritual Testament* (SS 1:1104–1114); *Reminders to missionaries* (SS 1:291–292; 299–305).
- *Lettere circolari di Don Bosco e di Don Rua ai Salesiani*. Torino: Tipografia Salesiana, 1896.

TEXTS:

- P. STELLA. *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità*

cattolica. Vol. I: Vita e opere. Roma: LAS, 2018².
Don Bosco: Life and Work. New Rochelle: Salesiana Publishers, 2005. Chapters 6, 8, 9.

- P. BRAIDO. *Don Bosco prete dei giovani nel secolo della libertà*. Roma: LAS, 2003. Vol. I: 360–581 and vol II. In particular: vol. I: chapters 12, 14, 15; vol. II: chapters 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 26. (Available at SDL in it, en)
- A. MARAVILLA. 'The Salesian Missionary Vocation: Reflections, processes and operational guidelines'. AGC 437 (2022) 53–68.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR THE TEACHER:

- E. VIGANÒ. 'The Pope's Appeal for the Missions'. AGC 336 (1991) 3–44.
- DEPARTMENT FOR YOUTH MINISTRY AND DEPARTMENT FOR THE MISSIONS. *Volunteering in the Salesian Mission: Identity and Orientation of Salesian Missionary Volunteering*. Rome, 2019.
- MISSIONS SECTOR. *SALESIAN MISSIONARY ANIMATION: Manual of Provincial Delegate for M.A.* Rome 2019.

5.2 Salesian spirituality

The content of the course is divided into three parts: (1) the spirituality of St Francis de Sales as it appears in his writings; (2) the sources and reference points of Don Bosco's spirituality: the models that influenced him (Ignatius of Loyola, Alphonsus Liguori...) and the main themes; (3) the proposal of youth spirituality as it appears in Don Bosco's writings, and its development up to the current proposal of Salesian youth spirituality; Salesian spirituality and the Salesian Family.

SALESIAN SOURCES:

- J. Bosco. *Salesian Sources* 1. Part Three: Writings and Testimonies of Don Bosco on Spiritual Life (The Companion of Youth – SS 1:693–765; Spiritual Formation of the Young through Preaching, 'Goodnight' and Dream Accounts – SS 1:801–841). Part Four: Writings of a Biographical and Autobiographical Nature. Section 1: Exemplary Biographies (Comollo, Savio, Magone, Besucco – SS 1:1122–1322).

- FRANCIS DE SALES. *A Treatise on the Love of God*.
- FRANCIS DE SALES. *Spiritual Conferences of St. Francis de Sales*.

TEXTS:

- P. STELLA. *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*. II: Mentalità religiosa e spiritualità, Roma: LAS, 1981. *Don Bosco: Religious Outlook and Spirituality*. New Rochelle: Salesiana Publishers, 1996.
- F. DESRAMAUT. *Don Bosco e la vita spirituale*. Leumann: LDC, 1970. *Don Bosco and the Spiritual Life*. New Rochelle: Don Bosco Publications, 1979.
- A. GIRAUDO. *Don Bosco, maestro de vida espiritual. Servid al Señor con alegría*. Madrid: CCS, 2012.
- G. BUCCELLATO. *Alle radici della spiritualità di San Giovanni Bosco*. Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013.
- SALESIAN FORMATION DEPARTMENT AND SALESIAN YOUTH MINISTRY DEPARTMENT. *Young Salesians and Accompaniment: Orientations and Guidelines*. Rome, 2019.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR THE TEACHER:

- E. VIGANÒ. 'Salesian spirituality for the new evangelization'. AGC 334 (1990) 3–46.
- E. VIGANÒ. *L'interiorità apostolica. Riflessioni sulla 'grazia di unità' come sorgente di carità pastorale*. Torino: Elledici, 2020. *Apostolic interiority: Reflections on the "grace of unity" as the source of pastoral charity*. 2023 (available on SDL). *Interioridad apostólica. Reflexiones acerca de la gracia de unidad como fuente de caridad pastoral*. Madrid: CCS, 1990.
- J.E. VECCHI. *Spiritualità salesiana. Temi fondamentali*. Torino: LDC, 2001. *Espiritualidade salesiana. Temas fundamentais*. Brasília, 2017. *Salesian Spirituality. Basic Themes*, 2025 (available on SDL).
- A. GIRAUDO. 'Linee portanti dell'animazione spirituale della Congregazione salesiana da parte della Direzione Generale tra 1880 e 1921'. *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* 23/44 (2004) 99–162.
- *Domenico Savio raccontato da don Bosco. Riflessioni sulla 'Vita'*. *Atti del Simposio. Università Pontificia Salesiana Roma, 8 maggio 2004*. Ed. A. Giraudo.

Roma: LAS, 2005.

- F. DESRAMAUT. *Spiritualità salesiana. Cento parole chiave*. Roma: LAS, 2001. 'Les cent mots-clefs de la spiritualité salesienne'. Paris: Éditions Don Bosco, 2001. The original was in *Cahiers Salesiens* 38 (1998); 39 (1999); 40 (2000). *One Hundred Keywords of Salesian Spirituality*. 2023 (available on SDL in en).
- *San Francesco di Sales e i Salesiani di Don Bosco*. Ed. J. PICCA and J. STRUS. Roma: LAS, 1986.
- J. BOENZI. *Saint Francis de Sales: Life and Spirit*. Stella Niagara, NY: DeSales Resources and Ministries, 2013.
- V. VIGUERA FRANCO. *Espiritualidad salesiana. Ensayo sobre la espiritualidad de san Francisco de Sales y de San Juan Bosco*. Madrid: CCS, 1992.

