

To the Salesian Cooperators of the East USA and Canada

Dearest Salesian Cooperators of the East USA and Canada,

It is my joy to be able to share a message to you on the occasion of your Formation Day as Association of Salesian Cooperators.

God gave Don Bosco a mission, to be an evangelizer and educator of young people, especially those who are poor. Don Bosco carried out this mission, in the beginning, with the help of priests and lay people, both men and women. Later, to give greater stability to his work he founded different congregations and groups: Salesians of Don Bosco (SDB), Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (FMA), the Salesian Cooperators (lay group), the Association of Mary Help of Christians (ADMA – lay group)

The mission that was entrusted to Don Boco and which the Salesians carry out today is expressed in the Salesian Constitutions as “to be in the Church signs and bearers of the love of God for young people, especially those who are poor” (Constitutions 2).

There is a growing awareness that the Salesian charism/mission, is given by God, through Don Bosco, not only to the Salesians (SDBs, FMAs, etc.), but to the whole Church. While it is given to all in the Church, Salesians (SDBs, FMAs) may be considered as having a special role (stewards, “charismatic point of reference”) in this charism/mission.

Since the Salesian mission/charism is entrusted to the whole Church, any member of the Church (we concern ourselves here especially with lay people) has a **right** to participate in this mission/charism and the Salesians have a **duty** to share it with others. In other words, Christian lay people can be partners in the Salesian mission/charism with Salesians (SDBs, FMAs), non-more as collaborators as in the past but as co-responsible according to their state of life, that is, as lay people (not religious).

Therefore, I would like to speak to you about the meaningful theme: “*The Salesian Cooperator, Making a Difference in the World*”. This is precisely what Don Bosco wanted from the Cooperators!

When we read Don Bosco’s writings, we are struck by the frequent use he makes of the concept of “cooperation.” Through the privileged use of this concept, Don Bosco reveals something of his own profound soul and of the ideal which he proposes to whoever wishes to be his disciple. A man of action, he wants to work and to succeed, but not alone: he wishes to work with God, the Great Worker, as a humble servant and instrument: “*Da mihi animas! Let me work with You!*”, and he seeks collaborators in this work, people who accept to “*work with Don Bosco*”.

It is not for nothing that he chose the name of “Cooperator” to identify those Priests and lay men and women who helped him. It seems to me that *this name is rich in doctrinal and spiritual value*, and capable of laying the foundation for the choice of life and the mysticism which every Salesian Cooperator needs in order to realize his or her Salesian vocation with perseverance and joy.

Two important events must remain at the center of your mind and action. The first is the *Holy See’s definitive approval of the Project of Life of the Salesian Cooperators*.

I would presume to say that it is not in the first place a project that we have thought up, as though we ourselves were proposing our own way of carrying out the Salesian apostolate, but it is the heartfelt and grateful taking up of God's plan to put into effect His work of Salvation. Ours is not voluntary work, even if it could be beautiful and significant, but a vocation. Making it our own and taking it up fervently, we become *God’s Cooperators* and companions of Jesus, at the school of St. John Bosco.

This point of view is not insignificant since it means taking as our living Rule the person of Jesus Himself and His Gospel. Only in this way does the *Project of Apostolic Life* of an Association of the lay faithful - that of the Salesian Cooperators - become a Salesian way of reading the Gospel. Its validity is confirmed by the official recognition of the Holy See, which declares the evangelical authenticity of the text and therefore considers it a way that leads to holiness, i.e., to the fullness of love, for those who take it up and live it as a "Rule of Life" since it starts from love and leads to love. In addition, it is a way of being faithful to Don Bosco, to his charism, and to his mission.

The *Project of Apostolic Life* has a three-fold aim: to ensure the *identity* of the Association through a dynamic fidelity, one which always refers back to the original intuition and motivation of the Founder and at the same time tries to remain up-to-date according to the changing historical circumstances; to strengthen the *unity* of its members in the variety of their backgrounds, ages, formation, sensitivities, languages, and cultures, but united by Love, by Faith, by Hope and by a common charism and a shared project; and promoting their *vitality*, bearing in mind that behind every vocation there is always a mission to be carried out, in the name of the Church and on behalf of the people, so that personal growth and the development of the Association become the criteria for authenticity and for assessment.

Never forget that *our Salesian Family is above all, spiritual*, because it’s not the fruit of Don Bosco’s genius, but as a gift of the Holy Spirit!

The *other event concerns the entire Salesian Family*. After having celebrated the Bicentenary of the birth of our beloved founder and father St. John Bosco (2015), we are going next year to celebrate the bicentenary of “Don Bosco dream at nine years old” (2024). Together with the whole Salesian Family we are committed to arriving at it having followed the path of a profound spiritual and charismatic

renewal and a pastoral conversion so that the Salesian mission, undertaken in different ways by the various groups, and in the varied contexts in which they find themselves living and working, may respond to the needs, the desires and the rights of the young people of today.

