

The Mission of the Salesian Family

Art. 14. A charismatic mission in the Church and for the Church

The mission of the Church flows from the free initiative of the Father, passes through the mandate of Jesus Christ and is perpetuated by the work of the Holy Spirit.¹³ It is one and is entrusted to all the members of the people of God on account of their Baptism and Confirmation. Particular charisms of the Spirit, however, mean that the mission is carried out in different ways according to the different persons or groups to whom they are sent.¹⁴

The mission of Don Bosco and of his spiritual Family is part of the common Christian vocation to the apostolate. But because it is in response to a spiritual gift, its *origin is charismatic*: it is the Spirit of the Father and of the Risen Lord who, as in the past, sent Don Bosco to the young and to the working classes, in the course of history continues to send his spiritual sons and daughters to perpetuate the apostolate to the young, the working classes and the missions.

This particular mission is *influenced by and responds to*, among other things, the signs of the times.¹⁵ For us, the needs and the expectations, the aspirations and the spiritual requirements of the young, especially the poor ones, of ordinary people and of peoples not yet evangelised, are signs through which, as times change and in different social and cultural contexts, the Spirit calls and *sends* the various groups of the Salesian Family to carry out their mission. This mission being carried out in the Church and for the Church is subject to its approval, authority and legislation, so that the charismatic mission takes its place in the harmonious carrying out of the Church's activity at various levels.

Then the charismatic mission finds its *practical application* in the *particular law* of each group of the Salesian Family. Within the Society of Saint Francis de Sales, the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the other religious institutes, the ones who send or

¹³ See LG 2-4; AG 2-4; UR 2.

¹⁴ See LG 9b 13ab 17 32; AA 2a; AG 2a 5 6 10 35-37.

¹⁵ See GS 11.

mandate are the legitimate superiors respectively. In each case the sender is *collegial*: this happens, for example, in the election of the members of the general council by a chapter assembly.

In the case of the Don Bosco Volunteers and the other secular institutes, as also with the Salesian Cooperators, the Damas Salesianas and the other Salesian lay associations, there is no one in authority who *sends*. The individual, however, is bound to follow faithfully the indications regarding the mission contained in his or her own Statutes, which specify, on the basis of particular law, the practical exercise of the Salesian apostolate in the world.

Art. 15. An apostolic Family

The Salesian Family is an *apostolic Family*. The groups which make it up are all responsible protagonists of the common mission although to a different extent and in different ways.¹⁶

In founding the Society of Saint Francis de Sales and the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco organised them as religious congregations, not contemplative but “apostolic”. According to the intentions of their founders, the spiritual sons of Don Bosco, all the other religious congregations today belonging to the Salesian Family have a clear apostolic orientation and form part of those religious institutes recognised as “apostolic”. Some groups have come into being in the so-called “mission” lands with the specific aim of taking part in the work of evangelisation *Ad Gentes* in a diversity of contexts and cultures. Belonging to this category are the *Caritas Sisters of Jesus*, the *Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary*, the *Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians*, the *Catechist Sisters of Mary Immaculate Help of Christians*, the *Daughters of the Queenship of Mary Immaculate*, the *Sisters Announcers of the Lord*, and the *Sisters of Maria Auxiliatrix*.

The associations of the Salesian Cooperators, the Damas Salesianas, the Witnesses of the Risen Lord and the Friends of *Canção Nova* are ecclesial associations of an apostolic nature, founded with the specific aim of putting into practice in a vast, expansive manner, and in a secular way, the mission of Don Bosco and of the respective founders.

¹⁶ See ASGC 163

The secular institutes of the Don Bosco Volunteers, the Daughters of the Queenship of Mary Immaculate, the Volunteers with Don Bosco and the Disciples all have apostolic ends: their members carry out a Salesian apostolate of a secular nature in the context of the family, the world of work, social relationships, and civil commitments.

In virtue of their particular vocations, the individuals belonging to a specific group are persons who are *sent*, called therefore to carry out a common mission according to the role entrusted to them, their capacities and the possibilities that they have.

On the basis of the constitutional norms, among the Salesians, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the other religious institutes, the mission is assumed and put into practice above all by the community – both *provincial* and *local* – which is therefore the primary executor of the mission.

Art. 16. “Mission to the young, the working classes and the missions”

The mission of the Salesian Family is addressed to the young and to adults, considered as both protagonists and beneficiaries of education and located in their particular social, cultural, religious and ecclesial contexts, with particular reference to the “places of mission”. To indicate this, there has come into current use the formula *mission to the young, the working classes and the missions*; three dimensions which complement each other.