5.3 The Salesian consecrated vocation in its two forms

Don Bosco's vision and proposal regarding the two forms of the Salesian religious vocation, clerical and lay, are explored. Don Bosco the pastor was formed in the pastoral approach of the Chieri seminary, developed certain new pastoral emphases at the *Convitto* and later presented his idea of the priest and brother in his writings to Salesians.

The historical development of the two forms within the one Salesian consecrated vocation.

TEXTS:

- E. CERIA. *Don Bosco sacerdote*. Sevilla: Impr. Escuelas Profesionales de Artes y Oficios, 1930.
- F. DESRAMAUT. *Per una spiritualità sacerdotale di don Bosco. Conferenze tenute al P.A.S. – Roma, 5–11 aprile 1968*. Torino: Ufficio Consigliere Generale per le Ispettorie d'Italia, 1968.
- A. GIRAUDO. *Clero, seminario e società*. Roma: LAS, 1993.
- F. PERAZA LEAL. *Perfil sacerdotal de don Bosco*. Quito: CSRFP, 1996¹. Madrid: CCS, 2009².
- A. BOZZOLO. 'Salesiano prete e salesiano coadiutore. Spunti per una interpretazione teologica'. *Sapientiam dedit illi. Studi su don Bosco e sul carisma salesiano*, ed.

- A. Bozzolo. Roma: LAS, 2015. 317–373. *The Dual Form of the Salesian Vocation: A Theological Interpretation*. Bengaluru: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2019.
- I. COELHO. 'Renewed attention to the Salesian Brother'. AGC 424 (2017) 65–75.
 - I. COELHO. 'Living the priesthood as Salesians'. AGC 431 (2019) 54–85.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR THE TEACHER:

- FORMATION DEPARTMENT. *The Salesian Brother: History, Identity, Pastoral Formation and Vocation*. Rome: Editrice S.D.B., 1989. (Available at SDL in it, en)
- E. VIGANÒ. 'The lay element in the Salesian community'. ASC 298 (1980) 3–51.
- E. VIGANÒ. 'The priest of the year 2000. A theme we have very much at heart'. AGC 335 (1991) 5–44.
- P. BRAIDO. 'Un "nuovo prete" e la sua formazione culturale secondo don Bosco. Intuizioni, aporie, virtualità'. RSS 14 (1989) 7–55.
- P. BRAIDO. *Religiosi nuovi per il mondo del lavoro. Documentazione per un profilo del Coadiutore salesiano*. Roma: PAS, 1961.
- J. AUBRY AND P. SCHOENEGER. *Le coadjuteur salésien*. Nice 1952. *Don Bosco li volle così. I Coadiutori salesiani. Conferenze tenute durante la prima riunione dei Coadiutori francesi a Ressins nel settembre 1952*. Torino: LDC 1961.
- M. VERHULST. *Le salésien-prêtre aujourd'hui, à la suite de don Bosco-prêtre. Une spiritualité sacerdotale spécifique*. Pro manuscripto. Lubumbashi, 2015–2016.
- M. VERHULST. *La figure du Salésien Coadjuteur dans la Congrégation, hier et aujourd'hui*. Pro manuscripto. Lubumbashi, 2016–2017.

5.4 Salesian Youth Ministry II (works, animation, planning)

Starting from the pastoral challenges and priorities in the various contexts, the following are explored. The *shared mission* and the role of service in EPCs. *Youth ministry settings*: the parish entrusted to the Salesian community, works and services for young people at risk, new forms

of Salesian presence among young people. *Kinds of animation*: the operational model of Salesian ministry, the Salesian community in its neighbourhood, community and personal spiritual accompaniment. *Provincial animation* of youth ministry through provincial and local planning.

Training in the basic skills of educative and pastoral planning should be included.

TEXTS

- SALESIAN YOUTH MINISTRY DEPARTMENT. *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference*. Rome, 2014. Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8.
- M. VOJTÁŠ. *Progettare e discernere*. Roma: LAS, 2015.
- C. Schaumont. *La vita di don Bosco tra scelte, sfide e passione*. Torino: Elledici, 2012.
- A. PAYÁ RICO. *Don Bosco y la cárcel. La prevención come respuesta al delito*. Madrid: CCS, 2019.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR THE TEACHER:

- *L'accompagnamento spirituale. Itinerario pedagogico spirituale in chiave salesiana al servizio dei giovani*, a cura di F. ATTARD e M.A. GARCÍA. Torino: LDC, 2014. *Spiritual Accompaniment: An Educational and Spiritual Journey with Young People in the Way of Don Bosco*. Ed. F. ATTARD and M.A. GARCÍA. Bolton: Don Bosco Publications, 2018.
- *Direzione spirituale in prospettiva salesiana. Accompagnare la vita di preghiera*. A cura di F. Attard e M.A. GARCIA. Torino: LDC, 2020. *Salesian Spiritual Direction: Accompaniment and Prayer*. Ed. F. ATTARD and M.A. GARCIA. Bolton: Don Bosco Publications, 2020.

