

IV. SALESIAN COOPERATORS ASSOCIATION

The Salesian Cooperators association, which came into being in 1876, just two years after the approval of the Constitutions of the Salesian Society, is the last group that Don Bosco founded. As with ADMA he did not ask the Holy See for formal, canonical approval of the association; he considered it sufficient for the aims of the Salesian Cooperators Association to gain moral recognition through the granting of indulgences by the Pope and favourable recommendation by some bishops.

First of all we publish the text of the Christian Union, which Don Bosco had printed at the beginning of 1874, before the Salesian Society was approved on 3 April (no. 49). Then comes a second text under the new title of Association for Good Works, printed in 1875, further developed than the earlier one and especially in that it had a new paragraph presenting the Salesian Society (no. 50). It seems we can attribute variations to Don Bosco's hand. In 1876 at Albenga first, then Sampierdarena-Turin came the printed version of Salesian Cooperators, or a practical way of helping good morals and civil society (no. 51). In the same year at Genoa-Sampierdarena (OE XXVIII, 365-374), in Nice, Buenos Aires extended editions appeared with some modifications³⁷ as well as a range of complementary texts: an introduction by Don Bosco on July 12, 1876, a petition to Pius IX on March 4, 1876, Pius IX's Brief on May 9, 1876 and a list of indulgences. "The pious association of Cooperators" effectively gained official approval from the Archbishop of Genoa, Salvatore Magnasco only on December 15, 1877, and for that archdiocese, following a further edition that year to which the archbishop of Turin reacted vehemently.

To these three texts of regulations we add here two circulars to the Salesian Cooperators which appeared in the Salesian Bulletin: one in January 1879 (no. 52) and another in January 1888 (no. 53). Don Bosco used these to inform them in a very familiar way of works that had been put in place the previous year and of what he was thinking of opening in the current year, thanks to their spiritual

³⁷ The most important perhaps is the title of the first paragraph: "It is necessary for Christians to unite in doing good" which is the title of the Turin edition: "*Unione cristiana nel compiere il bene*". To paragraph VIII (Religious practices) point 5 was added related to applying indulgences.

and financial help. He did not hide any problems or failures from them and encouraged them to continue with their generosity.

The brief set of regulations published here and the two simple circulars offered as a “side dish” don’t give us a complete picture of the identity, activity and value of the Salesian Cooperator. Conferences, speeches and events, especially in the final decade of Don Bosco’s life, have enriched the figure of the Cooperator, and this can be found in the third section of this volume. But a complete and exhaustive history of the Salesian Cooperators Association, which of course has a fairly complex pre-history, still waits to be written. For now one can go to partial studies and research³⁸, other than the appropriate pages, obviously, of the already quoted studies of Don Bosco³⁹.

49. “Christian Union” (1874)

Printed ed. in *Unione cristiana*. Torino, Tip. dell’Orat. di San Francesco di Sales, 1874
(OE XXV, 403-410).

1. [Preface]

If feeble forces are united they become stronger; *Vis unita fortior*, God says. A single strand can easily break, but if we bring a number of them together we get a strong rope that is very difficult to break; *Funiculus triplex difficile rumpitur*. This is what people in the world do to succeed in their temporal affairs and to ensure the success of their plans. We Christians should also do this: united as the first Christians were in one heart and mind to succeed in the most important of all affairs, the great project of the eternal salvation of our soul. This is the purpose of the Salesian Association.

³⁸ E. g. Guido FAVINI, *Don Bosco e l’apostolato dei laici*. Torino, SEI 1952; Francis DESRAMAUT, *Da Associati alla Congregazione salesiana del 1873 a Cooperatori salesiani del 1876*, in ID. - Mario MIDALI (Ed.), *Il cooperatore salesiano nella società contemporanea*. (= Colloqui sulla vita salesiana, 6). Leumann (To), Elledici 1975, pp. 335-359; ID., *Don Bosco fondatore dei cooperatori Salesiani*, in Mario MIDALI (Ed.), *Don Bosco fondatore della Famiglia salesiana*. Roma, SDB 1989, pp. 323-357.

³⁹ In particular there is the extensive and up-to-date summary by Pietro BRAIDO, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani nel secolo delle libertà*. (= ISS - Studi, 21). Roma, LAS 2009, vol. II, pp. 173-205.

2. *Salesian Association*

Therefore the purpose of this Association is to offer people who live in the world a tenor of life which in a certain way approaches that which is practised in a religious Congregation and this is, at least partly, to find the peace that we seek in vain in the world. Many would willingly lock themselves up in a cloister but there are some who because of age, health or circumstances, and many for lack of opportunity or vocation, are absolutely prevented from doing this. And again those in the midst of ordinary occupations, in their families, can live in a way that is useful to their neighbour and themselves almost as if they were in a religious community. Wherefore the Salesian Association could be called a type of third order of a traditional kind with this difference, in that they [the latter] propose Christian perfection through the exercise of piety: here the main purpose is an active life especially on behalf of youth at risk.

3. *Purpose of this Association*

The same field of activity (harvest) of the Salesian congregation is open to all accociation members.

1. The first task for members is charity towards young people at risk. Bringing them together, instructing them in the faith, advising them when they are at risk or bringing them to where they can be instructed, are matters where every member is invited to exercise his or her zeal. Whoever cannot do these things *per se*, can do them through others, such as advising a parent, a friend to do these things; or pray or offer material assistance where there is need. It is also a task of the Association to promote novenas, triduums, retreats and catechetics especially where material means or morals are wanting.

2. Because in these times we feel the lack of vocations to the ecclesiastical state, so each one can take special care of those young men who because of their behaviour and attitude to studies show some indication of being called, help them with good advice, and direct them to schools, colleges where they will be encouraged and directed to this purpose.

3. Encouraging good press over irreligious press by promoting good books, pamphlets, leaflets, printed material of any kind in places and amongst people where it seems prudent to make this proposal.

