**Interamerica Regional Congress Session**

**Saturday, August 13, 2022**

**Which Salesian Cooperator for the World Today?**

**Importance of Formation and Vocational Discernment for Aspirants**

**Presented by USA WEST**

**SLIDE ONE**

My dear brothers and sisters, our formation topic for this session is “Which Salesian Cooperators for Today’s World? The importance of Formation and Vocational Discernment for Aspirants.” My name is Judy Alvarez and I am the province coordinator for the USA Western province. Over the years I have also served as the Formation councilor and was excited when I saw the new ASC Formation Guidelines published in 2015. This document is rich with understanding and wisdom as we work to form Salesian Cooperators for today’s world.

We are blessed today have this opportunity to consider the factors that contribute to the effective formation for our Cooperator aspirants. Since our time is short, we will look closely at the meaning of accompaniment and some of the criteria related to vocational discernment.

**SLIDE TWO**

**Our goal** in this session is to identify formation as a fundamental element to prepare Salesian Cooperators adequately disposed to the vocation and mission to which we are called today.

To remain faithful to our beloved founder, what did Don Bosco say about our vocation and mission?

**SLIDE THREE**

***Let us listen to Don Bosco’s description of the Cooperators from the first issue of the Salesian Bulletin, published in August 1877. It is a concise and efficacious description of the identity and apostolic mission of our Association….***

“They are called Cooperators who wish to be involved in charitable works, not in a general way, but in a specific one – in harmony with and according to the spirit of the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales. One Cooperator can do good by himself, but the fruit shall remain rather limited, and, moreover, of short duration. On the contrary, when united to others, he finds support, counsel, encouragement, and, often with less labor, obtains more because even weak forces become strong when they are joined together. Thus says the well-known adage: “in unity is strength”... And so, our Cooperators, following the goal of the Salesian Congregation, work according to their strength to gather together youth abandoned on the streets and in the piazze who are at risk, bringing them to catechetical instruction, entertaining them on non-workdays, helping them find an upright boss, guiding them, counseling them, and helping them as much is possible to become good Christians and honest citizens. The norms to be followed in these works which we propose to the Salesian Cooperators will be the material of the *Salesian Bulletin*.”

**Clearly Don Bosco envisioned Cooperators to be Good News as they engaged with in the salvation of the young!**

**SLIDE FOUR**

**In Article 6 of the *Project of Life* we find this clear statement of who we are to be today:**

*“Salesian Cooperators live out their faith in their own secular reality. Taking inspiration from Don Bosco’s apostolic project, they have a strong sense of communion*

 *with the other members of the Salesian Family. They commit themselves to the same mission to youth and to ordinary folk in a fraternal and united way.”*

**How can we prepare such Cooperators for today’s young people and those marginalized?**

**SLIDE FIVE**

I suggest we consider, first of all, Joyful Ones! All those in our assembly room, I ask you to please pass the brown bag of candy on your table and take one without looking in the bag.

(Those on Zoom are asked to be a little patient with our process. In a few moments you will participate in the Zoom Chat.)

Please look at the candy you got from the bag, perhaps it is a flavor you like, perhaps it is not.

You now have 30 seconds to find 3 other persons from another table who have candy DIFFERENT from yours. When you hear a bell you will need to listen for further instructions.

(Ring bell)

In your candy group or in the Zoom Chat, I ask you to name CRITERIA you think are necessary to form joyful cooperators. You have 2 mins to share your ideas. Those on ZOOM are encouraged to please use the Group Chat

(Ring bell and change slide)

**SLIDE SIX**

At times we may feel disappointed that our Cooperators don’t demonstrate joy in our shared vocation and mission. In your same group or in the Zoom chat, I now ask you to identify any “red flags” or issues that are obstacles to forming joyful cooperators. You have 2 minutes.

(Ring Bell)

I now invite those in the assembly to share your candy with each other - the kind that each one likes…just for a bit of joy! Please return to your seats. (Zoom Moderator, please give the Chat Room High Fives!)

As we return to our seats, I invite you to take a look at the Zoom comments in our Chat room which are now on our screen display.

**SLIDE SEVEN**

My dear friends, you and I know that formation is the work of God, and that we, as formators are here to help our aspirants to hear God’s call in the ordinary moments of their lives. However, to do this, we too must be able hear God’s voice in our lives. As aspirants and formators, sometimes we just don’t get it. We lose sight of our joy and only see obstacles or issues that make our hearts heavy. We need to remember who we are as God’s children, members of the Salesian family, and those for whom we are sent.

**SLIDE EIGHT**

In June my husband and I went to Rome on a Salesian Family Pilgrimage.

