

# *Charter of the Charismatic Identity of the Salesian Family of Don Bosco*

## **INDEX**

### **ABBREVIATIONS**

#### **Presentation**

#### **First Chapter: The Salesian Family in the Church**

- Art. 1. The charismatic and spiritual experience of the Founder
- Art. 2. The development of the Family
- Art. 3. Institutional structure
- Art. 4. Unity and diversity
- Art. 5. The Mystery of the Trinity the source of communion
- Art. 6. In communion with the Church
- Art. 7. For a new Christian humanism
- Art. 8. The valuable contribution of woman
- Art. 9. For new forms of solidarity
- Art. 10. Exchange of gifts
- Art. 11. At home with Mary
- Art. 12. With reference to Don Bosco
- Art. 13. The Rector Major in the Salesian Family

#### **Second Chapter: The mission of the Salesian Family**

- Art. 14. A charismatic mission in the Church and for the Church
- Art. 15. An apostolic Family
- Art. 16. "Mission to the young, the working classes and the missions"
- Art. 17. At the service of the Gospel
- Art. 18. In the new religious and cultural contexts
- Art. 19. Communion and collaboration in the mission
- Art. 20. Autonomy and individuality of each Group
- Art. 21. Apostolic Co-responsibility

#### **Third Chapter: The spirituality of the Salesian Family**

- Art. 22. Horizons the apostolic spirituality of the Salesian Family
- Art. 23. Collaborating with God the Father
- Art. 24. Living with the sentiments of Christ

- Art. 25. Being docile to the Spirit
- Art. 26. Communion and mission in the Church
- Art. 27. The Spirituality of everyday
- Art. 28. The "contemplation in action" of Don Bosco
- Art. 29. Dynamic apostolic charity
- Art. 30. The grace of unity
- Art. 31. Preferential love for the young dedication to the ordinary people
- Art. 32. Salesian loving kindness
- Art. 33. Optimism and joy in hope
- Art. 34. Work and temperance
- Art. 35. Initiative and adaptability
- Art. 36. The spirit of Salesian prayer
- Art. 37. Mary Help of Christians, Teacher of apostolic spirituality

#### **Fourth Chapter: Formation for the communion and mission in the Salesian Family**

- Art. 38. Awareness of the specific identities
- Art. 39. Shared formation
- Art. 40. Taking one's place in different settings
- Art. 41. Methodology for collaboration
- Art. 42. The role of the priest in the Salesian Family

#### **Fifth Chapter: Composition and animation of the S.F.**

- Art. 43. A growing Family
- Art. 44. An open Family
- Art. 45. Points of reference
- Art. 46. Organisations of animation and times for meeting
- Art 47. Prayer

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

AA

*Apostolicam actuositatem*: Decree of Vatican Council II on the apostolate of the laity.

AG

*Ad gentes*: Decree of Vatican Council II on missionary activity.

CD

*Christus Dominus*: decree of Vatican Council II on the ministry of Bishops.

ACG

Acts of the SDB General Council

ACGS

Acts of the Special General Chapter of the SDB (1971-1972).

ChL

*Christifideles laici*: Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II on the lay faithful (1988).

Const

*Constitutiones* Constitutions (+ sign of the Group of the SF).

Cost

*Costituzioni* (+ sign of the Group of the SF).

DCE

*Deus caritas est*: Encyclical of Benedict XVI (2006).

DS

Damas Salesianas: Salesian Womens Association

FMA

Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

FS

Salesian Family.

GS

*Gaudium et spes*: Pastoral Constitution of Vatican Council II on the Church in the Modern World.

LG

*Lumen Gentium*: Dogmatic Constitution of Vatican Council II on the Church.

MB

Biographical Memoirs of Fr John Bosco, edited by Fr John Baptist Lemoyne

MD

*Mulieris dignitatem*: : Apostolic Letter of John Paul II on the dignity and the vocation of woman (1988).

NAe

*Nostra aetate*: Declaration of Vatican Council II on the relationship of the Church with non Christian religions

PC

*Perfectae caritatis*: Decree of Vatican Council II on consecrated life.

PO

*Presbyterorum ordinis*: : Decree of Vatican Council II on the priestly ministry.

PVA

Project of Apostolic Life of the Salesians-Cooperators (2007).

SCG

Sisters of Charity of Jesus.

SDB

Salesians of Don Bosco.

SPVA

Statutes of the Project of Life of the Salesians-Cooperators (2007).

SRS

*Sollicitudo rei socialis*: Encyclical of John Paul II on the social question (1987).

VC

*Vita consecrata*: Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II on consecrated life (1996).

## PRESENTATION

*To those Responsible*

*for the Groups of the Salesian Family*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We are at the beginning of the three year period of preparation for the celebration of the *Bicentenary of the birth of Don Bosco*, which in various ways involves all the Groups of the Salesian Family and the whole Salesian Movement. This period of preparation and of celebration, which goes from 16 August 2011 to 16 August 2015, is a “time of grace and of renewal”; it is being offered to us by the Spirit in order to know the charism of Don Bosco better and to assimilate it in our personal life and in that of our Groups. *The Charter of Identity* for our Family too, which I am about to present to you will also stimulate and guide us along this path.

On 31 January 1995, the Solemnity of Saint John Bosco, Fr Egidio Viganò, seventh Successor of Don Bosco, gave us the *Common Identity Card* of the Salesian Family of Don Bosco. In his presentation he wrote that it indicated “those fundamental elements which contribute to the building of the unique spirit of Don Bosco. We decided to begin with the soul of the family, because the sense of membership of belonging is nourished more by the vitality of the common spirit ...than by rules”. The contribution of reflection on the Salesian spirit, offered by this first Charter, helps us to understand that we are a *spiritual Family* and therefore that it is the Spirit which is the foundation of our relationships with each other.

On 25 November 2000, the day on which we remember the death of Venerable Mamma Margaret, Fr Juan Edmundo Vecchi, eighth Successor of Don Bosco, offered us the *Common Mission Statement* of the Salesian Family. Fr Vecchi wrote in his presentation: it offers us “the orientation and sensitivity of the Groups of the Salesian Family as regards the apostolic mission. We can rightly call it an inspirational text. It calls on each member of the Groups of the Family for a commitment that is characterised as Salesian”. This second document makes clear that ours is an *Apostolic Family* which works with pastoral intentions and purpose.

On 31 January 2012, the Solemnity of Saint John Bosco, in the first year of preparation for the Bicentenary of his birth, as ninth Successor of Don Bosco, I give you the *Charter of the Charismatic Identity of the Salesian Family of Don Bosco*. It will be for all of us a point of reference in our journey together as a Family and for the specific journey of each group. A first draft was published on 24 May 2011, the Solemnity of Mary Help of Christians. It is Mary herself, the one who inspires and sustains us, who places in our hands this “help” for our charismatic development. “Mary renews the Salesian Family of Don Bosco”,<sup>1</sup> Fr Viganò wrote in his first letter as Rector Major. She continues her work today, enlightening our minds and opening our hearts to the new developments of the charism we share.

The *Charter of Identity* gathers together the reflections and the experiences which have matured in these years, starting from the two previous documents on the communion and the mission in our Family. These documents have been incorporated in their essentials in this new text. In this new Charter, in fact, are described the characteristic and the distinguishing elements of the Salesian

---

1 E. VIGANÒ, *Mary renews the Salesian Family of Don Bosco*, in AGC n. 289, Rome 25 March 1978.

Family, in other words those features in which all the Groups recognise themselves, in this way making possible a sharing of experiences, collaboration and visibility.

What is described in this third Charter, *which incorporates and integrates the previous ones*, is the charismatic identity of the Salesian Family, in other words, all that refers to the mission, the spirit, to the relationships, to formation, to the methods of education and of evangelisation. Certainly, the history of the charism, considered in its origins and in its development, forms part of the identity; in fact an identity without a memory, being without roots, has no future. For this reason the Charter brings together the experience of the different Groups of the Family, tracing out in summary form, that identity of the Salesian charism that is the patrimony of all.

The description of the identity of the Salesian charism of our Family, to be found in this Charter, is the result of a long process of reflection and agreement especially within the World Consultative Committee of the Salesian Family. The fruits, which we await from a greater awareness and sharing of the common identity, are the strengthening of unity, of the sense of belonging and of the significance of our Family. In fact, a weak identity leads to the fragmentation of the ideals, a weakening of the links, and to the insignificance of what is done. Hence the invitation addressed to all the Groups that they revitalise and strengthen the common identity, so as to make of it a gift to the whole Church.

If we believe in the Salesian Family, we shall find the enthusiasm, the interior resources and the practical ways of making it grow in its identity. Then our Family will enjoy such vitality as to attract new vocations.

This is what we are entrusting to the Holy Spirit and to Mary Help of Christians, to Don Bosco and to all our Saints and Blesseds.

With affection and thanks,

**Fr Pascual Chávez Villanueva**

IX Successor of Don Bosco

Rome, 31 January 2012

Solemnity of Saint John Bosco

## chapter one

### THE SALESIAN FAMILY IN THE CHURCH

#### **Art. 1. The charismatic and spiritual experience of the Founder**

With humble and joyful gratitude we acknowledge that Don Bosco, by the initiative of God and the maternal mediation of Mary, gave rise in the Church to a singular experience of evangelical life.

The Spirit shaped in him a heart filled with a great love for God and for his brothers and sisters, in particular the little ones and the poor, and in this way made him Father and Teacher of a multitude of young people as well as the Founder of a vast spiritual and apostolic Family.

Pastoral charity which found in the Good Shepherd its source and model was for Don Bosco a constant inspiration in his work as educator and evangeliser, guiding his life, his prayer and missionary zeal. In choosing the motto *Da mihi animas cetera tolle* he wanted to express his passion for God and for the young, ready for any sacrifice in order to carry out the mission he saw in his dream at nine years of age.

In order to respond to the needs of the youth and the ordinary people of his time, in 1841 he founded the Oratory which he conceived as a large family of boys and established the *Pious Society of Saint Francis of Sales*, which he wanted to be a vital part of the Church which recognised in the Supreme Pontiff its centre of unity.

His meeting with *Mary Domenica Mazzarello* in 1864 persuaded him to extend the educational frontiers to include girls; for this reason with her in 1872 he founded the *Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*, dedicated to a work of education conducted with his spirit but given a feminine interpretation by the Saint of Mornese.

Don Bosco also had contact with *many Catholics*, men and women, in various ways dedicated to the good of youth, to the defence and to the strengthening of the faith among the ordinary people; with them he experienced the strength and the effectiveness of working in a united manner. In this way the *Association of the Salesian Cooperators* came into being, committed to carrying out in their families in the Christian communities to which they belonged, and in society, a shared apostolate for the young, the ordinary people and the missions, animated by the spirit of Valdocco.

To the founding of these three first groups Don Bosco dedicated time, energy, formative and organisational commitment. While recognising their different fields of action, he was always convinced that the apostolic strength of the whole Family would depend on its unity of purpose, of spirit, of method and style of education. The sign and guarantee of this unity were the juridical links of the FMA and of the Cooperators with the Salesian Congregation, and in particular with its Superior, the Rector Major.

