



DIREZIONE GENERALE OPERE DON BOSCO
Via della Pisana 1111 - 00163 Rome

The General Councillor for formation

Rome, 18 January 2012
Prot. 12/0071

To the Reverend
Fr. Provincial
at his address

To the Reverend
Provincial Formation Delegate
at his address

Subject: Revision of the “Ratio” concerning the initial formation of the Salesian Brother

Dear Provincial and Delegate,

After a study in our Formation Department, a consultation in the Provinces and a deliberation in the General Council, on the 13th of January this year the Rector Major with his Council approved some modifications to the text of the “Ratio” on the formation of the Salesian Brother.

One of the four elements needed to foster an appreciation and a growth of the lay form of our Salesian consecrated vocation is a **high quality formation**. In fact, the “care and advancement of the Salesian Brother’s vocation” requires, in addition to formation, a widespread **knowledge** of his vocational identity, his “**visibility**”, and the **promotion** of his vocation (cfr. AGC 382, Rome 2003, pp. 29-43).

GC26 offered a new outlook on the Salesian Brother’s vocation in its third key issue by describing the uniqueness of the Salesian consecrated vocation in its two forms. New situations also called for appropriate responses in the formation of the Salesian Brother. And so, some modifications of the “Ratio” became necessary for the whole Congregation. I am giving you here a bird’s-eye view of the changes that you will find in the attachment to this letter.

1. A global presentation of the formation process

Oftentimes in the past, the formation of the Salesian Brother was fraught with uncertainties. Improvisations took place under the guise of flexibility. For various reasons of vocation and of formation, a global view of the process became a felt need. This global view has now been formulated, keeping in mind that the formation of the Salesian, whether brother or priest, is “one in its essential content and diversified in its concrete expressions” (Const. 100).

In number 323 of the revised text, you will now find a global presentation of the formation process of the Salesian Brother. The uncertainties surrounding the stages of formation have been swept away, and our candidates are now offered a clear picture of the Salesian Brother’s formation, which is on a par with that of the Salesian cleric, albeit with its proper characteristics. **It now falls to each Province to lay down its practical decisions in this matter in the formation section of its Province Directory.**

2. Vocation discernment

Till now a serious omission in the formation method was the scant attention paid to the aspect of **vocational discernment** concerning the two forms of the Salesian consecrated vocation. This was mostly left to the individual; there was no mention made of **objective criteria**; and no distinctions were drawn regarding each phase’s contribution to the discernment itself.

Now instead you will find importance given to discernment. In the first place, it is recommended that, following the presentation in the prenovitiate of Salesian consecrated life in its two forms and the presence of a Salesian Brother on the formation team (n. 345), there should be a **discernment carried out in the novitiate by all the novices regarding their own Salesian vocation as future priest or brother** (nn. 371, 384), drawing on and studying the indications given in numbers 84-87 of “Criteria and norms”.

For the Salesian Brother, the discernment carries on - during the postnovitiate, when he has **to identify the field of work** in which to carry out the Salesian mission in the future (n. 417); in the choice he has to make of the **professional qualification** to be achieved, preferably before practical training (n. 409, 417, 425); and in **practical training**, when he is assigned to a setting in which to practise the professional qualification he has acquired (n. 439).

Furthermore, **in the course of preparation for perpetual profession**, Salesian clerics and Brothers are asked to **review their entire formation process** in order to deepen their motivations, also regarding the form of vocation they have chosen; this discernment is done before they begin their specific formation, if it should precede their perpetual profession (n. 512).

Finally, a more serious and responsible process is to be embarked upon in the case of a Salesian Brother asking for a **change in his choice of vocation**; however, such a case must be an exception, and the conclusion of the process will be a decision by the Rector Major (n. 481).

3. Academic studies

Academic studies are recognized as important for the Salesian Brother. They are not a useless lengthening of the formation process to the detriment of professional qualification. A Brother needs a **philosophical** and **pedagogical** as well as a **theological** and **pastoral** foundation.

To this end, provision is now made for an equivalent two-year, or at most three-year, programme of philosophical and pedagogical studies during the postnovitiate; these studies will be a help to understand contemporary culture and to acquire the skills needed in the field of education (nn. 409, 417, 425).

The Salesian Brother's specific formation too, which includes theological and pastoral studies, is now spelt out more clearly so as to avoid any confusion between specific formation and professional qualification. Explicit mention is made of the need for all Salesian Brothers to complete this phase in a regional or interregional centre established for the purpose (nn. 456, 480).