6. THE STAGES OF LIFE

930. There is no specific programme for Salesian studies in the different stages of life. It is up to the province or groups of provinces to organize meetings or seminars for study and reflection on current documents of the magisterium and of the Congregation and its Sectors, and also on topics that concern the actual life of the confreres. Personal readings should also be suggested.

Appendix 10.

Guidelines regarding formation programmes for rectors, formators and spiritual guides

931. Formation is our daily and lifelong response to the call of God that is also new every day. Part of this lifelong formation consists in acquiring the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are needed to carry out the specific ministries that may be entrusted to us.

The service of authority and formation offered by rectors, formators and spiritual guides calls for an adequate preparation in the Salesian charism, counselling and accompaniment. What is needed is not so much a degree as the knowledge and skills necessary as well as work on oneself.

1. RECTORS

932. The rector of a Salesian community is the guardian of the Salesian consecrated identity and the animator and guide of the Salesian religious community and mission, as well as of the EPC (AnGC 7). 'He is the first in order of responsibility for its religious life, its apostolic activities and the administration of its good' (C 176). He is responsible for community spiritual accompaniment (C 55) and makes himself available for the friendly talk with the confreres, taking care of the atmosphere and the conditions conducive to it. He willingly guides those confreres who choose him as their personal spiritual guide (C 70 and FSDB 201). To carry out his ministry effectively it would be important that the rector acquire the knowledge and skills required in various areas:

- A. Salesian charism and mission
- B. The Preventive System
- C. Animation and guidance of the council of the Salesian community
- D. Animation and guidance of the EPC
- E. Leadership

- F. Community building
- G. Dynamics of multicultural communities
- H. Counselling
- I. Spiritual accompaniment
- J. Personal and community prayer
- K. Administrative matters
- L. Assessment of candidates
- M. Relevant sections of canon law and civil law
- N. Protection of minors and vulnerable adults
- O. Conflict management.

Some Resources

- *Animating and Governing the Community: The Ministry of the Salesian Rector*, 2020.
- CICLSAL. *Economy at the Service of the Charism and Mission: Boni dispensatores multiformis gratiae Dei. Guidelines*, 2018.
- CICLSAL. *The Service of Authority and Obedience. Faciem tuam, Domine, requiram*, 2008.
- GC25, *The Salesian Community Today*, 2002.
- Salesian Formation Department & Salesian Youth Ministry Department. *Young Salesians and Accompaniment: Orientations and Guidelines*, 2019.

2. FORMATORS

933. GC28 made a very strong appeal for the adequate formation of formators (GC28 27, 30d). Echoing this concern, the Rector Major Fr Ángel Fernández Artime said, ‘the formation of the formators, meaning the formation of confreres who accompany the formation of young Salesians with a “particular vocation within their vocation”, and setting up of good teams of individuals who can accompany the stages of formation, are a real urgency and priority given that **the community is the first place of formation**’ (GC28 p. 32).

The formator needs to be prepared to accompany those entrusted to him in various ways, helping them to grow in their configuration to ‘to Christ the Good Shepherd in the footsteps of Don Bosco’ (AGC 426 34). This calls us, in the words of the Rector Major, ‘to

renew our style of formation, something that needs to be thought of more and more in personalizing, holistic, relational, contextual and intercultural terms' (GC28 p. 32). The formation of a formator should include at least these three areas: the formator's own development as a mature human being and integrated spiritual person; the knowledge necessary; the skills needed for accompaniment. Some important elements of such formation are:

- A. Personal psychological well-being
- B. Personal spiritual well-being
- C. Adequate psychological preparation (e.g. psychology of human development, psycho-sexual integration)
- D. Competence in Salesian charism and mission
- E. Knowledge of vocational pedagogy and discernment
- F. Ability to create an atmosphere of trust, responsibility, beauty and freedom
- G. Theory and practice of group dynamics.
- H. Competence in the subject one teaches and one's role (e.g. administrator)
- I. Competence in teaching techniques and classroom management.
- J. Capacity to assess formees in their totality, taking into consideration the gradual nature of development.
- K. Basic skills in spiritual accompaniment
- L. Skills for working in a team and for team building.
- M. Pastoral accompaniment
- N. Proficiency in living and making use of the Preventive System
- O. Ability to work with lay people and engage in shared formation
- P. Familiarity with the dynamics of the digital world and artificial intelligence
- Q. Ability to avail of supervision.

934. The formation of formators is a 'conditio sine qua non' for implementing what is required for the initial stages of formation programmes (see FSDB, Chapter 7 in its entirety). The need for teams of qualified formators is all the greater given how challenging it is to achieve this objective, because it is the investment in quality

that will give value and a future to every other choice of Salesian presence and mission.

Hence the need for provincials and provincial councils to be proactive and forward-thinking in planning and consistently investing in the selection and preparation of formators, through multi-year planning for the specialisation of confreres, shared at the Congregation level and ready to respond to the needs that emerge from the curatoriums in which they are involved (cf. FSDB 266, 292, 305, 309).

