

INM-KMJ-CIR 19/09-2018

SEPTEMBER 2018

LAY COLLABORATION IN OUR SALESIAN MISSION

My dear Confreres,



Gilbert Keith Chesterton once remarked that **every modern discussion begins one step too late!** The discussion on collaboration of lay people in our Salesian Mission is not new to us, but perhaps we have kept it only at the discussion level, with not much of conscious effort towards making it a visible and perceptible reality. It is true that in all our settings, we do have lay people working with and for us. **But it is high time we see them as “collaborators” and “co-workers”** and not just as hired or paid workers. Jesus says in **John 15:15**: *“I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father”*. This is the

attitude we Salesians need to have with regard to lay people who work with us in various sectors of our Mission. Therefore, in this Circular, I wish to reflect with you on the imperative need for us to do this in a more tangible way, by first of all, accepting the fact that “lay collaborators” are the parallel rails on which Don Bosco’s Mission can effectively and effectually be implemented.

When we think of lay collaboration in our Mission, **we need not immediately see them as a “threat”** to our authority but rather as an extension of our visibility, credibility and identity. It is true that at the moment we Salesians are blest with sufficient vocations, but it won’t be too long before this scenario changes, and hence “forewarned is to be forearmed”.

From the beginning of his apostolic activity, Don Bosco incorporated in his mission many lay people in so close an involvement that he had in mind a Congregation of religious with vows and a common life (Salesians) and of lay people (extern Salesians) linked to the same mission of service to the young according to their possibilities.

Today the involvement of the laity in the educative and pastoral mission of Don Bosco is a well-known fact, even if in most cases it is a matter of a presence which is prevalently professional or fortuitous and which should mature into a conscious option. **There is an urgent need to broaden and qualify the involvement of lay people** who are willing to become part of this vast movement of persons working for the salvation of the young, inside and outside Salesian structures, in the Church and civil institutions (GC 24).

The Theme of the **24th General Chapter** of the Salesian Congregation in 1996 was **“Salesians and Lay people: communion and sharing in the spirit and mission of Don Bosco”**. It was already here that we wanted to fix attention on the new relationship between SDBs and laity, and hence on the consequent demand for a change in mentality and style of life, in a common process of holiness and commitment.

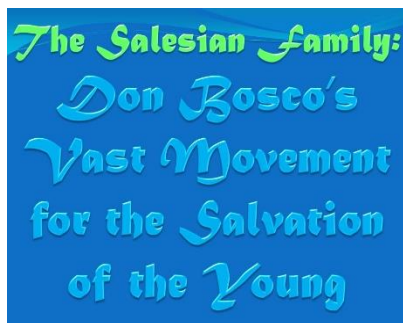
In practice the new rapport between SDBs and laity were to be realized through processes and strategies which are interdependent:

- Convinced and sincere INVOLVEMENT by both SDBs and Lay people
- which matures into concrete and effective SHARED RESPONSIBILITY
- with the necessary reciprocal and transparent COMMUNICATION
- qualified by an adequate FORMATION of a mutual and complementary nature.

It is not sufficient that there be facts or situations in which lay people are involved, but there is need for a conscious acceptance on the part of the SDBs of the necessity of promoting shared responsibility. It is a question of creating or intensifying a new rapport between SDBs and laity, respectful of the identity and functions proper to each without confusion of roles.

Lay persons too of other religions, those practising no religion, and non-believers all deserve our attention. Starting from their availability for involvement, they are called to grow in a valid, albeit only partial, sharing of our educative and social objectives. This sharing should be fostered also with all those who work for the benefit of youth.

We will give special emphasis to lay collaboration by providing our lay co-workers with a **strong foundation in Salesian spirituality and by inviting them to join us in a collegial style of ministry.** Effective collaboration even at this point of time is absolutely necessary for a healthy Mission.



The 25th General Chapter followed up the importance of Lay collaboration as can be seen from the prophetic words of Pope John Paul II to the member of GC 25: "You have chosen as the theme of the Chapter: "The Salesian community today". **You are well aware that you must renew your methods and manner of working, so that your "Salesian" identity may clearly emerge in today's different social situations that require openness to the contribution of lay collaborators with whom you share the spirit and charism that Don Bosco left to you as his legacy.** Your

experience in recent years has enlightened you on the great opportunities for this collaboration, that will enable the various members and groups of the Salesian family to grow in communion and to develop a common apostolic and missionary spirit. **To open yourselves to cooperation with lay people it is important that you bring into focus the special identity of your communities:** may they be communities as Don Bosco wanted them, gathered around the Eucharist and motivated by deep love for Blessed Mary, ready to work together, sharing a single educational and pastoral plan; communities that can motivate and involve others, especially by their example.