4. Professional qualification

In the recent past, professional qualification was often neglected because it was not properly made part of the formation process. And though, according to our tradition, the world of work and professional formation continue to be very important, not all Salesian Brothers have felt drawn to work in this field and therefore to acquire the necessary technical skills.

The fact is that the needs of our mission are many and varied, and therefore qualification in the professional field includes acquiring the necessary skills needed to fulfil tasks in various other fields besides professional training, such as, for example, the school, social communication, social work, administration and management. Such a qualification must ensure for the Brother a competence that puts him on a par with a lay person exercising the same profession in civil society (n. 409).

Professional qualification requires a discernment to be done during the postnovitiate (nn. 409, 417, 425); it is best achieved, if possible, before practical training (n. 439); and it can be completed with a professional specialization after specific formation (nn. 456, 480).

It is my hope that all this may contribute to an enhancement of the quality of formation given to this form of the Salesian consecrated vocation.

May our Salesian Brothers, Blessed Artemide Zatti, Venerable Simon Srugi, and the Servant of God, Stephen Sandor, intercede for us and obtain for us from God the gift of this precious vocation.

With my cordial greetings,

In Don Bosco,

Fr. Francis Cereda

REVISION OF THE “RATIO” REGARDING THE FORMATION OF THE SALESIAN BROTHER

Chap. V: THE SALESIAN FORMATION PROCESS

310. Throughout this journey Salesian formation demands at one and the same time a *basic equality and a differentiation* that respect and promote the specificity of the different vocations. The Constitutions say: “Lay Salesians, future priests and permanent deacons normally have the same initial formation and follow curricula of equivalent level, with the same phases and similar content and objectives. The necessary differences are determined by the specific vocation of each one, by his personal gifts and inclinations and the duties of our apostolate”.¹

311. The Constitutions describe how the vocation and formation of the Salesian are realized *in phases or successive moments*:

- the prenovitiate, a time for a deeper study of one’s initial choice of vocation, and preparation for the novitiate;
- the novitiate, the beginning of the experience of religious life;
- the period of temporary profession in its different phases: the immediate postnovitiate, which helps growth in an integration of faith, culture and life; practical training, which aims at forging a personal synthesis out of an intense lived experience of Salesian activity; specific formation, which completes initial formation and, in the case of clerics, continues until priestly ordination;
- the period of preparation for the perpetual profession, which verifies the spiritual maturity required and leads to a definitive commitment; and
- ongoing formation, which continues the maturing process until the end of one’s life.

323. *In all the phases of formation, account should be taken of the basic equality and of the differentiation due to the specific nature of the vocation of each person in formation. In particular*

- *in the prenovitiate, the Salesian consecrated vocation is presented in its two forms, ministerial and lay, and also by meeting significant figures; in this way the prenovice can become better acquainted with the forms of the Salesian vocation and reach a first orientation, without arriving at a decision about them;*
- *in the novitiate, each novice under the guidance of the director of novices, carries out a process of discernment regarding both forms of the Salesian vocation, in order to arrive at a specific option for his future as a Salesian Brother or a Salesian Priest/Permanent Deacon; this discernment and vocational choice precede the request for admission to the first profession, in which it is necessary to express one’s own vocational decision; in this process the Provincial is also involved;*
- *in the postnovitiate period, the Salesian Brothers with the help of their Rector and Provincial carry out a process of discernment with regard to the professional area in which they feel called to develop their own gifts and capabilities in response to the needs of the Province; in this phase they undertake two or three years of philosophical and pedagogical studies;*
- *having completed at least two years of philosophical and pedagogical studies, the Salesian Brothers begin or continue a period of “technical, scientific or professional*

¹ C. 106, quoted in part by FSDB 49.

training” for the purpose of acquiring a recognised “specific qualification,”² if possible before practical training;

- for practical training the Salesian Brothers are preferably placed in situations where they can exercise their professional qualification and assess the discernment undertaken in the postnovitiate regarding their future professional area;³
- the specific formation for the Salesian Brothers, as for the Salesian clerics, immediately follows practical training,⁴ it lasts for two years and is carried out in one of the regional or inter-regional centres approved by the Rector Major with the General Council;
- preparation for perpetual profession is done as far as possible, by the Salesian Brothers and the clerics together, before or during the specific formation;
- the “quinquennium” involves both the Salesian priests/permanent deacons in the first five years after their ordination and the Salesian Brothers in the first five years after their specific formation;
- after specific formation, at a suitable time, if necessary every Salesian Brother should have the possibility of completing some specialisation in the specific field of his profession and in the skills needed to fulfil the various tasks and roles that will be entrusted to him. In this way he completes the professional qualification begun during the time of temporary profession.

