

Don Bosco and the Bible

In a chapter of the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation promulgated by the Second Vatican Council, which deals with 'Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church', all the Christian faithful are urged to read the Holy Book frequently.

It is a fact that in Don Bosco's time in Piedmont, in parish and school catechesis, personal reading of the biblical text was not yet sufficiently practised. Rather than having direct recourse to it they used to do catechesis on Catholic doctrine with examples taken from Compendiums of Bible History.

And this was also the case in Valdocco.

This is not to say that Don Bosco did not personally read and meditate on the Bible. Already in the Seminary at Chieri he had Martini's Bible at his disposal, as well as well-known commentaries such as those by Calmet. But it is a fact that when he was in the Seminary, it was treatises of a doctrinal nature that were mainly developed rather than biblical studies proper, even if the dogmatic treatises evidently included biblical quotations. As a cleric, Bosco was not content with this and became self-taught in the matter.

In the summer of 1836, Fr Cafasso, who had been asked to find someone, proposed that his student Bosco teach Greek to the boarders at the Collegio del Carmine in Turin. They had been evacuated to Montaldo because of the threat of cholera. This prompted him to take Greek seriously so he was suitable for teaching it.

With the help of a Jesuit priest who had a profound knowledge of Greek, cleric Bosco made great progress. In only four months the learned Jesuit had him translate almost the whole New Testament, and then, for a further four years, every week he checked some Greek composition or version that Bosco sent him and which he punctually revised with appropriate

observations. "In this way," says Don Bosco, "I was able to translate Greek almost as well as one would do Latin."

His first biographer assures us that on 10 February 1886, by then elderly and unwell, Don Bosco was still reciting a few chapters of St Paul's Epistles in Greek and Latin in the presence of his disciples.

From the same *Biographical Memoirs* we learn that the cleric John Bosco, in the summer, at Sussambrino, where he lived with his brother Joseph, used to go up to the top of the vineyard belonging to Turco and there he devoted himself to studies he had not been able to attend to during the school year, especially the study of Calmet's *History of the Old and New Testaments*, the geography of the Holy Places, and the principles of Hebrew, acquiring sufficient knowledge of these.

In 1884, he still remembered the study he had made of Hebrew and in Rome was heard engaging with a professor of Hebrew on the explanation of certain original phrases of the prophets, making comparisons with parallel texts from various books of the Bible. He was also working on a translation of the New Testament from Greek.

Don Bosco, therefore, as self-taught, was an attentive scholar of the Bible's writings.

One day, while still a student of theology, he wanted to visit his old teacher and friend Fr Giuseppe Lacqua who lived in Ponzano. The latter, having been informed of the proposed visit, wrote him a letter in which he told him, among other things, 'come the time to visit me, remember to bring me the three small volumes of the Holy Bible'.

This is clear proof that the cleric Bosco was studying them.

As a young priest, he was talking with his parish priest, Fr Cinzano, about Christian mortification. Don Bosco then quoted him the words of the Gospel: '*Si quis vult post me venire,*

abneget semetipsum, et tollat crucem suam quotidie et sequatur me. If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross *daily* and follow me'). Fr Cinzano interrupted him saying:

"You are adding a word, that quotidie (= every day) which is not there in the gospel."

And Don Bosco replied:

"This word is not found in three evangelists, but it is in the gospel of St Luke. Consult the ninth chapter, verse 23, and you will see that I am not adding anything."

The good parish priest, who was skilled in ecclesiastical disciplines, had not noticed the verse from St Luke, whereas Don Bosco had paid attention to it. Several times Fr Cinzano recounted this incident with gusto.

Don Bosco's commitment in Valdocco



Don Bosco then demonstrated this deep interest and study of Sacred Scripture in many other ways, and he did much at Valdocco to make its contents known to his children.

One thinks of his edition of *Bible History*, first published in 1847 and then reprinted in 14 editions and dozens and dozens of reprints until 1964.

One thinks of all his other writings related to biblical history, such as *An easy for for learning Bible History*, first published in 1850; the *Life of St Peter*, which came out in January 1857 as a booklet of the *Catholic Readings*; the *Life of St Paul*, which came out in April of the same year as a booklet of the *Catholic Readings*; the *Life of St Joseph*, which came out in the March 1867 booklet of the *Catholic Readings*; etc.

Don Bosco then kept maxims from Sacred Scripture in his Breviary, such as the following: *'Bonus Dominus et confortans in die tribulationis'*.

He had sentences from Holy Scripture painted on the walls of the Valdocco portico, such as the following: *'Omnis enim, qui petit accipit, et qui quaerit invenit, et pulsanti aperietur'*.

As early as 1853 he wanted his clerical students of philosophy and theology to study ten verses of the New Testament every week and recite them word for word on Thursday mornings.

When this began, all the clerics were holding the volume of the Latin Vulgate Bible and had opened it at the first lines of St Matthew's Gospel. But after saying the prayer, Don Bosco began reciting verse 18 of chapter 16 of Matthew in Latin: *"Et ego dico tibi quia tu es Petrus, et super hanc petram aedificabo ecclesiam meam, et portae inferi non praevallebunt adversus eam"*: "And I say to you: You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." He really wanted his sons to always keep this evangelical truth in their minds and hearts.

Artemides ZATTI – Saint

LIFE AND WORKS

Saint Artemides Zatti was born in Boretto (Reggio Emilia) on 12 October 1880. He experienced the harshness of sacrifice at an early age, so much so that at nine years old he was already earning his living as a hired hand. Forced by poverty, early in 1897 (Artemide was then 17 years old) the Zatti family emigrated to Argentina and settled in Bahía Blanca.

Young Artemides immediately started working, first in a hotel and then in a brick factory. He started attending the parish run by the Salesians. The parish priest at the time was Fr Carlo Cavalli, a pious man of extraordinary kindness. Artemis found a spiritual director in him and the parish priest found that Artemides was an excellent co-worker. It did not take long for him to show a leaning to Salesian life. He was 20 years old when he left for the aspirantate in Bernal. Those were very hard years for Artemides, who was ahead of his companions in age but behind them in terms of the few studies he had done. He overcame all difficulties, however, thanks to his tenacious will, keen intelligence and solid piety.

While assisting a young priest with tuberculosis he unfortunately contracted the disease. Fr Cavalli's fatherly interest in him, following him from afar, meant that the Salesian House at Viedma was chosen for him, where there was a more suitable climate and above all a missionary hospital with a good Salesian nurse who in practice acted as the "doctor" there: Father Evasio Garrone. The latter immediately realised the serious state of the young man's health and at the same time sensed his uncommon virtues. He invited Artemides to pray to Mary Help of Christians to be cured, but also suggested making a promise: "If she cures you, you will devote your whole life to these sick people. " Artemides willingly made this promise and was mysteriously cured. He accepted the not inconsiderable pain of renouncing the priesthood (because of the illness he had contracted) humbly and docilely. Neither then nor later was any lament for this unattained goal ever voiced by him.

He made his First Profession as a coadjutor brother on 11 January 1908 and his Perpetual Profession on 18 February 1911. In keeping with his promise to Our Lady, he immediately and totally consecrated himself to the hospital, initially taking care of the adjoining pharmacy after he had obtained a "qualified in pharmacy" certificate. When Father

Garrone died in 1913, all responsibility for the hospital fell on his shoulders. In fact, he became its vice-director, administrator, an expert nurse respected by all the sick and by the doctors themselves, who gradually gave him more and more freedom of action. Throughout his life, the hospital was the place where he exercised his virtue, day after day, to a heroic degree.



His service was not limited to the hospital, but extended to the entire city, or rather to the two towns on the banks of the Rio Negro: Viedma and Patagones. He usually went out with his white coat and his bag containing the most common medicines. One hand on the handlebar and the other with the rosary. He preferred poor families, but was also called upon by the rich. In case of need, he moved at all hours of the day and night, whatever the weather. He did not stay in the city centre, but also went to the hovels in the suburbs. He did everything for free, and if he received anything, it went to the hospital.

