

Preparations for the 150th Anniversary of the First Salesian Missionary Expedition (1875-2025)

Next year, 2025, is the 150th anniversary of the departure of the first Salesian missionary expedition. In view of this anniversary, the Salesian Missions Department wants to prepare for the event and launches an introduction for the Salesian communities. This event is proposed as: Give Thanks, Rethink, Relaunch.

Give Thanks: We give thanks to God for the gift of missionary vocation which enables the sons of Don Bosco today to reach out to poor and abandoned youth in 136 countries.

Rethink: This is an opportune occasion to rethink and develop a renewed vision on the Salesian Missions in the light of new challenges and new perspectives which led to new missiological reflections.

Relaunch: We have not only a glorious history to remember and be grateful for, but also a great history still to be accomplished! We look to the future with missionary zeal and enthusiasm so that we may reach out to even more poor and abandoned youth.

The official logo: The *globe* crossed by waves which symbolise courage and new challenges, but also energy and boldness. At the centre is a *ship*, symbol of the first Salesian Missionary Expedition (1875), and, at the same time, the *fire* of a renewed missionary enthusiasm. The *shape of the wheel* alludes to unity and mutual connection. *The logo may be used only in the official version without making any changes or alterations to any part of the logo.* It is available in different formats

and can be downloaded (<http://tinyurl.com/33nt6y3b>) or requested by email (cagliero11 @ sdb.org).

Objective of the 2025 celebrations:

Keep the missionary spirit and enthusiasm alive in the Congregation in order to foster greater missionary zeal and generosity among the Salesians and the whole EPC (Educational and Pastoral Community) (cf. [Rector Major's Guidelines for the Salesian Congregation after General Chapter 28, no. 7, ACG 433/2020](#)).

Not an event but a *process* of missionary renewal

The 150th anniversary of the first missionary expedition ought not be only a commemorative event but a *process* of missionary renewal that already started with the drawing up of the six-year plan of missionary animation. Its high moment is 2025 but continues in the succeeding years. This takes place at three levels.

1. At the province level

Celebrations will be mainly at the Province level. Through the RCMA (**R**egional **C**oordinator for **M**issionary **A**nimation) the Missions Sector will continue to follow-up on each Province's Plan of missionary animation, of which the initiatives at the Province level for 2025 are part of.

In the context of the celebration, through the PDMA (**P**rovincial **D**elegates for **M**issionary **A**nimation) each Province will be actively encouraged to evaluate how it has put into practice the *Rector Major's Guidelines* Nos. 2, 5, 7.

"It is urgent that we give absolute priority to the commitment to evangelise the young with conscious, intentional, and explicit proposals. [...] We respond to the **"urgency of offering initial proclamation with more conviction**, because 'Nothing is more solid, profound, secure, meaningful and wisdom-filled than that initial proclamation' ([Christus Vivit](#), no. 214) (*Guidelines*, n. 2)

Let all Provinces make the *radical, preferential, personal and institutional option* – meaning on the part of every Salesian, on behalf of the most in need, boys, girls and poor and excluded youth, giving particular attention to the defence of those who are exploited and victims of what-ever abuse and violence (“the abuse of power, the abuse of conscience, sexual and financial abuse”) (*Guidelines* n. 5).

We made the missionary appeal concrete by inviting *each Province to open a missionary project* (refugees, immigrants, border crossings, exploited children...) during the previous six years, giving priority to the significance and the real requests for help from today’s youth (*Guidelines* n. 7).”

Each Province is asked to make a concrete initiative for 2025 (e.g., the Provinces of ARS and ARN are preparing a Historical Congress; the ZMB Vice Province has initiated the opening of a new presence in Botswana, etc.). This will be made known through [ANS](#), etc.

2. At the missions sector level

2025 will be an occasion to make known the result of the work now underway on refugees, gypsies, Identity of Salesian Missionary Museums, Identity of Provincial Mission Offices, conclusions of roundtable discussion of missiologists and theologians on Salesian missions today, Salesian Missionary Volunteering, *Bosco Food* (to create an intercultural mindset), Missionary Animation materials, SMD (**S**alesian **M**ission **D**ay) 2025, etc.

3. At the Congregation level

Missionary send-off (156th missionary expedition) on November 11, 2025 in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, Valdocco. This is a celebration through which the Congregation renews its missionary commitment in front of Mary Help of Christians.

The Rector Major invites each Province to send the PDMA for the celebration. They will spend a few days (9-12 Nov 2025) in Valdocco and Genoa to “Give Thanks, Rethink, Relaunch.

The Giving of the Salesian Missionary Cross

On 24 September the Rector Major presided at the giving of the missionary cross to the members of the 154th Missionary expedition of the Salesian Congregation. This is the 154th group since Don Bosco presided at the first missionary send-off in Valdocco on 11 November 1875.

The missionary send-off in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Valdocco is the way in which the Salesian Congregation renews its missionary commitment before Mary Help of Christians. The heart of this touching celebration is the missionary who receives the missionary cross from the successor of Don Bosco, the Rector Major. In fact, this distinctive Salesian missionary cross is given by the Rector Major only to those who offer the radical and complete gift of self which, by its very nature, implies total availability without any time limits (*ad vitam*).

