



PRESENTATION OF RECTOR MAJOR'S REPORT **SECTOR - FORMATION**

1. Starting point: the state of formation in 2014

A comparison of the plans of the Rector Major and his council in the last three six-year periods yields some interesting observations:

- There has been constant attention to ongoing and to initial formation;
- In the last two six-year periods we see a new emphasis on the Salesian consecrated vocation in its two forms;
- Formation of formation guides is now included under initial formation, and attention to the Salesian Brother has been placed under the “Salesian consecrated vocation”;
- The “shared mission and joint formation” are included in ongoing and initial formation.

In sum: during the last three six-year periods, the Congregation has learned to give attention to the Salesian consecrated identity and to ongoing and initial formation. Despite GC24, however, the shared mission and joint formation of Salesians and laity did not become a major thematic focus in formation.

2. Evaluation of the implementation of GC27 in the area of formation

1. *The Salesian consecrated vocation in its two forms*

This first area of the six-year plan is in keeping with the chief objective of GC27: the deepening of the Salesian consecrated vocation.

A first step was to concentrate on *formation personnel of the early phases of initial formation*: courses for novice directors (2016), followed by regional level courses for prenovice directors (2017) and postnovitiate formators (2018-2019).

Other steps included study of the theme in various regional and world meetings; production, translation and distribution of relevant material, also through <https://formazionebdb.org>; the seminar on discernment of the two forms of our vocation (2018); the summer modular course on Salesianity at Parañaque that attracted Salesians as well as lay mission partners; attention to the theology of consecrated life during specific formation; and the new manual of the Salesian Rector, whose first part is dedicated to the Salesian consecrated identity.

Special attention was given to the vocation of the *Salesian Brother*: a letter in AGC 424, a new specific formation centre at Martí-Codolar, and a seminar on specific formation at Genzano in 2017, besides various congresses and seminars in 5 regions (South Asia, East Asia – Oceania, Africa – Madagascar, Mediterranean, Central & Northern Europe).

A letter on the *Salesian Priest* was offered to the Congregation in AGC 431. Such a reflection is urgent, given that the majority of our novices today profess as aspirants to the priesthood, especially in the three regions with major vocational growth (Africa – Madagascar, South Asia, East Asia – Oceania). First professions in these regions over the last 5 years (2014-2018) were 1325 or 71.78% of the world total; 92.83% of them professed as aspirants to the priesthood.

In general, the Salesian consecrated vocation has become a focus of interest and concern, though much remains to be done to help each confrere and community assume this identity and live it to the

full. The kind of Salesians needed for the youth of today are surely people who live their consecrated vocation, as Brothers or Priests, with conviction, transparency, and joy.

2. Ongoing formation

In an effort to promote the mentality of ongoing formation, reflections on “life as prayer” and “formation as lifelong” were published in AGC 421 and 425.

The centres of Quito and Bengaluru and the mobile formation team of the East Asia – Oceania region continued to offer a precious service of animation of Salesians and lay people. A new centre was set up for the Africa-Madagascar region, another is being set up for the two regions of Europe.

The Salesian Rector: A ministry for animation and governing of the local community is available to the members of GC28 and will be given to all confreres after the Chapter, integrating any changes that become necessary.

The revised manual of prayer, *In Dialogue with the Lord*, is also ready and is available on the App *Salesians@prayer*. The Salesian Proper is being updated (missal, lectionary, liturgy of the hours) and will be available on our App and also on *I-Breviary*.

The seminar on Salesian meditation (2018) aroused good interest.

Attention to the shared mission and joint formation, instead, has to be improved. There are huge differences between the regions, with greater challenges in those regions with highest numerical growth in vocations.

We need to give more attention to the charismatic dimension of our vocation, also through the preparation of experts in Salesian studies.

3. Initial formation

The work on *Salesian personal accompaniment* begun in the last six-year period was taken up by the department, in collaboration with the youth ministry department, through a process of listening to Salesians in initial formation and their guides. The *Orientations* were formulated after a study of the 4000 responses, which include young people in formation and also 538 guides. One of the fruits of this work is the setting up of a Salesian School of Accompaniment. In general, the *Orientations* call for a return to the Preventive System as the model of a formation that knows how to reach the heart.

A letter in AGC 426 insisted on initial as well as ongoing *formation of formation guides*, asking for greater attention to the person of the guide and the acquisition of formation skills, besides the necessary assimilation of the Salesian charism.

As for promoting the *mentality of shared mission with the laity*, not much has been done in a systematic way.

The *practical training* phase was the object of attention in a letter from the councillor for formation, “The educative-pastoral experience of practical training” (2019). The only region that worked out an organic program of pastoral activities during initial formation was East Asia – Oceania. We could speak, however, of a new awareness in the Congregation that pastoral accompaniment consists in “learning by experience the meaning of the Salesian vocation” (C 98). We need to prepare formators capable of such accompaniment.

The philosophy study centres in the regions of Africa-Madagascar, South Asia and East Asia – Oceania were encouraged to seek “association” with the Faculty of Philosophy of the UPS, as a way of harmonizing the intellectual dimension of postnovitiate formation with recent guidelines and new realities.