4. Constitutions and government

1. Whoever is at least sixteen years old can become a Cooperator, so long as this person has the firm intention of abiding by the rules proposed here.

2. The Superior of the Salesian Congregation is also the Superior of this Association.

3. The Directors of each House of the Congregation are authorised to enrol members. They will pass on the name, surname and place of residence to the Superior who will note everything down in the common register.

4. In towns and cities where none of these Houses yet exist and where there are at least ten members, a group leader [called a 'decurion'] will be appointed. Ten decurions can have a head who will be called a prefect of the Association.

The prefect and decurion will preferably be chosen from amongst parish priests or some exemplary member of the clergy. They will correspond directly with the superior. Where there are fewer than ten members they will correspond with the director of the nearest house or directly with the superior.

5. Each decurion will communicate with his ten; each prefect with his hundred members; but each member if necessary, can direct himself to the Superior and explain whatever he judges should be taken into consideration for the benefit of his neighbour and especially youth.

6. At the end of each year the superior will communicate with the members explaining the works that should be promoted by preference in the following year, and at the same time giving news of those who in the past year were called to eternal life and recommending them to everyone's prayers.

Particular obligations

1. Members are not bound to any annual fee; they are only invited to make an offering to support works promoted by the Association. These offerings can be handed to the decurions, prefects, directors, or directly to the Superior.

6. Advantages

1. Members can gain many indulgences, a list of which will be sent to each one.

2. They will benefit from all the Masses, indulgences, prayers, novenas, tridiums, retreats, sermons, catechism classes and all the works of charity which the Salesians carry out in the course of their ministry, and especially from the Mass and prayers which take place mornings and evenings in the church of Mary Help of Christians in Turin to call down Heaven's blessings on all members and their families.

3. The day after the Feast of St Francis de Sales all priests of the Congregation and the Association will celebrate holy Mass for deceased confreres/members. Those who are not priests will try to go to holy communion and say a third part of the rosary with other prayers.

4. When a member falls ill, the Superior will be immediately advised, so particular prayers can be said for him or her. The same is to be done in the case of the death of a member.

7. Religious practices

1. No outward penance is prescribed for Salesian associates but it is recommended that they be modest in dress, frugal at table, simple in their domestic arrangements, blameless in speech and exact in the way they carry out the duties of their state.

2. They are advised to make at least some days of retreat each year. On the last day of each month, or some other day more convenient, they will make the exercise for a happy death, go to confession and communion as if it were the last time in their life.

3. Each day lay members will say an *Our Father, Hail Mary* to St Francis de Sales for the needs of the holy Church. Priests and anyone who says the Office of Our Lady, or the canonical Hours are dispensed from this prayer, so long as in saying the Office they add this special intention.

4. They will try to be more frequent in approaching the sacraments of confession and communion.

5. To remove any doubt of conscience we declare that the rules of this Association do not oblige under pain of either mortal or venial sin except for cases where they might be commanded or forbidden by the precepts of God or holy mother Church. But their observance is recommended for the many spiritual advantages that each one can gain and which are the object of this Association.

... [the enrolment formula follows]

50. "Association of Good Works" (1875)

Printed ed. in Associazione di Opere Buone. Torino, Tip. dell'Orat. di San Francesco di Sales
1875 (OE XXV, 483-494).

I. Christian Union for doing good

This association is called *Christian Union* or, [Union] of good works, because its purpose is to associate good people so they can join forces helping each other to do good.

This is the example that the faithful in the primitive Church left us. Seeing the serious dangers that hung over them every day, without being dismayed they united one in heart and soul to encourage each other to remain firm in the faith and overcome the endless assaults they were being threatened by. This is also the advice the Lord gave when he said: feeble forces, when united, become stronger, and if one strand taken on its own easily breaks, it is very difficult to break them when put together: *vis unita fortior, funiculus triplex difficile rumpitur*. Men of the world also follow a similar example in their temporal affairs. Should the children of the light, then, be less prudent than

the children of darkness? Certainly not. We Christians should likewise come together in these difficult times, and come together in the spirit of prayer, charity and zeal, using all means that religion offers to remove the evils which today may jeopardise the important affair of our eternal salvation. We propose the association be stably bound to the Congregation of St Francis de Sales.

II. Salesian Congregation

This Congregation was definitively approved by the holy Church on April 3, 1874. The principal aim of its members is to work for the benefit of one's neighbour in general and especially for youth. Although their number has already notably grown, nevertheless they can only respond to the need in a minimal way, or to other daily requests that come their way. In various parts of Italy and other parts of Europe, in China, Australia, America and especially the Argentine Republic requests have come for Gospel workers to open religious houses or colleges for the education of young people, to open or at least support missions - they are tirelessly calling for Gospel workers to come.

The poor Salesians cannot fulfil all these needs and therefore while they do what they can for their part, they turn to whoever loves our holy Catholic religion and the salvation of souls and invite them, indeed beg them out of love of Our Lord Jesus Christ to give them a hand and cooperate with them: in the special works of charity that make up the purpose of this Congregation. With so many hands at work it is hoped to extend our work to vaster and more copious harvests, thus bearing more fruit for the glory of God and the benefit of souls.

III. Salesian Association

1. This pious institute therefore, having been definitively approved by the Church, would seem to be able to offer itself as the stable bond of union.

2. Its general purpose is to establish a way of living as a good Christian sincerely desiring to save his own soul and at the same time gaining the peace of heart that one seeks in vain for in the world.

Many would certainly go to a cloister, but there are some who because of age, health or circumstances, and many for lack of opportunity, are absolutely prevented from doing this. And again there are those who are in the midst of ordinary occupations, in their own families, who can join with those who in fact are living in a Congregation thanks to this Association. Whence they can be considered as a kind of traditional Third Order, with the difference that these proposed Christian perfection through the exercise of piety; here the principal purpose is the active life in the exercise of charity to one's neighbour and especially youth at risk. That is the particular purpose of the Association.