From Don Bosco also came into being the *Association of the Devotees of Mary Help of Christians* (today the 'Association of Mary Help of Christians') to promote veneration for the Blessed Sacrament and devotion to Mary Help of Christians. Around Don Bosco the first *Past-Pupils* also began to gather.

## **Art. 2. The development of the Family**

On account of his stature as "a great man with a charism"<sup>2</sup> and as a saint, Don Bosco takes his place in a singular manner among the Founders of Institutes of consecrated life, religious and secular, and of Apostolic Lay Associations in the Church. To our amazement and gratitude, in fact, that first seed has grown until it has become a flourishing tree.

To the first four Groups founded by him, numerous other Groups have been added in the course of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the new millennium. From the Founder some of his spiritual sons have drawn inspiration and guidance in order to give life, in the different continents and in various social-cultural contexts, to new Groups, sometimes begun in collaboration with the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and with the support of the Salesians Cooperators and the friends of the Salesian work.

---

2 ASGC 7.

Many of these groups have been officially recognised as belonging for various reasons to the Salesian Family. While having specific vocations they recognise in Don Bosco the common "Patriarch", they feel themselves animated by his spirit, which they live out according to their own characteristics, and they find themselves with the common mission of serving the young, the poor, those suffering, as well as those people not yet evangelised.

Other groups are in the process of moving towards a possible aggregation to the one large Family in a significant sign of the perennial vitality of the Church.

In the implementation of the renewal promoted by the Vatican Council II, the awareness of belonging to the single spiritual and apostolic Family has grown more and more; the animating role of the Salesians has been clarified, re-affirming the Rector Major as the essential point of reference; exchanges between the Groups have been exploited, arriving at an ever more fraternal communion and a sharing which is ever more convinced of both the formation project and the missionary activity.

### **Art. 3. Institutional structure**

The term *family* describes the link which connects the various Groups, though to different degrees. It is not simply a matter of closeness or of friendly rapport, but the formal expression of a communion that is interior, charismatic and spiritual; it will help, therefore, to explain the different levels of belonging to the Salesian Family.

This belonging draws on a *common spirit* which is the foundation of the mission inspired by the charism of Don Bosco, while respecting the *particular and specific characteristics* of each group. This demands a wise process of discernment, that can lead to official recognition.

Therefore there are different titles for belonging. The first is that enjoyed by the Salesians, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, the Cooperators and the members of the Association of Mary Help of Christians: these are the first four Groups established by Don Bosco and the direct heirs to his work. To these all the other Groups need to refer and make comparisons as regards the spirit, the field of mission, the methodology of pedagogical and apostolic activity.

A second title to belonging is that of the numerous Groups of consecrated life, both religious and secular, as well as some Catholic Associations which have come into being through the creative efforts of some of Don Bosco's sons. They enrich with particular charismatic and spiritual forms of expression the common patrimony of the Family.

A third level, finally, is constituted by *particular titles to membership* which is constituted by 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 Movement 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.

The juridical title to belong is conferred by the official letter of recognition which the Rector Major sends in reply to the request made by the individual Groups.

## **Art. 4. Unity and diversity**

The Salesian Family of Don Bosco is a charismatic and spiritual community comprising different Groups, officially established and recognised, linked together by ties of spiritual relationship and of apostolic affinity.

These communities recognise *types of diversity*. These are: the difference of gender, male and female; the specific distinct vocations; the different ministries exercised in the service of the people of God; the distinct forms of life as male or female religious, consecrated lay men and women, male and female Christians who are celibate or joined in matrimony; the project of life of Salesian life proper to each Group and codified in the respective Statutes; the great variety of social, cultural, religious and ecclesial contexts in which the various Groups live and work.

*Unity* is nourished by the common baptismal consecration by which all are drawn into the Mystery of the Trinity and in communion with the Church; by participation in the Salesian mission at the service of the young and the poor and for the promotion of a new Christian humanism; by a new sense of citizenship and solidarity on a global scale; by sharing the spirit of Don Bosco; by the exchange of spiritual gifts within the Family; by a common reference to Mary Help of Christians and to Don Bosco, their holy Founder or Patriarch; by the special link with the Rector Major, the successor of Don Bosco.

## **Art. 5. The Mystery of the Trinity the source of communion**

The apostolic Family of Don Bosco is first and foremost a charismatic Family, that is to say a gift of the Spirit to the Church in view of a mission (cf. *1Cor* 12:1.4-6); its truest and deepest roots in fact are to be found in the Mystery of the Trinity, in other words in that infinite love that unites the Father, the Son and the Spirit, source, model and goal of every human family.

If that is its origin, the members of the Salesian Family recognise in their lives the primacy of God-Communion. This is the heart of Salesian *mysticism*.<sup>3</sup>

This communion with the Trinitarian God is appropriately codified in the constitutional texts of the single Groups.

Reference to *God the Father* inspires and motivates the members and the Groups of the Salesian Family to welcome each other as brothers and sisters because loved by Him and called by Him to collaborate in the vast field of the Salesian mission; it is an invitation to overcome any fears, reservations or doubts, and to appreciate what each one can give and succeeds in giving.

Reference to *Jesus* Apostle of the Father, sent especially to the little ones, the poor and the sick, motivates every Group to highlight one or other of his features: Jesus the child or the adolescent; the hidden life of Jesus at Nazareth; Jesus obedient, poor and chaste; as the good Samaritan; Jesus the Good Shepherd who blesses the children and gathers disciples, men and women, around him; the Christ who on the cross shows his merciful love, as a victim offered in sacrifice; the risen Lord, the first fruits and hope of those risen from the dead (cf. *1Cor* 15:20). The Salesian Family aims in this way to re-live all the attitudes and the conduct of the Lord Jesus, differentiating its services for the benefit of those to whom the single Groups are sent.

---

<sup>3</sup> Cf. VIGANÒ E., *Closing Address*, in *Atti del Convegno di studio sulla Animazione della Famiglia Salesiana*. (Rome 1980) 56.



The reference to the *Holy Spirit* relates to the fruitfulness of our Family since it is the Spirit who in raising up Don Bosco the Founder gave him a spiritual posterity; in this way the particular Groups came into being through the work of the different Founders, all of them, however, linked to Don Bosco as their Patriarch.<sup>4</sup>

The Spirit therefore is prompting everyone to appreciate the diversity of charisms and the multiplicity of the forces present in Christian communities, and to know how to recognise His presence in peoples' consciences, even those outside the boundaries of the Church,<sup>5</sup> and to establish intelligent relationships of dialogue and collaboration with all people of good will.

## **Art. 6. In communion with the Church**

The Spirit of God distributes different charisms to the faithful “for the common good” (1Cor 12:7), inserting them harmoniously into the life of the Church in view of its mission of the salvation of humanity.<sup>6</sup>

He is at the origin of a marvellous variety of Groups of consecrated men and women who, while they are contributing effectively to the mission of the Church, enrich her with different gifts, manifesting in this God's manifold wisdom and making visible the characteristic marks of the Church herself, one, holy, catholic and apostolic.<sup>7</sup>

The Salesian Family consists of Christian men and women, consecrated men and women who with the individuality of their own charism and spirit, place themselves at the service of the mission of the Church, especially in the vast world of youth, in working class areas, for the poor and for peoples not yet evangelised (*apostolicity*).

Living at the heart of the Church and carrying out the Salesian mission, it reflects the different gifts, unites together particular vocations within a single spiritual and apostolic Family, expresses communion between the various different ministries, all directed towards the service of the people of God (*catholicity*).

Being present in the local Churches, it fosters communion among its members and with the Successor of Peter, in this way re-living the devotion to the Pope handed down by Don Bosco (*unity*); it participates in their apostolic activity, offering its own particular contribution, especially in the area of the mission to the young and to the working classes; it promotes understanding and collaboration with other groups and institutions for an all-round education of the individual; it takes care of the vocational guidance of the young, educating them to the faith and setting them on the way to an apostolic commitment in the Church and for the world. In order to carry out their educational mission the various Group make good use of the support of the Past Pupils including those belonging to other religions or with different views of the world (*catholicity*).

The Family of Don Bosco, developing its characteristic spirituality of charismatic origin, enriches the whole Body of the Church with a model of Christian life all its own<sup>8</sup> (*holiness*). Bearing witness to this are the numerous ranks of the spiritual sons and daughters of Don Bosco already declared saints or proceeding along the path of beatification and canonisation.

---

4 Cf. ASGC 171.

5 Cf. GS 22e.

6 Cf. LG 12b; AA 3c.

7 Cf. PC 1b

8 Cf. ASGC 159

## **Art. 7. For a new Christian humanism**

The apostolic Family of Don Bosco is called *Salesian* because it is linked to Saint Francis of Sales, who Don Bosco chose as his inspiration and patron as with his work and writings he proposed that Christian humanism and that expression of charity which corresponded so well to his intimate aspirations.

It is a humanism that does not ignore man's weakness, but is based on an unshakeable confidence in the intrinsic goodness of the individual who is loved by God, and by Him called to Christian perfection, in every state of life.

This humanism is a constitutive element of the charismatic and spiritual experience of the Groups founded by Don Bosco, and as a precious inheritance has been made their own by the other Groups which today are aggregated to the single Family.

The whole Salesian Family, therefore, enters into this large movement, offering to the Church an original contribution in the field of education and in apostolic work.

*"Salesian" humanism* for Don Bosco meant giving due weight to all that is positive in the life of individuals, in creation, in the events of history. This led him to accept the genuine values present in the world, especially if pleasing to the young; to place himself in the flow of culture and of human development in his own times, encouraging the good and refusing to lament about the evil; wisely seeking the cooperation of many people, convinced that each one has gifts that need to be discovered, recognised and put to good use; believing in the power of education which provides support for the young person's development, and encouraging him to become an upright citizen and a good Christian; and always and everywhere entrusting himself to the providence of God, perceived and loved as a Father.

With the founding of the Groups which make up his Family, and with other apostolic initiatives, such as missionary expansion, Don Bosco intended to make his own contribution to the achievement of the project of a "Christian society" to be restored in the midst of the secularisation proper to the XIXth century, or to be established in contexts not yet evangelised.

In creative fidelity to Don Bosco, the Groups of the Salesian Family are committed to offering to today's society their own services, following the new guidelines promoted by the Vatican Council II and subsequent official pontifical teaching regarding the relationship between the Church and other religions and with contemporary society, centred on inter-religious dialogue,<sup>9</sup> on the defence of the dignity of the human person and of the family, on the promotion of justice and peace,<sup>10</sup> on intercultural dialogue especially in multi-ethnic contexts, and on the safeguarding of creation.

## **Art. 8. The valuable contribution of woman**

The Salesian experience of the first Groups and of those which subsequently arose came from and was enriched by the significant and effective contribution of a number of women.

It is recognised that Don Bosco in drawing up the Preventive System and in creating the family atmosphere that was evident at Valdocco received a significant contribution from Mamma Margaret.

---

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *LG* 16; *NAe* 2-5.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *GS* 77-93.