Receiving the Cross expresses many emotions and spiritual challenges. The life of the missionary is focused on the person of Christ and of Christ crucified. It implies that the missionary first receives and then passes on the great teaching of the Cross: the infinite love of the Father who gives the best of himself, his Son; love to the end that is obedient and generous in giving oneself to the will of the Father for the salvation of humanity. For every Salesian missionary "Our highest knowledge [...] is to know Jesus Christ, and our greatest delight is to reveal to all people the unfathomable riches of his mystery." (SDB Constitutions art. 34).

The Good Shepherd in the Salesian missionary cross reveals Salesian Christology: pastoral charity is the nucleus of the Salesian spirit, the attitude that “wins hearts by gentleness and self-giving” (SDB Constitutions art. 10-11).

Da Mihi Animas cetera Tolle (give me souls, take away the rest): This is the motto that characterised the Sons of Don Bosco from the beginning. In a missionary context this brief Salesian prayer acquires particular significance: leave everything, even one’s land and culture, and the things that give security, in order to devote oneself without limit to those to whom one is sent, to be an instrument of salvation for them.

The Holy Spirit who comes down on the Good Shepherd in the river Jordan, descends now on Christ present in the pastoral dynamism of the Church. Without the Holy Spirit, and without the light, discernment, strength and holiness that come from the Spirit, all missionary activity is no more than a series of activities, sometimes empty, carried out in distant places.

Finally, the text written at the back of the cross: “*Euntes ergo docete omnes nationes baptizantes eos in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti*” (Mt 28:19) (Go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit): the heart of the missionary mandate given by the Risen Lord. The text gives a mandate to teach all people so that they may become followers and disciples of Jesus (the Greek text emphasizes *mathêteúsate*, “make disciples”, which is more than just *docete*, “teach”). Evangelisation, the fullness of grace, comes through words and deeds, with the greatest of all the sacramental graces which is baptism that plunges the person into the mystery of communion with God.

In 1875 Don Bosco sent 10 Italian Salesians to Argentina. Today, missionaries come from all populated continents and are sent to all populated continents. Every Salesian, every

Province shares responsibility for the missionary activity of the whole Congregation. Thanks to Salesian missionaries, Don Bosco's charism is now present in 134 countries. The reflections of some members of the 154 missionary expedition reveal how much Salesian missionaries have touched people's lives, and in turn, generate new Salesian missionary vocations.

Cl. Jorge DA LUÍSA JOÃO, Salesian from in Bengo, Angola is 31 years old. "The seed of my missionary vocation developed when we watched missionary videos in the Salesian community at Benguela, where I became an external aspirant. Then during my prenovitiate, novitiate and post novitiate this developed with the accompaniment of my spiritual guide. Now that the Rector Major has accepted my missionary application and sends me to Capo Verde. my dream is to give my whole life in the mission land where I will be sent and be buried there, just like the missionaries who gave everything for Angola and whose bodies rest on Angolan soil."

Cl. Soosai ARPUTHARAJ from Michaelpalayam, Tamilnadu. "My missionary vocation began when I was a in the beginning of my initial formation, but I was afraid to tell anyone of my missionary desire. But during the meeting for young Salesians of our Province they spoke to us of missionary experience. This made me ask myself: "Why can't I become a missionary *ad gentes* in the Salesian congregation?" I am grateful to my Vice-Provincial who guided me to finally make this decision to offer myself to the Rector Major to go wherever he will send me. Thus, I accepted willingly the proposal of the General Councillor for Missions to send me to Romania. I know this is God's call to me to give my life to the youngsters of Romania.

Cl. Joshua TARERE, 30 years old from, hails from Vunadidir, East New Britain, Papua New Guinea. He is the first salesian missionary from Oceania. "When I was a child I knew only the diocesan priest in my parish. As a secondary student I was not in a Salesian school. But thanks to Salesians from Don Bosco

Rapolo who came to my parish for Sunday mass, I was inspired by their missionary work. They came to my country to serve the young people. This experience of service and availability to others helped me identify myself with their missionary vocation."

"During my novitiate my Novice Master, Fr. Philip Lazatin, encouraged me to discern and clarify my missionary interest. In the Post Novitiate, I continued my discernment with my Rector, Fr. Ramon Garcia, as well as with my spiritual guide, to discover if my desire to be a Salesian missionary is truly a call from God. After a long period of discernment, I finally decided to apply to the Rector Major and make myself available anywhere he will send me to. This I did freely without any pressure from anyone."

"I am told that I am the first Salesian from Oceania to be a missionary. But to me this is not important. What is important is my availability to respond with generosity to God's personal call to me. As a missionary to South Sudan, I have a mixed feeling of fear and courage. The media present all negative images of violence, and displaced people in South Sudan. But I am also inspired to be courageous because I know fully well that the Lord who has sent me for His mission will surely take care of me. My fears have not overtaken my great desire to serve, to love and to be one with the new culture and people I am sent to."

Cl. Francois MINO NOMENJANAHARY from Antananarivo, the capital of Madagascar is 25 years old. He is destined for the Vice-Province of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, offers us his testimony today. "I have to admit that I have never heard of Papua New Guinea before, until Fr. Alfred Maravilla, proposed that I go there. I accepted willingly to be sent because I have offered my availability to respond to God's call to me to be a missionary. I also had to explain to my parents and family where my missionary destination is. Thanks be to God, they came to accept it. Surely, Like everyone else, I have my fears. I am happy to meet missionaries in Papua New

Guinea in this course. I am happy to know that the first Papua New Guinean Catholic priest, Louis Vangeke, was formed in the seminary in Madagascar. This makes me feel also connected to my mission land.