First of all, we must bear in mind what the Pontifical Salesian University offers in its role and strategic service as the university of the Congregation (Fabio Attard, fourth key guideline in the 2025-2031 six-year plan in AGC 446 39-40). In particular, the following should be highlighted:

- A curriculum for Vocational Pedagogy which aims to form professionals who are experts in the fields of guidance, animation and education, vocational formation (professionals, teachers, researchers) specifically with regard to vocation ministry, ordained ministry, consecrated vocations and lay vocations, in particular the vocation to marriage and family life. The programme includes a Baccalaureate (Bachelor's degree) a Licence (Master's degree) and a Doctorate.
- The Faculty of Theology – Licentiate in Spiritual Theology – in the second cycle promotes the study of the dynamics of vocational formation with the contribution of theological-spiritual and pedagogical-methodological disciplines, for an integral formative practice. Salesian studies courses are also offered within spiritual theology.
- In the second semester of each academic year (February-May), a course in ongoing formation is offered for vocational formators of consecrated life, diocesan clergy, and community leaders, aimed at those who work in the field of formation and feel the need to renew their educational and spiritual commitment.

Some Resources

- CC. *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation. Ratio Fundamentalism Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, 2016.
- CCE. *Directives concerning the Preparation of Seminary Educators*, 1993.
- CCE. *Guidelines for the use of psychology in the admission and formation of candidates for the priesthood*, 2008.
- CEREDA, Francesco. 'Formation of the Formation Guides for Initial Formation'. AGC 404 (2009) 65–82.
- CICLSAL. *Potissimum Institutioni: Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes*. 1990.
- CICLSAL. *The Gift of Fidelity. The Joy of Perseverance: Manete in dilectione mea (Jn 15:9): Guidelines*, 2020.
- COELHO, Ivo. 'Formation of Formation Guides'. AGC 426 (2018) 32–47.
- FRANCIS. 'The Roman Curia and the Body of Christ', Presentation of the Christmas Greetings to the Roman Curia, 22 December 2014.
- SALESIAN FORMATION DEPARTMENT & SALESIAN YOUTH MINISTRY DEPARTMENT. *Young Salesians and Accompaniment: Orientations and Guidelines*. 2019.

3. SPIRITUAL GUIDES

935. 'Spiritual accompaniment, both communitarian and personal, is an... important part of the processes of initial formation, and, in fact, of formation as lifelong' (YSA p. 15). In order to make progress in spiritual life it is important to have the help of a guide. Reflecting on his own personal experience Don Bosco wrote: 'Until I came to the Convitto Ecclesiastico, I had no real guide in my spiritual life. I always did what seemed best, but I'm sure I would have made greater progress if I had had a steady and diligent spiritual director' (BM I:237). Recognising the importance of spiritual accompaniment for all phases of formation GC28 called for a renewed commitment to accompaniment: 'Let the Provinces and communities foster a renewed culture of accompaniment, helping confreres to rediscover its importance and value' (GC28 28g).

Spiritual accompaniment is different from psychological counselling, although they have many things in common and some of the skills and techniques they use are the same. Psychological counselling concerns itself mainly with the affective and psychological dimensions of a person. Spiritual accompaniment deals with a person's relationship with God, and touches upon other dimensions to the extent that they are related to one's spiritual growth. The formation of the spiritual guide should take into consideration three basic areas: content (information to be assimilated), skills (competences to be acquired), and the person of the guide (psychological and spiritual maturity). Here we shall indicate some important components that must form part of the formation of a Salesian spiritual guide:

- A. Personal psychological well-being
- B. The person of the guide – serene and integrated spiritual life
- C. Self-care
- D. Skills in counselling (e.g. listening, feedback, processing)
- E. Familiarity with Scripture
- F. Basic theological formation
- G. Familiarity with spiritual accompaniment in the life of Don Bosco
- H. Attentiveness to the workings of the Holy Spirit
- I. Formation to prayer, and especially to contemplative prayer
- J. Journaling
- K. Capacity to discern and facilitate the process of discernment
- L. Understanding of the ethical issues related to personal spiritual accompaniment (e.g. confidentiality)
- M. Supervision.

Some Resources

- *Accompaniment and Affectivity: Education to Love from a Salesian Perspective*. Ed. F. ATTARD and F. SANTOS MONTERO. Bolton: Don Bosco Publications, 2022.

- *Spiritual Accompaniment: An Educational and Spiritual Journey with Young People in the Way of Don Bosco*. Ed. F. ATTARD and M.-A. GARCIA. Bolton: Don Bosco Publications, 2018.
- *Salesian Spiritual Direction: Accompaniment and Prayer*. Ed. F. ATTARD and M.-A. GARCIA. Bolton: Don Bosco Publications, 2020.
- BARRY, William A. and William J. CONNOLLY. *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*. Revised and expanded. New York: HarperOne, 2009.
- CC. *The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy: An Aid for Confessors and Spiritual Directors*. 2011.
- FINNEGAN, Jack. *Walking the Wise Way of the Heart: Exploring the Art of Spiritual Accompaniment*. Sliema: Pubblikazzjoni Salesjana, 2024.
- Francis. *Christus Vivit*, 2019.
- KUTTIANIMATTATHIL, Jose. *Basics in Spiritual Direction*. Bengaluru: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2014.
- Salesian Formation Department & Salesian Youth Ministry Department. *Young Salesians and Accompaniment: Orientations and Guidelines*, 2019.

Appendix 11.

