



Regional Congress

8th -10th July 2022

Ambrosian Pastoral Center - Seveso (MB)

SALESIAN COOPERATORS DESIGNED TO LIVE THE
SYNODALITY IN THE CHURCH

End of mandate report by the World Councilor of Italy-Middle East-Malta region

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1. Introduction

With this congress my service in the role of World Councilor of the Region comes to an end and, with this report, I will try to focus on some salient and significant aspects of my experience.

It is well known that my mandate began in November 2018, after Antonio Boccia was appointed World Coordinator, and therefore his charge as Region Councilor could not last six years, but just four.

Having mentioned Antonio, first I would like to thank him for the closeness, affection and availability he had with me since the beginning of my service.

Nevertheless, I would like to express my gratitude thanking all those who have helped, supported and understood me. To all of them, a heartfelt thank you.

After this short introduction, I am going on with some considerations, with the aim above all of sharing my experience and presenting the image of the Association that arises from it.

Most of these four years have been somehow affected and influenced by the Covid pandemic; consequently, what I will say in this report must also be read in the light of this particular situation and, reasonably, I will not return to this theme later.



2. Size of the Region

Usually we present the status of the Association at a regional level, focusing on detailed numerical data and on the numerous activities carried out.

However, I believe that those who actively participate in our associative life (as you who are present at this congress) are well aware of it.

Therefore, I will limit myself to a very simple summary that can offer an immediate and current image of the size of the Region:

- the Italy-Middle East-Malta Region includes **15** Provinces, 13 of which in Italy, the Middle East and Malta; I will give some information about the Middle East Province later; with regard to Malta we currently have no contacts or knowledge of the local reality so I believe that the future World Councilor, together with the Regional Council, must take the necessary initiatives to revitalize this part of our Region;
- the number of centers currently active is **228** ; of these, about 54% are at SDB premises and about 26% at FMA; it should be noted that in recent years the number of centers in the Diocese has increased (about 20%);
- the number of Salesian Cooperators, according to the latest update, is approximately **7280**.

Particular attention should be paid to the number of new promises, which has shown a downward trend in recent years, but in 2021 there was a recovery that is a positive sign.

3. The World Council

The first thought undoubtedly goes to the World Council; I believe that for a Salesian Cooperator this is one of the most beautiful and rewarding experiences.

Meeting with the Councilors of the 11 Regions opens our hearts and eyes on the globality of our Association.

I remember with much affection and a hint of nostalgia the faces and names of the World Councilors with whom I shared this experience: Alzira , Antuvan , Asmiriam , Barbara, Francisco, Oracio , Patrick, Philip, Raul, Stani and Rosanna who passed away a short time ago.

And with them, I remember all the members of the World Executive Secretariat, the Coordinator and the World Delegates (SDB and FMA) who took turns during this period.

By participating in this Council, you immediately realize how Don Bosco's Charism is rooted in every part of the world, lived with different nuances, according to the local culture and the historical period, but characterized by the same passion: the education of young people as a way to bring them to meet Jesus.

And it is this same reason that makes the World Council not so much and not just a governing body of the Association, but a group of brothers who love and esteem each other from the very first meeting.

This passion has always helped us to overcome the small difficulties connected, for example, with the language.

The Directory has recently been updated to make the work of the Council itself clearer and clearer and more and more efficient.

Another aspect worth mentioning is the **civil recognition** of the Association as an "Ecclesiastical Body".

4. The Regional Council

Going now to the regional level, let's have a look at the reality of our Regional Council, an



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animation body ¹, according to its role defined in the PVA, but above all a place of aggregation in which, over the years, the spirit of collaboration and Communion has grown

The style that, with great commitment, we have tried to adopt is that of synodality, collegiality and listening, marked by mutual respect and fraternal love, according to the exhortation of St. Paul: "*compete in esteeming one another*" ².

Inevitably, we also had some moments of difficulties, due to differences of thought and different sensitivities, but almost always a point of convergence was found and when it was really not possible, we agreed to accept the decision of the majority, being animated by a common spirit of service that leads to choose what is good for the Association rather than one's own individual point of view.

Speaking of the Regional Council, it is necessary to mention and remember the approval of the **Directory**: it is a document that has the purpose of defining the work of the Italy-Middle East-Malta Regional Council and clarifying its internal organization.

It is a flexible tool, adaptable to the territorial reality of the Association in our Region, applying the principles and requirements contained in the PVA.

This document was approved in the session of 10th October 2020 and may prove to be particularly useful especially on the occasion of the alternation of both the World Councilor and the Provincial Coordinators, who may have a concise and immediate definition of the structure, composition and functioning of the regional council.

Another equally important document is entitled "THE SERVICE OF RESPONSIBILITY IN THE ASSOCIATION OF SALESIAN COOPERATORS", approved by the Regional Council in order to favor personal discernment, both for those who are available to take a position of responsibility, and for those who are called to vote.