Fr. Michał CEBULSKI from Katowice, Poland is 29 years old. He was ordained a few months ago, in June. "As a young Salesian he spent a year of practical training in Ireland. "Since I was a child I heard stories about missionaries which developed in me the desire to be like them. I am happy that I am sent to Lithuania, the country that shares a border with Poland. Although my country shares the border with Lithuania and we have similarities regarding food and culture, the Lithuanian language will not be easy for me. My new Provincial told me that I will have to learn Italian for some months. But once I will be in Lithuania, approaching the people and understanding their culture will be my priority. I hope that the Lithuanian people will discover God's love through my service. I want to help young people to live with true joy, which Don Bosco told us, is caused by a pure heart."

Br. Kerwin P. VALEROSO, a 35-year-old Salesian Brother from Pura, Tarlac, Philippines is going to the new Circumscription of North Africa (CNA). "Once I saw the pictures of the first three missionary expeditions of Salesians. Thinking about the places where they reached, the works they built, the hearts they have touched, and the souls they have saved, I felt that this was my vocation. I am grateful to my formators, mentors, and friends who co-journeyed with me to purify and strengthen my missionary vocation."

"I am grateful to my family, confreres and friends who made me feel their support, prayers, and well wishes as I embark to respond to my missionary vocation. I do not hide that I have mixed feeling of joy and fear in going to North Africa whose language, culture, or people I do not know yet. I have no knowledge of Islam either. However, my main task now is to learn well this year the French language. I have to say that

our confreres in Paris, France have made me really felt welcomed. I am also grateful to my Province of origin (FIN) that despite the multitude of work in the apostolate, has generously encouraged me to offer myself for the missionary works of our Congregation."

Cl. Dominic NGUYEN QUOC OAT, 30 years old, is from Dong Nai, Vietnam. "I had been interested about the mission since I was in Secondary School. I even shared with my high school classmates about my dream of becoming a missionary. As a young Salesian I had discerned because I believe that God is inviting me to be a missionary for Him and for his people, hence I applied make a lifelong missionary commitment wherever the Rector Major will send me."

"God has offered me an opportunity to be a missionary in Great Britain. I'm happy to accept my missionary destination although, I have some concerns because I am an Asian who is being sent to Europe. I need to educate myself more about the language and culture of my mission country. But I believe that God who called me to be a Salesian missionary will continue to bless me with his Grace to carry out the mission he has entrusted to me."

Fr. Andre DELIMARTA, is one of the first two Indonesian Salesians. At 55 years old, he had been Novice Master, Rector, Parish Priest in his Vice Province (INA). He is a member of last year's 153rd missionary expedition destined for Malaysia, but he will receive the missionary cross only this September 24. "I grew up with Salesians. The loving-kindness, hard work, commitment and the spirit of sacrifice of Salesian missionaries like Fr Alfonso Nacher, Fr Jose Carbonell, Deacon Baltasar Pires and Fr Jose Kusy have had a great impact on me. It was they who taught me Don Bosco, introduced me to the Congregation and made me fall in love with their missionary zeal".

"When I was in initial formation I wanted to be a missionary but my formators prohibited me because they said Don Bosco has

to take root in Indonesia. In fact, as the first Indonesian Salesian I had insisted on making Don Bosco's charism take root in Indonesia as our priority. But when the insistent appeal for missionaries was relayed to our Vice Province, my missionary vocation was reignited. My love for Don Bosco and for the Congregation made me decide to offer myself as a missionary. If the Congregation needs missionaries, then I want to say: "Here I am! I'll go!"

Here are all 24 members of the 154th Salesian Missionary Expedition:



- Shivraj BHURIYA, from India (Mumbai Province – INB) to Slovenia (SLO);
- Thomas NGUYEN QUANG QUI, from Vietnam (VIE) to Great Britain (GBR);
- Dominic NGUYEN QUOC OAT, from Vietnam (VIE) to Great Britain (GBR);
- Jean Bernard Junior Gerald GUIELLE FOUETRO, from the Republic of Congo (Africa Congo Province – ACC) to Germany (GER);
- Br Blaise MULUMBA NTAMBWE, from the Democratic Republic of Congo (Province of Central Africa – AFC) to Germany (GER);
- Fr Michael CEBULSKI, from Poland (Province of Cracow – PLS) to Lithuania (Special Circumscription of Piedmont and Valle d'Aosta – ICP);
- Br Kerwin VALEROSO, from the Philippines (Province of the Northern Philippines – FIN) to the North Africa Constituency (NAC);
- Br Joseph NGO DUC THUAN, from Vietnam (VIE) to the North African Circumscription (NAC);
- Fr Domenico PATERNÒ, from Italy (Province of Sicily – ISI) to the North African Circumscription (NAC);
- David Broon, from India (Province of Tiruchy – INT) to Albania (Province of Southern Italy – IME);
- Elisée TUUNGANE NZIBI, from the Democratic Republic of Congo

(Province of Central Africa – AFC) to Albania (Province of Southern Italy – IME);