Safeguarding of minors and vulnerable adults

I. INTRODUCTION

936. Safeguarding is not only a legal and pastoral duty, but a reflection of the Gospel call to protect the ‘little ones’ (Mt 18:6). In continuity with Don Bosco’s charism of loving presence and protective accompaniment, the Salesian Congregation reaffirms its commitment to the dignity, safety and integral development of every young person and vulnerable adult under its care.

This appendix outlines our safeguarding approach through three key principles: Promotion, Prevention, and Protection.

Safeguarding is intrinsically connected with the Salesian vocation to be ‘signs and bearers of God’s love to the young.’ Therefore, this commitment permeates our personal formation, community life, and mission.

This appendix is addressed to three principal groups:

- **Those in the early phases of formation** are called to embrace safeguarding formation with openness and responsibility, making it an essential part of their growth in pastoral charity and vocational discernment.
- **Formators** are entrusted with the duty to educate, witness and guide with vigilance and care, ensuring that safeguarding is a concrete and visible expression of Salesian formation.
- **Salesians in the field**, especially those entrusted with leadership roles, are to embody safeguarding through proactive leadership, public witness, structural accountability and accompaniment of communities and individuals.

2. PROMOTION: FOSTERING A CULTURE OF RESPECT AND SAFETY

937.

A. For those in the early phases of formation

- Actively participate in safeguarding formation as an integral part of one's vocational journey.
- Develop interior attitudes of respect, self-regulation, and mature relationships that reflect the Preventive System.
- Assume shared responsibility in cultivating safe environments in the formation community through example, vigilance, and openness.

B. For formators

- Ensure safeguarding is systematically taught and witnessed through example.
- Accompany those in the early phases of formation with attention to relational maturity, boundary awareness and affective discernment.
- Model a lifestyle of coherent evangelical witness and vigilance.

C. For Salesians in the field (ongoing formation and those in leadership positions)

- Foster renewal in safeguarding attitudes and awareness through periodic workshops and spiritual reflection.
- Promote safeguarding as a fruit of pastoral charity and Salesian assistance.
- Uphold public commitments that witness to our preventive pedagogy and the dignity of the young.
- Those in positions of authority and decision-makers must ensure that safeguarding is prioritized in policies, visitations, resource allocation and community culture.

3. PREVENTION: CREATING ENVIRONMENTS OF AWARENESS AND VIGILANCE

938.

A. For those in the early phases of formation

- Understand and practise safe relational and digital

conduct.

- Cultivate habits of vigilance and mutual correction in community.
- Develop personal responsibility for contributing to a safe and respectful atmosphere.

B. For formators

- Develop and implement safeguarding plans tailored to the formation community.
- Carry out thorough background checks and psychological assessments to ensure candidates demonstrate emotional maturity, relational integrity and absence of indicators of risk toward minors or vulnerable adults.
- Collaborate with provincial safeguarding delegates or contact persons and include formation-specific safeguarding modules.

C. For Salesians in the field (including those in leadership positions)

- Review and implement guidelines for the selection of candidates, including tests and measurements related to psychological dispositions
- Ensure every Salesian work has policies that align with Church and civil law.
- Participate in regular training on digital safety, trauma-awareness and intercultural vigilance.
- Involve the EPC in building a culture of safety.
- Those in positions of authority are responsible for evaluating safeguarding effectiveness in community life and apostolic activity.

4. PROTECTION: RESPONDING JUSTLY AND COMPASSIONATELY

939.

A. For those in the early phases of formation

- Be informed about procedures for reporting concerns safely and confidentially.
- Practise regular self-reflection and honest personal disclosure to formators, to prevent the development of

attitudes or behaviours that could lead to future abuse.

- Cultivate a culture of mutual protection and fraternal concern.
- Commit to personal and community integrity by speaking out responsibly.

B. For formators

- Foster a culture of trust and openness that encourages those in the early phases of formation to share freely, within appropriate boundaries.
- Engage in ongoing formation on safeguarding, trauma-awareness and ethical accompaniment to maintain a high standard of care and vigilance.
- Respond to concerns with discretion, justice and care.
- Be equipped to accompany victims and ensure their safety and support.

C. For Salesians in the field (including those in leadership positions)

- Uphold a zero-tolerance policy and act promptly in cases of abuse.
- Provide access to pastoral, legal and psychological support for victims.
- Publicly witness against abuse and promote systemic change when needed.
- Those in leadership positions should ensure proper implementation and accountability in safeguarding procedures.

5. DIRECTIVE

940. Each province, in the context of its culture and laws, shall create and enforce safeguarding policies that promote behavioural accountability and safe environments. Formation programs shall instil this commitment, while structures and accompaniment practices shall ensure that every Salesian setting cultivates trust, respect and Christian growth.

Appendix 12.

Church and Salesian documents on formation

1. CHURCH DOCUMENTS

941.

Paul VI

- *Perfectae Caritatis*, 1965.
- *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, 1967.

John Paul II

- *Christifideles Laici*, 1988.
- *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 1988.
- Letter *Iuvenum Patris* on the centenary of the death of Don Bosco, 1988.
- *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 1992.
- *Vita Consecrata*, 1996.
- *Fides et Ratio*, 1998.

Benedict XVI

- *Deus Caritas Est*, 2005.
- Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI for Lent 2007.
- *Caritas in Veritate*, 2009.