While in Rome we went to the Church of the Quo Vadis, Domine.” In the apocryphal literature of the early Church, there is a story of Peter which describes a scene similar to others in the New Testament. According to this story, Peter is fleeing from Rome during the persecution of Christians under the Emperor Nero; he was travelling along the Appian Way when he meets Christ in a vision. Astonished, he asks 'Domine, quo vadis?” ('Lord, where are you going ?'). Christ replies that he was going to Rome to be crucified a second time. Peter then realizes that his departure from the city is cowardly, and he returns to face whatever persecutions might befall him.

Isn’t it interesting that St. Paul had a similar moment of revelation when he is going off to Damascus to persecute Christians? In both cases, Jesus comes to meet them going the wrong way. This kind of encounter happens again to the disciples on the road to Emmaus who decided to leave Jerusalem after the death of Jesus.

I invite us to pray now with Luke 24:13-35. In this reading of scripture, I invite you to use your imaginations to enter the experience of the disciples leaving Jerusalem, and to enter the experience of Jesus who accompanies them. We will take a few minutes for this quiet reflection.

**SLIDE NINE**

**Meditative reading of Luke 24, 13-35**

*Begin with blank screen of background and Salesian Cooperators logo in lower right corner.*

*First click.*

*Luke 24, 13-35 appears.*

Reader One *begins meditatively to reads Luke 24, 13-35.*

**That very day two of the disciples were going to a village named Emmaus about seven miles from Jerusalem,**

**and talking with each other about all these things that had happened.**

*Second click.*

*Picture appears on left side of slide as reader continues.*

**While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them.**

**But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.**

**And he said to them, “What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?”**

**And they stood still, looking sad.**

**Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?”**

**And he said to them, “What things?”**

**And they said to him, “Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,**

**and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him.**

**But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.**

**Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since this happened.**

**Moreover, some women of our company amazed us.**

**They were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body;**

**and they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive.**

**Some of those who were with us went to the tomb, and found it just as the women had said;**

**but him they did not find.**

**And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!**

**Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?”**

**And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.**

*Third click.*

*Picture appears at lower center of the slide as reader continues.*

**So they drew near to the village to which they were going.**

**He appeared to be going further, but they constrained him, saying,**

**“Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent.”**

**So he went in to stay with them.**

**When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.**

**And their eyes were opened and they recognized him;**

**and he vanished out of their sight.**

*Fourth click.*

*Picture appears on right side of slide as reader continues.*

**They said to each other,**

**“Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road,**

**while he opened to us the Scriptures?”**

**And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem;**

**and they found the Eleven gathered together and those who were with them, who said,**

**“The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!”**

**Then they told what had happened on the road,**

**and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.**

*Brief silent pause before transitioning to next slide, then one click to slide TEN.*

**SLIDE TEN**

**Meditative reflection on the Human dimension of formation**

*Continue the silence as the composite of the three pictures of slide one appear in the middle of slide TEN. Then, after about one minute of silence:*

*First click.*

*Composite fades and single picture appears on left side of slide.*

Brief pause

*Second click.*

*The Human Experience questions enter on the right side of the slide.*

*After another brief silent pause,* Reader Two *meditatively reads the questions, without, however, reading the title (The Human Experience).*

**What were the disciples experiencing in themselves,**

*Brief pause.*

**between themselves,**

*Brief pause.*

**with Jesus the fellow traveler?**

*Slightly longer pause.*

**How was Jesus experiencing himself,**

*Brief pause.*

**the disciples**

*Brief pause.*

**and the journey they were taking together?**

*One minute pause. Then one click to transition to slide ELEVEN.*

**SLIDE ELEVEN**

**Meditative reflection on the Christian dimension of formation**

*Slide 11 begins with the composite of three pictures. After a brief pause:*

*First click.*

*Composite fades and middle picture appears, then moves to left side of slide.*

*After the motion is complete,* Reader One *begins meditatively to read
Luke 24, 30-32.*

**When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.**

**And their eyes were opened and they recognized him;**

**and he vanished out of their sight.**

**They said to each other,**

**“Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road,**

**while he opened to us the Scriptures?”**

*Brief silent pause, then:*

*Second click.*

*The Christian Experience questions enter on the right side of the slide.*

*After another brief silent pause,* Reader Two *meditatively reads the phrases, without, however, reading the title (The Christian Experience).*

**Enter the disciples’ experience of their hearts burning with love and understanding of Jesus.**

**Enter Jesus’ experience of his love and understanding flowing into the disciples in explaining the scriptures and in the Breaking of the Bread.**