1. *Mission to the young*. According to the precise intention of Don Bosco, the groups of the Family which he founded have as their preferred beneficiaries poor young people, abandoned and in danger or, in modern terms, youth of both sexes most in need on account of situations of economic poverty or affectively, culturally or spiritually deprived. This choice is shared explicitly by other groups and finds its place in their constitutional texts. In the world of youth all the groups pay particular attention to those who show signs of a specific apostolic, lay, consecrated or priestly vocation.

Some groups by preference direct their attention to male adolescents and young people. Other groups give preference to female young people at all stages of their development. Others again concern themselves with all young people without distinction. A good number of the groups give their special attention to those young people, male or female, who are the victims of serious forms of marginalisation, exploitation and violence.

2. *Mission to the working classes.* Enlightened from on high, Don Bosco also turned his attention to adults, by preference those who were humble and poor, the working classes, the urban underclasses, immigrants, the marginalised, summarily, to all those who were most in need of material and spiritual assistance. Faithful to the guidance of Don Bosco, the groups of the Salesian Family share this preferred option. The *Association of Mary Help of Christians* has inserted into its new Regulations the Salesian apostolate directed in particular to the working classes.

Special attention needs to be given to the family, the place where the process of human development begins, which is intended to prepare young people for love and the acceptance of life, and the first school of solidarity among people and peoples. All are engaged in ensuring that it is afforded dignity and is soundly based so that it may become, in an ever-more evident way the small "domestic church".¹⁷

Some groups, in virtue of a particular charism, extend their Salesian apostolate to special categories of people: the *Daughters of the Sacred Heart to lepers*, the *Sisters of Charity of Jesus* to the elderly, the *Damas Salesianas* to the sick.

3. *Missionary apostolate Ad Gentes.* Don Bosco cultivated the missionary ideal and in a practical way took part in the missionary work of the Church in his day. He wanted the *Salesian Society* and the *Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians* to dedicate themselves to the "missions"; and that is what the two congregations have done since their beginnings, with an extraordinary expansion leading to their being present in all the continents. From the very beginning, missionary cooperation has also been an essential feature of the *Association of Salesian Cooperators*. The *Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians*

¹⁷ LG 11b

and the *Catechist Sisters of Mary Immaculate Help of Christians* also dedicate themselves to missionary work as a priority. This form of Salesian apostolate clearly enters the mission of the *Volunteers of Don Bosco*, the *Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary*, the *Salesian Oblates of the Sacred Heart of Jesus*, the *Sisters of Charity of Jesus*, the *Witnesses of the Risen Lord*, the *Damas Salesianas* and the *Disciples*.

Art. 17. At the service of the Gospel

The Son of God became incarnate to reveal the face of a Father “who loves life” and put himself at the service of the physical and spiritual “well-being” of men and women, especially those most in need of help and of hope: “The Son of Man himself did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk. 10:45).

Following the example of the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth, the Church, and within it the Salesian Family, puts itself at the service (*diaconia*) of humanity in order to proclaim the Gospel and to call everyone to the fullness of life.

It is a service which according to the indications of the post-Conciliar magisterium¹⁸ includes the *renewal of humanity* through social works and various forms of educational action; personal and community Christian *witness*; the *explicit proclamation* of the Gospel through religious teaching and catechesis; *missionary work* through interreligious dialogue (especially the sharing of life and of prayer), collaboration with those belonging to other religions in the fight against unjust situations, and their accompaniment when they decide to enter the Church; the *animation of prayer*, in particular liturgical, of the Christian community; the many *initiatives of human and Christian solidarity*; the many *forms of missionary cooperation*; the *evangelising presence* in those areas marked by religious indifference or atheism.

The forming of “good Christians and upright citizens” is the aim most often expressed by Don Bosco to indicate *everything of which the young stand in need* in order to live fully human and Christian lives: clothes, food, lodging, work, study, free time; joy, friendship; active faith, the

¹⁸ See *The encyclical Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Paul VI and the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* of John Paul II.

grace of God, the way to holiness; participation, dynamism, a place in society and in the Church. His educative experience suggested to him a plan and a particular *style of approach*, which he himself summed up in the *Preventive System*, which "is totally based on reason, religion and loving-kindness".¹⁹

The various groups of the Salesian Family, taking up again the intuitions and the experiences of Don Bosco, and re-interpreting them in the light of the renewed ecclesiology of the Council and of papal teaching regarding evangelisation, undertake their work as educators and evangelisers with a variety of different formulas: "pastoral-educational service", practised according to the Preventive System; "educating by evangelising and evangelising by educating"; "all-round education in the style of the Preventive System"; educating and evangelising according to the "pedagogy of kindness"; and similar expressions.

