



# Relaunching with Hope

## From the Burdens of the Present to the Newness of the Future

Report for the Salesian Cooperators of the Interamerican Region on the Journey Toward the 150th Anniversary of the Association - Antonio Boccia – World Coordinator

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### Introduction

Dear Salesian Cooperators,

Today we want to reflect together on an important topic. We are in the third year of preparation for the 150th anniversary of our Association. The word guiding us is “relaunch.” But what does “relaunch” mean? How can we do it in a world full of difficulties?

We find the answer in the words of the prophet Isaiah: “Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. See, I am making all things new! Now it springs forth—do you not perceive it?” (Is 43:18–19).

These words do not tell us to forget our history. Don Bosco, Mother Mazzarello, and all our founders remain the pillars of our life. The prophet tells us not to remain prisoners of the past. We must not let yesterday’s burdens prevent us from seeing the newness that God is bringing forth today.

The verb “relaunch” fits well within this perspective. We must not go backward. We need to draw strength from our spiritual heritage to move toward the future with renewed energy and hope.

### Part One: The Challenges of the Present – The Burdens that Hold Us Back

#### *A World in Change*

We live in a time of great change. Around us, we see rapid transformations that often confuse us. As Salesian Cooperators, we must read the signs of the times. But this is not easy when the signs seem contradictory.

We look sincerely at the challenges of our time—not to discourage ourselves, but to understand them better. We want to find the right paths to respond with the wisdom of the Gospel and the spirit of Don Bosco.

#### *Excessive Individualism*

The first challenge is the increasingly strong individualism. We live in a society that exalts personal success, and often this success comes before the common good. This individualism is intertwined with globalization, which has brought benefits but also new forms of loneliness.



The young people we meet struggle to find a sense of belonging. They feel part of a global world and yet, at the same time, very alone. Technology connects them with people far away but distances them from those nearby.

As Salesian Cooperators, we must be bridges. Don Bosco taught us that education is always a community matter. One does not educate alone, but together. Our challenge is to recreate that sense of family that existed at Valdocco. Every young person must feel welcomed and valued.

### *Political Instability*

Another challenge is political instability in many parts of the world. Wars, conflicts, and tensions create a climate of uncertainty. This also impacts the daily life of our communities.

Young people grow up in a world where certainties seem to be collapsing. Institutions struggle to provide convincing answers. Politics often appear more interested in popularity than in the common good.

In this context, we Salesian Cooperators must be witnesses of stability—not the stability of those who shut themselves in their own world, but that of those who have deep roots and can therefore face storms without losing their direction.

### *The Misuse of Technology*

Technology is an extraordinary gift. But like every gift, it can be used well or badly. Today, we often see a misuse of social media and digital technologies. Instead of bringing people closer together, they distance them from reality.

Young people spend hours in front of screens. They build virtual identities that often do not match their real selves. Social media becomes a place of constant comparison, a search for approval, the construction of perfect images that hide fragility.

As educators in the Salesian charism, we must accompany young people. We need to help them use technology consciously and responsibly. We must not demonize digital tools; rather, we must help them discover that true happiness is born from authentic encounters with people, not from “likes” on social media.

### *Life No Longer Seen as a Value*

One of the deepest challenges is the loss of the sense of the value of life. We see a culture that often considers human life in terms of utility. Life is measured by productivity and efficiency. Those who cannot keep up are easily discarded.



This mentality affects all ages: the unborn, the elderly, the sick, the disabled — anyone who does not fit the efficiency standards of society. It is a culture that forgets that every life has infinite value, a value that does not depend on abilities or achievements.

Don Bosco taught us to see in every young person a hidden treasure—even in the most difficult one. We must apply this same logic to every person we meet. Our mission is to bear witness that every life is sacred, and every person has a dignity that no one can take away.

### *The Throwaway Culture*

Linked to the loss of the value of life is what Pope Francis calls “the throwaway culture.” If you are not young, if you don’t own, if you don’t produce, if you are not up to date, you are pushed aside.