Who are our Lay Collaborators?

Having seen the chronological process that has evolved with regard to Lay Collaboration, we can define the laity as those Catholics (or non-Catholics) who are neither ordained nor consecrated religious. Apparently, there seems to be nothing remarkable or notable about being a lay person! This is probably because we have presumed, in other words, that in order to have a role of any consequence in the Church one must be ordained. This is challenging, because **we will not solve the question of lay participation in the Church through ordination – that is, through abolishing the lay state.** It seems that full membership in the Church, at least according to our habits of speech, belongs to someone else, the hierarchy! This is a wrong notion that many people have and unfortunately, we Salesians can also think likewise!

The importance of an interior life is crucial and so, the fostering of lay spirituality is essential for the Catholic laity. Everyone has a distinct role within the Church. For example, the Church should participate in politics via lay people, who in turn must be encouraged by bishops in undertaking this vocation. Therefore, **it must not be forgotten that the role of the Catholic laity in both the Church and the changing society of today is crucial.** Lectors and cantors, lay ministers of the Eucharist or lay teachers in Catholic schools provide perfect examples of this. The mission of laity in the Church finds consistent parallels with its mission in the world, both directed toward the actualization of Christ's message. The Church's specific mission is a religious one, namely, to put into action the Kingdom of God; the lay, in virtue of their special vocation, must contribute to the sanctification of the world by fulfilling their respective duties at home, in the workplace, and in the public forum. **Members of the Catholic laity find salvation not only in their service to the Church on Sunday, but also through their daily lives.**



What is the need for Lay Collaboration?

Given this state of affairs, a genuine collaboration in the work of the Church may seem impossible. Collaboration therefore implies and indeed requires, some sort of equality: **one collaborates with one's peers; one delegates to one's subordinates.** If the lay role in the Church is entirely subordinate to that of the clergy, then the best we can hope for is the delegation of certain responsibilities to the laity. This is equally true also in our Salesian Mission, be it academic, social or pastoral. What sort of equality does true collaboration require? We should likely insist upon three prerequisites for a true collaboration: first, the collaborators must have equal **responsibility** for the end result. Second, the contribution of each of the collaborators should have comparable **dignity**. The test of this is that there are real grounds for taking counsel together with respect to the task at hand. Third, there must be a real difference in **competence** of office and in gifts and talents on the part of the collaborators: one does not collaborate with oneself.

Collaboration is explicitly called for in the Church's Magisterium. We read, for example, in ***Apostolicam Actuositatem***, "*As far as possible the laity ought to provide helpful collaboration for every apostolic and missionary undertaking sponsored by their local parish*".

Collaboration is possible in that our mission is common: no one among us, lay, ordained or religious, has greater responsibility for the mission than any other, and no one among us, lay, ordained or religious, has greater dignity in that work than another, unless by virtue, not of vocation, but of holiness. We are peers in the Church's mission. The Mission of the Lord, which is to redeem mankind, is that of the whole Church: the triple vocation of the Christian, the call to holiness, to ecclesial communion and to apostolic mission, is common; it pertains to all of us as the Body of Christ, and therefore to each of us as members of that Body, **"You are the Body of Christ and, individually, members of it"** (1 Cor. 12:27).

The work of the laity involves faithfulness to Christ and faithfulness in all of the secular endeavours of modern society. To be faithful is to stay, to remain with another regardless of what might occur, **to look and not look away.** Those who have been given the divine gift of faith are able to look upon human realities and to see them with Christ. Such a one is able to judge wisely the things of earth, the secular things, precisely because he or she loves them in Christ.

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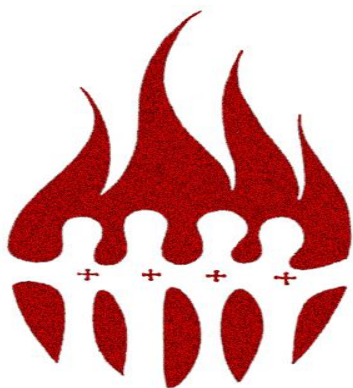


Pope Francis said that one of the great challenges facing the Church in this generation is to foster in all the faithful a sense of personal responsibility for the Church's mission, and to enable them to fulfill that responsibility as missionary disciples, as a leaven of the Gospel in our world. This will require creativity in adapting to changed situations, carrying forward the legacy of the past not primarily by maintaining our structures and institutions, which have served us well, but above all by being open to the possibilities which the Spirit opens up to us and communicating the joy of the Gospel, daily and in every season of our life.