Nor can we forget Mary Domenica Mazzarello, who knew how to translate into feminine terms the experience of Don Bosco, giving it a practical and original face in both the spiritual life and the educative and apostolic life, which is the real inheritance of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

The first Volunteers of Don Bosco, guided by Fr Philip Rinaldi, introduced the feminine consecrated secular state into the Salesian Family: united among themselves by the spiritual ties of the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, they carried out the common Salesian mission in the contexts of the family and in the daily work place.

At the start of almost all of the new Groups of consecrated persons in the Salesian Family which arose in the 20th century, we find a small group of Christians, generally of humble condition and already in various ways dedicated to apostolic works, who nurture an ideal of consecrated life, and guided by a bishop or by a Salesian priest, give life to and develop new foundations.

In the last decades of the 20th century a consideration of the rightful place of woman in the various continents has led the Groups of the Salesian Family, and in a special way the religious Congregations, the female Secular Institutes and the Salesian Association of the Laity to reflect on a due appreciation of the contribution of the feminine instinct in our world, following the guidelines, in many aspects innovative, of the teaching of John Paul II.<sup>11</sup>

## **Art. 9. For new forms of solidarity**

The current phenomenon of globalisation has increased interdependence between individuals and peoples in the economic, cultural, political and religious spheres; the opportunities are clear to be seen, but so too the danger of it turning into those forms of domination which cause new kinds of poverty and increase marginalisation; but there is another way of thinking about globalisation and it is that of *solidarity* inspired and guided by gospel values.

“This then is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.”<sup>12</sup>

The Groups of the Salesian Family are engaged in exercising this solidarity through a variety of educative and apostolic activities:

1. *Education*, which is the highest form of solidarity, if understood and exercised according to the criteria suggested by *Salesian assistance*. Nowadays we could describe it as “*the ethics of being close*”, in other words: personalised intervention, relationships of friendship and trust, listening to the deepest aspirations of young people and of the poor, identifying those responses which are possible and effective, faithful accompaniment.

2. *Civilian, social and missionary voluntary service*, nowadays widespread among young people and adults, which can be for some a genuine vocation, in so far as it demands readiness to give one’s time and energy; it puts them in contact with people’s practical problems, commits them to supporting development initiatives, invites them to exercise a sense of co-responsibility, encourages them to learn to give and to be of service.

---

11 Cf. MD 20 21 28-31; VC 57-58.

12 Cf. SRS 38.

3. *Social and political commitment*, carried out especially by Groups of lay members, according to the criteria expressed by the magisterium of the Church. We read in *Gaudium et spes*: “The Church regards as worthy of praise and consideration the work of those who, as a service to others, dedicate themselves to the welfare of the state and undertake the burdens of this task”;<sup>13</sup> and in *Christifideles laici*: “the lay faithful are never to relinquish their participation in ‘public life’, that is, in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the common good.”<sup>14</sup>

## **Art. 10. Exchange of gifts**

All heirs to the Salesian charism and spirit, the Groups establish among themselves a very close relationship so that each Group expresses the identity of the Salesian Family, but not without reference to the others.

In fact, entering into a Group, in virtue of a specific vocation, means entering the whole Family; it is as though each one feels entrusted to the others in a mutual relationship.

It is then that the different members enable the Family to live the completeness of gifts and values, because in the various Groups can be seen emphasised the particular spiritual features which are the common patrimony and which for this reason cannot be missing in any Salesian heart. The communion of the Family places these at the disposal of everyone.

All this is for the benefit of the mission, since it makes it possible to undertake in a more adequate and effective manner the human development and Christian education of the young, of poor people, of the sick and of peoples not yet evangelised.

The relatively short history of the Salesian Family demonstrates that without real communion there is the danger of a progressive impoverishment of the project of Don Bosco even to the extent of being unfaithful to it. The recognition that without the others the members of a particular Group cannot be themselves, ought to be an awareness cultivated by all, inspiring appropriate expressions and practical attitudes.

## **Art. 11. At home with Mary**

From his childhood Don Bosco saw in Mary his Teacher and Mother, since that was how she had been pointed out to him by the Personage in his dream at nine years of age.

In his first educational undertaking following the custom of the local church, he entrusted his work to Our Lady of Consolation; the boys “poor and at risk” becoming aware of Her protection and consolation.

Later, in communion with the Universal Church living through the experience of the definition of the Marian dogma, he proposed to them Mary Immaculate, presenting her as the teacher of their love and the powerful support of their human and Christian development.

Finally, having recognised that in the founding and the development of his work “Mary has done everything,” even in extraordinary ways, he dedicated the newly born Congregation to the Virgin under the title of Help of Christians.

---

<sup>13</sup> GS 75.

<sup>14</sup> ChL 42b.

Then receiving from Mary the inspiration to found the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, he wanted it to be a “living monument” of his gratitude to the Help of Christians.<sup>15</sup> To her also he entrusted the Salesians-Cooperators, so that in their apostolate they might be protected, and find inspiration in Her. He also set up the Association of the Devotees of Mary Help of Christians, linked to the sanctuary in Turin, as a sign of gratitude for the maternal presence of the Madonna in all his works.

This special reference to Mary has profoundly marked the charismatic and spiritual identity of the various Groups of the Salesian Family which have come into being during the 20th century. Some have even included her in the name by which they are officially recognised in the Church, such as the Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and *Mary*, the Catechist Sisters of *Mary the Immaculate Help of Christians*, the Sisters Servants of the *Immaculate Heart of Mary*, the Missionary Sisters *Mary Help of Christians*, the Daughters of the Queenship of *Mary Immaculate*, the Sisters of *Maria Auxiliatrix*.

If all the Groups of the Salesian Family venerate Mary Help of Christians as their Principal Patron, some refer to her presence with various titles to emphasise particular aspects of their apostolate.

Mary is considered not only as Mother of the Church and Help of Christians, but also as the Mother of all humanity, so that co-workers, men and women, of various Groups of the Salesian Family also belonging to other religions, cultivate a sincere devotion to her.

With good reason therefore, one can say that the Salesian Family is a *Marian Family*.

## **Art. 12. With reference to Don Bosco**

The originator of a true school of apostolic spirituality, Don Bosco is the point of reference for all those who, responding to a particular impulse of the Spirit, feel themselves called to share his mission today in the various states of life and in the different forms of commitment.

This means that belonging to the Salesian Family they gather around him as the centre of unity. In fact, the founders of the Groups which arose in the 20th century are all spiritual sons of Don Bosco, members of his Congregation. Their constant preoccupation was to carry out the vast mission in new contexts and with new apostolic forces, in which they had infused the spirit of their Father and Teacher. That which links together the different Groups and their members in a single Family is a kind of *spiritual relationship* with Don Bosco, due to the presence of the Spirit, the One Who in the Church unites together those gifted with particular charisms.

It is a relationship that finds expression in the pastoral charity that is Don Bosco's. Apostolic passion was the spiritual energy that drove him to seek souls and serve God alone; it is a charity that filled hearts, minds and plans intended to expand and give stability to his work. For this reason he gathered around himself a variety of people; he coordinated and harmonised the roles, the manifold gifts as well as the different states of life and ministries.

Don Bosco found the source of so much strength in an interior life constantly open to a relationship with God. For us too, educative and apostolic love requires a practical and demanding form of interior life.

---

<sup>15</sup> *FMA Const. Art 1 cf BM X*, p.265.

## **Art. 13. The Rector Major in the Salesian Family**

Belonging to the apostolic Family of Don Bosco has its origin in communion and is nourished by communion. This consists in corresponding to the Spirit Who leads it towards unity, bringing into existence and giving practical and even official forms to it, so as to ensure an effective relationship and collaboration in activities.

Belonging to the Salesian Family therefore of necessity requires a vital centre which makes the reference to Don Bosco, to the common mission and to the same spirit a reality.

This centre, according to the mind of Don Bosco, is the Rector Major. In him all recognise a three-fold ministry of unity: Successor of Don Bosco, common Father, centre of unity for the entire Family. It falls within his official competence to admit to the Salesian Family the Groups which request it, according to the pre-established criteria.

Since this is his mission, he feels he has a duty to offer the necessary guidelines to ensure the fruitfulness of the charism in each Group of the Family. Through his example and teaching he constructs unity and ensures in the variety of the specific vocations, fidelity to the spirit and the coordination of certain initiatives. He exercises this ministry with the paternity which was Don Bosco's own: an approach that requires understanding and kindness, attention to the growth of each one, guidance in charismatic fidelity, commitment to the fruitfulness of the Salesian vocation in all its expressions, just as Don Bosco had written: "Your Rector will have care of you and of your eternal salvation".

## **Chapter Two**

### **THE MISSION OF THE SALESIAN FAMILY**

## **Art. 14. A charismatic mission in the Church and for the Church**

The mission of the Church flows from the free initiative of the Father, passes through the mandate of Jesus Christ and is perpetuated by the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>16</sup> It is one and is entrusted to all the members of the people of God, on account of their Baptism and Confirmation. Particular charisms of the Spirit, however, mean that the mission is carried out in different ways according to the different persons or groups to whom they are sent.<sup>17</sup>

The mission of Don Bosco and of his spiritual Family is part of the common Christian vocation to the apostolate. But because it is in response to a spiritual gift, its *origin* is *charismatic*: it is the Spirit of the Father and of the Risen Lord who, as in the past he sent Don Bosco to the young and to the working classes, in the course of history continues to send his spiritual sons and daughters to perpetuate the apostolate to the young, the working classes and the missions.

This particular mission is *influenced by and responds to*, among other things, the signs of the times.<sup>18</sup> For us, the needs and the expectations, the aspirations and the spiritual requirements of the young, especially the poor ones, of ordinary people and of peoples not yet evangelised, are signs through which, as times *c* and *sends* the various Groups of the Salesian Family to carry out their

---

<sup>16</sup> Cf. LG 2-4; AG 2-4; UR 2.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. LG 9b 13ab 17 32; AA 2a; AG 2a 5 6 10 35-37.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. GS 11.

mission. This mission being carried out in the Church and for the Church is subject to its approval, authority and legislation, so that the charismatic mission takes its place in the harmonious carrying out of the Church's activity at various levels.

Then, the charismatic mission finds its *practical application* in the *particular law* of each Group of the Salesian Family. Within the Society of Saint Francis of Sales, the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the other religious Institutes, the ones who send or mandate are the legitimate Superiors respectively. In each case the subject who sends is *collegial*: this happens for example, in the election of the members of the General Council by a Chapter Assembly.

In the case of the Volunteers of Don Bosco and of the other Secular Institutes, as also with the Salesian Cooperators, the Damas Salesianas and the other Salesian lay Associations, there is no one in authority who *sends*. The individual, however, is bound to follow faithfully the indications regarding the mission contained in their own Statutes, which specify, on the basis of particular law, the practical exercise of the Salesian apostolate in the world.

