

**Address of Rosario Maiorano, exiting World Coordinator  
Cooperator World Congress  
Rome, November 8, 2012**

Dearest Friends,

When I was nominated World Coordinator during the summer of what is now a far away 2001, I greeted the then World Councillors with a remark on the true meaning of the word “to govern” for us Christians: it means “to serve,” i.e., to follow the example of Christ, bending to wash the feet of our most humble and needy brother. A few days before my nomination, I was given responsibility for a project launched by the Italian government. Then, a few days later, I happened to see a priest who was distributing hot meals in a soup kitchen. These three events did not seem to me to be happenstance, and I said to that secret Friend who has lived in my heart since I was a little child: “Look, one of God’s ministers is administering soup to these most unfortunate brothers of ours: it was then that I truly understood the etymological root, the true meaning, of the verb “to administer.”

If this is true for those who have been elected to office democratically in order to take care of certain responsibilities in the civil arena, with how much greater reason it is so for those who have received a direct call - like the one I received from our beloved Don Vecchi - to whom, only a few months after, before his final voyage, I had to bid farewell in the name of all of you in the Basilica of Don Bosco in Rome.

It is with this spirit that I sought, as the last World Coordinator, more so in merit than in time, to put my competencies and capacities at your service so as to contribute to the growth of the Association and the entire Salesian Family.

The task which awaited us in those first years of the Millennium, as Don Bosco himself had foreseen, was to be protagonists of a profound renewal of the Association. But to handle such a large commitment, it was necessary to renew ourselves and update ourselves constantly in our way of being Christians and lay Salesians in the world. It was necessary, and is necessary, so that we may respond concretely to the new needs of the young, to extend the experience of service and the educative presence of Don Bosco among the young of today, beginning with those youth and lay people who come to our places, helping them also to become protagonists for change.

This is our mission: to be, in the midst of the young and the poor, the living image of that perfect *humanitas* (humanity) of the Incarnate Christ – according to the example and teaching of Don Bosco; we need to push ourselves to conform our actions and our life to this. Here is where we give substance to our charismatic and missionary coherence, to being witnesses of the Lord through our lifestyle, and to contributing, in our small way and in our little area, to the humanization and Christianization of the world. Let us never forget that we have received a great gift as Salesians: that of knowing how to recognize in every youth who is alone, poor, or in difficulty, Christ Himself who is suffering, Jesus abandoned. Let us never neglect this precious gift; let us never worry if we need to suffer at seeing others suffer in order to be faithful, if this gift even keeps us firmly nailed to the wood of the Cross, because this, I can assure you, is the most beautiful recompense there is for the workers in the Lord’s vineyard...

But I do not wish to review these 11 years of my service, nor do I wish to annoy you by giving an account of the over 100 meetings of the SEM held here at the Pisana or at the FMA Generalate. I only wish to point out that, luckily, none of the meetings of the SEM ever weighed upon the finances of the Association because no one ever needed any kind of reimbursement. Above all, we preferred to work on the Net, thereby limiting even our movement from the regions and the provinces.

Now, let us come to the Congress:

The Cooperators of the entire world have been involved, during these years of hard work, in the task of bringing to birth a profound renewal of their presence in the Salesian Family, in the Church, and in society. Now we have arrived here, at this World Congress, convoked for this very reason: to approve in a definitive way our *Project of Apostolic Life*, six years after the approval of the Apostolic See to live them *ad experimentum*. As we have underlined so many times, the PVA envisages a Statute, a true ID card of a lay Salesian, and a Regulation, an instrument for government and for reorganization of the Association in the whole world.

During the Congress, with the definitive approval of such constitutive acts, before all else there will be definitively approved also the change in the name of the Association. This is no secondary fact and one which I hold very dear: we, in order to have a greater fidelity to Don Bosco's original plan (who, due to the strong objections of the ecclesiastical hierarchy of his time could not give life to a sort of lay order of Salesian "externs"), chose to call ourselves "Salesiani Cooperatori" and not "Cooperatori Salesiani." This is not a meaningless change because, at least for the Romance languages, the adjective "Salesian" becomes the noun! This is a choice which was born from the necessity to reaffirm our charismatic reality, to return to the origins of our history so as to root the future of our Association in it, and to tie more strongly our own commitment in Don Bosco's Family to the common Salesian mission.

