

Salesian Formation Department
Salesian Youth Ministry Department

Young Salesians and accompaniment

Orientations and Guidelines



Rome 2019

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and accompaniment



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The images

On the front cover: view of Tel Morasti, the land of the prophet Micah (photo Salesian Monastery Ratisbonne).

“You have already been told what is right and what Yahweh wants of you. Only this, to do what is right, to love loyalty and to walk humbly with your God.” (Mic 6:8)

The motif of the images chosen for the text is ‘walking.’

The first step is taken by the Good Shepherd (p. 2 – Catacombs of Saint Callistus): a powerful icon of the Salesian vocation and mission, focal point of all that follows.

In the first pages we find photos of Colle Don Bosco, starting from the house at Becchi, and in the last pages Valdocco and the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians. The three parts of the text unfold within this pilgrimage from Becchi, birthplace of our father Don Bosco, to Valdocco from where the Salesian Family spread throughout the world.

The first part, RECOGNIZING, involves careful listening to the steps of the many young people in formation and the guides who accompany them, paying keen attention to what they communicate through the international research from which these Orientations and Guidelines emerged. The circle of feet [p. 22] and the puddle jump [p. 42] connect us with the first protagonists of this work: the young people themselves.

The second part, INTERPRETING, outlines the way that we want to follow. From the point where we now find ourselves, as it surfaces from the research, we go back to the beginning of the journey, to the spirit that directed Don Bosco’s steps. We are inspired and moved to look forward and understand how to move ahead. It is a long way [p. 64], but one we willingly undertake, because it is not a lonely path that isolates us from the rest of the world. Rather, it leads us to share the life of the young people to whom we are sent [p. 78], with a heart closer to that of Don Bosco.

The third part, CHOOSING, outlines the suggestions that emerge from the journey. Since they are suggestions rather than norms, there is need of further reflection and incarnation at the level of regions, provinces and local communities. The image of young people who express with their hands the need to receive and the desire to give LOVE [p. 126] highlights the main DIRECTION of the entire journey. “Love and do what you will” (Augustine).



Abbreviations

AL *Amoris Laetitia*

Alburquerque Eugenio Alburquerque Frutos, 'Saint Francis de Sales as Spiritual Director: Spiritual Direction in the Pastoral Praxis of the Bishop of Geneva,' Attard- García 11-22

Attard-García Fabio Attard and Miguel Ángel García, ed. *Spiritual Accompaniment: An Educational and Spiritual Journey with Young People in the Way of Don Bosco*. Bolton: Don Bosco Publications, 2018

Bay Marco Bay, *Giovani salesiani e accompagnamento. Risultati di una ricerca internazionale*. Roma: LAS, 2018. ET: *Young Salesians and Accompaniment: Results of an international survey*. Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2019.

Buccellato Giuseppe Buccellato, 'Don Bosco's Experience of Spiritual Direction as it was practised during his years at the Turin Convitto Ecclesiastico (1841-1844),' Attard- García 75-105

C *Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales*

CV *Christus Vivit*

EG *Evangelii Gaudium*

EPC Educative and pastoral community

FD XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops 2018, *Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment: Final Document*

For Salesian Youth Ministry Department, *Salesian Youth Ministry: Frame of Reference* (2014)

FSDB *Formation of Salesians of Don Bosco: Ratio Fundamental Institutionis et Studiorum* (4th edition, 2016)

GE *Gaudete et Exsultate*

Giraud Aldo Giraud, 'Special Characteristics of the Spiritual Direction that Don Bosco Offered to Young People,' Attard- García 107-115. 'Spiritual Direction in Saint John Bosco: Contents and Methods...', Attard- García 117-127

Grech Louis Grech, *Salesian Spiritual Companionship with Young People Today inspired by the Thought and Praxis of St John Bosco*. Malta: Horizons, 2018

IL XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops 2018, *Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment: Instrumentum Laboris*

McDonnell Eunan McDonnell, 'Spiritual Direction in Saint Francis de Sales: Outlines of the Spiritual and Pedagogical Method in View of Salesian Youth Ministry,' Attard-García 49-71

NW *New Wine in New Wineskins*, CICLSAL, Rome 2017

OEA *Oeuvres de saint François de Sales*. Annecy 1892-1932

R *General Regulations of the Society of St Francis de Sales*

Struś Józef Struś, 'St Francis de Sales as Spiritual Director,' Attard- García 23-48.

VC *Vita Consecrata*





QUESTA
È LA MIA CASA.
DALLA BOSCO



Presentation

Dear confreres,

I am happy to present to you *Young Salesians and Accompaniment: Orientations and Guidelines*, promulgating it *ad experimentum* for a period of three years. While not being a supplement to our *Ratio (Formation of Salesians of Don Bosco)*, it supersedes the *Ratio* in case of conflict.

I am particularly happy to say that this document is the fruit of collaboration between the Formation and Youth Ministry departments of our Congregation. Spiritual accompaniment, as is becoming more and more clear to us, is central to both youth ministry and formation. At the request of the Rector Major and his Council, the two departments embarked on a fruitful collaboration that involved an extensive exercise of listening to young Salesians and to their spiritual guides. The two departments were, in fact, using the method of discernment that has been employed in the Synods on the family and the recently concluded Synod on Young People, the Faith and Vocation Discernment.

Despite the fact that the current document results from a collaboration between two departments, it focuses on accompaniment of Salesians in the processes of initial formation. Within accompaniment in general, the central point of concern is the relationship of personal spiritual accompaniment. Since, however, in our tradition and praxis there is a very close relationship between personal and community accompaniment, the document throws light also on community accompaniment, the personal talk with the Rector, and other elements in the formation process.

Further, it has become very evident through our 'listening' exercise that what happens in youth ministry affects formation, and vice versa. If there is good accompaniment and vocation discernment in our youth ministry, Salesian vocations emerging from there will enter well prepared into the processes of formation. And if there is good accompaniment in formation, we can hope to have



Salesians who are well prepared for youth ministry and the accompaniment of young people. Our mission ‘sets the tenor of our whole life’ (C 3), and ‘to become a consecrated apostle like Don Bosco is the guiding principle of our process of formation’ (FSDB 41). To become ‘companions on the way’ for young people, as Don Bosco was at Valdocco, is at the very core of our mission. And one of the best ways to prepare Salesians for this mission is to offer them rich experiences of personal accompaniment during initial formation, through the service of confreres ‘capable of a living communication of the Salesian ideal and of a genuine dialogue with the young confreres’ (C 104).

The document is addressed, therefore, to all those who are involved in different ways in the processes of initial formation: spiritual guides, formation guides and confessors; Rectors of those in initial formation – and here we must not forget practical trainees – and their Councils; Provincials and their Councils, provincial formation delegates and their commissions. But in the light of what I have said above about the connection between youth ministry and formation, it is addressed also in some way to all Salesians involved in youth ministry, and most especially to those working with aspirants to the Salesian life. All are invited to read this document, allowing themselves to be challenged and provoked by it, in order to work out ways – including the involvement of young Salesians themselves – of adopting the orientations and implementing the guidelines that the Rector Major and his Council hereby entrust to the entire Congregation.

At the core of the document is the invitation to formators and spiritual guides to be truly and genuinely Salesian. Writing to you from the Basilica of the Sacro Cuore, I cannot but ask you to go back to Don Bosco’s Letter from Rome, and to make of the Preventive System our model of formation. Don Bosco said it beautifully: Strive to make yourselves loved! Our perpetual profession cross is a constant invitation and reminder to us of this central principle of Don Bosco’s system of education: *Studia di farti amare!*



The approach of the 400th anniversary of the death of our patron St Francis de Sales is yet another invitation to us to recover the centrality of the heart in our charism and educative system, and to restore spiritual accompaniment to its proper place both in the pastoral proposal of Don Bosco and in the processes of formation of his Salesians.

Ángel Fernández Artime, SDB
Rector Major
Sacro Cuore – Rome, 15 August 2019





Introduction

In recent years, the Formation and Youth Ministry departments of the Salesians of Don Bosco have been engaged in an intense study of Salesian Personal Accompaniment (APS). Happily, the recent Synod of Bishops on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment has reflected on the related theme of the accompaniment of young people in the discernment of their vocation. We are therefore before an important topic that regards both formation and pastoral praxis.

Walking alongside young people and encouraging them to engage in free and responsible dialogue with the Lord who calls, is a task that belongs to the heart of the Salesian vocation and mission. To create a climate of trust and confidence in which young people feel loved as they are is part of Don Bosco's educational system and spirituality, and constitutes the framework of understanding of Salesian spiritual accompaniment.

Spiritual accompaniment, both communitarian and personal, is an equally important part of the processes of initial formation and, in fact, of formation as lifelong. There is an intrinsic and ongoing interaction between the accompaniment offered in our youth ministry, and that offered and experienced in the processes of formation. The better the accompaniment of young people, the better is likely to be the accompaniment experienced during the processes of formation; and the better the accompaniment during the years of initial formation, the more likely it is that Salesians will be good spiritual guides to young people and to our lay mission partners.

Already before GC27, Salesian accompaniment was the focus of attention of the department of Youth Ministry and the department of Formation, each in its own way, with the aim of promoting a rediscovery of this original part of the Salesian mission. The department of Youth Ministry conducted three seminars on the topic of the spiritual accompaniment of



young people,¹ while the department of Formation engaged in a process of consultation that was to result in a supplement to our *Ratio* on the topic of ‘Salesian personal accompaniment’ – which, while distinguishing itself from community accompaniment, was meant to include diverse forms of accompaniment such as the friendly talk with the Rector, personal spiritual accompaniment (‘spiritual direction’), the sacrament of reconciliation, psychological accompaniment, periodic evaluations (‘scrutinies’), and intellectual, liturgical and pastoral accompaniment.

In June 2015, a draft of this supplement – entitled *Criteria and Norms for Salesian Personal Accompaniment* – was presented to the Rector Major and his Council, but was not promulgated. Instead, Fr Ángel Fernández Artime invited the two departments of Formation and Youth Ministry to collaborate in a new process that would involve a more sustained process of *listening* to all those involved in Salesian spiritual accompaniment, before going on to interpreting and marking out the way ahead. The objective remained that of offering guidelines on the topic of Salesian personal accompaniment in the processes of formation.

The two departments made a critical decision to retain the broad understanding of ‘Salesian personal accompaniment’ as envisaged originally by the Formation department, but to focus especially on ‘personal spiritual accompaniment’ or the relationship of ‘personal spiritual direction’ in the processes of initial formation. Given that personal spiritual accompaniment is always done in the context of community, it was to be expected that the study would throw light also on the other elements

¹ Fabio Attard and Miguel Ángel García, *Spiritual Accompaniment: An educational and spiritual journey with young people in the way of Don Bosco* (Bolton: Don Bosco Publications, 2018).



such as the friendly talk, the sacrament of reconciliation, and the role of the community. The restriction of the study to the processes of initial formation meant that it would not directly concern itself with spiritual accompaniment in the context of youth ministry, or even with such accompaniment in the context of ongoing (in the sense of ‘post-initial’) formation. However, as we will see, important implications did emerge from the study for these areas of our life and ministry.

Method

In our study we followed the method of spiritual discernment – recognizing, interpreting, choosing – which is now no longer something optional, but must become the *habitus* of every Christian community. We must add that the listening and recognizing that is part of discernment is no merely sociological affair. There is, in fact, no such thing as ‘pure data.’ We are always already enveloped and immersed in grace. We live in a world that has been redeemed, in which the Spirit, as Pope Francis reminds us, has been given to all the baptized.²

So discernment means listening to what the Spirit is telling us, in our case through the great gift that is our 4000 plus formees and their spiritual guides. Young people, the 2018 Synod has said, are a *theological locus* ‘in which the Lord reveals to us some of his expectations and challenges for building the future.’ (FD 64)

Use

The text is obviously meant to provide orientations and guidelines concerning Salesian personal accompaniment in

² Francis, *Costituzione apostolica* Episcopalis communio *sul sinodo dei vescovi* (15 September 2008) 5.



the processes of initial formation, with special reference to personal spiritual accompaniment. Inevitably, the orientations and guidelines will also touch upon the ‘before’ and the ‘after’: the ‘before,’ because the quality of youth ministry and vocation animation directly affects initial formation; and the ‘after,’ because accompaniment, both communitarian and personal, is meant to be an integral part of formation understood as life-long, besides being a valuable service that we are called to offer to the young and to our lay mission partners.

The text is addressed primarily to those involved in different ways in the processes of initial formation: Rectors, formators, confessors and spiritual guides; provincial formation delegates and their commissions; Provincials and their councils.

Besides providing orientations and guidelines, the text is also to be used, along with Marco Bay’s book, *Young Salesians and Accompaniment*, for animation at world, regional and provincial levels.

Acknowledgements

We cannot end without thanking the many people who have been involved in our study of Salesian personal accompaniment:

Those involved in the drafting of the *Criteria and Norms regarding Salesian Personal Accompaniment*: Francesco Cereda, the then general councillor for formation, Chrys Saldanha, and all the regional formation coordinators and provincial formation delegates and the respective commissions.

The members of the Youth Ministry department: Miguel Ángel García, Patrick Antonyraj, Daniel García, Tarcizio Morais.



The members of the Formation department: Raymond Callo, Salvador Cleofas Murguía Villalobos (now Bishop of Mixes – Mexico), Silvio Roggia and Francisco Santos Montero.

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Those involved in the administration of the questionnaire.³

The candidates and confreres – those in initial formation as well as those offering the service of spiritual guidance – who participated in the survey.

The very large number of confreres and young people who generously did the data entry.⁴

The redaction group that worked on the draft of the present *Orientations and guidelines*: Miguel Ángel García, Koldo Gutierrez, Louis Grech, Salvador Cleofas Murguía Villalobos, Silvio Roggia, Francisco Santos Montero and Michal Vojtaš.

³ The names may be found in Bay 25.

⁴ The names may be found in Bay 25-26.



The translators: Zdzisław Brzęk, Placide Carava, Zenon Klawikowski, Luis Onrubia, Jean-Luc Vande Kerkhove, José Antenor Velho.

Finally, a very special thanks to Marco Bay and Silvio Roggia, for the passion and competence with which they pushed forward this work: without them it would have been impossible.

Ivo Coelho, SDB

Consigliere generale per la Formazione

Fabio Attard, SDB

Consigliere generale per la Pastorale Giovanile

Sacro Cuore – Roma, 25 luglio 2019







Part one

Recognizing





1. The study of Salesian personal accompaniment

1.1 THE PROCESS

1. The ‘pre-history’ of the present study has already been indicated in the introduction, and so we will restrict ourselves here to describing the process that led us to the current *Orientations and guidelines* regarding Salesian spiritual accompaniment.

The first step in the collaboration between the departments of Youth Ministry and Formation was to convoke an international seminar in Rome, 22-24 April 2016, with representatives from the fields of youth ministry and of formation from the seven regions into which the Congregation is divided.¹ One of the immediate fruits of this seminar was a clear direction for the following months: listening to the most numerous and important set of actors in the process of Salesian personal accompaniment: the young Salesians themselves. This group was defined as all those in the process of initial formation – those preparing for Salesian life in the prenovitiate, novices, post-novices, practical trainees, the two groups in specific formation (aspirants to the priesthood and Brother-Salesians) – and also those in the first five years after priestly ordination or perpetual profession (the quinquennium).

2. Led by Salesian Brother Marco Bay, Director of the Interfaculty Data Research and Processing Centre of the Salesian Pontifical University – Rome (UPS), and Silvio Roggia of the Formation department, seven questionnaires were prepared, one for each of the phases mentioned above, and an eighth one for those offering the service of accompaniment and spiritual guidance. The questionnaires, going into an average of 15 pages each, revolved around 12 key themes that had emerged in the April 2016 seminar. After a trial run and subsequent revision, the eight questionnaires were translated into the 6 most used languages in the Congre-

¹ The 7 regions established by GC27 are Africa – Madagascar, Central and Northern Europe, Mediterranean, South Asia, Interamerica, Latin America Southern Cone, and East Asia – Oceania.



gation: English, French, Italian, Polish, Portuguese and Spanish.

A first idea was to administer the questionnaires online. This was discarded for two reasons. First, the reflective and thoughtful approach demanded by the many open questions in the questionnaires is presumably better supported by paper than by keyboard and mouse. The second reason was the geography of initial formation in the Congregation: where the largest number of formees is found, the digital divide is still very strong, with the lack of the kind of connectivity needed for a calm and unhurried approach to questionnaires that call for anything between 30 and 60 minutes of answering time.

3. A reading of some of the questions, especially those cutting across the different phases, helps to perceive the nature of the research:

Which are the points that helped you grow in the Salesian vocation? How do you see your convictions about the ways of growing in the spiritual life? What has most helped you to reach the specific objectives of each phase of formation? What do you have to say about your experience of personal spiritual accompaniment? Could you describe personal spiritual accompaniment?

What is it that you appreciate about the confreres responsible for your initial formation? What is it that you do not appreciate in them? What are the indispensable tasks on the part of those who coordinate, animate, guide and govern the religious community? If the sacrament of reconciliation is a great gift for spiritual growth, could you try to say what you think about it, your experience of it, and in what way the sacrament has been of help to you?

Looking at the journey so far and thinking about the help you have received from those who have accompanied you, say something about what you have discovered that is important and new in your knowledge of yourself, your gifts and limitations. Talk briefly about the most important elements of your past life, positive and negative, that are part of the journey of self-discovery. Indicate what you imagine to be your vocational journey in the future.

Have you had up to now a positive experience of community with your companions and other Salesians with whom you have interacted? In Salesian settings and in the houses in which you have lived, what has been of most help to your growth? Could you try to express the difficulties you have ex-



perienced in personal spiritual accompaniment in a Salesian setting? What went well and what could have gone better on your part, and on the part of the guide?

For the young people who will come after you in the journey of Salesian formation, what changes would you suggest to make spiritual accompaniment more useful? (Bay 15)

4. During the first two months of 2017 the questionnaires were sent to all the provinces according to the number of copies for each phase indicated by the provincial formation delegates. They were administered during the first six months of 2017. Participation went beyond the most optimistic forecasts, as can be seen in Table 02 which indicates the number of completed questionnaires that reached the Interfaculty Data Processing Research Centre of the UPS in a sealed envelope. (Bay 35-37) Note especially the percentage of responses with respect to the number of candidates / confreres in each of the initial formation phases according to data supplied by the head office in Rome (31 December 2017).

	Frequency of questionnaires filled and submitted	Percentages according to provincial Flash reports
Prenovices	455	87
Novices	399	92
Postnovices	903	93
Practical Trainees	554	78
Specific, Theology	701	87
Specific, Brothers	54	79
Quinquennium	369	41
Spiritual guides	538	-
Total	4.000	-

Table 02. Respondents divided according to phase of formation plus guides

Even the phases in which the percentage of respondents is comparatively lower, such as practical training and the quinquennium, reveal a strong participation. We are dealing here with confreres who are not together in houses of formation and who, nevertheless, opted to respond.

5. The interest in this kind of research and the willingness to participate also emerges in the generous service of more than 220 confreres from different regions who volunteered to tabulate the data. Between June and August 2017, more than 4000 responses were transformed into PDF files. If we keep in mind that an average of 20 to 40 minutes is needed for work on a single question-



naire, depending on the open answers that it contains, we have an idea of the long hours of service that have been volunteered, mostly by postnovices and students of theology. The entire tabulation job was done through digital platforms.

6. At the end of September 2017 a second international seminar was held at Genzano di Roma in order to study this data. Most of the participants had taken part in the first seminar in 2016. A choice was made not to engage in an interpretation of the data, but rather to devote time to perceive the richness of the messages offered by the great chorus of voices representing 24.18% of the total number of members of the Congregation (novices included).

In the interests of confidentiality, the respondents had been asked to indicate neither name, nor community nor province. It was only a careful cataloguing of the replies, therefore, based on the place from which they were sent and the postal data, that allowed classification by region of origin. This offered an important added value to the research, making it possible to compare not only phases and linguistic groupings but also regions.

7. With the tables of percentages and graphs for the closed answers and the abundant open responses in different languages, the first report exceeded 5000 pages. It was the great merit of Marco Bay to have reduced this to the 584 pages of the volume *Giovani salesiani e accompagnamento. Risultati di una ricerca internazionale* (Rome: LAS, 2018), now available in English translation as *Young Salesians and Accompaniment: Results of an international survey* (Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2019). Once again, this book is meant to be not an interpretation but a first synthesis of the data received.

1.2 MACROSCOPIC ELEMENTS REGARDING THE RESPONDENTS

8. In the introduction to *Young Salesians and Accompaniment*, Bay notes that certain 'macroscopic elements' emerge immediately from the data. (Bay 19) These give us an idea of the variety of situations and contexts of the respondents, and at the same time offer a realistic image of the Salesian Congregation itself in its geographical and linguistic distribution and complexity. We report these elements in some detail, along with some illustrative tables from the first chapter of the book. (Bay 19-24, 39-44)



9. But first let us put down clearly some numbers and percentages.

	Total (31.12.2017)	Responses	% respondents vs total SDB
Prenovices	521	455	–
Novices + SDB in initial formation	3827	3007	20.51
Spiritual guides	–	538	–
Total (novices + professed)	14.660	4000	27.29

Note that novices and professed members in formation (including the quinquennium) who replied form 20.51% of the total number of members of the Congregation as of 31 December 2017 (novices included). Novices, professed members in formation, and spiritual guides who responded form 24.18% of the total number of members of the Congregation as of 31 December 2017 (novices included).

1.2.1 Newly professed

10. On the 50th anniversary of Vatican Council II and 15 years into the new millennium, the Salesian Congregation shows a decrease in the number of newly professed (see fig. 01a, 01b and 01c). However, this data must be read in conjunction with the significant reduction in the number of those leaving the novitiate before first profession: while there is a drop in the number of novices, there is at the same time a higher rate of those making first profession. Since 2011 there has been a downward trend also in the rate of departures among those in temporary vows. So the Congregation has a very real generational turnover and considerable potential, even if it does not seem to be able to maintain the same consistency and presence on all educational and pastoral fronts. The hundreds of newly professed members allow the Congregation to face the educational-pastoral and vocational challenges in a solid way, but it is clear from their testimonies that they require attention, support and formative stimuli of various kinds.



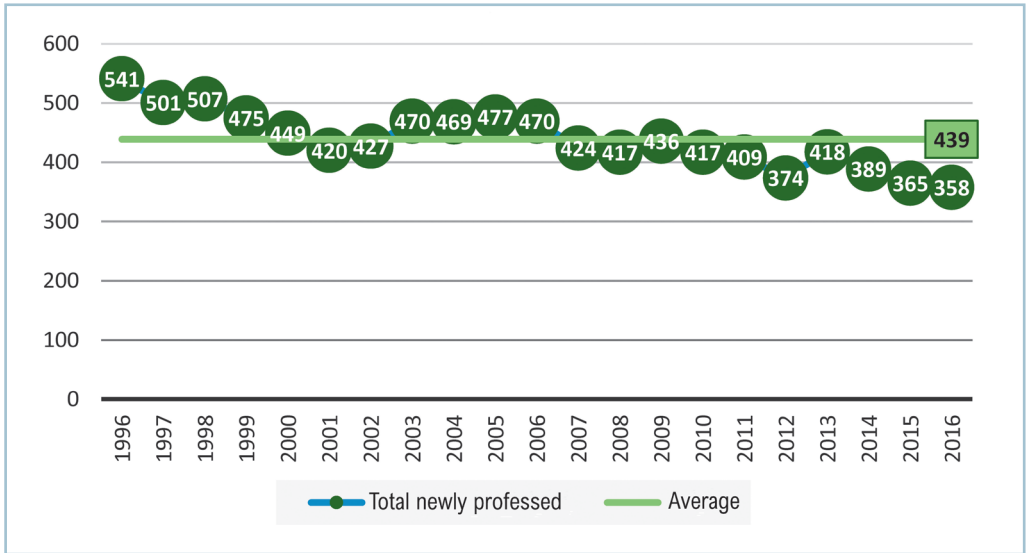


Fig. 01a. Newly professed confreres between 1996 and 2016

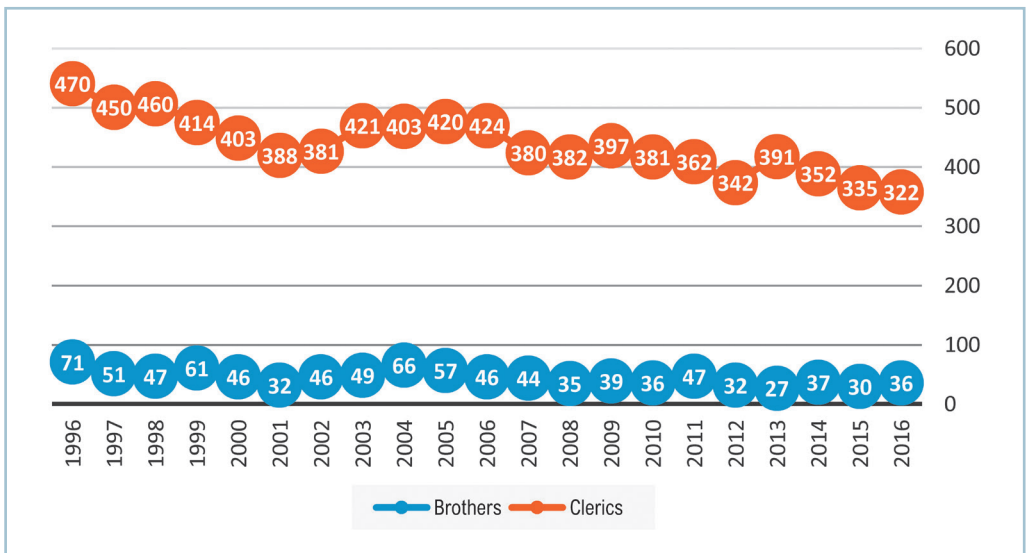


Fig. 01b. Newly professed confreres, lay and clerical, in the period 1996-2016



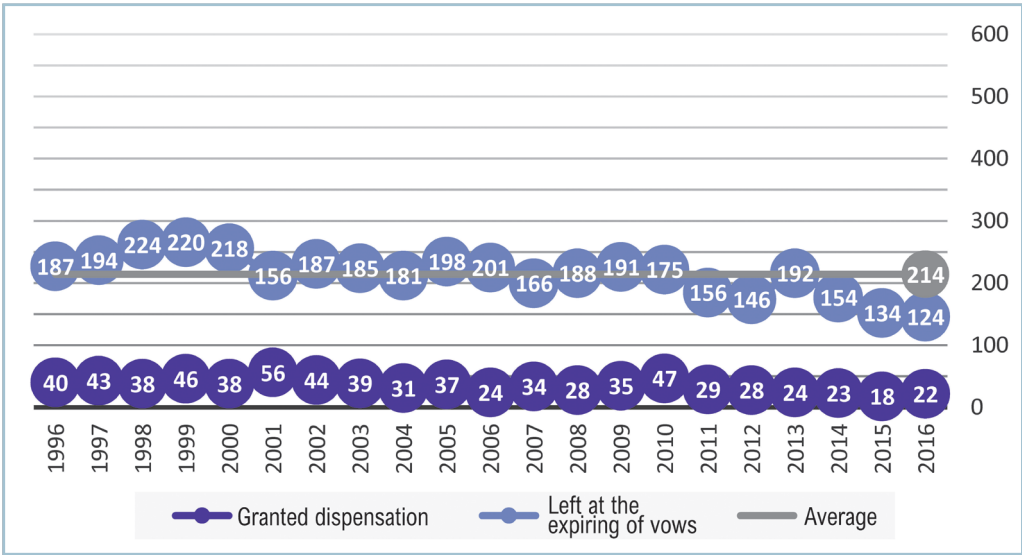


Fig. 01c. Confreres in temporary vows who left the Society (1996-2016)

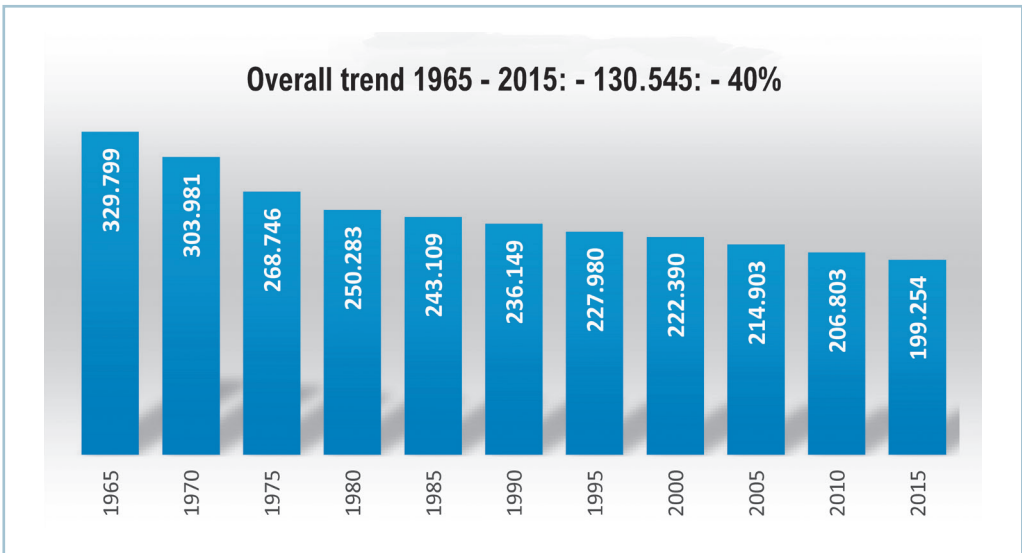


Fig. 01d. Number of members of religious institutes and societies of apostolic life (1965-2015) and the difference



1.2.2 Demographics

11. A little more than half (51%) of the young respondents are concentrated in India (1235 – 30.9%), Italy (292 – 7.3%, where, however, there are many novices and SDB students coming from other countries and regions), Brazil (205 – 5.1%), the Philippines (156 – 3.9%), and the Democratic Republic of Congo (145 – 3.6%). These are followed by Kenya (144 – 3.6%), Poland (130 – 3.3%), Colombia (115 – 2.9%, again with student confreres from different countries), Timor Leste (98 – 2.5%) and so on (see Bay, chapter 1, table 04).²

What does this mean in terms of human resources for the Salesian Society in the next twenty years?