Saint Artemides Zatti loved his patients in a truly moving way. He saw Jesus himself in them. He was always respectful to the doctors and hospital owners. But the situation was not always easy, both because of the some of their characters and because of the disagreements that could arise between the legal managers and himself. However, he was able to win them all over and his balanced attitude managed to resolve even the most delicate situations. Only a profound self-mastery could make it possible for him to triumph over the stress and easily shifting timetable.

He was an edifying witness of faithfulness to common life. It amazed everyone how this holy religious, while so caught up with his many commitments at the hospital, could at the same time be the exemplary representative of regular life. It was he who rang the bell, it was he who there before all the other confreres for community events. Faithful to the

Salesian spirit and to the motto "work and temperance" bequeathed by Don Bosco to his sons, he carried out his prodigious activity with habitual readiness of spirit, a spirit of sacrifice especially during night duty, with absolute detachment from any personal satisfaction, never taking holidays or rest. As a good Salesian, he knew how to make cheerfulness a component of his holiness. He was ever cheerful and smiling: this is how all the photos that have reached us portray him. He could relate easily with people, was clearly empathetic, always happy to entertain lowly individuals. But he was above all a man of God. He radiated it. One of the hospital doctors said, "When I saw Bro. Zatti, my disbelief wavered.". Another said, "I have believed in God ever since I met Bro. Zatti."

In 1950, Bro. Zatti fell from a ladder and it was after this accident that cancer symptoms manifested themselves. He clearly diagnosed them himself. However, he continued to carry out his mission for another year, heroically accepting his sufferings, and passed away on 15 March 1951 still fully conscious, surrounded by the affection and gratitude of a population that from that moment on began to invoke him as an intercessor with God. All the inhabitants of Viedma and Patagones flocked to his funeral in an unprecedented procession.

His reputation for holiness quickly spread and his tomb began to be much venerated. Even today, when people go to the cemetery for funerals, they always pass by to visit Artemides Zatti's tomb. Beatified by St John Paul II on 14 April 2002, Saint Artemide Zatti was the first non-martyr Salesian Brother to be raised to the honours of the altars.

HIS MESSAGE

The House Chronicle at the Salesian College in Viedma recalls that on 15 March 1951 the bell rang in the morning as usual,

but announced the flight to heaven of Brother Artemides Zatti. As the Chronicle put it prophetically, "One less brother in the house and one more saint in heaven."

Artemides' canonisation is a gift of grace that the Lord gives us through this confrere, a Salesian Brother who lived his life in the family spirit typical of the Salesian charism, embodying fraternity towards his confreres and the community, and closeness to the poor and the sick and anyone who crossed his path.

Artemides Zatti's life stages: childhood and early youth in Italy in Boretto; the emigration of the family and residence in Bahía Bianca (Argentina); his Salesian aspirantate in Bernal; his illness and the move to Viedma, which was the home where his heart truly lay; his formation and religious profession as a Salesian Brother; his mission for 40 years first at the San José Hospital and then at the Quinta San Isidro; his final years and death experienced as an encounter with the Lord of life, highlighting his heroic practice of virtue and the purifying and transforming action of the Holy Spirit, the author of all holiness.

Saint Artemides Zatti is a model, intercessor and companion of Christian life, close to each of us. Indeed, his life presents him to us as someone who experienced the daily toil of existence with its successes and failures. It is enough to recall the separation from his native country to emigrate to Argentina; the tuberculosis that broke in like a hurricane in his young life, shattering every dream and every prospect for the future; seeing the hospital he had built with so many sacrifices and which had become a sanctuary of God's merciful love, later demolished. But Zatti always found the strength in the Lord to get back up and continue on his way.

The testimony of Artemides Zatti enlightens us, attracts us and also challenges us, because he is a word of God incarnated in history and close to us. He transformed life

into a gift, working with generosity and intelligence, overcoming difficulties of all kinds with his unwavering trust in divine Providence. The lesson of faith, hope and charity that he leaves us becomes, if properly known and motivated, a courageous work of safeguarding and promoting the most authentic human and Christian values.



What stands out above all in the parable of Artemides Zatti's life is the experience of God's unconditional and gratuitous love. First and foremost, it is not the works he performed, but the amazement of discovering himself loved and his faith in this providential love throughout each stage of his life. It was from this lived certainty that the totality of giving himself to his neighbour for the love of God flowed. The love he received from the Lord was the power that transformed his life, expanded his heart and predisposed him to love. With the same Spirit, the Spirit of holiness, and the love that heals and transforms us, even as a boy he made choices and performed acts of love in every situation and with every brother and sister he met, because he felt loved and had the strength to love:

- while still a teenager in Italy he experienced the hardships of poverty and work, but laid the foundations for a solid Christian life, giving the first proofs of his generous charity;

- When he emigrated with his family to Argentina, he knew how to preserve his faith and make it grow, resisting an often immoral and anti-Christian environment and maturing, thanks to the encounter with the Salesians and the spiritual accompaniment of Father Carlo Cavalli, in his aspiration to the priesthood. He was ready to return to the school benches with twelve-year-old boys although he was already twenty;

- he readily offered to assist a priest suffering from

tuberculosis and contracted the disease, without uttering a word of complaint or recrimination, but experiencing his illness as a time of trial and purification, bearing its consequences with fortitude and serenity;

– cured in an extraordinary way through the intercession of Mary Help of Christians, and after making a promise to dedicate his life to the sick and the poor, he generously accepted renouncing the priesthood and dedicated himself with all his strength to his new mission as a lay Salesian;

– He lived the ordinary rhythm of his days in an extraordinary way: faithful and edifying practice of religious life in joyful fraternity; sacrificial service at all hours and with all the humblest of services to the sick and the poor; continuous struggle against poverty in the search for resources and benefactors to meet debts, trusting exclusively in Providence; ready availability for all human misfortunes that sought his intervention; resistance to every difficulty and acceptance of every adverse case; self-mastery and joyful and optimistic serenity that communicated itself to all those who approached him.

Seventy-one years of this life before God and before human beings: a life delivered joyfully and faithfully to the end, bearing witness to a holiness that is accessible and within the reach of all, as taught by St Francis de Sales and Don Bosco: not an impassable goal, separated from everyday life, but embodied in everyday life, in the hospital wards, on a bicycle through the streets of Viedma, in the travails of daily life to meet demands and needs of all kinds, doing everyday things in a spirit of service, with love and without spectacle, without claiming anything, with the joy of giving, enthusiastically embracing the vocation of a lay Salesian and becoming a shining reflection of the Lord.

International volunteer work in Benediktbeuern

Don Bosco Volunteers: the commitment of young people for a better future

For more than 20 years the German Salesian Province of Don Bosco has been involved in the field of youth volunteering. Through the Don Bosco Volunteers programme the Salesians in Germany offer around 90 young people each year an educational and life experience in Salesian houses in the Province and in various countries around the world.

For many young Germans it is customary, once they have completed their school education, to devote a year of their lives to social work. The profile of the Salesians for many of these young Germans is a source of inspiration when choosing an organisation to accompany them during this experience. In spite of the secularisation of German society and a constant loss of faithful by the Church in recent years, many young people knock on the Salesians' door with the clear intention of helping their neighbour and making a small contribution to a better world. These young people find a form of faith and an example of life in the figure of Don Bosco.

Not all of those who apply for admission to the volunteer programme at the relevant offices of the Province in Benediktbeuern and Bonn have had experience in youth groups connected with the Church and especially with the Salesians during their lives. Some of them are not baptised, but

recognise a possibility for personal growth in the Salesian educational offer, based on fundamental values for their own development. That is why so many young people begin a volunteer experience with the Don Bosco Volunteers programme every year: during training weekends, the young people not only learn useful information about the projects, but also come face to face with the Salesian preventive system and spirituality, thus preparing themselves for the time they will put into the service of other young people.