IV. The way to cooperate

Salesian associates are not to limit themselves to words but to end up doing works. Therefore their zeal consists especially in cultivating the harvest of the Congregation they intend to associate with.

1. The members shall promote novenas, triduums, spiritual retreats and catechetical instruction, especially in places where material and moral means are lacking.

2. The scarcity of priestly vocations in these times of ours is felt in all its severity. Hence, those members who are in a position to help shall take special care of youngsters who have the necessary moral qualities and an aptitude for study, and show signs of a vocation. They can help them with timely advice, and by directing them toward those schools and colleges where they will be cultivated and directed to this purpose.

3. [There is an urgent need to] counter the irreligious press by good press. Hence members can help by spreading good books, leaflets and all kinds of printed matter in those places and among those families in which acceptance may prudently be expected.

4. Finally there is the exercise of charity to youth at risk by taking them in, instructing them in the faith, getting them to take part in religious functions, advising them of dangers, taking them to where they can be instructed in religion. These are all part of the harvest where each associate is invited to

exercise zeal. Whoever cannot do these things per se can do them through others, such as advising a parent, a friend to do these things. One can pray or offer material assistance where there is need. The early faithful laid all their goods at the feet of the apostles so they could be used to help widows, orphans or other serious needs.

V. Constitutions and government of the Association

1. Whoever is at least sixteen years old can enrol in this Association, so long as this person has the firm intention of abiding by the rules proposed here.

2. The Association is humbly recommended to the benevolence and protection of the supreme pontiff, bishops, parish priests on whom it will have *absolute* and *unlimited* dependence in all things referring to religion.

3. The Superior of the Salesian Congregation is also the Superior of this Association.

4. The Director of each House of the Congregation is authorised to enrol members. He will pass on the name, surname and place of residence to the Superior who will note everything down in the common register.

5. In towns and cities where none of these houses yet exist and where there are at least ten members, one will be appointed as group leader [called a 'decurion'].

Ten decurions can have a head who will be called a prefect of the Association. The prefect and decurion will preferably be chosen from amongst parish priests or some exemplary member of the clergy. They will correspond directly with the superior. Where there are fewer than ten associates they will correspond with the director of the nearest house or directly with the superior.

6. Each decurion will communicate with his ten; each prefect with his hundred members; but each member if necessary can direct himself to the superior and explain whatever he judges should be taken into consideration.

7. Each month a printed bulletin will be given to members with an outline of things suggested, already done or proposed to be done. At the end of each year the superior will communicate with the members explaining the works that should be promoted by preference in the following year, and at the same time giving news of those who in the past year were called to eternal life and recommending them to everyone's prayers.

8. Every first Sunday of the month or some other more convenient day, decurions or prefects will bring together the members of their respective teams to see to the smooth running of works that have been undertaken especially catechetical instruction in the parishes, but always with permission of the parish priests.

9. Every centurion or decurion should try to call members of his respective team together on the day of St Francis de Sales or on the following Sunday so they can mutually encourage one another in devotion to their holy patron, and to perseverance in the works begun in accordance with the purpose of the association.

VI. Particular obligations

1. Every member will do what he can with his own means or funds collected from charitable individuals to promote and sustain the works of the association.

2. Every year members will make an offering of L. 1 for works that are promoted by and to promote the association. These offerings will be addressed to the superior, or the decurions, prefects or directors who will see that they are sent on.

3. A collection will be regularly taken up at conferences and especially at the conference for St Francis de Sales. Whoever cannot come to this conference can get his offering to the superior in some other way.

VII. Advantages

1. Members can gain many indulgences, a list of which will be sent to each one.
2. They will benefit from all the Masses, indulgences, prayers, novenas, triduums, retreats, sermons, catechism classes and all the works of charity which the Salesians carry out in the course of their ministry. They will also benefit from the mass and prayers said each day in the church of Mary Help of Christians in Turin to call down Heaven's blessings on members and their families, and especially on those who have fallen ill and whose life is in danger.
3. The day after the Feast of St Francis de Sales all priests of the Congregation and the Association will celebrate holy Mass for deceased confreres/members. Those who are not priests will try to go to holy communion and say a third part of the rosary.
4. When a member falls ill, the Superior will be immediately advised so particular prayers can be said for him or her. The same is to be done in the case of the death of a member.

VIII. Religious practices

1. No outward penance is prescribed for Salesian associates but it is recommended that they be modest in dress, frugal at table, simple in their domestic arrangements, blameless in speech and exact in the way they carry out the duties of their state, seeing that their dependants observe and keep holy Sundays.
2. They are advised to make at least some days of retreat each year. On the last day of each month, or some other day more convenient, they will make the exercise for a happy death, go to confession and communion as if it were really the last time in their life.
3. Each day members will say an *Our Father and Hail Mary* to St Francis de Sales for the intentions of the supreme pontiff. Priests and anyone who says the Office of Our Lady, or the canonical Hours are dispensed from this

prayer. It is enough for them to add this special intention as they say the divine Office.

4. They will try to be more frequent in approaching the sacraments of confession and communion.

5. Although members are keenly recommended to observe these rules for the many advantages each one can gain, to remove any doubt of conscience we declare that the rules of this Association do not oblige under pain of either mortal or venial sin except for cases where they might be commanded or forbidden by the precepts of God or holy mother Church.

... [the enrolment formula follows]

51. “Salesian Cooperators, or a way of helping good morals and civil society” (1876)

Printed ed: *Cooperatori Salesiani ossia un modo pratico per giovare al buon costume e alla civile società*. Torino, Tipografia salesiana 1875 (OE XXVIII, 256-271).