- Fr George KUJUR, from India (Province of Dimapur – IND) to Nepal (Province of India-Calcutta – INC);
- Br Soosai ARPUTHARAJ, from India (Province of Chennai – INM) to Romania (Province of North East Italy – INE);
- Br John the Baptist NGUYEN VIET DUC, from Vietnam (VIE) to Romania (Province of North East Italy – INE);
- Br Mario Alberto JIMÉNEZ FLORENCE, from Vietnam (Province of Central Africa – AFC) to Romania (Province of North East Italy – IME);
- Br John Paul VIET DUC, from Vietnam (Province of India – IND) to Romania (Province of North East Italy – INE);
- Br John Paul L. Mario Alberto JIMÉNEZ FLORES, from Mexico (Province of Guadalajara – MEG) to the Delegation of South Sudan (DSS);
- Sarathkumar RAJA, from India (Province of Chennai – INM) to Sri Lanka (LKC);
- Lyonnel Richie Éric BOUANGA, from the Republic of Congo (Province of Africa Congo – ACC) to the Vice Province of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands (PGS);
- Joshua TARERÉ, from Papua New Guinea (PGS) to the Delegation of South Sudan (DSS);
- Nomenjanahary François MINO, from Madagascar (MDG) to the Vice Province of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands (PGS);
- Jean KASONGO MWAPE, from the Democratic Republic of Congo (Province of Central Africa – AFC) to Brazil (Province of Brazil-Porto Alegre – BPA);
- Khyliait WANTEILANG, from India (Province of Shillong – INS), to Brazil (Province of Brazil-Porto Alegre – BPA);
- Fr Joseph PHAM VAN THONG, from Vietnam (VIE) to South Africa (Vice Province of Southern Africa – AFM);
- Fr Miguel Rafael Coelho GIME, from Angola (ANG) to Mozambique (MOZ);
- Klimer Xavier SANCHEZ, from Ecuador (ECU) to Mozambique (MOZ).

Towards a renewed missionary outlook

Salesian missions abroad, one of the characteristics of the Congregation founded by St John Bosco, begun during his lifetime, continue even though the concepts of mission and missionaries have changed due to the needs of the times.

Today we find ourselves in a different context than the missionary projects that spread the Congregation to America (1875), Asia (1906) and Africa (1980). New perspectives and questions have brought new missiological reflections. A renewed vision of Salesian missions is urgently needed.

In many countries, including countries of ancient Christian tradition, there are urban centres, or neighbourhoods, where people live who do not know Jesus, others who, after having known him, have abandoned him, or still others who live their faith as mere cultural tradition. Therefore, today “the missions” cannot be understood only in geographical terms, of movement towards “mission lands” as in the past, but also in sociological, cultural and even digital terms. Today “missions” are found wherever there is a need to proclaim the Gospel. And missionaries come from and are sent to all continents.

Salesian missionaries collaborate with the Church in fulfilling its mission to evangelise (Mt 28:19-20). Proclaiming the Gospel, especially to the young, is the primary missionary task of every Salesian. Salesian initiatives for human advancement, motivated by deep faith, are a First Proclamation of Jesus Christ. As educators and pastors, every Salesian appreciates the “rays of Truth” in

cultures and other religions. In contexts where the name of Jesus cannot even be mentioned, we proclaim Him with the witness of personal and community Salesian life. It is intentionality in promoting the First Proclamation that can help us overcome the danger of being seen as social service providers or social workers instead of witnesses to the primacy of God and proclaimers of the Gospel.

The young Salesian missionaries today bring a new paradigm of missions and a renewed model of missionaries: the Salesian missionary is not only the one who gives, who brings projects and perhaps collects money, but above all the one who lives with his people, who attaches great importance to interpersonal relationships; he not only teaches, but above all learns from the people he serves, who are not just passive recipients of his efforts. In fact, it is not the doing that counts, but the being, which becomes an authoritative proclamation of Jesus Christ.

Are there still Salesian missionaries who offer their lives for the witness of Jesus? Yes, and they no longer come from Europe as they used to, but come from all over the world and go all over the world. We present some young missionaries who have responded to the divine call.

We speak of 28-year-old Malagasy François Tonga, who went as a missionary to Albania to bear witness to his Christian and Salesian religious identity. His task as a practical trainee in the Salesian house in the capital, [Tirana](#), is to coordinate the school lessons of more than 800 children. It is no small challenge to learn the language and understand Albanian culture, to bear witness in a majority Muslim context, even if – thank God – one does not live in a situation of clash between religions, but of mutual respect. It is a testimony made up of presence and assistance among poor and marginalised children, and of prayer for the young people they meet every day. And the response is not long in coming: young people, parents and co-workers help out and offer a good welcome.

This is also the case of another 28 year old, Joël Komlan Attisso, a Togolese by origin, who accepted to be sent as a mission practical trainee to the Don Bosco Technical Secondary School in [Kokopo](#), in the Eastern New Britain Province of Papua New Guinea. The mission, with God's grace, of being called and sent to serve everyone – and especially young people – already bears fruit: welcome, openness, help and love is exchanged, even if one belongs to different cultural realities. This brings to mind [Don Bosco's dream about Oceania](#), when he saw a multitude of young people saying: 'Come to our aid! Why do you not do the work that your fathers began?' [...] It seems to me that all this together indicated that divine Providence was offering a portion of the evangelical field to the Salesians, but at a future time. Their labours will bear fruit, because the hand of the Lord will be constantly with them, if they do not demerit of his favour."

We also speak of 30-year-old Vietnamese Joseph Thuan Thien Truc Tran, Salesian Brother, a computer science graduate sent to [Juba](#) in South Sudan, where there is no shortage of commitments: three primary schools, a secondary school, a technical school, a parish, a camp for displaced persons and a pre-novitiate, in all, a complex of about 5000 students. Attracted by the testimony of a Salesian who worked as a doctor in Sudan, [Fr John Lee Tae Seok](#), he decided to say his "yes" of total willingness to be sent on the mission indicated by his superiors, relying exclusively on faith and God's grace, so necessary in one of the countries considered among the most dangerous in the world.