The volunteers are accompanied during their experience by a team of coordinators who look after not only the organisational aspects, but above all of the support before, during and after the volunteering experience. This is because the volunteer year does not end on the last day of service at the host Salesian home, but continues for life. This year in the service of others represents a foundation of values that has a strong impact on the future development of the volunteers. Don Bosco educated young people in order to make them upright citizens and good Christians: the Don Bosco Volunteers programme is inspired by this fundamental principle of Salesian pedagogy and seeks to create the basis for a better society, in which Christian values once again characterise our lives.

The German Province provides opportunities for young people to meet at all stages of the volunteering experience: orientation meetings, online information offers, training courses, parties and annual experience exchange meetings are basic activities on which the success of the Don Bosco Volunteers programme is built.

A co-ordination team consisting of co-workers from the Aktionszentrum Benediktbeuern youth training centre and the mission office in Bonn, supported by the provincial economist Fr. Stefan Stöhr and the youth ministry delegate, Fr. Johannes

Kaufmann, manages and directs all activities, developing the programme in all its components.

The volunteer experience begins with the application to join the programme: young people taking part in the national programme start their service in September and take part in 25 training days during the volunteer year. For volunteers intending to go abroad, the path is somewhat longer: after an orientation meeting in the autumn, selections are made and candidates receive information from former volunteers who have already taken part in the programme in the past. The training phase begins in the first months of the year and includes a total of 12 days of preparation, during which volunteers receive information on Don Bosco's pedagogy, the work of the Salesians in the world, important topics such as intercultural communication and precautions to be taken in case of emergency during the experience abroad. In July, the volunteers receive a blessing and a Don Bosco medal as a symbol of belonging to the Salesian Family.

The departure of the young people is planned for September, and towards the middle of the service, reflection meetings are offered in the various regions where the volunteers work, held by the coordination team of the German Province. The experience ends with a concluding seminar, shortly after returning from the service abroad, in which the foundations are laid for a future commitment to the Salesian Family.

On an annual basis, two meetings are organised in the Province for all those who have taken part in the programme since the start of activities in the 1990s. The Province's coordination team takes care of all organisational aspects, including: searching for Salesian houses interested in collaborating in the field of volunteering; financing activities through ministerial and European funds; support in the event of emergencies; organising the health insurance aspects of the volunteers; communicating with the families of the volunteers.



More than a thousand young people have already taken part in the Don Bosco Volunteers programme in Germany and abroad over the past 25 years. In a study carried out a few months ago by the German Province, in which around 180 former volunteers took part, a constant commitment to social work on the part of the young people was observed even many years after the volunteering experience. Particularly evident is the respondents' focus on issues such as social injustice, racism, ecology and sustainable development. This study has demonstrated the value of this programme, not only in terms of the immediate help that volunteers can give to their host communities during their year of service, but also in terms of the positive effects that can be registered in the long term, once they have completed their academic studies or embarked on their professional path.

An important aspect of the Don Bosco Volunteers programme is its inclusion in national and European programmes, such as the European Commission's European Solidarity Corps, the national volunteer programmes of the Ministry for Family and Youth or the weltwärts programme of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation, so that the Salesians' training offerings can be made more visible to institutions.

Constant quality controls carried out by competent associations certify the efficiency and transparency of the training offer of the Don Bosco Volunteers programme on a biannual basis. One aspect of these quality controls often concerns the cooperation between our competent offices and the host structures in Germany and in different countries around the world. This detail distinguishes the Salesian offer from many other private volunteer agencies, which cooperate with various organisations with the most varied profiles. Our volunteers work exclusively in Salesian facilities and are specially prepared for this life experience. It does not matter whether a volunteer is employed in a small village in

southern India or in a European metropolis. There is something that unites all these young people and makes them feel at home during their experience: Don Bosco with his presence in the host communities offers them a point of reference in everyday life and gives them comfort and protection in the most difficult moments.

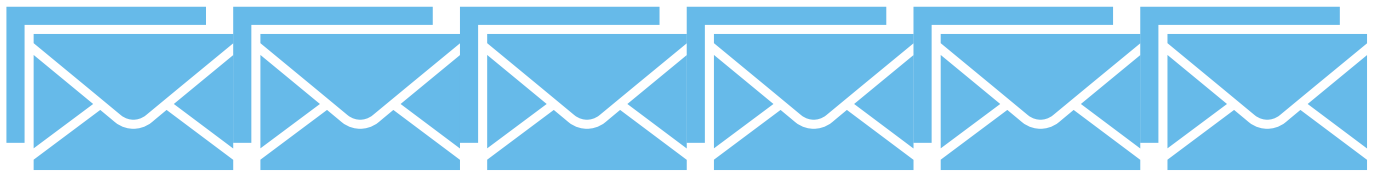
Of course, it would be too easy to say that a volunteer experience always goes smoothly or without problems: the acclimatisation phase in particular can create various integration problems for the volunteers. But it is precisely in these situations that growth can be observed in young people, who learn to know themselves, their limits and their resources better. The accompaniment provided by the Salesian host communities and the staff of the German Provincial coordination centres is intended to turn even the most difficult phases of this journey into opportunities for reflection and personal growth.

Many challenges await us in the future: the last two years have shown us that the world is changing and the fear that war will wipe out the prospect of a fairer society seems to be growing in the new generations. The Don Bosco Volunteers programme seeks to be a glimmer of light and a source of hope, so that our young people can build a better future for our planet through their commitment.

Francesco BAGIOLINI
Benediktbeuern, Germany

Photo gallery International volunteer work in Benediktbeuern

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Rector Major's Message. That young man said to me: "My passion is Christ"

It had been many years since I had last heard that expression from a young man in such a light-hearted context, in the presence of all his companions crowding around us.

Dear friends of the Salesian Bulletin, we have 'rounded the cape' of the year, as they say in seafaring parlance, and are facing up to the New Year. Every beginning possesses something magical, and the new always has its own special charm. The year 2023 seemed like a distant time, and yet here it is. The New Year is each time a promise that some good news will come for us too. The New Year springs from the light and enthusiasm given to us at Christmas.

'There is a time to be born' says Qohelet in the Bible. It is never too late to begin again. God always begins anew with us, filling us with his blessing.

One lesson I have learnt from these last few years: to be prepared for surprises and the unexpected. As St Paul says in a letter, that no human heart: 'has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him' (1 Cor 2:9). The content of Christian hope is to live by surrendering oneself into the

arms of God. Today, many ways of living, of expressing oneself, of communicating have changed. But the human heart, especially the hearts of young people, is always the same, like a bud in spring, full of life ready to burst forth. Young people 'are' walking hope. What I am telling you now seems to me very appropriate for this greeting from the Salesian Bulletin for January, the 'month of Don Bosco'.

A few weeks ago, I visited Salesian presences in the United States of America (USA), and one day, early in the morning, I arrived at St Dominic Savio Middle and High School in Los Angeles. I spent several hours with hundreds of students, followed by a panel discussion with forty-five young people from the high school. We talked about their personal plans and dreams. It was a very pleasant and enriching few hours.

At the end of the morning, I shared a sandwich with the young people in the courtyard. I was sitting at a wooden table in the courtyard with my sandwich and a bottle of water. Four other Salesians were with me at the time; I had greeted many young people, some sitting at tables, others standing. It was a cheerful lunch. At my table there were two empty seats, and at one point two young men approached and sat down with us. Naturally I started talking to them. After a couple of minutes, one of the young men said to me: "I want to ask you a question" to which I replied, "Of course, ask me."

