

SALESIAN BROTHERS AND THE LAY MISSION PARTNERS

III. THE SDB AND THE LAITY

1. PARTNERSHIP WITH THE LAITY

1.1 TURNING POINT IN SALESIAN HISTORY: The SDB General Chapter 24 pointed out towards the end of the 20th century its being a **turning point in the history of the Congregation**: “If on the one hand the GC 24 constitutes a **significant stage in the process of renewal**, on the other it wants to be a **point of departure**:



The Salesian Congregation intends to approach the Third Millennium with a new look, **involving in its spirit and mission the greatest possible number of men and women** who,

by educating and evangelizing, want to work with it for the Kingdom.” (GC 24, 18)

Fr. Juan Vecchi wrote: If previously such a model could be **thought of as optional or alternative, today it is clear that it is our normal form of presence and action.** We must learn to make it function in the terms which have been stated or perhaps dreamed. (Acts of the General Council 361, 3)

What are our **motives for the partnership** of Salesians and lay people in the spirit and mission of Don Bosco?

- **Not because of the exigency of our work:** It is not for reasons of necessity brought about by the increasing demands to open new settings and the diminishing number of religious to respond. That would be a superficial way of understanding our vocation as religious.
- **Not even for reasons of tactical alliance** with lay people who are often more competent than religious in the field of education: That would also shortchange the vocation of lay people.
- The first reason is **theological.** It is borne out of the new ecclesiology which **recognizes and fosters the dignity, vocation and mission** of the lay.
- The second reason is **pastoral.** It is prompted by a desire to be a more significant presence in the midst of the young. “The young would like the Salesians **to be less occupied in organizational matters and to have more time and tranquility for meeting and guiding them.**

1.2 The **BASIC REQUIREMENTS** asked of the lay person coming to the Salesian mission are: (GC 24, 164)

- **Personal coherence**, so as to become an educative point of reference for the young
- **Educative attitude and sensitivity to the youth condition**, especially the poor
- **Empathy for Don Bosco** and his method of education
- **Openness to God and respect for diversity**

1.3 **THE CHALLENGES:** The SDB General Chapter 27 observes this situation in the salesian world:

“We see **greater involvement and activity by the laity, helped by sharing and joint responsibility** with and within the educative and pastoral community... Where this kind of teamwork exists, in a climate of trust and family spirit, respecting roles, **that place becomes fruitful and purposeful, also in vocational terms. Systematic formation of the laity continues to be weak in certain contexts.**” (SDB General Chapter 27, art. 15)

Together with the many signs of positive growth in the partnership between salesians and laity, we do not conceal the resistance and problems that persist:

- 1.3.1 The communities **do not always have the necessary flexibility in their lives to accept stimuli and innovations** from lay people.
- 1.3.2 In some situations, a **defensive attitude may prevail**, which makes the **laity feel held back**, so to speak, in their apostolic intentions.



- 1.3.3 The **availability for accompanying the laity** in their salesian formation because the Salesians **are absorbed to a considerable extent in organization and administration**.
- 1.3.4 There are **different perceptions of the values of life** as lived by the salesian community and by the laity **in their families, social and economic conditions**, especially in developing countries, and notably different social levels.

- 1.3.5 Sometimes, as prevalent among the laity, it is the **economic matters that create difficulties in dialogue, attention and reciprocal understanding**, and so compromise the sharing of the mission.
- 1.3.6 In some parts and contexts of the salesian world, one may note an impressive fact: the **considerable presence of lay people of different cultures and beliefs who take part in our mission**, which can facilitate an exchange of gifts with **mutual advantage**, but can also give rise to a **facile syncretism** (*simplistic, superficial blending of beliefs*), and can become the cause of tensions, hostility and even of violence.

2. FORMATION OF THE SDBs ON LAY SPIRITUALITY

GC 24 acknowledges that when the salesian community becomes more attentive to shared responsibility of the laity, it “cannot fail to involve, from the standpoint of identity, the **primacy of spirituality.**” (GC 24, 54)

GC 24 directs us: (GC 24, 142)

“Keeping in mind the different nature of the SDBs and the laity, and the times needed for human, affective and apostolic maturing, the stages of **initial formation should have contents and experiences of reciprocal and complementary formation for the common growth.**”

GC 24 also proposes: (GC 24, 53)

“Young confreres receive more efficacious help when, from the period of their **initial formation, they are introduced to experiences of collaboration with lay people** both at a directly practical level and in the process of the elaboration of the Education-Pastoral Project.”