I. Christian Union for doing good

In every age good people need to come together to help one another in doing good and keeping evil at bay. This is what the Christians in the primitive Church used do. Seeing the serious dangers that hung over them every day, without being dismayed they united one in heart and soul to encourage each other to remain firm in the faith and overcome the endless assaults they were being threatened by. This is also the advice the Lord gave when he said: feeble forces, when united, become stronger, and if one strand on its own breaks easily, it is very difficult to break them when put together: *Vis unita fortior, funiculus triplex difficile rumpitur*. This is even what men of the world are accustomed to doing in their temporal affairs. Should the children of the light, then, be less prudent than the children of darkness? Certainly not. We Christians should likewise come together in these difficult times, and come together in the spirit of prayer, charity, using all means that religion offers to remove the evils which today may jeopardise good morals without which civil society is heading for destruction.

II. The Salesian Congregation as the bond of union

Given that this Congregation has been definitively approved by the Church it can serve as a sure and stable bond for the Salesian Cooperators. In fact its purpose is primarily to work for the benefit of youth, on whom either the good or sorry future of society depends. Nor do we only mean by this proposal that this is the only way to provide for such a need, given that there a thousand others; indeed we keenly recommend that each one use whatever means are appropriate to pursue this great objective. For our part we are offering one and it is the Salesian Cooperators, asking good Catholics who live in the world to come to the aid of the members of this Congregation. It is true that its members have notably grown in number, but their number is still far from being able to meet daily requests coming from various parts of Italy and Europe, China, Australia, America and especially the Argentine Republic. In all these places there are daily requests for sacred ministers to come and take care of youth at risk, to go and open houses or colleges, to open or at least support missions awaiting the arrival of workers for the Gospel. It is to respond to such needs that we are looking for Cooperators.

III. The purpose of the Salesian Cooperators

The fundamental purpose of the Salesian Cooperators is to do good to themselves by a tenor of life which is as close as it can be to that of the common life. Because many would willingly enter the cloister, but there are some who because of age, health or circumstances, and many for lack of opportunity, are absolutely prevented from doing this. There are also those who are in the midst of daily occupations, in their own families, who can become Cooperators and live as if they were in the Congregation. Wherefore the supreme pontiff considers this Association to be like a Third Order of a traditional kind with this difference, in that these [latter] propose Christian perfection through the exercise of piety: here the main purpose is an active life especially on behalf of youth at risk.

IV. *The way to cooperate*

Cooperators are offered the same harvest as the Congregation of St Francis de Sales which they intend to associate themselves with.

1. To promote novenas, triduums, retreats and catechetical instruction especially where material means or morals are wanting.

2. Since in these time the scarcity of priestly vocations is felt in all its severity, those members who are in a position to help shall take special care of youngsters who have the necessary moral qualities and an aptitude for study, and show signs of a vocation, They can help them with timely advice, and by directing them toward those schools and colleges where they may be cultivated and directed to this purpose. The Work of Mary Help of Christians aims precisely at this.

3. Countering irreligious press by good press thanks to spreading good books, leaflets and all kinds of printed matter in those places and among those families in which acceptance may prudently be expected.

4. Finally, charity towards young people at risk, taking them in, instructing them in the faith, getting them to take part in religious functions, advising them of dangers, taking them to where they can be instructed in religion, are another harvest for Salesian Cooperators. Whoever cannot do these things *per se*, can do them through others, such as advising a parent, a friend to do these things. One can pray or offer material assistance where there is need, following the example of the early Christians who laid their goods at the apostles' feet so they could be used to help widows, orphans or for other serious needs.

V. *Constitutions and government of the Association*

1. Whoever is at least sixteen years old can become a Cooperator, so long as this person has the firm intention of abiding by the rules proposed here.

2. The Association is humbly recommended to the benevolence and protection of the supreme pontiff, bishops, parish priests on whom it will have absolute dependence in all things referring to religion.

3. The Superior of the Salesian Congregation is also the Superior of this Association.

4. The director of each house of the Congregation is authorised to enrol members. He will pass on the name, surname and place of residence to the Superior who will note everything down in the common register.

5. In towns and cities where none of these houses yet exist and where there are at least ten members, one will be appointed as group leader called a 'decurion', who will preferably be a priest or an exemplary lay person. He will correspond with the superior, or with the director of the nearest house.

6. When there is a need every Cooperator can explain to the superior whatever he believes should be taken into consideration.

7. Every three months and even more often through a bulletin or printed leaflet members will be given an outline of things proposed, done or proposed for doing. At the end of each year members will be told of works that should be promoted by preference, and at the same time given news of those who in the past year were called to eternal life and recommending them to everyone's prayers.

8. On the day of St Francis de Sales and on the Feast of Mary Help of Christians every decurion will gather members of his group so they can mutually encourage one another in devotion to these heavenly protectors, calling on their patronage to help them persevere in the works begun in accordance with the purpose of the Association.

VI. Particular obligations

1. Members of the Salesian Congregation consider all Cooperators to also be their brothers in Jesus Christ and will always direct work to them in cases where it can be for the greater glory of God and the benefit of souls. When needed, Cooperators will turn to members of the Salesian Congregation with the same freedom.

2. Thus, every member with his own means or funds collected from charitable individuals will do what he can to promote and sustain the works of the association.

3. Cooperators do not have any financial obligation but will make a monthly or yearly donation as dictated by the charity of their heart. These offerings will be addressed to the superior in support of works promoted by the Association.

4. A collection will be regularly taken up at conferences on the Feasts of Mary Help of Christians and St Francis de Sales. In places where there are not enough members for a decurion, and where someone cannot come to the conference he will see that his offering arrives by whatever means is easiest and safest.

VII. Advantages

1. His Holiness, the reigning Pius IX, grants by a decree dated July 30, 1875 to promoters of this work all the favours, spiritual graces and indulgences enjoyed by Salesian religious, except for those referring to community life. A separate list of all this will be sent.

2. They will benefit from all the Masses, indulgences, prayers, novenas, triduum, retreats, sermons, catechism classes and all the works of charity which the Salesians carry out in the course of their ministry anywhere in the world.

