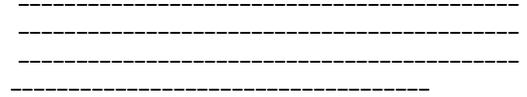


ASSOCIATION OF SALESIAN COOPERATORS

**GUIDELINES  
FOR FORMATION**

**GROWING AND MATURING  
INTO COOPERATORS OF GOD**



**WORLD CONSULTING BODY**

**Via della Pisana, 1111 - ROME**

**August 1996**

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## **Foreward**

*Dear Cooperators,*

*Your Association has reached a new goal with the elaboration of the present "Guidelines for Formation", discussed and approved by the World Consulting Body. In them, the Association gathers the best of its experience on formation and puts it at the service of all as an organic proposal, for the growth of each Cooperator and of the Centres.*

*Thus three documents, that clearly outline the identity of the Association and point out a sure way to live it, have been completed. These are the "Regulations of Apostolic Life" (together with its corresponding "Official Commentary"), the "Leaders' Manual" and these "Guidelines".*

*All three documents aim at the same goal: to bring the Cooperators to understand and appreciate the richness of their vocation and to help them to answer the challenges that the world, and especially the young, raise to Christian faith and to the Salesian mission.*

*For this, Christian maturity, deepening of faith, cultural openness and apostolic preparation are needed. In fact, these are the elements on which the "Guidelines" are based in line with what "Christifideles laici" proposes (cfr. nn. 57-63).*

*The Cooperators, following these "Guidelines" on formation, will be able to animate their own Association from within . In fact, animation is linked with spiritual consistency.*

*They will also attract new young and adult candidates desirous of an authentic and committed spiritual life.*

*Even more, they will become dynamic driving forces in the Salesian Family according to Don Bosco's idea and present needs.*

*It is necessary therefore that the commitment to formation be well rooted in all because formation is today required for the good of the person, for the survival of the Association and even to make action effective. The latter in fact becomes irrelevant if it is not backed by witnessing and if it is not enlightened by an appropriate perspective.*

*In this line, it will be necessary to spread the idea that formation should be seen as an on-going process. In fact, culture continuously confronts us with new questions. The Church guided by the Holy Spirit also presents new stimuli of doctrine, of pastoral practice and of spiritual life. Our own existence travels through different phases with problems and possibilities until then unknown. Therefore we can never say I don't need any more formation, since it is never completed.*

*In this situation, it is clear that the time and place for the on-going formation is daily life, assumed with an ever deeper faith. However moments of particularly intense formation are still indispensable. They sustain and give impetus to formation in daily life.*

*The main responsible for formation is, in this context, the person herself/himself, who must be able to make a synthesis between the different moments and contents. She/he must be able also to adjust the proposed objectives to her/his situation.*

*I thank the World Consulting Body for this work carried out with responsibility and efficiency.*

*It is up to each Cooperator to find in this material the guide to become a Cooperator of God in Don Bosco's spirit. This is my wish for each one of you.*

*I invoke the blessing of Mary Help of Christian on the Association so that it may be for all Cooperators a perennial source of spiritual uplift.*

**Juan Vecchi**  
Rector Major

*Rome, 14 September 1996*

## INTRODUCTION

This document is a kind of summary of the contributions made by many Cooperators and animating structures of our Association on formation. They were sent to the Central Office in Rome by individual Cooperators as well as by several Provincial Councils, following the request of the Coordinator General. They included documents on formation in a general sense, formation plans and some programs on formation elaborated in different parts of the world since the promulgation of the Regulations of Apostolic Life in 1986. These contributions were attentively analyzed and evaluated.

The FORMATION GUIDELINES hereby proposed, were prepared by a working group on behalf of the World Consulting Body. The working group, led by Nino Sammartano, examined all these contributions (currently available at the Central Executive Secretariat) in the light of the suggestions given by the World Consulting Body in the meeting of August-September 1994, and drew up a first draft. The WCB (World Consulting Body) in its meeting of July 1996 reviewed the draft and approved its final version.

The Guidelines consist of three parts.

The first part, **WHAT IS FORMATION**, is an introduction which intends to present the basic concepts regarding formation and the formation process that aims at developing the human person, the Christian, and the lay Salesian. The basic premise sees the Salesian Cooperator as a person striving to achieve human maturity, becoming an ever more convinced follower of Christ, and making a choice for the Salesian vocation.

The second and third parts develop further the first.

The second part, **THE PERSONAL FORMATION OF THE COOPERATOR**, intends to define the personal responsibility of the Cooperator -to the extent that it refers to his individual and personal initiative - and points out the components of personal formation and the ways to accomplish it.

The third part, **THE FORMATION IN THE ASSOCIATION**, intends to define the responsibility of the Association in regard to the formation of its members, and points out all that the Association can do and should do to promote it.

## **RECIPIENTS AND PURPOSE OF THE GUIDELINES**

### **1. RECIPIENTS**

The Formation Guidelines are intended for those who exercise responsibility in the Association (Councils at all levels) and for those in charge of animating and facilitating formation.

### **2. PURPOSE**

The present Formation Guidelines offer a complete and unified set of principles, criteria, essential indications and directives. They will enable those exercising responsibility in the Association and those responsible for formation to plan out and organize formation programs and strategies, in line with the various social, cultural and Church realities in which the Cooperators live, respecting the need to have common guidelines for all but also the fact that these have to be applied in very different geographical and cultural contexts (cf. RAL Official Commentary, p. 375).

This document is not a manual of practical norms on formation nor a formation aid, but guidelines, that is, a complete set of directives which develop the requests presented in the RAL. They are to be taken into consideration everywhere and yet they are to be applied with flexibility according to the various situations of formation in our Association.

The Guidelines should not therefore be mistaken for a simple plan of formation. It is a base document containing the fundamental elements, ie. principles, criteria, directives, directions, that one can refer to when drawing up a plan of formation.

Note: Two Appendixes are joined to the Guidelines: the first contains some themes already developed while the second contains themes presented only in a schematic form. Both Appendixes can be used for the preparation and the elaboration of formation programs.

## **General premise**

### **THE AIM**

The Salesian Cooperator we want to bring up through the process of formation is:

A person called to be

- a convinced witness of Christ;
- a living member of the Church;
- a christian capable of animating the world in Christ-like manner;
- a true Salesian, bearer everywhere of a strong desire to educate;
- an apostle animated by the cause of the Kingdom and committed to personal sanctification;
- a member of the Association committed to live Don Bosco's plan for it.

**We only achieve this through formation.**

Let us help each other to become what we are called to be!

## FIRST PART

### WHAT FORMATION IS

*"A prudent system of training will... develop...human maturity. This will be chiefly attested by a certain stability of character, the ability to make carefully weighed decisions, a sound judgement of events and people. (The candidates) should learn self-control, develop strength of character, and in general value those good qualities which are esteemed by men... such as sincerity, a certain love of justice, fidelity to one's promises, courtesy in deed, modesty and charity in speech"*

*(Optatam totius, 11  
- to be taken in an analogical sense)*

*"The gospel image of the vine and the branches reveals to us another fundamental aspect of the lay faithful's life and mission: the call to growth and a continual process of maturation, of always bearing much fruit."*

*(Christifideles Laici, no. 57)*

*"The call to be a Cooperator is an invitation to put oneself on the way of gradually developing the baptismal life by committing oneself to the realization of the Salesian mission and to living the spirit of Don Bosco".*

*(Official Commentary to RAL, p. 358)*

## WHAT FORMATION IS

### 1. THE SUBJECT OF FORMATION

To be able to understand what formation is and what commitment it entails, we should first of all ask ourselves who is the subject of formation. In fact, the way we look at formation depends also on the way we look at its subject.