Fig. 02. Demographic distribution of respondents according to provinces

The red circles indicate the areas of greatest concentration of respondents. (Bay 21)

² We need to keep constantly in mind that Italy, Philippines, Kenya and Colombia have such relatively high percentages because of the interprovincial communities present in these countries.



		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	RASS	1274	31,9	32,0	32,0
	RAFM	836	20,9	21,0	53,0
	RASE	480	12,0	12,1	65,1
	RAMI	402	10,1	10,1	75,2
	RAMS	336	8,4	8,4	83,6
	RMED	336	8,4	8,4	92,0
	RECN	266	6,7	6,7	98,7
	UPS	51	1,3	1,3	100,0
	Total	3981	99,5	100,0	
Missing	Not located	19	0,5		
Total		4000	100,0		

Table 04. Respondents according to Salesian regions (frequencies and percentages)
 Abbreviations: RAFM: Africa-Madagascar; RAMI: Interamerica; RAMS America South Cone;
 RASE: East Asia-Oceania; RASS: South Asia; RECN: Europe Centre North; RMED: Mediterranean;
 UPS: Pontifical Salesian University Vice-Province.

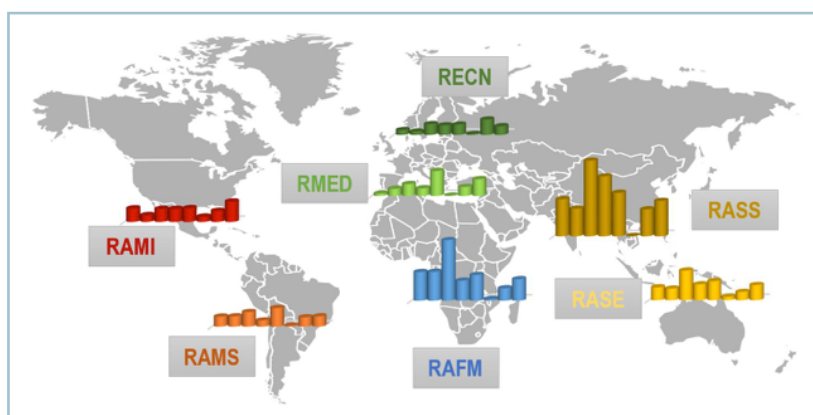


Fig. 01. The sample according to regions and phases of formation



1.2.3 Language

12. More than half the respondents (53%) make use of the English language. They represent very different geographical, social, religious and cultural contexts (India, the Philippines, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Malawi, Ghana, Vietnam, Ethiopia, Australia, Sri Lanka, Zambia, USA, Indonesia, Israel, Korea, Rwanda, Great Britain, Ireland, Thailand, China, Austria, Malta, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, Slovakia, South Africa, Timor Leste, Japan, Croatia, Germany...). 10% use Italian.

Many questions arise. What nuances or differences in formation are called for by anthropological and cultural filters like these? What are their implications for identity building and membership? Given that formation must take into account tradition as well as innovation, what about access to historical sources (critical study of Don Bosco and the Congregation)?

Language	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
EN English	2101	52,5	52,5	52,5
ES Spanish	521	13,0	13,0	65,6
FR French	468	11,7	11,7	77,3
PT Portuguese	394	9,9	9,9	87,1
IT Italian	388	9,7	9,7	96,8
PL Polish*	128	3,2	3,2	100,0
TOTALE	4.000	100,0	100,0	

Table 07. Respondents according to language of compilation of the questionnaire (frequencies and percentages).

Questionnaires completed in Polish were translated into Italian.

NB: The Polish responses were translated into Italian. As already mentioned, we need to keep in mind also that a good number of the Italian responses were by novices or confreres in various phases of initial formation or study in Italy.



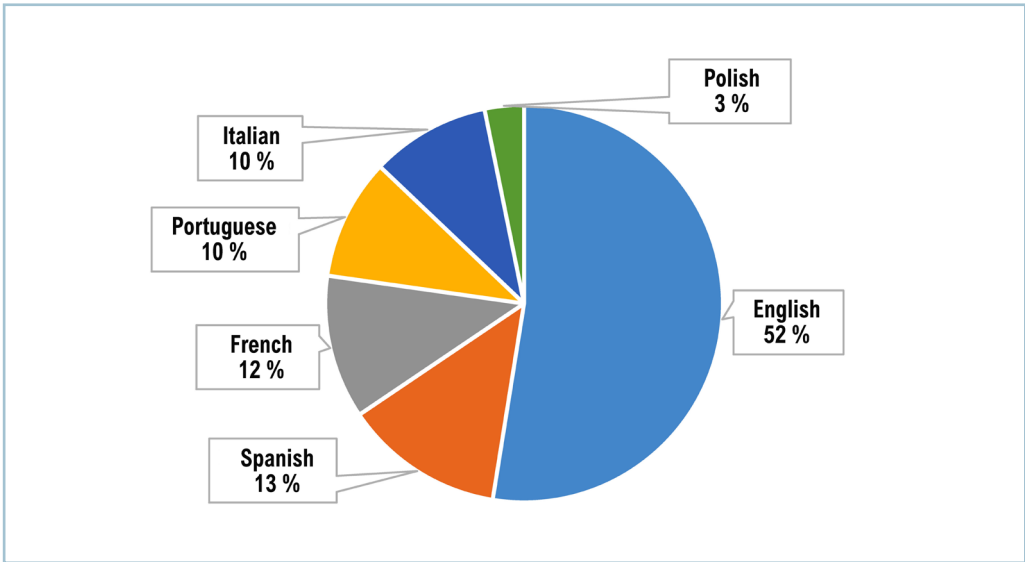


Fig. 2. Respondents according to language of compilation of the questionnaire (percentages)

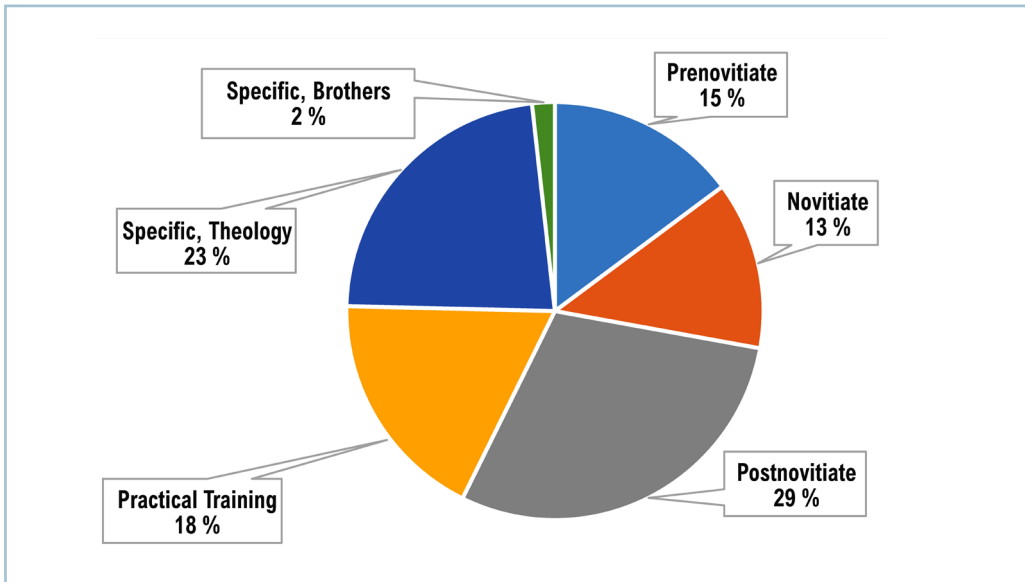
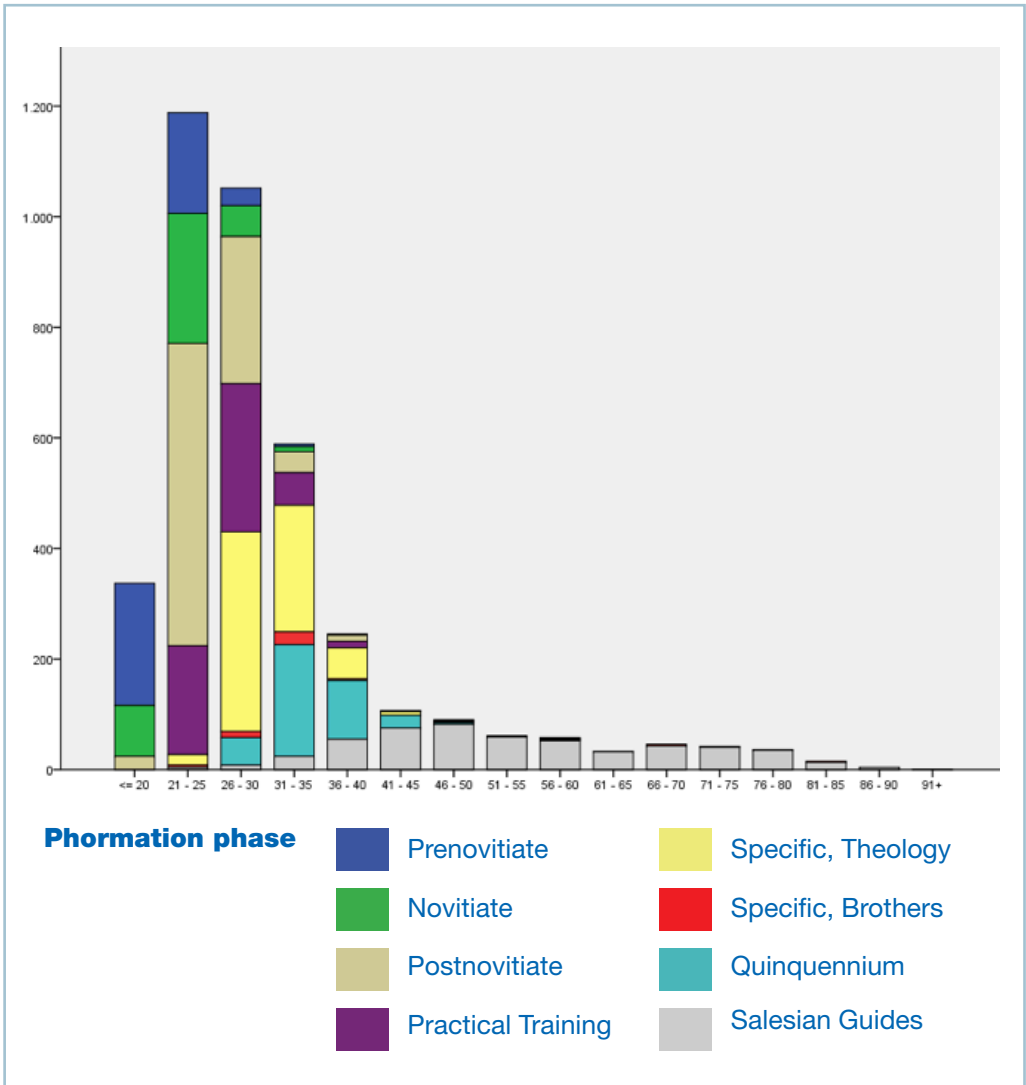


Fig. 03. Respondents according to phase of formation (percentages) (Bay 44)



1.2.4 Age

13. If we exclude the spiritual guides, we are faced with respondents in the 20-30 age bracket, mainly from Africa, Madagascar, Asia and Oceania (see fig. 03). As per the central database, Salesians + novices under the age of 35 are 3,355; those of the sample are 2,726, or about 81% of confreres and novices under 35. These proportions, compared with the 2,751 Salesians over 75 years of age, are rather comforting as a generational turn-over. If we go instead to the regional level as shown in the graph (fig. 3a), significant imbalances are noted.



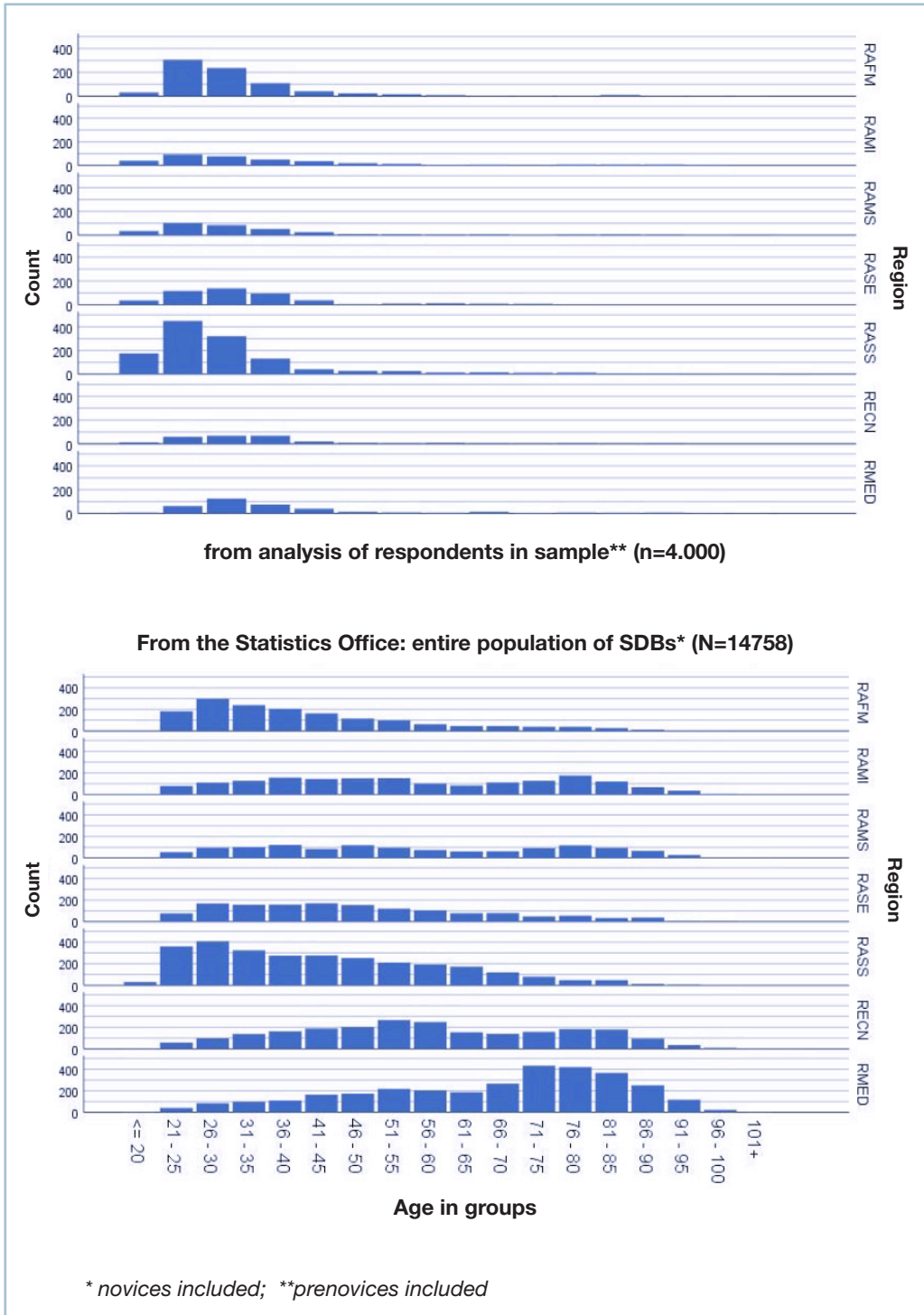


Fig. 3a. Age groups in the sample divided by region of origin
 From the central database (total number of Salesians = 14,758 at 31 December 2017)



14. Investment in the younger age groups is of fundamental importance for the present and the future of the Congregation, for vocational fidelity and fruitfulness.

In addition, it can be seen that the spiritual guides (see fig. 04) are of different ages, with a high concentration in the 40-50 age bracket. 27.4% of them work in the South Asia region and 16.9% in Africa – Madagascar. About half of them (48.3%) answered in English. Significant generational groups can be observed in the sample. Those over 70 are just under a hundred (of which more than a quarter are found in America, a fifth in the South Asia region and another fifth in Africa): a relevant group of people, active and appreciated for their experience, reliability and wisdom.

Figure 04. Overall trend of age groups of spiritual guides.

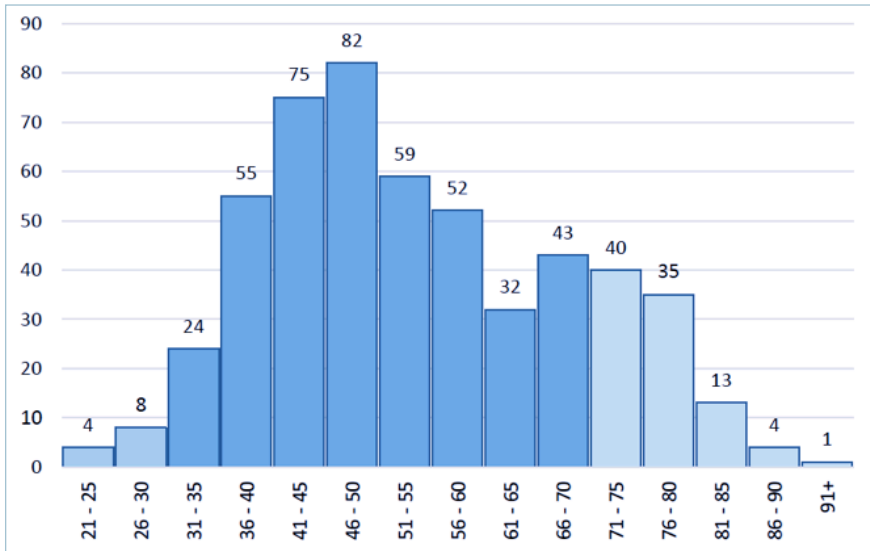


Fig. 4. Spiritual guides according to age groups

1.3 THE CURRENT DOCUMENT

15. We have said already that Bay's book is intended to be not an interpretation of the data but merely a first synthesis.

The work of interpretation will be carried out in two ways: [1] by a group of experts, [2] and by the departments of Formation and Youth Ministry.



The group of experts will carry out in-depth studies of the data, and other such studies will follow, taking up themes such as interculturality and accompaniment, interpretation from a psychological point of view, textual analyses of recurring items in phases such as practical training and the quinquennium, etc.

16. The interpretation by the departments of Formation and Youth Ministry is, instead, embodied in the current document – *Young Salesians and Accompaniment: Orientations and Guidelines*.

This second interpretative effort involves a movement of return, in some way, to the groups involved in the research – those in initial formation, those accompanying them as guides, provincial formation delegates and their commissions. The inspiration here comes from an image borrowed from trigonometry: triangulation. The synergy of three perspectives affords us a better grasp of the reality under study.

- The first perspective is that of the *data emerging from the research*, which is almost a census rather than a sample survey, given the high number of respondents for each phase.
- A second perspective is that of the *first hand experience of local realities*. Here the regional level is of special importance for capturing the peculiarities that emerge in each region and trying to grasp differences between regions. In general, the privileged moments for this work are the annual meetings of the regional formation commissions, the periodic meetings of the provincial formation commissions, and also meetings of formators of particular phases, such as those for Rectors and principals of postnovitiates in 2018-2019.
- The third perspective comes from the *pre-understanding of Salesian personal accompaniment* that all Salesians have. This pre-understanding might be seen as a limiting ‘pre-judgment’ or prejudice, but it should also be obvious that there is no way to ‘jump out’ of our pre-understanding. The only way is to become aware of it, and to engage in a continual process of enrichment, modification and purification in interaction with fresh data – which is in fact what we have been calling the process of triangulation.

17. Data, first-hand experience and Salesian pre-understanding come together in the method of discernment that has structured the study, and that gives a structure also to the present document with its three parts:



1. *Recognizing*: this first part gives an account of the listening process (the study of Salesian personal accompaniment), and then goes on to indicate the themes emerging from the research, organizing them around four points: what is personal spiritual accompaniment, those involved in it, how it is carried out, and some mediations.

2. *Interpreting*: the second part may be seen as the result of triangulation: interpreting the data in conjunction with first-hand experience at the regional and provincial levels, on the basis of the Salesian pre-understanding illuminated by the recent magisterium of the Church and the Salesian charism and tradition.

3. *Choosing*: the third part puts down strategies and lines of action suggested by the interpretation of the data. The guidelines that are offered are meant to serve as a stimulus for reflection, discussion and renewal, with the goal of making Salesian personal accompaniment an even more fruitful element in the journey of vocational fidelity.

18. All this may seem too ambitious, and it certainly would be, if it were a question merely of a printed text. But in point of fact the present document is merely one step within a far longer journey that has involved literally thousands of people, amounting to a little less than one-third of the Congregation.

The process of involvement is already part of the change – which has therefore already begun. Our firm hope is that this process will continue, involving every circumscription, community and confrere. In fact, it is not a question of adding something new to our already heavy workloads. It is a question of rediscovering the richness and beauty of a treasure that already belongs to us by vocation, a charismatic gift that can make us more faithful to Don Bosco and to the young people of our times, starting with those who feel called to share our lives, but not excluding those to whom we are sent. Because, as will become clear in what follows, there is the strictest correlation between formation and mission, between the quality of spiritual accompaniment in the processes of initial formation and the quality and place of such accompaniment in youth ministry and in the animation of our lay mission partners.

19. The research also provides rich data about differences between regions, which can be compared both with the overall re-



sults as well as with other regions. The current document, however, cannot enter into the analysis of these regional variations, which is a task best taken up at the regional level, especially by the regional formation centres, regional formation commissions and interprovincial formation communities.

20. Article 119 of our Constitutions – the last in the third part dedicated to formation, and therefore a summary and interpretative key to that part – offers a good indication of the fruit of Salesian personal accompaniment: ongoing formation as a permanent personal frame of mind. Read alongside R 99, it also implies that, just as formation is not something that ‘finishes’ with the last phase of initial formation, spiritual accompaniment is not something reserved for the years of initial formation.

Art. 119: Ongoing formation as a permanent personal frame of mind

Living in the midst of the young and in constant contact with working-class surroundings, the Salesian tries to discern the voice of the Spirit in the events of each day, and so acquires the ability to learn from life’s experiences. He sees his ordinary activities as effective means of formation, and he also makes use of any other means of formation that may be offered him.

Even when he is fully occupied he finds opportunities for renewing the religious and pastoral meaning of his life and of learning to carry out his work with greater competence.

He also feels it his task to make the best formative use of any situation, and to see it as a favourable opportunity for growing in his vocation.

Like formation, spiritual accompaniment is also permanent and lifelong, and must become a *permanent personal attitude and habit*. This is the great process in which the present document takes its place, as a small but hopefully useful contribution.





2 Emerging topics

21. In the previous chapter, we engaged in a description of the process leading to the current document, while also highlighting certain macroscopic elements regarding the respondents. In the current chapter we will present certain topics emerging from the research, while reserving interpretation to Part II. These topics have been organized around four nuclei: the principal actors in personal spiritual accompaniment; the dominant idea of personal spiritual accompaniment among those being accompanied and their guides; what actually happens in Salesian personal spiritual accompaniment; and the role played by some important mediations and instruments.

We remember again that the focus of the research was personal spiritual accompaniment in the processes of Salesian initial formation, but that it throws light also on related elements such as the friendly talk with the Rector, community spiritual accompaniment, the sacrament of reconciliation, the periodic assessments (scrutinies), and the role of the community.

2.1 THOSE INVOLVED IN PERSONAL SPIRITUAL ACCOMPANIMENT

22. The principal actors in personal spiritual accompaniment are the young persons being accompanied, their spiritual guides, the formation team and the community. The raw data regarding numbers and percentages has already been presented; here we try to identify the topics that emerge from these and other elements in the responses.



2.1.1 A young Congregation

The 20-30 age bracket

23. A first point is that the Salesian Congregation is quite young – perhaps younger than we commonly think. The number of Salesians who expressed themselves in the questionnaire – here we exclude prenovices but include novices and those offering the service of guidance – is 24.18% of the total: a little under one-fourth of the 14,660 members of the Congregation as of 31 December 2017, novices included. If we exclude the spiritual guides, the respondents are quite young, most of them in the age group addressed by the 2018 Synod on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment:

If we exclude the spiritual guides, we are dealing with respondents who are mostly between 20 and 30 years, predominantly African and Asian. According to the central database the SDB + novices under the age of 35 in 2017 were 3,355; those involved in the research were 2,726 (prenovices excluded). Approximately 81% of confreres and novices under 35 have been reached by this survey. (Bay 22)

24. We have seen already the distribution of young confreres in the different phases of formation. It is important to note that this distribution is influenced also by the varying durations of these phases: a maximum of 1 year for the prenovitiate; 1 year for the novitiate; 2-4 years for the postnovitiate; 2-3 years for practical training; 4 years for specific formation to the priesthood; 2 years for specific formation for Brother-Salesians. Thus, as of 31 December 2017, there were 521 prenovices, 435 novices, 942 postnovices, 676 practical trainees, 740 aspirants to the priesthood in specific formation, 68 Brother-Salesians in specific formation, and 966 Priest-Salesians in the quinquennium. (Bay 32) Obviously, the relatively small number of Brother-Salesians in initial formation³ is also reflected in their number in specific formation. This small number, it must be noted, tends to skew interpretations of their responses.

Geographic and linguistic shift

25. Another face of the Congregation that emerges is its internationality, along with a marked geographic and linguistic shift – a direct result of the great missionary projects of the Congregation such as Project Africa.

³ 214 as of 31 December 2015: see AGC 424 (2017) 72.



Responses to the questionnaires came from confreres or candidates from 61 nations spread over 88 circumscriptions grouped into 7 regions.

