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GUIDELINES FOR THE FORMATION OF SALESIANS IN SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

Content and method for the various
formation stages

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Rome, 24 May, 2006

INTRODUCTION

Social communication has always been seen as an urgent and necessary field of formation in the Congregation. Given its importance for Salesian life and mission, from the 90's onwards there have been efforts to offer a formation programme for the different stages, especially for those in initial formation.

The impetus for these Guidelines results from a range of factors coming together: the promulgation of the new Ratio in 2000, GC25's practical choice in 2002 to have a General Councillor exclusively for the Social Communications Department, indications in the Rector Major and Council's Plan, that a formation curriculum for social communication be drawn up, the request by the World Advisory Council for Social Communication in 2004, the publication of the "Salesian Social Communication System" guidelines at the beginning of 2005, and finally the Rector Major's Letter published in AGC 2005.

The Guidelines which you now have in hand are the result of collaboration between the Departments of Social Communications and the fruit of a Congregation-wide consultation, especially amongst those with competence in social communications, and amongst formators. Their inspiration is based on Church documents relevant to social communication, on our Constitutions and Regulations, and on interventions in the shape of Letters of Rectors Major: Fr Viganò (AGC 289), Fr Vecchi (AGC 370 and 366), Fr Chavez (AGC 387 and 390). Finally, they take account of experiences which have matured in various Provinces and areas of the Congregation.

Those for whom it is intended

The "Guidelines for the formation of Salesians in social communication" are meant for the same people and groups who were given the Ratio, namely: All Salesians, but especially Provincials and their Councils, Delegates and members of Formation and Social Communication Commissions, formators and those being formed, all those responsible for initial and ongoing formation of Salesians.

Purpose

The purpose of these "Guidelines" is the formation of the Salesian to becoming a "good communicator" (FSDB 252) with special reference to the area of social communication.

To be a good communicator requires a capacity for critical reception and creative production of information and messages; at the same time it demands a capacity for animation and management of social communication in educational and pastoral processes; it demands a capacity for interaction and relationships in social communication within and beyond the Congregation.

The area of social communication concerns the various mass and personal media, such as press, cinema, radio, television, internet, DVD, mobile phones, ... ; it includes all interactions in society or in a cultural grouping, such as theatre, music, advertising, public relations; it extends to a consideration of culture and especially the anthropological model created and spread by the media.

Formation levels

It is to be noted that these Guidelines focus on formation and not mainly on “training”, because they are meant not only to achieve a degree of ability and technical understanding in the one being formed, but his transformation as a person, including his attitudes and critical sense.

It is appropriate also to recall two paragraphs here (#59 and #89) from the “Salesian Social Communications System” guidelines which reflect on formational aspects: where it says that social communication is developed within the framework of reference of youth pastoral ministry (#59), and, where it speaks of formation references in social communication (#89).

Following what the magisterium of the Church and the documents of the Congregation say, the “Salesian Social Communication System” in #90 specifies what the three formation levels are.

The first level, basic, focuses on formation of the receivers. This deals with:

- educating the Salesian to a critical sense and forming his awareness so he can be freed from the subtle suggestions and manipulations of the media;
- equipping him to make free and responsible choices, using mass media not only for enjoyment, but especially for information and formation, for an harmonious cultural and social growth;
- teaching the technical details of individual media, necessary for a correct “reading” and an objective understanding of their communication;
- creating an awareness of the social, cultural, political and economic implications which lie behind the messages and values proposed by the media, giving special attention to the relationship between media and advertising, ideology and political power;
- seeing to the aesthetics of communication by taking up art, literature and music in a communicative key; this means developing an interest in cultural presentation in general; competence in and appreciation of fine arts; a study of the music of the young in order to understand their problems, their language, their dreams, and to be able to dialogue with them and search with them;
- reading at least some pages of modern literature.

The second level focuses on the preparation of educational and pastoral workers. This deals with:

- equipping the Salesian for the correct use of the various social communication media in educational and pastoral activity;
- forming Salesians and laity in the use of social communication for teaching and in education, in catechesis and preaching, in the fostering of peace and development and in giving a voice to the needs of the poor;

- sensitising and preparing the Salesian to integrate the Gospel with the “new culture” created by modern social communication.