The subject of formation is the person, man or woman enriched with all the human components that are part of his or her personal being.

Each person in fact is composed of a multiplicity of dimensions (physical, sexual, intellectual, psycho-affective, practical, moral and spiritual) brought into harmony among themselves thus forming an identity, a unique and unrepeatable person.

The person is naturally sociable, open, called to relate with others, not only to receive and give, but also to express herself/himself, communicate and find self-fulfillment.

Each person is endowed with abilities and talents, that is, with powers linked to the various dimensions of being a person, as well as with the supernatural gifts given by the Lord, incarnated and integrated with natural gifts.

The capabilities of the person, however, can still be perfected or improved, they are not something acquired once and for all. The human person is called to grow to perfection; all the potentialities (including the gifts of the Lord) need to be developed and cultivated not only in the so-called learning age but also beyond.

### 2. FORMATION

Formation is the care and the effort that a person exerts, alone and with the help of others, to develop harmoniously all the dimensions of her/his personality so as to cultivate and make fruitful all her/his capabilities and personal gifts. Therefore, everything that enables a person to develop and bring to maturity the personal potentialities has formative value.

#### 2.1. Not just a mental process

Formation is not only theoretical learning. At times we are perhaps tempted to reduce formation to just a mental exercise, and we come to think that it takes place only in moments of study, of reflection, of listening to a conference. These, of course, contribute to the formation of a person, but they are not sufficient.

Formation is a wider process of maturing which entails the whole person. Therefore, it finds nourishment in study and reflection. It consolidates itself in prayer, in moments of commitment, in the dialogue with God and in practical efforts. It enriches itself when we reflect on own experiences or those of others. It widens in perspective and takes place in dialogue and discussion with other persons.

Formation, in particular, requires that there be at the same time study and practical commitment, reflection and action, as in the best Salesian tradition. The Official Commentary to RAL reminds us: "Don Bosco always mistrusted a formation that was too theoretical and not integrated with life. He wanted a doctrine capable of enlightening

practice, and a practice which would enlighten reflection in view of an action more in conformity with apostolic realities. It is the sense of the concrete which is a characteristic of his spirit." (cf. Offic. Com. RAL p. 380)

## **2.2. A gradual and unified process**

Formation is a gradual and unified process, because the personal dimensions and capacities are developed and matured progressively and simultaneously, not separately or in distinct stages. Furthermore, it is unified by the formation of the conscience, which gives direction and meaning to the development of personal capacities.

## **3. A CONSCIENCE ENLIGHTENED BY GOD'S WORD**

As Cooperators, we are interested in formation not only from the human but also from the Christian point of view. A Christian has Christ as teacher. Therefore, one makes an effort to conform his/her life to Christ's. Formation, hence, is a "continuous personal process of maturing in faith and of becoming Christ-like, according to the will of the Father, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit" (CL. no. 57)

Therefore, in order to form his conscience, a Christian refers to the truths and values of the Gospel, revealed and announced by Christ and based on the plan of Creation and of Redemption.

Thus through formation and enlightening by the Word, the Christian discovers the call of God in an ever clearer manner and develops the availability to live it in the fulfillment of one's own mission, taking it as basis for his/her particular plan of life. Through formation, he/she educates himself/herself to live the faith in unity, harmonizing being and acting, not separating prayer from work and vice-versa.

## **4. AN INSPIRED PROJECT OF LIFE**

In the effort to become more Christ-like, the Christian can make reference to various human models, to persons who, in one way or another have already happily ended their journeying with Christ. The saints are for everybody concrete and living examples of how to become Christ-like, they are for everyone sure models of a life of faith and of Christian commitment.

### **4.1. Inspired by Don Bosco**

The Salesian Cooperator's effort of following Christ, draws inspiration from the experience of faith and of apostolic commitment lived and proclaimed by Saint John Bosco. "The Cooperator intends to live the Gospel at the school of St. John Bosco," (cf. Foreword, RAL)

Cooperators, therefore, make the gospel values their own, in Don Bosco's way.

Through formation, therefore, the Cooperator discovers and nourishes his/her vocation to follow Christ and his/her commitment to the Church's mission by making his/her own Don Bosco's apostolic project.

His/her formation implies, therefore, that he/she enters consciously in a process leading him/her to assume and assimilate Don Bosco's project as his/her own and live it daily.

#### **4.2. Inspired by exemplary Cooperators**

The Cooperator is also inspired by the lives of exemplary Salesian Cooperators who have assimilated, in a better way, the lay aspect of Salesian sanctity, making them models of lay sanctification, ie. Mamma Margaret, Dorotea Chopitea, Alexandrina da Costa, Attilio Giordani, etc (cf. RVA, art. 35/3).

### **5. COMPLEMENTARITY BETWEEN PERSONAL FORMATION AND FORMATION IN THE ASSOCIATION**

From what has been said, we easily infer that other people can contribute to the formation of a person, but they cannot substitute for the work of deepening which only the person can do for her/himself. This is tantamount to saying that the formation of the Cooperator is first of all a fact and a personal responsibility. Nevertheless, the formative activities, promoted by the Association in favour of its members, are of notable help.

We shall therefore deal now with these two complementary and inseparable aspects of the formation of the Cooperator.

## SECOND PART

### THE PERSONAL FORMATION OF THE COOPERATOR

*"One cannot offer a true and effective formation to others if the individual has not taken on or developed a personal responsibility for formation: this, in fact, is essentially a 'formation of self.'"*

*(Christifideles Laici, no. 63)*

*"The Cooperator is the first and the main person responsible for his/her formation."*

*(RAL art. 38/1)*

*"Formation is a personal fact: each one takes upon himself/herself the responsibility of forming himself/herself according to his possibilities."*

*(Official Commentary to RAL, p. 360)*

## FORMATION IS SOMETHING PERSONAL

*"The Cooperator develops his own human endowments to be able to fulfil his family, professional and civic responsibilities even better.*

*He matures in his own faith and charity, growing in union with God, to make his life more evangelical and more Salesian.*

*He gives time to reflection and study in order to deepen his knowledge of Sacred Scriptures, the doctrine of the Church, and Don Bosco.*

*He makes himself qualified for apostolate and for the service to which he is called."*

*(RAL, art. 37/2)*

### **Premise**

The formation proposed here is meant for that person who wants to make a personal choice for the Salesian Cooperator vocation. The proposal therefore cannot but begin with the formation at the personal level.

By personal formation or 'formation of self', we understand the personal commitment and effort of the Cooperator to achieve human maturity and growth in the life of faith, and in assuming the Salesian charism and mission. The Cooperators exert this on their own initiative; both, at the time of preparation prior to entering the Association, as well as after the official entry and Promise. They do this for the whole of their lives.