The *geographic* shift emerges when we look at the continental distribution represented more or less by the Salesian regions. Limiting ourselves to the most represented segment in the questionnaire, that of the postnovices, we see that 76.7% of them come from Africa – Madagascar, Asia and Oceania (34.9% from South Asia, 28.2% from Africa and Madagascar, 13.6% from East Asia and Oceania). These represent the three regions with the most significant vocational growth, with Africa – Madagascar in the lead. Three-fourths of the total number of Salesian postnovices comes from these regions.

26. When we look at the *linguistic* factor, we cannot help noting that 53% of the responses arrived in English. The implications for formation of this geographic and linguistic shift need to be studied. However, it is important to note that our respondents look upon interculturality as a gift, while not ignoring the difficulties and challenges involved.

27. It is interesting that the highest appreciation for internationality and interculturality comes from the novices and confreres of the Africa – Madagascar region, where formation takes place for the great majority within the region itself. We cannot overlook the fact that even a single continent may contain very real diversity.

Interculturality is a great challenge to those who offer the service of accompaniment, called as they are to respect, recognize, welcome and accept diversity. Here again, facile assumptions are to be avoided. It cannot be taken for granted, for example, that a formator belonging to a particular cultural group will be able by that very fact to understand and relate wisely to those of his own group. The ability to understand people involves far more than the mere fact of common belonging.

It is heartening to see that our spiritual guides look upon intercultural situations in a positive way. 'In general, situations in which there are differences of cultural origin (for example, country, language, ways of expression, habits, customs...) between the one accompanied and the guides are perceived by the 87% of the latter as positive and enriching, while only 13% see it as negative and problematic.' (Bay 470)

It would seem that a personal experience of interculturality –



perhaps through formation or missionary work in a different cultural setting – is a precious asset in a spiritual guide. The research shows that 91% of such persons consider cultural differences between them and those they guide as positive and enriching. (Bay 470)

2.1.2 The spiritual guides

28. The number of spiritual guides who responded is 538. We have no idea of the total number of confreres offering the service of spiritual guidance, and so it is not possible to determine the percentage of responses.

The age group of these respondents ranges from 21 to 91. The lower limit reflects the curious fact that 26 practical trainees chose to answer the questionnaire for spiritual guides – as well as probably the specific questionnaire for confreres in practical training. (Bay 427)

29. It may be interesting to compare the percentage of responses of formees [A] (Bay 516) and of guides [B] (Bay 427) according to their regions, as compared to the total of questionnaires received respectively from formees [A] and guides [B]. For East Asia – Oceania, America Southern Cone and Central & North Europe the relative percentages are almost the same (e.g., for America Southern Cone the formees [A] are 8.4% of the total, and the guides [B] are 8.0% of total). If we consider the Interamerica and Mediterranean regions, [B] is about 5 points higher than [A] (e.g., for Interamerica [A] = 10.1% and [B] = 15.8 %). For the South Asia and Africa – Madagascar regions, instead, the situation is reversed (e.g., for South Asia [A] = 31.9% and [B] = 27.3 %).

Spiritual guides who are Rectors

30. The number of spiritual guides who are also Rectors is 243 or 45.16% of the total number of guides who responded. Of this group, 119 are Rectors of houses of initial formation (probably excluding Rectors of practical trainees), and 42 are novice directors. (Bay 427) The others may be Rectors, but not of those they are guiding.

As for Rectors who are also spiritual guides (of their own ‘subjects’), this is true for 75% of prenovices, 93% of novices, 64% of postnovices, 55% of practical trainees, 37% of aspirants to the priesthood in specific formation, 28% of Brother-Salesians in



specific formation, and 37% of Priest-Salesians in the quinquennium. (Bay 495) If we leave aside the novitiate, we can see that there is a constant decrease in the percentage of Rectors who are spiritual guides.

Spiritual guides who are also confessors

31. The number of spiritual guides who are also confessors is not possible to ascertain from the data of our study. However, we can say that a large majority of the respondents considers the sacrament of reconciliation and spiritual accompaniment as distinct, requiring one to approach different individuals – and here also there is a lowering of percentages as one approaches the final phases of initial formation. (Bay 495) Thus a good number of those in the quinquennium and an even greater number of guides indicate that their confessor is also their spiritual guide.

Help received from Rector, spiritual guide, confessor

32. Regarding the help received from the Rector, the spiritual guide and the confessor, some trends emerge quite clearly and transversally.

If we take all respondents – guides included – according to age, the confessor is the one who is most appreciated (55,92%), reaching a peak value of 67% on the part of the older guides.⁴ If we restrict ourselves only to the confreres in initial formation, more than 80% say that they have great confidence in the confessor, and that it is not difficult to talk with him about what weighs on the conscience. (Bay 512)

The spiritual guide comes next, with a 50.53% appreciation rate. It is interesting to note, however, that for the below 40 group – which corresponds to almost all those in initial formation – the spiritual guide receives a rating of 62% – 2 points above the confessor (60%).

As for the Rector, the rating is as follows. For the entire group of respondents (guides included), the appreciation for help received is 32.15%, with those below 40 indicating 48.8% and those above 55 (= 42% of the guides who responded) indicating 16.6%.

⁴ The data and percentages of the following three paragraphs are from a part of the results of the research that was not included in Bay, *Young Salesians and Accompaniment*.



Appreciation for the friendly talk with the Rector

33. It would seem that there is also an appreciation for the friendly talk as one of the important services rendered by the Rector. In the answers to the question about the relative importance of various duties of the Rector, the friendly talk is consistently regarded – from the postnovitiate to specific formation – as a more important part of the Rector’s role than the service of personal spiritual accompaniment. (Bay 152, 209-210, 298, 350-351)

This is mostly matched by the answers to the question about which aspect the Rector should never neglect. The postnovices put the friendly talk in fourth place, followed by spiritual guidance (Bay 152); aspirants to the priesthood in specific formation put the friendly talk in fourth place, and spiritual guidance in the sixth (Bay 300); and the Brother-Salesians in specific formation place the friendly talk in second place, while not indicating spiritual guidance at all (Bay 352). Interestingly, only the practical trainees reverse the order, putting spiritual guidance fourth, followed by the friendly talk in seventh place (Bay 211).

Preparation of spiritual guides

34. As far as preparation for their service is concerned, 78.6% (423) of the guides say they have learnt by experience, 57.1% (307) by reading, writing, reflecting and personal meditation, and 41.3% (222) by seeking counsel and comparing their experience with others.

24.7% (133) speaks of supervision by a mentor who is an expert in spiritual guidance. (Bay 472) For 40.3% (205) of the guides, their own access to spiritual accompaniment is part of their lifestyle, while 44.6% (227) report an inertia in this regard. Paradoxically, 15.1% (77) of the guides say that they have not yet themselves acquired a conviction and strong motivation for growing in this direction. (Bay 453)

45.7% (246) reports some sort of formal preparation for the service of spiritual guidance. This preparation includes master’s degrees in spiritual theology or pedagogy (formation of formators), post-graduate courses in psychology or spiritual theology, the course for the ongoing formation of formators (UPS – Rome), the *Escuela Salesiana de Acompañamiento Espiritual* (Quito), the Rectors’ course (Don Bosco Renewal Centre – Bangalore), and the Salesian Studies course (Berkeley). Besides, there are shorter courses of a week or so organized by dioceses and religious con-



gregations in counselling, pastoral counselling, spiritual direction, etc. (Bay 470-471)

We need to note that the formal preparation mentioned here is very varied in nature. Some of the courses tend more towards the academic and intellectual, others concentrate on the acquisition of skills, while still others promote change and growth in the person of the formator. (AGC 426 40-42)

2.1.3 Community accompaniment

49

Desired presence and closeness of formators

35. When respondents are asked ‘what to change or add in the way formation is carried out,’ there emerges an insistence from all the linguistic areas on the proximity of formators. Our young formees from all over the world ask that their formation guides be present with them in informal moments, and that they be willing to share, bridge distances, encourage friendship, build trust and confidence and create a family spirit.

It is evident that the community environment greatly influences vocational growth, and is itself already a form of accompaniment. In no way does it replace personal spiritual dialogue, but it conditions very much the effectiveness of that moment, as the recent Synod has also insisted. (FD 95-97)

The community environment is not always favourable

36. In point of fact, it emerges that the community environment is not always favourable for personal accompaniment.

Speaking about the prenovices, for example, Bay observes: ‘An interesting group of about a quarter of respondents, 24.9% (110), has conversations [with the confreres who form part of the community] only 1-3 times a month or a few times a year.’ (Bay 72)

It is interesting to see also the relevance of community to those at the other extreme of the arc of initial formation – the quinquennium. From all linguistic areas there emerges an insistence on the importance of sharing, interaction and meetings with confreres, young people and lay mission partners, as also an attention to the difficulties experienced in relationships, especially within the religious community.



Regional variations

37. It may be illuminating to note certain variations over regions and linguistic areas in the responses of the quinquennium regarding difficulties concerning community life:

ITALIAN: too much work and loneliness, with little possibility of sharing with confreres because of the generation gap, leading to individualism and sectorialism.

ENGLISH: too much work and difficulties in relating to the seniors, leading to misunderstandings and behaviour contrary to the Salesian vocation.

FRENCH: misunderstandings, prejudices, problems in communication.

POLISH: generational distance and little openness on the part of senior confreres, with a tendency towards a diocesan style of life.

PORTUGUESE: generational gap, conflicts of mentality, too much work, inconsistencies.

SPANISH: a lot of work along with questions related to the use of money and power; very little accompaniment and dialogue.

Size of the community

38. Not a few of the quinquennists refer also to the size of the community: if it is too small, the difficulties mentioned above increase.

There is also the problem of large formation communities, with the risk of depersonalization and weakening of the processes of formative accompaniment.

2.2 HOW PERSONAL SPIRITUAL ACCOMPANIMENT IS UNDERSTOOD

39. One's understanding of personal spiritual accompaniment tends to orientate one's praxis. We would like to know, therefore, what the young confreres in initial formation and the spiritual guides understand by 'personal spiritual accompaniment,' and how they think it is related to other forms of accompaniment such



as the friendly talk with the Rector and the sacrament of reconciliation.

2.2.1 By those being accompanied

Distinction between personal spiritual accompaniment and the friendly talk

40. A first point is that there is a clearly emerging trend among our young people in formation to distinguish between personal spiritual accompaniment and the friendly talk. The percentages are as follows: prenovices 46%, novices 46%, postnovices 57%, practical trainees 67%, aspirants to the priesthood in specific formation 70%, and Brother-Salesians in specific formation 71%. (Bay 495)

However, there are interesting regional variations. Thus when postnovices are asked if ‘the colloquy I have with the person responsible for the formative phase is distinct from spiritual accompaniment (two different things),’ the percentages of ‘yes’ are as follows:

- 76% in the Mediterranean
- 71% in Central and Northern Europe
- 61% in East Asia – Oceania
- 59% in Interamerica
- 54% in Africa – Madagascar and South Asia
- 46% in America Southern Cone.

Sincere esteem for personal spiritual accompaniment

41. A second point: those being accompanied have a sincere esteem for personal spiritual accompaniment. A large number of items emerging from all the phases of initial formation reflect the consciousness of a treasure in the field that needs to be recovered.

The testimony of confreres in the quinquennium is especially remarkable: 89.80% (344 out of 383) considers spiritual accompaniment important for the journey, even though initial formation has ended.

Accompaniment is ‘spiritually focused’

42. Another element that emerges, especially in the responses of those in the last phases of initial formation, is that accompaniment is ‘spiritually focused.’ Our young confreres believe that spiritual accompaniment must concentrate on those aspects that help a per-



son grow in his spiritual life and in his relationship to God.

Thus, as far as students of theology are concerned, 'Attention in the meeting of accompaniment goes above all to the life of prayer and to the way of living the relationship with God, the commitments of the spiritual life, etc. for 88.60% (615)... The Word of God is often part of the dialogue, according to 67.60% (468).' (Bay 259)

We might add that while the word 'God' appears 1607 times in the open responses of the formees, the words 'Jesus' and 'Christ' occur 730 times.

Attention to the charism

43. Life in community and involvement in the apostolic mission are extremely significant factors in the processes of formation. Growth in the Salesian charism is an integral part of the journey of spiritual accompaniment whose aim is to grow as disciples of Christ in the way marked out by Don Bosco.

The research indicates that attention to the charism is especially strong in the novitiate but less so in later phases. 95.9% of the novices place love for Don Bosco and for the Salesian mission in the second place, coming after the possibility of better self-knowledge (97.5%) and before the journey of spiritual growth through silence, prayer and meditation (94.7%). (Bay 90)

It is also interesting to note that 'Salesianity' in general is more valued in some regions than in others. More than half of the respondents from Africa – Madagascar and East Asia – Oceania, and also those from the UPS, have highlighted as positive the help received to know Don Bosco better, and the study of the Constitutions. (Bay 533)

We may add that the word 'Bosco' occurs 596 times in the open answers of the formees, and 33 times in those of the spiritual guides.

Characteristics of accompaniment

44. Great importance is given to the feeling of being at ease in spiritual accompaniment and having no fear of opening the heart on delicate and personal issues (84% of students of theology).

Even more important is the atmosphere of freedom (96% of students of theology, but also practical trainees).



The freedom to choose the guide is rated very high (91% of students of theology, 93% of the quinquennium).

The students of theology note that, for their part, confidence and openness (97%), transparency and sincerity with the guide (95%) are important.

Again, absolute confidentiality on the part of the guide is considered of utmost importance (94% of students of theology).

2.2.2 By the spiritual guides

Accompaniment as 'spiritually centred'

45. What do the spiritual guides understand by personal spiritual accompaniment, and what value do they assign to it?

The Salesians offering the service of spiritual guidance were asked to express themselves on the 'intensity of the qualities and attitudes assumed, lived and practised by the guides in accompanying others.' They could choose among 12 closed answers expressing a spectrum of positive attitudes. The answer that received the highest consensus is as follows: 'I believe that the most important, but also the most difficult task, is to know how to 'transmit God,' that is, to help the person live more consciously in the presence of God. Serenity, peace, mercy, passion for the little ones and the poor, inner joy... these are the signs of 'union with God' that those who accompany must experience in themselves, in order to be able to communicate the same values in their turn to others.' (Bay 440)

In the open answers of the guides the word 'God' appears 237 times, the words 'Jesus' and 'Christ' 43 times, and the word 'Bosco' 33 times.

2.3 WHAT HAPPENS IN WHAT IS CALLED 'PERSONAL SPIRITUAL ACCOMPANIMENT'

46. We cannot take for granted that 'what one thinks' always coincides with 'what actually happens.' We ask therefore about what actually happens in what is called 'personal spiritual accompaniment.' Or at least, we seek some indications about what might be happening in personal spiritual accompaniment in our formation processes.



2.3.1 Some external conditioning factors

Initiation to accompaniment in the prenovitiate

47. A first point is that for over 80% of the respondents, including those offering the service of spiritual guidance, initiation to accompaniment took place in the prenovitiate. (Bay 494)

However, some respondents do recognize, with percentages that go from a third to more than half, that they were accompanied in some way already before the prenovitiate. (Bay 53, 535-536)

Rectors / in charges with not enough time for accompaniment

48. Secondly, there is a complaint that Rectors or those in charge do not always have enough time for accompaniment. Thus 45.70% (403 out of 882) of the postnovices say that the Rector has so many things to do that he does not have time to follow them spiritually. (Bay 153) More surprisingly, 31.40% (124 out of 389) of the novices reports the same thing about the novice director. (Bay 100) This is the situation also reported by 33.90% of prenovices (Bay 58), 46.10% of practical trainees (Bay 212), 37.90% of aspirants to the priesthood in specific formation (Bay 301), and 54.90% of Brother-Salesians in specific formation (Bay 353).

We must keep in mind, of course, that ‘accompaniment’ here might not always coincide with ‘personal spiritual accompaniment,’ given that the Rector is not always the chosen spiritual guide.

2.3.2 Rectors as spiritual guides: downward trend

49. We have seen (see section 2.2.1 above) that our formees increasingly tend to distinguish between the friendly talk and spiritual guidance. Distinction, however, does not necessarily mean separation: I may distinguish friendly talk and spiritual accompaniment and still choose the same person for both services. Thus, while 46% of prenovices make such a distinction, 75% of them indicate that the one in charge is also the spiritual guide. Going further up the arc of initial formation, 93% of novices say that their novice director is their spiritual guide. 67% of postnovices, 55% of practical trainees, 37% of aspirants to the priesthood in specific formation, and 28% of Brother-Salesians in specific formation say that their Rector is their spiritual guide. (Bay 495)



If we leave aside the novices, therefore, we see that our formees tend not only to distinguish between friendly talk and spiritual guidance, but also increasingly distinguish between Rector and spiritual guide.

2.3.3 Lack of confidentiality

50. There is a datum that emerges transversally across the regions: the sensitive issue of confidentiality regarding what is shared in personal accompaniment. We have seen already that such confidentiality is considered of absolute importance (cf. section 2.2.1 above). However, many of our respondents have the impression that what is shared with a guide is often revealed to others.

The scores are particularly high in the prenovitiate: **87.90%** (385) of the prenovices indicated as the main discomfort that the guide uses the information given by the prenovice with others, and sometimes even against the prenovice.' (Bay 73-74)

In the other phases, the scores about violations of confidentiality are much lower: novices 12.10% (47); postnovices 14.30% (78); practical trainees 14.90% (78); theology students 13.40% (91); Brother-Salesians in specific formation 25.5% (12 out of 47); and quinquennium 21.10% (79). However, it is interesting that even 16.7% of the Salesian guides reported this very difficulty during their own experience of personal spiritual accompaniment during initial formation. (Bay 459)

51. In various meetings of the regional formation commissions during 2018, the question was raised whether these feelings were more subjective than real, especially given that prenovices tend to be apprehensive about their being admitted to the novitiate.

Whatever be the answer to that, we cannot avoid the fact that the score, at least among the prenovices, is not only very high (almost 90%) but also cuts across differences between countries and regions. Even if this were to reflect a merely subjective impression, it would still be an indicator of the quality of relationship between formees, formators and the community. This is one of the data in our research that solicits the most urgent reflection and response.



2.3.4 Openness and transparency

52. We have seen that 97% of students of theology consider confidence, openness, transparency and sincerity as important in spiritual accompaniment (see section 2.2.1 above). In point of fact, however, there might not always be such openness.

Asked if personal spiritual accompaniment is a moment in which one can freely share feelings, doubts, joys and difficulties, very high values are given by the two regions of Europe, the two regions of America, and Africa – Madagascar; the two regions of Asia follow behind with a difference of 10-12 percentage points. (Bay 539)

Is personal accompaniment a moment in which one feels at ease, without fear of opening one's heart on very personal matters? Once again, the highest values are given by the Mediterranean and Central & Northern Europe regions (88-89%), while the lowest are given by the two regions of Asia. (Bay 539)

Does one say only what is strictly necessary during personal accompaniment? It is once again South Asia and East Asia – Oceania, this time along with Africa – Madagascar, that affirm this: they do esteem the guide, but do not yet have the full confidence to be able to tell him everything. (Bay 540)

There is, in other words, a diffidence about openness and transparency in some regions but not in others.

2.3.5 Other problematic aspects

53. When we turn to other problematic aspects concerning the relationship of accompaniment, the diversity among regions becomes even more pronounced. We cannot but notice a clear and constant difference of at least +9.14 points between the values coming from South Asia and East Asia – Oceania jointly (43% of the total respondents) and those of the other regions on the following six items:

- lack of trust on the part of the guide;
- infrequent meetings;
- poor ability to listen: the guide wants to hear certain things, and not what the one being accompanied would prefer to share
- misunderstandings
- too much attention to matters of character and of psychology



- fear of opening up on the part of the one being accompanied. (Bay 545-546)

2.3.6 A behaviour to which to conform

54. In many cases, formation is identified with conforming to a set of behaviours so as to reach up to the standard by which formees will be evaluated.

Thus 29.80% (117 out of 389) of the novices say that the minute regulation of every moment of the day gives little space for personal initiative. About a quarter, 24.20% (94), say they feel more observed and controlled than accompanied. 23.70% (93) say that the director of novices insists so strongly on discipline and obedience that he fosters fear rather than sincerity and spontaneity. For one out of five – about 21% (83) – the personal meeting with the novice director is more a duty to be fulfilled than a desired encounter in which to share what one really feels. (Bay 100)

55. When we come to the postnovices, the percentages are even higher: 393 out of 885 (44.60%) say they feel more observed and controlled than accompanied, and that the strong insistence on discipline and obedience favours fear more than sincerity and spontaneity; and 378 (42.70%) feel that the meeting with the Rector is more a duty to be fulfilled than a meeting where one can share what one really feels. (Bay 153)

As for the practical trainees, 29% feels more observed and controlled than accompanied, 26% feels that the insistence on discipline and obedience leads to fear, and for 36.20% the meeting with the Rector is mostly a duty to be fulfilled. (Bay 213)

For those in specific formation towards the priesthood and for Brother-Salesians in specific formation, 33.30% (221) and 44.9% (22) respectively feels more observed and controlled than accompanied, and 36.90% (250) and 46.9% (23) respectively regards the talk with the Rector as a duty rather than a moment for sharing what one truly feels. (Bay 301 and 353)

56. We are dealing, in other words, with a model of formation that makes use of strict discipline and formal obedience to a packed program of obligations and events as a kind of ‘railway’ that facilitates the achievement of clear and well-defined objectives for each phase. Among these obligations is also the monthly talk with the person in charge.



Given that for a very large number up to the postnovitiate this talk coincides with personal spiritual accompaniment, the latter also runs the danger of becoming one of the behaviours with which to conform ‘in order to go ahead.’

2.3.7 The overlap between accompaniment and authority

57. In a number of ways, and with varying degrees of insistence, our Regulations and the FSDB encourage that the service of spiritual guidance be offered by the one responsible for a particular stage of formation, at least up to and including practical training:

Formation communities must have a rector and a team of formation personnel who are specially prepared, above all as regards spiritual direction *which is ordinarily given by the Rector himself.* (R 78, emphasis added)

He [the Rector] is responsible for the personal formation process of each confrere. He is also the spiritual director *proposed to, but not imposed on,* the confreres in formation. (FSDB 233, emphasis added)

The Rector [of the postnovitiate] 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 conscience* and periodical conferences. (FSDB 417, emphasis added)

This overlap between accompaniment and authority emerges across the board as a major difficulty, because those recommended and proposed as spiritual guides are also those with major responsibilities in the process of admission.⁵

The fusion of roles is tolerated in the initial phases

58. Our survey reveals that such a fusion of roles is tolerated as long as it cannot be avoided, and is dropped by the majority just as soon as there is a chance to do so – usually between the

⁵ The FSDB proposes the Rector / in charge as spiritual guide up to the practical training phase: see 339, 345 (prenovitiate); 417, 420 (postnovitiate); 437, 438 (practical training). In the phase of specific formation it simply says: ‘[The Rector] should take care of the spiritual animation of the community and of individuals.’ (FSDB 490)



postnovitiate and practical training (see section 2.3.2 above).

Even among the novices, 93% of whom say that the novice director is also their spiritual guide (Bay 495), it is significant that more than half of them (67.50%) are uncomfortable with this situation.⁶

Insistence on the freedom to choose the guide

59. There is a remarkable convergence in all the linguistic areas – therefore in all seven regions – on the freedom to choose the guide. This emerges with special force when the respondents are asked to freely suggest (in the open answers) what they believe has to be changed in order to improve the quality of formation.

59

There are, however, regional variations. The majority of the prenovices who ask not to be obliged to approach the one in charge for spiritual guidance, even openly denouncing certain limitations in their formators (lack of trust, etc.), are French-speaking and English-speaking, coming from Africa, Madagascar, Asia and Oceania (see answers to open questions about what could be done better and what should be changed: Bay 73-83).

60. Again, the word ‘freedom’ recurs more strongly in the answers to open questions coming from Anglophone Asia as compared to other regions.

The desire for greater freedom in choosing the spiritual guide is openly expressed, and quite a number – especially in the three initial phases of formation – complain that such freedom is lacking.

Positively, the freedom to choose one’s spiritual guide is one of the most appreciated characteristics in the phases of specific formation, for both Priest-candidates and Brother-Salesians. Here is the reply of the theology students to Question 16 about ‘helpful elements for the experience of personal spiritual accompaniment’ (let us keep in mind that the respondents were 87% of the total of SDB students in that phase of formation in 2017):

⁶ Here we are correcting Bay 114 which reads: ‘An important group of about a third of the novices, i.e., 32.50% (127) indicate that the formator/novice director and spiritual director are the same person, even if for three-fourths, 67.50% (264), this is not true.’ The question was about what creates discomfort or difficulty: ‘Now, reflecting on the spiritual accompaniment that you experienced, try to express what might have created discomfort or difficulty for you.’ 67.50% indicated as a difficulty ‘the fact that the Formator/ Director of Novices / Spiritual Guide is the same person.’ 32.50% indicated the opposite – that this fact does not create discomfort or difficulty.



Almost all respondents to the questionnaire (over 90-98%) belonging to this formative phase spoke of their confidence in and openness to the guide – 96.70% (665 out of 688); the positive attitude and great respect on the part of the guide – 96.10% (661); the climate of freedom – 95.90% (658); the openness and confidence of the guide towards the one being accompanied – 94.40% (645). ... It is remarkable that 90.50% (620) of the confreres in specific formation indicate the freedom to choose the spiritual guide as an important element of help for their growth. (Bay 318)

What are we to make of this transversal insistence on the freedom to choose one's guide, and of the regional variations?

2.4 THE ROLE OF CERTAIN MEDIATIONS

2.4.1 Periodic personal assessments (scrutinies)

61. A topic on which a large number of those who participated in the questionnaire expressed themselves forcefully is the quarterly personal assessment, which is meant to be an aid for personal growth, complementing what is offered in personal accompaniment. This assessment could be described as a personalized community accompaniment. 'A form of guidance explicitly provided for by the pedagogy of Salesian formation are the periodic moments of personal assessment ('scrutinies') by which the Council of the community helps the confrere to assess the situation of his personal formation, guides him and gives him practical encouragement in the process of his growth to maturity.' (FSDB 261)

62. On this topic, the research brings out strong and persistent criticism through all the formation phases, with variations in percentages, but always with significant figures.

'For a third of the novices, that is 30.3% (106), it is felt more as a judgment on themselves that is not objective, that captures only something of what one does, and not who one really is. Finally, more than a quarter of the novices – 28.1% (106 out of 377) – maintains that the incidence of the scrutinies on admission to first profession leads them more to fear than to desire them.' (Bay 123) If already in the novitiate this instrument of growth is seen as negative by more than a third, the problem is neither personal nor isolated but structural.



The index of negativity increases when we come to the postnovitiate. 'For four postnovices out of ten, that is 41.6% (366), it is felt more as a judgment on oneself that is not objective, and that captures only something of what one does and not who one really is. In the end, more than a quarter of postnovices, that is 27.9% (244 out of 875), maintains that the incidence of the assessments on the admission for the renewal of vows leads the post-novice more to fear than to desire them.' (Bay 183) On the same items, the percentages of confreres in practical training are 38.3% and 31.9% respectively, and those of theology students in specific formation 35.30% and 27.5%.

63. A more detailed examination of regional variations would be significant. However, the data in general does call for our attention as a Congregation, given that for a very large number of formees this exercise does not seem to function as the help for growth that it is meant to be.

2.4.2 Different forms or aspects of prayer

64. We have seen that, in general, our formees hold the life of prayer in high esteem, and that many of them see personal spiritual accompaniment as centrally concerned with it.