4. Coordination and collaboration at different levels

Two important structures of animation at regional and world level were consolidated during the last three six-year periods: the regional formation commission and the world formation consultation.

Provincial formation commissions exist in all provinces, though their functioning depends much on the choice of delegate and the quality of interaction with the provincial. The last world consultation began work on a manual of the provincial formation delegate.

The reorganization / study of initial formation was carried out in all the regions. The curatorium, which is the organ of governance of interprovincial formation houses, is well-established in all the regions except one. A process of revision of the statutes of the curatoriums has been initiated, especially with a view to ensuring interprovincial formation teams.

Collaboration with the departments was begun. Especially significant was the work with the Youth Ministry department on the study of Salesian personal accompaniment.

The importance of synodality in the work of animation is clear: change is built with patience and on the basis of relationships.

The regional formation centres have an important role in the animation of the charismatic dimension and in the joint formation of Salesians and lay people.

3. Main challenges for the future

When we read the evaluation of the last sessennium in the light of the letter of convocation of GC28, certain challenges emerge for the future. The mission to the young, shared with lay people, determines our formation. From the very beginning of our Congregation, we have been formed *in* the mission and *by* the mission. Against this background we want to present four challenges.

1. *God calls us through Don Bosco*

God calls us through Don Bosco, so the first challenge is to pay adequate attention to the faith and to the charism.

Salesians are the charismatic point of reference in the shared mission and, in keeping with this vocation, they have a special responsibility towards lay mission partners. The shared mission leads not to a levelling down of differences but to “identity in relation,” with mutual witness between religious and lay people. The initiatives of the last sessennium need to be continued, with attention to the formation of formation guides, preparation of experts in Salesianity, and collaboration with the Youth Ministry department, especially in the area of vocational animation.

Sound processes of accompaniment and discernment in vocational animation can only lead to significant improvement in formation processes and lowering of vocational fragility. Vocational discernment must be an integral part of youth ministry, and aspirantates must be, by definition, processes where the discernment of vocations to special consecration takes place. It may be good to entrust aspirantates to the formation department, while vocational animation continues to be accompanied by the youth ministry department.

The preparation of experts in Salesianity is of capital importance for the future of the mission, not merely to ensure qualified teachers in initial formation, but also because the Salesian religious community is called to be the “charismatic point of reference” in the EPC. At the present moment, we need to prepare people for a theological-spiritual reading of our history and charism, while ensuring continued attention to the areas of Salesian history and pedagogy.

2. *A Church that is communion calls for an adequate formation*

A Church that is communion calls for a pastoral care of young people that is “synodal” (CV 203-208) and a formation that is participatory.

Joint formation with the laity presupposes a new way of relating to the mission, in keeping with the season of the Church in which we are living.

In order to respond adequately to the mission to the young today, we need to walk and grow with lay mission partners, other members of the Salesian Family, and young people themselves. An important setting for initial formation is the EPC. It is a question of learning *together* by experience and discerning in *community* the voice of the Spirit. (C 98, 119) The induction of lay people, especially women and married couples, into formation processes and teams is a great opening suggested by the recent synod (*Final Document* 163-164).

It is important that the synodal approach characterize all the processes of initial formation, so that young Salesians are not merely passive “objects” but active “subjects” of formation. Our young confreres are almost all digital natives and could be formidable ‘cultural mediators,’ provided they assume personal responsibility for formation in this area (cf. CV 203). Their formation guides must obviously be capable of listening and dialogue, respect and patience, so that formation is not conformation but transformation.

3. Formation of formation personnel

A synodal kind of formation calls therefore for careful preparation of formation personnel.

Among the formation guides are to be included all Rectors, given that they are guardians of the charism not only in the religious community but also in the EPC. The new Rector’s manual gives much importance to this aspect and must be studied and assimilated in all our communities, not forgetting those of initial formation, most especially the centres for specific formation.

Closer attention needs to be given to those provinces experiencing major difficulties with regard to the *complementarity of the two forms of our vocation*. In 2018, for example, South Asia had 94 newly professed, and only one among them professed as a Salesian Brother. It seems that the determining factor is not so much the context but the ‘Salesian culture’ of a province. There are provinces in highly clericalized contexts that have a significant number of Brother vocations.

In the conviction that formation is lifelong, we also need to accompany *Salesians who are elderly and ill*, as some provinces have begun to do. Here we would do well to dialogue and learn from the initiatives also of other Congregations and realities in the Church.

The reorganization of initial formation needs to be accompanied so as to ensure the preparation of formation personnel and the unity of the formation team. Critical here is the good functioning of the curatoriums, by means of a revision of their statutes and the formulation of courageous qualification plans by each province. The proposed school of accompaniment will be valuable here, as well as the service of information, facilitation and monitoring of the qualification plans on the regional level.

The role of the DIF and CIF are also important, and can be strengthened, especially in the aspect of reflection on formation, by means of a manual and a school for the DIF.

4. Revision of the Ratio

Given the new digital world and the also the significant differences between the regions, a major revision of the *Ratio* might be needed. The quality of formative accompaniment precedes the principle of the uniformity of formation structures, and that quality depends on a serious commitment to the formation of formation personnel. The revision could be undertaken in a gradual way (phase by phase), so as to allow the Formation Department to continue giving attention also to other processes mentioned above.