A challenge before us Salesians is the need to **change our mentality** and **develop an awareness** of the specific contribution of lay people to the Salesian mission. We may think that because we have more than sufficient vocations, lay collaboration is not the need of the hour! But this is not the right mindset. We praise and thank the Almighty for the religious vocations and we also nurture a firm commitment to form our lay collaborators in the true Salesian spirit.

Therefore, we Salesians need to make the Educative Pastoral Community the primary setting for the formation of Salesians and laity together. We have to **promote involvement** and participation of laypeople in **setting up and animating educative pastoral communities** and to **develop a participatory style of exercising authority.** We need to promote various formation programs in the provinces and communities at the local level for Salesians and lay collaborators. We need to also create frequent opportunities for Salesians and laypeople to come together, such as live-in programs, retreats, celebrations, study of themes relevant to Salesian mission and other meetings of a fraternal nature.

Our Province needs to give life to new centres of Salesian Cooperators & Past Pupils and a special effort will have to be made that every local community learn about the secular institute of the Volunteers of Don Bosco. We Salesians will need to intensify our collaboration and network with others, especially non-governmental organizations, to promote socio-economic development and to help our youth in leadership roles, both in civil and political life.



Lay Collaboration in our Parish Setting

In the parish setting there is already a structure that caters to the lay participation in a profound way. In the structure of the parish administration we have the **Anbiam, Pious Associations, Parish Council, and the Finance Committee.** These groups if conducted efficiently the lay participation in the Parish will be very effective.

Anbiam plays a vital role in the spiritual formation of the people in the parish. Anbiam leaders must first be chosen democratically. Then they need to be given a basic formation all together before they assume their duties. The Anbiam leaders need to organize their respective meetings regularly. Anbiam play a vital role in the animation of the liturgy and in family visits.

Pious associations also have a vibrant role in any parish. It is a source to build the spiritual edifice of the Parish. They can involve in both the spiritual and social activities of the parish.

For the administration of the Parish, **the Parish Council** plays a vivacious role in the administration of the Parish. They come together under the leadership of the Parish Priest to plan and execute various programs in the Parish. The Financial sector can often be a thorn in the flesh for the Parish priest. Therefore, in the given parochial structure, the Finance Committee helps him by following up the various sources of income to the Parish – shops, book depot, any place offered as rent, etc. and by exploring the various ways of increasing the finance of the Parish.

If these official sectors are followed in a Parish the lay participation would be admirable. In this endeavour the following must be kept in mind: **The Salesian community should be one and not divided**; The Parish Priest should take efforts to first form the members of these sectors in the right spirit of the Gospel values and that these positions are not for ulterior motives but to be of service to the Parish, in the name of Jesus Christ, the High Priest. Finally, **both Salesians and lay collaborators should have in mind the spirit and service of the Mission** so as to enhance the true faith and social development of the society.

Lay Collaboration with the Youth in our Educational Institutions and Youth Centres

I have already reflected with you on this theme in my previous Circulars at the beginning of this year, when we dealt with the Strenna 2018 as well as with the Salesian Education System. Still, I would like to add here a few more relevant points, which if implemented, can very well help us to experience productively the inevitability of **lay collaboration, instead of competition**, in order to be faithful, and successful in our Mission.

- a) **Strong ties** among school personnel, be it Salesians or lay, parents, and those who help us on a regular basis, with an integrated existing support network for the Students Body.
- b) Leadership focused on cultivating teachers, parents, and Salesian community members for an **eventual sharing of responsibility** in the school's development.
- c) An effective system to **improve professional capacity** by providing ongoing support and guidance for teachers, including opening teachers' classroom work for examination by colleagues and external consultants, to give them proficiency in their teaching and to make them stronger in the Mission.
- d) School personnel need to **engage in regular and extensive communication** with parents to coordinate support for students.
- e) We should always remember that **working together generates a greater commitment** and long-lasting standards.

Lay Collaboration in other sectors of our Mission

Finally, apart from the above major areas where lay collaborators are cooperative in our Mission, we can also think of other areas where we can employ their expertise.

1. To have **annual or biennial brainstorming sessions** with experts in various sectors of our mission (Academic & Pastoral) so that we can be up to date with the mode and modality of our Mission. This helps us to get a consciousness of current scenarios in social cultural and political aspects in a broader perspective.

2. Since **Social Media** is highly influential in our society today, it is imperative for us to enter this sector on an imposing measure. Web Forums, Webinars on our Salesian Mission & Ministry as well as the Salesian Charism can help orient lay people not only in general but more on specifics and it may influence them for voluntary participation, keeping in mind the antiphon that *“seekers may have more zeal compared to invitees”*. Salesians can provide the content for this and lay collaborators, who are hi-tech, can do the conscientization.