It is interesting, however, to examine the responses to various personal and community expressions of the life of prayer. The daily Eucharist always gathers the highest consensus – though here it is difficult to distinguish between 'head' and 'heart,' between a value that 'must be affirmed' and how the Eucharist is actually lived and valued. Instead, the responses regarding personal prayer, community prayer, meditation and the word of God are as follows:

	Personal prayer	Community prayer	Meditation	Word of God
Prenovices	74,60%	61,80%	Not among the 22 options	69,80%
Novices	83,00%	71,60%	65,00%	Not among the 22 options
Postnovices	73,80%	60,60%	52,40%	68,20%
Pr. trainees	77,70%	61,43%	42,23%	67,82%
Stud. theology	74,90%	57,90%	46,50%	73,20%
Bro. spec. for.	69,20%	69,20%	59,60%	63,50%
Quinquennium	74,20%	62,10%	42,30%	68,20%



The table confirms the general esteem for these expressions of prayer, especially personal. We may note that East Asia – Oceania is the region that gives the highest value to personal prayer, community prayer and meditation. (Bay 535)

65. However, there are also signs of fatigue. Take, for instance, the answers of the quinquennists with regard to the liturgy of the hours, which they identify as one of the dimensions of the life of prayer that is less authentic and life-giving. This gives cause for reflection: how is it that the liturgy of the hours, which is one of the most constant forms of prayer in the whole of initial formation, ends up becoming something merely external and not life-giving?

And what about meditation, daily fidelity to which is ‘guaranteed’ during the whole of initial formation? Clearly, faithfully ‘being present’ for it is not automatically a guarantee of growth and appropriation of its value and beauty from within. The individual needs to be helped to attend to what is happening interiorly as he meditates, so as to help him make decisions for growth and inner conviction. In the table above, meditation is the expression of prayer with the weakest appreciation indices.

2.4.3 The personal plan of life

66. Another mediation that can be very significant for the journey of personal accompaniment is the personal plan of life.

It is significant that the personal plan is one of the tools to which spiritual guides give a lot of attention. Among a number of other instruments, this is the one that gathers a large consensus (83.7%).

There is a question in the survey for each phase about ‘methods, techniques, models to learn more about oneself and spiritual life’ that are used and appreciated. It is interesting to read the consistent weight given to the personal plan of life as compared to three other instruments.



	Personal plan of life	Exercises of personal analysis and evaluation	Journal	Autobiography
Novices	78,20%	78,20%	68,80%	65,80%
Postnovices	72,40%	68,80%	50,60%	38,60%
Practical trainees	64,20%	62,40%	47,80%	32,50%
Theology students	75,40%	69,30%	45,50%	39,80%
Brother-Sale- sians in specif- ic formation	76,60%	72,00%	45,70%	40,40%
Quinquennium	70,10%	65,40%	28,90%	28,50%





Part two

Interpreting



3 Light from our tradition

3.1 THE ORIGINALITY OF SALESIAN SPIRITUAL ACCOMPANIMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE

67

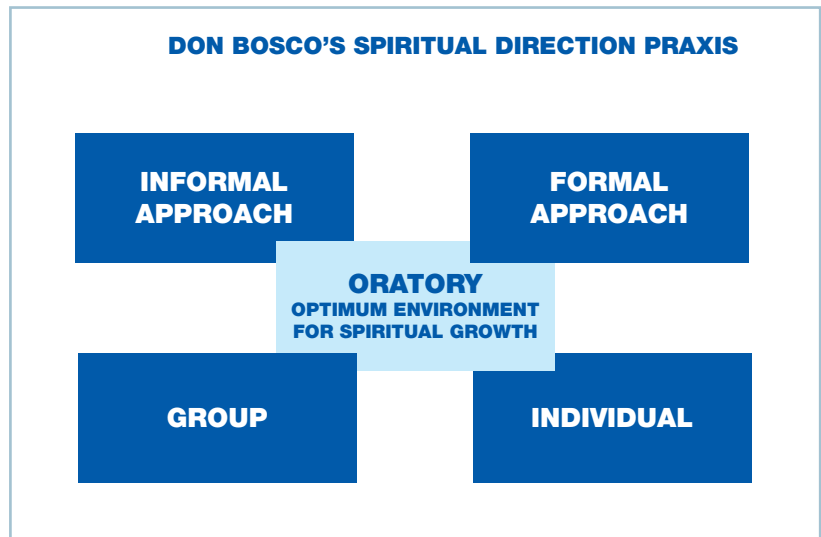
67. It is worth insisting on the peculiarity of Salesian spiritual accompaniment of young people: it is a process involving community, group and personal dimensions. (FD 95-97) On this point we now have full backing from the 2018 Synod: ‘There is an inherent complementarity between personal accompaniment and community accompaniment, which every spirituality or ecclesial sensibility is called to articulate in its own way.’ (FD 95)

Don Bosco found his vocation in the rapid expansion of the city of Turin, with a huge influx of young people searching for a job and at great personal risk. He realized that if his work were to succeed, he had to convince the boys that they had found a ‘friend,’ someone they could trust and to whom they could open up their hearts. He understood the fundamental importance of making each young person feel at ease and loved.

While catering to the needs of the group of young people flocking to his oratory, Don Bosco also took care to maintain one-to-one relationships. His aim was to prepare the boys for life and make them aware of God’s love for them, to love their Catholic faith and to live it in daily life. Thus the oratory became a home, a parish, a school and a playground.

The following diagram illustrates the originality and richness of Don Bosco’s praxis (Grech 251-254):





68. The spiritual direction practised by Don Bosco is a journey occurring simultaneously within an environment and on an individual level. Spiritual direction is not limited here to the periodic one-to-one meeting between spiritual director and the individual seeking guidance. Don Bosco managed to maintain a beautiful balance between a healthy, mature environment and the individual level. Within these two levels we can distinguish further between formal and informal approaches.

The *formal* approach is regular and is based on agreement. On the level of the *group* it includes spiritual retreats, liturgical life, catechesis and other meetings with formal input. On the *individual* level, it consists of one-to-one meetings between spiritual director and the person seeking guidance.

The *informal* approach is exemplified by the ‘word in the ear.’ Such accompaniment is occasional and may involve a variety of mentors.

69. The process of spiritual accompaniment takes place within a faith community receptive to grace and the action of the Holy Spirit, where there is a natural interweaving of formal and informal approaches. The regular and structured approach is more likely to be transformative and fruitful, but it is equally true that without the various informal interventions and the community environment the efficacy of the formal moments would be diminished.

Such a holistic praxis indicates also just how much time Don



Bosco dedicated to accompanying his youth. Dedicating a few hours a week to one-to-one dialogue was simply not enough for him. His originality lay in creating a holistic approach that incorporated group and individual dimensions through various formal and informal approaches within a specific environment. (Grech Chap. 4. Giraud 107-109)

The one-to-one spiritual accompaniment of Ignatius of Loyola

70. Don Bosco's praxis is related in interesting ways to Ignatius of Loyola and to Francis de Sales.

69

The spiritual direction praxis of Ignatius of Loyola is centred on one-to-one meetings with a guide. Like Teresa of Jesus, Ignatius gave great importance to the discernment of spirits aiming at establishing a relationship with God. His *Spiritual Exercises* were forged by reflection on his own spiritual journey and imply a clear option for introspection and review of the inner motivations behind choices. Ignatius' proposal consists in removing disordered affections and seeking knowledge of God's will on the basis of this new freedom.

71. The Exercises were a central element in the formative project of the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* where Don Bosco spent three decisive years of his early priestly life and 'learnt to be a priest.'¹ Don Bosco not only made the Exercises every year but also offered them from the very beginning to his poor young people, besides regularly helping Cafasso with the Exercises for groups of clergy and of lay people at Sant'Ignazio sopra Lanzo for many years. Offering the Exercises to the young and to simple people was, in fact, one of the five aims of the Salesian Congregation from the time of the first Constitutions written by Don Bosco himself.

Francis de Sales: Spiritual friendship in accompaniment

72. The Ignatian influence is strong on Francis de Sales. He chose to enter the Jesuit college of Clermont in Paris over his father's preference for the College of Navarre. As a student in Padua, he chose the Jesuit Fr Anthony Possevin as his spiritual guide.

¹ The Convitto was founded by Luigi Guala under the inspiration of Pio Brunone Lanteri. Lanteri himself was a disciple of Nicolaus von Diessbach, a Jesuit who was an enthusiastic follower of Alfonso Maria de' Liguori. Diessbach had initiated Lanteri to the propagation of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius as a privileged instrument of the apostolate. This was one of the central intuitions of the Convitto Ecclesiastico in which Don Bosco was formed. See Buccellato 76-80.



As a young bishop he entrusted himself to Fr Fourier, Rector of the Jesuit College of Chambéry. In his own praxis, however, to what he learnt from the Ignatian tradition he adds the element of spiritual friendship. 'Perhaps the most characteristic trait of Salesian spiritual direction is the mutual friendship that unites the director and the directee. We can safely say that for Francis de Sales there is no real spiritual direction without real friendship, and such friendship always involves mutual communication and reciprocal enrichment, which allows the relationship to become truly spiritual.' (Albuquerque 19) In the context of Francis de Sales' terminology, 'the word which best expresses the spiritual director's manner and style of being full of charity is "friendship",' and his insistence on friendship probably constitutes a watershed in the history of spiritual direction in the Church. (Struś 40, 47-48)

Relationship as central to the praxis of Don Bosco

73. Building on what he had learned about the Ignatian tradition at the *Convitto*, Don Bosco spontaneously seems to have adopted also the Salesian element of friendship and warm personal relationships in the praxis of spiritual accompaniment. 'In Salesian spiritual direction, the relationship of the director with the young person is not incidental to the whole process, but essential for both healing and growth.... This fatherly or motherly concern can be traced back to St Francis [de Sales]' and Jane Frances [de Chantal's] unique mode of spiritual direction where "they hold their directees in their hearts".' (McDonnell 55) 'The relationship that is established between the Salesian formator and young people should always have the imprint of "the *greatest cordiality*," since "*familiarity* leads to love, and love leads to *confidence*. It is that that opens up the heart and the young reveal everything without fear.... They become honest in confession and outside, and they are readily open to all that is asked from them by the one whom they know loves them."²

There is, in fact, a beautiful resonance between the etymology of the word accompaniment and Salesian familiarity: to accompany means 'to be companions on the journey,' with that level of togetherness that comes from sharing bread, *cum-panis*, with all the echoes from our Christian and Salesian context.

² Giraud 111, citing G. Bosco, *Due lettere da Roma, 10 maggio 1884*.



Community, group and personal accompaniment in Don Bosco

74. But to relationships of friendship and cordiality with the young people, Don Bosco added the community and group dimensions – and here lies his originality. We find this well reflected in the *Frame of Reference* of Salesian youth ministry (FoR Chap. 5) when it notes that the educative and pastoral community (EPC) is animated by means of accompaniment of the environment, of the group and of each person.³

In the context of community and group accompaniment, ‘meeting and dialogue have a value and a particular function. The dialogue is an opportunity for pastoral intervention, as we see in the encounter of the boy John Bosco with Fr Calosso or the meeting between Don Bosco the priest with Bartholomew Garelli. The Salesian approach is intended to evoke the young person’s active collaboration and this is critical to the educational process, because of the possibilities, choices and personal experiences it creates.... It evokes the desire for dialogue and discernment, and promotes the internalisation of daily experiences in order to decipher the messages to be learned. It enables the young person to face confrontation and make critical judgements, to seek reconciliation and regain inner calm, and leads to a growth in personal and Christian maturity.’ (FoR 124)

Accompaniment in the Strenna of 2018

75. The originality and peculiarity of the Salesian style of accompaniment of young people is beautifully confirmed by Fr Ángel Fernández Artime in his 2018 Strenna on the topic of accompaniment, “‘Lord, give me this water’ (John 4:15). Let us cultivate the art of listening and of accompaniment.’ (AGC 426) First, like Don Bosco, Salesian accompaniment does not limit itself to the moment of personal dialogue, but inserts this into the living context of an attractive educative environment ‘rich in educational proposals and human relationships.’ (AGC 426 21) Second – and this follows from the first – Salesian personal accompaniment is a living part of our pedagogical spirituality of relationship, which aims at the conquest of the heart: ‘the emotional tone and the creation of trust and sympathy’ are fundamental conditions of Don Bosco’s educational method. (AGC 426 22)

³ In his post-synodal Exhortation, Pope Francis observes that the Church is growing in the awareness that it is the entire community that evangelizes the young. (CV 202)



All this finds confirmation in Pope Francis when he says that in the pastoral care of youth ‘we need to use above all the language of closeness, the language of generous, relational and existential love that touches the heart, impacts life, and awakens hopes and desires. Young people need to be approached with the grammar of love, not by being preached at.’ (CV 211)

3.2 SALESIAN SPIRITUAL ACCOMPANIMENT IN THE PROCESSES OF FORMATION

3.2.1 Don Bosco’s praxis reflected in formation processes

76. The originality and richness of Don Bosco’s spiritual direction praxis ought to be reflected not only in the various settings of our youth ministry but also in the processes of initial formation. Thus, commenting on the *Ratio* in ‘Vocation and Formation,’ Fr Pascual Chávez notes that formative accompaniment or guidance ‘is not limited to individual dialogue, but is a composite of relations, environment and pedagogy, something typical of the Preventive System.’ (FSDB 258; AGC 416 46) Community accompaniment plays a very important role in the living communication of Salesian values. This accompaniment needs of course to be personalized, and for this we must ensure that there are ‘dedicated people involved in formation who are competent and united in their criteria.’ (AGC 416 47)

3.2.2 The Preventive System and the processes of formation

77. The Preventive System is our way of doing things: it is both a spirituality and a pastoral methodology. It is, in fact, our model of formation.

The famous triad of the Preventive System can be specified in terms of fundamental attitudes for accompaniment: hospitality in reference to love, pedagogy in reference to reason, and mystagogy in reference to religion.

78. *Hospitality* involves values such as unconditional acceptance, loyalty, respect and trust, patient listening, sensitivity to the other, a relationship full of humanity, and the objective of integral health. At the centre of education and formation is the person in



his singularity and concreteness.⁴ ‘The first kind of sensitivity is directed to the individual. It is a matter of listening to someone who is sharing his very self in what he says. A sign of this willingness to listen is the time we are ready to spare for others. More than the amount of time we spend, it is about making others feel that my time is their time, that they have all the time they need to say everything they want. The other person must sense that I am listening unconditionally, without being offended or shocked, tired or bored.’ (CV 292)

Hospitality means looking positively at the person, listening, engaging in dialogue, making concrete proposals for growth, accompanying the processes of growth with patience, being present at key moments of decision and difficulty. The research shows that young people immediately perceive whether or not their formators dedicate themselves willingly to the service of guidance, or are more concerned, instead, about their personal agenda. A guide who is time conscious will hardly be able to create a conducive holding environment.

The formator helps persons be themselves, risk making their own decisions and take charge of their lives. It is such hospitality that creates a safe space where those in formation might dare to open up their hearts and confide in their formators and guides. It is such openness, confidence and transparency that enables due attention to the human dimension, including the area of affectivity and sexuality, and allows the surfacing of deep motivations and convictions.

Pedagogy involves beginning from where each young person is, initiating a journey, engaging in a process, proposing goals and stages, helping think critically, and educating to the faith. The attention to the life story of each person in his uniqueness is the starting point of accompaniment and demands very good listening skills on the part of the one accompanying the candidates, most especially in the first stages of their vocation journey. Our candidates exhibit a growing diversity and fragmentation, linked also to family and social backgrounds in constant transformation.

To accompany the young starting from the ‘present stage of their freedom’ (C 38) is a pedagogical art that requires a very good Salesian sensitivity and also specific preparation. Much help can be obtained from counselling, psychology and the human scienc-

⁴ This is one of the central axes of spiritual direction in St Francis de Sales: see Albuquerque 15-16.



es, in the context of a preparation that engages the person and the life experience of the educators.

Mystagogy involves awakening the desire for faith, helping persons become aware of their interiority, connecting with questions regarding meaning, recognizing the indwelling of a Presence, initiating to the experience of God. The Final Document of the Synod on youth invokes the example of the deacon Philip:

Like the deacon Philip, the accompanier is called to obey the call of the Spirit, going outwards and leaving behind the safe area enclosed by the walls of Jerusalem, a figure of the Christian community, so as to set out towards an inhospitable desert place, perhaps a dangerous one, in which he makes the effort to pursue a chariot. Having reached it, he must find a way of entering into a relationship with the foreign traveller, so as to elicit a question that perhaps would never have been formulated spontaneously (cf. Acts 8:26-40). (FD 101)

79. All this is part of the maternal role of the Church. ‘Education therefore means sharing with a fatherly and maternal love in the growth of the individual concerned, while fostering collaboration with others to the same end: educational relationships presuppose, in fact, a number of different agencies working together.’ (Viganò AGC 337 14) Here personalized care and maternal intimacy become *mystagogy*. (Giraudò 115)

The *mystagogical* dimension involves acknowledging that the guide is a mediator. Like the Baptist, the Lord must increase and the guide must decrease (cf. Jn 3:28-30). The great virtues of the mediator are humility and self-denial. The humble guide helps a lot; the guide who is filled with himself is a great danger. ‘In brief, to accompany requires placing oneself at the disposal of the Spirit of the Lord and of the one accompanied, with all his or her qualities and capacities, and then having the courage to step aside with humility.’ (FD 101)

80. The temptations of the guide are many: wanting to occupy the place of the Lord, appearing as someone special, searching for followers and disciples, thinking that everything depends on him, or that the victories of the one accompanied are his own victories, and that the failures of that person are his own failures. Again, he might be tempted to substitute the person accompanied – not respecting his freedom or his process of growth, making decisions for him, betraying confidentiality, failing to encourage independence, creating dependence. ‘At a certain moment,’



says Pope Francis, ‘we ourselves have to disappear in order to let the other person follow the path he or she has discovered. We have to vanish as the Lord did from the sight of his disciples in Emmaus, leaving them alone with burning hearts and an irresistible desire to set out immediately (cf. Lk 24:31-33).’ (CV 296)

81. The mystagogical dimension obviously presupposes an intense love for Jesus on the part of the guide. ‘It is not the same thing to have known Jesus as not to have known him, not the same thing to walk with him as to walk blindly, not the same thing to hear his word as not to know it, and not the same thing to contemplate him, to worship him, to find our peace in him, as not to. It is not the same thing to try to build the world with his Gospel as to try to do so by our own lights.’ (EG 266)

Love for the Lord is nourished by prayer. To nourish love it is necessary to speak with the beloved: ‘Our infinite sadness is only cured with an infinite love.’ (EG 265) ‘With a friend, we can speak and share our deepest secrets. With Jesus too, we can always have a conversation.... Prayer enables us to share with him every aspect of our lives and to rest confidently in his embrace. At the same time, it gives us a share in his own life and love. When we pray, “we play into his hands,” we give him room “so that he can act, enter and claim victory”.’ (CV 155)

Prayer is fundamental to one who is a spiritual guide: ‘Without sustained moments of adoration, of prayerful encounter with the Word, of sincere dialogue with the Lord, the tasks are easily emptied of meaning, we are weakened by the fatigue of the difficulties and the fervour is extinguished.’ (EG 262) The guide prays for those he accompanies. His prayer is a humble request to the Spirit to enlighten and accompany the one guided and to make up for the limits and deficiencies of the guide himself. When the guide fails to give value to intercession, accompaniment slowly loses its freshness and becomes a routine.

82. Accompaniment, finally, becomes a school of holiness and bears fruits of joy and happiness both in the one accompanying and in those who are accompanied. ‘Do not be afraid of holiness. It will not take away strength, life or joy. On the contrary, because you will become what the Father thought when he created you and you will be faithful to your own being.’ (GE 32)



3.2.3 The splendid blending between family spirit and personal guidance

83. From Don Bosco's own descriptions in his *Memoirs* and in the *Lives* he wrote, we see that the interplay between environment and personal accompaniment is so intense that we cannot imagine one without the other. The 'splendid blending of nature and grace' that describes our Founder (C 21) is reflected in the way he carried out his mission among the young, in the splendid harmony of family life and personal accompaniment that Magone, Besucco, Savio and their companions found in Valdocco.

Our research confirms the importance of the relationship between a community environment steeped in the family spirit (see C 16) and the attention given to each one through the three main accompaniment roles. These roles found a unity in the person of Don Bosco, who was at once superior, spiritual guide and confessor. History has given rise to many changes in the animation of the community and the way personal guidance is carried out in the Congregation, but the value of these three ways of personal accompaniment remains unaltered.

Rector

84. In our tradition, the Rector's role is closely linked to the pedagogical and spiritual experience of Don Bosco himself, and is therefore quite different from what we find in other religious institutes. More on this point may be found in *The Salesian Rector: A ministry for the animation and governing of the local community* (2019), which is the revised Rector's Manual mandated by GC27. For the purpose of the present orientations and guidelines it is sufficient to remind ourselves of the fact that (1) the Rector is the spiritual guide and guardian of unity in the religious community and in the educative and pastoral community; (2) he is the guardian of Salesian charismatic identity, favouring common commitment towards a creative fidelity to Don Bosco in the particular context and situation of the Salesian presence; and (3) he 'has a direct responsibility towards each confrere; he helps him realize his own personal vocation' (C 55) especially through the friendly talk (C 70). This kind of accompaniment retains its value even when distinguished from the personal spiritual accompaniment that enters into the internal forum. The head of the family is the one who knows the confrere in those aspects of life that are manifested within the community and in the mission, and he has a special responsibility at times of discernment, applications and admissions.



Confessor

85. The sacrament of reconciliation is an element of central importance in the spirituality and pedagogy of Don Bosco. We will have more to say later about the confessor (see section 4.7 below). Here it is enough to note that this form of accompaniment, where the encounter between grace and freedom finds expression in a most intimate and sacramental way, is in harmony with the roles of Rector and spiritual guide. It is in this harmonious blend of inner life and external commitments, community relationships and personal journeys, that we find the best support for our 'path to holiness' (C 25).

Spiritual Guide

86. Personal spiritual accompaniment must be in deep harmony with the community environment, the Rector's fundamental role of accompaniment of the community and of the confreres, and the sacramental experience of reconciliation. The better the integration, the richer will be the journey of vocational growth. We give much importance, and rightly so, to personal freedom, including the freedom to choose one to whom we can confide our most personal experiences. Nevertheless, this does not diminish the wisdom coming from our tradition about choosing a guide who not only knows our charism but can also witness the unfolding of our daily experience within the community. Our interactions with others and our daily lifestyle are part of the 'matter' of personal spiritual accompaniment, so it can be helpful if our guides themselves form part of our community and have independent access to these experiences. A wise Rector will, therefore, know how to help his confreres in the choice of spiritual guide.





4 Understanding what the Spirit is saying

87. In Chapter 2 we structured the data given us by our exercise of *listening* with the help of four questions: Who are those involved in the process of spiritual accompaniment? What do they understand by personal spiritual accompaniment? What actually happens in what is being called personal spiritual accompaniment? And what is the role of certain mediations? In Chapter 3, we tried to draw light from the Salesian tradition and the recent teaching of the Church.

We can now proceed to the second step in our exercise of spiritual discernment, which is *interpreting*: what is the Spirit telling us through what we have heard? Here we will not follow the structure provided by the four questions but will allow the themes to emerge spontaneously.

4.1 AN INCULTURATED FORMATION

Dialogue with the culture of the young

88. A first point that emerges from our study is the invitation to dialogue with the culture of the young, so as to ensure an inculturated formation. Meeting young people ‘at their present stage of freedom’ (C 38) also involves entering into dialogue with their culture, their way of understanding life, and their patterns of communication.

If this is a challenge that concerns all Salesians, it is undoubtedly a prominent one for those who offer the service of personal accompaniment, especially in the initial phases of formation. It is precisely there that the encounter between the new generations and Salesian life takes place every year, with new faces, gifts, needs and challenges.



Dealing with a culture that is digital

89. A major element in the culture of the young people of today is the digital universe. “The digital environment is characteristic of the contemporary world. Broad swathes of humanity are immersed in it in an ordinary and continuous manner. It is no longer merely a question of ‘using’ instruments of communication, but of living in a highly digitalized culture that has had a profound impact on ideas of time and space, on our self-understanding, our understanding of others and the world, and our ability to communicate, learn, be informed and enter into relationship with others.” (CV 86)

Given that the majority of our formees are in the 20-30 age bracket, they are *digital natives*, belonging to *Generation Y* and now also to *Generation Z*.⁵ They have grown up in a culture dominated by the technologies of virtual communication. Within this space, they have become actors and scriptwriters, with their own language and interests. They discover and reinvent themselves, and demand the right to navigate and dialogue in cyberspace. ‘The fresh and exuberant lives of young people who want to affirm their personality today confront a new challenge: that of interacting with a real and virtual world that they enter alone, as if setting foot on an undiscovered global continent. Young people today are the first to have to effect this synthesis between what is personal, what is distinctive to their respective cultures, and what is global.’ (CV 90)

In the process, one of the risks is that ‘bringing those far away much closer, while at the same time making those near more distant.’ With hyper-connectivity, paradoxically, loneliness has not decreased: it is quite possible to be ‘alone together.’ At the same time, young people still value connectivity with anyone at any time. The challenge before them is ‘to pass from virtual contact to good and healthy communication.’ (CV 90)

90. Among other risks are pornography, gambling, cyber-bullying, hidden dangers in chat rooms, and ideological manipulation, and our young candidates and confreres are not exempt from these dangers. Those offering spiritual accompaniment urgently need to become attentive to these obstacles to growth, their habit-forming potential and the tendency to addiction.

⁵ According to one proposal, Gen Y includes those born between 1980 and 2000, while Gen Z are those born after 2000.



91. But the task of guides is not limited to a healthy and ethical use of the net. For us, social communication is a field of activity that constitutes one of the apostolic priorities of the mission. (C 43) Here also, Pope Francis invites us to trust the young: ‘Young people can find new fields for mission in the most varied settings. For example, since they are already so familiar with social networks, they should be encouraged to fill them with God, fraternity and commitment.’ (CV 241) Growing up faith-filled and deeply rooted in the Salesian charism, our young confreres of the digital generation will create new languages for communicating with their peers and sharing the good news brought by Jesus.

A culture that does not encourage definitive commitments

92. The present generations also tend to have difficulties in making definitive commitments. They are marked by a state of fluidity and uncertainty, where freedom is understood as the possibility of access to and choice from an indefinite range of ever-new opportunities. Such fluidity and uncertainty lead to a marked fear of making definitive commitments.⁶ At the same time digital natives are still ‘major seekers of meaning... intrigued and motivated to action by anything that is in tune with their quest to give value to their lives.’ (IL 7) Despite secularization, there is still a deep hunger for God in the young people of today.

93. Further, in the current social, economic, political and cultural scenario, the period of youth varies a great deal. ‘In some countries, people get married or choose the priesthood or religious life even before they turn 18, whereas elsewhere this happens after 30, when youth is actually over. In several contexts, transitioning into adulthood has become a long, complicated and non-linear process, where progress and setbacks occur and, in general, job searching prevails over the affective dimension. This makes it harder for young people to make definitive choices.’ (IL 16)

94. Two further factors are the idea of freedom and consumer capitalism. When freedom is understood as the possibility of having access to ever-new opportunities, and when it is reinforced by consumer capitalism driven by an abundance of choices, young people are easily led to shy away from making definitive choices that seem to limit and restrict them: ‘Today I choose this, tomorrow we’ll see.’ Or: ‘Up to now I am happy. Tomorrow if I find something else, I will see.’

⁶ See F. Cereda, ‘La fragilità vocazionale. Avvio alla riflessione e proposte di intervento,’ ACG 385 (2004) section 2.1: Incapacità di decisioni definitive.



Dealing with interculturality

95. There is the further element of interculturality. The planetary distribution of the Salesians of Don Bosco is not merely a geographical fact but a dynamic of internationality that is quite unique. Spread out over 132 countries, we are undoubtedly one of the most widely distributed religious congregations in the world. This cannot but have an impact on the formation process, particularly in what concerns spiritual accompaniment.

Speaking only in terms of diversity, we have young candidates from the great urban centres and others from remote rural areas; those who belong to dominant majority groups, and others who come from ethnic minorities; those who have the possibility of engaging in the formation process in their own native language, and others who have to go through the pain of learning a second and sometimes even a third language; and so on. Added to this is regional, national, cultural and economic diversity, not to mention also the caste and other subtle or not so subtle stratification or classification factors that prevail in several parts of the globe.