Another young Salesian practical trainee who has given his availability for the missions is Rolphe Paterne Mouanga, from the Republic of Congo (Congo-Brazzaville or former French Congo). Sent to the [Don Bosco Central Salesian House in Santa Cruz](#), Bolivia, in a work that includes oratory, primary school, secondary school and parish, he is one of the first two missionaries from Africa in this country, together with

his compatriot David Eyenga. His African origins help him to familiarise himself with the young people who are intrigued and interested in getting to know him, and this relationship is strengthened through sport, to which he is so much inclined. The cultural diversity of Bolivia is a real challenge, because it is not only a matter of integrating into the local culture but also of being flexible in adapting to every situation. However, the openness, acceptance, cooperation and sharing of young people and co-workers help him in this endeavour. He wants to show himself open and willing to integrate with what he now considers 'his people'.

Rolphe's other compatriot, David Eyenga, was also sent to Bolivia, but to the Salesian house in [Kami](#), Cochabamba: a complex Salesian presence that includes an agricultural technical school, a parish, a work of assistance and social promotion, an internship and even a radio station. Cultural differences are also strongly felt in this area, in the way they relate to others, especially in terms of hospitality, meals, dances and other local traditions. This requires a lot of patience to be able to relate to the local mentality. It is hoped and prayed that the presence of the missionaries will also be a stimulus for local vocations.

Emmanuel Jeremia Mganda, a 30-year-old from [Zanzibar, Tanzania](#) is another young man who has accepted God's call to mission. He was sent to Amazonia, Brazil, among the [Yanomami](#), an indigenous tribe living in communities in [Maturacá](#). His educational tasks in the oratory and religious activity enriched him pastorally and spiritually. The welcome he received, also shown in the name given, 'YanomamiInshiInshi' (Black Yanomami), made him feel like one of them, helped him a lot to integrate, understand and share the love for Creation and the protection of this good of God.

Is there hope that the missions started by Don Bosco, almost 150 years ago, will continue? That Don Bosco's dream – or better said – that Don Bosco's dreams will come to fruition?

There is only one answer: the divine will cannot fail, it is enough for the Salesians to give up their comforts and comforts and to be willing to listen to the divine call.

Connecting with the Millennial and 'Gen Z' mindsets

*Communication involves several components that we need to seriously consider: first of all, the **sender** who encodes the **message** by choosing the **medium** through which the message is relayed from the sender to the receiver. The **receiver**, in turn, analyses the message in his context and interprets it in ways both intended and unintended by the sender. Finally, the **feedback** indicates how well the message was received. Any attempt to communicate Christ today starts from understanding the mindset of today's generation of young people. This short essay will focus on this.*

A generation is a group that could be identified by their year of birth and significant events that shape their personality, values, expectations, behavioural qualities, and motivational skills. Sociologists call **theBaby Boomer** generation those born between 1943 and 1960. **The Generation X** are those born between 1961 and 1979. **Millennials** (also called **Generation Y**) are those born between 1980 and 2000. The **Generation Z** are those born after 2000.

The **senders** are the Salesian pastor-educators and youth ministers. The **receivers** are the youth and young adults today

who are mainly millennials and Generation Z. Hence, this presentation will focus on understanding their mindset in order to discover ways of communicating to them our **message**, Jesus Christ. We cannot close our eyes to the reality of the 'digital divide', which reflects the huge and growing social inequality between those who have easy access to the Internet and those who do not, especially many young people. Thus, an important response to this essay is to compare what is presented here with the reader's own context.

THE MILLENNIALS

Today millennials are about 41-20 years old. They learnt using technology and became dependent on it at an earlier age than other previous generations. Younger millennials could not even imagine life without smartphones and internet. They belong to a generation that is so connected through social media. They live in an age when one post could reach countless peoples across linguistic, cultural and geographic barriers. This has created in them the desire to have all the information they want that will provide instant answers and instant feedback.

Millennials want to be involved by being given the opportunity to share their thoughts because they like to share ideas and choose the best one. They want to be part of the conversation by listening and speaking. When their opinions are listened to, they feel valued and will be ready commit themselves to something they feel part of. Millennials want their faith to be holistically integrated into their life, including technology.

Millennials are the app generation. Apps have become a means for them to communicate, process information, purchase goods or even read Scriptures and pray. They are tech savvy who use apps up to two hours a day. They want to be discovered. They are optimistic and desire to share, with preference to communicate with texts. They are focused on the 'now' but tend to be idealistic.

THE GENERATION Z

Today those of the Generation Z are those who are 21 years old and younger. They are the first who have the internet readily available to them. They are digital natives because they have been exposed to the internet, social networks and mobile systems from earliest age. They use social sites to socialize without distinguishing friends they meet on-line and friends in the physical world. For them, the virtual world is as real as the physical world. They are always connected; for them there is no offline anymore. They are vigorous contributors and high consumers of on-line content. They prefer on-line social sites to communicate and interact with people especially using images.



They prefer to participate and remain connected via technology at their fingertips. They are creative, realistic and focused on the future. They have a broad awareness about important issues and events and have a great desire to search for the truth. But they want to choose and discover the truth for themselves. In fact, the search for truth is at the centre of their characteristic behaviour and consumption patterns.