Decisions regarding the formation curriculum for the Salesian Brothers should be included in the formation section of the Province Directory.

Chap. VI: PRENOVIATE

345. ... The one responsible for the prenovices collaborates with a *team of formation guides*, who may also hold posts of responsibility in the community or in the Salesian institution. It is important that among them there be *at least a Salesian Brother* in order to enable the prenovices to have a direct knowledge of the two forms of the Salesian vocation. The presentation of the two vocations to the Salesian life, already begun in the aspirantate, continues in the prenovitiate, and the decision to embrace one or other of the two forms is subsequently taken in the novitiate...

346. The prenovitiate is not only a time of formation, but also of discernment.

The prenovice:

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- acquires a good and practical knowledge of the two forms of the Salesian vocation.
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Chap. VII: NOVITIATE

371. The novitiate year is *a time of intense vocation discernment* carried out in an atmosphere of faith, sincere openness and systematic guidance.

As he gradually gains experience of Salesian consecrated life, the novice assesses his situation before God: the place that Jesus occupies in his life, his assimilation of the values of his vocation, his motivations, and the progress he has made in his formation and, with the guidance of his director and the help of his community, he reaches a degree of serenity and clarity about God’s will in his regard.

² Cf. Reg. 95.

³ Cf. FSDB 442.

⁴ Cf. C 116, FSDB 479.

Important moments of this process are also *the periodic assessments and above all the final discernment* which directly involves the novice himself. They are moments in which the novice examines himself in relation to his everyday experience on the one hand, and in the light of his Salesian identity and the requirements and motivations to live it on the other.

There is a special moment during the novitiate when every novice is helped by the novice director to undertake a discernment concerning both forms of the Salesian consecrated vocation, and before making his request to be admitted to profession comes to a specific option for the future as a Salesian Brother or a Salesian priest/permanent deacon. In particular it is a discernment regarding whether in addition to the other criteria, in educative pastoral work with the young the novice has a greater propensity for “the specific qualities of his lay status, which make him in a particular way a witness to God's Kingdom in the world, close as he is to the young and to the realities of working life”⁵ or for the “ministry, which makes him a sign of Christ the Good Shepherd, especially by preaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments”⁶.

384. *Every three months, the director of novices with the Council of the community, will make a careful assessment of the maturing of each novice in his vocation. The novices themselves should be trained to make a constant discernment on their own account, so as to come to perceive God's will and purify their own motivations.*

*In addition every novice is to carry out a process of discernment with the Director of Novices regarding the two forms of the Salesian consecrated vocation making use especially of the criteria expressed in “Criteria and norms” in numbers 84 - 87. Before the request to be admitted to profession is made, each novice clarifies his own specific vocational orientation as a future Salesian Brother or as a future Salesian priest / deacon. The vocational orientation ought to become definitive, for all, before specific formation after practical training or before perpetual profession, should this precede specific formation.*⁷

To encourage a proper discernment and to highlight the Salesian consecrated vocation, if there is the custom of giving the Salesian clerics the cassock during the novitiate, this should be transferred to the time of conclusion of the novitiate.

Chap. VIII: POSTNOVITIATE

409. Without compromising the fundamental value of his basic philosophical, pedagogical, pastoral and social formation, so as to be able to begin or continue qualification in the professional field preferably before practical training, it is not convenient that the length of philosophical and pedagogical studies for the Brother postnovices be ordinarily more than two-three years.

Qualification in their professional field regards the skills needed to fulfil the various tasks and roles that will be entrusted to them such as for example, *the vast area of school, professional training, social communication, social work, and the different aspects of administration and management.* Everything possible must be done to ensure that the studies give the brothers a competence that puts them *on a par with a lay person* exercising the same profession in civil society.

417. *The Rector continues the action of the director of novices.* With wisdom and sound judgement he animates the life and progress of the community, following up and helping the postnovices especially through personal guidance and the friendly talk, the spiritual direction of

⁵ C. 45.

⁶ C. 45.

⁷ In “Criteria and norms” number 7 states: “it is best that the vocational choice is made clear from the first profession, and in any case, before the beginning of specific formation and perpetual profession.”

conscience and periodical conferences. He helps to keep the vocation alive in each one, to strengthen the motivations of the Salesian lay and priestly consecrated life, and to foster everyone's participation and responsibility in the work of formation.

In addition, under the responsibility of the Provincial, he accompanies each Brother postnovice in undertaking a **discernment regarding the profession** in which he feels called to develop his gifts and capabilities in response to the needs of the Province, so as to be able to undertake, after the philosophical and pedagogical studies an appropriate period of "studies of a technical, scientific or professional nature,"⁸ in view of a professional qualification.