This throwaway culture does not concern only people—it also affects values, traditions, and anything that does not appear immediately useful or modern. In this way, memory is lost, the links between generations are broken, and the human and spiritual heritage of communities is impoverished.

As Salesian Cooperators, we must be guardians of memory. We must build bridges between generations. Our Association is an example of how a charism can remain alive over the centuries—adapting to new times without losing its essence.

### *The Struggle for Peace to Be Born*

We cannot ignore how peace struggles to be born in our world. Not only the wars that afflict various parts of the planet, but also the small, daily conflicts—the divisions in families, in communities, and even within ecclesial communities.

Peace is not just the absence of war; it is the presence of justice, respect, and dialogue. It is the ability to live together while recognizing and valuing differences. It is what Don Bosco called the “family spirit”—a place where everyone feels welcomed and valued.

### *The Risk of Self-Referentiality*

There is another burden we must honestly acknowledge: the risk of self-referentiality within our own Association. What does it mean to be self-referential? It means looking only at ourselves—focusing on our internal dynamics, our rules, and our procedures, while losing sight of the outside world and our mission.

It is like a circle closing in on itself, isolating from the context in which it is called to act. We can recognize self-referentiality when our energies are absorbed mainly by internal discussions, when we struggle to communicate with other ecclesial or civil entities, when we keep doing things the same way even though the world around us is changing.



Our Project of Apostolic Life is a precious gift—it is the compass that guides our life and action. But if we interpret it as a set of rigid, unchangeable norms, we risk falling into legalism. This can stifle creativity, hinder adaptation to local contexts, and block our ability to respond authentically to new challenges.

Our identity as Salesian Cooperators calls us to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. We are not an association that exists for itself—we exist for the mission: to bring Don Bosco's message and the Gospel where they are most needed, especially among the young.

### *The Risk of Remaining Stuck*

All these challenges risk paralyzing us. It is easy to look at the reality around us and feel discouraged. It is easy to think there is nothing we can do, that the problems are too great for our strength.

It is here that the words of the prophet Isaiah resound with power: “Remember not the things of the past.” We must not remain prisoners of what is not going well, of what is discouraging, of what seems impossible to change. God is doing something new—right now—and He wants to do it through us as well.

## **Part Two: The Elements of Hope – The Newness Being Born**

### *The Jubilee of Hope*

At this particular moment in the history of the Church, we are living the Jubilee of Hope. It is no coincidence that Pope Francis chose this very theme for the Holy Year. In a world that often seems without hope, the Church invites us to rediscover this fundamental virtue.

Christian hope is not a superficial optimism that closes its eyes to problems. It is the deep certainty that God never abandons human history. Even in the most difficult situations, there is always the possibility of renewal and growth.

The Jubilee offers us an extraordinary opportunity for renewal. It is a time of grace. We are invited to let go of what weighs us down. We are invited to open ourselves to the newness that God wants to bring about in us and through us.

As Salesian Cooperators, we are called to be protagonists of this Jubilee—not only by participating in events and celebrations, but above all by living daily that spirit of hope which should characterize every Christian, and in a special way, every educator in the charism of Don Bosco.

Hope is transmitted more by witness than by words. The young people we meet need to see in us adults who have not lost their trust in the future. Adults who know the difficulties of life but have not given up. They need to see that it is possible to live with joy even in the midst of trials.



## *The Three-Year Journey toward the 150th Anniversary – A Path of Growth*

The journey we are making toward the 150th anniversary of our Association is not merely a preparation for a celebration. It is an opportunity for growth, renewal, and a relaunch of our mission.

Each year of this three-year period has its own particular focus. The first year invited us to “start again” from the roots—to rediscover the origins of our charism. The second year called us to “review” our life and mission in the light of the Gospel and the Salesian charism. This third year invites us to “relaunch,” projecting ourselves into the future with renewed energy.