3. They will also benefit from the mass and prayers said each day in the church of Mary Help of Christians in Turin to call down Heaven's blessings on members and their families, and especially on those who do something morally or materially for the benefit of our Congregation.

4. The day after the Feast of St Francis de Sales all priests of the Congregation and the Association will celebrate holy Mass for deceased confreres/members. Those who are not priests will try to go to holy communion and say a third part of the rosary.

5. When a member falls ill, the superior will be immediately advised so particular prayers can be said for him or her. The same is to be done in the case of the death of a cooperator.

VIII. Religious practices

1. No outward work is prescribed for Salesian Cooperators but it is recommended that their life be in some way similar to the life of someone living in a religious community. They are recommended to be modest in dress, frugal at table, simple in their domestic arrangements, blameless in speech and exact in the way they carry out the duties of their state, seeing that their dependants observe and keep holy Sundays.

2. They are advised to make at least some days of retreat each year. On the last day of each month, or some other day more convenient, they will make the exercise for a happy death, go to confession and communion as if it were really the last time in their life.

3. Each one will say daily an *Our Father, Hail Mary* to St Francis de Sales for the intentions of the supreme pontiff. Priests or those who say the canonical Hours or Office of the Blessed Virgin are dispensed from this prayer. It is enough for them to add this special intention as they say the divine Office.

4. They will try to be more frequent in approaching the sacraments of confession and communion.

Notice

Although members are keenly recommended to observe these rules for the many advantages each one can gain, to remove any anxiety of conscience we declare that their observance does not oblige under pain of either mortal or venial sin except for cases where they might be commanded or forbidden by the precepts of God or holy mother Church.

... [the enrolment formula follows]

52. Circular to Male and Female Cooperators at the beginning of 1879

Printed ed in BS 3 (1879) 1, 1-3 (E III, pp. 429-432).

[Turin, January 1879]

My venerable benefactors,

I find the greatest consolation in presenting myself to you, worthy Cooperators, and speaking to you of things which in the course of the year were the object of your concerns and charity.

First of all I have to fulfil a great duty, that of thanking you for the kindness and zeal with which you have responded to invitations made to give financial offerings or contributions of any other kind.

I believe you will be satisfied when you have heard the report on the results of your charity.

I am doing two things here: first of all a brief report on things achieved and secondly proposing works for the coming year. I need to do this to fulfil what our regulations prescribe in article 7 chapter V.

Things achieved in 1878

Thanks to your effective support we have been able to do many things which we trust are for the glory of God and for our neighbour's benefit.

Twenty two new Houses were opened this year for the benefit of young people at risk in Italy, France, South America, meaning the Republics of Uruguay and Argentina.

The missions, then, in these foreign parts have extended over a vast evangelical field which promises a most abundant harvest.

This has forced us to send a new expedition of Salesians and Sisters of Mary Help of Christians to open further hospices, education centres, and to support those already opened.

This way we have increased the number of people taken from the path to evil, returned them to being an honour to themselves, to where they come from, and a benefit for their families.

We have also had the great consolation of having pulled not hundreds but many thousands of youngsters from danger and we could say from prisons, setting them on the right path, on the way of virtue, and helping them eventually to earn an honest living.

Another work that excited common interest was the church and institute of St John the Evangelist. Work has gone as far as the roof and we hope to resume work on this next spring.

Serious personal and financial sacrifices have been needed to support all these works. But the assistance of Divine Providence through your help has not been lacking. You must be content given the holy purpose that your charity was directed to, and also content for the moral and material results gained for souls and civil society.

It was this great thought that moved the inexhaustible charity of the supreme pontiff Leo XIII, may God keep him healthy and safe, to come to our aid. When he was informed that we were in dire straits, he was happy to send us the generous gift of two thousand francs with the paternal and consoling letter you will find below (1).

Nevertheless we were still lacking ten thousand lire for the new expedition of missionaries, and this sum came to us through the charity of a Salesian Cooperator. This generous Christian wanted to remain anonymous, but along with his offering he enclosed the following words: I have read how the Holy Father, with all his constraints, has sent two thousand lire for the various works of charity he supports. Moved by such example I am offering you, especially for the needs of your missionaries, the sum of 10,000 francs. These are savings I put aside through work and effort when I was young, and I willingly offer them so they can go before me to light up the way to eternity, which I feel is very near.

May Heaven bless the heroism of this pious donor and grant him adequate recompense in this life and the reward of the just in the life to come.

With this help we were able to go through with the expedition of new missionaries, provide them with what they needed, and have the necessary provisions for those who are already exercising their sacred ministry in these remote regions.

Things proposed for 1879

There are more things to propose for the new year. The first, using every moral and material means in our power, is to promote parish catechetical instruction and all other works for the benefit of young people who are abandoned and at risk.

We want to free them from imminent danger, doing wrong, from prison; we want to make them upright citizens and good Christians.

Another thing to recommend is the *Work of Mary Help of Christians* which has the purpose of cultivating vocations to the ecclesiastical state amongst adults.

The main house is the St Vincent's Hospice in Sampierdarena. There have already been consoling results. Already a notable number have made decisions about their vocation and returned to their respective dioceses, while others chose the religious state and others the foreign missions.

The church of St John's then, with its attached hospice, being a tribute that the Salesian Cooperators pay to the glorious memory of Pius IX, should encourage everyone to support it fully, trusting that in the current year at least the church will be brought to completion.

Projected events

Worthy Cooperators, you ask where we can find the means to support similar works of public charity.

I am placing all my trust in your charity.

God has helped us in the past in very difficult times; he will certainly continue to inspire your generous resolutions, and will ensure that you can carry them out.

Since we currently find the need to prepare bread and clothing for many of the boys we have taken into our hospices, with the approval of the civil authorities the idea has been floated of a small lottery involving some paintings and ancient *objet d'arts* offered for this charitable purpose.