96. In the face of this diversity, the Congregation is actively encouraging interculturality, both in the phases of initial formation and elsewhere.⁷ What kind of formators, guides and teams are needed to accompany diversity and interculturality? How should we prepare such formators and guides? Above all, how can the Congregation effectively govern interprovincial realities such as those of an increasing number of formation houses around the world, when most of its structures are meant to govern provinces?

Also, the Congregation has to take more into account the fact that 53% of the respondents answered in English. We have to ask about the implications for our formation processes.

Further, if the learning of a foreign language calls for dedication and constancy, much more demanding and necessary is an openness to the new way of understanding, valuing and communicating characteristic of the new generations. This kind of language, grammar and culture calls for a readiness to listen, dialogue and learn that is no less intense than what is demanded of a confrere sent to a new country as a missionary *ad gentes*.

⁷ GC27 75.5; A. Fernández Artime, AGC 419 (2014) 25-26; F. Cereda, 'Encouraging international communities (GC27 75.5),' AGC 429 (2019) 42-51.



Bridging cultures

97. We are seeing a shift from a ‘classicist’ to an ‘empirical’ notion of culture, to the idea that there is no one culture that is normative, the ideal to be reached.⁸ Faith and charism are fundamentally transcultural realities that call for incarnation in the variety of the cultures of humankind.

98. In such a situation, the formators and guides of today are called to a necessary inculturation or the capacity to create bridges across cultural gaps. And this, in our opinion, is not so much a matter of knowledge of cultures, as of the ‘solid inner core’ of the person of the formator. *It is the existential-spiritual interiority of the formator that is the true bridge over cultural distances.* No formator or spiritual guide can ever hope to know every one of the cultures in his often multicultural community, but we can certainly expect him to grow and keep growing in his graced interiority. We come back, in fact, to the need for the preparation and continued formation of formation guides, and to a simple but generous insistence on the Preventive System that knows how to value each person in his particularity and to engage in dialogue with patience, knowing that all of us are carried and enveloped by grace.

Our research shows that the experience of a lived and consistent exposure to a culture that is not one’s own is seen to be very helpful to a formator (see above, section 2.1.1). ‘Until a man acquires some knowledge of another culture, he cannot be said to be educated, since his whole outlook is so conditioned by his own social environment that he does not realize its limitations.’⁹

Keeping in mind the fact that the great majority of young Salesians now belongs to the regions of Africa – Madagascar, South Asia and East Asia – Oceania, the need to give deeper attention to the cultures that nurture the lives of these young people and confreres, especially in the formation of formators, becomes a strategic way forward for the Congregation. Without a proper understanding of cultures there will be no inculturation of formation and of mission. Formation and mission are meant to be interwo-

⁸ The distinction (though not in these terms) may be found in the ecclesiastical and Salesian magisterium, as for example in EG 117 and AGC 419 25. Classicism took one culture as the norm; others were merely barbarian. The empirical notion of culture is simply the negation of classicism. It acknowledges a plurality of cultures, because it regards culture as the way any people apprehends meaning and value in their way of life.

⁹ Christopher Dawson, *The Crisis of Western Education* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961) 113.



ven in the process of engaging with the life and culture of peoples and nations, in that ‘blending of nature and grace’ (C 21) that is at the heart of every vocational journey.

Bold steps need to be taken also in the inculturation of our study programmes, in line with what has been proposed in *Veritatis Gaudium*.¹⁰

New forms of vocational discernment and aspirantate

99. The accompaniment of young people who show an interest in the Salesian consecrated life has to take into consideration all the changes affecting the social and cultural world of youth today, changes that manifest not only a frenetic rhythm but also major variations as far as regions and provinces are concerned. The letter issued by the Youth Ministry and Formation departments in 2011 attempts to respond to this by proposing a variety of approaches to the aspirantate:

Nowadays we recognise that the maturing process takes much longer and that individuals’ rhythm of progress are different. Many factors contribute to this situation. However, it is not a question of prolonging the formation process but of changing pedagogical methodology. ... Aspirantates take different and new forms according to the various circumstances of the candidates [*a list of different types of aspirantates follows*] ... Indeed one hopes that new kinds can be found to respond to the circumstances of the young, in particular of university students, workers, immigrants and the autochthonous. Today it is possible to have in a Province two or more types of aspirantate. It is up to each Province to determine the type or types of aspirantate it needs in order to respond to the diversity of the candidates and of the situations in its own territory.¹¹

¹⁰ See Mauro Mantovani, ‘La “filosofia” nel Proemio di *Veritatis Gaudium*, vent’anni dopo *Fides et ratio*’ *Salesianum* 81/1 (2019) 27-46, and Andrea Bozzolo, ‘Trasformazione missionaria e rinnovamento degli studi nel Proemio di *Veritatis Gaudium*,’ *Salesianum* 81/1 (2019) 47-71.

¹¹ Letter of Fabio Attard and Francesco Cereda, ‘Guidelines for the Aspirantate Experience,’ dt. 26 July 2011, prot. 11/0377.



4.2 CLARIFICATION OF THE MEANING OF SALESIAN SPIRITUAL ACCOMPANIMENT

Our accompaniment is spiritually centred

100. We have seen that our formees and their spiritual guides have a ‘spiritually centred’ idea of personal spiritual accompaniment. This is a positive and encouraging signal, revealing an interest and predisposition to discover within one’s personal story the plan of God and the working of the Spirit. It also means that the young are looking for adults who can accompany them in this kind of journey, helping them to move towards the ‘high standard of Christian living’¹² to which we are called.

85

Going by the word counts in the open responses of both formees and guides, however, there is a clear preponderance of the word ‘God’ over the words ‘Jesus,’ ‘Christ,’ and ‘Spirit.’ Might this indicate a need to ensure that personal accompaniment is more clearly Trinitarian and Christocentric?

But not always charismatically consistent

101. The spiritual centeredness of personal accompaniment is not always matched by charismatic density. As we have said already (see section 2.2.1 above), attention to the Salesian charism is very strong during the novitiate but much weaker in the successive phases. Again, we have seen that ‘Salesianity’ in general is more valued in certain regions (Africa – Madagascar and East Asia – Oceania) than in others.

Our identity must give direction to our formation

102. The Constitutions insist that ‘the religious and apostolic nature of the Salesian calling indicates the specific direction our formation must take.’ (C 97) The *Ratio* repeatedly indicates the Salesian consecrated identity as the constant point of reference for the whole of formative accompaniment:

To become a consecrated apostle like Don Bosco is the guiding principle of our process of formation.

It is through formation, in fact, that we achieve our identity as Salesians and acquire the maturity needed to live and work in conformity with the founding charism. Starting out from an initial state of enthusiasm for Don Bosco and his mission for youth,

¹² *Novo Millennio Ineunte* 31.



we arrive at a true conformity with Christ and a stronger identification with our Founder; we embrace the Constitutions as our Rule of life and identity-card, and develop a strong sense of belonging to the Congregation and to the provincial community.

The close relationship between formation and identity ‘means that each member should study diligently the spirit, history and mission of the Institute to which he or she belongs, in order to advance the personal and communal assimilation of its charism’. [VC 71] It underlines the importance of ‘Salesianity’, that is, of the spiritual patrimony and the ‘mind’ of the Congregation that need to be progressively studied, assimilated and fostered. (FSDB 41)

Led by the Spirit ‘to live Jesus’

103. From Francis de Sales also we have inspiration to move spiritual accompaniment more explicitly in the direction of discipleship and configuration to Christ. The aim of all accompaniment is to put on the mind of Christ, to be transformed and transfigured into Christ – or, as Francis says simply, ‘to live Jesus.’ Our growth into Christ, the bishop of Geneva would say, is a continuation of the incarnation in us. ‘When we follow his imperceptible allurements and then begin to unite ourselves to him... he assists our feeble efforts and perceptibly joins himself to us, so that we perceive that he has penetrated and entered into our heart with incomparable gentleness.’ (OEA V 11: McDonnell 50)

104. Our transfiguration into Christ is the work of the Spirit: ‘And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.’ (2 Cor 3,18) Spiritual accompaniment is therefore profoundly Trinitarian. God comes to us through the missions of the Son and the Spirit; it is the Spirit who ‘raised up Don Bosco... formed within him the heart of a father and teacher... inspired him to initiate various apostolic projects’ (C 1), and it is the Spirit who transforms us into the likeness of Christ.

Making accompaniment more charismatic

105. Given further that our following of Christ is mediated by Don Bosco, *there is need for explicit and greater attention to the charismatic dimension of our following of Christ* – and this is a concern that those offering the service of spiritual accompaniment must take to heart.

Helpful here is the Congregation’s new attention to a theologi-



cal-spiritual reading of Don Bosco's life and experience and to the Salesian spiritual journey. Any effort in this direction will be of great help to personal spiritual accompaniment and to lifelong formation.

Attention to the charismatic dimension involves helping those in formation to know Don Bosco and with him to discover the presence of God through those to whom we are sent (C 95). It would be important to draw up more adequate local formation plans, and discover and implement pedagogical processes of growth.

It also involves accompaniment of pastoral experiences, attention to the field of social communication and to the missionary dimension as a decisive ingredient in vocational growth.

The accompaniment of pastoral experiences (FSDB 198-199) will ensure that one learns by experience the meaning of the Salesian vocation (C 98), in keeping with the formative phase, and in a progression that follows the educative-pastoral qualification outlined in the *Frame of Reference* of Salesian Youth Ministry. This is also one of the most fruitful areas of joint formation of confreres and lay people.

106. Social communication 'constitutes one of the apostolic priorities of the Salesian mission' (C 43), with an ever growing impact that cannot be overemphasized, considering the context from which our candidates are coming, the environments of the communities in which they live, and the youth world to which they are sent. The formation team must therefore be formed in the area of this apostolic priority, so as to be able to respond to the challenges and needs that emerge in the accompaniment of the young people in formation. Steps towards such formation include collaboration with the Social Communications department at provincial, interprovincial and regional levels, as well as with other ecclesial and educational realities, drawing on the support of experts in the area of communication.

107. The missionary dimension qualifies the Salesian charism at every stage of vocational growth. It is a key element in the process of initial vocational discernment, since it represents in a synthetic, symbolic and realistic way the kind of life one feels called to embrace. The absence of clear positive signs of attraction to this mission towards youth and to the poorest among them would be a clear indication of absence of the Salesian vocation. Local formation plans and ongoing personal accompaniment will help the missionary slant to grow along the arc of initial formation. Contemplating Christ with Don Bosco, therefore, we learn to see everything with the eyes of the Good Shepherd.



4.3 CROSSING THE THRESHOLD OF THE EXTERNAL FORUM

108. We have seen that a large number of formees consider personal spiritual accompaniment as quite distinct from the friendly talk with the Rector, and that the distinction becomes more evident and widespread through the regions in the successive phases of formation, reaching a peak during specific formation (see section 2.2.1 above).

We have also noted a transversal desire among our formees to be able to freely choose their spiritual guide (see section 2.3.7 above).

Let us set aside the novitiate, where the novice director is by law the spiritual guide, and specific formation, where by and large there exists real freedom in choosing one's guide. The fact remains that in the other phases, a large number choose the Rector as their spiritual guide (75% of prenovices, 64% of postnovices, 55% of practical trainees). We need to ask about the nature and quality of spiritual accompaniment in these cases. It could well be that a formee, while considering the friendly talk and spiritual accompaniment as quite distinct, still freely chooses the Rector for both services, and that is fine. It could also be, however, that a formee chooses the Rector as his spiritual guide for other reasons. In this case, there is a risk that what is being called spiritual guidance never really quite crosses the threshold of the external forum – either because of the fear rooted in the overlap between authority and accompaniment, or simply because he chooses not to open his heart.

We keep in mind, of course, that our young confreres express a great appreciation for spiritual growth, genuine Salesian values and accompaniment with meaningful and trustworthy adults. They have a genuine desire for fruitful Salesian personal accompaniment. At the same time they do point out, with great frankness, the real obstacles on the way, and we need to address these if personal spiritual accompaniment is to cross the threshold of the external forum and become what it is meant to be.

4.4 THE EXPERIENCE OF THE PRENOVIATE AS CRITICAL

109. The prenovitiate is a phase of critical importance as far as



accompaniment is concerned, given that for 80% of the respondents initiation to personal spiritual accompaniment took place in this phase. The experience of the prenovitiate *influences and determines – positively or negatively – subsequent experiences of accompaniment.*

If the person in charge of the prenovices or the aspirants is able to lay the foundations for a relationship of true mutual trust, his charges will learn to read the traces of the presence of God in their lives, pick up courage to open the pages of memory, engage in a healing of wounds, grow in faith and engage in vocational discernment. This may be the greatest gift that the prenovitiate can give, and in this way the prenovice can relive at least in part what John Bosco experienced in Morialdo during the nine months he spent with Don Calosso.

But if the dynamics are different and the one in charge of the prenovices does not have the time, interest or approach that favours this type of initiation, a paradigm is created in the mind of the prenovice that becomes the measure of subsequent accompanying relationships. 144 out of 455 (31.54%) prenovices claim to have esteem for the guide, but do not yet have full confidence and are not willing to tell all their personal secrets. 151 (33.18%) say that the role of authority communicates respect and fear, but does not help to have confidence or to open up. (Bay 57-58)

110. Much has been done by way of strengthening the prenovitiate. In almost all provinces and circumscriptions we now have prenovitiates of at least six months if not an entire year – and this has already borne good fruit, if we are to go by the drop in the rate of departures from the novitiate in the last few years. However, much more needs to be done by way of the consistency in quality and number of the formation teams, and to ensure that formation plans and processes focus clearly on growth in faith, within which alone genuine vocational discernment can take place. Pope Francis says it very well: ‘The first thing we need to discern and discover is this: Jesus wants to be a friend to every young person. This discernment is the basis of all else.’ (CV 250) He insists that growth in faith cannot be reduced to doctrinal and moral formation, however necessary these might be: any educational project or path of growth for young people must be centred on two axes: ‘the deepening of the *kerygma* and growth in fraternal love, community life and service.’ (CV 213)¹³

¹³ Cf. also the whole section ‘Main courses of action’ (CV 209-215). The two courses are ‘*outreach*, the way we attract new young people to an experience of the Lord’ and



Within the team, the one in charge of prenovices has an extremely important and delicate role to play in terms of formative accompaniment and vocational discernment. If he is selected and prepared with care, it makes a qualitative difference to the experience of the prenovitiate.

111. Much more delicate is the issue of freedom of choice of spiritual guide in this phase. We have seen that a large number of prenovices ask for the freedom to choose a guide (see section 2.3.7 above). We can only speculate about what goes on in what is called ‘personal spiritual accompaniment’ when a prenovice approaches his mandated spiritual guide with fear, trepidation, anxiety, apprehension, and so on. Without a free choice of guide, the very experience of spiritual accompaniment risks being vitiating. On the other hand, it is true that the one in charge has to help the prenovices arrive at a clear vocational choice. The discussion of the dynamic of grace and freedom (see section 4.6 below) will hopefully throw some light on this issue.

112. There is also the area of psychological testing and accompaniment in the prenovitiate.

Before or during the prenovitiate it is necessary that there be a medical check-up and a psychological examination to verify if there exists the human foundation and the required elements of suitability required by ‘Criteria and norms’ for beginning the Salesian formation process, without prejudice to can. 220. The results of the medical check-up and the psychological examination can be communicated by the doctor and the psychologist to the Rector of the prenovitiate and to the Provincial, if, ‘within the framework and necessary collaboration with those responsible for the formation process’ (CN 36), the prenovice consented to it in writing, prior to the medical check-up and the psychological examination. This consent must be ‘previous, explicit, informed and free’. (FSDB 352)

This is an area that calls for adequate attention, and here lay faithful with professional competence in the human sciences can be especially helpful, as well as institutions of the local Church that offers such services. This would be one way of implementing the call of the Synod on youth for the inclusion of lay people, especially women and married couples, in the process of formation. (FD 163-164)

‘*growth*, the way we help those who have already had that experience to mature in it.’ (CV 209)



4.5 THE QUALITY OF YOUTH MINISTRY DETERMINES THE FORMATION PROCESSES

Personal accompaniment is still an exception in our youth ministry

113. Of the 80% of respondents who speak of having been initiated to personal spiritual accompaniment only in the prenovitiate, some of them (from a third to more than half) do recognize that they were accompanied in some way already before the prenovitiate (see 2.3.1 above). This means that a large number (ranging from two-thirds to a little less than half) have not experienced an accompanying relationship and help to vocational discernment prior to the beginning of the vocational journey towards Salesian life. We cannot therefore take for granted that personal accompaniment is always available in many of our settings.¹⁴

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And also in our aspirantates

114. This would seem to be true, unfortunately, also of many of our *aspirantates*, which are by definition periods of accompaniment and vocational discernment. Most of the prenovice respondents come from a previous experience of aspirantate lived full time in a Salesian house, and yet not all of them report an experience of spiritual accompaniment as part of the aspirantate. If our aspirantates themselves neglect personal spiritual accompaniment, it is a serious and dramatic state of affairs.

Combining the signals we get from the research and from the study of the statistics regarding those who leave during the novitiate, in temporary vows and even after perpetual vows, we are led to the clear realization that discernment and vocational orientation before the prenovitiate is extremely important.¹⁵ 'Only when the candidate has made his option for the Salesian life and shows, in the judgement of those responsible, a corresponding human, Christian and Salesian maturity, can he be admitted to the prenovitiate.' (FSDB 330) The solution cannot be merely a stricter process of screening of candidates; it has to involve good accompaniment and discernment.

¹⁴ Giraudo is severe on this point: 'Among the great spiritual directors in the history of the Church, one can say that Don Bosco is the one who in a very explicit way dedicated himself to preadolescents and developed a method for their spiritual accompaniment, thus creating a school of spiritual formation for them that has great historical resonance, both within and outside the Salesian world. Today, one gets the impression that the Salesians have completely forgotten it.' Giraudo 109, see also 109-110.

¹⁵ See FD 163 on the need for serious initial discernment.



Accompaniment and discernment as an integral part of youth ministry

115. The Congregation has been saying for years that vocational guidance is an integral part and ‘the crown of all our educational and pastoral activity... sustained by prayer and personal contact, above all in spiritual direction.’ (C 37) All the dimensions of youth ministry converge on the vocational dimension, ‘the ultimate horizon and reference point of our ministry.’ (FoR 160) ‘The vocational dimension shapes the first and ultimate objective of Salesian Youth Ministry.’ (FoR 160) In Chap. 7 on activities and works of Salesian youth ministry, the *Frame of Reference* dedicates a section to ‘experiences or services of animation and vocational guidance,’ such as ‘welcoming communities, live-in community experiences, vocational discernment centres’. (FoR 256)

116. All this is echoed in the Synod on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment, which even speaks of ‘vocational youth ministry,’ to indicate that vocational animation is intrinsic and essential to youth ministry. With the Synod, therefore, we insist on *the urgent need to offer a valid personal accompaniment to all the young people to whom we minister*, and not only those who wish to embrace Salesian life. (IL 1) As Aldo Giraudo notes, spiritual accompaniment towards Christian perfection is an essential and necessary part of Salesian pedagogy. (Giraudo 108) Underlying this is the conviction about the universal call to holiness that was such an important part of the praxis of Francis de Sales and of Don Bosco himself.

Community, group and personal accompaniment is the proper context within which vocational discernment can take place. A healthy vocational culture favours the emergence also of specific vocations within the Church such as the vocation to Salesian religious life.

117. As for the aspirantate, a joint letter from the Youth Ministry and Formation departments had described it thus: ‘The environment, the suitable conditions, the process and the accompaniment proposed to the young person inclined to Salesian consecrated life are what constitute the aspirantate experience.’ Regarding the aspirants it said:

Those young people begin the aspirantate experience who, in ordinary circumstances, have already undertaken a process of developing maturity in the faith and of vocational guidance within the Salesian youth ministry programme aimed at fos-



tering apostolic vocations for the Church and for the Salesian Family. Other young people also begin this experience who are attracted by Don Bosco's charism, and who have not lived in a Salesian educative pastoral community. To all these candidates the Province offers specific accompaniment by means of one of the various different forms of aspirantate which best corresponds to the needs arising from their personal background and their present situation.¹⁶

The need to continue the renewal of youth ministry

118. *The quality of youth ministry determines the quality of formation, and vice versa.* We are invited to continue on the path of renewal of youth ministry that has already been undertaken by the Youth Ministry department, so that it becomes truly a process of education and evangelization, in which group and personal accompaniment finds their rightful and necessary place – given that every young person must be helped to discover the manner in which he is to live out his vocation to love.

On the other hand, if the experience of personal accompaniment during the phases of initial formation has been meaningful and fruitful, there is a good probability that a confrere will continue to seek guidance after this process, and in his turn be ready to accompany the young people to whom he is sent. Unfortunately, the reverse also is true: if for some Salesians the experience of accompaniment has been 'suffered' and merely tolerated, it is not likely that they will continue to seek accompaniment once they have reached the end of initial formation, nor that they will be moved to offer accompaniment to young people.

Between youth ministry and formation there is a circularity and interaction that is far deeper than what may appear.

4.6 THE FOUNDATIONAL DYNAMIC OF GRACE AND FREEDOM

4.6.1 The problematic overlap between authority and personal spiritual accompaniment

119. Our respondents have given intense attention to the overlap between personal spiritual accompaniment and authority, to the fact that in the codification of our tradition, the Rector is ordi-

¹⁶ See Attard and Cereda, prot. 11/0377 dt. 27 July 2011.



narily also the spiritual guide (R 78), one who is proposed though not imposed (FSDB 233). (Cf. sections 2.3.7 and also 2.3.6 above)

This overlap is seen as less problematic in places where numbers are smaller, fraternity is high, and there is no gap between formees and formators. It is felt much more as a problem, instead, where numbers are high, formation tends to be conformation (see section 4.11 below), and there is also a certain distance between formees and formators. In this case the overlap between authority and accompaniment leads to fear and conformity without deep conviction to standards and forms of expected behaviour, including that of the regular friendly talk / spiritual accompaniment.

We could identify three elements in the overlap between personal spiritual accompaniment and authority: (1) the Salesian tradition codified in our proper law, (2) the conformation model of formation, and (3) the personalities of the formators, most especially that of the Rector or the one in charge. But let us begin with a reflection on grace and freedom, which is the core dynamic of any spiritual journey.

4.6.2 Grace and freedom

Freedom is central to spiritual accompaniment

120. Freedom is central to spiritual accompaniment. We can draw here on the authority of Francis de Sales himself, for whom freedom of spirit is central. To Jane Frances de Chantal, Francis writes in capital letters: DO ALL THROUGH LOVE, NOTHING THROUGH CONSTRAINT. ‘At the core of this Salesian insistence on gentleness rather than coercion is the fundamental belief that everything must be done by love, and not by coercion, because the will must not be forced in an extrinsic sense to move in a direction contrary to itself. Gentleness, if you like, corresponds to freedom of spirit... This liberty of spirit is one of the hallmarks of Salesian spiritual direction which is recognised universally by Salesian commentators.’ (McDonnell 55)

Francis ‘never wishes to impose his own will, but prefers to motivate his directees in such a way that they will arrive at and take the necessary decisions themselves. Underlying all this is a deep respect for the person and their liberty, which is a constant through Francis de Sales’ praxis of spiritual direction.’ (Albuquerque 19)

121. Freedom is, in fact, the only way to access the truth of



the person and invite his full involvement in the spiritual journey of holistic growth. Where freedom is diminished or even replaced by behaviours that are only external and formal, accompaniment is emptied from within of its meaning and value. One can be faithful and regular for the moments of personal spiritual accompaniment, but they remain an empty field without any hidden treasure.

Only what is freely assumed becomes conviction and reaches the level of motivation, where that 'right intention' is born which the *Ratio* indicates as the foundational element of the whole journey of Salesian life: 'A fundamental sign of the maturity required for perpetual profession is the right intention, that is, a clear and decisive will to offer oneself entirely to the Lord, to belong to him and serve him in one's neighbour, according to the Salesian vocation.' (FSDB 504)

Deep respect for the person and his liberty is very much part of the 'reason' or 'reasonableness' that is one of the pillars of Don Bosco's Preventive System. It should be pedagogically natural for us to favour the meeting between young people and the Lord, respecting the path of each one and meeting them 'at their present stage of freedom.' (C 38)

Grace and freedom are at the heart of accompaniment

122. The dynamic of grace and freedom is at the very heart of the process of accompaniment. Spiritual accompaniment is nothing if it is not attuned to the dialogue between the love of the Lord and the freedom of the young person who is called to respond.

The spiritual journey of each human being is the mystery of the ongoing encounter between two freedoms – that of God and that of the person himself. Grace not only speaks to freedom but also empowers it and makes it ever more full. Grace it is that enables our response, because it is love that calls to love.

But there can be no love without freedom, and so even the greatest grace does not take away our freedom. Francis de Sales says: 'In spite of the all-powerful strength of God's merciful hand, which touches, enfolds and bends the soul with so many inspirations... grace has the power not to overpower but to entice our heart.' (OEA IV 126-127: McDonnell 63) The omnipotent God, as Benedict XVI liked to say, is a beggar before the human heart.¹⁷

¹⁷ Benedict XVI, *Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI for Lent 2007* (21 November 2006).



Pope Francis puts this in terms of friendship: Jesus presents himself as a friend (Jn 15:15) and invites us to be friends with him – with an invitation that does not force us but appeals delicately to our freedom. (CV 153) The Salesian formator and spiritual guide should not try to be different.

4.6.3 Respecting the dynamic of grace and freedom

Beginning with the quality of our relationships

123. Faced with the intense dissatisfaction with present arrangements and the strongly expressed desire to be able to freely choose one's spiritual guide, our temptation might be to either take refuge in the tradition or else to somehow blame our young formees for not being willing to entrust themselves with simplicity to the one indicated ('proposed not imposed') by our official documents.

Our reflections on grace and freedom light up what is being said by the Synod on youth. 'The first fruit of this Synod, clearly visible in the *Final Document*, is that we cannot blame young people for having gone away from the Church; we must instead evaluate and renew the evangelical quality of the Church as a whole.'¹⁸ Such evaluation and renewal begins with the relational quality of its members – youth included.¹⁹

124. Let us look – all of us, young Salesians included – at the quality of our relationships. The process of formation is *reciprocal* by nature. Our formees are not merely objects of formation, they are also subjects and the main protagonists (cf. CV 203, 206). They are a *theological locus* 'in which the Lord reveals to us some of his expectations and challenges for building the future.' (FD 64)

Imitating God himself

125. What are our young Salesians telling us through their cry? What is the Lord telling us through what they are saying? This is the question we must try to answer.

¹⁸ Rossano Sala, 'Invito alla lettura,' in XV Assemblea generale ordinaria del Sinodo dei vescovi, *I giovani, la fede e il discernimento vocazionale: Documento finale* (Torino: Elledici, 2018) 14.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*



We are being invited to imitate God himself who respects our freedom and is infinitely patient with us.

We are being invited to a formation that touches the heart and leads to transformation.

We are being invited to learn to listen.

Starting again from Don Bosco

126. Above all, we are being asked to return to Don Bosco and to recover his educational method in all its authenticity. We are being invited to listen to the cry of Don Bosco in his 1884 Letter from Rome. We are being reminded that confidence and trust cannot be imposed but can only be won.

The Preventive System, we could say, is our model of formation, and its leitmotif is 'Strive to make yourself loved' – the *Studia di farti amare* that is found on the cross we receive at perpetual profession.

Towards a formation that touches the heart

127. Opening our gaze on to the wider horizon of religious life, we see that the Church has been insisting on a formation that is capable of 'encountering the freedom' of young people. We recognize the serious difficulties that emerge when life in formation houses 'does not touch the heart':

We must, therefore, ask ourselves some serious questions about our formative system. We have certainly made some positive changes in recent years that are taking us in the right direction. These changes, however, have been carried out irregularly and have not modified the structures that are essential in supporting formation. Despite all of the effort and hard work put into formation, it does not seem to reach and truly transform the heart of people.