Francis

- *Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013.
- Apostolic Letter to All Consecrated People for the Year of Consecrated Life. 2014.
- *Laudato Si'*, 2015.
- *Amoris Laetitia*, 2016.
- *Veritatis Gaudium*, 2017.
- *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 2018.
- *Christus Vivit*, 2019.
- *Totum Amoris Est*, 2022.
- Message of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Members of GC28. AGC 433 (2020) 55–66.
- *Laudate Deum*, 2023.

- *Motu proprio Ad theologiam promovendam*, 2023.
- *Dilexit Nos*, 2024.
- *Spes Non Confundit*

942.

Dicastery for Culture and Education (formerly Congregation for Catholic Education)

- *A Guide to Formation in Priestly Celibacy*, 1974.
- *Educational Guidance in Human Love*, 1983.
- *Directives Concerning the Preparation of Seminary Educators*, 1993.
- *Instruction to the Episcopal Conferences on the Admission of Candidates Coming from Other Seminaries or Religious Families*, 1996.
- *Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood*, 2008.
- *Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies in view of their Admission to the Seminary and to Holy Orders*, 2005.

Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (formerly Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life)

- SCRIS and Congregation for Bishops, *Mutuae Relationes*, 1978.
- *The Contemplative Dimension of Religious Life*, 1980.
- *Potissimum Institutioni: Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes*, 1990.
- *Fraternal Life in Community: Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor*, 1994.
- *Inter-Institute collaboration for formation*, 1999.
- *Starting Afresh from Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium*, 2002.
- *The Service of Authority and Obedience: Faciem tuam, Domine, requiram*, 2008.
- *Rejoice! A letter to consecrated men and women*, 2014.
- *Keep Watch! To Consecrated Men and Women Journeying in the Footsteps of God*, 2014.
- *Identity and Mission of the Religious Brother in the Church*, 2015.

- *Contemplate: 'You whom my heart loves' (Sg 1:7): To consecrated men and women on the trail of Beauty*, 2016.
- *Proclaim: To consecrated men and women witnesses of the Gospel among peoples*, 2016.
- *New Wine in New Wineskins*, 2017.
- *Economy at the Service of the Charism and Mission: Boni dispensatores multiformis gratiae Dei* (1 Pt. 4:10), 2018.
- *The Gift of Fidelity and the Joy of Perseverance: Manete in dilectione mea* (Jn 15:9), 2020.
- *Circular letter on the utilization of computer-telematic tools*, 2023

Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (formerly Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith)

- *Donum Veritatis: Instruction on the ecclesial vocation of the theologian*, 1990.

Dicastery for the Clergy (formerly Congregation for the Clergy)

- *Basic norms for the formation of permanent deacons – Directory for the ministry and life of permanent deacons*, 1998.
- *The priest and the third Christian millennium teacher of the Word, minister of the sacraments and leader of the community*, 1999.
- *The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy: An Aid for Confessors and Spiritual Directors*, 2011.
- *Directory for the Ministry and the Life of Priests*, new edition 2013.
- *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation. Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*, 2016.

International Theological Commission

- *Faith and inculturation*, 1988.

2. SALESIAN AND OTHER DOCUMENTS

943.

General Chapters

- SGC (1972): 'Formation to Salesian Life' (document 13)
- GC21 (1978): 'Formation to Salesian Life'; 'The Salesian Brother'; 'Opera PAS and the Salesian Pontifical

University’

- GC23 (1990): *Educating Young People to the Faith*
- GC24 (1996): *Salesians and Lay People: Communion and sharing in the spirit and mission of Don Bosco*
- GC25 (2002): *The Salesian Community Today*
- GC26 (2008): ‘*Da mihi animas, cetera tolle*’
- GC27 (2014): *Witnesses to the Radical Approach of the Gospel. Work and temperance*
- GC28 (2020): *What kind of Salesians for the youth of today?*
- GC29 (2025): *Passionate about Jesus Christ, dedicated to young people*

944.

Rectors Major

Egidio Viganò

- ‘The lay element in the Salesian community’. ASC 298 (1980) 3–51.
- ‘The Salesian according to Don Bosco’s dream of the ten diamonds’. ASC 300 (1981) 3–36.
- *Un progetto evangelico di vita attiva*. Leumann (TO), 1982.
- ‘The renewed text of our Rule of Life’. AGC 312 (1985) 11–47.
- *Per una teologia della vita consacrata*. Leumann (TO), 1986. *Towards a Theology of Consecrated Life*. 2023 (available at SDL).
- *Interioridad apostolica. Reflexiones acerca de la gracia de unidad como fuente de caridad pastoral*. Fortín Mercedes – 1988. Madrid: CCS, 2020. *L’interiorità apostolica. Riflessioni sulla ‘grazia di unità’ come sorgente di carità pastorale*. Torino: Elledici, 2020.
- ‘Salesian spirituality for the new evangelization’. AGC 334 (1990) 3–46.
- ‘The priest of the year 2000’. AGC 335 (1991) 5–44.
- ‘Charism and prayer’. AGC 338 (1991) 3–38.
- ‘Reading the founder’s charism again at the present day’. AGC 352 (1995) 3–35.
-

Juan Edmundo Vecchi

- ‘Indications for a process of growth in Salesian spirituality’. AGC 354 (1995) 3–54.