*One minute of silence. Then one click to transition to slide TWELVE*

**SLIDE TWELVE**

**Meditative reflection on the Salesian dimension of formation**

*Slide TWELVE begins with the composite of three pictures. After a brief pause:*

*First click.*

*Composite fades and right side picture appears, then moves to left side of slide.*

*After the motion is complete,* Reader One *begins meditatively to read
Luke 24, 32-35.*

**“Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road,**

**while he opened to us the Scriptures?”**

**And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem;**

**and they found the Eleven gathered together and those who were with them, who said,**

**“The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!”**

**Then they told what had happened on the road,**

**and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.**

*Brief silent pause, then:*

*Second click.*

*The Salesian Experience questions enter on the right side of the slide.*

*After another brief silent pause,* Reader Two *meditatively reads the questions, without, however, reading the title (The Salesian Experience).*

**How will I, like the disciples, announce that I have seen the Risen Lord?**

*Slightly longer pause.*

**How will I accompany fellow Cooperator believers as did the Risen Lord?**

*One minute of silence. Then one click to transition to next image*

**Luke 24, 13-35 illustrated in three pictures**

*Then* Reader Two *begins the concluding prayer…*

**Embracing our call and moving beyond any obstacles, we are sent to be Good news for our brothers and sisters, including the young and those most in need**

**Glory be to the Father,**

*Everyone continues:*

***And to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;***

***as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be***

***world without end.***

***Amen.***

**SLIDE 13**

GOAL OF INITIAL FORMATION

 To accompany the Aspirants as they discern and mature in their own personal vocation to assume a responsible commitment to the Church.

ASC Formation Guidelines, 3.1.1

The role of those who accompany the aspirant is not to convince them of their call, but to allow them to discover it through their experience of formation that should foster their growth as a human person, a Christian, and a Salesian. From what we heard yesterday in Antonio’s talk, what kind of responsible commitment to the Church does a Cooperator make? (make the point of being a lay person in the world, as the light of Christ there…)

ACCOMPANIMENT

* It is important that the Aspirants feel the Association is close to their experience and sustaining them both humanly and spirituality.

A formative journey takes time, and during that time life happens, both joyful and difficult. At times the aspirant’s participation may be derailed by a change in employment, personal/ FAMILY SICKNESS, OR the death of a loved one. This situation can become an opportunity to live Salesian spirituality in a deeper way. Our accompaniment can help guide them, but they may or may not complete our “formation program.” Still your friendship that remains open and supportive of them is the greatest lesson anyone can teach.

Always remember that God is the formator who has the formation plan of a lifetime for them. our primary role is to help the aspirants to listen to what God is teaching them in their life journey whether they are in our formation program or not.

* They especially need to feel accompanied and integrated into the life of the Local Center, and participate actively in the encounters, gatherings, and initiatives.

We offered initial formation programs that aspirants from different centers could attend. One at the province level and one at the local level. It was expected that members of the Local center would accompany the aspirants. Likewise, it was expected that the aspirants would attend the Local Center meetings. These are big expectations! There were varying success stories from our two experiences. however, for those aspirants who made their cooperator promise and those who will soon do so there is one common factor. how well did the Center know them as a brother / sister in Christ, and how well did they feel accompanied.

ASC Formation Guidelines, 3.1.5

SLIDE 14

Method of Accompaniment

The accompaniment process involves:

* Walking beside the Aspirant, helping them to know they are loved, and that God loves them and sees them
* Knowing how to listen and being creative in helping them recognize the footsteps of God walking with them, asking questions, like Jesus, or sending them to GO AND SERVE….so they can discover the joy of love and service with the young and the poor
* Knowing how to involve and help them become co-responsible in the life and initiatives of the Center….start small or big, depending on the person, fostering their growth in skills for relationship with others, especially youth, and collaboration too.
* Cultivating a sense of belonging to the Association, through participation also in province, regional, and world initiatives. Explore ANS news at every session!
* Proposing forms of communion and collaboration at the level of the Center, the diocese, the province, and worldwide Salesian family, e.g. retreats for youth and families, outreach projects, festivals, and fundraising

**SLIDE 15**

**Accompaniment must lead to an authentic vision of Salesian life as a joyful commitment and service to the young and to the poorer classes of people, leading one to work at their side in the spirit of the *da mihi animas cetera tolle.***

 ***- ASC Formation Guidelines, 3.1.5***

**NOW A WORD FOR THOSE OF US WITH GRAY HAIR, OR EVEN GRAYING SPIRITS….**

**“Don’t allow yourselves to be uprooted….though you are a migrant for youth….Keep walking….**