## **Art. 15. An apostolic Family**

The Salesian Family is an *apostolic Family*. The Groups which make it up are all responsible subjects of the common mission although to a different extent and in different ways.<sup>19</sup>

In founding the Society of Saint Francis of Sales and the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco organised them as religious Congregations, not contemplative but "apostolic". According to the intention of their Founders, spiritual sons of Don Bosco, all the other religious Congregations today belonging to the Salesian Family have a clear apostolic orientation and form part of those religious Institutes recognised as "apostolic". Some Groups have come into being in the so-called "mission" lands with the specific aim of taking part in the work of evangelisation *ad gentes* in a diversity of contexts and of cultures. Belonging to this category are: the Caritas Sisters of Jesus, the Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians, the Catechists Sisters of Mary Immaculate Help of Christians, the Daughters of the Queenship of Mary Immaculate, the Sisters Announcers of the Lord, the Sisters of Maria Auxiliatrix.

The Associations of the Salesian Cooperators, the Damas Salesianas, the Witnesses of the Risen Lord and the Friends of Canção Nova are ecclesial Associations of an apostolic nature, founded with the specific aim of putting into practice in a vast expansive manner, and in a secular way, the mission of Don Bosco and of the respective Founders.

The Secular Institutes of the Volunteers of Don Bosco, of the Daughters of the Queenship of Mary Immaculate, of the Volunteers with Don Bosco and the Disciples all have apostolic ends: their members carry out a Salesian apostolate of a secular nature in the context of the family, of the world of work, of social relationships, of civil commitments.

In virtue of his or her particular vocation, the individual person belonging to a specific Group is someone who is *sent*, called therefore to carry out a common mission according to the role entrusted to them, their capacities and the possibilities that they have.

On the basis of the constitutional norms, among the Salesians, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the other religious Institutes, the mission is assumed and put into practice above all

---

<sup>19</sup> Cf. ASGC 163.

by the community – both *provincial* and *local* – which is therefore the primary subject of the mission.

## **Art. 16. "Mission to the young, the working classes and the missions"**

The mission of the Salesian Family is addressed to the young and to adults, considered as the subjects and beneficiaries of education and located in their particular social, cultural, religious and ecclesial contexts, with particular reference to the “places of mission”. To indicate this, there has come into current use the formula *mission to the young, the working classes and the missions*, three dimensions which complement each other.

1. *Mission to the young*. According to the precise intention of Don Bosco, the Groups of the Family which he founded have as their preferred beneficiaries poor young people, abandoned and in danger or, in modern terms, youth of both sexes most in need on account of situations of economic poverty, affectively, culturally or spiritually deprived. This choice is shared explicitly by other Groups and it finds its place in their constitutional texts. In the world of youth all the Groups pay particular attention to those who show signs of a specific apostolic, lay, consecrated and priestly vocation.

Some Groups by preference direct their attention to adolescents and young people of the male sex. Other Groups give preference to female young people at all stages of their development. Others again concern themselves with all young people without distinction. A good number of the Groups give their special attention to those young people male or female who are the victims of serious forms of marginalisation, exploitation and violence.

2. *Mission to the working classes*. Illuminated from on high, Don Bosco also turned his attention to adults, by preference those who were humble and poor, the working classes, the urban under-classes, immigrants, the marginalised, in a word, to all those who were most in need of material and spiritual assistance. Faithful to the guidance of Don Bosco, the Groups of the Salesian Family share this preferred option. The Association of Mary Help of Christians has inserted in its new Regulations the Salesian apostolate directed in particular to the working classes.

Special attention needs to be given to the family, the place where the process of human development begins, which is intended to prepare young people for love and the acceptance of life, and the first school of solidarity among people and peoples. All are engaged in ensuring that it is afforded dignity and is soundly based so that it may become, in an ever-more evident way a small “domestic church.”<sup>20</sup>

Some Groups, in virtue of a particular charism, extend their Salesian apostolate to special categories of people: the Daughters of the Sacred Hearts to lepers, the Sisters of Charity of Jesus to the elderly, the Damas Salesianas to the sick.

3. *Missionary Apostolate ad gentes*. Don Bosco cultivated the missionary ideal and in a practical way took part in the missionary work of the Church in his day. He wanted the Salesian Society and the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians to dedicate themselves to the “missions”; and that is what the two Congregations have done since their beginnings, with an extraordinary expansion leading to their being present in all the continents. From the very beginning, missionary cooperation has also been an essential feature of the Association of Salesians Cooperators. Also the

---

20 LG 11b.hange and in different social and cultural contexts, the Spirit calls



Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians and the Sisters Catechists of Mary the Immaculate Help of Christians dedicate themselves to missionary work as a priority. This form of Salesian apostolate clearly enters into the mission of the Volunteers of Don Bosco, of the Daughters of the Sacred Hearts, of the Salesian Oblates of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, of the Sisters of Charity of Jesus, of the Witnesses to the Risen Lord, of the Damas Salesianas and of the Disciples.

## **Art. 17. At the service of the Gospel**

The Son of God became incarnate to reveal the face of a Father “lover of life” and put himself at the service of the “well-being” physical and spiritual of men and women, especially those most in need of help and of hope: “The Son of Man himself did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10,45).

Following the example of the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth, the Church, and within it the Salesian Family, puts itself at the service (*diaconia*) of humanity in order to proclaim the gospel and to call everyone to the fullness of life.

It is a service which according to the indications of the post-council magisterium<sup>21</sup> includes: the *renewal of humanity* through social works and various forms of educational action; personal and community *Christian witness*; the *explicit proclamation* of the Gospel through religious teaching and catechesis; *missionary work* through inter-religious dialogue (especially the sharing of life and of prayer), collaboration with those belonging to other religions in the fight against unjust situations, and their accompaniment when they decide to enter the Church; the *animation of prayer*, in particular liturgical, of the Christian community; the many *initiatives of human and Christian solidarity*; the many *forms of missionary cooperation*; the *evangelising presence* in those areas marked by religious indifference or atheism.

The forming of “good Christians and upright citizens” is the aim most often expressed by Don Bosco to indicate *everything of which the young stand in need* in order to live fully human and Christian lives: clothes, food, lodging, work, study, free time; joy, friendship; active faith, the grace of God, the way to holiness; participation, dynamism, a place in society and in the Church. His educational experience suggested to him a plan and a particular *style of approach*, which he himself summed up in the *Preventive System*, which “is totally based on reason, religion and loving kindness.”<sup>22</sup>

The various Groups of the Salesian Family, taking up again the intuitions and the experiences of Don Bosco, and re-interpreting them in the light of the renewed ecclesiology of the Council and of Papal teaching regarding evangelisation, undertake their work as educators and evangelisers with a variety of different formulae: “educative pastoral service”, practised according to the Preventive System; “educating by evangelising and evangelising by educating;” “all-round education in the style of the preventive System”; educating and evangelising according to the “pedagogy of kindness”; and other similar expressions.

Fundamentally there are three areas in which the Salesian Family puts into practice its multiform gospel service: human development, education and evangelisation.

---

21 Cf. The encyclical *Evangelii nuntiandi* of Paul VI and the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* of John Paul II.

22 G. Bosco, *Il sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù*, in Pietro Braidò (ed.), *Don Bosco Educatore, scritti e testimonianze*, LAS, Rome 31997, p. 248ss.

For all the Groups, evangelisation, understood as the proclamation of and witnessing to the Gospel, is the priority objective of their mission.

## **Art. 18. In the new religious and cultural contexts**

In the process of renewal and of communion among all the forces which go to make it up, the Salesian Family has arrived at certain fundamental options with regard to the missionary commitment in the new cultural context, marked, among other things, by an ever more rapid change in mentality and habits and a growing human mobility, with the presence, in the same territory, of people belonging to different religions and cultures.

1. *Promoting Salesian humanism.* This places at the centre the individual, whose dignity needs to be safeguarded and promoted in all its expressions. In educational terms this means re-awakening and mobilising all the potential of youth: the capacity to think; the variety of its affective inheritance; the forces of will directed towards freedom and strengthened by grace.

It gives due weight to all the values which are authentically human. Among these, those such as work and culture, friendly relationships and social commitment, artistic talent, professional competence and academic achievement, moral uprightness in both private and public life, and the little things of everyday life which give it its flavour; these values need to be defended and promoted by everyone.

In addition, Salesian humanism strives to give meaning to everyday life, and to provide a reason for hope and future prospects for the individual and for society.

Finally it sets out to help everyone find their rightful place in society and in the Church, recognising that every young person has the right to be helped to discover his or her own vocation.

2. *Taking its place in the practical situations.* For all the Groups of the Salesian Family operating in the various continents, being engaged on behalf of the individual is a challenge that is not easy given the diversity and the complexity of the local contexts from the social, cultural and religious standpoints. In order to identify the possible and effective actions to be taken in response to emerging needs, what is required is the capacity to appreciate the local situation with intelligence and competence, always drawing inspiration from the guidelines of the Pope and of the local hierarchy.

3. *Taking care to be significant.* This presence becomes significant because of the witness value of sharing what one has to offer, the practical operative proposals that arise from listening directly to people over a long period of time, and the processes of learning from each other which occur when people really work together for the future with a common aim.

Then together they face the difficulties and identify possibilities: problems that can arise with people and with institutions; the defence and the promotion of moral values while at the same time respecting different positions and convictions of conscience; the new solutions which need to be discovered starting from past experiences, and looking towards the future; the defence of the rights of those who are the weakest and exposed; an effective presence in the political arena, especially in those places where educational policies are drawn up; the promotion of public opinion nourished by human, Gospel and Salesian values.

It is obvious that the criterion for the significance of a Salesian presence has different applications in the various geographical and cultural contexts: what is possible and appropriate in one place may

not be so in another; what some can do in certain situations may turn out to be impossible for others. Being faithful to the one mission does not impose on different people the same procedures.

4. *Taking up the challenge posed by social communication.* Don Bosco clearly saw the effectiveness of social communication and left to his spiritual Family the task of making good use of it as a means of personal and communitarian growth, and at the same time as a means of defending and promoting the faith among the working classes.

Today the means of information technology make public what at one time was considered private; they act in an instantaneous and pervasive manner, involving large numbers of people and fascinating the young especially, producing changes in the way people think and relate, spreading suggestions for life-styles which are not always in harmony with a humanism inspired by Christian values.

On the other hand, such means offer unexplored opportunities for education and evangelisation. In fact the possibilities afforded by networking and distance communication make it possible to do a variety of things and to create forms of synergy in ways which in the past were unimaginable. The apostolic Family of Don Bosco intends to put to good use these still unexplored possibilities in the Salesian mission and to seize the opportunities which society offers, combining abilities already acquired with innovative creativity.

## **Art. 19. Communion and collaboration in the mission**

The link which unites the members of our Family is that of a “mission to communion<sup>23</sup>. The various Groups, therefore, are called to live the gift of communion which comes from God, carrying out the common but differentiated service of the Gospel, according to their specific beneficiaries, the particular aims and their varied styles.

In all his activity as educator, pastor and founder Don Bosco showed a great ability in recognising the potential and the gifts of each one, in giving responsibility even to the youngest among his collaborators, in harmonising in apostolic work the most varied skills, in identifying for each one work corresponding to his inclinations, ability and formation. He was always aware of the need for *cooperative charity* in educative and pastoral service, convinced that the Holy Spirit raises up charisms for the benefit of the whole Church.