Fundamentally there are three areas in which the Salesian Family puts into practice its multiform Gospel service: human development, education and evangelisation.

For all the groups, evangelisation, understood as the proclamation of and witnessing to the Gospel, is the priority objective of their mission.

Art. 18. In the new religious and cultural contexts

In the process of renewal and of communion among all the forces which go to make it up, the Salesian Family has arrived at certain fundamental options with regard to the missionary commitment in the new cultural context, marked, among other things, by an ever more rapid change in mentality and habits and a growing human mobility, with the presence in the same territory of people belonging to different religions and cultures.

1. Promoting Salesian humanism: This places at the centre the individual, whose dignity needs to be safeguarded and promoted in all its expressions. In educative terms this means re-awakening and mobilising all the potential of youth: the capacity to think; the variety of its affective inheritance; the forces of will directed towards freedom and strengthened by grace.

¹⁹ *Giovanni Bosco, Il sistema preventivo nella educazione della gioventù*, in Pietro Braido, ed., *Don Bosco Educatore: scritti e testimonianze*, 3rd ed. (Rome: LAS, 1997), pp. 248ff.

It gives due weight to all the values that are authentically human – among them, those such as work and culture, friendly relationships and social commitment, artistic good taste, professional competence and academic achievement, moral uprightness in both private and public life, and the little things of everyday life that give it its flavour; these values need to be defended and promoted by everyone.

In addition, Salesian humanism strives to give meaning to everyday life and provide a reason for hope and future prospects for the individual and for society.

Finally, it sets out to help everyone find his or her rightful place in society and in the Church, recognising that every young person has the right to be helped to discover his or her own vocation.

2. Taking its place in practical situations: For all the groups of the Salesian Family operating in the various continents, being engaged on behalf of the individual is a challenge that is not easy given the diversity and the complexity of the local contexts from the social, cultural and religious standpoints. In order to identify the possible and effective actions to be taken in response to emerging needs, what is required is the capacity to appreciate the local situation with intelligence and competence, always drawing inspiration from the guidelines of the Pope and the local hierarchy.

3. Taking care to be significant: The presence of the Salesian Family becomes significant because of the witness value of sharing what one has to offer, the practical operative proposals that arise from listening directly to people over a long period of time, and the processes of learning from each other which occur when people really work together for the future with a common aim.

Then together they face the difficulties and identify possibilities: problems that can arise with people and institutions; the defence and the promotion of moral values while at the same time respecting different positions and convictions of conscience; new solutions which need to be discovered starting from past experiences, and looking towards the future; the defence of the rights of those who are the weakest and most exposed; an effective presence in the political arena, especially in those places where educational policies are drawn up; the promotion of public opinion nourished by human, Gospel and Salesian values.

It is obvious that the criteria for the significance of a Salesian presence have different applications in the various geographical and cultural contexts: what is possible and appropriate in one place may not be so in another; what some can do in certain situations may turn out to be impossible for others. Being faithful to the one mission does not impose on different people the same procedures.

4. Taking up the challenge posed by the means of communication: Don Bosco clearly saw the effectiveness of the means of communication and left to his spiritual Family the task of making good use of them as means of personal and communitarian growth, and at the same time as means of defending and promoting the Faith among the working classes.

Today the means of information technology make public what at one time was considered private; they act in an instantaneous and pervasive manner, involving large numbers of people and fascinating the young especially, producing changes in the way people think and relate, spreading suggestions for life-styles which are not always in harmony with a humanism inspired by Christian values.

On the other hand, such means offer unexplored opportunities for education and evangelisation. In fact, the possibilities afforded by networking and distance communication make it possible to do a variety of things and create forms of synergy in ways that were unimaginable in the past. The apostolic Family of Don Bosco intends to put to good use these still unexplored possibilities in the Salesian mission and to seize the opportunities that society offers, combining abilities already acquired with innovative creativity.

Art. 19. Communion and collaboration in the mission

The link that unites the members of our Family is that of a "mission to communion".²⁰ The various groups, therefore, are called to live the gift of communion which comes from God, carrying out the common but differentiated service of the Gospel, according to the specific needs of the beneficiaries, their particular aims and their varied styles.

²⁰ ChL 32.

In all his activity as educator, pastor and founder, Don Bosco showed a great ability in recognising the potential and the gifts of each one, in giving responsibility even to the youngest among his collaborators, in harmonising in apostolic work the most varied skills, in identifying for each one work corresponding to his inclinations, ability and formation. He was always aware of the need for *cooperative charity* in educational and pastoral service, convinced that the Holy Spirit raises up charisms for the benefit of the whole Church.