With the Directory approval the tasks and the activities of each animation **Sectors** were better defined:

- Youth Sector
- Families sector
- Communication sector
- Sociopolitical Sector

Each animation sector is represented within the regional council by a person (who can be one of the provincial coordinators or another person, in accordance with what is written in the PVA) ³.

These charges will be reassigned by the Regional Council after the election of the new World Councilor.

5. The situation in the Middle East

The Middle East Province includes several nations: Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Turkey.

The particular socio-political and geographical conditions of this Province have not made it possible, for a long time, to summon the Provincial Congress for the election of the Provincial Council.

For this reason in 2021, in full agreement with the world Coordinator and with the SDB and FMA Provincial Delegates, we decided to start a form of aggregation alternative to the Provincial Council, in any case in compliance with the rules of the PVA.

¹PVA, Article 34 of Reg.

² Rom 12, 10

³PVA, Article 34 of Reg



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The MIDDLE EAST CONSULTATION was therefore conceived and defined; it is an organism made up of the Coordinators of the Local Centers of the Middle East Province and the SDB and FMA Provincial Delegates.

This new body has been given a role of animation, to guarantee the connection among the centers and with the World Councilor, and to participate in the meetings of the Regional Council through its own representative.

Anyway, today we can look to the future with optimism, since the Provincial Congress will soon be held, and the Provincial Council will be elected; with the appointment of its Coordinator, also this Province will be a full member of the Regional Council.

6. The service of formation

Several years ago our Region started a team, led and chaired by the Regional Coordinator for Formation, with the task of creating and offering texts and support materials for a more and more effective formative action in our Centers.

Thanks to this team, every year we have a “**formative proposal**”, i.e. a very rich text containing materials and suggestions, which each Formation Responsible (both local and provincial) can use while preparing the meetings.

A weak point is still the “**initial formation**”: we feel the need to prepare a text to be used by formators so that each Province and each Center may have a unique and shared reference point, on the basis of which they can build a personalized formative path, through which the aspirants may mature not only their knowledge of the Salesian charism and spirituality, but they may also feel they belong to the Association.

7. Some ideas for improvement

So far I have tried to highlight the many positive aspects and strengths of our Association at the regional level.

At this point it is inevitable, to try to focus our attention on some weaknesses which are worth of attention in a constant growth process.

It is clear that these are general considerations that do not deal with all Centers and Provinces, but each Center knows if and how much they are involved.

1. A first aspect that needs to be improved is the **vision** of the Association in a **global perspective**; in some situations there is a slightly “Italocentric” idea.

Many times I have been called with the name of “national president” or “national coordinator”, sometimes even by some Salesian Cooperators. Regardless of the correctness of the title, behind these terms there is an image that is inconsistent with our organization in Regions and, consequently, an incorrect vision of the role of the World Councilor.

And many beautiful initiatives of ours have often been planned and tailored for the Italian Provinces, almost forgetting that our own Region goes far beyond Italy.

Even in local and provincial programming, we often do not take into consideration programs made on a global or regional level, leading to the unpleasant condition of having to choose which event to join or even having to manage situations of conflict between various levels.

2. A second very important point is the **knowledge of the Project of Apostolic Life**; ten years after its final approval, I still find evidence people do not know it well.

This statement may seem to you excessive and unjustified, but I assure you that it is well founded.



I am thinking for example of the questions that I sometimes receive from local Centers or Provinces, whose answers are clearly contained in the PVA; or even worse, to some situations in which it was necessary to intervene to correct choices that do not comply with our PVA.

As another example, I remind you that some Provincial Congresses were held without asking the World Council for the approval of the Regulations of the Congress ⁴.

And I could quote other examples that make me believe that the PVA is not known to everyone, or worse, that it is consciously disregarded.

And yet, the heart of the "promise" that we have all made is " *I promise to commit myself to living the Project of Apostolic Life of the Association of Salesian Cooperators*".⁵

Let us wonder: how can I commit myself to living something that I do not know in depth?

And finally, let's pay attention to the risk of "fragmenting" the PVA, taking into consideration only those pages that do not bother us too much.

3. Another important point, to some extent included in the previous one, is **economic solidarity** .

How many Salesian Cooperators do not offer even a minimal financial contribution, considering themselves justified by the fact that there is no obligation? They forget that " *Salesian Cooperators support the Association with free and generous contributions, as Don Bosco wanted* " ⁶.

The **management of the economic aspects** has other difficulties, at the regional level, when decisions have to be taken regarding the budgets and the use of available funds; I had to attend hours of discussion without reaching a shared decision or, at best, having to decide "by a narrow majority".