The Ratio gives **specific orientation for the different stages of formation:**

- 2.1 **Post-novitiate:** For his “**spiritual formation**”, he grows in an understanding of the different forms of the Salesian vocation and the lay vocation. (Ratio, 400)
- 2.2 **Practical training:** For his “**human formation**”, he matures in his personality through his interactions with his community and in his work of education (assistance) and through his sharing with the laity, he becomes more conscious of his personal attitudes, his resources and shortcomings, his difficulties and the aspects he needs to correct or improve. (Ratio, 430)
- 2.3 **Specific formation of lay brother:** For his “**formation to youth pastoral ministry**”, he develops the ability to animate, plan and work in a team within the educative and pastoral community, sharing with the laity and taking care of his relationships with the Salesian Family; he offers his special

contribution within the animating nucleus, aware of the unique value of his apostolic consecration. (Ratio, 457)



Along with his identity as one who **“lives the lay state as a consecrated person”**, the Salesian Brother **“also acts as a link between his consecrated brothers and the lay people...**

- to his consecrated brethren he **recalls the value of creation and of secular realities**;
- to the laity he **recalls the value of total dedication to God for the cause of the Kingdom**;
- to all he offers a particular sensitivity for the **world of work**, a concern for the **locality**, and a need for the kind of **professional approach** he uses in his educative and pastoral activity. (Ratio, 40)

2.4 Specific formation for priests: For his very **“nature and purpose” as a priest**, he thinks with the Church: **embracing the priest’s identity** as presented by the Church and in its **relationship with the Christian community, the laity and other vocations**.

(Ratio, 460)

2.5 **Ongoing formation:** For his **salesian youth pastoral ministry**, each confrere finds particular opportunities for ongoing formation in “**working together**” with confreres and lay people. (Ratio, 200)

3. AREAS OF CLOSER RELATIONSHIP IN THE SALESIAN FAMILY

3.1 **FORMATION TOGETHER:** GC 24 speaks about the “development of a **process of formation in common**”: (GC 24, 55)

- The laity ask in the first place for the elaboration of a plan of **formation for their spiritual and charismatic preparation**.
- Secondly they note that formation to communion and sharing should be **realized by both parties together**.

What benefits to our own particular vocation as SDBs do we get when we are formed to share the same spirit and to work in the same mission together with lay people? The **prospects to our fruitfulness** are, according to GC 24: (GC 24, 53)

- It **makes the Salesian grow as a prophetic sign** of the newness of the Kingdom.
- It **promotes in the Salesian a change of mentality** and opens him to a new style of communion and sharing.

But with these gifts is a responsibility which the lay people express: “With regard to the SDBs the laity express the desire to **feel them nearer, more concerned about animation and coordination, more involved in their accompaniment.**” (GC 24, 53)

3.2 THE VOLUNTEERS WITH DON BOSCO (CDB)

3.2.1 CONTEXT OF ITS INCEPTION IN THE FIN:

- **AS NEW FRONTIER:** The CDBs are the consecrated Salesians who can, using the images of Pope Francis, (a) wear “**dusty shoes**”; (b) have “**the smell of the sheep**”; and (c) serve as the “**field hospital after the battle**” with their very proximity and accessibility especially to young workers.
- **FOR THE BICENTENARY OF DB'S BIRTH:** Beyond celebrations that may just be postcards of happy memories, what can give more lasting significance is the re-birthing in the Province of the avant-garde idea of Don Bosco about the **'Extern Salesian'** which he presented in the 1860 Constitutions.



- **IN THE YEAR OF THE CONSECRATED LIFE:** The Salesian Family has a unique vocation to offer through the professed CDBs who “**by vocational choice live as laymen in the world... to enliven reality from within...** immersed in the Heart of Christ and enlivened by the optimistic humanism of Don Bosco and St. Francis de Sales” (CDB Constitutions, 6).

3.2.2 CHARISM OF THE INSTITUTE

After the Special General Chapter (20th) of the Salesians of Don Bosco (1971-72) the idea of the Extern Salesian had come back into the thinking of some Salesian circles; Don Bosco had presented this idea in his 16th chapter of the 1860 Constitutions.

Salesian – Consecrated – Secular: This is the CDB’s TRINOMIAL VOCATION.

3.2.2.1 SECULAR: A PART OF THE WORLD

- By vocational choice we **live as laymen in the world...** to enliven reality from within, bringing the spirit of the beatitudes to human community.
- Immersed in the Heart of Christ... **we love the world and the people of our time**, with all of their problems, hopes, desires and expectations.

