

Revisions to the “Ratio” regarding the formation of Salesian Brothers

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- The present Ratio (formation of the SDBs) was published in the year 2000.
- After 10 years, the General Council decided not to produce a new Ratio, but to re-write those parts that were outdated or insufficient.
- So, in 2009: a rewrite of chapter 6 on the prenovitiate;
- In January 2012: a rewrite of the formation of Salesian Brothers, approved by the Rector Major and his Council.

Why was it necessary to revise the formation of Salesian Brothers?

1. The existing formation programme of Salesian Brothers was limited, uncertain and easily subject to improvisation. **Needed:** a clear and comprehensive programme of formation.
2. Very little attention paid to vocational discernment during the formation process;
 - Limited experience given to Brothers of the lay dimension of their vocation;
 - No clear criteria to distinguish the vocation of a Brother from that of a priest.
 - Cases of Brothers switching over to the priesthood.
3. Academic studies were not seen as important for Salesian Brothers.
 - Philosophical and pedagogical, theological and pastoral studies: “tolerated”.
4. Not much importance was paid to the professional formation of Salesian Brothers.
 - It was not even part of their formation process.

The GC26 introduced a new outlook: a single Salesian consecrated vocation in two forms.

Need felt to give Salesian Brothers a “quality formation” to enable them to live their true identity and meet the apostolic needs of the present day.

Prenovitiate

The GC26 changed the way of looking at and presenting the vocation of the Salesian Brother in the prenovitiate. Our Salesian identity is not a matter of what we do but of who we are.

We Salesians are first and foremost consecrated persons who, inspired by God, have chosen, after the example of Don Bosco, to follow Jesus by giving ourselves completely to God in the service of the young - which service we carry out in either a priestly or in a lay manner.

To help the Provinces present the Salesian vocation the proper way, the Formation Department, in 2009, circulated some 80 pages of ready-made material in the form of 15 sessions for use in aspirantates and prenovitiates.

In 2012, the Rector Major and his Council promulgated a curriculum of intellectual formation for initial formation.

Prenovitiates were called upon to foster:

- a knowledge of and love for Don Bosco,
- an awareness and appreciation of the Salesian Congregation in the world,

- an understanding of the Salesian consecrated life and its two forms, ministerial and lay,
- a reading of biographies of outstanding examples of both forms of Salesian consecrated life.

Also, the Congregation asked that on the team of formation guides of the prenovitiate “there be at least a Salesian Brother in order to enable the prenovices to have a direct knowledge of the two forms of the Salesian vocation”.

The new guidelines have made it clear that:

- in all the years up to the prenovitiate, all the candidates and prenovices are to be given a good knowledge and experience of the one Salesian vocation in its two forms, but are not yet required to choose between Salesian priesthood and brotherhood. That decision is to be made later.

These changes regarding the prenovitiate indirectly affect:

- the aspirantate: the practice of separate aspirantates for candidates to the Salesian priesthood and candidates to the Salesian brotherhood seems no longer valid today;
- vocation promotion: a correct presentation of the Salesian vocation requires the Salesian priesthood and the Salesian brotherhood to be presented as two ways of living out the same Salesian vocation.

Novitiate

The new guidelines require every novice to discern his own vocation as a future Salesian Priest or as a future Salesian Brother before he applies for first profession; in fact, he must state his vocational decision in his application for first profession.

With help of the novice director, the novice has to discern whether, in the educative pastoral work with the young, he has a greater inclination towards being “a witness to God’s Kingdom in the world, close as he is to the young and to the realities of working life” (C 45), or towards or towards being “a sign of Christ the Good Shepherd, especially by preaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments”.(C 45).

In this process of discernment the Provincial is also involved.

To encourage a proper discernment and to highlight the Salesian consecrated vocation, if there is a custom of giving the Salesian clerics the cassock during the novitiate, this is deferred to the time of conclusion of the novitiate.

Postnovitiate

The postnovitiate formation programme comprises a number of subjects like philosophy, pedagogy, Sacred Scripture, Christian faith, Salesian studies, psychology, sociology and communication.

Philosophy, the major subject, enables one to use his reason to arrive at a deeper understanding of the person, his freedom and his relationship with the world and with God.

The study of philosophy is important for anyone who wants to understand, for example, the postmodern thinking of the young, the relativism prevalent in many parts of the world, the flaws of Marxism, the issue of creationism versus evolution, and a host of many other current issues.

That is why it is part and parcel of the formation of the Salesian Brother, who is called to be an educator of the young.

According to the new guidelines, “the length of philosophical and pedagogical studies for the

Salesian Brother during the postnovitiate ought to be at least two years, but not more than three.

During the final year of the postnovitiate, each Brother, assisted by his Rector and the Provincial, carries out a discernment regarding the professional area (academic school, professional training, social communication, social work, different aspects of administration and management, etc.) in which he feels called to develop his gifts and abilities in response to the needs of the Province.

Technical, scientific or professional training

Immediately after the postnovitiate, the Brother is given an opportunity to engage in “technical, scientific or professional studies” to qualify himself in the profession he has chosen.

Why this step of formation?

- 1) It is necessary for the Brother to have a serious and direct contact with the professional field, i.e. with the lay aspect of his vocation before his perpetual profession;
- 2) It seems obvious that, if the Brother is to have some standing as an educator among the young during his practical training, he needs to have some training and qualification in the professional field.