Therefore, both the Statutes and the Regulations will be examined and approved, article by article. They will then be "validated" immediately by the Rector Major of the Salesians (let us recall to mind again that he is also the "Supreme Moderator" of the Association) and then sent for the ultimate ratification on the part of the Holy Father.

I cannot, nor do I wish to, anticipate the conclusions, but, certainly, the process of renewal continues and I do not exclude the possibility that the Congress might give the mandate to the Council to foresee an ulterior verifica, as delimited by the Regulations, perhaps for the sake of re-examining those proposals (which, in truth, are few) which were momentarily shelved or not deemed well "put-together" in how they were formulated. The important thing is that there always be a spirit of true collaboration and of maximum participation, shrinking the distances, including the psychological, emotional, and temporal ones during the various moments of encounter and confrontation on this international level, between provinces, regions, and all the representatives of the Association, so that we might make use of the opportunities that the new technologies in very rapid evolution give us.

Certainly, if Don Bosco were alive today, he would be the first to have recourse to such innovative, rapid, and transparent means of communicating, dialoging, and working together... We need to overcome the difficulties we encountered, especially in these last months when not everyone had respected the announced deadlines, constraining the SEM to a supplementary, additional, and even substitutive work, which possibly caused things even to be forgotten or errors to be made, which we have tried to correct right up until these last days; to all of this I must add my own personal scarce participation in the SEM meetings, which made the burden of work even heavier.

I must, however, point out to you a second very important point. Lately, following the renewal that is in progress, some raised the doubt that the charismatic dimension and the very mission of the Association had been altered. We should not fear change – even the children of Israel, once freed from slavery in Egypt, cried in the desert for the soup served at Pharaoh's table (pined for the onions of Egypt), but still continued their long march towards the Promised Land. We, too, must bring to life the desire of our Founder, without fear of newness and without being afraid of making mistakes, which certainly are verifiable, indeed, and which we have committed and will commit, but without which there is no growth in the Association. Don Bosco's desire for us was that we might live the Salesian mission fully today, among the young of our time, committing ourselves to form good Christians and honest citizens, and, therefore, we ourselves first need to be "good teachers."

If in these years I ever had difficulties in confronting myself with the top brass of the Salesian Family, even at the highest levels, along the path of renewal, always obtaining encouragement to proceed on that path and without fear about launching out into the deep, I must confess to you that the greatest resistance I encountered was precisely from within the Association, from us laity, almost as if, in a sort of inversion of roles, we became clerics and they laicized!

I do not mean to begin a polemic – this is just a simple observation of one who leaves with some regret for the great mountain of work tackled but still not fully complete; certain, however, that the one who comes after will know how to avail him or herself of the recommendations and will spread good seed on the land that has only been tilled up until now.

But let us return to our mission for today: to form good Christians and honest citizens means, in good part, to educate the young to that Love read with the magnifying lens of the Gospel.

In Italy, in Europe, in a great part of the Western world, in those places which once upon a time were called the “First World” (to contrast it with the communist and Third World, of impoverished lands) there exist substantial pockets of poverty and marginalization which are destined to spread further in the near future, whether because of the dismantling of society, hoped for by the neoliberals, or whether because of the inevitable spread of migrations, which will only grow if we do not “invest” in the fields of cooperation and solidarity in favor of developing nations. The economy and politics, enslaved to commerce and to its unscrupulous rules, tend to legalize social marginalization, insecurity, and exploitation, especially of the young.