- The **different areas of human activity which we engage in professionally...** are the privileged place where we experience encounter with God and with our brothers and sisters... **promoting human values and social justice.**
- To guarantee our complete engagement with the world and on behalf of our apostolate, we **keep a prudent and responsible reserve** with regard to our own belonging and that of others to the Institute.
- This brings us more in line with the **behaviour and life of Jesus Christ in Nazareth.** Ordinarily we live alone or with our families.



3.2.2.2 **CONSECRATED: APART FROM THE WORLD**

- We place Christ at the centre of our life, seeing this as having absolute primacy. We give a free response to the gift of vocation through our **profession of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience.**

- By imitating the example of Jesus, we choose a life of **perfect continence in celibacy for the Kingdom of Heaven.**
 - Through the vow of poverty we **entrust ourselves to Divine Providence** and pledge that we will **work to support our own upkeep and apostolate**, to discern and evaluate with those responsible, our use of goods and our tenor of life, to **seek authorization for significant expenditures or investments**, to contribute with a sense of common belonging to expenses of the Institute, to possible needs of the brothers and to the support of the Church.



- Through the vow of obedience, we pledge that we will **readily take the Gospel as our supreme rule of life and lovingly obey**, even at the cost of sacrifice, the norms of the Church's Magisterium, our Constitutions and the legitimate directions of the institute which trace out an evangelical path to perfect charity.

3.2.2.3 **SALESIAN: IN THE SPIRIT OF DON BOSCO**

- fully involved in the **spirit and mission common to the Salesian Family**... aware of the **originality of our role which combines secular consecration with our Salesianity**
- to **read the Gospel with the mindset of Christ the Good Shepherd** who goes looking for his sheep with loving-kindness and urgency... in the motto **“da mihi animas, cetera tolle”**
- marked out by **Salesianity in our secular consecration**... to engage the world with an attitude of joyful optimism, concerned with **“saving rather than condemning”**



3.2.3 FORMATION PROCESS

3.2.3.1 Request for the **ADMISSION TO THE CDB VOCATION**

DISCERNMENT PERIOD: The candidate is invited to send a written request to the CDB World President (Responsabile Mondiale) asking to be admitted to the initial phase of

discernment, indicating the motivations of this choice

- curriculum vitae: information about his basic personal info, his own family, formation and professional background
- experience of animation or ministry in any kind of Church or secular service
- presentation from one trustworthy person (spiritual guide, confessor, parish priest).

This documentation is to be sent with personal signature (air mail) to:

CDB Central office - Rome
VOLONTARI CON DON BOSCO - CDB
Segreteria Centrale
c/o Casa Generalizia Salesiana
Via della Pisana, 1111
00163 ROMA 5
Digital copy to: cdb.segreteria@gmail.com

3.2.3.2 **PHASES OF THE INITIAL FORMATION:** The initial training process is divided into three phases: Discernment, First Formation and Temporary Vows.

As a rule, each candidate is required to go through all the stages until the Perpetual Vows. The General Moderator, with the consent of his Council may, in exceptional cases, grant or arrange changes on the duration of the phases of formation.

- **DISCERNMENT:** Discernment normally lasts no less than a year and no longer than two. Its purpose is to ascertain the suitability of the candidate to begin specific formation.

- **EARLY FORMATION:** Early Formation, normally lasting three years, and no more than four, culminates in First Profession. This is an initial testing period with the purpose of offering a specific formation, getting to know the nature of our vocation and experiencing life in the Institute in practice.
- **FIRST PROFESSION:** The first Profession incorporates the candidate and makes him a member of the Institute with all its effects. Temporary vows normally last six years and, in any situation, no longer than nine. Their purpose is to confirm in practice whether one is able to live this vocation in perpetuity.
- **PERPETUAL VOWS AND PERMANENT FORMATION:** Definitive incorporation in the Institute comes about with Perpetual Profession. It results in one acquiring all the rights and duties of a member.

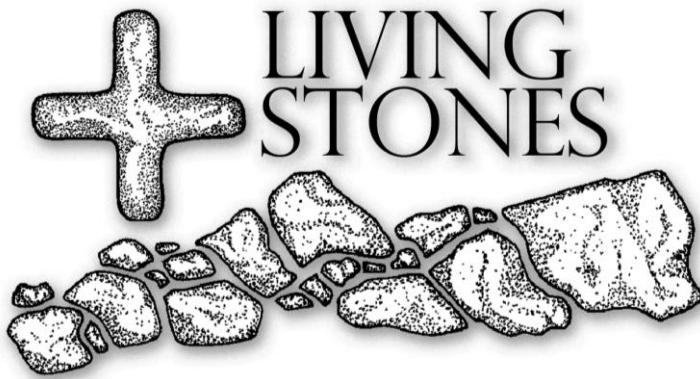
The formation journey continues also after the formation of the Perpetual Vows and requires an open attitude to a process of continual conversion, of constant renewal and personal growth in any condition of life.