- 'For you I study...'. AGC 361 (1997) 3–53.
- 'Experts, witnesses and craftsmen of communion'. AGC 363 (1998) 3–44.
- 'The Father consecrates us and sends us'. AGC 365 (1998) 3–49.
- 'A love without limits for God and the young'. AGC 366 (1999) 3–43.
- 'He has reconciled us to himself and has given us the ministry of reconciliation'. AGC 369 (1999) 3–47.
- 'This is my Body, which is given for you'. AGC 371 (2000) 3–53.
- *Called to be Shepherds. Retreat Talks on Salesian Life*. New Delhi, 2000.
- 'Beatification of Bro. Artemide Zatti: A Sensational Precedent'. AGC 376 (2001) 3–58.
- *Spiritualità salesiana. Temi fondamentali*. Torino, 2001. *Espiritualidade salesiana. Temas fundamentais*. Brasília, 2017. *Salesian Spirituality. Basic Themes*, 2025, available on SDL.

Pascual Chávez Villanueva

- 'My dear Salesians, be saints!' AGC 379 (2002) 3–37.
- "But who do you say that I am?" (Mk 8,28). Looking at Christ through the eyes of Don Bosco'. AGC 384 (2004) 3–41.
- 'Let us educate with the heart of Don Bosco'. AGC 400 (2008) 3–48.
- "He summoned those He wanted and they came to him" (Mk 3,13). On the 150th Anniversary of the Founding of the Salesian Congregation'. AGC 404 (2009) 3–64.
- "And he took pity on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he set himself to teach them at some length" (Mk 6,34). Salesian Youth Ministry'. AGC 407 (2010) 3–60.
- "Come and see" (Jn 1,39). The Need for Vocation Ministry'. AGC 409 (2011) 3–48.
- 'Inculturation of the Salesian Charism'. AGC 411 (2011) 3–56.
- 'Vocation and Formation: Gift and Task'. AGC 416 (2013) 3–56.
- 'Il carisma salesiano.' Rassegna CNOS 38/3 (2022) 31–44.

Ángel Fernández Artime

- ‘Belonging more to God, more to the Confreres, more to the Young’. AGC 419 (2014) 3–30.
- “‘Lord, give me this water’ (John 4:15). Let us cultivate the art of listening and of accompaniment’. AGC 426 (2018) 3–31.
- ‘What Kind of Salesians for the Youth of Today? Letter convoking the 28th General Chapter’. AGC 427 (2018) 3–34.
- “‘So that my joy may be in you’ (Jn 15,11). Holiness for you too’. AGC 429 (2019) 3–41.
- ‘The Rector Major’s Guidelines for the Salesian Congregation after General Chapter 28’. AGC 433 (2020) 13–54.
- “‘Do all through love, nothing through constraint’ (Saint Francis de Sales). In the fourth Centenary of the death of St Francis de Sales’. AGC 437 (2022) 3–52.
- “‘Young man, I say to you, rise!’ (Lk 7:14). The Salesian option for young people at high social risk as a commitment to justice, peace and care for creation’. AGC 438 (2022) 3–62.
- ‘As Yeast in Today’s Human Family. The lay dimension of the Family of Don Bosco’. AGC 439 (2023) 3–42.
- ‘I believed, I promised, I recovered!’ Artemides Zatti: Gospel of Vocation and a Church that Cares. Letter of the Rector Major for the canonization of Bro. Artemides Zatti’. AGC 439 (2023) 43–78.

945.**Other documents**

- ‘The first few years of Salesian training’. ASC 276 (1974) 58–83.
- Paolo Natali. ‘Admission to the Diaconate and Priesthood and the Exercise of the Diaconate’. AGC 312 (1985) 55–58.
- *The Project of Life of the Salesians of Don Bosco: A Guide to the Salesian Constitutions*. 1986.
- *The Salesian Provincial: A Ministry for the Animation and Government of the Provincial Community*. Rome, 1987. (Available at SDL)
- *The Salesian Brother. History, Identity, Vocational Apostolate and Formation*. Rome, 1989.

- *Rite of Religious Profession Society of St Francis de Sales*. Rome, 1990.
- *Proper Masses of the Salesian Family, Society of St Francis de Sales*. Rome, 1992.
- Francesco Cereda. 'The Delegate and Provincial Commission For Formation'. AGC 383 (2003) 42–54.
- *Juridical Elements and Administrative Praxis in the Government of the Province*. Rome, 2005.
- Francesco Cereda. 'Interprovincial Collaboration in Initial Formation.' AGC 388 (2005) 45–65.
- Mario Midali. *La Famiglia Salesiana, identità carismatica e spirituale*. Rome, 2010.
- *Salesian Social Communication System*. Rome, 2011.
- *Charter of the Charismatic Identity of the Salesian Family of Don Bosco*. Rome, 2012.
- *Missionary Formation of the Salesians of Don Bosco*. Rome, 2014.
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MARIA AVXILIVM CHRISTIANORVM ORA PRO NOBIS





Glossary and index



Glossary

acolyte

One of the ministries common to the whole Church (along with reader or lector), and can be conferred in a special ceremony, including on lay people. On 10 January 2021 Pope Francis issued an Apostolic Letter titled *Spiritus Domini*, which modified the Code of Canon Law to allow women, as well as men, to be installed in the ministry of acolyte and lector, or reader, at Mass.