The third level concerns the preparation of specialists in social communication whose task is on behalf of the entire provincial community which needs to:

- prepare some confreres who show a special inclination, so they can be experts in teaching this social communications;
- prepare some people for working in production in this media field and for exercising their competence in the management and animation of province enterprises in this field.

Initial formation is aimed at the first and second levels; these are brought up to date in ongoing formation and for some it includes achieving the third level.

Proposals for each formation stage

For each stage of initial or ongoing formation, these guidelines offer a brief summary of what the Ratio says concerning the nature and scope of that stage.

Then they highlight certain formation aspects in the stage, which are particularly relevant to social communication at this stage. These deal with the aims of formation to social communication, presented not in an abstract way but by way of directions to be taken up.

This is followed by proposed study topics to encourage a theoretical reflection on the significance of the media, its social role, its languages and a critical use. The contents involved in the study can be better organised once one has taken into consideration what the *Ratio Studiorum* says about the different stages.

Finally, experiences to exercise and some competencies to acquire, to help the following up of aims indicated. Obviously these experiences are not to be restricted to just the stage under consideration, but are something to be continued and looked into more thoroughly in the stages that follow, as indeed are the competencies needing to be gradually acquired.

This part - experiences and competencies – will need to be understood in greater depth and above all exercised. It requires, then, that support materials be offered; these will be offered in due course. For each formation stage then, we find: a summary of the nature and scope of that stage, its aims concerning social communication, study and reflection topics, experiences and competencies.

Our thanks go to everyone who has helped in putting these Guidelines together. It is our hope that they can be of real help in forming Salesians, that they can be a common departure point for fruitful experience, and that they contribute to cooperation between the Province Delegates and Commissions for Formation and Social Communication.

Fr Francesco Cereda, General Councillor for Formation

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1. PRENOVITIATE

1.1. The prenovitiate is that stage of formation in which the candidate to Salesian life deepens his vocational choice, maturing especially in his human and Christian aspects, so as to be suitable to begin the novitiate.

1.2. As part of this Christian and human growth, the candidate needs to:

- be open to the social and cultural reality in his setting and in the world of social communication;
- be especially sensitive to the problems of poor and marginalised youngsters, situations of poverty, injustice and exclusion;
- be mature concerning the reality of life, and grow in a sense of compassion and solidarity which shows itself through a simple lifestyle (cf. FSDB 338);
- begin to develop a serious critical capacity which makes him capable of respectful and objective judgements about people and events and which enables him to take a position on the cultural models offered by the media; then he will know how to critically read and responsibly use the social communication media (cf. FSDB 69);
- mature in a calm affectivity and exercise vigilance in his own life, practising custody of the senses and making discreet and prudent use of social communication media (cf. FSDB 65);

1.3. Certain study topics are recommended to the candidate as an introduction to social communication: what is communication; forms of communication; models of communication; language of sign and symbol; social communication; audio-visual culture; history of social communication.

1.4. The following experiences to be exercised and competencies to acquire, finally, are suggested for the candidate:

- developing proper attitudes and communicational abilities: Listening, speaking, writing, reading in public, receiving feedback;
- acquiring according to each one's capacity, artistic, dramatic, musical ability;
- learning to make good use of the computer and the internet, if not already able to do so;
- being interested in media such as press, magazines, newspapers;
- educating oneself to the appropriate use of free time and to responsible choice of television programmes and internet;
- knowing how to appreciate and to critically evaluate media and social communication products;

- accustoming oneself to making good use of newspapers, radio, tv, newsletters, bulletins;
- undertaking analysis and discussion of news, especially of matters concerning youth and ordinary people, and today's cultural and multicultural challenges for the Church, especially in fields of peace, justice, solidarity, work, the family.

2. NOVITIATE

2.1. The novitiate is the beginning of the Salesian religious experience as a follower of Christ. The novice begins to live consecrated and apostolic life, interiorising Salesian values.

2.2. As part of this practical exercising of Salesian life, the novice:

- continues to cultivate self-control and temperance, and to strengthen the motivations for his choices (cf. FSDB 359);
- adopts such attitudes with regard to social communications media;
- develops a strong attachment to Don Bosco, to the Congregation, to the Salesian Family and to the Salesian Movement (cf. FSDB 362);
- discovers a meaningful field of action in social communication that forms part of the apostolic priorities of the Salesian mission: grows in a strong sensitivity towards the Salesian mission amongst poor young people, and keeps himself informed about this;
- nurtures an attentiveness to the world's needs, a lively sense of Church; therefore nurtures a true missionary attitude in himself (cf. FSDB 366);

2.3. The development of some of the following study themes forms part of his education to social communication:

- Don Bosco teacher of communication;
- references in the Constitutions and Regulations to social communication;
- the Congregation's developments in the field of social communication from the SGC to our own time.

