

The Venerable Monsignor Stefano Ferrando

Monsignor Stefano Ferrando was an extraordinary example of missionary dedication and episcopal service, combining the Salesian charism with a profound vocation to serve the poorest. Born in Piedmont in 1895, he entered the Salesian Congregation at a young age and, after serving in the military during the First World War, for which he was awarded the Silver Medal for Valour, he dedicated himself to apostolate in India. As Bishop of Krishnagar and then Shillong for over thirty years, he tirelessly walked among the people, promoting evangelisation with humility and profound pastoral love. He founded institutions, supported lay catechists, and embodied the motto "Apostle of Christ" in his life. His life was an example of faith, surrender to God, and total self-giving, leaving a spiritual legacy that continues to inspire the Salesian mission worldwide.

Venerable Bishop Stephen Ferrando knew how to combine his Salesian vocation with his missionary charism and episcopal ministry. Born on 28 September 1895 in Rossiglione (Genoa, diocese of Acqui) to Agostino and Giuseppina Salvi, he was distinguished by an ardent love of God and a tender devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. In 1904 he entered Salesian schools, first at Fossano and then at Valdocco in Turin where he got to know Don Bosco's successors and the first generation of Salesians, and undertook his priestly studies; in the meantime he nurtured the desire to leave as a missionary. On 13 September 1912, he made his first religious profession in the Salesian Congregation at Foglizzo. Called to arms in 1915, he took part in the First World War. For his courage he was awarded the silver medal for valour. Returning home in 1918, he took his perpetual vows on 26 December 1920. He was ordained a priest in Borgo San Martino (Alessandria) on

18 March 1923. On 2 December of the same year, with nine companions, he embarked in Venice as a missionary to India. On 18 December, after 16 days of travel, the group arrived in Bombay and on 23 December in Shillong, the place of his new apostolate. As novice master, he educated the young Salesians in the love of Jesus and Mary and had a great spirit of apostolate.

On 9 August 1934, Pope Pius XI appointed him Bishop of Krishnagar. His motto was "Apostle of Christ". In 1935, on 26 November, he was transferred to Shillong where he remained bishop for 34 years. While working in a difficult situation of cultural, religious and social impact, Bishop Ferrando worked tirelessly to be close to the people entrusted to him, working zealously in the vast diocese that encompassed the entire region of North East India. He preferred to travel on foot rather than by car, which he would have had at his disposal: this allowed him to meet the people, to stop and talk to them, to be involved in their lives. This live contact with people's lives was one of the main reasons for the fruitfulness of his evangelical proclamation: humility, simplicity, love for the poor led many to convert and request Baptism. He established a seminary for the formation of young Indian Salesians, built a hospital, erected a shrine dedicated to Mary Help of Christians and founded the first Congregation of indigenous sisters, the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians (1942).

A man of strong character, he was not discouraged in the face of countless difficulties, which he faced with a smile and meekness. Perseverance in the face of obstacles was one of his main characteristics. He sought to unite the Gospel message with the local culture in which it was to be embedded. He was intrepid in his pastoral visits, which he made to the most remote places in the diocese, in order to recover the last lost sheep. He showed particular sensitivity and promotion for lay catechists, whom he considered complementary to the bishop's mission and on whom depended much of the fruitfulness

of the proclamation of the Gospel and its penetration into the territory. His attention to family pastoral work was also immense. Despite his numerous commitments, the Venerable was a man with a rich interior life, nourished by prayer and recollection. As a pastor, he was appreciated by his sisters, priests, Salesian brothers and in the episcopate, as well as by the people, who felt him deeply close to them. He gave himself creatively to his flock, caring for the poor, defending the untouchables, caring for the cholera patients.

The cornerstones of his spirituality were his filial bond with the Virgin Mary, his missionary zeal, his continuous reference to Don Bosco, as emerges from his writings and in all his missionary activity. The most luminous and heroic moment of his virtuous life was his departure from the diocese of Shillong. Archbishop Ferrando had to submit his resignation to the Holy Father when he was still in the fullness of his physical and intellectual faculties, to allow the appointment of his successor, who was to be chosen, according to his superiors' instructions, from among the indigenous priests he had formed. It was a particularly painful moment, experienced by the great bishop with humility and obedience. He understood that it was time to retire in prayer according to the Lord's will.