From another perspective, we may say that the formation of every Christian, if it is to have any effect, will either be one's own personal responsibility or there will be no formation at all. Formation takes place if it affects the reasons and criteria that influence our way of living as well as our way of judging and of behaving in our every-day life, and finally if it impels us to take direct personal responsibility for our growth. "Each Cooperator -the Official Commentary to RAL affirms- is responsible for his own life, for his own development and for his fidelity to the Salesian vocation; as such, he cannot entrust to others the responsibility of his formation." (Off. Comm. RAL p. 382)

A fundamental condition for the process of personal formation is an interior attitude of searching and a lasting commitment to growth in the fulfilment of one's own duties and responsibilities, in the sincere giving of oneself to others, in the personal relationship with the Lord. Without this attitude, formation remains superficial. It does not take root and does not bear significant fruits. Formation, in fact, does not consist in what one receives from the outside, but in what one allows to mature and acquires from within, from the inside.

This interior attitude of searching includes also the availability to listen to the Spirit, who speaks to the heart. "The docility to the Holy Spirit," we read in the Official Commentary to RAL, "is an essential condition in order to accomplish in a consistent manner the personal task of one's own formation." (Off Com RAL p. 382).

## 1. OBJECTIVES

Through personal formation, the Salesian Cooperators resolve to draw up their own project of life in society and in the Church, following the Lord's call.

In particular they resolve:

- to develop, nurture and make fruitful their own potentialities and gifts;
- to strengthen their own faith and deepen their response to the demands of Christian life;
- to acquire an ever more mature and profound Salesian lay spirituality.

## 2. THE DEMANDS OF PERSONAL FORMATION

Personal formation demands the following commitments:

2.1. Improving of one's character by acknowledging one's own defects and proposing goals of gradual and possible growth. One's own character is not something unchangeable: with the recognition of one's own defects and a patient struggle to overcome them, it can be improved.

2.2. Fostering and developing one's own human and professional capabilities and acquiring a profound professional ethical standard. It is important to avoid both extremes of overestimating and underestimating one's capabilities and to be aware of the tasks and duties, as well as of the professional qualifications, related to one's work. One should not reduce work to a simple activity in order to earn a living, but should carry it out as a service to others and as a way of contributing to the good of society. "In work, the Cooperator continues the creative action of God and gives witness to Christ with serious and updated professional competence." (RAL, art. 10).

2.3. Growing in the capacity to relate by becoming aware of one's tendency to withdraw and of one's egocentric attitudes, distrust and unmotivated fears, and by educating oneself to listen and consider the opinions of others and by fostering attitudes of openness and trust. The capacity to communicate, in fact, is not only the result of a person's temperament that is more or less sociable, but can be developed and improved by means of a constant effort of opening up and of overcoming interior conditioning. "In his relationships," the RAL asserts, "the Cooperator practices that kindness desired by Don Bosco: he strives to be open and friendly, ready to take the first step and to always welcome others with kindness, respect and patience." (RVA, art. 31/2)

2.4. Progressing in one's own journey of faith, by maturing in an ever more convinced adhesion to Christ and to his Gospel. It is not a question of mental adhesion (based on truths to believe), but of a commitment that is vital, that is, acquiring and consolidating a vision of faith that gives direction to one's whole life. The Cooperator "seeks to follow Jesus Christ, the perfect One, sent by the Father to serve the world. For this reason their intent is to realize, in the ordinary conditions of life, the Gospel ideal of the love of God and one's neighbour." (RAL, art. 7).

2.5. A profound assimilation of the Salesian charism. The participation in the apostolic project of Don Bosco is a task which does not overlap with one's growth in the life of faith. To assimilate more profoundly the Salesian charism, the Cooperator is required to

live the baptismal vocation authentically and faithfully, according to the spiritual and apostolic experience of Don Bosco. "The Cooperator does it animated by the Salesian spirit and showing everywhere a special attention for the youth in need." (RAL, art 7)

2.6. Strengthening of one's sound moral sense so as to know how to live today with critical sense in the face of the world realities:

- by conquering freedom from any form of theoretical or practical conditioning coming from conformism and permissiveness.

- by allowing ourselves to be guided by authentic and universal criteria and values in the light of the Word of God. (The Cooperator "accepts novelties with a critical christian sense, integrating into their own life 'everything that is good'"; RAL. Art. 29/1).

2.7. Knowing how to read the "signs of the times", which implies an effort to capture, through an attentive interest in issues and today's social realities, the situations of need and poverty and the urgent needs of a place or local area, especially in relation to youth, families and the poor and working classes. The Cooperators, in fact, form themselves so as to be able to have consistency in themselves and to be active, to be able to witness and to work, to be able, in other words, to "spread -as Don Bosco wanted- the energy of charity". The Cooperator, "attentive to the reality and to the signs of the time, has the sense of the concrete, knows how to discern the plan of God and commits himself with a spirit of initiative to give an answer to the pressing situations which occur." (RAL, art. 30/2).

2.8. Preparing themselves consciously for a fruitful apostolate. The Cooperators do this by developing their own apostolic capabilities and by committing themselves consciously to some type of apostolate.

### **3. PLACES AND MEANS OF PERSONAL FORMATION**

Where is personal formation realized? It takes place in everyone's life. The fundamental place of personal formation is the whole of life lived with the perspective of faith.

Naturally, in order that life may be a place of formation it is necessary that one's own experiences become the object of one's own formative commitment.

In any case, the idea here is to identify and point out the places and the particularly effective means for personal formation. The following are proposed:

- Regular and periodic reflection to revise, in the light of the Gospel and of the RAL, one's own life, behaviour, relationships and commitments towards self, the family, others, the civic community, the Church community, God. The Cooperator "is convinced that he/she is always on the way towards a greater human and Christian maturity." (RAL, art. 30/2).

- Professional updating and qualification for the exercise of one's proper activity or profession, as well as for the undertaking of specific commitments of apostolate. The Cooperator "seeks qualification for the service to which he/she is called;" (RAL, art. 37/2).

- Information and reflection, with a vision of faith, on the world events, on facts and situations in today's society. The Cooperator "is in deep solidarity with the world in which he/she lives." (RAL, art 29/1)

- Reading and meditation on the Word of God, possibly daily. "The Cooperator, through the reading and the meditation on the Word of God, possibly daily, learns to see and to judge everything in the divine light." (RAL., art 33/2)

- Active and conscious participation in the liturgical life and in the mission of the Church. The Cooperator "takes an active part in the liturgy and values the forms of popular piety which may enrich the spiritual life." (RAL, art. 33/1)

- Daily examination of conscience. The Cooperator "gives time to personal dialogue with the Lord, daily." (RAL, art. 33/2)

- Frequent participation in the Sacraments of Reconciliation and of the Eucharist. "In the Eucharist the Cooperator draws from the fountain of pastoral charity. In Reconciliation one encounters the mercy of the Father and marks one's life with a dynamism of continuous conversion which makes one grow in love." (RAL, art. 33/3)

- Spiritual direction. The Cooperator "gives importance to prayer life and to spiritual direction." (RAL, art. 38/1)

- Assimilation and constant reference to RAL and its Official Commentary, besides the reading of supplementary materials on Cooperators. The Cooperators "compare their lives with the Gospel and with the present Regulations." (RAL, art. 34/2)

- Meditative reading of the life of Don Bosco, of other holy Salesians and of some text of Salesian spirituality. Besides Don Bosco, in fact, the Salesian Cooperator "venerates with predilection St. Francis de Sales, St. Mary Domenica Mazzarello, St. Dominic Savio, and the other saints and blessed of the Salesian family." (RAL, art. 35/3)

- Reading of books, magazines and Catholic newspapers.

- Use of mass media, particularly of television, applying to them evangelical criteria.