Communion among the Groups *in and for* the mission is being seen as more and more indispensable in the commitment to education and in the missions; in fact, it is recognised that there is an urgent need to coordinate activities, to present a variety of models of Christian life and to ensure ministries that are complementary.

In this way, working together makes the witness more effective, the proclamation of the Gospel more convincing, fosters a more lively apostolic charity, and makes it possible to appreciate better the characteristic traits of each Group while it reflects and gives expression to the identity of the Family in communion and in the mission.

For this reason, while respecting the autonomy of each Group, it is necessary to safeguard ways of collaboration, and if necessary find some new ones that may be possible.

---

23 ChL 32.

## **Art. 20. Autonomy and singularity of each Group**

Communion *in and for* the mission does not prejudice, but rather clarifies and strengthens the autonomy and the specific nature of each Group in the Family.

In fact the various Groups enjoy their own *autonomy* not only spiritual, formative, economic and of government, but also apostolic, fulfilling the mission in their own structures and according to their own particular ways.

In fact it is not a question of imposing a uniform way of acting for everyone: that would lead to a levelling out of the differences, causing confusion and uncertainty in the apostolate. It is rather a question of harmonising what each one is doing in the context of the whole project which is shared by everyone.

The *specific character* of each Group in the communion, therefore, needs to be recognised and promoted. Young people have the right to be able to make use of the specific service offered by each Group; it is a richness for the Family and for the whole Church, in this way multiplying the forces at work for the good of the young. This communion in autonomy is an invitation to be co-responsible in the mission, but does not necessarily imply co-responsibility in every single enterprise or in every particular local area.

## **Art. 21. Apostolic Co-responsibility**

Co-responsibility requires as a pre-requisite that each Group is able to ensure its autonomous capacity with regard to its own development, to the formation of its members, to its apostolic enterprises, and that it carries out, with the greatest possible effectiveness, its specific vocation and mission ensuring within itself that vitality which is the fruit of fidelity and creativity.

To be hoped for therefore are: 1. Forms of collaboration between the different Groups so that the Salesian mission may be carried out in its various sectors and fields and in the different kinds of works; 2. Collaboration among the Groups which are living and working in the same local area, in conjunction with the pastoral structures of the local Church and civil institutions so as to offer a Salesian contribution, which is varied in its richness and contents, to the common construction of the civilisation of love.

It is obvious that the carrying out of a common project requires a process of convergence that can sometimes mean giving up certain points of view or some future prospects linked to a single Group to which one belongs.

In any case, co-responsibility demands the common commitment to pursue certain shared objectives. All the Groups are called to spread abroad - together with the values of the Gospel - the characteristic traits of the charismatic and spiritual identity of the apostolic Family of Don Bosco. They are the characteristics of the entire Family and therefore cannot be the concern of only some Groups. Everyone, including the individual members are personally responsible for animating and promoting the spiritual heritage received.

The objectives which need to be recognised and pursued by each Group are:

1. To share the *preoccupation regarding education* in the current historical climate, seeking the best ways to educate boys and girls in the fundamental values of life and to bring them into contact with the Gospel.

2. To make the *preventive System* known: it represents the synthesis of Don Bosco's pedagogical wisdom and constitutes a prophetic message which he left to his heirs and to the whole Church. It is a spiritual and educational experience which is based on reason, religion and loving kindness.

*Reason* underlines the values of Christian humanism, such as the search for meaning, work, study, friendship, cheerfulness, piety, freedom not detached from responsibility, the harmony between human sound judgement and Christian wisdom.

*Religion* means making space for the Grace with saves, cultivating a desire for God, fostering the meeting with Christ the Lord as this gives a full meaning to life, and is a response to the thirst for happiness, progressively taking one's place in the life and mission of the Church.

*Loving kindness* expresses the fact that in order to create an effective educational relationship it is necessary that the young are not only loved but know that they are loved; it is a special kind of relationship and an affection that awakens in the hearts of the young all their potential and makes it mature even into total self-donation.

Reason, religion and loving kindness are today more than ever indispensable elements in the work of education, and valuable stimuli, in response to the expectations of the new generations, in giving life to a society which is more human.

3. Through personal witness and word of mouth to spread the *Salesian spirit*: Salesian humanism invests in every individual, and obliges all educators to work tirelessly for its expansion, also in sometimes difficult circumstances; it is the foundation for a new civilisation of love.

4. Promoting the *Salesian Movement*: Don Bosco involved many people in his educational and missionary work; at all levels he tried to ensure that attention was given to his boys and to people in need. The large Salesian Movement and the links among the many forces at work within it are making a contribution from which everyone can usefully benefit.

## Chapter Three

### THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE SALESIAN FAMILY

#### Art. 22. Horizons of the apostolic spirituality of the Salesian Family

Apostolic spirituality is the centre which inspires and animates the life of communion in and for the mission of the Salesian Family. It is, in fact, a communion which does not arise from human planning, nor does it coincide with an organisation no matter how perfect nor with refined techniques for bringing people together, but flows from that pastoral charity which having been evoked by the Spirit in the heart of Don Bosco, inspired him even to the heights of holiness.

*Spirituality* means that our life is being guided by the Spirit, He who graces with his charisms the various Groups belonging to the one Family. *Apostolic* means an inner force which spurs on to donation and service, giving salvific effectiveness to educational and evangelising activity and uniting the whole of life around this centre of inspiration..

Moved by faith hope and charity, the members of the Salesian Family share in the action of God who is always working to communicate his merciful love to every individual, and they feel themselves to be fully a part of the communion and the apostolate of the Church.

## **Art. 23. Collaborating with God the Father**

Putting God as the unifying centre of one's life, the source of fraternal communion and the inspiration for one's activity, pre-supposes a certain image of God. Not the distant God, totally immersed in His solitary state and imperturbable silence with no interest in the earth, but God-Love (cf. *1Jn* 4:16) who gives Himself totally to humanity, a "Father who goes on working" (*Jn* 5:17) sharing the life of his children, engaged in responding, in practical ways and with infinite love to peoples' expectations; a God so involved in our history as to lay himself open to man's freedom, accepting the risk of rejection, always giving himself as love which forgives (*agape*).<sup>24</sup>

Silently but effectively working within history, this God associates with himself active and busy co-workers, who in the practical circumstances of life, devote all their energies to proclaiming His love and undertaking good works, drawing from Him the strength to love, to give and to serve.

For the Salesian Family and its members, "living in the presence of God" means cultivating an intense and constant loving relationship with Him ("union with God"); feeling oneself therefore filled with a love similar to His, that which gives itself in a loving and selfless way and freely spends itself for the special beneficiaries of the mission; it also means knowing how to see and to respond to the signs of his mysterious presence in the expectations and the requests of the men and women of our day.

It is to this God, the merciful Father that Don Bosco addressed his heartfelt prayer: "Da mihi animas, cetera tolle". To all his disciples, men and women, Don Bosco repeats: "The most divine of all divine things is to cooperate with God in the salvation of souls, and it is a sure path to the highest holiness".

## **Art. 24. Living with the sentiments of Christ**

Don Bosco placed at the centre of his spiritual life and apostolic action a convinced devotion to Jesus present in the Eucharist, *the Master of the house* – as he often used to say – and to the Divine Saviour, whose gestures of salvation he wanted to imitate.

Grafted onto Christ in force of our Baptism, we allow ourselves to be assimilated to Him, docile to the action of the Spirit, so as to be able to say with Saint Paul: "Life to me is Christ" (*Phil* 1:21), "I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me" (*Gal* 2:20); but also hearing the other exhortation of the Apostle: "In your minds you must be the same as Christ Jesus" (*Phil* 2:5).

This means: an attentive awareness of being the One sent by God guided in everything by the Spirit; unconditional obedience to the will of the Father in carrying out the mission entrusted to him, facing with courage difficulties and contradictions (cf. *Jn* 5:17ff); the continuous and generous commitment to freeing people from all kinds of death and to communicate to everyone life and joy; a passionate concern for the little ones and the poor with the solicitude of the Good Shepherd; love which always forgives even to becoming a victim on the cross; the promise of being the travelling companion of his disciples as he was with the two on the way to Emmaus.

It is the image of the Good Shepherd, in particular, which inspires our activity, indicating two valuable aspects of Salesian apostolic spirituality.

---

24 Cf. *DCE* 10.

The *first*: The apostle of the Lords puts at the centre of his or her attention individuals as such, and loves them just as they are, without prejudice or exception, precisely as the Good Shepherd does, even with the lost sheep.

The *second*: the apostle does not put himself forward but always and only the Lord Jesus, the only one who can liberate from all forms of slavery, the only one who can lead to the pastures of eternal life (cf. *Jn* 10:1-15), the only one who never abandons the lost one but makes his own his weakness, and full of confidence and hope, goes in search of him, retrieves him and leads him back so that he might have life to the full.

Rooted in Christ and conformed to Him is the deepest joy for a son or a daughter of Don Bosco. From this comes love for the Word and the desire to live the mystery of Christ re-presented by the liturgy of the Church; the careful celebration of the sacraments of the Eucharist and of Reconciliation, which educate to Christian freedom, to conversion of heart and to the spirit of sharing and of service; participation in the Paschal mystery of the Lord, which opens the way to a new understanding of life and of its meaning, personal and communitarian, interior and social.

## **Art. 25. Being docile to the Spirit**

The Christian life is, of its very nature, life in the Spirit. Caught up in the process of renewal promoted by the Vatican Council II, the Salesian Family has tried to deepen its relationship with the Spirit of the Risen Lord, defining its own identity in terms of the charism of Don Bosco, a true gift of the Spirit and source of the spirituality which animated his apostolic Family.

The features of the person of the Holy Spirit taken from the revealed Word, are particularly illuminating for the spiritual-apostolic life of those belonging to the various Groups of the Salesian Family: the Spirit is the Creator and gives life; he is the One sent by the Father and by the Risen Lord in order to extend in history the work of salvation; it is He who introduces believers to the Truth /Christ so that they may live in Him and of Him; He is the Voice who speaks to the conscience of people to open them to the light of truth and prepare them for the gift of love;<sup>25</sup> He is a Presence particularly alive and active in Christians communities, uniting them in communion and in service, instilling in the faithful the spirit of the mission; He is the One who anticipates, assists and accompanies those who are engaged in the work of evangelisation.<sup>26</sup>

The attitudes the members of the Salesian Family are called to assume in His regard are: serenity and trust in the certainty that we are always supported by the power of the Spirit; docility to his secret inspirations; wise discernment of his presence in human events, both personal and communitarian; intelligent and courageous collaboration in his work for the coming of the Kingdom of God in peoples' lives, in the Church and in society; gratitude for the charism of Don Bosco and generosity in putting into practice his educative and apostolic plan

## **Art. 26. Communion and mission in the Church**

Don Bosco had a great love for the Church and he showed this in his sense of belonging to the ecclesial community. At the same time, aware of having received a particular charism for the education of youth, he developed it so as to build up the Church in various cultural contexts.

---

25 Cf. AA 29c; GS 22e.

26 Cf. AG 4.

The Family of Don Bosco has among its family treasures a rich tradition of filial fidelity to the Successor of Peter, and of communion and collaboration with the local Churches: “No effort should be spared when the Church and the Papacy are at stake”.<sup>27</sup> “The counsels and even the wishes of the Pope must be a command for us”.<sup>28</sup>

This unconditional devotion to the Pope was in Don Bosco an expression of his passion for the Church. And it is an inheritance that we accept and by which we live.