Those of the Generation Z use the social media networks like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, Tiktok, Tumblr to obtain information about the social concerns, health and nutrition, spirituality, etc. But they are also heavy users of anonymous social media platforms like Snapchat, Secret, Whisper, where any incriminating images disappear almost instantly. With vast amount of information at their disposal, they are more pragmatic and less idealistic than the millennials. Their high on-line reliance could risk too much sharing of personal information in the virtual world and to internet addiction. Their character is moulded by what they post about themselves on-line and what others post and assess

about them. A great majority of them in all continents declare themselves to be religious but not necessarily identifying themselves to a religion: they believe without belonging, others belong without believing. Those who claim not to belong to any specific religion normally come from families with no religious faith or who are lukewarm Christians. They are much less religious than the millennials.



THE SOCIAL MEDIA

It is true that the social media could in some way hinder authentic interpersonal relationships. These could also be used as a platform to distribution and access to materials that could cause moral, social and spiritual harm. The truth of the matter is that any medium has the potential to be used for evil. It is true that the social media has been used, for example, to globalise populism and to help spark revolutions like the Arab Spring and the yellow vest protests in France.

Yet, the social media has also allowed people to stay connected globally, empower each of us to update each other what is happening in our lives, share powerful ideas, and invite people to know Jesus Christ. The social media have become our virtual courtyard. Therefore, it is important that we move from demonising the medium, to educating young people to its proper use and to developing its potentials to evangelise.

COMMUNICATING CHRIST

Credible witness is an important condition for communicating Christ. In the virtual world, witness implies **visibility** (we visibly manifest our Catholic identity), **truth** (we ensure that we are bearers of the truth and not of fake news) and **credibility** (the images we present reinforce the message we want to communicate). Faith needs to be presented to millennials and to the Generation Z in new and engaging ways.

This, in turn, will open possibilities for them to share their faith with their peers. We should resist the temptation to bombard the social media with religious messages and images. This will actually drive away a big number of young people.

Initial proclamation is not about Christian doctrines to be taught. The adjective 'initial' is not to be understood in a strictly linear or chronological sense as being the first moment of proclamation because it actually impoverishes its richness. Rather, it is 'initial' in the sense that the term *arché* was understood by ancient Greek philosophers as the principle or the fundamental element from which everything has its origin, or that from which all things are formed. It is the foundation for a new evangelisation and of the whole process of evangelisation.

Initial proclamation is about fostering an overwhelming and exhilarating experience which is capable of stirring up the desire to search the truth and an interest in the person of Jesus. This, ultimately, leads to an initial adhesion to Him, or the revitalisation of faith in Him. Initial proclamation is that spark that leads to conversion. This choice for Christ is the **feedback** to the **message**. It is then followed by the process of evangelisation through catechumenate and systematic catechesis. Without initial proclamation that brings about a personal option for Christ, any effort to evangelise will be sterile. Thus, the challenge for every Salesian pastor-educator, for every youth minister, of every missionary disciple is not making content for the social media. This is a temptation that has to be resisted strongly. The challenge is to train and accompany millennials and Generation Z themselves so that they can create faith-based content for themselves and their peers on the social media that can stir interest in knowing the person of Jesus Christ. Indeed, today the social media is a privileged forum to communicate Christ to young people. It is up to each of us to use it with missionary creativity!

TODAY'S YOUTH VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT

New insights from a missionary perspective

Survey conducted by Juan Carlos Montenegro and Fr Alejandro Rodriguez sdb, San Francisco Province (SU0), USA.

Jesus' command to 'Go and make disciples' (Matt 28:19) continues to resound to us today. Our love for Christ challenges us to go beyond our boundaries and reach out to people particularly young people of our society today. To do this we need to see reality from their perspective, understand how they process information, and how this information influences their behaviour. Nonetheless, our primary Salesian mission as educators-evangelizers to bring them closer to Christ and Christ to them.

Generational differences could be a challenge that does not help us transition from being "fully" present in this new courtyard where the young people have built their own language, they have developed their own rules, and they have created new different expressions and kind of significative relationships. This new playground is a virtual world where young people today live, interact, dream, engage, and suffer. The love and missionary seal of Don Bosco move us to embrace this new reality with hope, faith, and pastoral charity.

If we don't know the new reality the youth is facing in the virtual world, our proposal and accompaniment as educators-evangelizers will be insignificant and irrelevant. *The Salesian Youth Ministry Frame of Reference (2015)* calls us to be present in the "new courtyard". Now more than ever, we need to innovate and to adapt our Salesian style of being present among the young.

To understand what's happening in this new virtual courtyard, the Missions Sector conducted an online survey at the Congregational level seeking to understand our young people, what they think, what they do, what they expect regarding the contents, possibilities and the use of the social media. The online survey in 6 languages involved 1,731 young people of our Salesian educative-pastoral communities who are between 13

to 18 years old from 37 countries and 6 different continents. This is important to keep in mind because the responses from young people who are not from the Salesian environment may differ.

Key findings:

- It is known that the greater use of the Internet is associated with a decline in the participants' communication with members in the household, a decline in the size of their social circle, and an increase in their depression and loneliness. These are important topics to keep in mind regarding accompaniment in our pastoral planning.
- 91% of our young people use mobile phones to access to the social media. These devices are associated with behavioural problems and even possible health problems. Connectivity among the 75% of the sample is more than 6 hours per week but may be over 20 hours in some cases. The connectivity to the internet has a lot of implications, like the shift of social skills development, relationships, knowledge, etc.