## PART THREE

### FORMATION GIVEN IN THE ASSOCIATION

*"Groups, associations and movements also have their place in the formation of the lay faithful. In fact, they have the possibility, each with its own method, of offering a formation through a deeply shared experience in the apostolic life."*

*(Christifideles Laici, no. 62)*

*"The Association promotes and upholds the personal and group formation of its members through the work of qualified Cooperators and of the Delegate who act in co-responsibility."*

*(RAL. Art. 38/2)*

## FORMATION GIVEN IN THE ASSOCIATION

### **Premise**

By formation given in the Association we mean the help offered by the Association to Cooperators in the process of maturing their vocational choice and in view of its continuous development. It is a programmed formation and it is offered to help the Cooperator in his/her personal formation. It sustains him, enriches him and gives him opportunities, which otherwise he/she as an individual Cooperator would not be able to have. The personal formation of the Cooperator is, therefore, backed up by the one offered by the Association. This formation fosters the sense of belonging to the Church, to the Association itself and to the Salesian Family.

The formation process -and this includes the activities proposed by the Association- is not optional for the Cooperator, and particularly for the Cooperator aspirant. It is not something we can take or leave at will. Therefore, the Cooperator accepts a program of formation, both at the stage of initial formation (cf. RAL, art. 36) and after the Promise (cf. RAL, art. 37).

## **1. PURPOSE, CHARACTERISTICS AND CRITERIA**

### **1.1. The Purpose**

Through its programs and formative initiatives, the Association intends to help the Cooperators in their integral formation: Human, Christian, Secular and Salesian.

Human: it aims to implant and develop in the Cooperators the most authentic human values, such as civic sense, sincerity, goodness, justice, liberty, generosity, strength of character, and so on.

Christian: it aims to make the life of faith and the following of Christ more conscious and steadfast.

Secular: it aims to animate the earthly realities with the gospel values.

Salesian: it aims to foster the assimilation of Don Bosco's charism and the sharing in the Salesian mission.

### **1.2. Characteristics**

Because the formation offered by the Association has a definite purpose, which is the formation of the Cooperator as a Salesian apostle present in the world, there are intrinsic demands expressed in some specific characteristics, which are presented here below without any specific order or priority.

They are:

1.2.1. doctrinal formation, which aims at deepening the truths of faith for a more convinced acceptance of it and a greater capacity to "give a reason for Christian hope". Particular attention should be given to the social teachings of the Church. (cf. *Christifideles Laici*, no. 60/d);

1.2.2. spiritual formation, which aims at favouring an ever more intimate union with Christ and docility to the Holy Spirit who calls and sends. "Spiritual formation ought to occupy a privileged place in a person's life. Everyone is called to grow continually in intimate union with Jesus Christ." (*Christifideles Laici*, no. 60);

1.2.3. apostolic formation, which intends to foster and develop the missionary spirit, a serious dedication to the renewal of society and the commitment to order all temporal realities towards God;

1.2.4. a formation that is attentive to the teachings of the Pope and the Bishops, in order to journey through history in communion with the universal and local Church. The Cooperators "promote love and fidelity to the Pope and to the Bishops, and foster the acceptance of their teachings and pastoral directives." (RAL, art. 18/2). The formation is also attentive to the authoritative sources of Salesianity in order to nourish a dynamic and actualized fidelity to Don Bosco's charism;

1.2.5. a formation open to the social, the cultural, and the practical-operational aspects. "The Cooperators ... form a correct conscience about their own responsibility and participation in social life in the cultural, political and economic fields." (RAL art. 11/1).

### **1.3. Criteria**

In order to preserve the essential characteristics which qualify it, the formation of the Association follows certain criteria which contribute to make it fruitful and effective.

#### **1.3.1. Fundamental criteria**

1.3.1.1. It is a formation comprising reflection and prayer and centered on the Word of God, source of truth and discernment. Constant reference to the Word of God should constitute the basic orientation of the daily formative experience and initiative in the Association.

1.3.1.2. It is a gradual formation, regulated by the rhythms of assimilation and of interior maturation, and not by the sessions on the different topics to be studied.

1.3.1.3. It is a formation that is 'in context'. In programming the formative initiatives, those holding responsibility in the Association will be attentive both to the local reality and to the indications and suggestions of the broader formative-pastoral plans on the ecclesial, Salesian and association levels.

1.3.1.4. It is also a formation that calls for commitment, that is, it implies a formative process that is demanding. "A formation particularly intense and demanding at the initial period, which continues also after the admission", says RAL art., 37/1; but at the same time it is a formation that is attentive to and respectful of the person's rhythms, levels of maturity and needs which are naturally different.

1.3.1.5. It is also an experiential formation which starts from life and returns to life. It questions the way of being and of acting of persons and suggests to them useful incentives for their sanctification and for their apostolic work.

1.3.1.6. It is a formation, where possible, being done in groups, open to the contributions of all. Everybody shares in a formation process that is enriching for all.

1.3.1.7. It is a formation that is simple (in the sense of not being complicated) and open, that is, that allows each one to feel at home and participate in the formative experience.

1.3.1.8. Finally, it is a formation characterized by the dynamics of seeing-judging-acting. In this case formation is not reduced to learning and the knowledge of things. It encourages the person to discern right from wrong and to make a personal commitment.

#### **1.3.2. Organization criteria**

The above mentioned criteria must be accompanied by others which concern the organization of formation activities and initiatives.

1.3.2.1. The formative meetings must be set and organized in such a way that they allow the maximum exchange of views among the participants. This does not exclude the possibility of inviting a speaker to provide a more consistent contribution or presenting a planned intervention.

1.3.2.2. Furthermore, the meetings should be conducted in a way that allows maximum participation, inviting and encouraging all to intervene but without any imposition. Care should be taken that all feel at ease, both in listening and in intervening. From the logistical point of view, we should prefer the room and seating-arrangements that

foster spontaneity and interchange and that facilitate the moving around of communication among the participants.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The formation of the Cooperator, both at personal and association levels, is a process which involves his/her person as a whole. The starting-point is the person's interior experience.

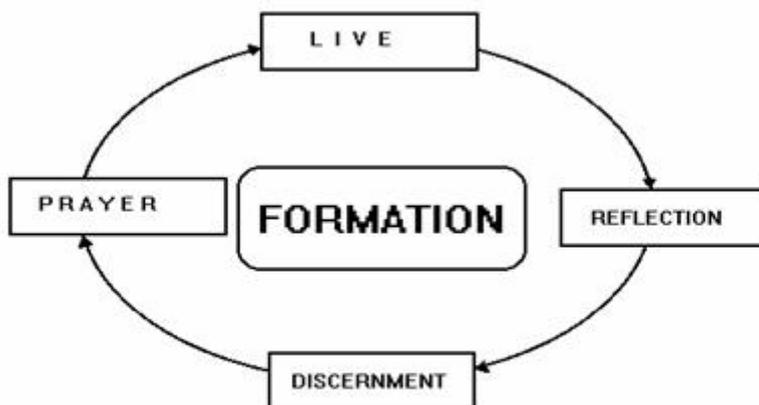
It is not therefore a question of acquiring knowledge, but of bringing convictions and profound attitudes to maturity. We are dealing here with a journey, which cannot be accomplished if the formative experience touches the person only superficially or only at the mental level.

It is important that both the Cooperator and those who accompany him or her in the formation process be aware of the fact, each at his/her own level, that they are undertaking a journey and that both are to do their part in carrying it out.