He returned to Genoa in 1969 and continued his pastoral activity, presiding over the ceremonies for the conferral of Confirmation and dedicating himself to the sacrament of Penance.

He was faithful to the Salesian religious life to the last, deciding to live in community and renouncing the privileges that his position as bishop might have reserved for him. He continued to be "a missionary" in Italy. Not "a missionary who moves, but [...] a missionary who is". His life in this last stage of life became a "radiating" one. He became a "missionary of prayer" who said: "I am glad I came away so that others could take over to do such wonderful works."

From Genoa Quarto, he continued to animate the mission in Assam, raising awareness and sending financial aid. He lived

this hour of purification with a spirit of faith, of abandonment to God's will and obedience, touching with his own hand the full meaning of the evangelical expression "we are only useless servants", and confirming with his life the *caetera tolle*, the sacrificial aspect of the Salesian vocation. He died on 20 June 1978 and was buried in Rossiglione, his native land. In 1987 his mortal remains were brought back to India.

In docility to the Spirit he carried out a fruitful pastoral action, which manifested itself in great love for the poor, in humility of spirit and fraternal charity, in the joy and optimism of the Salesian spirit.

Together with many missionaries who shared the adventure of the Spirit with him in the land of India, including Servants of God Francis Convertini, Costantine Vendrame and Orestes Marengo, Bishop Ferrando gave rise to a new missionary method: to be an itinerant missionary. Such an example is a providential warning, especially for religious congregations tempted by a process of institutionalisation and closure, not to lose the passion to go out to meet people and situations of the greatest material and spiritual poverty and destitution, going where no one wants to go and entrusting themselves as he did. "I look to the future with confidence, trusting in Mary Help of Christians... I will entrust myself to Mary Help of Christians who already saved me from so many dangers."

Cardinal Augustus Hlond

The second of 11 children, his father was a railway worker. Having received a simple but strong faith from his parents, at the age of 12, attracted by Don Bosco' reputation, he followed his brother Ignatius to Italy to dedicate himself to the Lord

in the Salesian Society, and soon attracted two other brothers there: Antonio, who was to become a Salesian and a renowned musician, and Clement, who was to become a missionary. The college at Valsalice accepted him for his secondary studies. He was then admitted to the novitiate and received the cassock from Blessed Michael Rua (1896). Having made his religious profession in 1897, his superiors sent him to Rome to the Gregorian University for the philosophy course which he graduated in. From Rome he returned to Poland to do his practical training in the college at Oświęcim. His fidelity to Don Bosco's system of education, his commitment to assistance and to the school, his dedication to the young and the amiability of his manner won him great acclaim. He also quickly made a name for himself for his musical talent.

Having completed his theology studies, he was ordained a priest on 23 September 1905 in Cracow by Bishop Nowak. In 1905-09 he attended the Faculty of Arts at the Universities of Krakow and Lvov. In 1907 he was placed in charge of the new house in Przemyśl (1907-09), from where he went on to direct the house in Vienna (1909-19). Here his valour and personal ability had an even greater scope due to the particular difficulties the institute faced in the imperial capital. Fr Augustus Hlond, with his virtue and tact, succeeded in a short time not only in sorting out the financial situation, but also in bringing about a flowering of youth work that attracted the admiration of all classes of people. Caring for the poor, the workers, the children of the people attracted him the affection of the humblest classes. Dear to the bishops and apostolic nuncios, he enjoyed the esteem of the authorities and the imperial family itself. In recognition of this social and educational work, he received some of the most prestigious honours three times.

In 1919, the development of the Austro-Hungarian Province advised a division in proportion to the number of houses, and the superiors appointed Fr Hlond as provincial of the German-Hungarian Province based in Vienna (1919-22), entrusting him with the care of the Austrian, German and Hungarian confreres.

In less than three years, the young provincial opened a dozen new Salesian presences, and formed them in the most genuine Salesian spirit, raising numerous vocations.

