

Cir_Ref. No: LPO/50/2022

05th April 2022

Dear Confreres, members of the Salesian Family and friends,

It is with faith, hope, love, peace, joy and happiness that I wish you “**A very happy and grace-fill Easter!**”. The **Holy Week** which is fast approaching will lead us closer to the Lord as we journey with Him and we will experience His constant presence and love. We also believe that the passion, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ bring about the forgiveness of our sins.

FORMATIVE EXPERIENCE OF PRACTICAL TRAINING

In this month of April 2022, I would like to share with you the mind and heart of the Salesian Congregation particularly from the Formation Department. The main focus is on **Formative Experience of Practical Training**, and the way to accompany confreres living this period of their lives, which our *Ratio* describes as “the most characteristic phase of initial formation” from the Salesian point of view. (FSDB 428).

1. CONSTITUTIONS ART. 115 ON PRACTICAL TRAINING

Constitutions Art. 115

Throughout the whole period of initial formation, importance is given not only to study but also to the pastoral activities of our mission.

The practical training period provides opportunity for a deeper living experience of Salesian educative and pastoral action. During this time the young confrere gets practice in the preventive system, particularly in Salesian assistance.

With the support of the Rector and the community, he is able to integrate his activity and the fundamental values of his vocation.

[See also R 86 and 96]

The first point to note is that C 115 focuses not on the educative and pastoral action as such but on the **Deeper living experience** of such action. It is the **quality of the lived experience** that makes the practical training years “the most characteristic phase of initial formation.” (FSDB 428)

The integration of activity and the fundamental values of our vocation mentioned here is an echo, in fact, of the learning by experience the values of the Salesian vocation of C 98. And both C 98 and C 115 are taken up again in a new synthesis in C 119, which is final article of the third section of the Constitutions on formation, and which captures the essence of what formation is for the Salesians of Don Bosco:

“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. ...” (C 119).

C 119, like C 98, talks not about practical training as such but about “ongoing formation,” which it describes as “a permanent personal frame of mind.” It sees this frame of mind as a learning by experience that is a *discernment* of the voice of the Spirit. With all the more reason we can say that practical training is not so much about work, work and more work but about learning the attitude of formation that lasts through life. This most characteristic



phase of our formation, our first “full immersion” as religious into Salesian educative and pastoral activity, is therefore a question of learning from experience and discerning the voice of the Spirit in living and constant contact with the young.

SALESIAN ASSISTANCE is, fact, the hallmark of practical training. ‘Salesian assistance’ is our daily educational presence among the young and it is wonderfully described in C 39 and in a brilliant comment in the *Project of Life of the Salesians of Don Bosco* (pp. 372-376, 267-270), in which everyone is urged to read, beginning from our young confreres in practical training.

Assistance is the Preventive System in practice. It calls for “empathy with the young and a willingness to be with them” (C 39). It is a presence that is brotherly rather than institutional or authoritarian. It is an active presence that is proactive. It is also an animating presence that knows that the young are not objects but active and responsible subjects of our pastoral work among them. It is a witnessing presence that knows also how to listen, appreciate and dialogue.

All this means that very high expectations are placed on our young confreres! They must be always physically present, but also very creative. They must understand the young and the “new world” to which they belong, but also make them behave in the way their seniors want them to.

On the other hand, our young practical trainees are precisely that – “trainees” who, far from being experts, are new to their job. If they have met Salesians who were always present among the young, and have lived in communities “capable of a living communication of the Salesian ideal” (C 104), they are blessed and will have some idea of what to do and how to go about. If, on the other hand, their experiences have been negative, as sometimes happens, they arrive in practical training with severe handicaps. Blessed are they if they find welcoming communities “capable of a living communication” of the meaning of the Preventive System and of Salesian assistance.

“Learning from life’s experience” happens with the “Support of the Rector/Incharge and the Community.” If such support is always important, it is even more important during the first ‘full immersion’ of a confrere in the active Salesian life.

A community with practical trainees is, in fact, a “formation house,” one that has a major impact on the lives of the young confreres sent to live there. The Rector/Incharge of such a community is first and foremost a formator, not only of the younger ones entrusted to his care but also of the other Salesians, so that together they may live “ordinary activities as effective means of formation,” (C 119) leading the younger ones first of all by their example.

The accompaniment of confreres during practical training is the key to making sure that the experience is formative. This is what Cafasso did with John Bosco, 26-year-old newcomer to Turin. Through Cafasso’s accompaniment, what John saw in the juvenile prisons and in the miserable suburbs of Turin became a transformative experience to whose fruitfulness we are still bearing witness.