The Church, in fact, is the visible presence of the Risen Christ in the history of humanity; it is the communion of brothers and sisters in the unity of the faith and in the variety of charisms and ministries; it is charity which urges us to make the love of God known by proclaiming the Gospel; it is a service offered to humanity in order to build a world that corresponds to God’s plan; it is a family which finds the centre of its unity in Christ the Lord and the servant of unity in the Successor of Peter.

The spirituality inherited from Don Bosco is eminently ecclesial: it expresses and nourishes the communion of the Church, building up within Christian communities a network of fraternal relationships and of active collaboration; it is an educational spirituality that sets out to help young people and the poor to feel at ease in the Church, and to be builders of the Church and to be participators in her mission; it is a spirituality which enriches the whole Church with the gift of the holiness of so many of his sons and daughters.

## **Art. 27. The Spirituality of everyday**

Don Bosco drew inspiration from Saint Francis of Sales recognising him as the teacher of a spirituality that was simple because based on essentials, popular because open to all, attractive because full of human values, and therefore particularly suitable in the work of education. In his fundamental work (*Treatise of the Love of God or Theotimus*) the holy bishop of Geneva speaks about ‘ecstasy’. This word does not so much indicate extraordinary spiritual phenomena as, according to the etymology of the word, going out from oneself and being inclined towards the other; it is the experience of someone who allows himself to be attracted, convinced and conquered by God, entering ever more deeply into His mystery.

For Saint Francis of Sales there are three kinds of ecstasy:

- *intellectual ecstasy*: this is wonder at what God is, but also amazement at the great things He has done in creation and still continues to do in the life of individuals and in the history of humanity; it is a gaze which grows clearer if we use it in meditating on the Word: it is the Word, in fact which opens our eyes so that we can see things as God sees them;
- *affective ecstasy*: this is having a personal experience of the love of God for us, so that the desire to correspond to it grows, and, nourished by such a love, we are ready to give our talents and our lives for his glory and the cause of the Kingdom; it pre-supposes constant vigilance, purification of the heart, the practice of prayer;
- *ecstasy of action and of life*: for Saint Francis of Sales, it is this which crowns the other two, because intellectual ecstasy could become pure speculation, and affective simple sentiment. Ecstasy of action, on the other hand, reveals a generosity and a selflessness that can only come from God;

---

<sup>27</sup> *BM V*, p. 383; *C SDB* art. 13.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *BM V*, p. 380



and it is transformed into practical and effective dedication to peoples' good in various forms of charity.

The Salesian Family, in its reflection on Don Bosco the Founder, has translated the nature of the spirituality and the mysticism of Saint Francis of Sales into a simple and challenging formula: *everyday spirituality*.

## **Art. 28. The "contemplation in action " of Don Bosco**

The mysticism of Don Bosco finds its expression in his motto *Da mihi animas, cetera tolle*, and is identified with the "ecstasy of action" of Saint Francis of Sales. It is the mysticism of daily work in harmony of thought, feeling and will with God; so that the needs of one's brothers and sisters, especially the young, and apostolic concerns are an invitation to prayer, while constant prayer nourishes the generous and self-sacrificing working with God for the good of one's brothers and sisters.

It is the mysticism of "contemplation in action" described as follows by Blessed Fr Philip Rinaldi, who knew Don Bosco's inner life very well: "Don Bosco *combined* to the highest degree exterior activity, tireless, totally absorbing, on a vast scale, full of responsibility, with an interior life which was based on a sense of the presence of God, and which little by little, became habitual, constant and vital so as to be *perfect union* with God. In this way he came to that state of perfection which is *contemplation in action*, the ecstasy of action, in which he was totally absorbed until the very end, with ecstatic serenity, in the salvation of souls".<sup>29</sup>

The Salesian Family takes up this mysticism, lived so intensely by Don Bosco, and left by him as a precious heritage to all his spiritual disciples.

## **Art. 29. Dynamic apostolic charity**

Dynamic apostolic charity represents the heart of Don Bosco's spirit, the essence of Salesian life, as well as the force behind the apostolic commitment of the members of the Salesian Family

*Charity/Love* is the very name of God (cf. *1Jn* 4:16). It does not indicate merely the powers of the human heart but is participation in the anticipatory mercy of the Father, in the compassionate heart of Christ and the indescribable love of the Holy Spirit. This is the distinguishing feature of the disciples of the Lord: loving one another with the same love with which God loves.

*Apostolic*: it is participation in the infinite love of the Father who sends Jesus so that we may have life to the full; it is a sharing in the solicitude of the Good Shepherd for the salvation of all; it is openness to the flow of love with which the Spirit works in consciences and in peoples' life-history.

*Dynamic*: expresses lively activity, a capacity for innovation, not being satisfied with what has been done already, not giving way to habit, avoiding all kinds of mediocrity and the comfortable, but rather with passion and creativity, seeking what is the most necessary and effective way of responding in practical terms to the expectations of the world of youth and of the working classes.

For Don Bosco all this was called an *oratorian heart*: it is fervour, zeal, making all possible resources available, seeking new paths, a capacity to resist under trial, the will to start again after defeats, an optimism that is nurtured and cultivated and spread abroad; it is that concern, full of faith and of charity, which finds in Mary a shining example of self-giving.

---

29 RINALDI F., *Conferenze e scritti* (LDC, Leumann- Torino 1990) p. 144.

In the Groups in which Salesian service is directed towards infants and children, dynamic apostolic charity becomes evangelical tenderness; in the Groups which educate adolescents and young people it becomes acceptance, participation and guidance in the goals of growth and development; in the Groups dedicated to the care of people affected by various forms of poverty it has a tone of merciful and providential love; in the Groups whose apostolate is among the sick and the elderly it becomes compassionate charity; in the Daughters of the Sacred Hearts it shows itself in oblatinal love, especially towards the lepers; in the Groups engaged in a Salesian apostolate among the simple people, scattered in far distant villages or immersed in urban slums, it becomes a humble love which offers solidarity and oneself.

## **Art. 30. The grace of unity**

Expressions used in Salesian circles to refer to the source of this apostolic charity are: the grace of unity, apostolic interior life, the contemplative dimension of life, a vital synthesis, a single movement of love for God and for the young, the liturgy of life.

*Evangelising by educating and educating by evangelising* is a formula well known by now to express the interior unity of the members of the Salesian Family, since it refers not only to a method of education but also to the spirituality of individuals and of the Groups: when one allows oneself to be guided by the Spirit, life and the apostolate form a single whole, just like prayer and action, love for God and for one's neighbour, attention to oneself and dedication to others, education in human values and the proclamation of the gospel, belonging to a Group and being part of the Church. Everything leads to unity; and it is the vital synthesis which is holiness. From this comes an incredible force for action and witness, by the power of the Spirit who has taken possession of all the people to make them free and joyful instruments of his action.

Apostolic charity constitutes for everyone belonging to the Salesian Family the inner principle and force capable of unifying the many different daily activities and preoccupations. It fosters the fusion in a single inner movement of the two inseparable poles of apostolic charity: passion for God and passion for one's neighbour.

## **Art. 31. Preferential love for the young dedication to the ordinary people**

To carry out the mission to the young and the working classes effectively, all the disciples of Don Bosco cultivate a genuine predilection for the young and devote themselves to the working classes. They are convinced that they have an experience of God precisely through those to whom they are sent: young people and the ordinary people, in particular the poor.

*Boys and girls* are recognised as a gift from God to the Salesian Family; they are the field shown to Don Bosco by the Lord and by Mary in which to carry out his work; for all of us they are the objects of the Salesian vocation and mission.

Being dedicated to the young means having one's heart constantly turned towards them, picking up their aspirations and desires, problems and needs. It also means meeting them at the point in which they are in their process of maturing, but not just to be in their company but rather to lead them to where they are called; for this reason the educators recognise the power for good the young have within them and support them in the growing pains both human and Christian, identifying with them and for them possible educational opportunities. In the heart of the educators and evangelisers

full of passion always resound the words of Paul: “The love of Christ overwhelms us” (cf. 2Cor 5:14).

*The world of the working classes* is the natural and ordinary context in which we encounter the young, especially those most in need of help. The commitment of the Family of Don Bosco is addressed to the ordinary people supporting them in their efforts for human development and growth in their faith, indicating and promoting the human and gospel values it stands for, such as the meaning of life, hope for a better future and the exercise of solidarity.

Don Bosco traced out also with the Association of the Salesians Cooperators and the Association of Mary Help of Christians, a path of education to the faith for the people, making good use of the contents of popular religious devotions.

In addition he dedicated himself to the promotion of social communication, so as to reach as many people as possible for the purpose of education and evangelisation.

## **Art. 32. Salesian loving kindness**

The loving kindness of Don Bosco is without doubt a characteristic trait of his pedagogical method which is considered still valid today, both in contexts still Christian and in those in which young people belonging to other religions are living.

It cannot, however, be reduced to simply being a pedagogical principle but needs to be recognised as an essential element of our spirituality.

It is, in fact, authentic love because it draws its strength from God; it is love which shows itself in the language of simplicity, cordiality and fidelity; it is love which gives rise to a desire to correspond; it is love which calls forth trust, opening the way to confidence and to profound communication (“education is a matter of the heart”); it is love which spreads out and in this way creates a family atmosphere, where being together is beautiful and enriching.

For the educator, it is a love which demands a strong spiritual effort: the willingness to be there and to stay there, self renunciation and sacrifice, chastity in affections and self-control in attitudes, participation in dialogue and patient waiting in order to identify the most appropriate moment and the best ways, the capacity to forgive and to renew contacts, the meekness of the one who sometimes knows how to lose, but continues to believe with unlimited hope. There is no real love without asceticism and there is no asceticism without an encounter with God in prayer.

Loving kindness is the fruit of pastoral charity. Don Bosco used to say: "On what is this reciprocal affection based? [...] On the desire I have to save your souls, which were redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, and you love me because I try to lead you on the paths of eternal salvation.. Therefore the good of our souls is the foundation of our affection."<sup>30</sup>

In this way loving kindness becomes a *sign* of the love of God, and a means of re-awakening his presence in the hearts of those who are reached by Don Bosco’s goodness; it is a way of evangelisation.

From this comes the conviction that the apostolic spirituality of the Salesian Family is characterised not by a generic kind of love, but by the ability *to love and make oneself loved*.

---

30 John Bosco, Letter to Fr Joseph Lazzero and to the community of the artisans at Valdocco, Rome 20 January 1874, in *Epistolario*, vol. IV p. 208, edited by Francesco Motto, LAS Rome 2003

## Art. 33. Optimism and joy in hope

In Jesus of Nazareth God reveals Himself as the "God of joy"<sup>31</sup> and the Gospel is "good news" which begins with the "Beatitudes" - men and women sharing in the Blessedness of God Himself. It is a question of a not insignificant but profound gift, since joy rather than being a passing sentiment is an interior power which is able to resist in the face of the difficulties of life. Saint Paul says: "In all our hardship, I am filled with encouragement and overflowing with joy" (2Cor 7,4). In this sense the joy we experience here below is an Easter gift, a foretaste of that full joy we shall possess in eternity.

