

DIREZIONE GENERALE OPERE DON BOSCO
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The General Councillor for Formation

Rome, October 13, 2003
Prot. 03/1224

**To the Provincial Formation Delegates
and the Provincial Formation Commissions**

My dear confreres,

This is the first time I am writing directly to you, even though I have got to know many of you in our regional meetings. I have met so far with the Provincial Formation Delegates of the Regions of Africa & Madagascar, South Asia, East Asia & Oceania, West Europe, Italy & the Middle East, Interamerica and the CISUR Conference. When visiting the Provinces I have also met with the Provincial Formation Commissions. And at least indirectly, through the Regional Formation Coordinators, I have been keeping in touch with everyone.

I am writing to you in connection with the Guidelines that have appeared in the AGC 383 concerning the figure of the Delegate and the tasks of the Provincial Formation Commission. After consulting the Rector Major, I chose this way of highlighting this figure and the commission responsible for provincial animation because at present formation in the Provinces faces new tasks and challenges. When a committed and competent group studies, plans, offers suggestions, inspires, undertakes initiatives and verifies them in the formation field, a Province makes considerable progress in a very short time.

The horizon of our work is the application of the “Ratio”, which is proving to be an effective instrument of guidance and governance in the Provinces and is increasingly appreciated by everyone. We are also concerned with putting the GC25 into practice, as it has a lot to do with formation and the changes it proposes require new things to be learned in the spiritual, relational and pastoral fields. In this letter I am not going to dwell on the contents or motivations of our formation work today, but on the *basic things required* to make it effective, viz. *a planning mentality, forms of collaboration and coordination, a common understanding of problems and their solutions*.

1. The Provincial Formation Delegate and Commission

I think it was important to underline the tasks of the Provincial Formation Delegate and Commission, offering a summary of what is found in the “Ratio”, the GC25 and the AGC382. A clear picture helps to give importance and a sense of direction to your work.

Do not be put off by the many tasks set before you; they are to be done gradually and steadily. What is important is to be focused on growth. Reflection must be a fundamental attitude of the Delegate and the Commission. Your regular tasks must be to follow up initial and ongoing formation. And, as for team-work and networking, they are two ways of connecting with others and discharging your responsibilities.

You have some important tasks to carry out in the area of planning: there is the formation section of the Province Directory, the Provincial Formation Plan, the initiation of communities and confreres to the Salesian Community Plan and the Personal Plan of life, and the promotion of the Salesian Brother's vocation. This is a responsibility confined to these two or three years; when these plans are drawn up, it will only be a matter of seeing that they are implemented, evaluating them and eventually modifying them. The initial effort is precisely one that requires a planning mentality.

2. The programming work of the Provincial Formation Delegate and Commission

In recent months, some helpful materials and guidelines have been sent to you from me and my Department through your Regional Formation Coordinator, the Acts of the General Council and the Congregation's own portal, www.sdb.org.

You have been given materials concerning the Salesian community plan and the formation community plan as well as the personal plan of life for those in ongoing formation and for those in initial formation. You have received guidelines for formulating the formation section of your Province Directory, for contributing the part concerning formation to the POI – this appeared in AGC 381 - and for promoting the Salesian Brother's vocation. Very soon you will be given some materials and guidelines regarding the Provincial Formation Plan and the fragility of vocations in the Provinces. Some Regions are already engaged in an evaluation of their formation communities; others will be asked to do this, eventually.

These materials and guidelines were all produced at the same time since each Province has its own point of departure and its own pace as it forges ahead. It is important for every Delegate and every Commission, in consultation with the Provincial, to lay down its own time-frame and contents for its onward journey. This is the programming work of the PFC (Provincial Formation Commission). Without a doubt, the PFC's work in this year, 2003 –2004, must concentrate on the Provincial Chapter for what concerns the formation section of the Province Directory, the operational guidelines of the POI on the subject of formation, and the promotion of the Salesian Brother's vocation; not so urgent is the work on the Provincial Formation Plan.

3. The Regional Formation Coordinator and Commission

Finally, a basic element of our formation work is the linkage with and coordination among the Provincial Formation Delegates of the same Region. There are Regional Commissions operating or coming into being in all the Regions. Only two Regions have a coordination on the basis of Conferences or Groups of Provinces.

In almost all the Regions these Commissions hold one or two meetings a year. The key figure in all this joint planning and work is the Regional Coordinator who arranges these meetings and facilitates a link with the Department. For its part, the Department is ready to send a representative to the Commission's annual meetings and would like to receive reports of what is being done. We find ourselves at the beginning of a new process which is already bearing good fruit. There are Regions which do their own programming as well.

The Region is the place where formation problems can be better understood, experiences more easily shared, and more appropriate solutions found. The Provinces today are not in a position to meet all the aspects and needs of formation all by themselves. There is a need to foster interprovincial collaboration, a sharing of ideas and experiences, joint endeavours and solidarity, both in initial and in ongoing formation. The Regional Commission serves to create this mentality and this new space for work in the formation field.

Let me thank you for giving me your attention. I look forward to an increasing cooperation between us. Formation is an exhilarating work because it brings us into direct contact with the mystery of freedom and God's grace in the human person; its challenges are daunting. It is for this reason that we let ourselves be guided by the Spirit of Christ and entrust ourselves to the support of Mary our Help.

With esteem and gratitude,

Fr. Francis Cereda