Now we have already the ***Orientations and Guidelines*** on young Salesians and accompaniment – fruit of a study that has involved the whole Congregation in the last few years. This study has confirmed what we already knew: that the phase of formation needing most attention and accompaniment is precisely the practical training.

When there is good accompaniment, and when the young confrere feels understood and affirmed, he grows and profits from the experience, even when it is very challenging and demanding. Accompaniment of experience clarifies and reinforces the motivations and the ‘right intention,’ which is the basic energy behind the Salesian vocational journey, and opens the confrere to new opportunities for growth and the flowering of his inner potential.



Unfortunately, for a large number of confreres in practical training this is not or has not been the case. The data of the research and the sharing with young Salesians give evidence of serious lack of accompaniment, where the main and almost only focus is on the work to be carried out, and huge number of tasks and activities are loaded on the shoulders of the newcomer, without much orientation or care for how he feels and is able to cope. The worst situation is when sectors are strictly demarcated and each head (Principal, Vice rector, Counselor, Administrator, Warden, Incharge of the boarding...) expects the confrere in practical training to be at his disposal, with the Rector himself being reduced to just one more on the list of these authorities. Imagine what happens when not only the work is compartmentalized but also there are rivalries among sectors. The practical trainee may find himself in an unpleasant tug of war, with some seniors even threatening him with dire consequences at the time of admissions.

What stand should we take about the accompaniment of confreres in practical training?

The most important action is at the level of province governance, as the ***Orientations and Guidelines*** mentioned above say: the choice of community for practical training, the availability of good formation guides, etc.

As far as the Rector/Incharge of a community with practical trainees is concerned, his first responsibility is towards the confreres, starting from the younger ones: he has “a direct responsibility toward each confrere; he helps him realize his own personal vocation and carry out the work entrusted to him.” (C 55) He is the guardian of the charism and the spiritual guide of the community. He meets his confreres “frequently” for a friendly talk (C 70, R 49). The ***Orientations and Guidelines*** ask him to distinguish between the friendly talk and personal spiritual accompaniment (“spiritual direction”), and to respect the freedom of each one to choose his spiritual guide. He will do his best to create a family atmosphere and a climate of mutual trust and confidence, giving time every month for the confreres in practical training to meet him. In addition, if he is blessed with more than one practical trainee, he might find it useful to have also a monthly meeting with them, in order to share and learn together from experience.

2. REGULATIONS ART. 86 AND ART. 96 ON PRACTICAL TRAINING

Regulations Art. 86 & 96

R 86. The pastoral experiences should be carried out in activities proper to our mission, and should have as their purpose the development of an apostolic spirit and of the educative and pastoral potential of the Salesian in formation. Such experiences should be diversified and graded so that they respond to the personal and religious development of the individual confrere and to the phase of formation he has reached.

R 96. Practical training lasts ordinarily for two years and is carried out before perpetual profession in a community that can provide whatever is necessary for the validity of this experience

Art. 86 of the Regulations reminds us that the goal of the pastoral experiences during initial formation is not the work to be done but rather the APOSTOLIC SPIRIT to be developed though “the activities proper to our mission.” Once again, we have here a call for proper accompaniment in which the young confrere is helped to learn from experience.

This means that we cannot assign just any occupation whatsoever to young confreres in practical training. To be generous and available is surely part of our spirit, but the energies of the young are to be invested in a way that the experience leads to “the development of an



Provincial Circular

apostolic spirit and of the educative and pastoral potential of the Salesian in formation.” Such a goal calls for quality discernment at the time of community planning, as also at the time of evaluation, and not just about the practical trainee and the work assigned to him, but also about the community as a whole and the way it accompanies him. When what is demanded of the young confrere and the accompaniment that is given him is not in line with this goal, the Rector/Incharge has the moral duty to intervene and reorient the community and the confreres.

R 86 also says that “such experiences **should be diversified and graded** so that they respond to the personal and religious development of the individual confrere and to the phase of formation he has reached” (see also GC27 71.4). The primary reference here is to the set of apostolic experiences over the arc of initial formation, but obviously this includes also the phase of practical training. The leading criterion is not so much the diversity and gradation as the personal, religious and pastoral development of the young confrere. Don Bosco was an artist in the ability to find for each one of his young Salesians what was most suited to his personality and gifts. We will have our Michael Ruas and also our Caglieros, and we allow ourselves to be inspired and guided by our founder and by the Constitutions that take his place.