### 2.1. The formative process

The formative process, proposed here, is made up of some elements which, when interacting with each other in a circular movement in the life of a person, can bring about growth. The use of this process in the form indicated here below will greatly help in the Cooperator's journey towards growth.

We can synthesize the elements of the formative process by means of a diagram



The starting point is the person's experiences of life (situations, vision of things, acts, duties, etc) (STEP ONE).

Human life is not just a repetition of things. It is to be consciously lived and therefore it involves reflection (study, meditation of the Word of God, cultural, doctrinal and spiritual deepening) (STEP TWO).

Reflection favors a greater discernment, that is a greater capacity to understand, to evaluate, to distinguish facts and values (STEP THREE).

Discernment becomes deeper in prayer, in the dialogue with the Lord and in the effort to adhere to his will, out of which choices and attitudes mature and renew the experience of life (STEP FOUR).

Of course, in real life this process does not always happen with the components following one another in strict succession. Rather, they integrate with one another in various ways. However, the process substantially takes place through the interaction of these components.

## **2.2. What are the practical implications?**

If the formative process consists of these elements, it is important to give them due space, both in the personal formation of the individual Cooperator as well as in the formal formation cared for by the Association.

In organizing the initiatives and the formative meetings, one should not reduce them to a simple conference. Care should be taken that all the elements of the formative process are present.

Above all, a reflection, which is the fruit of a conference, of a report or of a meditation, should lead to a personal confrontation with life experiences and to a discernment regarding one's proper behaviour. In this way, one's orientations and choices for living and acting can mature.

In handling a formative theme, therefore, the Formation Facilitator (cf. Part 6 of this document) should study how that theme may be related to the persons' experiences, and to which facts, problems or behaviour the theme may have a relation. Then, the Formation Facilitator may propose suggestions and appropriate elements to make the discernment.

Ultimately, reflection and discernment will find a natural outlet in prayer. This may be a spontaneous or a prepared prayer, but it should be one that is within the context, that is, in line with the formative theme dealt with and springing from the reflections and plans that have developed and matured. A prayer, therefore, open to life, "adhering to life" (RAL art. 32/2)

Note: On this point, we suggest that the reader consult "The Manual for Leaders", in particular the chapter which deals with the "Criteria for formation of Leaders."

## INITIAL FORMATION

*"He who desires to enter the Association accepts an adequate program of preparation which covers the time needed to verify one's own call".*  
(RAL, art. 36/1)

### Premise

To become a Cooperator is a vocational choice, that freely matures in answer to the Lord's call (cf. RAL, art. 2). It is, therefore, necessary that one who intends to make this choice, should be prepared for it through a formative journey conceived and programmed as a journey of discovery and of vocational maturing.

This implies the acceptance of an adequate program of formation with three characteristics:

First of all, it should be commensurate to the importance of the objective of this period which is to verify one's choice to eventually join the Association.

Second, it should be commensurate to the age, maturity, professional and ecclesial qualification of the candidates...

Third, it should be adapted to the cultural and ecclesial situations of the place..." (Official Commentary to R.V.A, p. 367)

For the initial formation of those aspiring to be Cooperators, formative programmes in groups should be planned and conducted. Where it is not possible to form groups, the individual Aspirants should go through a personal formation programme, following the orientations and the suggestions of the Council of the local Centre, who will take care to follow the progress of the Aspirants.

From the perspective of the Association's responsibility, initial formation is the process of accompanying and helping the person to discover, verify and bring to maturity the Cooperator vocation.

### 3.1. Objectives

To help and accompany the Cooperator candidates to become aware of their own secular Salesian vocation and to bring it to maturation to the point of assuming a responsible commitment in the Church through the Promise.

### 3.2. The proposal

Evidently, the first step consists in identifying the persons to whom the proposal can be made.

The invitation to know and deepen the vocational proposal of the Salesian Cooperator can be addressed to Christians of any social and cultural condition (cf. RAL, art. 2/3), who wish to be men and women of a living and active faith, sensitive to the values of the Salesian charism and mission. In fact, in the mind of Don Bosco, the Cooperators' Association is meant "to shake up people from the apathy," into which many Christians easily allow themselves to fall, and to "spread the driving force of charity."

### **3.2.1. First approach**

It will be the concern of all the members of the Association, in particular of the local Councillors, to identify and approach the persons to whom they want to present the Cooperators' Association and to make the "proposal", keeping the local Council informed.

There could be many ways to approach people, however it is important that the "proposal" be for them a group experience, where they feel welcome and familiar, and where they are offered an opportunity to get involved.

### **3.2.2 To whom, in particular, is the proposal to be made**

Although the vocational proposal can be made to everybody, it is particularly suitable to certain people, as for instance:

- faithful who show a love for youth;
- animators engaged in youth ministry and in the Salesian Youth Movement;
- students and alumni of the Salesian works who are particularly close to the spirit of Don Bosco;
- friends and supporters of Don Bosco and of the Salesian works;
- teachers and collaborators in Salesian settings;
- relatives of SDB, of FMA and of the Cooperators;
- collaborators and catechists in parishes, those involved in family life ministry;
- diocesan priests and deacons.

### **3.2.3. The follow-up**

To those who show interest or manifest the desire to deepen the vocational proposal (Aspirants), the Association offers an initial formative program. Schedules and organizational details are agreed upon together with the persons interested.

During the entire formation period, it is important that those aspiring to become Cooperators feel the Association close to their experience, not in order to force them to make a hasty decision but to give them human and spiritual support.

It will, therefore, be the task of the local Council and of the Cooperators of the Centre, and in particular of the one in charge of formation and of the Delegate, to follow and accompany the Aspirants in their personal journey, that is, to support them, to be at their side, to share in their perplexities, learning and discoveries, to advise and help them to find their own way.

The formation activities of those aspiring to become Cooperators include various experiences and moments:

- meditation on the Word of God;
- prayer, (especially of listening);
- reflections on specific formative topics;
- encounters with other Cooperators and with the Delegate;
- participation in the activities of the Centre;
- formative encounters for aspirants only (but foreseeing also their participation in some encounters together with the Cooperators);
- participation in significant events (retreats, days of spirituality) with other aspirants (these events can also be organized at regional or provincial level), and in encounters and conventions of the Association or of the Salesian Family;
- involvement of the aspirants in some activities of ecclesial or social service.

### **3.2.4. Discernment**

To be effective and fruitful, the formative programme must be internalized. The aspirant should discover true and profound motivations which lead him to follow the Cooperator vocation. It is a question of distinguishing and discerning the true motivations which show if there is the Salesian vocation or not.

To this end, the moments of vocational reflection and discernment are important, both during the formative period as well as at its conclusion. They should possibly be part of a spiritual retreat organized for this purpose.

### **3.2.5. Choice and admission to the Association**

The formative journey of those aspiring to become Cooperators is not bound to a fixed length of time, because as RAL says: "It lasts as long as necessary to verify that the calling really exists." (cf RAL Art. 36/1).

In making the choice to become a Cooperator, it is very important to avoid that it be the result of a fleeting enthusiasm.

It is therefore suggested, as a guideline, that a minimum period of two years be given for the preparation of those aspiring to become Cooperators.

After completing the formation programme (but not necessarily soon afterwards), if the aspirant feels prepared and is convinced of his or her own call, he/she may present the petition for admission to the Council of the Centre to which he/she belongs.

The local Council will examine the petition according to the criteria expressed in RAL, Art 36, and the Manual for Leaders, Chapter 4, No.20, D.1.