2.4. The following experiences to be exercised and competencies to acquire are suggested for the novice:

- using the "space" for his freedom and responsibility provided in the novitiate in reference to to social communication media, for measuring himself, exercising his personal autonomy, making discreet and prudent use of the media with a critical attitude, reflecting on the choices he has made;
- developing appropriate attitudes for communication: photos, video, theatre, music, news sheets, internet, drawing;
- using the media for listening to and meditating on the Word of God, in the sharing of faith and prayer in the group and in liturgy, in novitiate apostolic experiences;

- taking active part in forums and other similar exercises for analysing, discussing and critically judging shows and messages, especially those with marked or controversial views about the mission of the Church and the Congregation towards the young;
- being in touch with social communication in the Congregation and the Salesian Family: The Salesian Bulletin, ANS, the www.sdb.org site in Rome, newsletters, etc.;
- developing the sense of belonging to the Congregation through a reading of Salesian news.

3. POSTNOVITIATE

3.1. The postnovitiate is the stage where the newly professed Salesian strengthens his own vocational growth and gets ready for practical training, gradually integrating faith, culture and life through a deeper understanding of the experience of religious life and Don Bosco's spirit, and an appropriate philosophical, pedagogical and catechetical preparation in dialogue with culture (cf. C 114).

3.2. A part of the postnovitiate formation, then, is the fact that he:

- gains a capacity for a serious relationship with culture, with the world of young people, with problems of education, with the Christian viewpoint (cf. FSDB 401);
- acquires a broad and at the same time critical understanding of social communication, knowing how to read, critically evaluate and interact with media, information and modern advertising, and is able to grasp its social and psychological effects in ordinary settings, and on the young;
- achieves a certain competence in the techniques of various kinds of social communication, with a view to knowing how to use these for educating and evangelising the young (cf. FSDB 410);

3.3. Since intellectual formation is the characteristic aspect of this stage, the postnovice takes on studies in the social communication field:

- theory of communication and social and psychological problems of social communication;
- kinds of communication, in particular, new technologies: press, radio, TV, internet;
- the culture produced by social communication;
- media education;
- applications of social communication to the different areas of catechesis, liturgy, pastoral activity in general, teaching and cultural animation.

3.4. These studies are accompanied by different experiences to be exercised and competencies to acquire which serve to put what is learnt at school into practice:

- developing attitudes for social communication in regard to photographs, video, theatre, journalism, computer programmes, drawing, posters, noticeboards, music, audiovisuals;

- taking part in analysis and discussion groups which evaluate products offered by mass media with a Christian and critical sense, especially with regard to content and language of news, advertising, newspapers, film, video and internet and video games, and that reflect on the globalisation of information;
- knowing the language and jargon of the young; bringing to life amongst themselves the Salesian approaches to theatre, feasts, academies, courses, ...;
- involvement in producing information services whether they be at local or province level.

4. PRACTICAL TRAINING

4.1. Practical Training is the stage of vital and intense coming to grips with Salesian activity, brought about within pastoral and educative experience, which helps the confrere to mature in his Salesian vocation and to ascertain his vocational suitability for perpetual profession. (cf. FSDB 428-429);

4.2. Because of its nature, practical training has no real curriculum of studies. It is an experience, or better, the whole set of different experiences of Salesian life and activity, amongst which the responsible use of social communication and its employment for the formation, education and evangelisation of young people. In particular the practical trainee can take into consideration and check what the "Salesian Social Communication System" has to say in #68 and #92, which make reference to those responsible for social communication and the animation of social communication in educational processes.

4.3. It calls for a reflection or practical trainees sharing their experiences and, when possible, some short programmes dealing with social communication within the framework of a pedagogical, methodological, educational or catechetical formation. (FSDB 433). For example some reflection could be useful on aspects such as: presence amongst the young from the point of view that McLuhan offers in his "Medium as message"; educommunication in pastoral and educative experience; globalisation of the media and its influence on the choices and the style of religious life.