R 96 takes care to specify the communities to which confreres are sent for practical training: “**a community that can provide whatever is necessary** for the validity of this experience.” This is where governance at provincial level plays a major role. The Provincial, of course, never acts alone: has his council, his delegates for formation and for youth ministry; he has the possibility of animating and giving direction during meetings of Rectors and of other groups. Each of these contribute to the animation and government of the province, also with regard to this delicate act of discernment: to send young confreres to communities that “can provide whatever is necessary for the validity of this experience.” Let’s be very clear on this point: the one criterion is formation, there is no other. Practical trainees are not cheap labour, they are not meant to fill the gaps, they cannot be dispatched merely to satisfy the demands of confreres who know how to make their voice heard. Every province needs sound formation, and R 96 reminds us of an important and indispensable element in that formation that takes place in practical training.

Where possible it is useful, as our Ratio says (FSDB 441), to assign more than one practical trainee to a community. Once again, the idea is not so much to meet the “needs” of a community and its work, but to ensure formative quality to the experience.

What about communities that are direly in need of help, but cannot provide what is necessary for the validity of the experience of practical training? Here the Provincials have to be firm. They can never sacrifice or put at risk the vocational growth of a confrere under the pressure of emergencies.

As for communities that receive practical trainees but do not meet formative requirements, the Provincial must make clear decisions: no more practical trainees to those communities.

3. FORMATION OF THE SALESIANS OF DON BOSCO (FSDB) 428 & 429

- ❖ *FSDB 428. “Throughout the whole period of initial formation, importance is given not only to study but also to the pastoral activities of our mission. ‘The practical training period provides opportunity for a deeper living experience of Salesian educative and pastoral action. During this time the young confrere gets practice in the Preventive system, particularly in Salesian assistance. With the support of the Rector and the community, he is able to integrate his activity and the fundamental values of his vocation.’ (C 115) From the Salesian point of view, this is the most characteristic phase of initial formation; it has its **model in Don Bosco’s lived experience with the youth of the first Oratory.***



❖ *FSDB 429. During practical training great importance is attached to formation-centered goals and approaches since **its main concern is the formation of the confrere**. Practical training has two objectives:*

- *growth in the Salesian vocation: the confrere, exercising himself in the **spirit and mission of the Preventive System, develops his aptitudes and his sense of responsibility** and seeks “to **integrate** his activity and the fundamental values of his vocation” (C 115);*
- ***assessment** of his vocational suitability through a personal and community experience of the Salesian mission and in view of his perpetual profession.*

FSDB 428 and 429 take up themes that we have already mentioned

At the very beginning we recall the remarkable statement that, from the Salesian point of view, practical training is the *most characteristic phase of initial formation*. Again and again, we have insisted that the *main concern during practical training is the formation of the confrere*.

We have spoken about *assistance as the hallmark of practical training*: the confrere exercises himself in the spirit and mission of the Preventive System. We have seen that the *integration of activity with the fundamental values of our vocation* (C 115) echoes C 98 and is reassumed by C 119 in the key of discernment as a permanent frame of mind for the Salesian.

The two fresh elements are the mention of the first Oratory as model, and the two objectives of practical training.

The reference to **Don Bosco’s Experience in the first oratory** is more than a historical remembrance. It is a way of giving emphasis to the Salesian charismatic nature of this period of Salesian life, where our mission that “sets the tenor of our whole life” (C 3) can be lived so intensively as to shape the heart, mind, energies of a son of Don Bosco. This experience is greatly enriched through solid reflection and reference to the Salesian sources. The practical training phase needs intellectual formation no less than other phases, though of course the proportion of time dedicated to study will differ. With the help of the Rector/Incharge and other guides, in constant contact with young people and along with the lay people who share our mission, the young confrere can be helped to connect life and reflection. So much depends, once again on the quality of accompaniment offered in this phase.

The two objectives mentioned are (1) *growth in the Salesian vocation*, and (2) *assessment of vocational suitability* in view of perpetual profession.

“Growth in the Salesian vocation” includes exercising oneself in the spirit and mission of the Preventive System, developing aptitudes and sense of responsibility, and the integration of activity and the fundamental values of our vocation by a process of discerning attention to experience so as to learn from it.

“Assessment of vocational suitability” happens in formal and informal ways, the formal ways being the periodic assessments (scrutiny) and the admissions to renewals and to perpetual profession. Our new document *Young Salesians and Accompaniment: Orientations and Guidelines* (2019) has this to say on the matter:

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



Provincial Circular

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/Incharge 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/Incharge and the council of the community – make use of these objectives to assess the progress made by their candidates and Salesians in formation. Each assessment will take into account the progress made in respect of the previous assessments.

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, scrutiny 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.