### **3.3. Specific formative topics**

The topics proposed here are only broad indications. The intention is simply to present the basic themes of a programme of initial formation. Therefore, they can always be further enriched and adapted to circumstances.

It is important, however, to deal with all the proposed themes in order to obtain a common identity among the Cooperators within the universal Church and in the world.

Although the themes are arranged according to a certain framework, they may be rearranged according to the needs of the group in formation.

Note: As noted above, we add to the Guidelines two Appendixes which include themes in the form of Supplementary Materials. Appendix I contains themes that have already been developed and are considered to be necessary to have an appropriate picture of the Cooperators, their history and identity. Appendix II contains, on the other hand, themes in a schematic form useful for deepening the formation of the Cooperator. The two supplementary materials should be a help in drawing up the local plan of formation.

#### **3.3.1 COOPERATOR'S ROOTS AND HISTORY**

The particular objectives of this first unit are:

- To have a quick overview of the identity of the Cooperator, of the Association and of its history.
- To have sufficiently clear ideas in order to make a conscious decision whether to continue in the formation process of becoming a Cooperator.

##### **3.3.1.1.The Cooperator, the history of an identity**

###### *3.3.1.1.1. The Cooperator according to Don Bosco*

- Don Bosco needs help and thinks of a great apostolic family.

- The foundation of the Cooperators

The following themes (found in Appendix 1) are proposed:

- \* *Don Bosco arrives at founding the Cooperators*
- \* *The Cooperator in the "Rules" given by Don Bosco*
- \* *Don Bosco speaks of the Cooperators*
- \* *The laity in the mind of Don Bosco*

3.3.1.1.2. *The Cooperator: from Don Bosco up to our days*

- Ecclesial ferments that question the Cooperators' Association.
- the Cooperators in the mind and work of SDB Rector Majors
- Relaunching of the Cooperators' identity in the light of Don Bosco's first project, in the light of the teachings of Vatican Council II.
- From the "New Regulations" of 1974 to the "Regulations of Apostolic Life" of 1986.

The following themes are proposed:

- \* *The Cooperator as seen by SDB General Chapters from 1888 to 1965*
- \* *"A new beginning", the Magna Charta of Pius XII to the Cooperators*
- \* *The Cooperator as seen by the SDB Special General Chapter XX*
- \* *The RAL and the 1985 World Congress*
- \* *The Cooperator as seen at the SDB Chapters, XXI to XXIV*
- \* *The Cooperator as seen by the Cooperators Regional Congresses 1993-94*
- \* *The Cooperator as seen by the FMA*
- \* *History, teacher of life*

3.3.1.2. *The new vision on the Cooperator*

according to the 1985 RAL

The Cooperator according to the Regulations of Apostolic Life is:

- \* *a Christian: following Christ in the footsteps of Don Bosco;*
- \* *a lay person: a person of the world in the heart of the Church, a person of the Church in the heart of the world;*
- \* *a Salesian: co-responsible together with others for Don Bosco's project;*
- \* *an apostle: the apostolic heart of the Salesian Cooperator;*
- \* *an associate: a member of a public association of faithful*

Note: Here we present, in brief, the essential features of the Cooperator's identity and life; that is, the fundamental elements which will be successively deepened in the initial formation period.

These are the following:

- \* *The "new face" of the Cooperator according to RVA*
- \* *The Cooperator in the Salesian charism*
- \* *The Cooperator, model of a lay salesian not consecrated*
- \* *The spiritual life of the Cooperator*
- \* *The spirituality of the Cooperator*
- \* *The apostolate of the Cooperator*
- \* *The Cooperator and youth ministry*
- \* *The reason for a promise*
- \* *The meaning of the promise*
- \* *A public association of faithful*

### 3.3.2. DEEPENING ON THE IDENTITY

When somebody wants to become a Cooperator they undertake a programme of initial formation. In this line this second unit offers themes in schematic form which should be developed in order to deepen the formation of the Cooperator and to help him/her to complete his/her formation according to the different qualifying characteristics.

### **3.3.2.1. A Christian**

Particular objectives:

- To determine to identify oneself with Christ and to live according to the Gospel values.
- To be able to express a correct vision of the Church, the incarnation of Christ in the world.

#### *3.3.2.1.1. The vocation of the human being*

Some themes:

- \* *The dignity of the human person.*
- \* *The richness and the responsibility of the person.*
- \* *A new dignity in Baptism and in Confirmation*
- \* *A serious decision for Christ*
- \* *Life in the Spirit*
- \* *Called to love and to self giving*
- \* *Called to build the Kingdom of God.*

#### *3.3.2.1.2. Vatican II ecclesiology*

Some themes:

- \* *The Church-Body of Christ: equal dignity of all the baptized;*
- \* *From the hierarchical Church to the Church-communion;*
- \* *The organic communion of the Church: diversity and complementarity of ministries and charisms;*
- \* *The universal vocation to sanctity;*
- \* *A Church entirely missionary.*

### **3.3.2.2. A lay person**

Particular objectives:

- To know how to express with clarity the identity and the mission of the lay person in the Church and in the world.
- To engage in typically secular tasks in the Church and in the world.

#### *3.3.2.2.1. The vocation and the mission of the laity*

Some themes:

- \* *The secular condition of the faithful;*
- \* *The lay spirituality;*
- \* *The Christian animation of the temporal realities;*
- \* *The mission of the laity in the family;*
- \* *The mission of the laity in work;*
- \* *The mission of the laity in society and in civil activities;*
- \* *The participation of the laity in the life and mission of the Church.*

### 3.3.2.3 A Salesian

Particular objectives:

- To know and to be able to point out the essential elements of the Salesian spirit.
- To commit oneself to live the Salesian spirit as a typical form of spirituality.

#### 3.3.2.3.1 *Sharing in the Salesian spirit*

Some themes:

- \* *The source of the Salesian Spirit;*
- \* *The heart of the Salesian spirit; apostolic charity*
- \* *The meaning of God's fatherhood*
- \* *Spirituality of action and union with God;*
- \* *Spirituality of the daily and ordinary things and of joy;*
- \* *Trust in Providence and in human resources;*
- \* *Fidelity to the Pope and the meaning of ecclesial communion;*
- \* *A style of life inspired by the Beatitudes;*
- \* *A style of action and of relationship, based on openness and trust;*
- \* *A simple and vital life style;*
- \* *The devotion to Mary Help of Christians.*

#### 3.3.2.3.2. *Sharer in the Salesian educative charism*

Some themes:

- Pedagogical optimism: a positive vision of the person;
- The goal of education: health, wisdom and sanctity;
- Don Bosco's option: prevention
- The Preventive System: "reason";
- The Preventive System: "religion";
- The Preventive System: "kindness" (amorevolezza);
- Unity of the Preventive System;
- The educative environment: the "oratory";
- The climate of the educative environment: family spirit;
- The "oratorian heart" of the Salesian educator.

### 3.3.2.4. An apostle

Particular objectives:

- To be convinced that there cannot be a true Cooperator without apostolic commitment, according to his/her condition of life.
- To gain experience in the apostolate by participating in some apostolic activities.