The verb “relaunch” is very significant. It is not about inventing something entirely new; it is about drawing momentum from what we have received in order to go further—to reach goals we might never have imagined.

It is like an athlete taking a run-up to jump higher. The run-up is not the jump itself, but without it, the jump would not be possible. In the same way, our past, our tradition, our charism are not the finish line—they are the foundation from which we set out to soar higher.

The 150th anniversary we will celebrate will not be only a moment of thanksgiving for the past; it will be above all a moment of commitment for the future. It will be the occasion to say to the world that the Salesian Cooperators are here, that we have something important to offer, and that we are ready to continue Don Bosco’s mission with creativity and courage.

## *An Association that Renews Itself*

In these years of preparation for the 150th, we are witnessing a real renewal of our Association. It is not a change imposed from above—it is a growth that comes from below, from the concrete life of the Local Centers, from the daily experience of the Salesian Cooperators.

We are rediscovering the beauty of our lay vocation. We are not “failed” religious or priests who didn’t make it. We are lay people who have chosen to live the Salesian charism in the world—in the family, in the workplace, in society. This is our distinctiveness, our original contribution to the Salesian mission.

We are also rediscovering the importance of formation—not a theoretical or abstract formation, but one that helps us read reality with Don Bosco’s eyes and respond to the challenges of our time with the wisdom of the Gospel and the creativity of the Salesian charism.

The young Salesian Cooperators who are approaching our Association bring new energy. They bring fresh ideas and different ways of living the mission. We must not be afraid of this renewal; on the contrary, we must welcome it as a gift of the Spirit—a Spirit that wants to keep our vocation alive and relevant.



## *Salesian Optimism*

One of the most beautiful characteristics of the Salesian charism is what we call “Salesian optimism.” It is not a naive optimism that denies problems; it is a deep trust in the fundamental goodness of every person and in God’s active presence in history.

Don Bosco had this positive outlook on young people. Even when everyone else had given up on them, he continued to believe in them, to see their potential, to bet on their future. This optimism was not the fruit of a naturally cheerful temperament, but of a deep faith in Divine Providence.

Salesian optimism helps us look to the future with confidence—not because we think everything will automatically turn out well, but because we know that God is with us and that, with His help, we can face any challenge.

This optimism is particularly important today, in a world that often seems dominated by pessimism and fear. Young people need to meet adults who believe in the future, who know how to transmit hope, who are not crushed by difficulties.

Salesian optimism is not just a mental attitude—it is a way of life. It is the ability to see the glass half full rather than half empty; to notice signs of hope even in the most difficult situations; to believe that every person can change, grow, and become better.

## *Trust in Providence*

At the heart of Salesian optimism is trust in Providence. Don Bosco always lived with this certainty: God provides. Not in the sense that He magically solves all problems, but in the sense that He never abandons those who entrust themselves to Him.

This trust in Providence is not passivity; on the contrary, it is the spring that drives us to action. Precisely because we know that God is with us, we can dare, we can take risks, we can undertake works that seem beyond our strength.

The history of the Salesian Family is full of examples of this trust in Providence—Don Bosco starting the Oratory without a penny, Mother Mazzarello welcoming the first girls without knowing how to feed them, the first missionaries leaving for unknown lands with nothing but their faith.

Even today, as Salesian Cooperators, we are called to live this same trust. We cannot wait to have every certainty before we act; we must be able to take the first step, certain that the others will open up before us.

## *A Positive Outlook on Young People*

Salesian optimism is expressed in a particular way in the outlook we have on young people. In a world that often criticizes, judges, and considers them a problem, we are called to see them as a resource, as a hope, as the future of the Church and society.



Today's young people certainly have their difficulties, their limits, and their mistakes. But they also have extraordinary energy, deep ideals, and capacities for generosity that we adults have often lost. Our task is not to judge them, but to accompany them—to help them discover their potential, and to support them in their growth journey.

Don Bosco used to say that in every young person, even the most difficult, there is a point accessible to good. Our task is to find this point and help it grow. This is not always easy; it requires patience, understanding, and the ability to go beyond appearances. But when we succeed, the results are extraordinary.