5. SPECIFIC FORMATION

5.1. Specific formation is the formation stage which completes the basic formation of the Salesian pastor and educator along the lines of his specific vocation as brother or priest.

5.2. It is, then, a part of this formation for the Salesian to:

- Have a solid basis of convictions concerning the social communication field;
- Be ready to be the educator, teacher and guide for others, teaching how to use critical tools for reading, understanding and evaluating texts and messages offered and often imposed by the mass media;
- Be able to be a pastor in the social communication field, wisely and professionally employing the techniques and processes of modern communication at small and large group level, and integrating the Gospel with the culture of the media.

5.3. On the one hand, then, some studies are needed to offer a theoretical frame of reference: theology of communication; Church documents on social communication; social communication ministry with attention to ethics in communication and pastoral problems associated with youth cultures (cf. FSDB 468);

5.4. On the other hand, the one in formation is invited to avail himself of certain experiences to be exercised and competencies to acquire:

- involvement in the use of information technologies and the internet;
- using the techniques of social communication in homiletics, liturgical praxis, ministry, catechesis, and in general in the world of work and in ministerial service, and being involved in making “media education” programmes for the young;
- learning to speak to local radio and TV, to prepare a press conference, to give an interview or interview someone, to prepare a homepage or web site, to write articles and various other publications; it is not essential for the one being formed to have all these abilities; it is enough for him to command one or two of the techniques, to be able to better understand, from a particular point of view, the rules of audiovisual language, which are, in reality, the same techniques for all the media; it is enough to give serious attention to one or two of these techniques;
- using some of the instruments and languages of modern social communications media for proclaiming the Gospel, but also for passing on the Gospel message in the culture of modern media itself; this approach means that the Gospel becomes easier to understand for today’s young people and becomes part of their culture (cf. FSDB 466);

- choosing dialogue with media professionals, for example on the occasion of World Social Communication Day; this provides the opportunity to directly appreciate the difficulties which the professionals come up against, their ideals and limitations, ethical problems, and the questions they pose for people of the Church.

6. CONTINUING FORMATION

6.1. Continuing formation is the continuation, the completion and the updating of initial formation: it has as its scope the living of the Salesian apostolic project with an energy which is both joyful and creatively faithful.

6.2. This demands, amongst other things, that the confrere:

- experience his encounter with the reality of social communication with openness and intelligence, that he becomes capable in the new languages and in a more attentive listening to the world and to youth culture, and that he possesses solid criteria of discernment which are consistent with a Christian viewpoint, with ecclesial and Salesian guidelines, and with the Salesian charism (cf. FSDB 528-529);
- even at an advanced age seeks to keep up to date in the social communications field and with new technologies;
- be prepared and up-to-date in the social communication field to the level required for adequately facing up to his educational and pastoral service, and that he achieve this with a capacity for animation and guidance of people, projects, works (cf. FSDB 523, 528);
- be able to form the laity and also to form himself together with them (cf. FSDB 529, 542);
- in the case where he has the necessary gifts and where it also corresponds with the needs of the Province, he accepts his superiors' request and specialises in social communication to render a competent service to the Province and to the Congregation (cf. FSDB 542, 556);

6.3. During this period (of continuing formation) there are no formal courses, except in the case of those asked to qualify themselves in social communication. Salesians may take part in study and reflection days together with the Salesian Family and lay helpers. These would be on the Universal or Local Church's guidelines, or guidelines of the Congregation concerning social communication, and on important or emerging topics in this field; amongst these we indicate those regarding new educational technologies; forming public opinion; catechesis, evangelisation and new languages; psychology and sociology of social communication; institutional communication and public relations.

6.4. Apostolic initiatives in the social communication field are themselves formative experiences for the Salesian confrere, especially when they include reflection on activities already carried out. Here are some of the more important items:

- taking part, together with lay people in the EPC or the Salesian Family, in initiatives aimed at reflection and a deeper understanding of certain aspects of social communication, dealing with experiences;

- being engaged in the specific formation of leaders and animators, especially amongst the Salesian Family, in the field of social communication for school, free time and associations, by organising reflection groups, study days and specific activities for helping them to have a reading and critical appreciation of social communication media;
- being directly involved professionally, according to one's own competence and the Provincial's request, in the world of the mass media, by creating, enabling and animating our production and distribution centres for books and magazines, or by managing social communication media which belong to the Congregation: Radio stations, television channels, "videoclubs" with special attention to families and to ministry.