animating nucleus

A group of individuals who identify with the Salesian mission, educational system and spirituality and jointly take on the task of calling together, motivating, involving everyone concerned with a work, making up the educative community together with them and carrying out a project of evangelization and education of the young. R 5 speaks of the Salesian community as the animating nucleus of the educative and pastoral community, but GC25 (nos. 78–81) expanded the animating nucleus to say that the religious community, as the point of charismatic reference, is not the complete animating core in itself but one of its integral parts.

charismatic dimension

Following Christ as Don Bosco did is the charismatic dimension of our following, central to Salesian life.

circumscription

‘Normally the circumscriptions of our Society are provinces and vice-provinces, As regards other eventual juridical circumscriptions, their internal structure and representation at the General Chapter will be defined in the decree of erection, in line with Salesian spirit and tradition’ (C 156). C 156 indicates the eventual existence of circumscriptions other than provinces or vice-

provinces. These are called a 'special circumscription' (*circoscrizione a statuto speciale* in Italian) and each is determined by the decree which sets it in place.

clericalism

Clericalism is a disordered attitude toward clergy, an excessive deference and an assumption of their moral superiority. In the pithy description of Pope Francis, it's when 'Clerics feel they are superior, [and when] they are far from the people.'

Comunità Proposta

The term does not have a precise English equivalent, though the closest may be that it is a live-in community experience. It is one form of the aspirantate.

counter-indication

In the context of Salesian vocational discernment, situations and attitudes that raise questions or doubts regarding vocational suitability or rule out the possibility of the Salesian consecrated life.

Convitto Ecclesiastico

The residential Pastoral Institute, located next to the Church of St Francis of Assisi in Turin, that Don Bosco attended after ordination. Its superior was Fr Joseph Cafasso. It was here that Don Bosco's activity for young people, that eventually became the Oratory and all that goes with it, began.

curatorium

In the Salesian context this body determines aspects of shared responsibility in interprovincial formation structures (formation communities, study centres, regional formation centres).

docibilitas

A responsive attitude to grace, an openness to the Spirit, the freedom to let ourselves be touched and educated by life, by persons, by existential situations.

fratelli tutti

‘brothers and sisters all’. The Italian phrase belongs to St Francis of Assisi and was chosen as the incipit and title for Pope Francis’ third encyclical.

hagiography

Literature relating to saints, generally characterised by edifying intentions; critical study of this literature.

humus

Literally the dark organic material in soils, produced by the decomposition of vegetable or animal matter, essential to fertility and favourable moisture supply. Figuratively any underlying substrate essential to growth.

interculturalism

A relatively new term, interculturalism refers to support for cross-cultural dialogue and challenging self-segregation tendencies within cultures. Interculturalism involves moving beyond mere passive acceptance of a multicultural fact of multiple cultures effectively existing in a society and instead promotes dialogue and interaction between cultures.

lector

See acolyte above.

maius

A Latin word that can mean greater, larger, or more important. It appears in words Pope Francis addressed to pontifical university communities in 2014, asking them to be ‘always open to the *maius* of God, of truth’ in their thinking.

paraphilia

A condition in which a person’s sexual arousal and gratification depend on fantasizing about and engaging in sexual behaviour that is atypical and extreme.

phase

A term applied to the formal steps in Salesian initial formation: prenovitiate, novitiate, postnovitiate, practical training, specific formation of the priest or brother.

potestas

A Latin term for the particular authority invested in an ecclesiastical position. In the history of the Church, the Sacred Power (*sacra*) of the clergy has been divided into two categories indicating two separate origins of that one power: 1) Power of Order (*ordinis*) and 2) Power of Jurisdiction (*iurisdictionis*).

quinquennium

A distinct phase after the period of initial formation. It lasts five years and is applied to the period of five years following priestly ordination or following final profession for brothers.

rhetoric

Classical rhetoric is the art of persuasive communication in speech and writing.

Salesian Movement

The *Charter of the Charismatic Identity of the Salesian Family of Don Bosco* speaks of different levels of belonging to the Family, the third level being constituted by particular titles to membership, or ‘the circle of people who form part of the vast Salesian Movement and find in the Salesian Family their animating nucleus. This is formed by the Friends of Don Bosco, by the Salesian Youth and more in general by Salesian voluntary social service and by an extensive category of men and women educators, catechists, adult professionals, sympathetic politicians, co-workers, even those belonging to different religions and cultures, who are working in the five continents.’

sapiential

To do with wisdom, e.g. the sapiential Books of the Bible; or in reference to a form of wisdom in knowledge.

syncretism

The attempted reconciliation of different or opposing principles, practices in philosophy or religion.

synodality

‘Synodality is... a “style” of life and action (modus vivendi et operandi) that requires conversion in relationships, implementation of processes and renewal of structures’ (GC29 47).

university

From the word ‘universe’ that St Francis de Sales coined in his *Treatise on the Love of God* (Book II, chapter 2): ‘All these together [i.e. distinction and variety of creation reduced to proportion, order and unity of the world] are called the universe, perhaps because all their diversity is reduced to unity, as if one were to say ‘universe’, that is, unique and diverse, unique along with diversity and diverse along with unity.’



Index

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A good way of using this Index could be to look under ‘formation’ first, since it offers an overview of the main topics in the *Ratio*. Other helpful starting points could be ‘accompaniment’, ‘discernment’, since they are involved in almost every aspect of formation; or even ‘mission’, since formation is in and for the mission.

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