A number of tickets will be sent to each Cooperator, and I hope you can take some or at least spread them around some charitable relatives or friends. At any rate there will be a description eventually in the *Bulletin*.

Meanwhile, venerable and outstanding benefactors, please accept the warmest of thanks that I with the Salesians and the young people who have benefited offer you from the bottom of our hearts.

Our gratitude is indelible, while God is preparing an imperishable reward for you.

We pray morning and evening in the church of Mary Help of Christians in Turin, in all Salesian churches and houses, that God may grant you stable health and a happy life, give harmony and peace to your families, prosperity and fruitfulness to your business. In short, our prayers are addressed to calling down God's blessings upon you, so that after having spent quiet and happy days on this earth, you will enjoy the fruits of your charity in the highest heaven.

In a particular way we recommend the Supreme Pontiff Leo XIII, our chief Cooperator, to your prayers; and all those who work for the good of holy Church; and those Cooperators who were called to another life during the year. Finally, I also recommend my soul to the charity of your prayers, assuring you that I will always be, in Jesus Christ,

your most indebted servant,

Fr John Bosco

(1) The letter was also published in the magazine *Unità Cattolica* No. 279, year 1878.

53. Final circular to Cooperators at the beginning of 1888

Printed ed. in BS 12 (1888) 1, 1-6.

Worthy Cooperators,

I feel that my poor health will not allow me to write at length, nevertheless I cannot omit sending you this letter this year, in accordance with the Regulations, to spend some time with you who are the benefactors of my boys, and who take loving care of the works entrusted by God to the Pious Society of St Francis de Sales.

What shall I tell you? I tell you especially that you should join with me in saying at least an *Our Father and a Hail Mary* and a *Requiem aeternam* for more than 1,000 Cooperators, men and women, who were called to another life in the year that has just concluded. I tell you that we thank God, who in the midst of so many victims of death, was kind enough to spare us, and allows us to find ourselves once more at the beginning of a new year. I will tell you that we have many reasons to rejoice in the Lord, because with his divine assistance we have been able to complete many works for the salvation of souls and for the benefit of civil society. Finally, I will tell you that the good we must do is growing more and more every day, and therefore, reason and religion require that we do not lose our good will, that indeed we have the courage to make greater sacrifices, and grow in our efforts.

Rapid review of the main works carried out in 1887

Although the main works carried out in the year just past have already been sufficiently noted in the *Salesian Bulletin*, just the same so you can see it all at a glance, I recall them here briefly.

The work that needs to be highlighted above all others is the consecration of the church of the Sacred Heart in Rome, which took place amidst the splendour of the sacred rites and saw the presence of some of the most important prelates and members of the Sacred College, the accompaniment of classical music and all that this means, to the complete satisfaction of the Holy Father Leo XIII, who had entrusted us with its construction since he began his pontificate.

At Vallecrosia near Bordighera, in the house of Mary Help of Christians, we repaired the considerable damage caused by the earthquake on February 23, rebuilt it almost from scratch because it was uninhabitable, rebuilt most of the bedrooms, classrooms, and even the bell tower of the new church, which was in danger of collapse, and finally we completed the church itself, which will be opened for divine worship on December 18 this year.

At Mathi they have begun and will complete the paper works to the point where from a thousand five hundred kilograms a day it will now be producing four thousand, thus doubling production and therefore bringing down costs to the great advantage of the Catholic press.

At Catania a property known as Villa Piccioni was acquired, with its surrounding property of about eight thousand square metres, a modest house which will be enlarged and become, with the help of divine providence and citizen's charity and generosity, a large hospice and house of arts and trades for poor boys of the people, who because of their education will be able to earn an honest living, and will one day be the support of their family and a secure guarantee of the moral good of the whole city.

We acquired a good piece of land in Marseilles, to enlarge the House already there which has become too small for the needs; this acquisition will make it possible to accept many other boys and pull them out of abandonment and poverty.

We are likewise extending the Houses in Paris and Lille in France, Utrera and Sarrià in Spain, and also Faenza and Florence in Italy.

Thanks to his Highness, Prince and Bishop, the help of the authorities and various charitable clergy and laity, we have opened a Salesian House in Trent, which will be an orphanage; this House is the first to be opened in the Austrian Empire, and I hope it will undergo great development with divine assistance and the support of good people. I hope it will prepare the way for setting up other similar Houses in the same Empire.

In London, capital of England, through the zeal of a Catholic noblewoman we have accepted the running of schools which already have around 200 boys

and girls, and we have also taken on the administration of a parish of some 30,000 individuals, almost all Protestants, from amongst whom it is hoped that over time we will have many conversions to the Catholic Church.

Nor should I remain silent about the spiritual and corporal care the Salesians are offering to the victims of cholera in Catania in Sicily, and in San Nicolás de los Arroyos in the Argentine Republic, as well as those who were injured or were victims of the earthquake in Diano Marina in Liguria, and the orphans in either case; this care has won broad praise from the authorities.

As for America I would go on too long if I were to sum up everything, thanks be to God and Catholic charity, that we were able to do in the year just concluding.

I will touch on the missions further on, so it is enough here to indicate the setting up of a house of arts and trades, under the name of St Joseph, in Concepcion, and a stable residence for the missionaries in Punta Arenas in the Republic of Chile and another similar residence in Chol-Malal and Guardia Pringles in Patagonia Argentina. In these and other places, at the same time we have built various chapels for celebration of the divine mysteries and to instruct the faithful and others.

Many of the American Houses already founded, especially colleges and hospices, have been enlarged to the benefit of many hundreds of young people, with new buildings; amongst others those of Patagones and Viedma on the banks of the Rio Negro, the one at Payssandù and San Paolo in the Empire of Brazil.