Looking more specifically at the phase of practical training, there is an interesting suggestion of the *Ratio* with regard to assessment that is not yet well known and practiced:

When one finishes his practical training, it is appropriate that there be an overall assessment – on the part of the Provincial and the community, and on his part as well – of his entire experience and of the progress he has made in his vocation. (FSDB 439).

It is worth taking this invitation seriously.

The assessment is an evaluation of growth in the Salesian vocation; it involves an effort of integration; and it involves not only the Provincial and the local community – religious as well as educative-pastoral, one would imagine – but also the confrere himself. If done regularly, it can provide precious data on the quality of practical training experiences in the province, and an important aid to discernment about communities capable of providing good experiences (see the comment on R 96 above).

Before I put down my pen, let me mention a point made very well by Fr Francesco Cereda, then councilor for formation, “I have been trying to reflect on what our Constitutions, Regulations and the *Ratio* say about the practical training phase of formation. Our documents have important things to say not only to practical trainees but also to provincials and their councils, formation delegates and their commissions, Rectors and communities where practical training is taking place. The research on Salesian personal accompaniment served to highlight both opportunities and challenges in the way the phase is being lived.” I would also like to mention Fr. Ivo Coelho, the present Councilor for Formation who addressed principally to confreres in practical training: that each confrere in practical training remains his own first formator, since “all formation... is ultimately a self-formation” and “no one can replace us in the responsible freedom that we have as individual persons.” (PDV 69) Real life situations always present themselves as a mixed bag of gifts and challenges. The apex of our formative capacity is when one learns to make “the best formative use of any situation, and to see it as a favourable opportunity for growing in his vocation.” (C 119)

May Mary be our Mother and Teacher as we become, and help our confreres become, pastors and educators of the young in the lay or priestly state they have embraced. (C 98).



NEWS & INFORMATION

INS PRINCIPALS' MEET

We would like to thank Fr. Babu Stephen Delegate for Education and Culture for the well-organized, animated and fruitful Principals' Meet held from 07th – 08th March, 2022. We thank the Principals, Vice Principals and all those who participated actively in the Principals' Meet. We are also very grateful to the community of Don Bosco Silchar for hosting this meeting in the best way possible. We can't forget to thank in a very special way the Committee that discussed, studied and brought out the **"Personnel Education Policy of Shillong Province"**. Every Principal, Vice Principal and the whole management will execute and implement in all our schools without fail by the Academic year 2022. This is the decision taken unanimously by all the Confreres who are in the schools and above all by the Provincial and his Council.

ADMINISTRATORS & LAY ACCOUNTANTS' MEET

We congratulate and thank Fr. James Thyрниang, the Economer, and his staff for conducting the Administrators and Lay Accountants' meeting on 10th and 11th March, 2022. It was really good, useful and very successful. Many Salesians and lay collaborators attended this meeting. May the Lord bless them all!

VOCATION CAMP – POST MATRIC 2022

We wish Fr. John Zosiana and his team success and fruitfulness of the forth coming Vocation Camp for the Post Matric, XI, XII, UG and PG. It will be held from 25th – 30th April, 2022 at Pastoral Centre Shillong. Kindly announce in our parishes, schools and all our institutions. Kindly encourage young boys and follow them up.

DELEGATE OF INS BOSCO'S SCOUTS AND GUIDES

I have appointed Fr. Nelson Joseph, the Principal of Don Bosco School Lawngtlai, as a Delegate of INS Bosco's Scouts and Guides (Main Coordinator). We would like to thank him and wish him God's blessing as he leads, guides and form Scouts and Guide Masters in the Province.

INS PROVINCE WEBSITE LAUNCHED

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Fr. Michael Makri and his team for giving a face lift to the website of the province. We thank him for the hard work and dedication. The INS website was launched on 10th March 2022.

CONDOLENCES

Let us pray for the repose of the departed souls:

- ✠ **Mrs. Mariam:** She is the beloved mother of Fr. Devasia Vazhayil. We extend our sincere condolences to Fr. Devasia and the family members.
- ✠ **Mr. Joseph:** He is the father of Fr. Joseph Pulinthanath (PJ) SDB. We offer our condolences to Fr. PJ Joseph and the family members.



BIRTHDAY WISHES

My prayerful wishes to all those confreres who celebrate their birthday this month. I assure them of my prayers and may God bless them and their ministry.