There is the impression that the formation process is more informative than it is performative. The result is that people maintain a certain fragility, both in their existential convictions and in their journey of faith. This leads to minimal psychological and spiritual endurance and the subsequent inability to live one's own mission with openness and courage when it comes to dialogue with culture and social and ecclesial integration. (NW 12)



It is more important to begin processes than to try to dominate spaces, as Pope Francis tells us:

Obsession, however, is not education. We cannot control every situation that a child may experience. Here it remains true that ‘time is greater than space.’ [EG 222] In other words, it is more important to start processes than to dominate spaces.... The real question, then, is not where our children are physically, or whom they are with at any given time, but rather where they are existentially, where they stand in terms of their convictions, goals, desires and dreams. The questions I would put to parents are these: ‘Do we seek to understand where our children really are in their journey? Where is their soul, do we really know? And above all, do we want to know?’ (AL 261)

Learning to listen

128. Listening is the key. ‘When we are called upon to help others discern their path in life, what is uppermost is the ability to listen.’ (CV 291) In what does this listening consist? How can we together listen to the Lord? It is worth meditating on the three distinct and complementary ‘sensitivities or attentions’ that Pope Francis offers in *Christus Vivit*: (1) attention to the *person*, which is an unconditional listening, ‘without being offended or shocked, tired or bored’ – exemplified by Jesus with the disciples of Emmaus who were going ‘in the wrong direction’; (2) attention, through a discernment between grace and temptation, to the *deep truth* that the other is trying to express; (3) attention to *the impulses* to go forward that the person is experiencing, that may demand ‘that they look not to their own superficial wishes and desires, but rather to what is most pleasing to the Lord’ (CV 294). The pope adds: ‘This kind of listening seeks to discern their ultimate intention, the intention that definitively decides the meaning of their life. Jesus knows and appreciates this ultimate intention of the heart.’ (CV 294)

We have here a marvellous interaction between the person, the guide and the Lord. It is a question of listening to the Lord through the person, in order to discover what might be more pleasing to the Lord, the gift that will make him smile (cf. CV 287). It is a question of a ‘discernment of friendship’ that becomes even more marvellous when we realize that he has *primereado*, ‘beaten us to it’ (cf. CV 153), because it is he who first thinks of the gift that will please us and do us most good (cf. CV 288-290).

The experience of John Bosco with Cafasso and of Dominic Savio with Don Bosco are some of the Salesian Emmauses of the



origins, whose fruitfulness is proof of the value of this openness to the presence of God. In the answers given by the 538 spiritual guides, it is significant to note that among the approaches or types of accompaniment that gathered most consensus was the following:

[One that] does not focus exclusively on solving a problem, but is aimed at initiating or strengthening one's spiritual life. In this approach, it is not so much the themes that direct the work of accompaniment, and certainly not the well-being and capacity of the person as such, but, taking into account the problems and the particular person, the guide focuses more on the goal to which the person is called, pays attention to the vocation to which he is called to respond, looks to continuing growth in Christ. (Bay 435)

Learning to respond

129. All this naturally also involves a great responsibility on the part of the formees themselves. With the best of formators and guides, it can still happen that a formee does not decide to open up his heart. Such openness and transparency is, instead, vital: 'In the process of formation, it is necessary that the seminarian should know himself and let himself be known, relating to the formators with sincerity and transparency.'²⁰

Without the total engagement of one's freedom there is no answer to a call, and not even a true beginning of a vocational journey.

Far from making the process easier, the recognition of the full 'weight' of freedom in dialogue with grace puts greater demands on anyone who sincerely wishes to grow in discipleship.

If a candidate is not ready to commit himself fully to this vocational journey and trust those who have been given him as mediations for the process of discernment and vocational growth, it means that he has freely chosen not to walk this road, and the sooner he come to this realization the better.

Formators for the young Salesians of today

130. The words of the young people of the pre-Synodal meeting summarize well the kind of formators needed for the young

²⁰ Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation: Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* (Rome, 2016) 45.



Salesians of today:

Mentors should not lead young people as passive followers, but walk alongside them, allowing them to be active participants in the journey. They should respect the freedom that comes with a young person's process of discernment and equip them with tools to do so well.

A mentor should believe wholeheartedly in a young person's ability to participate in the life of the Church. A mentor should therefore nurture the seeds of faith in young people, without expecting to immediately see the fruits of the work of the Holy Spirit. (CV 246, citing the *Document of the Pre-Synodal Meeting*)

4.7 RECTOR, SPIRITUAL GUIDE AND CONFESSOR: THREE KEY FIGURES

131. As we have said above (see section 3.2.3), in our tradition there three key figures as far as personal accompaniment is concerned: the Rector, the spiritual guide, and the confessor.

The research shows that these three roles are central in the unfolding of the Salesian experience through initial formation and even beyond, as we can see in the responses of the guides. But there are major variations in the way they are perceived and valued according to age, phase and region.

132. One common element is the great value given to the community atmosphere and closeness between older and younger confreres, either as something appreciated or, quite often, as something that is desired and sought (see open answers in all phases). This kind of 'community accompaniment' is closely linked to the Rector's role of animation. We must remember that the friendly talk with the Rector is an important instrument also for the smooth running and well being of the community. When properly lived, it is a help not only to the individual confrere, but also to the entire community, enhancing communion of purpose and favouring personalized care and attention to the needs and pace of each one of its members.

133. It has to be clearly acknowledged that the Rector is the one ultimately responsible for formation in the community – which does not necessarily mean that he is the only one responsible. He is the guarantee of the totality of the process of formation. He accompanies the community spiritually in various ways, and



the individual confreres through the friendly talk and also through informal interventions. He does his best to promote the friendly talk as an important and irreplaceable moment of formative accompaniment and an extremely useful means for the building up of the community. He must be careful to ensure true freedom of choice as far as personal spiritual accompaniment is concerned, while at the same time keeping himself open to those who wish freely to choose him as their spiritual guide. He helps the young confrere in initial formation to make a synthesis with his earlier phase of formation and to prepare him in some way for the next one. He also ensures that confreres in initial formation are able to genuinely participate in the process of drawing up or revising the formation plan of the community.

134. The confessor offers the ministry of sacramental accompaniment of conscience. It appears that several formees opt to combine the sacrament of reconciliation with personal spiritual accompaniment. In this case the confessor must ensure, with delicacy, that the relationship of spiritual accompaniment not be reduced to a mere formality. One way of doing this would be to distinguish the two moments of sacramental confession and personal spiritual accompaniment.

The appreciation for the sacrament of Reconciliation expressed in various ways by the research is an invitation and a challenge. How much are we ready to invest in the preparation and qualification of confreres for this ministry? The choices made by those entrusted with the service of leadership are open indications of a hierarchy of values. If the confessor becomes a synonym for one who ‘can’t do anything else’ for reasons of age and health, what kind of message are we giving to our confreres?

135. For both spiritual guide and confessor, the *Ratio* expresses the strong desire that he be a Salesian: ‘If a confrere should ask for a special confessor or spiritual director, the superior should grant it to him, but it should be kept in mind that in the period of initial formation it is highly desirable that such a person be a Salesian and that his service be permanent.’ (FSDB 292) Here again, however, the Rector and the formation team must ensure true freedom of choice, and strive first and foremost to imitate the example of Don Bosco who was able to gain the confidence of the young and of his confreres. Within such a relationship of mutual trust, they will find it possible to gently guide the choices that have to be made.

136. Clearly, there is need for a shared vision and objectives



among the three figures of the Rector, the spiritual guide and the confessor – and here, once again, it is the Rector who has prime responsibility for such unity, which he exercises also by involving the others to the extent possible in meetings of the formation team. The documents of the Church give the greatest importance to such unity.²¹

4.8 CONTINUITY OF ACCOMPANIMENT

137. The problem of fragmentation of spiritual accompaniment has emerged in some way in our survey – the fact that a confrere ends up by having a series of spiritual guides during the arc of initial formation.

Is it an ideal to have a single spiritual guide all through the process of initial formation? Is not ‘letting go’ also part of the process of growth and maturity, in spiritual accompaniment as in other areas of life – both on the part of the one being accompanied and on the part of the guide himself, who has to be himself attentive to the temptation of possessiveness?

138. Having said that, it is important to ensure some continuity in formative accompaniment. A key role can be played here by the provincial himself through his fatherly concern, and by the provincial formation delegate, through periodic meetings and visits to houses of initial formation but most especially to houses hosting practical trainees and confreres in the quinquennium. Meetings of formators of various phases are also useful in this regard, to ensure common vision and styles of formation, and to ensure ongoing communication while safeguarding confidentiality. Then, of course, the willingness on the part of the Salesian in formation to be open and transparent with his guide, despite the changes, is something that greatly favours continuity.

139. Special care, as we have said, needs to be taken of the phases of practical training and the quinquennium, not least by wise choice of communities capable of providing accompaniment. This is the responsibility of the Provincial.

To the Provincial also belongs the responsibility of selecting, preparing and proposing a certain number of confreres as spiritual

²¹ See, for example, *Optatam Totius* 5; *Potissimum Institutioni* 32; *Pastores Dabo Vobis* 66; *Directives on the Preparation of Educators in Seminaries* (1993) 29-32; *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation*, Introduction section 3.



guides for the province. In addition, it would be helpful to propose some criteria for the choice of spiritual guides on the part of the confreres in initial formation: the possibility of a monthly meeting (which means that the guide must be close enough and not very far away); knowledge, on the part of the guide, of the Salesian charism and of the formative characteristics of the various phases of formation; the possibility, on the part of the guide, of participating in at least some meetings of the formation team.

4.9 ROLE OF COMMUNITY AND MISSION

140. Mission and community are constitutive elements of the Salesian consecrated identity, and emerge as important themes in the research. The relationship of spiritual accompaniment cannot but be marked by the mission and by the life of community.

Spiritual accompaniment and community

141. There is a *reciprocal relationship between spiritual accompaniment and community*. We keep in mind that by community we mean not only the Salesian religious community but also the educative and pastoral community (EPC) – and this is especially significant in the phase of practical training.

A good formation journey helps one become more open to others and more willing to make a gift of oneself in service.

On the other hand, it is also true that the *community ambient has a great impact on the journey of each one*, and on his openness and ability to benefit from spiritual accompaniment. The physical ambient is itself educative: the 'Oratory criterion' (C 40) must govern even the architecture and the concern for community spaces. The practice of community discernment (C 66) becomes a school for the formation of future communities that are discerning. The atmosphere of the religious community creates the confidence and familiarity that mark all the human relationships that constitute it, including that of personal accompaniment. The reverse is also true, as can be seen especially in the open responses from certain regions. Further, in all linguistic areas, as we have seen, our formees ask that their formators be close to them, sharing their life in informal moments, building relationships of friendship and confidence. Community and personal accompaniment are dialectically related, so that if one suffers, the other is affected too. It is interesting that the 2018 Synod took the trouble to highlight this typically Salesian point of view (FD 95-97), as we have seen



above when dealing with the originality of Don Bosco's praxis (see section 3.4).

The culture of the province

142. We must speak here also about the relationship between initial formation and the 'culture of the province.'

What is happening to confreres in a formation house, even when they live in interprovincial communities outside the territory of their province, is not indifferent to the life of the province. The quality of their formative experience and the way they are accompanied will determine the life and mission of the province.

The reverse is even more true: the culture of the province is a central determinant of formation processes. The lifestyle of the province inevitably has a positive or negative impact on those in initial formation, who look up to their seniors for example and inspiration.

A direct implication is that 'formation issues' – such as accompaniment – cannot be confined or relegated to the initial formation communities. If this happens, it is already a sign that something is not going well in the formation environment that is the culture of the province.

The peer group

143. As pastor and educator of the young (C 98), every Salesian is called to value the great potential of group experience in the formation of young people. This general pedagogical principle is valid also in the context of initial formation. Group experience in the phases of initial formation has a great impact on the vocational journey of candidates and confreres.

This is true also with regard to Salesian personal accompaniment. Companions can encourage or discourage in a way that is often more influential than what is proposed by formators. This is yet another element in community accompaniment and the atmosphere of the house.

In the digital world of today, furthermore, we cannot forget that virtual friends on social networks might be even more influential than companions and colleagues in the community.

In some formation communities, small group interaction be-



comes a form of spiritual accompaniment. The group creates a holding environment where sharing about one's faith journey and the basic values of Salesian life can take place for the mutual enrichment of all. In turn, such group experience facilitates the other forms of accompaniment such as personal spiritual guidance.

The problem of large formation communities

144. The problem of *large formation communities* also needs to be mentioned. Even when such communities are 'peaceful,' we are becoming increasingly convinced that the quality of interaction and formative accompaniment is much better in smaller communities. Division of large communities calls, of course, for greater investment in terms of formation personnel, and this is not always easy. To a certain extent, though, group processes of various kinds (year groups, cluster groups cutting across the years, etc.) may offset the problem of excessively large communities.

Mission and spiritual accompaniment

145. The community atmosphere and involvement in the apostolic mission are extremely important for growth in those aspects of our life that are *typically Salesian*. This is an ever valid area of interest for the journey of Salesian accompaniment, given that our aim is to grow precisely as disciples of Christ *in the path marked out by Don Bosco*. We have seen already that we need to take greater care of this dimension, especially in the phases of formation that follow upon the novitiate (see section 4.2 above).

Besides the friendly talk with the Rector and the possibility of accessing the sacrament of reconciliation, the community offers also other forms of accompaniment, such as the pastoral, the intellectual, and the psychological.

Then again, even in the phases of initial formation we need an initiation to the sharing of the Salesian spirit and mission with lay people, and to working within an EPC where we are part of the animating nucleus along with lay mission partners. The weekend apostolates and the summer apostolates can both be extremely fruitful if properly accompanied – if formators are capable of helping young Salesians to 'learn by experience the meaning of the Salesian vocation.' (C 98) Formators and guides will be especially attentive to help those in formation to learn to meet God through those to whom they are sent (C 95), and to discern the voice of the Spirit in every experience, making best formative use of any situation (C 119) – and their service of formation would



become even more effective if they are able to participate in some way in these apostolic experiences. Obviously, such pastoral and spiritual accompaniment is the indispensable formative moment of the experience of practical training: without it, practical training runs the risk of being reduced merely to 'work.'

The Salesian collaborative style of accompaniment

146. An adequate formative and family environment is essential to the Salesian style of spiritual accompaniment. Collaboration and teamwork are essential to the creation of such an environment. The process of formation should not be the heroic effort of some gifted individual but rather the outcome of effective teamwork. In a world where individualism is so strong, our young Salesians need to know that working together is possible and beautiful. They need to see their older confreres working together.

There is, therefore, the task of building cohesive formation teams. Obviously, it is not enough to choose a set of gifted and qualified individuals. They need to be able to blend together into a good team that can enhance the community atmosphere and favour meaningful interaction. The selection of formators and the putting together of cohesive formation teams is a vital task of governance at the provincial and interprovincial level.

147. The family spirit is a basic condition for a good formation journey, and is absolutely the first thing to take care of in the community. 'Don Bosco wanted everyone to feel at home in his establishments. The Salesian house becomes a family when affection is mutual and when all, both confreres and young people, feel welcome and responsible for the common good. In an atmosphere of mutual trust and daily forgiveness, the need and joy of sharing everything is experienced, and relationships are governed not so much by recourse to rules as by faith and the promptings of the heart. This is a witness that enkindles in the young the desire to get to know and to follow the Salesian vocation.' (C 16)

The dialogue of Salesian personal spiritual accompaniment presupposes and builds upon relationships that have been established in the context of the community. The whole community and formation structures offer informal accompaniment, complementing and supporting the formal moments.

148. If each member of the community is responsible for the family spirit, even more so the *Rector*, who plays a key role in creating conditions for a positive community experience and fa-



vouring personal processes of growth. (See Bay 454) He knows the importance of the friendly talk, the objective of which is the good of the confrere himself and also the good running of the community (C 70), and makes himself available for it. He ensures that confreres, especially those in initial formation, enjoy a real freedom to choose their spiritual guide.

149. A good *Vice-Rector* is also precious in a formation community, especially if he knows how to support the Rector and take over matters of discipline and organization, freeing the Rector to exercise his role as father, animator and guardian of the family spirit.

150. Both the Rector and the other members of the formation team know the importance of unity and cohesion of the *team*, and do their utmost to promote this. The absence of unity is sufficient to compromise all other efforts at formation.

Connected to the issue of the team is also the fact that there are no 'pure teachers': every teacher is also a formator. One who wants to be only a teacher and not a formator is disqualified for both the former and the latter.

151. The Rector and team also recognize the importance of the family of origin of the confreres. The more we succeed in 'walking together' with the family, the more the paths of human growth and faith acquire value and strength.

4.10 RESPECTING CONFIDENTIALITY AND CREATING TRUST

Spiritual accompaniment

152. In the relationship of spiritual accompaniment, it is important to create 'a gentle place' where one can share intense feelings, knowing that it is safe. Maintaining confidentiality is the best way to ensure such a safe environment. 'Confidentiality is a gift we can still give to people in a world with few secrets.'²²

Without trust, it is not possible to get in touch with the truth of the person. It is the very nature and purpose of spiritual accompaniment to be in touch with the inner truth of the person, and to help him recognize himself, in order to become slowly

²² Richard Gula, *Ethics in Pastoral Ministry* (Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 1996) 117.



what God wants him to be.²³

The research on accompaniment gives us a strong indication that, on the side of those being accompanied, *freedom* is indispensable if accompaniment is to be a path of truth. On the side of those serving as spiritual guides, instead, the indispensable condition is *trust*.

153. In our educational system it is not just a question of entrusting oneself to some spiritual master in a monastery or shrine. It is the formation house that is the good ground where the climate of trust, respect and commitment is communicated, and that becomes the humus for individuals to flourish and bear fruit.

The results of the survey give the impression that much of what is proposed by various formation houses is accepted as required behavioural adjustment. How truly it becomes personal conviction is not easy to say. From the open answers, especially from practical trainees and theologians, we see the tendency to ‘spiritualise’ things both on the part of the formators and the formees, giving ‘official priority’ to ‘spiritual things’ as compared to other elements in the daily timetable and elsewhere. The periodic evaluations base themselves on the externals (e.g., being present at meditation). The content and impact of these practices can be processed only in a personal accompaniment that is characterized by freedom and trust.

154. In the classical Salesian literature there is a text of incomparable force when it comes to the themes of freedom and trust, confidence and openness – Don Bosco’s 1884 Letter from Rome. Meditating on it in the light of the results of our survey could be very illuminating.

The Letter is the mature expression of Don Bosco’s pedagogical and spiritual experience, with a perspective that embraces a worldwide horizon. Don Bosco knows he is handing over his heritage and testament, his way of being father and teacher of youth. It is the same approach he had followed ten years before when he wrote the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, at a time when the

²³ Discernment can be defined itself as the art through which man understands the word that has been addressed to him, and in this very word recognises the way he must follow in order to respond to the Word.... It is therefore a progressive way to see oneself and the history with the eyes of God, to see how God is present and accomplishes his work in me and in others, and how I can dispose myself to partake in this divine working, so as to become part of the humanity that Christ assumes, and through which he also assumes creation, to submit everything to the Father (Col 1,24). Cf. Marko Ivan Rupnik, *Discernimento* (Roma: Ed. Lipa, 2004).



Constitutions of the newly born Congregation had finally been approved and the first missionary expedition was getting ready. He is convinced that going back to the beginning is the best way of going forward to the future. The recent Synod on youth and the orientations given to the whole Church in its wake show how prophetic are the intuitions contained in that letter written in May 1884 and given to each Salesian along with the Constitutions on the day of his first profession.

Pope Francis speaks of the same ‘firm and affectionate trust’ with regard to family life: ‘a family marked by a solid and loving trust, come what may, helps its members to be themselves and spontaneously to reject deceit, falsehood, and lies.’ (AL 115) ‘Moral formation should always take place with active methods and a dialogue that teaches through sensitivity and by using a language children can understand. It should also take place inductively, so that children can learn for themselves the importance of certain values, principles and norms, rather than by imposing these as absolute and unquestionable truths.’ (AL 264)

The friendly talk

155. The friendly talk with the Rector is itself protected by a very high level of confidentiality in all the documents of the Church and of the Congregation, which is also what is required by the code of conduct in many helping professions today, such as counselling. It is enough to quote the *Ratio*: ‘Guidance at the different levels of formation requires that those who render the service... must abide by the principles of prudence and justice which, depending on the circumstances, imply discretion or absolute respect for a professional or sacramental secret.’ (FSDB 264) As Fr Paul Albera says, there is such a close correlation between confidentiality and trust that even a slight ‘leakage’ in the first causes the almost complete and immediate loss of the second.²⁴

²⁴ ‘The very nature of the friendly talk with the Rector calls for rigorous secrecy and confidentiality. “Let the Rector be careful never to reveal to others the faults a confrere may have, even when they may already know of them through other channels. Let it be obvious to his subjects that he is able to respect the confidentiality of what is entrusted to him. It only takes some small indiscretion to weaken and maybe entirely destroy the confidence they have shown him.” (From the Manual of the Rector of Don Paolo Albera no. 131) For reasons inherent in your office, you may be asked by the provincial for your opinion on some confrere or other, and in such a case you have to give the necessary information objectively and responsibly. But it should be based exclusively on the external behaviour of the confrere concerned and on what others may say about him. Confidences that may have been given in private talks are protected by a rigorous secret: *nihil, numquam, nulli* (nothing, never, about anyone).’ *The Salesian Rector* (Rome: Editrice SDB, 1986) 264.



Even external things, if communicated to the Rector during the friendly talk, as for example matters of health or a personal difficulty, are considered confidential, because everyone has the right to his good name and privacy. They cease to be confidential, however, if the Rector later comes to know about them in the external forum; but it would be good for him to advise the confrere on this matter.

Further, since one of the purposes of the friendly talk is also the good running of the community, however, the Rector has always the possibility, with the permission of the confrere, to act on the information received.

The secrecy covering the friendly talk – as also personal spiritual accompaniment – is not, however, absolute, as is the seal of the sacrament of reconciliation. There are, in fact, grave circumstances that can supersede it, as, for example, the case of abuse of minors, homicide or suicide.

Admissions

156. When it comes to admissions, with the exception of the cases mentioned above (n. 155) the principle formulated by GC19 remains valid: ‘The obligation of secrecy regarding those things heard in manifestation is the most rigorous. When treating of intimate things the Rector is bound not to reveal anything directly or indirectly for any motive whatsoever, or at any time whatsoever, and still less when treating of admission to the vows or to ordination.’ (GC19 – ASC 244 97-98)

In practice this means that the Rector can neither share information from the friendly talk with other members of his Council, nor can he use it to arrive at his own position. He makes his judgment solely on the basis of his own observations and of those of his Council.

If it happens that, before the admissions in the local Council, the Rector judges that someone should not profess or receive orders, he has ‘the grave obligation of conscience to say clearly and seriously and with all charity to the confrere concerned, that he cannot and should not – also for his own good – go ahead.’ (ACG 281 p. 893) If, despite this, the confrere makes his application, the Rector must act in the Council as in any other case. He cannot, in other words, allow himself to be influenced by his own judgment and by its communication to the person concerned.



4.11 RETURNING TO THE PREVENTIVE SYSTEM

The different 'models of formation'

157. There exists a certain uniformity and commonality in the way formation is carried out across the world, and this comes from our shared tradition, the efforts made to implement the *Ratio*, and the unity that derives from governance and animation at the world level. However, we must admit – and this is one of the most obvious findings of our survey – that there are also major differences.

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Painting in broad strokes, we could say that in some areas the dynamic of fraternity is quite visible and predominant, while in others there persists a certain 'gap' between 'superiors' and 'subjects,' as can be seen even in banal things such as seating in the refectory. Again, 'fear' is reported quite consistently in certain areas, with a consequent tendency to external conformity ('formalism') instead of true transformation of motivations, attitudes and convictions. These are also the areas where, in general, the formees ask insistently for a distinction between the Rector / in charge and the spiritual guide (see 2.3.7 above), where the possibility of freely opening one's heart and trust receive the lowest values (see 2.3.4 above), and where the word 'freedom' recurs insistently. Unfortunately, it is again in these areas that personal meetings are not very regular (see 2.3.5 above), and where the friendly talk coincides for very many with personal spiritual accompaniment and becomes one of the behaviours with which to conform.

We allow ourselves to speak, therefore, of different prevalent or operative 'models' of formation – even when everyone theoretically subscribes to the model defined in and proposed by the *Ratio*.

The 'conformation' model of formation and its results

158. The prevalent model of formation is a key issue in the process of formation and in the relationship of personal accompaniment, where by 'prevalent' we mean, as we have said, not necessarily what is expressed, but that which 'prevails' in practice, that which is operative. It is quite possible, as we know, to say one thing and do another. It is possible to keep swearing fidelity to the Preventive System and yet, in practice, be operating in quite a different way. What we actually do is one thing, what the Preventive System demands is another, and we are unaware of the



difference. Further, our unawareness is unexpressed. We have no language to express what we are doing, so we continue to speak in terms of reason, religion and loving kindness, and thereby set into motion a devaluation, distortion, watering down, corruption of these terms. Such devaluation may occur only in scattered individuals. But it may occur on a more massive scale, and then the words are repeated but the meaning is gone. And this is really a difficult situation – when not just a few individuals, but a whole group is affected by a devaluation and distortion of the tradition.

159. If the prevalent model of formation aims at the *acquisition of a set of behaviours*, the results obtained after a considerable number of years of initial formation will be exactly what has been pursued: behavioural adaptations, with a set of *habiti* that have become customary, and the hope that corresponding internal motivations have grown. If the model aims somewhat deeper, at the *acquisition of a set of skills* needed for the ministry, the result will be a group of skilled persons. If the model aims at a *transformation of the person himself* – his transfiguration into Christ in the way marked out by Don Bosco – the result will be a group of persons who have taken personal responsibility for their growth, and who hopefully keep growing into Christ, both individually and as a group.

We could talk about a top-down, conformation model of formation when the goal is, in practice, external conformity. This kind of model is strong on authority and rules; it tends to be marked by a distance between those in authority and those subject to authority; and it is not surprising to find strong elements of fear and anxiety in the formees.

160. Even within the vertical, conformation model of formation, there have surely been individuals who grew well and even attained sanctity. However, it is unlikely that mere external behavioural adaptation is today a good recipe for Salesian religious life. The rhythms of life in our local communities quickly consume fidelity, if such fidelity is anchored merely to good behavioural habits. Only what has become reason, conviction and deep motivation will remain, and will help to find a new balance and to integrate the challenges and opportunities that constantly surface. The rhythm of life today demands much strength and a solid spiritual life, as well as docility to discern the voice of the Spirit in the events of each day. (C 119) Once again the importance of a fruitful journey of personal spiritual accompaniment becomes evident. Personal spiritual accompaniment is the main instrument through which the expressions of our life of prayer can become true paths of



personal growth that will continue to nurture us regardless of external situations. 'We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them.' (AL 37)

The importance of interiority and transformation of the heart

161. A model of formation that remains merely at the externals is profoundly dissonant with the Salesian tradition. (McDonnell 51-53) Francis de Sales was sceptical of those who focus on the exterior: 'as for myself, I have never been able to approve of the method of those who, to reform someone, begin with the exterior, with appearance, dress, hair. On the contrary, I feel one needs to begin with the interior.' (OEA III 23: McDonnell 51) He was convinced that 'those who have Jesus in their hearts will soon have Him in all their outward ways.' (OEA III 27: McDonnell 51) Salesian spirituality underlines the importance of interiority: for Francis, the heart is central. One of the very first aims of Salesian spiritual direction is to enable young people to reconnect with the centre of their being – with their heart. This primacy of the heart is a mark of the originality of the Christian humanism of St Francis de Sales. The spiritual journey is an inward journey, a journey to the heart, and spiritual accompaniment aims at a transformation of the heart, the configuration of the person to Christ.