### **Part Three: The Concrete Relaunch – Embracing the Newness That Is Being Born**

#### *Not Remembering the Past Things Without Forgetting Our History*

The words of the prophet Isaiah, “Remember not the things of the past”, might seem like an invitation to erase our memory, to forget everything that has been. But that is not the case. The prophet is not asking us to forget our history — he is asking us not to remain prisoners of it.

There is an important difference between remembering and being stuck in the past. Remembering means treasuring experience, learning from mistakes, preserving the values passed on to us. Being stuck in the past means being unable to move forward, endlessly repeating the same patterns, and closing ourselves off to what is new.

As Salesian Cooperators, we have a beautiful history to preserve. Don Bosco, Mother Mazzarello, and our founders have left us a spiritual heritage of great value. This heritage must not be forgotten, but neither should it be mummified. It must be brought to life. It must be updated. It must be translated into the language of our time.

The relaunch of our Association toward the 150th anniversary depends precisely on this ability — to be faithful to the original charism while being creative in applying it to the challenges of today. We do not have to do everything exactly as Don Bosco did; rather, we must do everything in the spirit of Don Bosco.

#### *Embracing the Newness That God Is Bringing Forth*

“See, I make all things new: now it springs forth — do you not perceive it?” (Is 43:19). These words of the prophet Isaiah invite us to be attentive. We must recognize the signs of the newness God is working in history and in our lives.

Too often, we are so focused on problems that we fail to see opportunities. We worry so much about what is not working that we do not notice the good and beautiful things being born around us.





God continues to act in history: He continues to call new vocations, to inspire new initiatives, to move hearts toward good. Our task is to be attentive to these signs, ready to collaborate with God's action, willing to seize the opportunities He gives us.

On our journey toward the 150th, we are already seeing much that is new: New Salesian Cooperators joining our Association, New forms of mission opening before us, New collaborations with other ecclesial and social groups, New ways of formation and communication that allow us to reach people we could not reach before.

This is not by chance — it is the fruit of the Spirit's action, renewing our Association and propelling it toward the future. Our task is to be docile to this action, willing to change, and courageous in taking new paths.

### *Overcoming Self-Referentiality*

To truly relaunch our Association, we must overcome the danger of self-referentiality. We must ask ourselves: Are we living our Project of Apostolic Life as an inspiration or merely as a rigid rulebook? How open are we to dialogue and collaboration with the outside?

To be leaven, we must be in contact with the dough. This means opening ourselves to dialogue with other branches of the Salesian Family, with dioceses, parishes, lay associations, and social realities. Collaboration enriches us — it allows us to learn and to make a more significant contribution to the common good.

We must live our Project of Apostolic Life dynamically — interpreting it in the light of the signs of the times, adapting it to new challenges without betraying its spirit. This requires discernment, courage, and a willingness to try new forms of presence and action, while always keeping the person and the Salesian mission at the center.

### *Concrete Commitments for the Relaunch*

Our relaunch cannot remain at the level of good intentions — it must translate into concrete commitments, specific actions, and courageous choices.

**First Commitment: Formation** – We cannot relaunch the Association without investing in the formation of Salesian Cooperators. Formation must go beyond the transmission of knowledge to foster human and spiritual growth, help us see reality through the lens of the Gospel, and respond to today's challenges with the wisdom of the Salesian charism.

**Second Commitment: Welcome** – We must open our doors to all who feel called to live the Salesian charism in the world. We cannot be a closed club of long-time acquaintances; we must be an open, welcoming family, capable of integrating differences and valuing each person's gifts.





**Third Commitment: Mission** – We cannot relaunch the Association without relaunching our educational mission. Young people need us. Families need us. Society needs our contribution. We cannot remain enclosed in our internal activities — we must go out, reach out, and draw near to those in need.