Nor could I omit mentioning the various missions, this same year, begun by Bishop John Cagliero, Vicar Apostolic of southern and central Patagonia, and by Bishop Joseph Fagnano, Prefect Apostolic of southern Patagonia; missions pushing up to the Cordilleras and down to Tierra de Fuego, with huge efforts and clear danger to life but with great and consoling results inasmuch as the first seeds of the divine word have been sown in hitherto unknown tribes, and we have discovered places and customs which will be very useful for us in setting up mission stations in such abandoned spots, where we can strengthen religious and moral good for the salvation of so many unfortunate souls.

Since I am speaking of the missions, I should not let the charity of the Cooperators pass without a word. It has grown over recent months following the sending out of the circular I felt I needed to send you asking for help for the missions; charity that, while it lifts my heart and makes me rejoice in the Lord, also gives me the means to continue quickly spreading the Gospel and Christian civilisation in far away parts of the world. And I especially must not remain silent about the recent expedition of eight Salesians to Quito in the Republic of Ecuador, where they will open schools and workshops for boys, and from where they will then spread the light of faith to thousands of poor natives who are living in the Andes without the benefits of Christian civilisation. Finally, in the exultation and commotion of the Catholic world for the priestly jubilee of our wise Leo XIII, we have even been able to collect rare and precious items from our houses in Europe and America, and even from the missions at the furthest end of Patagonia, to place at the feet of his august throne. These will be a tribute of our profound veneration and unwavering attachment to him, and sign of our sincere joy at the glorious event.

New Houses and Works of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians

The Sisters too, known as the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, have been able to increase the number of their works on behalf of girls. In fact they have taken on the running of infant schools and opened schools, workshops and festive oratories in eight other places such as in Italy, at Gattinara, Torre di Bairo, Farigliano, Pecetto Torinese, and Mathi. At Moncrivello and Novara, because of the charity of two zealous Salesian women Cooperators, two large areas have been bought to begin a work which will be of great advantage to girls. In America, with the help of a well-known family in Montevideo, they have opened a new college in Payssandú, with a festive oratory and day school attended by many hundreds of girls. They have also extended their existing Houses in Buenos Ayres and Patagones, and there they have girls coming from as far away as Tierra del Fuego, have instructed them and had them baptised, presenting them to God as the first Christian fruits of those extreme confines of the world. It is also worth mentioning the assistance given to

people affected by the cholera in Bronte in Sicily, where some of them out of love for Jesus Christ did not hesitate to join them in hospital where they have been locked away.

I should also mention other works of the Salesians and Sisters; but given the fact that you have already been informed of them during the year, I will leave these in order not to go on too long, and so I can talk about another work which we have particularly in mind for the coming year.

Meanwhile, from what I have said thus far you can easily see how your charity has borne abundant fruit; fruit in the relief, education and instruction given to many boys and girls whom we have been able to take in, in greater numbers, in our hospices and colleges, workshops, festive oratories, weekday and Sunday schools, churches and chapels erected and consecrated to divine worship; fruits in the conversion of many people without faith, by evangelising and civilising them in their hitherto unknown lands; fruits in the preservation of the faith in many Christian countries of Europe and especially America where they are emigrating every year in their thousands in search of a poor earthly fortune, but are in danger of losing their happy and eternal inheritance in Heaven; fruits again in the publication of good books, hundreds and thousands of copies of them in defence of religion and to encourage Christian piety. For all this good the Salesians and the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians give thanks to God especially, who has extended his heavenly favours so much, then to all of you, worthy Cooperators, who came to our help in your kindness and who have been able instruments of divine providence for the benefit of countless souls.

Work proposed for 1888

There are many works that I could recommend to your charity for the coming year, but there is only one I want to indicate to you here, the one I have most at heart. Faithful men and women can now benefit at their leisure from the church of the Sacred Heart in Rome; many can hear God's word there, frequent the sacraments, be present for their edification at the sacred ceremonies, be instructed by more frequent preaching, and in short be

inspired to piety and devotion and be more fervent in the practice of Christian virtues. But this is still not everything. The Holy Father, Leo XIII, would like another work to rise up beside the church; he would like the hospice that has just opened there to be extended with buildings already planned, and be able to take in five hundred or more boys who are the daily living representatives of the children of Palestine around the adorable person of Jesus Christ, to be blessed, instructed, set on the way to virtue, on the way to heaven, by Him.

This work is highly called for by the current needs in Rome. Hundreds of youngsters, Roman or not, coming from everywhere, out of poverty, or neglect, or by the snares of the enemy, find themselves exposed to huge dangers to body and soul. Many for want of some place to live become lazy, grow in vice, are caught up in wrongdoing, and end up falling into the hands of the police and from there end up in prison. Not a few have come from elsewhere and go there looking for work, then not finding any, become listless, find bad companions and even lose the religion that has its centre and headquarters there, spreading its vivid rays to all parts of the world. What a misfortune it is that a poor young Christian lad should be in peril of his faith and good behaviour in Rome itself which, by means of the Vicar of Jesus Christ, has enlightened and enlightens, sanctified and sanctifies the people!

These things sadden the Pope when they happen to a Catholic anywhere on earth, but they afflict him profoundly when they happen so often and under his very gaze, without him being able to prevent or remedy them, and they happen especially to so many unwary and inexperienced youngsters who are also the hope of the Church and civil society.

Well, now we can greatly lessen such disasters in Rome, we can save many young people, comfort the soul of the Roman Pontiff, and at the same time console the heart of Jesus; and we can achieve this holy purpose by constructing the planned hospice. Our most zealous supreme head of the Church was kind enough to indicate this when I had the happy fortune to be received by him in a special audience last May. After hearing with pleasure that the church of the Sacred Heart was finished and opened in the service of God, after thanking the Salesians, their Cooperators and whoever had helped in completing this

arduous task, he went on and said: “Now get to work putting up the already planned hostel, so we can take in and save so many poor boys, teaching them to become good Christians and wise citizens. To this end I bless you and all those who will give you a hand.”

These words of the Vicar of Jesus Christ are profoundly engraved on my heart, and I want you too to treasure them.