3. Encouraging **Volunteerism** among lay people from our own schools, colleges, parishes and mission stations and then eventually forming them to take up roles and responsibilities in their own settings, will in due course also bring about religious vocations or give us sturdy and robust lay people in the imminent evolution of our Mission. This is a concept that is still in its infancy and we Salesians need to make a conscious and resolute choice in this regard.

NEWS FROM THE PROVINCE

SANCTITY IN INM

I am happy to inform you that **Fr. Vincent Durairaj** and **Fr. Amalraj Thomas** are appointed to pursue the **Cause of Canonization of Fr. Mantovani, Fr. Castelli and Fr. M. C. Antony**. In view of this I exhort you to invoke these good and holy Salesians who have lived and worked in our Province. They will intercede for us before the Almighty. If there are any graces received through them or any others, no matter how insignificant they may be, please report to the appointed Salesians.

Silver Jubilarians Course in DBRC Bangalore from 12th to 25th September

Every year Don Bosco Renewal Centre (DBRC) Bangalore organizes a special Salesian renewal short course for those celebrating their Silver Jubilee of First Profession. I have already informed the Silver Jubilarians of our Province to attend this course which will help them the opportunity to reflect on the numerous graces that God has blest them through the Salesian Congregation and the numerous people they have encountered during these twenty-five years as a Salesian. We will certainly accompany them with our prayers as they experience this short, yet intense, time of ongoing formation.

NECDB Program in SRM

The National Educational Conference of Don Bosco Schools – India (NECDBS) is organized once in two years. It gives me immense pleasure to state that the Salesian Province of Chennai is indeed proud to organize the 5th NECDBS with a national presence, celebrating the 8th year of its foundation, in dedicated service, enabling schools to create an ambiance for students. This time, the 5th NECDBS (National Educational Conference of Don Bosco Schools – India) will be held at the SRM Institute of Science and Technology (formerly known as SRM University), Kattankulathur, Chennai from 28th September to 1st October 2018. The Conference will commence at 4.00 p.m. on 28th September and will conclude on 1st October 2018 at 1.00 p.m. The objective of this Conference is to facilitate the Principals with new ideas and to exchange the best practices followed at various educational institutions across the Country. We are happy to inform you that about 250 Principals from Don Bosco Schools across India, who are directly responsible for 10 lakh students will be attending this Conference. This Conference will feature renowned education specialists with the theme “Committed to Accompanying the Young”, with a special outlook of our Strenna 2018, developing a framework of Commitment and Accompaniment, in shaping and moulding the young in our Don Bosco Schools, all over India.

BOSCONET

BOSCONET wants the Development Office in every Province to collect the data of all the social, developmental and educational activities of all our communities. BOSCONET has also designed the data collection form for each of the communities. Therefore, SURABI and the Economer’s Office will contact you regarding this. Kindly cooperate and ensure that the relevant statistics reach BOSCONET by 20th September 2018.

Consecration to Sacred Heart on 2nd September in SHC Tpt.

As I have already informed you in the last Circular, on the 2nd of September 2018, we are celebrating 75 years of the Consecration of the Province to the Sacred Heart of Jesus (1943-2018). The Solemn Consecration took place in Tirupattur on the evening of 2nd July 1943 by Rev. Fr. Carreno SDB. On the occasion of the Platinum Jubilee Celebration of the Sacred Heart Church, Tirupattur, we can relive that moment by participating in the Holy Eucharistic Celebration which will be presided over by Archbishop (Emeritus) Most Rev. Dr. A.M. Chinnappa SDB along with Right Rev. Dr. Soundararaju SDB, Bishop of Vellore and Right Rev. Dr. Lawrence Pius D.D., Bishop of Dharmapuri.

Programme

5.00 p.m. Holy Eucharistic Celebration

7.00 p.m. Car Procession

7.45 p.m. Renewal of the Consecration of the Province of Chennai to the Sacred Heart

8.00 p.m. Fellowship Meal

I exhort all of you who can participate, especially those in and around Tirupattur Region, to be present and solemnize this occasion.

Kerala Flood Relief amount sent to INK

I sincerely thank you for your prompt response to the appeal for the INM Kerala Flood Relief Fund. Most of the communities have sent your contribution while a few communities have sent flood relief material directly to INK through various channels. We have contributed a total sum of Rs. 25 Lakhs. Let us continue to pray for the speedy and complete rehabilitation of the thousands of people affected by this serious calamity.