- The youth interviewed perceive online bullying, paedophilia, fake news, predators, and hackers as the biggest threat in the use of the social media. While 26.40% of our young people affirm that they have been bullied.
- Due to lack of supervision and/or formation and accompaniment young people are exposed to online adult content; the most urgent educative presence of adults starts with kids at the age of 11-13 years old because is the moment when, according to the survey, they are most vulnerable to surf on webpages with adult content.
- In regard to our presence with religious content, 72.56% of the young people who took this survey have been exposed to some type of religious content. 47.72% believe that the internet helps to develop their relationship with God.
- Our youth visit websites that are related to videos -music, games, tutorials, etc. The 88% of the sample prefer video as

the type of content.

- Young people prefer WhatsApp (64 %), Instagram (61 %), Youtube (41%), Tik Tok or Facebook (37%), and Messenger (33 %). This information helps us to improve our ways of communication with young because adults may spend a lot of effort to be present in platforms where the young are not present. Maybe our channels for communication must be Facebook for parents, and Instagram for our young people.



This survey is a powerful reminder which challenges us educators and evangelizers of the young to be present among our young people in a relevant and significant way in the social media.

Missionary Synodality

Missionary Synodality: A Salesian Perspective

Synodality in the New Testament

In recent years, the noun “synodality” has become more commonly used. Unfortunately, some have their own ideological or flawed understanding of the concept. So, it is no surprise that many people, even religious and priests, openly ask: “what is this thing? What does it mean?” Synodality is actually a new word for an old reality. Jesus, the pilgrim who proclaimed the Good News of the Kingdom of God (Lk 4,14-15) shared with everyone the truth and love of communion with God and our sisters and brothers. The image of the disciples of Emmaus in Luke 24,18-35 is another example of synodality: they

began by *remembering* the events they have experienced; then they *recognised* the presence of God in those events; and finally, they *acted* by returning to Jerusalem to proclaim Christ's resurrection. This means that, we disciples of Jesus, ought to walk together in history as the People of God of the new covenant. In fact, in the *Acts of the Apostles* the People of God moved forward together, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, during the Council of Jerusalem (*Acts* 15; *Gal* 2,1-10).

Synodality in the early Church

In the early Church, St. Ignatius of Antioch (50-117) reminded the Christian community in Ephesus that all its members are 'companions on the journey', by virtue of their baptism and their friendship with Christ. While St. Cyprian of Carthage (200 – 258) insisted that nothing should be done in the local church without the bishop. Similarly, for St. John Chrysostom (347-407) 'Church' is a term for 'walking together' through the reciprocal and ordered relationship of the members leading them to have a common mind.

In the early Church, the two-part Greek word: *syn* (meaning "with") and *ódós* (meaning "path") was used to describe the journey together of the People of God on the same path to respond to disciplinary, liturgical and doctrinal issues. Thus, synods have been held periodically in local Churches and dioceses since the middle of the second century, that is, from about the year 150. Similarly, since 325 in Nicaea, the gathering of all bishops of the Church, called 'Council' in Latin, took decisions as expressions of communion with all the Churches.

Synodality in Vatican II

The Second Vatican Council did not specifically address the theme on synodality nor use the term or concept in its documents. Instead, it used the term 'collegiality' for the method of building the conciliar processes. However,

synodality lies at the heart of the work of renewal the Council was encouraging. While collegiality concerns decision-making process of bishops at the level of the universal Church, synodality is the fruit of active efforts to live the Vatican Council II's perspectives at the local level. This understanding was embodied in its vision of the nature of the Church as '*communion*' which has received the '*mission*' of proclaiming and establishing among all peoples God's kingdom (*Lumen gentium*, 5). It envisions the Church walking together and sharing "[the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties](#)" of all those we walk with (*Gaudium et spes*, 1).

Pope Francis and Synodality

Since 2013 Pope Francis has been teaching us about synodality in all that he does and says. Synodality is not a simple discussion nor like the deliberations in parliaments in search for the consensus which end in the vote of the majority. It is not debating, arguing or listening in order to respond. It is not a process of democratisation or putting doctrine up for a vote. It is not a plan, or a programme to be implemented. It is not even about what bishops or other stakeholders want, nor about command and control. Instead, synodality is about who we are and who we aspire to be as a Christian community, as the body of Christ. It is the style of life that qualifies the life and mission of the entire Church. Synodality is attentive listening in order to understand on a deeper, personal level. It is being a Church of participation and co-responsibility, beginning with the Pope, bishops and involving the whole people of God, so that we may all discover God's will as we face a particular set of challenges.

The presence of the Holy Spirit, through the sacrament of Baptism they received, enables the totality of God's people to have an *instinct of faith* (*sensus fidei*) which helps them to discern what is truly of God as well as feel, sense and perceive in harmony with the Church. Synodality involves the exercise of the *sensus fidei* of the whole People of God, the

ministry of leadership of the college of Bishops with the clergy, and the ministry of unity of the Bishop of Rome.

Synodality and Discernment

Above all, synodality is marked by a constant discernment of the presence of the Holy Spirit. This is a dynamic, unfolding reality, because we cannot predict where the Holy Spirit may lead us. Synodality is not a path marked out in advance. It is, instead, an encounter that shapes and transforms. It is a process that challenges us to recognize the prophetic function of God's people and requires us to be open to the unexpected of God. Through mutual listening and dialogue, God comes to touch us, to shake us, to change us interiorly. In the final analysis, synodality is the expression of the collective involvement and sense of co-responsibility for the Church of the totality of God's people.