The young man said: "What do I have to do to become Pope? I want to be Pope.

I looked surprised, but I smiled. I replied that I had never been asked such a question and that I was surprised by his clarity and determination. It came to me spontaneously to explain to him that among so many millions of Catholics there is a lot of competition and it is not so easy to be elected Pope.



Rector Major in the Salesian Family Youth Centre located in Boyle Heights, East Los Angeles, USA, Nov. 2022

I suggested: "Listen, you could start by becoming a Salesian."

The young man smiled and said: "Well, I'm not saying no" and added, very seriously: "because what is certain is that my passion is Christ'." I must say that I was impressed and pleasantly surprised. I think it had been many years since I had heard that expression from a young man in such a light-hearted context, in the presence of all his companions, who were now crowding around us.

The young man had a genuine smile on his face and I told him that I liked his answer very much, because I understood that it was absolutely sincere. I added that, if he agreed, I would like to recount our conversation at another time and place, and so I did.

But already at that moment my thoughts had flown to Don Bosco. Surely Don Bosco would have appreciated a conversation with a young man like this. There is no doubt that in many conversations he had with Savio, Besucco, Magone, Rua, Cagliero, Francesia and many others there was much of this, the desire of those young men to do something beautiful with their lives.

And I thought how important it is today, 163 years after the beginning of the Salesian Congregation, to continue to believe deeply that young people are good, that they have so many seeds of goodness in their hearts, that they have dreams and projects that often carry within them so much generosity and gift of self.

How important it is to continue to believe that it is God who acts in the heart of each of us, each of his sons and daughters.

It seems to me that today, in our time, we are in danger of becoming so practical and efficient in looking at everything that happens to us and what we experience that we risk losing the ability to surprise ourselves and others and, more worryingly, not letting ourselves be "surprised by God".

Hope is like a volcano within us, like a secret spring gushing in our hearts, like a spring bursting forth in the depths of

our souls: it involves us like a divine whirlpool into which we are inserted, by the grace of God. I think that like yesterday with Don Bosco, today there are thousands and thousands of young people who want to see Jesus, who need to experience friendship with him, who are looking for someone to accompany them on this beautiful journey.

I invite you to join them, dear friends of the Bulletin, and I wish you time to be amazed and time to trust, time to look at the stars, time to grow and mature, time to hope again and to love. I wish you time to live each day, each hour as a gift. I also wish you time to forgive, time to give to others and plenty of time to pray, dream and be happy.

In memoriam. Fr Davide FACCHINELLO, sdb

A life spent for others. Fr Davide FACCHINELLO, sdb

Born in the thousand-year-old city of Treviso on 21 May 1974, Davide was baptised in the parish church of Loria (Treviso) where his family lived. He attended primary school in his birthplace and continued as a boarder in the two-year graphics school at the San Giorgio Institute in Venice, where he met the Salesians. He began a live-in experience in the Salesian Community in Mogliano Veneto, continuing his graphic design studies in Noventa Padovana where he received his qualifications. This experience led him to learn about the activities of the parish oratory in Mogliano, summer leadership initiatives, and formation groups, which would

become catalysts for his response to a divine call, entering the novitiate in 1993. His first pastoral destination was in the Mogliano Veneto Astori house as Catechist for middle school, where he remained until 2011. He then received a new destination to the House at Este as vice-rector of the community and pastoral animator among the students at the Job Training Centre. This gave him a heartfelt desire for pastoral experience in mission lands, and he put himself at the disposal of the Salesian Congregation for this purpose. As his superiors indicated Peru as his destination, he immediately began to study Spanish, a language he continued to improve in while in the mission, at the same time as he immersed himself in the local culture.



Since his arrival in Peru in 2017, after a period of acclimatisation he was sent to the missionary community at Monte Salvado, in the region of Cusco. He started as assistant parish priest of Mary Help of Christians Parish, Quebrada Honda, in the Yanatile Valley, deep in the jungle where the Salesians accompany the Andean missions. After almost two years, he was appointed parish priest there on 12 April 2019.

As soon as he arrived, he dedicated himself to getting to know the people and putting himself at their pastoral service, being faithful to the instructions of the Archdiocese of Cusco and in collaboration with the local community. Since it was a missionary parish, he periodically visited all seventy-three communities, travelled to the most remote villages and reached the most humble and remote homes in a vast region. Eager to get even closer to the souls he served, he set about learning the Quechua language.

He initiated assistance and promotion projects, such as the parish canteen and a comprehensive psychological assistance programme, and, as a good Salesian, he gave encouragement to many oratories in the various villages. He intensely developed the renewal of catechesis along the lines of the RCIA, in

harmony with the Province's Educative and Pastoral Project. His commitment to the local Church was so great that he was appointed Dean of the region by the Archbishop of Cuzco. Among the testimonies of the people, the special care he had for some people (the poorest of the poor) stands out. David accompanied and promoted them in a special and very discreet way.

The testimonies received confirm that he was kind and attentive to the confreres in the community, an exemplary religious and a hard-working and committed apostle. From the very first moment he won the hearts of everyone with his kindness and serene cheerfulness; he was able to win the esteem and trust of people: companions, co-workers, parishioners and young people, thanks to his optimism, good sense, prudence and availability.

In addition to all this apostolic work, Davide was a much loved confrere: he loved being in the Salesian community, the confreres appreciated his good humour and his ability to create close bonds.

The young people at Monte Salvado (the school for young people from the jungle who attend the Salesian missionary community) loved him very much, appreciated the fact that he was happy to spend time with them during the break, and were impressed by his enthusiasm when he taught catechesis: his was a true sacrament of presence.

His earthly journey ended there: after sharing the feast of Mary Help of Christians with the parish community on 24 May 2022, he left for heaven in a car accident on his return around midnight. His final celebration of Our Lady would accompany him to Paradise.

Two fundamental traits that Don Bosco saw in St Francis de Sales – apostolic charity and loving-kindness – are those he most embodied. It is almost a reflection of what one of his

countrymen, Fr Antonio Cojazzi, used to say: “Cheerful face, heart in hand, there goes the Salesian.”



We hope that he will obtain many holy vocations for us from Heaven to accompany young people on their earthly journey. In the meantime, let us pray for him.

Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and may perpetual light shine upon him. May he rest in peace.

Commemorative video

St Francis de Sales. Life (1/8)

1. The early years

Francis was born in the family castle at [Thorens](#) (about 20 km from Annecy). He was seven weeks old and “it was a miracle that, in such a dangerous birth, his mother had not lost her life”. He was the eldest son followed by seven brothers and sisters. His mother, Françoise de Sionnaz, was just 15 years old while his father, Monsieur de Boisy, was 43! In those days, marriage among aristocrats was an opportunity to climb the social ladder (to gain noble titles, lands, castles...). The

rest, including love, came later!



Church of St. Maurice de Thorens, France

He was baptised in the small [church of St Maurice in Thorens](#). Years later, Francis chose that humble little church for his episcopal consecration (8 December 1602).

Francis spent his early years with his three cousins in the same castle: he played with them, amused himself and contemplated the splendid nature that surrounded him. It became the great book from which he would draw a thousand examples for his own books. The education he received from his parents was clearly Catholic. 'One must always think of God and be a man of God,' his father said, and Francis would treasure this advice. His parents regularly attended the parish and treated their employees fairly. They gave generously to them when needed. Francis' earliest memories were not only of the beauty of that wonderful nature, but also of the destruction and death caused by fratricidal wars in the name of the Gospel.

The time to go to school arrived: Francis left home and went to boarding school, first at [La Roche](#) for about two years and then for three years at [Annecy](#) in the company of his cousins. This time was marked by some important facts:

- he received his First Communion and Confirmation in the [church of St Dominique \(present-day Church of St Maurice\)](#) and from then on would frequently receive communion.