On this point, there is a lot of agreement in principle, but plenty of divergence in practice. Because situations vary considerably from one Province to another.

Each Province has to take its circumstances into account and devise the best possible plan to ensure the professional training of its Brothers, if possible before practical training.

Practical training

The new guidelines suggest that Brothers should preferably be placed in situations in which they can exercise the professional qualifications they have acquired.

Specific formation

Specific formation is not something optional for Salesian Brothers; it is a part of their regular pattern of formation.

C 116. “After practical training the Salesian goes on to complete his initial formation... 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 his subsequent apostolic work of education.”

Today there are 6 regional or inter-regional centres approved by the Rector Major and his Council for the two-year programme of specific formation for Salesian Brothers:

- Manila in the Philippines for the Region of East Asia – Oceania;
- Shillong in India for Region of South Asia;
- Yaoundé in Cameroon for the French-speaking Salesians of Africa,
- Sunyani in Ghana for the English-speaking Salesians of Africa;
- Guatemala for the two Regions of the Americas;
- Turin for the three Regions of Europe.
- In addition, Turin is also a centre open to Salesian Brothers from all the Regions of the world.

The specific formation of Brothers is the response to a particular need.

Brothers need to nourish their daily life on the Word of God; Sacred Scripture.

Many moral questions (abortion, euthanasia, contraception, gay marriage and population control...) call for an answer:

Moral Theology.

Issues facing mankind like human rights, peace and justice, the morality of war, human trafficking, third world development and globalization find guidelines in: The Social Teaching of the Catholic Church.

Brothers must learn the theology of consecrated life;

They must know about growth in their spiritual life: spiritual theology;

They need a greater understanding of Salesian spirituality;

At the same time, they must be better prepared for Salesian youth ministry, for communicating the faith to others: catechetics, and for a fruitful involvement in the field of social communication.

Since they will take up posts of responsibility, they need to learn the basics of management.

Fr. Cereda has laid down two important requirements for this course:

- 1) a separate community for the Salesian Brothers with their own Rector and formation staff drawn from the various Provinces;
- 2) with the exception of Salesian studies, separate classes for the Brothers, as far as possible.

The course remains open to other religious who may wish to join the Brothers.

Preparation for Perpetual profession

The preparation for perpetual profession comprises “the process of discernment and verification prior to making a definitive option, including the application, admission and immediate preparation for the act of profession”.

The programme for the course, therefore, may last a year or several months, and may be carried out during practical training or specific formation.

As far as possible it is done by the Salesian Brothers and the clerics together.

During the course the participants

- meditate once again on the Constitutions
- and on the fundamental themes of consecrated life;
- they have a competent and experienced spiritual guide offered them to follow each individual and the group.

Above all, the Salesian clerics and Salesian Brothers pay careful attention to a discernment concerning the two forms, ministerial and lay, of the Salesian vocation in view of the definitive choice.

Concretely speaking, this means that the Salesian clerics and Brothers

- verify their vocation in the light of their lived experience,
- mature a new personal synthesis as they reformulate their personal plan of life,
- and conclude their discernment with the decision to permanently embrace Don Bosco’s apostolic project as a Salesian Priest or a Salesian Brother at the service of the young, following the path of holiness traced out by the Salesian Constitutions.

In Provinces in which specific formation precedes perpetual profession, “this same careful

discernment should be undertaken before the start of specific formation”.

“Quinquennium”

The first years of full involvement in pastoral work pose new challenges and problems:

- after a directed and supervised life, full personal responsibility for one’s apostolic work;
- hence, a rearrangement of one’s life, an adjustment to a new pace of life and work, a new synthesis in one’s life some needs begin to be felt more strongly: self-affirmation, the quest for fruitfulness, personal initiative and creativity.
- tension because of the discrepancy between what one learned and what one actually finds in daily life.
- a feeling of inadequacy arises regarding one’s new roles and responsibilities.

Accordingly, each Province chooses the ways in which it intends to accompany and help its young Priests and Brothers in their first five years of insertion in the educative and the pastoral work of the Province after their specific formation.

In the particular initiatives and programmes, both Priests and Brothers take part together.

Specialization

Specialization is different from specific formation.

After specific formation, every Salesian Brother, as a rule and according to need, “should have the possibility of completing some specialization in the specific field of his profession.

Fr. Cereda recommends that, in the case of Brothers,

- the studies for a Licentiate commence between 2 to 5 years after Perpetual Profession;
- if they be chosen to do research or work in centres of study, their doctoral studies should be undertaken some 3 – 5 years after completing the licentiate.

The guidelines for professional qualifications at higher levels should follow similar lines.

This is an overall picture of the formation of the Salesian Brother today.

Each Province has to consider its own situation and spell out in the Formation section of its Provincial Directory the formation itinerary for its Salesian Brothers.

What fruits are expected from this revision of the Salesian Brother’s formation?

- 1) a greater awareness and clearer idea of the identity of Salesian Brothers;
- 2) a greater commitment to promoting the Salesian Brother’s vocation, within the framework suggested by the GC26, viz. a single vocation in two forms.
- 3) a new kind of insertion of Salesian Brothers in our educative and pastoral communities, viz. Brothers offering their own specific contribution and becoming very visible in educative and pastoral activities.