#### 3.3.2.4.1. *The lay person in the apostolic project of Don Bosco*

Some themes:

- \* Don Bosco: a life spent in serving youth;
- \* Don Bosco's mission for youth and the common people;
- \* Don Bosco, a promoter of apostolic vocations;
- \* Don Bosco the Founder: Salesians of Don Bosco, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Salesian Cooperators;
- \* Don Bosco's labour to found the Cooperators: a journey that goes from the period of the "extern Salesians" to the Rules written by DB;
- \* The association of the Cooperators from Don Bosco's Rules to RAL
- \* The Salesian Family;
- \* The specificity of the Cooperators in the Salesian Family;

- \* The co-responsibility of the Cooperators in the Salesian mission;
- \* Forms of apostolate of the Cooperator according to RAL;
- \* Apostolic experiences.

As references for these themes, we recommend:

- \* *Personal reading of Don Bosco's biography;*
- \* *The reading of the Rules for Cooperators written by Don Bosco.*

#### 3.3.2.4.2. Preferential apostolic option: youth

Besides concrete experiences of animation in the field, here are

some themes:

- \* *The typically Salesian apostolate*
- \* *Youth: "the most delicate part of human society" (Don Bosco)*
- \* *Age of crisis and choices: preadolescent, adolescence, youth;*
- \* *"Natural" needs in the growth of youth;*
- \* *Youth's condition in today's society;*
- \* *Youths on the fringe of society and situations of grave danger for the young;*
- \* *The many forms of apostolic commitment on behalf of youth;*
- \* *The educational apostolate: formation and catechetics, promotion of the family, promotion of culture and commitment in the mass-media, social and cultural help to the working class, evangelization and missionary commitment;*
- \* *Techniques of animation and of communication;*
- \* *The apostolic needs of the local area;*
- \* *The choice of an apostolate.*

#### 3.3.2.5. An associate

Particular objectives:

- To know well what it means to belong to an ecclesial association.
- To make one's own contribution to the Association for its running and its vitality, in spirit of co-responsibility.

##### 3.3.2.5.1. Associated lay Salesians

Possible themes:

- \* *Ecclesiality of the Association of Salesian Cooperator;*
- \* *To become a Cooperator: the Promise;*
- \* *Communion in the Association;*
- \* *Co-responsibility in the spiritual and apostolic growth of all the members of the Association;*
- \* *Organization and animation of the Association.*

##### 3.3.2.5.2. The Regulations of Apostolic Life

Obligatory theme:

- \* *The RAL and its official commentary are the central and constant point of reference of the entire formation process.*

The Formation Facilitator will be presenting the Regulations of Apostolic Life at the same time that the different formative topics previously listed will be developed, identifying for the candidates the articles to which they can make reference.

But above all RAL should be made the object of an attentive and meditative personal reading. This will lead the Cooperator aspirant, if he/she feels called, to assume the project of life there proposed.

#### 4. ONGOING FORMATION

*"The formation, which is particularly intense and demanding in the initial period, continues even after the admission, because the Lord never ceases to call through the changing circumstances of life."*

*(RAL, art. 37/1)*

*"Important formation activities are:*  
*- the meetings, at least monthly, and the annual conferences, laid down by Don Bosco, or other kinds of meeting;*  
*- the significant times of prayer and discernment;*  
*the frequent contacts with Groups of the Salesian Family at every level;*  
*- the use of salesian literature and aids of the Family, among which is the Salesian Bulletin."*

*(RAL, art. 38/3)*

#### **Premise**

The formation of a person is not limited only to some phases or periods of life. In general a person is always growing to more mature convictions and to more profound reasons for discernment.

Then personal, family and social life situations, especially today, are in continuous evolution. They continuously question persons in a new manner, thus compelling people to review their own options and positions. We read in the Official Commentary to RAL (p. 375) "A person grows and matures in proportion to her capacity to learn from life and to answer with creativity to the new situations that life presents before her."

Likewise, the following of Christ and the task of evangelization, which have to come to grips with ever new historical situations in continuous evolution, require new answers and new forms of announcing the message that are challenging. The same can be said of the Salesian apostolate, which holds the education of youth as a privileged commitment. It calls for openness and effort to adapt oneself to the changing situations and to the new emerging needs.

All this explains the need for ongoing formation, which falls once again under the personal responsibility of the Cooperator but it is also the Association's duty to promote it. Therefore, it programs formative and spiritual initiatives (cf. RAL, art. 38/3), from which the Cooperator should not absent him/herself without valid reasons.

The Cooperator should be convinced of the fact that keeping up with news and information is part of formation. One should be informed about issues taken place locally, nationally and globally. This demands an ongoing effort, using the available means, in order to examine all with a critical eye.

## **4.1. OBJECTIVES**

To help the Salesian Cooperators

- to bring to maturity an ever more convinced acceptance of the vocation received;
- to strengthen their spiritual and apostolic fidelity to the evangelical project of the Association;
- and stand up to new situations of Church and society.

## **4.2. FORMATIVE TOPICS**

Because of the secular and charismatic nature of the Cooperator's vocation, the themes of the Ongoing Formation necessarily cover a wide area.

They include:

- Topics and issues relevant to the situation of the family, youth, culture and mass media, the protection of human life and bio-ethics.
- Topics regarding professional life, work, economy and the environment.
- Topics and issues relevant to social life, human rights, social justice, solidarity and peace.
- Surveys and studies on the needs of the local community.
- Social-pastoral plans of the local Church, of the Salesian Family

To shed light on these topics and respond adequately to these signs of the times the cooperators will have recourse to:

- The Word of God, meditated personally and in common.
- Church documents.
- Books or documents on Christian and Salesian spirituality.
- Formation materials prepared by the Association.
- Publications and journals of Christian inspiration, Salesian printed matters and those of the Association (Salesian Bulletin, Cooperatores, etc.)

## **4.3. MOMENTS AND MEANS**

There are several occasions and means to attend to the ongoing formation (cf R.V.A, art. 38,3). Since these can be programmed and offered by the Association, they should not be neglected, but should rather be carefully prepared. We refer to:

- periodic formative meetings. The Centres should plan them according to schedules and in ways suited to the local demands. At least one monthly meeting should be regularly held;
- days of recollection. Don Bosco used to recommend the monthly recollection; if for various reasons the practice of the monthly recollection cannot be held, spiritual recollections should be held at least during the important seasons of the liturgical year;
- the two annual conferences. One conference should be on the "Strenna" of the Rector Major, the other on a theme which may be chosen by the local Council or suggested by the Provincial Council. The Annual conferences are two important occasions to be maximized so that they may have a significant effect on the formation of the Cooperators and on the life of the Centre;

- the yearly spiritual retreats. According to the mind of our Founder, the Cooperator should participate in a few days of spiritual retreat. Where it is difficult to organize them at a local level, they can be organized at regional level, as the joint effort of several neighbouring centres, or at provincial level.

- prayer meetings. Though every meeting of the association should be preceded by a moment of prayer, it is good to organize prayer meetings according to the needs that may emerge now and then. These can also be organized in occasions of social and ecclesial events, or during gatherings of the Salesian Family;

- meetings with experts on themes of social concerns. It is important to foster lay spirituality in the Cooperators, to offer them formative occasions dealing with social problems of local, national or international relevance;

- meetings for programming and evaluating past activities. These meetings are conceived and organized not merely for organizational efficiency, but for improving the group's activity in the service of persons and for the greater glory of God. They certainly have a formative value;

It will be the task of those who hold posts of responsibility in the Association to encourage and foster the participation of Cooperators in conventions at the provincial, national, regional or world levels, both ecclesial and of the Salesian Family. These experiences empower persons spiritually, and usually leave a strong impact on them and greatly foster the ecclesial sense and that of belonging to the Salesian Family.