- he enrolled in the confraternity of the Rosary and from then on made a habit of saying the rosary daily.

- He asked to receive the tonsure: his father granted him permission, since this step did not imply the start of a clerical career at the time.

Francis was a normal, studious, obedient lad with a characteristic trait: "you never saw him make fun of anyone!"

By this time, [Savoy](#) had taught him all he could. And so in 1578, with his inseparable cousins and under the watchful eye of his tutor Déage, Francis left for [Paris](#) where he was to remain for ten years as a pupil at the [Clermont college](#) run by the Jesuits.

2. Ten significant years: 1578-1588

The timetable at the College was strict and the religious precepts were also demanding. During these years Francis studied Latin, Greek, Hebrew, familiarised himself with the classics and perfected his French. He had excellent teachers.

In his spare time, he frequented high-ranking circles, had free access to the Court, excelled in skills particular to the nobility, and took some theology courses at the [Sorbonne](#). In particular he listened to [Fr Génébrard's](#) Commentary on the Song of Songs and was deeply moved by it: he discovered the passion of God for humanity in this allegory of the love of a man for a woman. He felt loved by God! But at the same time the idea of being excluded from this love grew in his thinking. He felt he was damned! He experienced a time of crisis and for six weeks did not sleep or eat. He wept and fell ill. He only emerged from this state by entrusting himself to Our Lady in the [church of St-Etienne-des-Grès](#) with an act of heroic abandonment to God's mercy and goodness. He said a Salve Regina and the temptation vanished.

Finally, having completed his final exams, he was able to leave Paris, though not without regret. What a joy it was for Francis to return home and re-embrace his parents, his little brothers and sisters who had meanwhile arrived to cheer up the family.

All for only a few months, because he had to leave once more to achieve his father's dream: to become a great lawyer.

3. The Padua years: 1588-1591

These were the decisive years for Francis on a human, cultural and spiritual level.

[Padua](#) was the capital of the Italian Renaissance with

thousands of students coming from all over Europe: the universities were home to the most famous teachers, the best spirits of the time.

Here Francis studied law and at the same time developed his theological studies, read the Church Fathers, and placed himself in the hands of a wise spiritual director, Jesuit [Father Possevino](#). He came close to death's door, probably due to typhoid fever, received the sacraments and made a will: 'When I die, give my body to the medical students'. Such was the fervour for study and thirst for knowledge of the human body that medical students, short of corpses, would go to the cemetery to dig them up!

This testament of Francis is important because it speaks of a sensitivity he would retain for the rest of his life, for culture and the scientific innovations typical of the Renaissance.

He recovered, completed his studies brilliantly on 5 September 1591 and left Padua having "graduated with full marks *in utroque*" (civil and canon law). His father was proud of him.

4. Towards the priesthood: 1593

There were other dreams in Francis' heart, far removed from his father's, but how to tell him? Monsieur de Boisy placed all his hopes in Francis!

Francis was appointed [Provost](#) of [Annecy Cathedral](#). On the strength of this honorary title, he met with his father to tell him of his intention to become a priest. It was a harsh and understandable confrontation.

"I thought and hoped that you would be the staff of my old age and the support of the family...I do not share your intentions, but I do not deny you my blessing," his father concluded.

The way to the priesthood was open: in a few months, Francis received minor orders, the sub-diaconate, the diaconate and finally, on 18 December, priestly ordination. He spent three days preparing to celebrate his first mass on 21 December.

A few days after Christmas, Francis de Sales could be officially "installed" as provost of the cathedral and on that

occasion he delivered one of his most famous addresses, a veritable [harangue](#). One can already sense the ardour and zeal of the pastor, in tune with what the [Council of Trent](#) had indicated as the way to reform.

5. Missionary in the Chablais: 1594-1598

The [Chablais](#) is the territory bordering Lake [Geneva](#). The priests in this area of Savoy had been driven out by the [Calvinists](#) in Geneva and the churches were without pastors. But now, in 1594, [Duke Charles Emmanuel](#) had reconquered the area and urged the Bishop of Annecy to send new missionaries. The proposal was passed on to the clergy, but no one had the courage to go to such hostile areas, risking their lives. Only Francis declared himself available and on 14 September, with his cousin Louis, he left for this mission.

He took up residence in [the Allinges](#), a castle where Baron d'Hermance watched over his safety. Every morning, after Mass, he went down in search of the elders of [Thonon](#). On Sundays he preached in the [church of St Hippolytus](#), but the faithful were few in number. So he decided to write and have his sermons printed: he posted them in public places and slid them under the door of Catholics and Protestants alike.



Chapel of the Château des Allinges, France

His model was Jesus on the streets of Palestine: he was inspired by his gentleness and goodness, his frankness and sincerity. There was no lack of hostility and rejection, but 'the first ears of corn', the first conversions did come about. He was stern and inflexible towards error and those who spread heresy, but of unlimited patience towards all those he considered victims of the heretics' theories.

"I love preaching that relies more on love of neighbour than on indignation, even of the Huguenots, whom one must treat with great compassion, not by flattering them, but by

deploring them.” The Salesian spirit seems to be concentrated in this expression of Francis: **“Truth that is not charitable springs from charity that is not true”**.

The initiative to celebrate **the three Christmas Masses** in the church of St Hippolytus in 1596 is still worth remembering as a reminder, in this extraordinary period, of Francis’ zeal, kindness and courage.

But the initiative that contributed most to dismantling heresy in the Chablais was [Forty Hour](#) devotion promoted and led by Francis’ new collaborator, Fr Cherubin de la Maurienne. The devotion was celebrated at [Annemasse](#) in 1597, on the outskirts of Geneva.

The following year the Forty Hours were held at Thonon (beginning of October 1598).

At the end of the year, Francis had to leave the “mission” and go to [Rome](#) to deal with various problems of the diocese.

He made important friends in Rome ([Bellarmine](#), [Baronio](#), [Ancina](#)...) and met the priests of the [Oratory of St Philip Neri](#) and fell in love with their spirit.

He returned to Annecy via [Loreto](#), then by ship he sailed up to [Venice](#); he stopped in [Bologna](#) and [Turin](#) where he discussed with the Duke how much the Pope had granted to the parishes of the diocese.

In 1602, he went to Paris again to negotiate with the Nuncio and the King on delicate diplomatic issues concerning the diocese and relations with the Calvinists. He remained there for nine long months but returned home empty-handed. Despite this being the diplomatic result, the spiritual and human profit was able to draw from it was very rich and important.

Decisive for Francis’ life was his encounter with the famous [‘Madame Acarie’](#) group: it was a kind of spiritual gathering where the works of [St Teresa of Avila](#) and [St John of the Cross](#) were read, Thanks to this spiritual movement, the reformed Carmelite Order would be introduced to France.

On his way back, Francis received the news that his beloved bishop had died.

6. Francis, Bishop of Geneva: 1602–1622

Francis was consecrated bishop on 8 December 1602, in the little church of Thorens, and remained at the head of his diocese for twenty years. “On that day God took me from myself to take me for himself and thus give me to the people, meaning that he had transformed me from what I was for me into what I should be for them.”

Let me highlight three important aspects of this period:

6.1 Francis the pastor

During these years his zeal shone through in the words: “*Da mihi animas*” which became his programme.

“The priest is all for God and all for the people” he used to say, and he was the model of this first of all!

The problems of the diocese were many and very serious: they concerned the clergy, the monasteries, the training of future ministers, the non-existent seminary, catechesis, the lack of economic resources.

Francis immediately began visiting the more than four hundred parishes. This period of visitation lasted five or six years: he spoke with the priests, comforted, encouraged, solved the most thorny problems, preached, administered the sacrament of Confirmation to children or future spouses, celebrated weddings...