**Fourth Commitment: Collaboration** – Relaunching the Association also requires greater collaboration within the Salesian Family and with other ecclesial and social realities. We cannot do everything alone — we need alliances, networks, and synergies to multiply our strength and extend our reach.

**Fifth Commitment: Witness** – The best way to relaunch the Association is to live our vocation with coherence. To be Salesian Cooperators not only during meetings but in everyday life — in our families, at work, in society. To be credible witnesses of the values we profess.

### *Promoting a Missionary Reading of the Project of Apostolic Life*

To overcome self-referentiality, we must create moments of formation and reflection that highlight the missionary dimension of our Project of Apostolic Life and its openness to the world. We must encourage collaboration with other ecclesial and social groups at local, national, and international levels.

It is important to promote the exchange of good practices among Local Centers — this stimulates creativity and contextual adaptation. We must periodically evaluate our ability to make an impact in our territory and to respond to emerging needs — measuring external impact, not only internal activities.

### *Active Hope*

The relaunch of our Association is an expression of what we can call “active hope.” This is not the passive hope of those who wait for things to change on their own, but the active hope of those who work to make change happen.

Christian hope is never passive — it is dynamic, proactive, and transformative. It is the certainty that God desires the good of humanity and that we can and must collaborate with Him to make it happen.

As Salesian Cooperators, we are called to be protagonists of hope — not just to wish for a better world, but to build it with our own hands, day by day, choice by choice.

This active hope is nourished by prayer but expressed in action. It is fed by the Word of God but made concrete in daily life. It is rooted in faith but manifested in works.

### **Conclusion: The Invitation to Hope**

Dear brothers and sisters, we have reached the end of this reflection — but in reality, we are only at the beginning of a journey: the journey toward the 150th anniversary of our Association, and above all toward a future of hope and commitment.



The words of the prophet Isaiah that we have meditated on are not just a beautiful biblical text to remember — they are a program of life, a call to action, an invitation to look ahead with confidence.

“Remember not the things of the past, nor consider the things of old! See, I am making all things new: now it springs forth — do you not perceive it?” (Is 43:18–19).

God is doing something new in our lives, in our Association, in our Church, and in our world. This newness is being born right now — as we gather, as we reflect, as we commit to living our vocation more fully.

Our task is to notice it — to open the eyes of our hearts to see the signs of hope, to open our hands to receive God’s gifts, to open our hearts to be transformed by His grace.

The verb “relaunch,” which marks this third year of preparation for the 150th, is not just a slogan — it is a call to draw strength from our past to soar toward the future. It is an invitation not to be content with what we are, but to become what God dreams for us.

Salesian optimism is not naïve — it is wisdom. It is the certainty that, despite all the difficulties and challenges of our time, good is stronger than evil, light is stronger than darkness, and hope is stronger than fear.

Like Don Bosco, we are called to be “signs and bearers of God’s love for the young.” In a world that often seems hopeless, we are called to be witnesses of hope. In a society that often discards the weakest, we are called to be the voice of the voiceless. In a culture that often forgets fundamental values, we are called to be their guardians and transmitters.

The Jubilee of Hope we are living is an extraordinary opportunity to renew our commitment. Let us not miss it. Let us heed the Pope’s invitation to be “pilgrims of hope” — bearers of a hope that springs from faith and translates into concrete acts of love.

The 150th anniversary we will soon celebrate will not only be a celebration of the past — it will be above all a promise for the future: the promise that Salesian Cooperators will continue to be present in the Church and in the world, to serve young people and families, to bear witness to the beauty of the Gospel and the fruitfulness of the Salesian charism.

May Mary Help of Christians — whom Don Bosco always invoked as the “Help of Christians” — accompany us on this journey. May she help us to let go of the burdens of the past and embrace the newness of the future. May she sustain us in our commitment to relaunch the Association and make us credible witnesses of that hope which never disappoints.

Let us go forward together, with confidence and joy — the best is yet to come.

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*“See, I am making all things new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” (Is 43:19) Amen.*