Dates	Names	Dates	Names
01	Cl. Jokim Manar	15	Br. Pascal Dkhar
04	Cl. Khelaiñbor Warjri	16	Cl. Khrawbok Nongsiej
05	Fr. Michael Khongngaiñ	17	Fr. Lurshai Wahlang
06	Cl. Kitboklang Tyngkan	22	Br. Simon Thaimai
07	Cl. Silvanus Nongdhar		Fr. John Kalapura
08	Br. Wanpherbor Lyngdoh	23	Fr. George Rodrigues
	Fr. Thomas Manooramparambil (MC)		Cl. Leo Myrchiang
	Fr. Jose Valiaveettil (VK)	24	Fr. Peter Syiemlieh
	Br. Solomon Swer		Fr. Mark Thanglamtuanga
09	Fr. Paul Kuttala	25	Cl. Pynshaibha Latam
	Cl. Patrick N Khupzaliana		Cl. Jack Samuel Wahlang
10	Fr. Barnes Mawrie	29	Fr. Michael Makri
12	Cl. Donboklang Nongkhaw		Cl. Shaisingstar Lyngdoh
14	Bp. Rajendran Kuttinadar		

CONCLUSION

Let me conclude with a note of celebration as we are approaching the Easter Season. Let us celebrate it with the young people who are with us. We are preparing the teachers of our schools to be sharers of our Faith in the Risen Lord. The students who are in our schools need to know in depth about the Risen Lord.

I would like to share with you the ways that we need to keep alive the faith, hope and love in the Risen Lord. As the students walked into the classroom and someone greeted them with an energetic "Happy Easter!" One of them quickly turned and responded, "Why are you saying that? Easter was on Sunday." As they chatted about it further, we learned that the students had just discussed in their religion class that Easter lasts for 50 days until the celebration of Pentecost. They talked with them about Jesus' Resurrection, his Appearances to the disciples, his Ascension, and the descent of the Holy Spirit. They knew the facts, but did not recognize that we were truly still celebrating Easter.

Let the concepts in every class and at every age, the truth takes a little bit longer to settle in and take root than the facts do. So how can we help our young people especially the students to realize that Easter is full season of joyful celebration in the rhythm of the liturgical year?

- 1) **Enter into the Easter prayer of the Church:** In the classroom, we've been saying the Angelus immediately after lunch or in the formation houses or other institutions we do pray morning and evening hours too. During the Easter season, we must try to pray the *Regina Caeli*. We'll talk about the joy that we are invited to proclaim with the rest of the Church—a joy that celebrates not only a Resurrection that happened long ago, but the hope and life that will forever exist because of it.
- 2) **Use liturgical colours:** If we have a prayer area in the room, make some small changes to reflect the liturgical season of the Church. Draw the students' attention to these changes to help them recognize the ways that we signify and celebrate different liturgical seasons of the Church. We could even incorporate the discussion into a literature discussion by relating it to the symbolism used in novels and short stories.



Provincial Circular

- 3) **Celebrate life:** Whether we are teaching a biology unit on plant growth, a history unit on a birth of new civilizations or cultural traditions, or reading a novel in literature, discuss the new life that surrounds us and how they relate to our lives as Catholics and Christians. In younger classrooms, the change of seasons from winter to spring can be related to a discussion of the new life of the Resurrection. In a biology classroom, and analysis-level-questions could encourage students to think about what makes a plant during the Easter season.
- 4) **Reflect and Imagine:** Encourage our students to imagine themselves in the Resurrection story. What would they feel if they were the ones to discover the empty tomb? What questions would they have for Jesus when he entered the Upper Room? What would they want to tell Jesus? This could be part of a classroom discussion or a creative writing prompt in a language arts classroom.
- 5) **Incorporate artwork:** Let us continue to be surprised by the details in a text that our students will notice that we have previously overlooked or the connections that they will make that we have not thought of. We recently observed a teacher display a piece of artwork of the Ascension and ask a group of elementary students what they saw. We were amazed by the details that they noticed and the questions that the art inspired. Easter is a great time to incorporate artwork as a writing prompt to use as either an assessment or writing practice.

However, let us choose to celebrate Easter this year in our classrooms, the key idea is to recognize that it is a celebration that is not meant to be confined to Easter day or Sunday Mass or religion class. This celebration is one that should give us new hope and make us a people – and a classroom community – that proclaims the love and life that is celebrated throughout this Easter season.

**HAPPY EASTER! MAY THE RISEN LORD JESUS CHRIST BRING PEACE, LIGHT, WISDOM, HOPE AND LOVE!
MAY THE UKRAINE PEOPLE AND REFUGEES FROM MYANMAR EXPERIENCE HIS PRESENCE DURING THIS EASTER SEASON!**

Yours in Don Bosco,



Fr. Paul Olphindro Lyngkot SDB
Provincial