To remedy the ignorance of the clergy, he taught theology at home, and gathered his priests together in synod each year. He preached... “For some years, he taught many theological subjects to his canons in Annecy and dictated lessons to them in Latin.”

There were many who aspired to religious life or the priesthood: it was not vocations that were lacking. It was very often a real sense of vocation that was lacking!

He wrote a pamphlet, *Advice to Confessors*, a jewel of pastoral zeal where doctrine, personal experience, advice were interwoven...

He visited the numerous monasteries in the diocese: some he closed, had people in others transferred elsewhere, founded

new ones.

He struggled to have a seminary, right to the end: funds were lacking due to the selfishness of the Knights of St Lazarus and St Maurice, who withheld the revenues due to the diocese. The dominant characteristic in Francis the pastor was his ability **to accompany people**.

“It is a real effort to guide individual souls, but an effort that makes one feel it is as light as the reapers’ and harvesters’ efforts, who are never as happy as when they have much work and a big load to carry.”

The characteristics of this individualised style of education: **Richness of humanity**: “There are no souls in the world who love more warmly, more tenderly and I would say more completely and lovingly than I since it has pleased God to make my heart thus.”

Father and brother: he could be very demanding, but always in a gentle and serene way. He never avoided the real issue at stake: just read the first part of the *Introduction to the Devout Life* to realise this.

Prudence and practicality: “Be kind to yourself during this pregnancy... if you get tired of kneeling, sit down, and if you don’t have enough attention to pray for half an hour, pray for just a quarter of an hour...” (Madame de la Fléchère)

Sense of God: “You need to do everything through love and nothing through constraint; love obedience more than you fear disobedience. “May God be the God of your heart.”

Francis was described as the truest copy of Jesus on earth ([St. Vincent de Paul](#))

6.2 Francis the writer:

Despite the commitments associated with his being a bishop, Francis found time to devote himself to writing. Writing what?

Thousands of letters to people asking for his spiritual guidance, to the newly founded monasteries of the Visitation, to prominent members of the nobility or the Church to try to solve problems, and to his family and friends.

The *Introduction to the Devout Life* was published in 1608: it

is Francis' best known work.

"It is in the character, in the genius, but above all in the heart of Francis de Sales that one must seek the true origin and remote preparation of the *Introduction to the Devout Life* or *Philothea*": thus wrote Dom B. Mackey, a man who dedicated his life to the study of the Saint's works, in the introduction to the Annecy critical edition.

The preface bears the date of 8 August 1608.

This book received **an enthusiastic reception**.

La [Chantal](#) speaks of it as "a book dictated by the Holy Spirit". In its 400 years of life, the book has had over 1300 editions with millions of copies, translated into all the languages of the world.

Four centuries later, these pages still retain their charm and relevance.

In 1616, another of Francis' writings appeared: *The Treatise on the Love of God*, his masterpiece, written for those who want to aim for the heights! He guides them with wisdom and experience to live total abandonment to God's will... up to the point "where lovers meet!" that is, to Calvary. Only the saints know how to lead us to holiness.

6.3 Francis the founder

In 1604, Francis went to [Dijon](#) to preach for [Lent](#), invited by the Archbishop of [Bourges](#), Andrew Fremyot. From the outset he was struck by the attention and devout behaviour of one woman there, Baroness Jeanne François [Jane Frances] Fremyot, the archbishop's sister.

Between 1604, the year Jane met Francis, until 1610, the date Jane entered the novitiate at Annecy, the two saints met four or five times, each time for a week or ten days. The meetings were enlivened by the presence of various people from the family (Francis' mother, sister) or friends (Madame Brulart, the abbess of Puy d'Orbe...).

Jane Frances would have wanted to speed things up, but Francis proceeded with caution.

Little by little the various knots were loosened, they found consensus, serenity and peace grew and this allowed the problems to be better resolved.

God had taken possession of her heart and made her a woman ready to give her life for Him. Her long-cherished dream came true on 6 June 1610: a historic day! Jane Frances and her two friends (Giacomina Favre and Carlotta de Brécharde) entered a small house, "[la Galerie](#)" and began their novitiate year.

On 6 June the following year the three made their first professions before Francis. Meanwhile, other young people and women asked to be received. Thus began the religious family inspired by the Visitation of Mary.

The expansion of the new [Order](#) was prodigious. Some figures: from 1611 (year of foundation) to 1622 (year of Francis' death) there were thirteen foundations: Annecy, [Lyon](#), [Moulins](#), [Grenoble](#), Bourges, Paris.... By the time of Jane Frances' death in 1641, there would be 87 monasteries with an average of over 3 new ones per year! Among them two in Piedmont: Turin and [Pinerolo](#)!

7. Final years

Francis had to take the road to Paris twice in the last years of his life: important diplomatic and spiritual journeys, tiring journeys for him as he was already tired and in ill health.

Francis' reputation for holiness was known in Paris to the point that [Cardinal Henri de Gondi](#) thought of him as his likely successor and put it to him. Francis' sympathetic reply can be noted: "I married a poor woman (the diocese of Annecy); I cannot divorce to marry a rich one (the diocese of Paris)!"

In the last year of his life he undertook another trip to Pinerolo, Piedmont, at the Pope's request, to restore peace in a monastery at Foglianti (reformed Cistercians) who could not agree on their superior general. Francis managed to reconcile minds and hearts to their unanimous satisfaction.

Another order from the Duke required Francis to accompany [Cardinal Maurice of Savoy](#) to [Avignon](#) to meet [King Louis XIII](#).

On his return, he stopped in [Lyon at the Visitandine Monastery](#). Here he met Jane Frances de Chantal for the last time. He was exhausted, but still preached until the end, which came on 28 December 1622.

Francis died with a dream: to retire from the affairs of the diocese and to spend the last years of his life in the peaceful [Monastery at Talloires](#), on the shores of the lake, writing what he thought of as his final work, a *Treatise on the Love of Neighbour*, and praying the Rosary. We can be certain that he had already written this book through the example of his life; as for praying the Rosary, he now lacks neither time nor the tranquillity.

[\(continued\)](#)

Missionary in Amazonia

To be a missionary in Amazonia is to allow oneself to be evangelised by the forest

The beauty of the indigenous people of Rio Negro conquers hearts and causes our own heart to change, to expand, to be surprised and to identify with this land, to the point of it being impossible to forget “dear Amazonia”! This is the

experience of Leonardo, a young Salesian in the heart of Amazonia.

How did the idea of being a missionary arise in your heart?

This desire matured within me over many years of listening to the stories of Salesian missionaries, their witness as bearers of the love of God to the world. I have always admired these confreres who experienced divine love in their lives and could not remain silent; rather they felt compelled to announce it to others so that they too could prove how much they were loved by God. So it was that I asked to have an experience in the Salesian missions in Amazonia among the indigenous peoples. In 2021 I began to live and work as a “practical trainee” in the São Gabriel da Cachoeira missionary community, in the state of Amazonia. It was a real “missionary school”, full of new discoveries and experiences, of unimagined challenges, facing realities totally unknown to me until then.



What were your first impressions on arriving in an unknown

Land?

From the first moment that I looked out the window of the plane and saw the vastness of the forest and the many rivers, my mind “clicked”: I really am in Amazonia! Just as I have always seen on TV, the Amazon region is of exuberant beauty, with beautiful natural landscapes, true masterpieces of God the Creator. Another very beautiful first impression was seeing so many indigenous brothers and sisters, with such striking physical characteristics, such as the colour of their skin, their bright eyes and their black hair. To see the diversity and cultural richness of Amazonia is to remember our history, to remember our origin as Brazil and to understand better who we are as a people.

And why the choice of the Amazon? What is special about it for you?