Those responsible for formation find in the community and personal assessment they carry out from time to time a useful means to evaluate, stimulate and guide the formation process.

In this phase *the professors* wield great influence. It is their task to provide a solid and convincing frame of reference, and to develop a knowledge that becomes sound judgement, a discerning mind that can read situations and an ability to form a synthesis.

It is also important to draw **on the contribution of the laity and the members of the Salesian Family in the formation of the postnovices**. This must be done in a way that ensures that their contribution is truly valuable.

425. *The length of philosophical and pedagogical studies for the Salesian Brother during the postnovitiate ought to be at least two years. So as to allow a suitable time for professional qualification, in ordinary circumstances it is not convenient that he extends philosophical and pedagogical studies of the postnovitiate for more than three years.*

Chap. IX: PRACTICAL TRAINING

439. *The Provincial is conscious of his responsibility, first of all in choosing the community to which to send the confrere for his practical training: it must be a community that can guarantee the conditions for the formation to be imparted in this phase, and in the case of a Salesian Brother, a situation in which he can exercise the professional qualification he has acquired. He indicates to the Rector the aspects that need to be taken care of in offering guidance for formation. He makes it his concern to have personal contact with the confrere in practical training and to show solicitude in guiding him. He can also let himself be assisted by another qualified confrere in this task. He follows up, with his Council, the periodical assessment that is made of the one in practical training. With the help of the Provincial Commission for formation, he provides appropriate initiatives of animation and guidance for those in practical training and of assistance to their communities, following a well thought out programme. These initiatives are occasions for a direct exchange of views among the confreres engaged in the same programme, for a sharing of experiences and reflections, and for mutual support. They help to further the individual's progress in his formation. When one finishes his practical training, it is appropriate that there be an overall assessment - on the part of the Provincial and the community, and on his part as well - of his entire experience and of the progress he has made in his vocation.*

Chap. X: SPECIFIC FORMATION

456. *The period of specific formation is distinct from the time of professional preparation. It is not possible to undertake together specific formation and professional preparation. Professional*

⁸ Cf. FSDB 409.

qualification has its first opportunity during the period of temporary profession, preferably before practical training, and concludes after specific formation with a possible specialisation.

480. *It is the responsibility of the Provinces to ensure that the brother confreres receive, after their practical training, the specific formation and professional training laid down by the Constitutions and General Regulations: the specific formation in the intellectual sector consists in an adequate theological, pedagogical and Salesian preparation appropriate to his specific vocation. After specific formation there could be the possibility of further specialisation, in order to complete the professional qualification begun preferably before practical training.*⁹.

481. *The Salesian brother's vocation is a gift from the Lord that must be taken care of and cultivated by the confrere himself and by the whole community. From this point of view, therefore, the request of a Salesian brother to embark on a formation curriculum with a view to becoming a permanent deacon or priest must be the subject of particular discernment with all the consideration and reserve called for by a change of vocation.*

In the case of a temporarily professed Salesian Brother the decision will be taken by the Provincial with his Council, according to a process he will determine.

In the case of a perpetually professed Salesian Brother the request must be addressed to the Rector Major, after it has obtained approval of the Provincial with his Council. Before the request is presented to the Rector Major, a serious and responsible process needs to be ensured within the Province:

- *the Salesian Brother making the request begins a process of discernment with a spiritual guide; should the discernment with the spiritual guide conclude with an indication for a change in the vocational option, he approaches the Provincial;*
- *the Provincial with his Council proceed to approve the request or not, considering the vocational history and the motivations which have emerged, the opinion of the Rector of the community, examining whether the confrere shows clear signs of a vocation to the Salesian diaconate or priesthood, and finally identifying the new factors that have led to this change; in the case of the approval on the part of the Provincial and his Council, the Provincial sends all the documentation to the Rector Major, with whom the final decision rests.*

Chap. XI: PREPARATION FOR PERPETUAL PROFESSION

512. *The preparation for perpetual profession comprises the period of verification and discernment in view of the application, the process of admission and the preparation for celebrating the act of profession; it is not limited to preparing for the ceremony, after the admission has taken place.*

In the period of preparation for perpetual profession by Salesian clerics and Salesian Brothers careful attention should be given to discernment concerning the two forms, ministerial and lay, of the Salesian vocation in view of a definitive choice. The same careful discernment should be undertaken before the start of specific formation, should this precede perpetual profession. This discernment is to be undertaken not only by the one in formation but also by the Provincial with his Council.

Chap. XII: ONGOING FORMATION

No change.

⁹ Cfr. Reg. 98.