Reproduction of what is experienced in initial formation

162. A further reflection about the model of formation is suggested by the remarks made by the 538 Salesian spiritual guides. In the questionnaire the guides were asked to give a feedback about their own experience of being accompanied during their initial formation. It is surprising that many of the difficulties pointed out by the other respondents (from prenovitiate to quinquennium) are similar – even in percentages! – to the problems faced by the Salesian guides when they themselves were in initial formation. This suggests that certain trends are permanent, being somehow linked to the structures or to the model of formation.

If the experiences of initial formation are marked by severe limitations – e.g., lack of respect for confidentiality – it is difficult and unlikely that the generations of Salesians who passed through such 'filters' will have the best dispositions and preparation to be good spiritual guides of their younger confreres. Exceptions are always possible, as when one is able to learn from one's negative experiences, but the most common tendency is to reproduce what one has 'gone through.'



163. Becoming aware of the operative model of formation is, therefore, important and urgent. By bringing the operative model to light, we can look at it critically and decide whether it needs to be changed.

In our opinion, the conformation model of formation is uncomfortably close to the Repressive System, and cannot go along with the Salesian spirit (see Constitutions Chapter 2). We need to look at it honestly, and have the courage to go back to the Preventive System. The recommendation of Don Bosco to the young first Rector of the Congregation, Michael Rua – *Studia di farti amare* (Strive to make yourself loved) – is inscribed on the cross given to us at our perpetual profession, and cries to be put into practice, with the invaluable comment on it that is the Letter from Rome. Such a striving on the part of Rectors, formators and spiritual guides, but also every Salesian called to the service of accompaniment in its various forms, will surely involve a journey of purification and asceticism, which we learn to accept as our daily taking up of our cross in our following of Christ.

4.12 LEARNING BY EXPERIENCE

164. Article 98 of our Constitutions gives us a fundamental methodology of formation: we ‘learn by experience’ the meaning of the Salesian vocation. This is another way of talking about the centrality of the heart or of interiority in the tradition of Francis de Sales.

Learning by experience is not simply ‘having experiences.’ It involves attending to experiences and reflecting prayerfully on them, in order to discern in them the voice of the Spirit (C 119). It is the ‘core skill,’ if we may speak that way, of formation as life-long. When we live this way, we live really in a permanent attitude of discernment. (AGC 425 30-33)

165. It is not enough, therefore, to keep our formees busy doing a thousand things. Accompaniment involves helping them focus attention to what is going on in the depths of the heart, in order to listen to the Spirit. Such accompaniment may take place in community, and it ought to take place also in smaller groups when the community is large. It should certainly be the bread and butter of personal spiritual accompaniment. And we can learn by experience across the board: the experience of relationships, community life, pastoral work, intellectual commitments, the practices of piety, the life of prayer and so on. Failure to do this is probably



why many of us can ‘go through’ certain practices of piety, for example, all through our initial formation, and not really learn to pray.

We need to remember that the pedagogy of prayer was central to Don Bosco’s educational proposal: ‘The fundamental area of accompaniment is formation to prayer which, beginning from the exercise of the presence of God and the practices of piety, leads to the acquisition of the spirit of prayer, to union with God and towards the state of prayer in daily life.’ (Giraudó 124)

4.13 SPIRITUAL ACCOMPANIMENT AS HOLISTIC

166. The path of true vocational growth lies in the harmonious interaction of all the dimensions within each one’s unique life history. The one who accompanies is called to attune his interaction to this process of unfolding, healing and flourishing, encountering the young ‘at their present stage of freedom’ (C 38).

Accompanying young people who intend to follow Christ in the Salesian Congregation is therefore a holistic process, where community and individuals are involved in all the aspects of daily living. Spiritual accompaniment is concerned with the totality of the person, and not only with the ‘spiritual’ aspect understood in a narrow way. We can take inspiration here from the ‘total development’ described in C 31: ‘We educate and evangelize according to a plan for the total well-being of man directed to Christ, the perfect Man.’

All the dimensions of being human, therefore, enter into the ‘matter’ of spiritual accompaniment. The moment of personal accompaniment is most especially a safe and gentle place where the whole experience of the person can be allowed to emerge: physical condition and health, the emotional life in its past and present, community life, group life and interpersonal relationships, the educative-intellectual aspect that forms such an important part of initial formation at certain moments, the formal experiences of prayer together with life that becomes prayer, pastoral experiences, and the Salesian consecrated vocation as permeating all these. A good guide will enable the person to gradually bring his life experience into the relationship of accompaniment and will help him discover and discern there the voice and action of the Spirit (C 98, 119).

Such a holistic approach goes well with the basic principle proposed by Pope Francis, that time is greater than space: ‘This



principle enables us to work slowly but surely, without being obsessed with immediate results. It helps us patiently to endure difficult and adverse situations, or inevitable changes in our plans. It invites us to accept the tension between fullness and limitation, and to give a priority to time.... Giving priority to time means being concerned about initiating processes rather than dominating spaces.' (EG 222-223)

4.14 PERIODIC PERSONAL ASSESSMENTS AS MEANS FOR GROWTH

167. The sole aim of the periodic personal assessments (scrutinies) is to enhance holistic growth. Through them the house Council evaluates, encourages, corrects and strengthens the vocation journey of each person. Ideally, then, these assessments should be a significant community complement to what takes place in the friendly talk with the Rector and in personal spiritual accompaniment. When done well, assessments can be a very fruitful experience. However, if they are carried out rashly and imprudently, they could severely damage the trust relationship between the confrere in formation and the formation team.²⁵

168. The formation team is invited to reflect carefully on the purpose and modality of the periodic assessments in order to guarantee a healthy process that will benefit the candidate in formation. It is worth emphasizing that the assessment is not in itself a discernment process linked to the admission of a candidate to the next phase. Such admissions are juridical acts that involve the province and not only the house Council, while the main purpose of the periodic assessments is to foster the vocational growth of the one receiving it, through the qualified contributions offered by members of the local Council. The formation scrutiny is, instead, an assessment of the progress made by someone who is in formation. Used during initial formation to personalize the formative process, it is an instrument of considerable help to the Rector and the spiritual guide in their work of spiritual accompaniment. Since each phase has its own specific objectives in the human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral dimensions of formation, the formation personnel – and more specifically, the Rector and the Council of the community – make use of these objectives to assess the progress made by their candidates and Salesians in formation. Each

²⁵ 30.3% of novices experience the scrutiny as a judgement on what one does rather than on who one is. In postnovitiate this feeling is even more common – 41.6%. Cf. 'Valutazione della Pratica dello Scrutinio' in Bay 123, 241, 330, 364.



assessment will take into account the progress made in respect of the previous assessments.

169. A suggestion made by the *Ratio* may be helpful: the direct involvement of the confrere himself in the process of evaluation. ‘During the period of initial formation, scrutinies must be conducted every three months to evaluate and foster each person’s process of formation. The objectives of the phase and the progress of the confrere should be examined together, and his growth in his vocation must be assessed in continuity with previous assessments. The confrere himself should be involved in the assessment in different ways.’ (FSDB 296)

Above all, the assessments must make constant reference to ‘the way of the Gospel’ set out in the Salesian Constitutions (C 24). They are part of the assistance of our brother Salesians that we invoke in our formula of profession to keep us faithful day by day. Our brothers in formation must be helped to remember that such assistance in living our Gospel way of life is an essential part of our growth and fidelity.

4.15 TAKING PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR FORMATION

170. It is not enough to have good formation teams and well prepared spiritual guides. As our Constitutions say, ‘each Salesian accepts responsibility for his own formation’ (C 99) and makes a decision to open himself to his guides and ‘let himself be known, relating to the formators with sincerity and transparency.’²⁶

The community and the formation guides have their own important role, and we know that there are no perfect communities and guides. But nothing can substitute what is entrusted to each one’s free response. Even the best guide will not be able to help someone who is not ready to open up, sincerely share his experience, and embark on a process of growth. Similarly, if one’s core motivations are not sincere, and pretence is deliberately adopted as a way of ‘survival,’ the damage to discernment and to formation process is incalculable, and is the grave responsibility of the person himself.

When instead there is full availability and readiness to engage ourselves in response to the call, ‘in dialogue with the Lord,’

²⁶ See *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation* 45.



then we learn ‘to make the best formative use of any situation’ (C 119).

171. ‘Vocational Fragility’ (AGC 385) had discussed the roots, expressions and causes of such fragility, and had gone on to suggest interventions, many of which are reflected in the present document: care of vocations to Salesian religious life, attention to the prenovitiate, a formative methodology that is personalized and that privileges personal accompaniment, strengthening of formation teams and communities. ‘Vocational fidelity’ (AGC 410) had invited each confrere to revisit the story of his vocation, strengthen the awareness of his consecrated identity, take care of his human maturity, spiritual life, apostolic commitment and intellectual formation, acquire the mentality of lifelong formation, and assume personal responsibility for this formation that is lifelong. It also pointed out the vital role of the local and provincial community in vocational fidelity. The great insistence of the present document on the quality and formation of formators and guides does not take away the fact that all formation is ultimately a self formation (PDV 69). In the dynamic of grace and freedom that is at the core of vocational growth and the relationship of personal spiritual accompaniment, the responsibility of each confrere remains: he is invited to respond, every day, to the call of the Lord (C 96; see AGC 416).

4.16 LEARNING THAT SPIRITUAL ACCOMPANIMENT IS LIFELONG

172. A confrere in initial formation learns that formation is lifelong. He learns that personal spiritual accompaniment is also likewise lifelong.

Our Constitutions mention spiritual direction as one of the means available to all confreres for growing in chastity: ‘he entrusts himself with simplicity to a spiritual director’ (C 84). In addition, our Regulations mention spiritual direction as one of the elements in lifelong formation. (R 99)

173. GC26 and GC27 invited Salesians to a regular experience of spiritual accompaniment. GC26 asked each Salesian, in order to rediscover the significance of the *Da mihi animas cetera tolle* as a programme of spiritual and pastoral life, to ‘renew or strengthen the practice of being accompanied by a spiritual director, looking at Don Bosco’s experience.’ (GC26 20) GC27 proposed that, in order to become mystics in the Spirit and live the following of Jesus with passion, we commit ourselves to ‘having a stable



spiritual director and referring to this person periodically.’ (GC27 67.2) Here we have the great example of Don Bosco himself, who was guided for almost 30 years by Cafasso, and before that by a series of directors beginning with the good Calosso.

174. The *Directory for the Ministry and the Life of Priests* (2013) speaks of the necessity of priests seeking spiritual guidance for themselves:

In order to contribute to the improvement of their spirituality *it is necessary for priests to practice spiritual direction with respect to themselves*, because ‘with the assistance of accompaniment or spiritual counsel [...] it is easier to discern the action of the Holy Spirit in each person’s life.’ By placing the formation of their soul in the hands of a wise confrere – the instrument of the Holy Spirit – they will develop, as of their first steps in the ministry, their awareness of the importance of not journeying in solitude along the ways of the spiritual life and pastoral commitment.²⁷

We are witnessing here and in the teachings of Benedict XVI and Francis, an expansion of what was said in *Vita Consecrata*, where John Paul II had spoken of ‘confident and humble recourse to spiritual direction’ as of great help on the path of fidelity to the Gospel ‘especially in the period of formation and at certain other times in life.’ (VC 95)

Personal spiritual accompaniment it is not meant, therefore, only for handling crises; its aim is continued growth in Christ. Just as formation is lifelong, so also personal spiritual accompaniment is lifelong.

4.17 THE URGENCY OF SELECTING AND PREPARING SPIRITUAL GUIDES

Careful selection

175. The gift of spiritual accompaniment – or the ‘gift of counsel,’ as it is sometimes called – is part of our patrimony and charism,²⁸ but that does not mean that all Salesians have this gift.

²⁷ Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory for the Ministry and the Life of Priests*, new edition (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013) 73. The internal citation is from Congregation for the Clergy, *The Priest, Minister of Divine Mercy. Material for Confessors and Spiritual Directors* (9 March 2011) 98.

²⁸ Don Bosco certainly had the gift of counsel (Ceria’s *Don Bosco with God*, has a



Those in authority have, therefore, the task of discerning selection of spiritual guides. Speaking about the formation of seminarians and of consecrated persons, the very first insistence of the Synod on youth regards the choice of formation guides: 'it is not enough for them to be academically well qualified; they need to be capable of fraternal relationships, listening with empathy, profound inner freedom.' (FD 163) Earlier the document had presented the profile of the guide:

A good accompanier is a person who is balanced, a listener, a person of faith and prayer, who has the measure of his own weaknesses and frailties. Hence he knows how to be accepting of the young people he accompanies, without moralizing and without false indulgence. When necessary he also knows how to offer a word of fraternal correction.

The awareness that accompanying is a mission that requires a profound spiritual rootedness will help him to remain free in his dealings with the young people he accompanies: he will respect the outcome of their journey, supporting them with prayer and rejoicing in the fruits that the Spirit produces in those who open their hearts to him, without seeking to impose his own will and his own preferences.

Equally he will be capable of placing himself at their service, not taking centre stage or adopting possessive and manipulative attitudes that create dependence rather than freedom in others. This profound respect will also be the best guarantee against any risk of domination or abuse of any kind. (FD 102; cf. also CV 246)

Clearly, Priest-Salesians and Brother-Salesians can both offer the service of spiritual accompaniment, given that the service of spiritual accompaniment is not linked to priestly ordination:

This role is not and cannot be limited to priests and consecrated life, but the laity should also be empowered to take on such a role. All such mentors should benefit from being well-formed, and engage in ongoing formation.²⁹

chapter dedicated to this theme), as did his mentor and guide Don Cafasso (see Buccellato 86).

²⁹ CV 246, citing the Document of the Pre-Synodal Meeting. Cf. also IL 126, and the *Discorso del Santo Padre Francesco ai partecipanti alla plenaria della Congregazione per gli Istituti di Vita Consacrata e le Società di Vita Apostolica*, Saturday, 28 January 2017.



Specific preparation

176. Careful selection does not make specific preparation of spiritual guides unnecessary. Those who have the gift will benefit from specific preparation for their service, just as those blessed with musical gifts benefit greatly from specific training in their field.

In order to perform this service, the accompanier will need to cultivate his own spiritual life, nourishing the relationship that links him to the One who assigned this mission to him.... *It is important that he receive a specific formation for this particular ministry....* (FD 103; cf. also CV 246)

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Salesian personal accompaniment cannot be improvised: it requires strong roots in the charism and at the same time a constantly updated ability to listen to the new generations that are so exposed to change.

Ongoing formation of formators

177. Obviously, those offering the service of spiritual accompaniment must take care of their own ongoing formation and here, in the very first place, there must be willingness to care for their own personal accompaniment. This point is so important that it calls for a special comment.

Guides who are guided

178. Like all confreres, those offering the service of spiritual accompaniment also need to be themselves accompanied.

Pope Francis invokes the image of ‘guides who are guided.’³⁰ *Evangelii Gaudium* is very clear on this point (though unfortunately not in the English translation): ‘Today more than ever we need guides who, *on the basis of their own experience of being accompanied*, are familiar with processes that call for prudence, understanding, patience and docility to the Spirit.’ (EG 171, our translation from the Spanish) ‘*Our personal experience of allowing ourselves to be accompanied and assisted, our ability to talk about our life with total sincerity to those who accompany us*, will teach us to be patient and compassionate with others, and to find the right way to gain their trust, their openness and their readiness to grow.’ (EG 172, our translation from the Spanish) The teaching

³⁰ Francis, Omelia, 19° Giornata per la Vita Consacrata, 2 febbraio 2015.



of Pope Francis is taken up in the final document of the 2018 Synod: 'Once the initial phase of formation is concluded, there is a need for ongoing formation and accompaniment of priests and consecrated men and women, especially younger ones, who often have to face challenges and responsibilities that are quite out of proportion.' (FD 100)

Supervision

179. Besides one's own personal spiritual accompaniment, there is also need for supervision of the service of spiritual accompaniment that one offers to others. '*It is important that [the guide] ... can benefit in his turn from accompaniment and supervision.*' (FD 103, emphasis added) Such supervision is needed because the guide cannot be expected 'to have all the answers,' and also so that his own reactions and personal dynamics do not get in the way of his work of accompaniment.

Supervision is ordinarily done by someone prepared for this task – e.g., those certified as clinical supervisors. However, peer supervision is also helpful, with occasional help from an expert. Finally, self-supervision is something that is not only helpful but that all those offering spiritual accompaniment must learn to do. This involves listening to oneself as one is listening to others (heightened self-awareness), and reviewing sessions soon after they are done.







Part three

Choosing





5. The way ahead

5.1 EMERGING SUGGESTIONS

180. Our effort of interpretation throws up a whole series of choices and suggestions for action.

An inculturated formation, for example, calls for formators capable of entering into dialogue with the culture of the young, and invites the Congregation to continue its efforts to ensure adequate communication in widely used languages such as English.

Again, the aspect of configuration to Christ as consecrated persons inspired by Don Bosco needs to be better highlighted in spiritual accompaniment. There is also need to invest in the preparation of formators and spiritual guides. Further, we must be especially attentive to the dynamic interaction between community and personal dimensions of spiritual accompaniment, selecting and preparing Rectors with care while at the same time ensuring real freedom of choice of spiritual guide. Yet again, aware of the great formative impact of our involvement in the Salesian mission, we are called to select formators with sufficient pastoral experience.

Most importantly, we are being called to a profound respect for the dynamic of grace and freedom at the heart of formation and of spiritual accompaniment. Here we want to ‘start again’ from the Preventive System, which is not only pedagogy and spirituality but also model of formation, with its deep respect for the person and its willingness to accompany him with patience, in a spirit of family, affection and friendship. At the same time, those in initial formation are reminded of the absolute importance of openness, sincerity and transparency in any process of formation and spiritual accompaniment.

The critical role of the prenovitiate in initiation to Salesian personal accompaniment calls for continued attention to this phase of formation, especially in terms of careful selection and preparation of the one in charge and of the formation team. On the other



hand, reflection on the prenovitiate has also made us aware of the close connection between youth ministry and formation, and of the need for a continued renewal of Salesian youth ministry and of the aspirantate.

181. Our exercise of listening to the Spirit speaking through our confreres leads us to some broad strategies. We present them here, along with suggestions for action to be further concretized, contextualized and implemented at regional, provincial and local levels.

5.2 STRATEGIES

5.2.1 Clarifying the nature of Salesian spiritual accompaniment

182. The first strategy is *to clarify the nature of Salesian spiritual accompaniment*.

The present document can be considered part of this process, especially in Part II where we have tried to read the signals coming from the voices of our young candidates and confreres in initial formation and of the Salesians rendering the service of spiritual accompaniment, in the light of the magisterium and of our own Salesian tradition. That is, however, just the beginning of the journey. Much has to be done by way of deepening, assimilating and growing in the important area of our life and mission that is Salesian personal spiritual accompaniment. We will certainly need to make a generous investment in the formation of formators and spiritual guides.

5.2.2 Continuing the renewal of vocational youth ministry and aspirantates

183. Another basic strategy is *to continue the renewal of youth ministry and to ensure that aspirantates are truly experiences of vocational discernment through community, group and personal accompaniment*. With the 'Guidelines for the Aspirantate Experience,' we envisage attention to the aspirantates as a collaborative endeavour between the Formation and Youth Ministry departments.¹

¹ See Attard and Cereda, prot. 11/0377 dt. 27 July 2011.



It will be important to clarify the difference between ‘vocational recruitment’ and ‘vocational discernment,’ making use of the pronouncements of the Congregation as well as the documents of the Synod on youth (the Working Document, the Final Document, and *Christus Vivit*).

As we have said already (see section 4.5 above), there is a direct relationship between the quality of youth ministry and vocation animation, and the processes of initial formation. The more serious the accompaniment and vocational discernment *before* entry into the prenovitiate, the better will be the ability of those in formation to benefit from what is being offered them, including personal spiritual accompaniment. Similarly, the better the quality of formation and spiritual accompaniment, the more likely it is that youth ministry will really be what it is meant to be: the accompaniment of young people in the discovery and living out of their vocations.

Suggestions for contextualised lines of action in the regions, provinces and local communities

- 1. Study and evaluation, by the provincial youth ministry and formation commissions, of the extent to which Salesian personal accompaniment is part of the ordinary educative-pastoral ministry of Salesian works.*
- 2. Study and evaluation, by those more directly involved in youth ministry, vocational animation and initial formation, of vocational animation at provincial and regional level, in the light of the present orientations.*
- 3. Evaluation of the study of pastoral theology, and of the way pastoral activities are carried out during specific formation, in the light of the present orientations. Gradual preparation for the service of personal accompaniment is a qualifying aspect of Salesian specific formation.*
- 4. Promoting the regularity and quality of personal spiritual accompaniment in the aspirantate, by means of evaluation and training.*

5.2.3 Adopting the Preventive System as our model of formation

184. To ‘begin again’ from the Preventive System is not so much a strategy as a process of conversion or spiritual renewal.



It is going back to our charismatic roots, especially to that most inspiring testament given by Don Bosco in the letter of Rome of May 1884.

This leads to a shift from a model of formation that concentrates on external conformity and modification of behaviour, to a process of community and personal accompaniment that recognizes and respects the dynamics of grace and freedom. Any tendency to blaming and quick judgment has to give room to valuing and appreciating the young people entrusted to communities and formation teams. Formation is a matter of beginning processes rather than trying to dominate spaces.

Those entrusted with the service of formation are called to invest in 'self-care' so that their personalities are a help rather than a hindrance to the formation process. Those who offer the service of personal spiritual guidance will remember that such accompaniment is a three-way affair, and that they have to learn to play their secondary role as formators and guides, at the service of the encounter between grace and freedom.

The accompaniment of consecrated persons following Christ obedient, poor and chaste touches the deepest level of motivations and the totality of the vocation journey in its present, past and future. Without a relationship marked by mutual trust, sharing at this level cannot take place and little meaningful help can be rendered and received.

185. The Preventive System also calls us to truly live the family spirit. Community accompaniment, both formal and informal, is the essential counterpart of personal spiritual accompaniment. Presence and closeness to the formees is also necessary so as to create the confidence and familiarity that carry over into personal spiritual accompaniment. This goes along with learning to listen to the young, not only in one-to-one relationships but also in communities, provinces, regions and Congregation, passing from one-way communications to genuine dialogue, and from being formators who only teach to being formators who also participate in games and work.



Suggestions for contextualised lines of action in the regions, provinces and local communities

1. Freedom, responsibility and trust are key elements for every journey of growth and vocational response. Tools to enhance a correct understanding and exercise of freedom, responsibility and trust (courses, seminars, aids...) could be offered especially for those who are at the beginning of the journey – aspirants, prenovices, novices.

2. The formation commission and provincial Council could carry out a careful discernment / evaluation of Salesian personnel to whom candidates and confreres in initial formation can turn for personal accompaniment (closeness, availability, preparation, etc.), keeping in mind also the communities with confreres in practical training.

3. Training sessions for Rectors and confreres engaged in the ministry of accompaniment can be offered at provincial or interprovincial levels, so as to understand the difference between the friendly talk with the Rector and personal spiritual accompaniment, and to promote each of these valuable means of growth.

4. The provincial formation commissions could work out ways of evaluating the level of discretion and respect for confidentiality in the processes of personal accompaniment of candidates and confreres, and of offering training sessions to promote confidentiality.

5. With the help of the formation commission the provincial could revise the provincial qualification plan for formators, evaluating the human relationship skills of the confreres involved and looking in particular at the way they have done their practical training and quinquennium.

6. Efforts could be made at various levels (universities, centres for ongoing formation, Salesian study centres, etc.) to reflect on the renewal of formation in response to generational and contextual changes, involving also young confreres in initial formation.



5.2.4 Taking care of community accompaniment

186. Ensuring adequate community accompaniment in initial formation involves investing in the formation of Rectors of formation houses and communities with practical trainees. It also involves helping teachers in our centres for the study of philosophy and theology to realize that they are always also formators.

187. Formation processes would be very much enriched if they were to include in some way people from the three states of life, consecrated, priestly and lay, including women and married couples. (FD 163-164) ‘The make-up of these formation teams, where different vocations interact, is a small but precious form of synodality, which can have an impact on the minds of young people in their initial formation.’ (FD 163) Obviously, the Congregation asks that Brother-Salesians be part of the formation team, with adequate preparation for formation and spiritual guidance.

188. The friendly talk with the Rector is to be recovered in its full potential as a precious instrument for the building up of the community, even more when it is proposed in clear distinction from spiritual direction (see sections 4.7 and 4.9 above). Fatherliness, however, also involves responsibility, and so for those who have to make important steps of vocational discernment, the Rector remains a key point of reference, as the promoter and guardian of the charism in the name of the whole Congregation, and as having a direct responsibility towards each confrere and his vocation (C 55).

Salesian personal accompaniment cannot, therefore, be reduced to a private experience. It will always reflect the life lived in community, and to this life it will orient each person, encouraging an ongoing dialogue with the confreres and particularly with the confrere who has been asked to serve as father of the family.

189. Since a Salesian is not only member of a religious community but also of an educative and pastoral community,² the experience of accompaniment will be conditioned, enriched and shaped by interaction with our lay mission partners and with all those with whom we are called to collaborate. The contribution coming from the different states of life within the Church is precious and enriching, and we have all to learn how to be members of a Church that is Communion, in which each state of life has its role and task in relation to the others. As members of the Salesian religious community, we have to also learn to play our role as the

² *The Salesian Rector* (2019) 121-123.



'charismatic point of reference' within the educative and pastoral community.

Suggestions for contextualised lines of action in the regions, provinces and local communities

- 1. Investing in the formation of Rectors of formation houses, including those with practical trainees.*
- 2. Making full use of the community plan and the personal plan of life, community assemblies and local Council meetings, as important instruments and moments of spiritual accompaniment of the community.*
- 3. Devoting time during community meetings to reflect on the quality of community life and of the friendly talk as a tool for building community.*
- 4. Conducting courses at provincial or interprovincial level for the formation teams of the aspirantate, prenovitiate and novitiate, to enhance attitudes that create a conducive family environment and favour a good level of personal accompaniment.*
- 5. Initiating aspirants, prenovices and novices to personal accompaniment and the practice of journaling, through suitable seminars and pedagogical tools.*
- 6. Proposing capacity building moments for formation teams for the purpose of improving the way periodic assessments are carried out.*
- 7. Initiating those in initial formation to apostolic work in Salesian educative and pastoral communities.*
- 8. Indicating in the letter of obedience of confreres appointed to teach in centres for the study of philosophy and theology, that they are both teachers and formators.*

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5.2.5 Guaranteeing freedom in personal spiritual accompaniment

190. There are several factors involved in guaranteeing that



freedom is at the heart of the process of spiritual accompaniment: freedom in the choice of spiritual guide; a model of formation that is an expression of the Preventive System; the personality and preparation of the Rector or the one in charge.

Our Constitutions and Regulations, and the *Ratio*, as we have seen, are careful to keep open this window of freedom of choice, but the language they use tends to give weight to the choice of the Rector as spiritual guide: the Rector is ‘ordinarily’ the guide, he is proposed not imposed, he functions like the novice master.... (cf. sections 2.3.7 and 4.6 above). Especially in areas where formation is more conformation than transformation, this tends to be interpreted badly both by those exercising the service of authority and those in initial formation.

191. In order to avoid such situations, which affect the largest number of formees in our Congregation at the present moment, we propose the following modifications to the *Ratio*:

PRESENT TEXT ‘He is responsible for the personal formation process of each confrere. *He is also the spiritual director proposed to, but not imposed on, the confreres in formation.*’ (FSDB 233)

PROPOSED TEXT ‘He is responsible for the personal formation process of each confrere. *If the confrere so wishes, the Rector may also offer the service of personal spiritual accompaniment.*’ (FSDB 233)

PRESENT TEXT ‘The Rector [of the postnovitiate] 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 conscience* and periodical conferences.’ (FSDB 417)

PROPOSED TEXT ‘The Rector [of the postnovitiate] 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, periodical conferences, *and if the young confrere so wishes, also the spiritual direction of conscience.*’ (FSDB 417)

192. This proposal changes nothing of our venerable Salesian tradition. It remains true that Don Bosco was not only superior but



also confessor and spiritual guide of his boys and of his Salesians. It remains true that this is how he wanted his Rectors to be. It is also true that, at the behest of the Church, we accepted that Rectors could no longer ordinarily hear the confessions of their subjects, whether young people or confreres. But the Salesian Rector still remains the spiritual guide of the community, with a special responsibility towards each confrere, whom he meets regularly for a friendly talk, and when some confrere freely requests him to be also his spiritual guide, he willingly accepts this responsibility.