The Church, including our Salesian Congregation, is essentially missionary. However, in the Northern region this is even more so because the territories are immense; access, generally by river, is difficult and costly; the cultural and linguistic diversity is vast and there is an enormous lack of priests, religious and other leaders who can carry out evangelization and the presence of the Church in these lands. Therefore, there is a lot of work and “heavy”, demanding work. It is not only the service of visits, preaching, celebrating the sacraments, as one might think of missionary life, but it means sharing the life and work of the people, carrying heavy burdens, feeling the need, exclusion, and abandonment of the people by the politicians; spending hours on the road or on the river; feeling the stings of insects; eating the food of the simple people “seasoned” with the spices of love, sharing and of welcome; listening to the stories of the elderly, often with words and expressions that we do not understand well; getting muddy feet and clothes, unheated cars; being without internet and, sometimes, even without electricity... All of this

is involved in Salesian missionary life in Amazonia!

Tell us something more about the Salesian work where you have lived? What do the Salesians do for the young people of the region?

One of the purposes of our Salesian community in Sao Gabriel is the Oratory and Social Work: it is the Salesian playground, our direct work with the young people of "Gabriel" who frequent our Oratory every day and find in our house a place to play, have fun and live in a healthy way with their friends and colleagues. The young people here love sports, especially the national passion that is football. As the city does not offer many options for leisure and sport, the kids are present at our work all the time we are in operation and they complain a lot when it's time to end the day's activities. An average of 150 to 200 young people pass through our work every day. Besides this, the Salesian Missionary Centre offers courses for teenagers and older youth, such as computer and bakery courses.

And if a young person, knowing you and liking the charism, expresses the desire to become a Salesian, is there a way to be formed as such?

Yes, for some years now our community has also been running the Centro de Formação Indígena (CFI), which aims at accompanying and welcoming young indigenous people from all our missionary communities who want to follow vocational accompaniment and be helped in drawing up a Life Project. This accompaniment is what the Indigenous Aspirantate of the Salesian Missionary Province of Amazonia (ISMA) is all about. Besides offering this formation process, CFI offers classes in Portuguese, Salesianity, computer and bakery courses, spiritual and psychological accompaniment and gradual insertion within Salesian life. It is really an experience that is highly valued by them, since they are the first steps on the formation journey and it is done in their environment, with their people, with the affection and closeness of the

Salesians and lay leaders.



You said that there are other missionary communities besides San Gabriel? How is this? How does the missionary work in Rio Negro function?

Because it has more connections and services, our Sao Gabriel community is the base seeing to links and logistics with our missions in the interior, especially Maturacá (with the Yanomami people) and Iauaretê (in the “tukano triangle”). In these missionary situations there is no formal commerce, and when there is, the prices are extremely high. Therefore, all purchases of food, hygiene products, materials for repairs and fuel for the boats used in the itinerance (pastoral visits to the riverside communities) and the production of electricity by generator, are done in São Gabriel and then sent by us, via river transport, to these locations. It is a very intense manual work, because we have to buy and then carry a lot of

heavy materials to the boats that will take these products to our people who live and work in the other missions. We carry food bags, Styrofoam boxes with meat and several “carotes” (plastic containers for carrying liquids) of 50 litres of fuel each. Besides this, our house has several rooms, always available and prepared to host the missionary confreres who are passing through São Gabriel, either going to or returning from the other missions. It is a real work of assistance and networking.

And do you remember any powerful experiences from these “itinerance” on the rivers?

Yes, of course, in relation to these “itinerance”, one experience that impressed me deeply was the one at **Maturacá**. We had days of profound experience of the encounter with God through the encounter with others, with those who are different from us, with our neighbour, because we made a pastoral visit to the Yanomami people’s communities.



In addition to the headquarters of the Salesian Mission at Maturacá, we visited six other communities (Nazaré, Cachoeirinha, Aiari, Maiá, Marvim and Inambú). These were intense and challenging days. Firstly, because each community is very distant from one another and access is only possible by means of the tributaries of our beloved Amazon, travelling in a motorised boat (called a voadeira), under strong sun or heavy rain. Secondly, they are traditional Yanomami communities, so culture shock is inevitable, as they have habits, customs and ways of life that are completely different to us non-indigenous people. Thirdly, there are the practical challenges, such as the lack of electricity 24 hours a day, no telephone signal, little choice and variety of food, bathing and washing clothes in the river, living with insects and other animals of the forest... A real anthropological and spiritual "dive". We celebrated the Eucharist in all the communities and several baptisms in some of them, we visited

the families and prayed with the children. It was a fantastic experience of encounter, special days, days of gratitude, days of returning to the most essential aspects of our faith and Salesian Youth Spirituality: love for Jesus, fruit of our personal encounter with Him, and the love for our neighbour that is manifested in the desire to be with him and to become his friend.

This remarkable “itinerance” undoubtedly left you with much to learn in your life, true?

These pastoral visits are a real “school” and give us life lessons: detachment, because the more “things” we accumulate, the “heavier” the journey becomes; living in the present, because in the middle of Amazonia, without access to the means of information, the only contact is with present reality, whatever is around us, the forest, the river, the sky, the boat; gratuitousness, because we face difficulties and weariness without expecting gestures of human gratitude. Finally, geographical itinerance leads us to an “inner itinerance”, conversion, a return to the essentials of life and faith. To sail the rivers of Amazonia is to sail to interior rivers. To be in the missions is to be constantly provoked to free oneself from preconceived and rigid ideas in order to be freer to love and welcome the other and to announce the joy of the Gospel to them.

A very special lesson that I learn every day in the missions is that to be a good missionary I must be someone deeply marked and touched by the merciful love of God, and only from this experience can I be ready to “take” and “show” everywhere how God loves us and can transform our whole life. I also learn that, being a missionary, I take and show this love, first of all with my own life given to the mission. Without saying a word, by the simple fact of leaving my origins and embracing new cultures, I can reveal that the love of God is worth much more than all the things we consider valuable in our lives. Therefore, the missionary’s life is his first and

greatest witness and proclamation!

You have had this missionary experience, but can it be said that you too have been evangelised? What has given you satisfaction in your heart?

Finally, being in São Gabriel, the most indigenous municipality in Brazil, "home" to 23 multicultural and multilingual ethnic groups, I realize every day that, in calling us to be missionaries, God calls us to be capable of being enchanted by the beauty and mystery which is each person and each culture of our world. Therefore, following the example of the Master, Jesus, missionary of the Father, we are called to "empty ourselves" of everything in order to "fill ourselves" with the beauties and marvels present in every corner of the earth and to associate them with the preciousness of the Gospel. This was one of the most profound experiences for me.

At the end of all this, I believe that satisfaction comes from the smiles and cries of our boys and girls playing, running, jumping, throwing a ball, telling their jokes; it comes from the curious and brilliant glances of the men and women of the forest; joy comes from contemplating the beauty of nature, the generosity of the people and the perseverance of the Christians who remain, at times, for months without the presence of a priest, but who look at and touch with love and devotion the little feet of the small image of Our Lady or the cross on the altar. In the Salesian missions of Rio Negro one learns to live without excesses, to value simplicity and to rejoice in the little things of life. Here all becomes a feast, dance, music, celebration, faith. Here one lives in the same poverty and simplicity as at the beginning of Valdocco, where Don Bosco, Mamma Margaret, Dominic Savio, Fr Rua and so many others lived and were sanctified. Being in Amazonia certainly enriches us as people, Christians and Salesians of Don Bosco!

Interview of Don Gabriel ROMERO with the young Salesian

Leonardo Tadeu DA SILVA OLIVEIRA, from the Province of São João Bosco based in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil.

Amazonia Photo Gallery

< >



New missionaries

La prima spedizione missionaria fu benedetta dalle lacrime di don Bosco che disse: «Noi diamo principio ad una grand'opera. Chi sa, che non sia questa partenza come un seme da cui abbia a sorgere una grande pianta?». La profezia si è avverata. La prima volta fu [...]