I have no doubts whatsoever about this! The new world order appears deprived of an authentic project of solidarity, so much so as to make everyone a participant in the huge process of transformation under way. The huge technological synergies, the vast financial concentrations, the great multinational economic potentates are consolidating their power: if they reinforce all the centers of power of the capitalistic-financial domain, while the rift between the North and the South of the planet worsens, they will feed the phenomena of integralism and terrorism, which easily take root in a human and social substrate composed of desperation. This is not a political opinion, it is a fact! At the center of our society, is not Man (according to all the criteria of the humanism of the Ancient Greeks), and still less God (the one Lord of History and Savior of the world), but commerce, business, and trade – the market – with all of its ruthless laws; the market, this dull divinity, fanatical and intolerant, this apostatized abstraction, on which altar every day thousands of innocent victims are sacrificed.

What must we Salesians do in the face of such a reality? What succeeds best for us – that for which we have been called by the Lord to be part of Don Bosco’s Family and of the Church: educating the young, educating them to models and styles of life which are different from those of the “winners”, put before them today by all the means of social communication – in the first place by TV and the “Net” – even if it might seem to be an impossible undertaking! Certainly, educational proposals inspired by the values of the Gospel appear out of place (today, we would say they don’t attract an audience), but precisely because of this, we need to have more strength, trustingly throwing open the doors of our heart to Christ and having recourse to His help to have the courage of the Truth! And today, we can point out to the young the courage of the Truth by teaching them not to serve two masters (God and mammon), educating them to the rights and the responsibilities of “Gospel citizenship”, and not to accept profit as an end in itself, not to consider money as the measure of all things, and to have the titanic courage to pardon our enemies!

The young, they always say, are the future of the world, but their future is in the hands of those who educate them; these persons, then need to be good teachers and good role models, so as to be able to build a social order to the measure of Man, based on solidarity with the poorest and most unfortunate, on tolerance towards those who are

different, on respect for others; and they also need to be educated to respect for the truth and to make clear choices, knowing how to say, when necessary, if yes, yes! If no, no! Because, as the Lord says, all the rest is from the Devil!

All of this means, to me, to educate them to Love, to true Love, to that Love which denies oneself, which accepts the other, which does not seek its own interests - to that Love of which St. Paul speaks in his Hymn to Charity, and that of which Benedict XVI speaks with extraordinary pedagogical and theological competence.

“God is Love; he who lives in loves, lives in God and God lives in him.” (I Jn. 4:16) These words of the First Letter of St. John express with singular clarity the center of the Christian faith: the Christian picture of God and the consequent picture of Man and of his path. Following this, in this very same verse, John offers us a concise formula, in a manner of speaking, of Christian existence: “We have known the love that God has for us and we have believed in it.”

We have believed in the love of God: thus can the Christian express the foundational choice of his life. At the foundation of the Christian's being is not an ethical decision or a great idea, but rather the encounter with an event, with a Person, who brings to our lives a new horizon and with it, his decisive direction. Christianity, if we think about it well, is not a religion (i.e., a group of rules) and not a faith (understood as abstract dogmas) – Christianity is, before all else, an empty tomb, an example to follow and to imitate - that of Christ, casting off everything that weighs us down in life (glory, wealth, power) because we are not great if we are rich, we are not great if we are cultured, we are not great if we are famous, but we are great if we know how to love and to be loved.

Allow me another brief consideration on our role as Salesians in the world, taking as my point of reference what our Founder so hoped for, in merit of the necessity of making both unity and diversity co-exist in the Salesian Family, in perfect equilibrium.

The Salesian Mission and Spirituality and the very existence of the Salesian Family are a gift of the Spirit, distributed among both the consecrated and secular vocations. This flow of the same Spirit creates new, more mature, and more conscious relationship and brings us to the discovery of an even greater communion, collaboration, and cohesion, and to an even more intense apostolic commitment, to the reciprocal witness and of all as one Family in the Church and in the world.

Our vocational choice does not permit us to live in community, as it does for the Religious Sisters and Confreres. Even if this privilege is not accorded us, we laity can and must live in spiritual communion among ourselves and with all the Salesian Family, precisely by virtue of a common charismatic dimension. And to grow greatly in our spiritual uniqueness, which much reflect fully the daily (ferial) dimension of our charism, we need to seek and, above all, to practice our Autonomy responsibly, because precisely in the diversity of its various components rests the richness of the Salesian Family.