3.2.3.3 **CONDITIONS FOR ENTRY:**

- Maximum 38 years of age;
- Unmarried;
- Physical health to participate to the life of the Institute;

- Psychological and emotional maturity for his age and life situation;
- Having good culture and expertise in the professional life;
- Having understood clearly the meaning and the value of secular salesian consecration;
- Having the desire and search for spiritual, cultural and profession growth;
- Having economic autonomy;
- Having time for prayer and formation, for meetings in local and Institutional level.

Any exceptions to the rules set may be granted by the General Moderator, by having heard the opinion of his Council.



3.3 THE FUTURE OF RELIGIOUS LIFE: RELATIONAL SPIRITUALITY

In the second part of the Rector Major's report to GC 27 (n. 2.1), Fr. Pascual Chavez gave some reflections on the future of religious life in our postmodern society, among which are:

changes **from being a closed fortress to being an encampment...** with communities more like hearths (*fireplace of the home*) than hotels, with **more communion in life and more fellowship, providing an impetus to true unity in diversity, with lay people beside us as companions on the journey...**

3.3.1 **A winning team is not made by good coaches but by interested players...** Are you interested in the God-given dignity and vocation of lay people?

3.3.2 **The strength of the group is the strength of leader...** Do you as a leader get strength from the gifts that only lay people can give to the salesian spirit and mission?

3.3.3 **Continuous effort is the key to unlocking potential... Practice. Persevere. Excellence is not an act but a habit...** Do you value the fruitfulness in reciprocal, ongoing formation of the SDBs together with the lay mission partners?

Furthermore, the way leaders run the community in a given context or situation is at the soul of the change process.

- **Do what you love.** When you love your work, you **become the best worker in the world...**
- But remember, that in the spirit and mission of Don Bosco, a **vast movement of persons takes part in it, becoming a living experience of the Church.** The Salesian mission **cannot be thought of without the laity**, for what they bring to it is also vital for our charism.
- The shared mission between SDBs and lay people is **no longer optional.** The shared mission between SDBs and laity, reflection on this mission, the process of conversion by our SDB confreres in this regard, is **something we cannot go back.**

3.3.4 How are you going to succeed in developing a **day-to-day operative relationship** between SDBs and lay people, especially in contexts where there are **diverse religious beliefs, marked by: contribution of gifts, strong sense of belonging, and the esteem and veneration for the figure of Don Bosco and the salesian mission?**

3.3.5 What **other initiatives** do you have in the Educative-Pastoral Community for **contact and growth between SDBs and the laity**, for **mutual enrichment**, and for **greater efficacy for the mission to youth**?

3.3.6 As regards the **Salesian Family**, in particular, are there still environments in which a certain **clericalism weakens the leadership of the laity**, and **inadequate formation compromises the sharing of responsibility** in the mission?

L: The Salesian Family is a Marian Family. We came into being through the motherly care of Mary Help of Christians. We pray to the Lord to sanctify this Salesian Family.

ALL: Preserve it in unity, fidelity and apostolic fruitfulness.

L: We pray for the Salesians of Don Bosco who see Mary as the model and guide of our apostolic charity.

ALL: May she be mother and teacher of our interior life and in our formative experience.

L: We pray for the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians who see Mary as the humble handmaid and real Superior of the Institute.

ALL: May she be for them model of faith, hope and charity and of motherly care and tenderness.

L: We pray for the Sisters of Charity of Jesus who see Mary as the mother of humanity and the woman of faith who seeks the will of God in ordinary life.

ALL: May she be for them the first disciple of Christ who listens to the Word.

L: We pray for the consecrated secular Salesians who see in Mary the deepest element of their lay vocation.

ALL: May she be for them the true cooperator of God in the realization of his plan for them to be light and leaven in the world.

L: We pray for all the other members of the Salesian Family who see in our devotion to Mary as a mark of the spiritual and apostolic life of the sons and daughters of Don Bosco.



ALL: May she be for them the inspiration and help in living a spirituality of daily life with evangelical attitudes.