

Address of Noemi Bertola, New World Coordinator
Salesian Cooperator World Congress
November 11, 2012

Dear Rector Major, Sr. Miranda, Don Bregolin, all the Delegates, and dearest Salesian Cooperators,

In this, my first encounter with you, my heart urges me to speak on a matter of great priority.

First, I feel the need to thank the Lord for the great things He has done for me during the course of my life. Among these, He placed me in one of our Sisters' schools from the time of my youth. There I met the FMA, came to know Don Bosco and his charism, and experienced the goodness of his pedagogy.

Following this, I moved from being a Past Pupil to a Cooperator. This was a step in my spiritual growth, and for this, yet again, I must thank Mary Most Holy who worked through her Daughters.

My love for the Association grew in me step-by-step with my deepening of the RVA, of the charism of Don Bosco, of the prophetic greatness of his pedagogical intuitions, and of my meeting so many brothers and sisters with whom I shared moments of prayer, of study, and of confrontations which were neither banal nor superficial.

Then I had another grace: that of sharing this choice to participate in the life of the Association, of the daily commitment to the service of the young, with my husband. And, therefore, here I am today, to express my gratitude to the Rector Major, and to all of you for the honor to which I have been called.

I will always keep in my heart everything from these days, but above all, some key phrases which have hit me in a particular way and on which I have had the chance to reflect: the references Don Pascual made to the concept which Don Bosco held, right from the start, about the figure of the Cooperator.

Our beloved Founder wanted us to be "a support for a work which has as its goal to help Holy Mother Church in her most urgent needs. This means to come together to promote a work which has been so much recommended by our Holy Father: that we educate youth to virtue, to the way of holiness, because its principal aim is to instruct youth who have become, today, the target of evil people. It seeks to promote in the midst of the world, of schools, of hospices, of the festive oratories, and of families: love for religion, good manners, prayers, the frequenting of the Sacraments, etc."

As you see, what article three of our Statutes says, "Salesian Cooperators live out their faith in their own secular reality. Inspired by Don Bosco's apostolic project they feel themselves to be in living communion with other members of the Salesian Family. They are committed to the same mission to youth and ordinary people also as associates, brothers and sisters. They work for the good of the Church and society, in a manner adapted to the educational needs of their territory, to their circumstances, and to their actual possibilities," does not waver from the original thought of our father and teacher. I feel that this commitment has become a true imperative for me – to serve the Church in the young, seeking to return Christ's great love through my love of my littlest brothers.

The present re-reading which the Rector Major has proposed to us in his "lectio magistralis" is also a "vision" of the complete figure of the Salesian Cooperator:

I see them (the Salesian Cooperator) as people dedicated to the common good, with a great openness of heart which pays special attention to the poor, the excluded, the sick, and the marginalized of all

kinds; engaged in giving vitality to the Church by putting into practice the beneficial projects of the Association, at the different levels, with a real attitude of service; with a strong lay spirituality so as to become holy educators who know how to form others to a gospel lifestyle and to participation in the Sacraments.

In order to live up to this concrete model which the Rector Major gives us, we need to become a new Salesian Cooperator who will respond better, today, to the changed conditions of history, with the intuition and the original will of our beloved Founder and Father.

I am certain that the long and loving work carried out by all the Salesian Cooperators of the world for the revision of the PVA, which we just concluded in these past days of constructive exchange and discussions, will have brought us closer to this model. Each one of us, when returning to our own Center, will commit himself with renewed enthusiasm to work towards this objective.

Permit me, however, to re-propose also one of Rosario Maiorano's significant lines, in which, besides noting his wonderful dedication to our Association, I find also an invitation for all of us:

"The true meaning of the word "to govern" is, for us Christians, "to serve"; i.e., following Christ's example, to bow down to wash the feet of our most humble and needy brother."

I firmly believe that with just such an attitude, and counting on united prayer, on communion of intentions and paths, we will succeed, always with Mary Most Holy's help, to bring Christ to so many young people, who, today, as yesterday, thirst for, but still do not know, that water which quenches interior thirst, the true fount of salvation, of joy, and of human and spiritual wholeness.

With these sentiments, but most of all with the serenity that comes in serving my neighbor, I assure you of my total commitment to the service of the Association of Salesian Cooperators, in harmony with the entire Salesian Family and in communion with the whole Church.