Those in charge in the Association should encourage the participation of Cooperators, according to each person's abilities, interests and competencies, in activities and meetings, promoted by non-ecclesial organizations, that are socially useful. The outcome of such participation should be shared with the Cooperators of the Centre to foster among all the members a greater openness to the social reality in which the Association is inserted.

## 5. THE FORMATION FACILITATOR\* OF THE SALESIAN COOPERATORS

*"For the purpose of a truly incisive and effective pastoral activity, the formation of those who will form others is to be developed through appropriate courses or suitable schools."*

*(Christifideles Laici, no. 63)*

*"The Association takes care of the formation of its members through the action of qualified Cooperators and of the Delegate who act in co-responsibility."*

*RAL, Art. 38/2)*

\*N.B.

By Formation Facilitator we mean the one responsible for formation, and who facilitates the process. (cf. RAL Art 38)

### **Premise**

Helping other persons in their formation is a task of great responsibility and importance. It is to be carried out in the awareness, on both the one being formed and the Formation Facilitator, that we are all disciples of one Master, Jesus Christ.

The Formation Facilitators therefore are also committed to forming themselves. They are not a special class of persons. They are Cooperators who are only helping their brothers and sisters to grow in faith. Their formative task is therefore to be seen within the framework of a fraternal sharing of spiritual goods and as a service in which they themselves are enriched by sharing with those who are being formed.

We notice in the Church today, and therefore also in our Association, the need to give more attention and care to formation. Hence the need of preparing and of qualifying the Formation Facilitator.

The need to have a greater number of persons who can dedicate themselves to formation is particularly felt in our Association. Besides the Delegates, it is important, therefore, that the following persons take formative tasks:

- the provincial and local Councillors;
- other Cooperators who are available and competent.

### **5.1. OBJECTIVES**

To stimulate, support and prepare Cooperators (besides the Delegates) who are capable of undertaking the duty of formation, and thus be able to face all the needs and demands of formation.

## 5.2. WHO IS THE FORMATION FACILITATOR

The task of formation is a responsibility that demands certain abilities and attitudes from the Formation Facilitator. The effectiveness of the formative activity highly depends on the facilitator's abilities and attitudes.

The Formation Facilitator should be:

- a person who frequently meditates on the Word of God and who lives in profound sacramental union with the Lord Jesus. A person, therefore, of tested interior life, who can transmit to others the taste for spirituality;
- a believer, who with his/her life gives witness to faith and to his/her vocational choice. Witnessing is the most effective form of formative communication and is a condition for any other type of formative communication;
- a person who carefully follows the Magisterium of the Church, the Pope and the Bishops, and strives to go deeper into it. The Magisterium constitutes, in fact, the master guide of Christian formation;
- a person who has assimilated the values of the Preventive system and of Salesian spirituality and who follows the reflections and today's studies on "Salesianity". The Formation Facilitator should be able to give witness to the Salesian vocational choice and to an ever living fidelity to it;
- a person who is well acquainted with RAL, the Official Commentary, the Manual for "leaders", and with the present Formation Guidelines. These are official documents, under whose light the identity, tasks and membership of the Cooperator are defined;
- a person fully inserted in the life of the Association, who, therefore, knows how to transmit a living sense of belonging;
- a person conscious of being a mediator of the Truth. The Formation Facilitator does not teach his or her own truth (ideas, opinions), but places himself/herself at the service of Truth, of which he/she is an instrument;
- a brother or sister conscious of giving a service to help other fellow Cooperators in their formation. This should not be a reason for self-complacency, but a task that calls for commitment;
- a person ready to qualify herself to offer a service. In matters of formation one cannot improvise. One should be qualified both in doctrinal aspects as well as in communication skills;
- a person who is free from thinking that she is the main character of the show. The Formation Facilitator should have mental self-control in order to avoid the temptation, albeit involuntary, of showing "knowing-it-all" attitudes or "highly-personal" positions;
- a person able to listen. It is important also for the Formation Facilitator to be a good listener because this will permit him/her to go down to the experience level of those speaking, and to find the more suitable forms of communication and language in the dialogue with them.
- a person capable of communicating and of promoting dialogue. The formative moments become more fruitful and effective if the Formation Facilitator is able to create a rich atmosphere of dialogue, communication and discussion.

### **5.3. TO FORM THE FORMATION FACILITATOR**

The Association is concerned with the training of the Formation Facilitator, without detriment to the necessity of self-formation.

- If possible, at regional or provincial level, the Association programs and organizes specific formation meetings for Formation Facilitators, for those who already carry out a formative task and for those who will eventually assume the said task.

The following can be discussed in the specific meetings for Formation Facilitators:

- themes concerning Church Magisterium and Salesian charism. These should be studied and deepened so as to be able to transmit their contents to Cooperators;

- themes and formative plans concerning the Association and the Salesian Family, to be proposed later to the Centres;

- social themes of particular interest for the apostolate of the Cooperators, to be developed and deepened in order to be transmitted in ordinary formative moments;

- themes regarding the animation of groups and the methodology of formation;

- themes regarding the preparation and the use of formation materials;

- evaluation of formative plans carried out in the Centres.

The Association edits also materials for Formation Facilitators to help them to fulfil better their task. They should cover the methodological aspects as well as the contents. The Association also suggests which publications and texts produced by others may be useful to Facilitators.

Where possible, the Association organizes "formation schools for Formation Facilitators", at provincial and national levels.

### **5.4. THOSE WHO ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR FORMATION**

Concern for formation in the Association is a collegial responsibility of Councils, whether local or provincial.

Within the respective Councils, a Councillor is entrusted (not delegated) with the task of formation. The Councillor brings to the Council ideas and proposals on which to eventually work and deliberate. The Councillor is in continual dialogue with the Delegate.

The local Council plans the formation of the Cooperators of its own Centre, adapting to local demands and needs, the recommendations and materials offered by the Provincial Council.

The Provincial Council

- studies the formative needs of the Centres of its own Province;

- coordinates and promotes interventions aiming at ensuring a regular and constant formative activity in all Centres;
- promotes the formation of the Formation Facilitators.
- elaborates plans and formative materials, taking into consideration the orientations given by the World Consulting Body (these may come via the Regional member of this Body) adapting to the situation and demands of the Province the materials and formative tools prepared by the National/Regional Conference or by the World Consulting Body.

The National and Regional Conferences and the World Consulting Body can prepare formative materials on general or specific themes considered useful for the spiritual growth of the Cooperators.

## **Conclusion**

*We hope to have offered, through these pages, some clear points to plan concrete itineraries and formative materials.*

*Every Provincial Council should strongly feel the responsibility for closely following the setting-up of formation in its Centres, providing all the necessary support to ensure a solid and complete formation.*

*We entrust to the Holy Spirit the troubles and the efforts of those who devote themselves to the task of formation in our Association. The World Consulting Body on behalf of the Association thanks them in advance for their generous service. Certainly, the Spirit will know how to make the seed, planted in the heart of fellow Cooperators by every Formation Facilitator, germinate and take root, and give fruit.*

**The World Consulting Body**

***"Be perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Mt 5, 48)***

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Printed for internal use

**Collection of formation materials**

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- 1. Regulations of Apostolic Life**
- 2. Official commentary to RAL**
- 3. "Leaders" manual**
- 4. Guidelines for Formation**