This implies an attitude of attentive listening with humility, respect, openness, patience to our experiences and readiness to listen even to discordant ideas, to people who have left the practice of the faith, to people of other faith traditions or even no religious belief so as to discern the promptings of the Holy Spirit, who is the main protagonist, and consequently promote God's action in people and society by acting with wisdom and creativity.

The Church is missionary

The Church exists to spread the good news of Jesus. Thus, its missionary activity is, above all, proclaiming the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God (Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 14, 22). Since all members of the Church, by virtue of the baptism received, are agents of evangelisation, consequently a synodal Church is an indispensable precondition for a new missionary energy that will involve the entire People of God. Evangelisation without synodality lacks concern

for the structures of the Church. Inversely, synodality without evangelisation means we are just another social, business or philanthropic club.

Missionary synodality

Missionary synodality is a systemic approach to pastoral reality. Sent to proclaim the Gospel, every baptised, as missionary disciple, has to learn to listen attentively and respectfully, as fellow travellers, to the local people, to followers of other religions, to the cries of the poor and marginalised, to those who have no voice in the public space, in order to be closer to Jesus and his Gospel and become a Church that goes forth, not closed in on itself.

If our public witness is not always evangelising in a broad sense, we are just another NGO, in a world of increasingly growing inequality and isolation. Today there is a growing realisation that everything we do as Catholics is a touchpoint of evangelisation. We evangelise through the way we welcome people; how we treat our friends and family; how we spend our money as individuals, communities and groups; how we care for the poor and reach out to the marginalised; how we use the social media; how we attentively listen to the longings of the young and how we disagree and dialogue with one another.

The synodal process

In order to attentively listen to the instinct of faith of God's people (*sensus fidelium*), which the Church teaches as an authentic guarantor of the faith it expresses, Pope Francis instituted the 'synodal process.' By journeying together, discussing and reflecting together as God's people, the Church will grow in its self-understanding, learn how to live communion, foster participation, and open itself to the mission of evangelisation.

Indeed, the synodal process is meant to inspire hope, stimulate trust, bind up wounds so that we may weave new and

deeper relationships, learn from one another, and enlighten minds to dream with enthusiasm about the Church and our common mission. It is a *kairos* or 'ripe moment' in the life of the Church to undergo conversion in preparation for evangelisation and it is a moment of evangelisation.

Synodality and the Salesian charism

From the pedagogical and spiritual treasures of the Salesian charism we can draw out expressions of missionary synodality.

Our Patron, St. Francis de Sales, made real friendship as the necessary context where journeying together through spiritual accompaniment takes place. He believed that there could be no real spiritual accompaniment without real friendship. Such friendship always involves mutual communication and reciprocal enrichment, which allows the relationship to become truly spiritual.

In the Oratory at Valdocco, Don Bosco prepared his boys for life and made them aware of God's love for them, helped them love their Catholic faith and practice it in their ordinary daily life. He took care to maintain one-to-one relationship so as to provide them, according to the needs of each one, personal and group accompaniment. Thus, he wrote in his letter from Rome of 1884: "familiarity leads to love, and love leads to confidence. It is that that opens up the heart and the young reveal everything without fear." By maintaining a beautiful balance between a healthy, mature environment and the individual responsibility, the Oratory became a home, a parish, a school and a playground.

Don Bosco formed around him a community in which young people themselves were key players. He fostered participation and the sharing of responsibility by ecclesiastics, Salesians, lay people. They helped him teach catechism and other classes, assist in church, lead the young in prayer, prepare them for their first communion and confirmation, assist in the

playground where they played with the boys, and help the more needy to find employment with some honest employer. In return, Don Bosco took diligent care of their spiritual life, through personal encounters, conferences, spiritual direction and the administration of the sacraments. Such an environment gave rise to a new culture where there was deep love for God and our Lady, which in turn, created a new style of relationship between young people and educators, between laity and priests, between artisans and students.

Today the *Educative-Pastoral Community* (EPC), through the *Salesian Educative Pastoral Plan* (SEPP), is the centre of communion and sharing in the spirit and mission of Don Bosco. In the EPC we foster a new way of thinking, judging and acting, a new way of confronting problems and a new style of relationships – with young people, Salesians and lay people, in various ways as leaders and collaborators.

An essential element of Don Bosco's charism is the missionary spirit which he passed on to his Salesians and to the whole Salesian family. This is summed up in *Da mihi animas* and is expressed through the 'oratorian heart', fervour, drive and passion for evangelisation, particularly of young people. It is the capacity for intercultural and inter religious dialogue and the willingness to be sent where there is a need, particularly to the peripheries.

A time for conversion

Personal and communal conversion will always be needed because we humbly recognise that there are still so many hindrances within us to our efforts to live the missionary synodality: an urgent sense to teach than to listen; a sense of privilege and entitlement; a failure to be transparent and accountable; a slowness to dialogue and lack of animating presence among the young; a propensity to control and to claim the sole right to make decisions; a lack of trust in empowering the laity as

mission partners; and a lack of recognition of the presence of the Holy Spirit in cultures and peoples even before our arrival.

Indeed, Salesian missionary synodality is both a gift and a task!