4. Another important issue deals with the **entry** into the Association **of the new SSCCs** ; in many local centers it is considered as a prize or a "recognition of merits". You are a good catechist, a good teacher, a good animator, so you can make the promise to become a Salesian Cooperator.

Also on this issue it is necessary that the Coordinators of Local Centers fully exert their role in accompanying the aspirant on a serene path of discernment, in which it is clear that to pronounce the "promise" means to respond to the Salesian apostolic "vocation".⁷

In this regard, I have recently sent a note of clarification to the Provincial and Local Coordinators ⁸; I invite you to find it out and to read it carefully.

5. A final point is the **absence** in this Congress of many Provincial Councilors (especially from some Provinces), even though the date had been decided and known about a year ago.

Certainly, in some cases the absence is well justified, for example for health reasons, but perhaps, for some people it is simply a choice of priority over other commitments.

On my side, I consider it a small failure of my own service, having failed to express the importance of this event for our associative life, and I regret this.

8. The election of the councilor

Tomorrow we will proceed with the election of the World Councilor for the next six years and in today's program we have foreseen an adequate time for the presentation and the acquaintance of those who, very generously and freely, have offered themselves to take on this service.

⁴PVA, art. 28 Reg

⁵PVA, art. 32 Stat

⁶PVA, art. 8 Reg

⁷PVA, art. 2 Stat

⁸Letter from the World Councilor, p rot. n ° 12/2022



At this point, a necessary consideration must be made about the votes for the election of those who are responsible, at all levels of the association.

Repeatedly, both in our provincial and regional congresses, the question of the possibility of admitting voting "by proxy" or voting "electronically" is raised.

To cope with this issue, I believe that an effort to **change perspective is essential** : we will have to try to overcome the idea of the "right to vote" in favor of the "value of participation".

To be more explicit, I believe that for us Salesian Cooperators, the expression of the vote for the election of the responsible people in charge is not the exercise of a "right", but is the adherence to a call that arises from belonging to the Association itself.

If we seriously and serenely accept this vision, then it immediately follows that the Regional Congress is for us a moment of communion, of personal relationship, of prayer and formation, within which the choice of the World Councilor is inserted, which is certainly expressed through an election, but it cannot be reduced to a sterile counting of votes.

9. Some events to be remembered

Before concluding, I would like to remind you some important moments in our associative life at the regional level, during the period I was in charge. I will mention only a few that I consider the most significant, since it is not a matter of self-praise, but of looking back at the past in order to better project ourselves into the future.

I certainly begin with the most recent, the 4th Regional **Meeting** held last April, with about 250 people. After several postponements, it was finally possible to meet in person and, above all, to reflect on the theme of "welcoming", according to the invitation that Pope Francis has repeatedly addressed to the Church.

Another important event was the Regional Formative **Congress** which took place online in April 2021, prompted by the need to keep our relations alive even in a time of severe limitations due to the pandemic.

Equally significant for our Region was the **Workshop** of the Animation Sectors, held in Florence in October 2019 ; it was an opportunity to find a renewed enthusiasm and the revitalization of the animation sectors.

This also gave rise to the **Advanced Training Course for social and political commitment** , carried out with the IUSVE (Salesian University Institute) in collaboration with the Former Pupils Union ; undoubtedly an initiative enhancing the socio-political commitment, as a concrete expression of the lay Salesian vocation. It was an important investment in economic terms, but also as far as time and energy are concerned, which should not be forgotten.

And finally, I'd like to recall the **Spiritual Exercises** for Coordinators, Delegates and Provincial Delegates; the last one was held in Rome in July 2019 and I think we should organize other occasions in the future.

10. Conclusion

I can imagine that, at this point, many of you are expecting the usual phrases of circumstance, with expressions such as: it was a wonderful experience ... I felt good ... I would do it again without hesitation ... and so on.

Perhaps I will disappoint some of these expectations, but I will express myself with an open heart.

These four years have been the cause of many **hardships** and even some suffering for me.

As for the hardship, it is quite natural: none of us can think that such an associative service can be carried out lightly. It needs commitment, heart, time and energy.



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And I was quite prepared for this.

It was not so natural to remember some moments of suffering, caused by misunderstandings and **easy judgments** , sometimes leading to criticism.

Many roses, of course, but also some thorns.

Now, someone will ask me: so why did you do it?

The answer lies in the heart of our **Promise** : “ *attracted by your Love, I want to love you back by doing good* ”.

For me, accepting this assignment was a way of responding to the love of Jesus, who called me to be part of the wonderful family of Don Bosco.

Freely you have received, so give freely⁹, these are the words of Jesus that have always guided and motivated me in all my experiences of service in the Association.

My thank you goes to all of you for this stretch of road we have travelled together.

And to the new world councilor I do not wish "good work!" but "good service!".

Carlo Pellegrino

World Councilor of the Italy - Middle East - Malta Region

⁹ Mt 10.8