Communion among the groups *in and for* the mission is being seen as more and more indispensable in the commitment to education and in the missions; in fact, it is recognised that there is an urgent need to coordinate activities, to present a variety of models of Christian life and ensure ministries that are complementary.

In this way, working together makes the witness more effective and the proclamation of the Gospel more convincing, fosters a more lively apostolic charity, and makes it possible to appreciate better the characteristic traits of each group while it reflects and gives expression to the identity of the Family in communion and in the mission.

For this reason, while respecting the autonomy of each group, it is necessary to safeguard ways of collaboration, and, if necessary, find some new ones that may be possible.

Art. 20. Autonomy and singularity of each group

Communion *in and for* the mission does not prejudice, but rather clarifies and strengthens the autonomy and the specific nature of each group in the Family.

In fact, the various groups enjoy their own *autonomy* – not only spiritual, formative, economic and governmental, but also apostolic, fulfilling the mission in their own structures and according to their own particular ways.

As a matter of fact, it is not a question of imposing a uniform way of acting for everyone: that would lead to a levelling out of the differences, causing confusion and uncertainty in the apostolate. It is rather a question of harmonising what each one is doing in the context of the whole project shared by everyone.

The *specific character* of each group in the communion, therefore, needs to be recognised and promoted. Young people have the

right to be able to make use of the specific service offered by each group; it is a richness for the Family and for the whole Church, in this way multiplying the forces at work for the good of the young. This communion in autonomy is an invitation to be co-responsible in the mission but does not necessarily imply co-responsibility in every single enterprise or in every particular local area.

Art. 21. Apostolic co-responsibility

Co-responsibility requires as a prerequisite that each group be able to ensure its autonomous capacity with regard to its own development, the formation of its members, and its apostolic enterprises, and that it carries out, with the greatest possible effectiveness, its specific vocation and mission ensuring within itself that vitality which is the fruit of fidelity and creativity. To be hoped for therefore are:

1. Forms of ***collaboration between the different groups*** so that the Salesian mission might be carried out in its various sectors and fields and in the different kinds of works;
2. Collaboration ***among the groups which are living and working in the same local area***, in conjunction with the pastoral structures of the local Church and civil institutions so as to offer a Salesian contribution, varied in its richness and contents, to the common construction of the civilisation of love.

It is obvious that the carrying out of a common programme requires a process of convergence that can sometimes mean giving up certain points of view or some future prospects linked to a single group to which one belongs.

In any case, co-responsibility demands the common commitment to pursue certain shared objectives. All the groups are called to spread abroad – together with the values of the Gospel – the characteristic traits of the charismatic and spiritual identity of Don Bosco's apostolic Family. They are the characteristics of the entire Family and therefore cannot be the concern of only some groups. Everyone, including the individual members, is personally responsible for animating and promoting the spiritual heritage received.

The objectives which need to be recognised and pursued by each group are:

1. To share the ***preoccupation regarding education*** in the current historical climate, seeking the best ways to educate boys and

girls in the fundamental values of life and to bring them into contact with the Gospel.

2. To make the **Preventive System** known: it represents the synthesis of Don Bosco's pedagogical wisdom and constitutes a prophetic message which he left to his heirs and the whole Church. It is a spiritual and educational experience based on reason, religion and loving-kindness.
 - **Reason** underlines the values of Christian humanism, such as the search for meaning, work, study, friendship, cheerfulness, piety, freedom not detached from responsibility, and the harmony between human sound judgement and Christian wisdom.
 - **Religion** means making space for the Grace which saves, cultivating a desire for God, fostering the meeting with Christ the Lord as this gives a full meaning to life and is a response to the thirst for happiness, progressively taking one's place in the life and mission of the Church.
 - **Loving-kindness** expresses the fact that in order to create an effective educative relationship it is necessary that the young are not only loved but know they are loved; it is a special kind of relationship and affection that awakens in the hearts of the young all their potential and makes it mature even to total self-donation.

Reason, religion and loving-kindness are today more than ever indispensable elements in the work of education, and valuable stimuli in response to the expectations of the new generations for giving life to a society that is more human.

3. Through personal witness and word of mouth to spread the **Salesian spirit**: Salesian humanism invests in every individual and obliges all educators to work tirelessly for its expansion, also in sometimes difficult circumstances; it is the foundation for a new civilisation of love.
4. Promoting the **Salesian Movement**: Don Bosco involved many people in his educational and missionary work; at all levels he tried to ensure that attention was given to his boys and to people in need. The large Salesian Movement and the links among the many forces at work within it are making a contribution from which everyone can usefully benefit.