Letter Rector Major. Appeal for missionaries 2023

We remember 163 years ago – 18th December 1859 – when Don Bosco founded our “””Pious Society of St. Francis de Sales.” Since then, it has never stopped expanding. Thanks to our missionaries today Don Bosco’s charism is present in 134 countries, and next year we are preparing to start new presences in Niger and Algeria. Don Bosco’s 6th successor, Fr. Luigi Ricceri, had reminded us that the missionary spirit and commitment were not only a personal interest of our founder but a true *charisma foundationis* that he transmitted to us and to the whole Salesian Family (ACG 261, p.14). Therefore, today is a beautiful opportunity to send you this appeal for missionaries.

During the send-off of the first missionary expedition in 1875 Don Bosco had made a prophecy: “... Who knows if this departure, this humble beginning, may be the seed that will grow into a mighty tree? ... Who knows if this departure may awaken in many hearts a desire to consecrate themselves to God in the missions, to join forces with us and reinforce our ranks? I hope so. ...” (BMXI, 385). In 1875, even though there were only 171 Salesians (64 perpetually professed of whom 49 were priests, 107 temporarily professed) and 81 novices, Don Bosco sent 11 Salesians to Argentina. At his death in 1888 there were 773 Salesians of whom 137 were missionaries sent by Don Bosco himself in eleven missionary expeditions.

Today we find ourselves in a vastly different context from Don Bosco’s time. Today “missions” cannot be understood solely as a movement towards “mission lands” as in the past. Today Salesian missionaries come from the five continents and are sent by the Rector Major to the five continents. In a world where borders are in danger of closing more and more, Salesian missionaries are sent not only to respond to the need for

personnel but, above all, to bear witness that for us there are no borders, to contribute to intercultural dialogue, to the inculturation of faith and of our charism, and to trigger processes that can generate new local vocations.



In my first letter as Rector Major, I expressed my conviction that “a great treasure of our Congregation is precisely its missionary capability.” (ACG 419, p. 24). I have a firm conviction that we Salesians need to journey towards a greater awareness of our internationality. And the missionary generosity of the confreres is a prophetic witness that our Congregation is without borders. Indeed, the presence of missionaries in a Province helps better reflect the internationality of our Congregation and that the Salesian charism is not monochromatic and that differences and multiculturalism enrich the Province and our whole Congregation.

On the contrary, a Province composed only of confreres from the same culture risks being reduced to an ethnic enclave that is less sensitive to the challenge of interculturality and less able to see beyond the boundaries of its own cultural world. This is why I have insisted several times that we do not make our religious profession for a country or a Province. We are Salesians of Don Bosco in the Congregation and for the mission, wherever we are most needed and wherever our service is possible.



Already in 1972, our Special General Chapter had considered missionary relaunching as “the thermometer of the pastoral vitality of the Congregation and an effective means against the danger of taking a middle-class lifestyle.” (SCG, 296). Likewise, the capacity of the confreres to welcome and accompany the new missionaries sent to their Province is a thermometer of their missionary spirit.

Thanks to the missionary spirit in our Congregation, confreres continue to give their lives to God as missionaries. To my appeal last 18th December 2021, 36 Salesians responded by sending me the letter expressing their missionary availability. After careful discernment 25 were chosen as members of the 153rd missionary expedition this year. The rest continue their discernment.

Therefore, with this letter, I invite you, dear confreres, to pray and make a careful discernment whether the Lord is calling you, within our common Salesian vocation, to be missionaries, which implies a lifelong commitment (*ad vitam*).

I invite the Provincials, together with their Delegates for missionary animation (PDMA), to be the first to help the confreres cultivate the missionary desire and to facilitate their discernment, inviting them, after personal dialogue, to place themselves at the disposal of the Rector Major to respond to the missionary needs of the Congregation. Then the General Councillor for the Missions, in my name, will continue the discernment that will lead to the choice of the missionaries for the 154th missionary expedition that will take place, God willing, on Sunday 24th September 2023, in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Valdocco, as it has been done since the time of Don Bosco.

The dialogue with the General Councillor for the Missions and the shared reflection within the General Council allows me to indicate the urgencies for 2023 and where I would like a considerable number of confreres be sent:

- to South Africa, Mozambique and to new frontiers on the African continent;
- to Albania, Kosovo, Slovenia and to other new frontiers of Project Europe;
- to Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Mongolia, and Yakutia;
- to our many presences in the islands of Oceania;
- to missionary frontiers of Latin America and amongst

indigenous peoples.

I greet you, dear confreres, with genuine affection and with a remembrance before Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco here in Valdocco.

Turin Valdocco, 18th December 2022

Youth and family pastoral care

Investing in the education of youth to build the families of today and tomorrow

The education of young people is the primary task of parents, connected to the transmission of life, and a primary duty with respect to the educative task of other subjects; the role of the EPC is therefore proposed as a complement, not a substitute for the educative role of youngsters' parents. The contribution of vocation as family, parents and couples can be identified in at least three central themes: love, life and education.

Caring for the family arouses great interest around the world. Particular attention is given to the issue through articles, scientific publications and conference documents. At the same time, the family is asked to take care of the bonds that make up the dense network that supports the person of young people in the growth process and that increases the quality of life of a community. Therefore, it is necessary to promote adequate

educative-pastoral strategies to support the family, on the role it has in building interpersonal and intergenerational relationships, as well as in the overall understanding of the education and accompaniment of new generations.

In its complexity, each family is like a book that needs to be read, interpreted, and understood with great care, attention, and respect. In our contemporary society, family life has, indeed, certain conditions that expose it to weakness.

Meeting Don Bosco is a timeless journey. Following his dreams; understanding his passion for education; learning about his talent for pulling young people out of the “wrong path” to make them “good Christians and honest citizens”, to educate them in the Christian faith and social conscience, to guide them to an honest profession, is an experience of extraordinary human and familiar intensity. Don Bosco’s experience has deep roots. His life, indeed, is filled with families, a multitude of relationships, generations, youth without families, love stories and family crises, from the earliest years of his life, when he has to face the loss of his father at a very young age.

The Educative-Pastoral Community is one of the forms, if not the form, in which the family spirit is embodied. In it, the Preventive System becomes operational in a community project. As a large family that is responsible for the education and evangelization of young people in a specific territory, the EPC is the actualization of that intuition which, at the origin of the Salesian charism, Don Bosco often repeated: “I have always needed everyone’s help”. Starting from this conviction, from the earliest days of the Oratory, he built around himself a family-community that did take into account the diverse cultural, social and economic conditions of its collaborators and in which young people themselves are the protagonists.



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Pastoral theology, in this process of accountability, affirms that the family is the recipient, context and subject of pastoral action. This reflection leads us to question the originality of the family within the EPC, which can occupy a specific place. The contribution of vocation as family, parents and couples can be identified in at least three central themes: love, life and education.

For this reason, both locally and at a provincial level, it is necessary to start planning formative courses for operators/educators, integrating families into the SEPP, where the educative and pastoral proposal is structured around activities in which the family is the protagonist in favour of young people. These paths must include dialogue, the methodology of family pedagogy and the Salesian Spirituality as their central core.

For this reason, it is essential for the youth ministry to redesign itself together in a vocational sense; at the same time, it is necessary to enter into the daily life of families, speak their language, remain next to the fragility of relationships and recognize the hardships present in the lives of many of them, taking care of young people without families, young families, the most fragile family situations (from poverty, inequality and vulnerability) by promoting solidarity among families. It is then essential to accompany the love of young couples/families by taking care of them and planning a good and constant formation in love for the development of every vocation.

All that has been said regarding the Salesian Youth Ministry and Family, in order to be realised, the launching of

formation processes for all the members of the EPC: for consecrated Salesians and for lay people who support the development of SEPP and the Salesian Family.