We place our confidence, therefore, in the Preventive System, and want to *work towards ever fuller implementation of that wonderful system, where confidence and trust are earned, not imposed*. We are making a shift from the rule or recommendation to the spirit of the Preventive System, a spirit that is wonderfully embodied in the Letter from Rome.

193. The key point is, therefore, how to change operative styles of formation so as to make them consonant with the Preventive System, and how to make it more probable that we have formators and guides who are able to inspire confidence and trust, while fully respecting the freedom of those entrusted to them. We need a sustained process of animation and *formation of formators and spiritual guides*, and also *good governance* that decides to set aside people for the task of formation and guidance, and invests wisely in their preparation.

This is the core strategy for the vexed problem of the fusion of roles, the overlap between authority and spiritual accompaniment, leading to fear, external conformity, and in general to an evisceration of the inner meaning and fruitfulness of the processes of formation and of spiritual accompaniment in particular.

194. Obviously, guaranteeing freedom of choice of spiritual guide is only one side of the picture. Unless the person in formation decides to be open and transparent with his guide, the process of personal spiritual accompaniment is vitiated at its core. In the dynamic of grace and freedom, the responsibility of each person is never taken away (see section 4.16 above).

195. The free choice of spiritual guide in the prenovitiate is a particularly delicate point, as we have said already (see section 4.4 above). We need to ensure, first of all, that genuine family spirit and the practice of the Preventive System prevails in our prenovitiates, most especially through careful attention to the composition of the formation teams and the prior preparation of formation



guides, and especially of the one in charge of prenovices. In an atmosphere of mutual trust, it is possible to win the confidence of the young, while allowing them a basic freedom to choose their guide. The Provincial and the provincial formation delegate will do their part in indicating to the prenovices the delicate and critical role of the one in charge, especially as far as vocational discernment is concerned.

A related point in ensuring freedom of choice of spiritual guide is to ensure that the members of the formation team are specifically prepared for spiritual accompaniment, and also that there be at least one confessor among them who is not part of the local Council.

196. Should the spiritual guide be chosen from within the formation team, and should he necessarily be a Salesian? Here again, the basic principle is the same: it is better to place our trust in the Salesian quality of the formators and of the community rather than in a rule or directive. It is important to ensure, however, also two further elements: that the guide chosen is someone familiar with our charism and spirituality, and that it is possible to meet him or her regularly. Within a relationship of mutual trust and confidence, the Rector will find ways of dialoguing and discerning with the person in formation about his choice of spiritual guide.

5.2.6 Strengthening the figure of the Rector

197. We have said already that the Rector continues to be responsible for formative accompaniment, both communitarian and personal, and that he has a particular responsibility for the vocation of each confrere (C 55). The charismatic figure and role of the Salesian Rector is not to be minimized in any way. Instead, the Salesianity of his figure must be enhanced, inviting him, along with his team of formators, to be truly and fully the Salesians they have professed to be. Ensuring genuine freedom in the choice of spiritual guide cannot translate into lowering of standards in the choice of Rectors. The direction to be taken is precisely the opposite: all our Rectors, and with greater reason those of formation communities, are called to exercise their fatherliness and authority in such a way that confreres will be drawn to open their hearts to them – as used to happen with Francis de Sales, as used to happen with Don Bosco.

The Provincial and the provincial formation delegate would do well to present clearly the figure, role and responsibilities of the



Rector to the confreres in initial formation, while at the same time ensuring them genuine freedom of choice of spiritual guide. Those who offer the service of spiritual accompaniment, on their part, will also know how to suggest, especially in particular moments of vocational discernment, that the person concerned speak to the Rector and/or to the Provincial.

Suggestions for contextualised lines of action in the regions, provinces and local communities

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- 1. As Rectors of formation communities, provincials will choose confreres who are clearly men of faith and sufficient Salesian pastoral experience, capable of a living communication of the Salesian ideal and of genuine dialogue with the young confreres (C 104), and ensure them an adequate preparation, so that they can be men who inspire confidence in the formees.*
- 2. The Rector remains the spiritual guide of the community, animating it through conferences, goodnights, meetings, the drawing up of the community plan, etc.*
- 3. The Provincial and the Rector will ensure that the charismatic dimension of formation be adequately highlighted and cared for.*
- 4. When requested by a confrere, the Rector will willingly offer the service of personal spiritual accompaniment.*
- 5. The Rector will regularly convoke meetings of the formation team, including the spiritual guides, so as to ensure unity of formation and to give space for the sharing of difficulties and challenges in the area of formation and accompaniment.*
- 6. Knowing the importance of 'presence,' the Rector will take care not to take up responsibilities that seriously take him away from the community.*
- 7. The Rector will make sure that he is available for the personal talk with the confreres, with those in initial formation (cf. C 70, R 49 and R 79).*



5.2.7 Preparing formators and spiritual guides

198. The formation and training of spiritual guides and of formators in general – Rectors and teams of formation houses, Rectors of practical trainees and of quinquennists, confessors – is clearly a key strategy for strengthening and improving the quality of personal spiritual accompaniment. We have seen already that the Final Document of the Synod on youth insists on the need for the specific formation of spiritual guides. (FD 103 and above, section 4.15) We could even read the three proposals of n. 164 of the Final Document as regarding not just formees but also the formators themselves: the formation of formation guides along with lay people and priests, and the quality of their community and pastoral experience. Formation guides themselves must develop the capacity to exercise their role of guidance in an authoritative rather than authoritarian way; they must overcome any tendencies to clericalism, be able to work in team, have a particular sensitivity to the poor, transparency of life, and, once again, the willingness to allow themselves to be accompanied. (FD 163)

199. Though the theme of affectivity and human growth might not have emerged explicitly in these *Orientations and Guidelines*, the whole point of this document is to provide the conditions that will make it possible for those in formation to speak freely about the matters of the heart, including affectivity, sexuality and relationships. Since the last six-year period, the formation department has been animating the regions to draw up programs for education to sexuality, affectivity and the vow of chastity. Obviously, programs alone are not enough; we need formators capable of implementing them, and above all, formators capable of creating the safe and gentle spaces where those in formation might find the courage to open up what is most intimate and personal. The challenge before the Congregation is not so much speaking about affectivity and human maturity, as providing the conditions where such growth might take place.

After having concentrated so much on those in formation, we are now learning to complete the circle by turning our attention also to formators, in the belief that formation takes place in the relationship between formees and formators, in the intricate interaction between personal and communitarian aspects, with our ‘we’ nestling in the We of God.³

³ Extraordinary expression from J. Ratzinger, ‘On the Understanding of “Person” in Theology,’ *Dogma and Preaching: Applying Christian Doctrine to Daily Life*, ed. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011) 195.



Suggestions for contextualised lines of action in the regions, provinces and local communities

1. Promoting at congregation, regional and provincial level processes and initiatives for the formation of formators with the following goals and objectives:

- fostering the existential-spiritual interiority of formators and their ability to engage in dialogue, so that they might find themselves more prepared to deal with the human-affective dimension and with the culture of the formees, which is increasingly multicultural and digital;

- helping formators acquire skills of self-appropriation and 'learning by experience' so as to discern there the voice of the Spirit (C 98, 119);

- helping formators to have a holistic idea of spiritual accompaniment, as including the totality of the person in his physical, emotional-affective, communitarian, intellectual, pastoral and spiritual dimensions, and preparing them for such accompaniment;

- learning to handle affectivity in oneself and in those entrusted to one's care.

2. Fostering a 'Preventive System' formation culture within the province, cultivating the following aspects:

- the unity of the formation team around the Rector;

- the need for all confreres, and especially formators and guides, to have their own spiritual guides, following the example of Don Bosco himself, recent ecclesiastical magisterium (including the Synod on youth), and General Chapters 26 and 27 (see section 4.15 above); this can be a specific point of evaluation with the members of formation teams during the canonical visitation;

- clear ideas and convictions about confidentiality as pertaining to various contexts – the sacrament of reconciliation, personal spiritual accompaniment, the friendly talk, psychological accompaniment;

- distinction between periodic assessments and admission procedures, reflecting on the purpose and modality of the assessments, involving formees in the process of evaluation;



- ensuring that formators and spiritual guides have enough quality time at their disposal for accompaniment.

3. *Some choices involve directly the decision making level in the provinces:*

- selecting formators who have had a good experience of the practice of the Preventive System in practical training (see C 115), rather than merely those who have done well in philosophical or theological studies;

- assigning the best guides to the earlier phases (aspirantate, prenovitiate), because of the critical nature of these phases.

4. *Requesting that the four-month ongoing formation of formators course at the UPS be offered also in English, preferably in the first semester.*

Salesian School of accompaniment

200. In the area of formation of spiritual guides, a key line of action at the level of the Congregation is the establishment of a Salesian school of accompaniment, in synergy with what is already being offered in various regions. The goal is to activate itineraries and offer instruments to help confreres and lay mission partners to become experts in the art of Salesian personal spiritual accompaniment. The modalities must take into account the variety of contexts in which the Salesian charism is at work, making sure that those who qualify in this field become in turn propagators of the gift in their home environment.

This school will be offered in various languages, and intends taking full advantage of the charismatic significance of the Salesian heritage sites.

Provincial qualification plans for the preparation of spiritual guides

201. Provincials and *curatoriums* of interprovincial formation houses are requested to carefully select and prepare confreres (and others) for the service of spiritual accompaniment. This means preparing spiritual guides, confessors and also Rectors. Such choices and decisions are not only crucial but also long term in their impact on Salesian identity and the way we carry out our mission. In addition, they benefit not only those in initial formation but also all the confreres of a province. We should not



have to hear any more the complaint: 'I don't know whom to go to for guidance. We don't have confreres who are prepared.'

Participating provincials are requested to draw up and periodically update qualification plans that include the preparation of confreres for the service of spiritual accompaniment.

202. The statutes of the *curatorium* are to be revised so as to ensure the contribution of all participating provinces in the selection and preparation of formators, teachers and spiritual guides. By 'participating provinces' is meant those provinces that have made an option for a particular formation house in their provincial directories. Such options do not exclude the possibility of sending confreres to other formation houses, but in that case there is no obligation to participate in the *curatorium* and to contribute formation personnel.

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Policy for appointment of Rectors of formation houses and novice directors

203. We suggest that the Rector Major and his Council promulgate a policy that *Rectors of formation houses and novice directors will be appointed only if they have some prior preparation for the service of formation.* The module for their appointment could reflect this requirement.

Formation plans and processes

204. Through organisms such as the regional formation commissions, the formation department will initiate a process of study and updating of local formation plans so as to ensure the inclusion of pedagogical processes for growth in faith and in the charism.

5.2.8 Ensuring that spiritual accompaniment is lifelong

205. If formation is lifelong, personal accompaniment also is lifelong (see section 4.16 above). All Salesians are therefore invited to have a stable spiritual director and seek regular personal spiritual accompaniment.

If personal accompaniment is necessary during initial formation, it is all the more needed when we have finished initial formation, given that we are now exposed to far more demanding life situations, with great responsibility for the life and growth of many



people. Just as supervision is a ‘must’ in the helping professions, personal accompaniment is the normal way of growing in our vocation, whatever be the particular apostolic task assigned to us. Once again the experience of our founder is extremely significant. The presence of Don Cafasso was far more important and relevant for the life and mission of Don Bosco *after* his priestly ordination in 1841 than it was in the period of his initial formation. This is also the encouragement Pope Francis gave to all priests, writing to them on 4th August 2019, being the 160th anniversary of the death of St John Vianney:

I would encourage you not to neglect spiritual direction. Look for a brother with whom you can speak, reflect, discuss and discern, sharing with complete trust and openness your journey. A wise brother with whom to share the experience of discipleship. Find him, meet with him and enjoy his guidance, accompaniment and counsel. This is an indispensable aid to carrying out your ministry in obedience to the will of the Father (cf. Heb 10:9) and letting your heart beat with “the mind that was in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:5). We can profit from the words of Ecclesiastes: “Two are better than one... One will lift up the other; but woe to the one who is alone and falls, and does not have another to help!” (4:9-10).

Despite the insistence of the Church and the Congregation, personal spiritual accompaniment after the period of initial formation is still a treasure to be discovered and appropriated by many confreres and communities. The work of sensitization has to be carefully planned and carried out at provincial and regional levels. Above all, many more Salesians have to be initiated and prepared for this ministry, remembering that the first training is our own experience of being guided, our willingness to be ‘guides who are guided.’

5.2.9 Contextualizing the strategies

206. Our study of Salesian personal accompaniment has given us a very good idea of the diversity that exists in the Congregation. Such diversity means that all the strategies suggested above have to be contextualised in the regions and provinces. It is at these levels that concrete lines of action will be worked out and responsibilities and time frames assigned.



We suggest therefore:

1. further study of the results of the research on Salesian personal accompaniment at the regional and provincial levels;
2. study of the present *Orientations and Guidelines* regarding Salesian personal accompaniment with a view to contextualization and implementation;
3. sharing and exchange of reflections and action plans for promoting Salesian personal accompaniment between groups of provinces and in formation phases within the same region;
4. dialogue with the regional centres for ongoing formation in order to work out plans for the formation of formators, in line with the reflections and action plans about accompaniment.
5. involvement of the provincial formation delegates, provincial formation commissions and teams of formators, to ensure a systematic reflection on the present *Orientations and Guidelines* in each community, to be carried out together with the young candidates and confreres in formation. Particular attention should be given to interprovincial communities, communities with confreres in practical training and in the quinquennium, and especially communities of specific formation, which are closest to the transition from initial formation to full insertion into the educative and pastoral communities of the province.

207. However, animation alone is not enough: we also need governance. We bring together various suggestions for governance that have already been mentioned:

At world level:

1. A suggested new policy for the appointment of Rectors of formation houses and novice directors (see section 5.2.7 above).

At interprovincial level:

2. Strengthening the *curatorium* to ensure long-term selection, preparation and commitment of formators, spiritual guides and teachers.

At provincial level:

3. Qualification plans to ensure long-term selection and preparation of formators, spiritual guides and teachers.



4. Ensuring the constitution of formation teams that are qualitatively and quantitatively consistent, and that are able to work in team.
5. Assigning practical trainees and those in the quinquennium only to communities where good accompaniment can be ensured.
6. Ensuring that provincial formation delegates and their commissions carry out their work of reflection, planning, accompaniment of initial and post-initial formation, team work and networking with the Provincial and his Council, other provincial delegates, the regional formation coordinator and the regional commission, and the general councillor for formation.







Conclusion

208. Our study focussed on Salesian personal accompaniment with a special emphasis on personal spiritual accompaniment, keeping in mind that ‘personal accompaniment’ includes other forms of accompaniment such as the sacrament of reconciliation, the friendly talk with the Rector, psychological, intellectual, liturgical and pastoral accompaniment, as also the periodic assessments or scrutinies.

Given our particular tradition, it was inevitable that the study should throw light also on the friendly talk with the Rector and its peculiar relationship to personal spiritual accompaniment.

The study has also indicated a very high level of satisfaction as regards the sacrament of reconciliation and some dissatisfaction about community accompaniment and periodic assessments, but did not enter into the areas of psychological, intellectual, liturgical and pastoral accompaniment, though it did have something to say about the ‘practices of piety’ such as the Eucharist, meditation and the liturgy of the hours.

209. The fact that the Congregation, through two of its departments, has chosen to focus over almost two six-year periods on personal spiritual accompaniment in youth ministry and in the processes of formation, as also the collaboration between the two departments that has resulted in the present *Orientations and guidelines*, is in itself indicative of a very important moment in our history. Feliculously, the Synod on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment took place precisely during this period – and even more happily, there has been a dialectical interaction between the two processes.

We can make our own the exhortation of Pope Francis, that from the Synod we must learn a method, or better a style of being Church:



The fruits of this work are already ‘fermenting’, as does the juice of grapes in barrels after the harvest. The Synod on youth was a good harvest, and promises good wine. But I would like to say that the first fruit of this synodal assembly should be the example of a method that we tried to follow, right from the preparatory phase. A synodal style that does not have as its main objective the drafting of a document, which is also precious and useful. More than the document, however, it is important to establish a way of being and working together, young and old, in listening and in discernment, to arrive at pastoral choices that respond to reality.¹

210. Surely the Spirit is inviting us as a Congregation to a secure retrieval of the jewel in the educative proposal of Don Bosco that is spiritual accompaniment, in the wonderful richness of its originality, with its community, group and personal dimensions in fruitful and dynamic tension. May our efforts to appropriate this treasure, prepare ourselves for this service, and take the necessary steps in terms of animation and governance, bear fruit in God’s time for the good of young people and all those who share Don Bosco’s mission in the great movement that takes its origin from him.

May Our Lady, the Shepherdess of Don Bosco’s dream, be our Mother and Teacher; may Don Bosco inspire us with his life and example, and may all the saintly members of our family intercede for us – beginning with our great and venerable patron, Francis de Sales, whose 400th death anniversary we will be celebrating in 2022.

¹ See Angelus of 28 October 2018.





Appendix: questions and hints for reflection

Ch. 1 THE STUDY OF SALESIAN PERSONAL ACCOMPANIMENT

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A . The research on Salesian personal accompaniment gave evidence of how young people in initial formation are ready and willing to contribute to the improvement of the formation processes, sharing opinions and proposals, when they are genuinely listened to.

What processes of involvement of young people in formation are already in place in our province? What further steps could be taken in this direction?

B. Growth in the number of confreres in the coming years will be seen especially in Africa – Madagascar, South Asia and East Asia – Oceania. The quality of the future will depend on the quality of formation taking place in each province.

Are we as a province convinced that investment in formation is the most urgent and important ‘Salesian work’ for the future, one that will have the strongest impact on our service to the young people to whom we are sent?

Two direct indications of the value given to formation in the culture of the province are: [1] how much is invested in the specialization – qualification of confreres, and the areas of such specialization; [2] how we balance the relationship between qualification of confreres and expansion in terms of new presences.

Are we ready and willing to make a serious discernment about the choices we make on these two fronts and, if necessary, change our strategies?

C. The research highlights the multicultural nature of the Con-



gregation, with a clear prevalence of the English language as a cultural medium of communication.

What is the quality of interculturality in your province? And is the learning of languages becoming part of the mission and formation you promote, especially among young confreres?

D. The large majority of young people in formation belong to the ‘digital natives’ generation, with a growing group born after the year 2000, with cultural and linguistic paradigms that are very different from those of previous generations. Those who dedicate themselves to the care of initial formation should be most attentive to this world and to the need for constant updating, if they are to dialogue with the new generations.

Are our formation teams ready for this process of constant updating? What steps can be proposed to favour this kind of inculturation today?

a. Young people in formation are not mere recipients but the first protagonists of their journey of growth.

b. The family spirit and the characteristic dynamism of our mission make the apostolic contribution of young Salesians particularly valid.

c. Young Salesians are closer to the new generations, are capable of animation and enthusiasm, and are willing to try out new solutions.

d. The community, encouraging and guiding this generosity, helps their apostolic religious growth. (C 46)

Is our provincial community ready and willing to involve young confreres in processes of discernment and decision-making about the mission and the life of the community, which will be entirely entrusted to them in the near future? How actively are they involved in the basic choices that govern the life of the formation communities?

Ch. 2 EMERGING TOPICS

A. One of the recurrent appeals in the research, in all phases and regions, is for greater proximity, presence, dialogue and familiarity between formators and young people in formation.



Do our formation teams – including those in communities with confreres in practical training – embody the familiarity that lies at the heart of the Preventive System (see Letter from Rome of 1884), in their way of interacting with young people in formation?

B. The research indicates that our young people in formation make a clear distinction between spiritual accompaniment and the friendly talk with the Rector. There is also a preference to have recourse to different persons for each of these services, or at least a request for real freedom of choice of spiritual guide.

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How could we activate in the houses of the province a careful and thorough reflection on personal spiritual accompaniment and the talk with the Rector, in the light of what has emerged from the research and the indications of the present Orientations and Guidelines?

C. The fact that 80% indicate the pre-novitiate as the time when they have begun an experience of personal guidance leads to the need to carefully check the life of the communities in two directions.

[1] Is there a good initiation to personal guidance in the aspirantate and prenovitiate, knowing that this first experience will greatly influence the way accompaniment is lived during the subsequent formation phases?

[2] Does personal accompaniment and vocational discernment form an integral part of youth ministry in all our educational works? Together with the delegate for youth ministry and the confreres directly involved in youth ministry and vocational animation, could we start a serious process of evaluation in this regard?

We could give particular attention to the ‘time factor,’ given that the research repeatedly makes reference to the fact that Salesians ‘have no time to dedicate to listening’ because they are too busy with other activities.

D. A risk often underlined in the research is conformism, where young people undergoing initial formation merely adapt to the demands made on them, not because of maturing convictions and



motivations, but because there is a strong element of control and not infrequently of fear. There is a risk that even the most vital elements of the formation process, such as the life of prayer, be affected by a formalism that empties them of their value. This risk is stronger where there is an overlap between the role of authority and that of personal spiritual accompaniment .

Could we verify, with the involvement of our young people in formation, the authenticity and sincerity of the personal involvement of each candidate and of the formators in the formation processes? Could we also help bring to light and evaluate the type of approach with which the formation team animates and guides the community?

E. From the research an alarming signal emerges regarding the confidentiality of what is shared in the friendly talk and in personal spiritual accompaniment, especially in some phases of initial formation.

How could we make a serious examination on this front, taking into consideration each community, in order to correct errors and create the necessary conditions to foster an authentic climate of trust, which is the indispensable starting point for Salesian personal accompaniment and its effectiveness?

F. Quarterly assessments are a form of community support. The research highlights many elements of concern on this front.

Could we carry out an evaluation of how these exercises are conducted in the formation houses of the province (communities with confreres in practical training included), so as to enhance their quality and effectiveness?

It is important that such verification be done with the involvement of the young people candidates and confreres. Their vocational growth is the only reason that motivates the quarterly assessments.

Ch. 3 LIGHT FROM OUR TRADITION

A. The reflection on Don Bosco's practice of spiritual accompaniment helps us understand that care of the community environment and the personal approach are both fundamental for growth.



How to foster in the communities of the province this fruitful blending of community environment and personal relationships, in view of the growth of each person, young people as well as formators?

B. Living the Preventive System in the experience of personal accompaniment involves investing one's best energies in the quality of relationships.

How could we help educators and formators truly live the Preventive System in the relationship with each person? How could we help these relationships to be marked by a profound respect for each person and the ability to listen, sharing with a fatherly and maternal love in the growth of the individual?

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C. The mystagogical dimension is a crucial element of the Preventive System – which means that a deep life of faith and prayer lays the foundations of our educational and pastoral service.

Is this the basic horizon cherished among the conferes, and does it animate the formative commitment of the Salesians in the province? How could we revive this fundamental dimension that unites spirituality and educative service also within our formation houses?

Ch. 4 UNDERSTANDING WHAT THE SPIRIT IS SAYING

A. In the pre-Synodal meeting, the young people traced an identikit of the spiritual mentor that was taken up in full by Pope Francis in *Christus Vivit* 246: 'The qualities of such a mentor include: being a faithful Christian who engages with the Church and the world; someone who constantly seeks holiness; someone who is a confidant without judging. Similarly, someone who actively listens to the needs of young people and responds in kind; someone deeply loving and self-aware; someone who recognizes his or her limits and knows the joys and sorrows of the spiritual journey. An especially important quality in mentors is the acknowledgement of their own humanity – the fact that they are human beings who make mistakes: not perfect people but forgiven sinners. Sometimes mentors are put on a pedestal, and when they fall, it may have a devastating impact on young people's ability to continue to engage with the Church.



Mentors should not lead young people as passive followers, but walk alongside them, allowing them to be active participants in the journey. They should respect the freedom that comes with a young person's process of discernment and equip them with tools to do so well. A mentor should believe wholeheartedly in a young person's ability to participate in the life of the Church. A mentor should therefore nurture the seeds of faith in young people, without expecting to immediately see the fruits of the work of the Holy Spirit. This role is not and cannot be limited to priests and consecrated life, but the laity should also be empowered to take on such a role. All such mentors should benefit from being well-formed, and engage in ongoing formation.'

This can be a good stimulus for reflection in the province on the profile of the Salesian spiritual guide today, both in youth ministry and within initial formation communities.

B. Openness to the diversity of cultures, situations, generations and life stories is required in all formators and spiritual guides today, and is a matter of one's inner attitudes.

Where do diversities emerge most sharply in our province, and how do we respond to them? (Mention good practices, elements of weakness, aspects that need to be changed.)

C. 'The spiritual focus of personal accompaniment' needs to be matched by 'charismatic density' of equal intensity. 'The religious and apostolic nature of the Salesian calling dictates the specific direction our formation must take.' (C 97)

What can we say about the spiritual centeredness and charismatic density of formation and spiritual accompaniment in our province? How could we strengthen these dimensions, both for the guides and for the young people in initial formation?

D. The quality of youth ministry determines the processes of formation.

The provincial formation delegate could propose a joint evaluation of vocation animation in the province, to assess whether, in keeping with the Frame of Reference, such animation is an intrinsic and essential aspect of every youth ministry (FoR 160-161; 256-257). Special attention must be given to the ex-



periences of aspirantate, evaluating them in the light of the joint letter of Attard and Cereda on the aspirantates (July 2011).

E. Prenovitiate.

Is the province giving enough importance to the prenovitiate, as it gives to the novitiate, in particular regarding the choice of the one in charge of prenovices and the team that collaborates with him (FSDB 345)? What is the involvement of lay people in the formation of prenovices?

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F. Grace and freedom. This part of the *Orientations and Guidelines* (section 4.6) is the theological foundation of Salesian personal accompaniment.

Rather than limiting ourselves to a few questions, it would be better to propose a process of reflection and study of this section, followed by sharing and dialogue, in order to verify, together with the formation teams and also the young people in formation, whether what is going on in the province is in harmony with these basic truths. This hopefully will open the way to processes and itineraries of gradual conversion.

G. Rector, spiritual guide, confessor.

How are these three figures understood and valued in the communities in relation to accompaniment? What kind of preparation has been offered to those who exercise these ministries? What are the weaknesses associated with these roles in our province, and what remedies could be proposed in the short and long term?

H. The accompaniment of the community and of the formation team.

A courageous evaluation can be proposed to the formators and to the young people in formation about the formative impact of the community and the formation team, e.g., by means of a SWOT analysis.

I. The letter from Rome of 1884.



Taking this letter as the paradigm of what trust and openness, confidence and familiarity mean in Salesian personal accompaniment, a Salesian lectio could be proposed with moments of sharing.

J. Models of formation.

We propose a calm and careful reflection on this part of the document (section 4.11) with an evaluation of [1] the model we ourselves have experienced at the beginning of our formation journey; [2] the present model each one follows; [3] what our young people in formation think about the model of formation they experience.

K. The trimonthly evaluation exercise as an opportunity for renewal.

While verifying and rethinking the way in which scrutinies are carried out, a joint process can be activated that will lead both to the improvement of this instrument as well as to a renewal of the relationship between the formation team and the young people in formation.

L. Formation of formators: two levels of evaluation are proposed.

[1] On the level of the provincial formation commission and provincial Council: evaluation of the discernment process followed for choosing formation personnel, and of the care with which they are prepared specifically for their service, both initially and in an ongoing manner.

[2] On the level of the local formation team and individual formators: evaluation of each one's openness to supervision and willingness to be 'guides who in turn are guided' (section 4.17).

NB: The third part (CHOOSING) is already a set of strategies with a series of 'Suggestions for contextualised lines of action in the regions, provinces and local communities,' and so it is superfluous to propose further questions here.







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