Already in formation as Aspirants, and with even greater reason in the permanent formation of the Salesian Cooperators, these themes must be dealt with adequately. We ask, therefore, that the Spirit guide us in practicing our Autonomy correctly and consciously, which is understood certainly not as a desire to be separate or as a wish to hide, nor as some sort of intensified federalism, but rather as a mature request of sons and daughters who, ready to undertake greater responsibilities towards themselves and others, do not wish to abandon their paternal home nor to disown its merits and roles, but rather, to bring into it, with their own original contribution of experiences and knowledge, new lifeblood; because in every family it is wonderful to be together and also wonderful to come back home to find the warmth, welcome, and sharing, every time that our work and life send us to labor outside the walls of our home.

In conclusion, let me share a brief account of the work carried out in these last months, in which, I repeat, I did not participate fully and for which I again ask your pardon and that, above all, of my brothers on the SEM who had to bear almost all the weight of the work.

All the acts taken by the SEM and put before the consideration of the Commission, with no exception, were evaluated and examined attentively. In many cases some proposals which were very similar to others, coming from different contexts and even those distant from each other, were merged or integrated with each other; this should not be taken as a “diminution” of the individual proposals, but, rather, that they contributed greatly to enrich the text, precisely in their communality.

With full adhesion to the Rector Major’s concerns and shared by the Councillors at the meeting in November 2011, therefore, all the proposals were evaluated according to the criteria for admissibility, charismatic compatibility, and juridical congruity, with the intent only to improve the text of the *Project of Apostolic Life*, without altering its content and its purposes, and, above all, in reference to the Statutes, which, as you well know, need specific approval of the Holy See if substantial modifications should be made. This, of course, does not exclude the possibility, even in the near future, of proceeding autonomously and in direct understanding with the Rector Major, of making ulterior needed modifications to the Rule.

As to the choices that have been made, which, I repeat, are in regards to the major part of the requests, under the constant monitoring of the Rector Major, we sought to make the text easier to comprehend (above all in the Regulations), to strengthen the autonomy of the local centers in order to favor their full revitalization, to give more clarity to the diverse roles of the different levels of government (local, provincial, and world) as regards animation in the charism, to give a greater large-scale effort to the world-wide dimension of the Association, to point out again the privileged place given to references to the youth, both as future movers in the centers and as the recipients of our commitment to be true lay Salesians in the world.

More specifically, the layout of the text shows three columns, these are:

- on the left, the approved text from 2007;
- in the center, and in different colors (the significance of which I will explain in a minute), the text with the integrations, and/or corrections and/or modifications and/or cancellations and/or new placements:
- on the right the definitive text, which is placed before us, the Assembly here, and which, if necessary, may undergo further modification and editing, independent of the proposals and decisions of the Congress

As regards the colors, please note that:

- a) The color red indicates the insertion of new content and/or of significant modifications to the pre-existing text;
- b) The color blue indicates lexical and/or modifications of form which improve the comprehension and flow of the text
- c) The doubling of the two colors above, utilized for a number of the articles, indicate a change in the order of placement of the articles themselves in the text
- d) The color green is used in the footnotes to show the origin of the change, i.e., the place/center/province/Cooperator/group making the suggested modification and/or correction-integration, underlining that this is not always what was done, in reference to the modified text, which at times was, but only in form, modified to homogenize it with the pre-existing one

In any event, I want you to know that all the documentation as it has been analyzed and opportunely catalogued will be at your disposition and can be consulted by all during the work of the Congress. This will serve as a means of getting all

into the habit of the greatest transparency, as is proper among brothers and sisters of the same apostolic and charismatic family.

In closing this, my address, which has been purposely poor in details and citations because all can be found in the acts, let me thank all those who made possible the attainment of this fundamental step in our renewal – and to you first of all; remembering, in reference to possible errors made, what my catechist during my years in high school used to say (Don L'Arco, a great Salesian, recently deceased), “the forest makes no noise while growing, but the tree that falls puts to flight all the birds of the woods.”

Thank you to all from my heart and *buon lavoro!*