It would be truly worthy of your zeal that in 1887 and 1888 you would honour the great Jubilee festivities of Leo XIII by finishing the two main works that he entrusted to you as soon as he ascended the throne of St Peter. The first is finished, and we have already presented it to him on May 14 last when it was solemnly consecrated, almost as an opening for his priestly jubilee, and today the church of the Sacred Heart is the admiration of many pilgrims, amongst others, who come to Rome from all over the world. What a great consolation it would be for your charity if at the end of next year, at the closing of the above-named festivities, we could say to the Holy Father: “Here you are, we have finished the hospice you so much wanted for the good of young people: hundreds of them can now find safe shelter near you, and in the shadows of your cathedral can grow up as worthy sons of the Church, and an unflinching pledge of good order and behaviour for civil society.”

Four reminders by way of conclusion

I conclude by putting four ideas to you by way of reminder. I observe especially that a person and a house which provides alms is like the ocean; no matter how much water the sun causes to evaporate from its surface, it never diminishes in its extent because the evaporation becomes rain, snow and ice, and after having irrigated and made the earth fruitful, it becomes rivers which flow back into it from everywhere. So it is with a person, a family, who with what they have, maybe even only with what they have left over, cooperate for the glory of God and the benefit of their neighbour. Their alms combine with those from many others, and this, like when many drops of water come together, becomes a rain shower of benefits for thousands of people, profiting faithful and faithless alike, helping young people, families, whole populations

in human society. These children then, these families, these people who have benefited, other than praying and asking God to shower a hundredfold of graces on their benefactors, through the religious and moral education they have gained from the coming together of so many alms, are formed and grow up in virtue, promote harmony and peace in private and public, help work, industry to grow. It sees a decrease in theft, crime, revolution, and in this way every citizen benefits, including in temporal terms and sees a hundredfold return for whatever has been dispensed by works of religion and charity.

So the first reminder is this: if we want our spiritual and material interests to prosper, let us especially try to help God's interests to prosper, and promote the spiritual and moral good of our neighbour by means of almsgiving.

Coming to the second reminder I begin by reflecting that the ordinary rule, when someone dearly wants to obtain some grace from God by intercession of the Virgin or some Saint, is usually more or less along these lines: if you give me this grace I will give so many alms, make such and such an offering. Although this way of doing things is not to be disapproved of, just the same I do not believe it is the best way to quickly and securely gain God's favours, the graces we especially have most at heart. This way of doing things suggests a degree of mistrust of God, Our Lady or the Saints we call on. Much better and more effective would be to first give what we would want to give after the grace we implored has been granted. By first giving something, we do something good, and this joined with faith, trust in God, has much greater power before his throne. By giving first, it in some way commits God, the Virgin and the Saints to be generous to us, since we have abandoned ourselves to their sovereign kindness and powerful intercession. By giving first, the words of Jesus Christ are fulfilled, for where he recommends almsgiving he says: "Give and it will be given you: *date et dabitur vobis.*" Here, as we see, Jesus Christ does not say: "Promise to give and it will be given you"; he says: "You give first, and then it will be given you." Experience shows that this is a very powerful way of obtaining more important graces; I myself am witness to this thousands of times over. So here is the second reminder: if you want to more easily obtain some grace, be gracious yourself, meaning give alms to others before God or the Virgin do so for you. *Date et dabitur vobis.*

Thirdly, remember that giving alms for the spiritual or corporal good of our neighbour is not mere advice which we can ignore without detriment to our soul, but it is a strict command, included in the commandments of the divine law, one group obliging us to honour and love God, the other obliging us to love our neighbour. It is only a suggestion that you give everything you have, profess voluntary poverty, like religious do; but it is a precept to give some of what you have as alms, or what you have over, as the Gospel says: "*Quod superest date eleemosynam.*" And it is precisely because this precept is overlooked that Jesus Christ, on the day of Universal Judgement will say to the damned: "Go away from me, you cursed, into eternal fire." Why? Because you were not charitable to those in need. It was because he had not given of his surplus to poor Lazarus that Jesus Christ told the rich man buried in hell: "*Mortuus est dives et sepultus est in inferno.*" And again to those who do not give of their goods to the poor, the apostle St James says that their faith is dead, and it will not help them in eternal life. The same apostle also adds that pure and undefiled religion is this: to provide for the needs of orphans and widows, meaning doing works of spiritual or corporal mercy. All these and other similar judgements of the Holy Spirit are trying to point out that someone who could but does not do works of mercy is a Christian but not a Christian, he is a man who on the last day will hear a sentence of condemnation; a man who, although not lacking in anything like the rich man without mercy, will not receive mercy from God. So my third reminder is this: by our works of charity we close the gates of hell and open the gates of Paradise for ourselves.

Finally, I confide in you that my sight is failing, I feel weaker, and the day is not far off when I must pay my tribute to death and go to my grave. If that should happen and this be the last letter I send you, here then is my fourth and final reminder: I recommend to your charity all the works that God has deigned to entrust me with over almost fifty years; I recommend to you the Christian education of youth, vocations to the ecclesiastical state, and the foreign missions; but in a very special way I recommend to you the care of poor and abandoned young people who have always been the dearest portion in my heart, and who through the merits of Our Lord Jesus Christ I hope will be my crown and glory in heaven.

And now it only remains to me to call on God that he may shower you, your families and your interests with his choicest blessings; I ask him especially to grant you a prosperous and happy life, crowned in time by the death of the just. For this purpose the Salesians and young people in our houses join with me in praying to the Lord every day, and through the powerful intercession of the Virgin Help of Christians and St Francis de Sales we hope to be heard and to have the good fortune to find ourselves reunited in eternal bliss.

May you also be kind enough to pray for me. With the greatest of gratitude I profess myself, worthy Cooperators,

Turin, 8 December 1887,
your most indebted servant,
Fr John Bosco