Don Bosco took the desire for happiness the boys had and translated their joy of life into the language of cheerfulness, of the playground, of celebration; but he never stopped pointing out to them that God was the source of true joy. Some of his writings such as *The Companion of Youth*, the biography of Dominic Savio, the explanation contained in the story of Valentino, are a demonstration of the connection that he established between grace and happiness. And his insistence on the "rewards of heaven" projected the joys of here below into the perspective of their completion and fullness.

At the school of Don Bosco, the person belonging to the Salesian Family cultivates some attitudes which encourage joy and communicates them to others.

1. *Confidence in the victory of good*: "Even the most callous boys have a soft spot," Don Bosco writes. "The first duty of the educator is to locate that sensitive spot, that responsive chord in the boy's heart, and take advantage of it."<sup>32</sup>
2. *Appreciation of human values*: The disciple of Don Bosco is able to make his own what is good in the world and does not bewail his own times; he accepts all that is good, especially if it appeals to the young and the people.
3. *Education to the joys of every day*: a patient effort of education is needed in order to learn or to re-learn, to enjoy, with simplicity, the many human joys that every day the Creator puts in our path.

Since they entrust themselves every day totally to the "God of joy" and bear witness in words and works to the "Gospel of joy", all the disciples of Don Bosco are always joyful. They spread this joy and know how to educate to the happiness of Christian life and to a sense of celebration, remembering Saint Paul's exhortation: "I want you to be happy, always happy in the Lord" (Phil 4,4).

## Art. 34. Work and temperance

The exercise of apostolic charity includes the need for conversion and purification, in other words the death of the old man so that the new man may be born, live and grow, who in the image of Jesus the Apostle of the Father is ready to sacrifice himself everyday in apostolic work. Giving oneself means emptying oneself and allowing oneself to be filled by God so as to give Him to others. Detachment, renunciation, sacrifice are essential elements, not because of any taste for asceticism, but simply by the logic of love. There is no apostolate without asceticism and there is no asceticism without mysticism. Whoever puts his whole self at the service of the mission has no need for

---

31 SAINT FRANCIS OF SALES, *Lettre à la Présidente Brulart*, Annecy, 18 February 1605, in *Oeuvres*, vol. XIII, p.16.

32 *BM V*, p. 237

extraordinary penances; the difficulties of life and the fatigue of apostolic work are sufficient if they are accepted with faith and offered with love.

The asceticism recommended by Don Bosco has various aspects: *the asceticism of humility* so as not to feel anything other than servants before God; *the asceticism of mortification*, so as to be in control of oneself, guarding one's senses and one's heart and taking care that the seeking after comfort does not cause generosity to dry up; *the asceticism of courage and patience* so as to be able to persevere with one's actions when coming up against hard reality; *the asceticism of abandonment* when events take us closer to the cross of Christ.

## **Art. 35. Initiative and adaptability**

The desire to do good means looking for the best ways to put it into practice. At stake are: the correct interpretation of the needs and of the practical possibilities, spiritual discernment in the light of the Word of God, the courage to take the initiative, creativity in identifying untried solutions, adaptation to changing circumstances, the ability to collaborate, the willingness to evaluate.

Fr Philip Rinaldi reminds the Salesians – and what he says applies to all the Groups of the Salesian Family –: “This flexibility in adapting to every form of good continually arising among humanity is the spirit proper to our Constitutions: the day in which there were to be introduced a variation contrary to this spirit, it would be the end of our Society.”<sup>33</sup>

There are many words of Don Bosco recommending a spirit of initiative: “I do not hesitate to take a risk in projects which may benefit endangered youth or help lead souls to God”.<sup>34</sup> “Let us always strive to meet their wishes as best we can, adjusting to modern requirements, local customs and traditions as far as our conscience allows us.”<sup>35</sup>

It is not only a question of strategy, but a spiritual matter, since it implies a constant renewal of themselves and of their actions in obedience to the Spirit and in the light of the signs of the times.

The coming into being of numerous Groups of the Salesian Family which began in the XX century was the fruit of the spirit of initiative and of the flexibility of the respective Founders, faithful and creative sons of Don Bosco.

## **Art. 36. The spirit of Salesian prayer**

Salesian prayer is *apostolic prayer*; it is a movement which starts from action in order to reach God, and it is a movement which, from God, leads back to action with Him, since mind and heart are filled with His love.

Don Bosco did not devote long hours to prayer nor did he use any particular methods or forms (for him the “practices of the good Christian” were enough), because in him action and prayer were all one. The extraordinary work in which he was engaged from morning until night did not disturb his prayer, rather it gave rise to it and guided it; and the prayer cultivated in the depth of his heart nourished in him renewed energies of charity to dedicate himself with everything he had for the benefit of his poor boys.

---

33 E. VIGANÒ, *Don Philip Rinaldi, authentic witness and interpreter of the "Salesian spirit"*, in AGC n. 332, Rome 5 December 1989.

34 Letter to Vespignani. *Epistolario* Ceria III, p. 166-167; cf. also *BM* XIV, p. 536.

35 *BM* XIII, p. 210.

The name itself *oratory* given to his first institution is meant to convey that everything in that place was prayer or could become prayer; and that whatever good was done in that house was the fruit of prayer: that of Don Bosco, his collaborators and his boys.

Prayer spreads out and therefore is typical of those who live Don Bosco's spirituality and carry out his mission. Not however, to the neglect of those moments of explicit prayer, nourished by listening to the Word of God and a loving response, which transform life into prayer, prayer into life.

## **Art. 37. Mary Help of Christians, Teacher of apostolic spirituality**

Devotion to Mary (together with that to Jesus in the Holy Eucharist and to the Pope) has been one of the three devotions which marked the spiritual and apostolic life of Don Bosco. The whole Salesian Family is and feels itself to be a *Marian Family*, which came into being through the motherly care of the Immaculate Help of Christians. All the Groups in fact express this conviction in their own Constitutions.

For the Salesians, Mary Help of Christians is the model and guide in their educative and apostolic activity,<sup>36</sup> mother and teacher in their formative experience,<sup>37</sup> particularly invoked in their prayer.<sup>38</sup>

For the Daughters Mary Help of Christians, Mary the Virgin Mother, the humble handmaid, Mother of the Saviour is Mother and Teacher of every Salesian vocation and the "real Superior of the Institute".<sup>39</sup> She is the model of faith, of hope, of charity, and union with God, of motherly care and tenderness, of consecrated life, of prayer, of openness, of listening, docility, and collaboration, of apostolic charity.<sup>40</sup>

The Salesian Cooperators "in the Immaculate Virgin and Help of Christians discover the deepest elements of their vocation: being true "cooperators of God" in the realisation of his salvific plan".<sup>41</sup>

For those belonging to the Association of Mary Help of Christians, entrustment to Mary means "living a daily spirituality with evangelical attitudes, especially with thanksgiving to God for the wonders he continually works, and with fidelity to him even in times of difficulty and grace, following Mary's example".<sup>42</sup>

According to the Sisters of Charity of Jesus, Mary helps them to live animated by the Holy Spirit, to put Jesus Christ at the centre of their lives, to nourish a sincere love and great confidence in Her in their relationships with people, to imitate the example of the Woman of faith who seeks the will of God in ordinary daily life, of the loving Mother concerned about others, of the Disciple of the Son who listens to the Word, of the Consoler of the afflicted, of the Help of Christians and of the Mother of humanity.<sup>43</sup>

The Damas Salesianas in their *Ideario* put it this way: "Mary is the first committed lay woman who in the giving of herself faithfully accepts the plan of God, brings to life his word, as woman, spouse and mother, teacher and witness, the first to be evangelised and to evangelise. She is the inspiration

---

36 Cf. *Const SDB* arts. 20 34 92.

37 Cf. *Ibid* art. 98.

38 Cf. *Ibid* arts 84 87 92.

39 Cf. *Const FMA* arts 17 18 44 79 114.

40 Cf. *Ibid* arts. 4 7 11 14 37 39 44 79 71.

41 *SPVA* art. 20.

42 *New Regulations of ADMA* art. 4

43 Cf. *Cost SCG* art.12.

and the model to be followed by the Dama Salesiana, and all this leads us to declare her to be the First Dama Salesiana, the norm, the guide, the inspiration, mother, sister and faithful companion in our mission”.<sup>44</sup>

Daily entrustment to Mary therefore is a characteristic of our spirituality. Entrustment has an upwards action: it is a giving of oneself in order to respond generously to a mission to be accomplished; but there is also a downwards motion: accepting with trust and gratitude the help of Her who guided Don Bosco and continues to guide the spiritual Family which has its origin in him.

## **Chapter Four**

### **FORMATION FOR COMMUNION AND MISSION IN THE SALESIAN FAMILY**

Each Group of the Salesian Family takes care of the formation of its own members while drawing on the common patrimony and on its own specific features. Nevertheless it is possible to identify common elements, possible convergences, and to be hoped for forms of collaboration.

#### **Art. 38. Awareness of the specific identities**

The communion of the Salesian Family is based, in addition to the common charism and the same mission, also on knowledge and appreciation of the different Groups which make it up. Unity, in fact, is never uniformity, but plurality of expressions converging on a single centre.

It is therefore necessary to foster knowledge about each other in order to enjoy the gifts and the particular features of each Group in so far as together they constitute a treasure that is to everyone's benefit.

Helpful in contributing to this are contacts on an occasional or regular basis, informal or official, social gatherings and moments of prayer in common.

Distribution of the *Charter of charismatic and spiritual identity*, of writings about Don Bosco, biographies of the Founders or Co-Founders, of the annual Strenna of the Rector Major, of the planning documents of the individual Groups, of the *Salesian Bulletin*, of particularly significant apostolic experience, could contribute to reciprocal knowledge and esteem, and at the same time re-enforcing the unity of the Family.

Special attention needs to be given to the Groups directly begun by Don Bosco and those present and at work in one's own area.

#### **Art. 39. Shared formation**

To ensure unity of spirit and a convergence on the mission, moments of formation in common are also necessary, especially when it is a question of throwing light on or studying in depth the essential aspect of the charism or of planning projects to be shared. All of this can be done while always respecting legitimate autonomy, but also that family spirit which expresses and strengthens unity.

In order to be formed together it is necessary above all to learn to *think together*, since there is always the danger of simply leading the other person to one's own point of view. This is possible

---

44 Cf. *Ideario DS* art.14.

when the fear of real debate and discussion is overcome, when instead of focusing on oneself each one concentrates on the others, when the aim is seen to be what is good in itself and not the affirmation of oneself, when truth and charity come together.

In addition it is necessary to learn to *work together*, identifying the methods and the strategies for shared reflection and constructive dialogue.

It is always and everywhere necessary to *pray together* since it is the Spirit, the Light of truth and the source of unity, the One Who inspires all that is good, just and right for the good of individuals and of the whole.