Knowing Don Bosco as a historical figure and putting his pedagogy into effect today lead us to the well-spring of his charism: pastoral charity. It is pastoral charity that makes all the difference in the world.

In practical terms, how do I see the Salesian Cooperators today? I see them as people dedicated to the common good, who are working in the political, social and humanitarian fields:

- with special attention for the poor, the excluded, the sick, and the marginalized of all kinds, all of which requires an open heart;
- engaged in giving vitality to the Church by putting into practice the beneficial projects of the Association, at the different levels, with a real attitude of service;
- with a strong lay spirituality so as to become holy educators who know how to form others to a gospel lifestyle and to participation in the Sacraments.

To sum up: *a new kind of Salesian Cooperator is needed today*: one who, in the changed historical circumstances of today, will respond better to the insight and the original intention of our beloved founder and father. For the whole Salesian Family, and, therefore, for the Association of Salesian Cooperators, today's challenge is focused above all on prevention: on breaking the vicious cycle which perpetuates the continuous violation of the fundamental rights and dignity of individuals, especially of the young. The words and the example of Pope Francis must encourage you to walk in this direction.

The mission, precisely as an expression of Christian commitment for the growth of the Kingdom, involves:

- *Professional competence*
- *Moral conscience*
- *Social commitment*

It's about building a better world!

In social, political and economic commitment, we must pay close attention and defend values at all costs, above all:

- *life*: which is sacred, from birth to death.
- *freedom*: especially today, when governments seem to act more and more in a monarchical way while appearing democratic, endangering freedom
- *truth*: not only the scientific one, but also the affective and spiritual one.

If all Salesian work is oriented towards forming honest citizens and good Christians, this means that the identity and mission of Past Pupils and Salesian Cooperators is found in this binomial.

As Christians they are called to be «salt of the earth and light of the world, and leaven which ferments the mass». These are the images used by Jesus to define the nature and mission of his disciples. You just have to "be" to have meaning and relevance.

But if the salt loses its flavor, or if you put light under a bushel, or if the leaven has no strength to ferment, all these things are useless. They have lost the reason for their being and humanity remains deprived of the signs of God.

As *citizens* they are called to be true citizens of this world to collaborate in its humanization. More specifically as Salesian Cooperators of Don Bosco.

The Salesian commitment is to participate as Christians and citizens in public activities bringing a renewed need for social justice, solidarity, development and peace.

This is not a time for nostalgia or irresponsibility, we cannot reduce ourselves to being consumers or spectators of history. We are called to be 'collaborators with God' and have an open sea before us: young people, their own families, the field of work and communication, social and political activities, the Salesian Family itself, the world.

Our Salesian presence, in its various areas, is called, in this historic hour, to make the priority of spirit over matter understood and triumphed; the priority of people over things; the priority of ethics over technique; the priority of labor over capital; the priority of a just distribution of goods; the priority of forgiveness over justice; the priority of the common good over personal interests.

By way of conclusion.

Fascinated by this model, we want to integrate deeply into society, we share life with everyone, we listen to their concerns, we collaborate materially and spiritually in their needs, we rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who mourn and we are committed to building a new world, side by side with others.

This is the time to demolish walls and build bridges, to integrate diversity into unity, to promote the culture of encounter and to create dialogue!

I invite you, therefore, dear Salesian Cooperators, to drink from the springs of Don Bosco's spirituality, i.e., his pastoral charity. May you be true Salesian Cooperators, making a difference in the city of man and of the young today. May the maternal presence of Mary be your consolation. She was, in a most special way, the first Cooperator of Her Son. From Nazareth to Bethlehem, all the way to Calvary and the Cenacle, "she *cooperated* in an absolutely unique way in the work of the *Savior*" (*Lumen Gentium*, 61). And now "she *cooperates* with a maternal love in the birth and the education of Her Son's brothers and sisters" (*ibid*, 63) and, therefore, is called, with reason, "the Helper" (*ibid*, 62), the Help of

Christians. Don Bosco was absolutely convinced and had direct experience of this truth, from the time of his dream of nine years old up until his death.

May the Holy Spirit enlighten your minds, but, above all, may He warm your hearts with the fire of educative passion in this new bicentenary of grace. May He reawaken in you that great faith and stupendous generosity which characterize Salesian Cooperators. May the Virgin Help of Christians accompany you with maternal love.

And I, with Don Bosco's heart, bless each one of you, your families, the Association of the Salesian Cooperators in this part of the world.

Haledon,
July 22, 2023

Don Pascual Chávez V., SDB