SPCSA MEETING IN SHILLONG

I am writing this Circular from Shillong, where all the Provincials of South Asia are gathered for the SPCSA Meeting. I will be presenting the how the Province has evolved in the last one year concentrating on the Four Areas that the SPCSA has given: **Bonding as a Salesian Family, Migrant Youth, Family Ministry and Ecological Perspective**. I will also be presenting the Six Priorities of the Province based on the Team Visit of last year: **Re-visioning and Re-Signification of Salesian Mission in South Asia**. The meeting concludes on the evening of 3rd September. Kindly pray that we may be able to be open to the Spirit in discerning what is best for the Salesian Mission here in South Asia.

INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS: 'YOUTH AND LIFE CHOICES'

In view of the Synod of Bishops on "Youth, Faith and Vocational Discernment", scheduled for October 2018, the Salesian Pontifical University (UPS) and the Pontifical Faculty of Educational Sciences "Auxilium" are organizing the International Congress "Youth and Life Choices: Educational Perspectives" in Rome, 20 – 23 September 2018. Fr. Don Bosco Lourdasamy, our Vice Provincial will attend this Congress on behalf of the Province. We accompany him with our prayers and wish him a prolific experience.

Welcome Back

The Province of Chennai is very pleased to welcome back to Fr. Gandhi Kallarasan after completing PhD. and Fr. Ernest Rozario after his Masters' in Media and Video Production. They will return sometime early next month. We are sure they will put their expertise at the service of the Province.

RIP

Rev. Fr. Jose Nadackal SDB, of ING passed away on 4th August 2018. The funeral was held on 6th August 2018 at St. Joseph's Co-Cathedral, Guwahati. Our sincere condolences to the Provincial and confreres of Guwahati Province.

Mrs. Desam Reeta Mary, the elder sister of Fr. Augustine Sellam SDB (Vice Provincial of AFE), passed away tragically in an unfortunate road accident. The funeral was held on 24th August 2018 at A. Kattupadi Parish. Our prayerful condolences to Fr. Augustine and his family who have lost three of their beloved family members in the last one year.

HAPPY FEAST OF OUR LADY OF GOOD HEALTH



Dear Confreres, on the 8th of September we celebrate the Nativity of Our Lady and the Feast of Our Lady of Velankanni. Even though we cannot trace the celebration of the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary back any further than the sixth century, the source for the story of the birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary is much older. The earliest documented version is found in the *Protoevangelium* of James, an apocryphal gospel written about A.D. 150. From the *Protoevangelium* of James, we learn the names of Mary's parents, Joachim and Anna, as well as the tradition that the couple was childless until an angel appeared to Anna and told her that she would conceive (many of the same details appear also in the later apocryphal Gospel of the Nativity of Mary). Her birth represents the entrance into the world of a new grace, a new blessing, a new presence that was an incomparable presage of the presence, blessing and grace that would come with the Saviour. For all these reasons the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lady should be most dear to us!

For us in Tamilnadu, this day is celebrated as the Feast of Our Lady of Good Health. Though the apparitions of Our Lady of Velankanni have not been formally approved by the Church, they are implicitly approved by the elevation of the Church to Basilica status. In 1962, the Bishop of the Diocese, Rev. Dr. R.A. Sundram went to Rome to attend the second session of the Second Vatican Council. At this time, he requested that the Holy Father raise the ancient shrine of Our Lady of Velankanni to the high rank and dignity of a "minor basilica". The request was carefully looked into and magnanimously granted. His Holiness Pope John XXIII graciously issued orders raising the Shrine to the exalted state of a minor basilica. Thus, the Shrine Basilica of Velankanni became linked to the St. Mary Major Basilica in Rome. Pope John XXIII officially recognized this as the "Our Lady of Good Health" due to the healing waters of the Pond. Adjacent to this Basilica, is a "museum" of offerings, left behind by thousands of pilgrims, often with their personal stories of miraculous healings.

As we celebrate this joyful day, we wish the Provincial and confreres of Tiruchy Province a Happy Feast of their Patron! And we pray that She continue to bless and protect all of us as that we may continue to be her true sons and daughters.

I take this opportunity to wish all our TEACHERS in all our institutions a very **Happy TEACHERS DAY!** Teachers are the people who dedicate their entire lives in for just one cause – helping others build their own! Being a teacher is such a noble and selfless profession! God bless you my dear teachers!

I wish you a very Happy Feast of Our Lady of Good Health! May we be healthy and vigorous in our Mission for the poor and needy!

Affectionately,

Fr. K.M. Jose SDB

Date: 01.09.2018

Place: Shillong