There can be many occasions for formation in common:

- study sessions on aspects of the charismatic experience which are common yet differentiated, on the spirituality which is proper to us, on the patrimony inherited from Don Bosco, on the challenges which the signs of the times present to us, on the main ecclesial events or on important directives of the pontifical and episcopal magisterium;
- discussions on youth ministry issues and problems, on particular topics of Salesian pedagogy, on strategies regarding the mission in view of the new evangelisation;
- participation in a process of discernment in situations of particular difficulty or with regard to formation programmes or apostolic projects to be undertaken together.

Particularly relevant in this area is the Consultative Committee of the Salesian Family, which needs the presence and the support of all the Groups.

## **Art. 40. Taking one's place in different settings**

The mission requires the ability to enter into varied cultural, social and ecclesial contexts, being able to perceive urgent needs and demonstrating the ability to collaborate with all those working for good.

For this it is necessary to train oneself to adopt a listening attitude without prejudice, acceptance without being suspicious, appreciation without jealousy, participation without reservation.

It is in this way that a contribution is made to the inculturation of the faith and of the charism while ecclesial communion is built up, always wider than that of a particular Group or of the Salesian Family itself.

It is a formation which takes place in the practical circumstances of meetings with groups, movements and associations which express the richness of the Church and place themselves at the service of the Kingdom.

First among these is the vast Salesian Movement, of which the spiritual Family of Don Bosco constitutes the animating centre.

Other places which favour this formation are constituted by the presence of the Groups of the Family in the local Churches, and by collaboration with other ecclesial groupings operating in the area. The multiform grace of God given to the various ecclesial movements expresses itself in a particular spirituality and in an original apostolic form which needs to be known and accepted, while to all we offer the gift of our charismatic identity and the support of our specific mission.



It is a formation which educates to respect for each other, to generosity in charity and the willingness to collaborate, in acting with patience and farsightedness, in a readiness to accept the sacrifice this sometimes implies.

As the Salesian Family, stimulated by the example of Don Bosco who for everyone had sentiments and words of acceptance and gratitude and who knew how to share with everyone insights, experiences and achievements, we are called to strengthen the gift received sharing it with the whole Church.

## **Art. 41. Methodology for collaboration**

Knowing how to collaborate does not come automatically; formation is needed which takes into consideration certain essential elements.

1. Above all it is necessary to educate oneself about *planning together*. Every educative and apostolic activity should start from an analysis of the situation of one's own beneficiaries and aim at achieving certain specific objectives, short, medium and long term. All this needs to be studied and planned together, making good use of the skills available, respecting different points of view and encouraging convergence.

2. It is necessary to work together on the strategies of *coordination*. The combination of different forces in view of an enterprise never occurs automatically. In fact certain abilities are required: to have precise knowledge of the problem one intends to solve, to clarify the purpose of the exercise, realistically weigh up the possibilities for action, assess the forces and the resources available, honestly state the support that one can give and one intends to give.

3. It is also necessary to accept the consequences of the logic of *reciprocal action*. Giving and receiving are never in just one direction. Mutual appreciation is an awareness of one's own gifts and those of the others, it is the recognition of one's own worth and that of others, it is the acceptance and the exchange of complementary sensitivities, ideas and skills, it is making contributions with generosity and humility.

4. Finally it is necessary to educate oneself to *shared responsibility*. The success of collaboration in the educative and apostolic fields depends on both the acceptance of a primary responsibility which coordinates the project, and the recognition of the responsibilities of others, giving everyone space so that they can actively take part in carrying out the common plan.

## **Art. 42. The role of the priest in the Salesian Family**

The Vatican Council II presents priests as guides and educators of the people of God. It states: "Ceremonies however beautiful, or associations however flourishing will be of little value if they are not directed toward educating men in the attainment of Christian maturity."<sup>45</sup>

And it gives the reason for this affirmation: "As educators in the faith priests must see to it, either by themselves or through others that the faithful are led individually in the Holy Spirit to a development of their own vocation as required by the gospel, to a sincere and active charity and to that freedom with which Christ has made us free."<sup>46</sup>

---

45 PO 6.

46 *Ibid.*

In this way the Salesian priest is called to his most significant responsibilities in the area of formation. The Word of God, the sacraments and in particular the Eucharist, the service of unity and of charity represent the greatest treasures of the Church.

Paraphrasing an expression of the Council, it can be said that it is not possible to spiritually form an apostolic Family such as the Salesian one unless it has as its basis and centre the celebration of the Eucharist, from which must originate all education aimed at forming the spirit of the family.<sup>47</sup>

The Groups of the Salesian Family have always demonstrated this requirement for formation and they re-enforce it in this *Charter of Identity*.

## **Chapter Five**

### **COMPOSITION AND ANIMATION OF THE S. F.**

#### **Art. 43. A growing Family**

The Salesian Family, in these last decades, has experienced a real spring-time. Under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, other Groups have been added to the original Groups and have enriched communion and broadened the Salesian mission.

Everyone can see how much the Family has grown, and how the apostolic work has multiplied in various countries of the world, and the field of activities has extended to the benefit of many young people and adults. This invites us not only to thank God, but makes us more aware of our greater responsibility: in fact the vocation of our Family, like every other vocation, is at the service of the mission, in a particular way for the salvation of youth, especially, the poorest, the abandoned and those in danger.<sup>48</sup>

The Groups formally enrolled in the Salesian Family are the following:

1. The Society of Saint Francis of Sales (Salesians of Don Bosco)
2. The Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians
3. The Association of Salesians-Co-operators
4. The Association of Past Pupils of Don Bosco
5. The Association of Past Pupils of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians
6. The Association of Women Volunteers of Don Bosco
7. The Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary
8. The Salesian Oblates of the Sacred Heart
9. The Apostles of the Holy Family
10. The Sisters of Charity of Jesus
11. The Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians
12. The Daughters of the Divine Saviour

---

<sup>47</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Pascual Chávez, *The Salesian Family yesterday and today: the seed has become a tree and the tree a wood*, Strenna of the Rector Major. Rome 2009.

13. The Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary
14. The Sisters of Jesus the Adolescent
15. The Association of the Damas Salesianas
16. The Catechists Sisters of Mary Immaculate Help of Christians
17. The Volunteers with Don Bosco
18. The Daughters of the Queenship of Mary Immaculate
19. Witnesses of the Risen Lord TR
20. The Congregation of St. Michael the Archangel
21. The Congregation of Sisters of the Resurrection
22. The Congregation of the Sisters Announcers of the Lord
23. The Disciples - Secular Institute
24. The Friends of "Canção Nova"
25. The Sisters of St Michael the Archangel (Michaelites)
26. The Sisters of Maria Auxiliatrix
27. The Community of the Mission of Don Bosco (CMB)
28. The Sisters of the Queenship of Mary Immaculate
29. The Visitation Sisters of Don Bosco (VSDB)

## **Art. 44. An open Family**

The Salesian Family, which has the characteristics of a great Movement for the salvation of youth and expresses itself in a variety of forms for the apostolate in the missions, among the working classes, in social communication and in the care of vocations is open to other Groups which ask to be officially recognised by the Rector Major.

The essential criteria to be recognised in the Salesian Family are:

1. *Participation in the "Salesian vocation"*: in other words sharing, to a significant degree, in the human and charismatic experience of Don Bosco. In fact, he remains for all the Groups, the original inspiration for a particular path of discipleship and of apostolate; as such he is the source of inspiration and point of convergence.
2. *Participation in the Salesian mission to the young and/or the working classes*. This means that every Group, among its specific ends, includes some typical element of the Salesian mission, even though expressed in different forms and with particular emphasises.
3. *Sharing the spirit, the educative method and the missionary style*, in other words the spiritual and pedagogical patrimony of Don Bosco.
4. *Evangelical life according to the Salesian spirit*, that is to say a life inspired by the evangelical counsels as the way to holiness; this is expressed in practical terms either by the profession of the

vows of religious consecration, or in the various kinds of promise or commitment which gives each of the Groups its particular features.

5. *An active fraternity* which leads each group to link itself and work in harmony synergy with the other groups of the Salesian Family.

## **Art. 45. Points of reference**

In force of their apostolic communion of a charismatic nature, the Groups which make up the Salesian Family recognise in the Rector Major, Successor of Don Bosco, the Father and centre of unity of the Family itself.

Then, the Salesians of Don Bosco particular heirs of his charismatic richness have the responsibility of animating the whole of the Salesian Family. They in fact have particular “responsibilities: to preserve unity of spirit and to foster dialogue and fraternal collaboration for mutual enrichment and greater apostolic fruitfulness”.<sup>49</sup> Therefore they carry out a service which does not belong to the authority of government, but to the humble and joyful dedication of one who promotes a path of fidelity to the gift received, fostering its communication, sharing and realisation.

## **Art. 46. Organisations of animation and times for meeting**

To ensure a regular and effective animation of the Salesian Family, some essential coordinating bodies are available to us and we encourage specific occasions for meeting together.

*At world, regional, national, province and local level*, unity and animation are supported and strengthened by Councils or Consultative Committees of the Salesian Family.

The meeting of the Consultative Committee at various levels is intended to achieve the following objectives:

1. To study and examine more deeply Don Bosco, his life, his pedagogy and his spirituality in order to know, understand and better take on board his apostolic project and his criteria for pastoral activity.
2. To strengthen the sense of belonging, fostering a direct and practical knowledge of the various different Groups of the Family and appreciation of their specific identity.
3. To arrange meetings and formation experiences in common.
4. To know the pastoral challenges facing society and the local Churches within which the Salesian Family takes its place, studying possibilities for forms of pastoral synergy, according to the specific nature of the individual groups, and in communion with the Salesian mission.
5. Seeking to put into action as often as possible, practical apostolic initiatives, shared by all the groups in the area.

The *World Consultative Committee* meets every year at the Salesian Generalate and proposes the essential lines for animation in the coming pastoral year.

In the individual Regions or Provinces every year the *Salesian Family Day* is celebrated with proposed opportunities for formation and the sharing of experiences.

---

49 C. SDB art. 5c

At world level every year *the Spirituality Days of the Salesian Family* are held. These represent a time of communion, of reflection and of sharing, during which it is possible to study specifically the contents of the *Strenna of the Rector Major*. This document is proposed each year by the Successor of Don Bosco as an invitation to come together in reflection and in the practical implementation of particular aspect of Salesian spirituality and mission.

## **Art. 47. Prayer**

*Father and Teacher of youth,  
Saint John Bosco,  
who docile to the gifts of the Holy Spirit,  
bequeathed to the Salesian Family  
the treasure of your special love  
for “the small and the poor ones,”  
teach us to be  
each day for them  
signs and bearers of the love of God,  
cultivating in our souls  
the same sentiments of Christ  
the Good Shepherd.  
Ask for all the members of your Family  
a heart full of kindness,  
constancy in work,  
wisdom in discernment,  
courage to bear witness  
to a sense of the Church and to missionary generosity.  
Obtain for us from the Lord  
the grace to be faithful  
to the special covenant  
that the Lord has made with us,  
and help us so that, guided by Mary Help of Christians,  
we may follow with joy,  
together with the young,  
the path that leads to love.  
Amen.*