He was in the full fervour of his Salesian activity when, in 1922, the Holy See having to provide religious accommodation for Polish Silesia still bleeding from political and national strife, the Holy Father Pius XI entrusted him with the delicate mission, appointing him as Apostolic Administrator. His mediation between Germans and Poles gave birth in 1925 to the diocese of Katowice, of which he became bishop. In 1926 he was Archbishop of Gniezno and Poznań and Primate of Poland. The following year the Pope created him Cardinal. In 1932 he founded the Society of Christ for Polish emigrants, aimed at assisting the many compatriots who had left the country.

In March 1939 he took part in the Conclave that elected Pius XII. On 1 September of the same year the Nazis invaded Poland: the Second World War began. The cardinal raised his voice against Hitler's violations of human rights and religious freedom. Forced into exile, he took refuge in France, at Hautecombe Abbey, denouncing the persecution of the Jews in Poland. The Gestapo penetrated the Abbey and arrested him, deporting him to Paris. The cardinal categorically refuses to support the formation of a pro-Nazi Polish government. He was interned first in Lorraine and then in Westphalia. Freed by allied troops, he returned to his homeland in 1945.

In the new Poland liberated from Nazism, he finds communism. He courageously defended the Poles against atheistic Marxist oppression, even escaping several assassination attempts. He died on 22 October 1948 of pneumonia, at the age of 67. Thousands of people flocked to the funeral.

Cardinal Hlond was a virtuous man, a shining example of a Salesian religious and a generous, austere pastor, capable of prophetic vision. Obedient to the Church and firm in the exercise of authority, he showed heroic humility and unequivocal constancy in times of greatest trial. He cultivated poverty and practised justice to the poor and needy. The two pillars of his spiritual life, in the school of

St John Bosco, were the Eucharist and Mary Help of Christians. In the history of the Church of Poland, Cardinal Augustus Hlond was one of the most eminent figures for the religious witness of his life, for the greatness, variety and originality of his pastoral ministry, for the sufferings he faced with an intrepid Christian spirit for the Kingdom of God. The apostolic ardour distinguished the pastoral work and spiritual physiognomy of the Venerable Augustus Hlond, who took *Da mihi animas coetera tolle* as his episcopal motto. As a true son of St John Bosco he confirmed it with his life as a consecrated man and bishop, bearing witness to tireless pastoral charity.

We must remember his great love for Our Lady, learnt in his family and the great devotion of the Polish people to the Mother of God, venerated in the shrine of Częstochowa. Moreover, from Turin, where he began his journey as a Salesian, he spread the cult of Mary Help of Christians in Poland and consecrated Poland to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. His entrustment to Mary always sustained him in adversity and in the hour of his final encounter with the Lord. He died with the Rosary beads in his hands, telling those present that the victory, when it came, would be the victory of Mary Immaculate.

Venerable Cardinal Augustus Hlond is an outstanding witness of how we must accept the way of the Gospel every day despite the fact that it brings us problems, difficulties, even persecution: this is holiness. "Jesus himself warns us that the path he proposes goes against the flow, even making us challenge society by the way we live and, as a result, becoming a nuisance. He reminds us how many people have been, and still are, persecuted simply because they struggle for justice, because they take seriously their commitment to God and to others. Unless we wish to sink into an obscure mediocrity, let us not long for an easy life, for 'whoever would save his life will lose it' (Mt 16:25). (Mt 16:25). In living the Gospel, we cannot expect that everything will be easy, for the thirst for power and worldly interests often

stands in our way... the cross remains the source of our growth and sanctification.” (Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, nos. 90-92).

Venerable Ottavio Ortiz Arrieta Coya, Bishop

Octavio Ortiz Arrieta Coya, born in Lima, Peru, on 19 April 1878, was the first Peruvian Salesian. As a young man, he trained as a carpenter, but the Lord called him to a higher mission. He made his first Salesian profession on 29 January 1900 and was ordained a priest in 1908. In 1922, he was consecrated bishop of the diocese of Chachapoyas, a role he held with dedication until his death on 1 March 1958. Twice he refused appointment to the more prestigious see of Lima, preferring to remain close to his people. A tireless shepherd, he travelled throughout the diocese to personally know the faithful and promoted numerous pastoral initiatives for evangelisation. On 12 November 1990, under the pontificate of St John Paul II, his cause for canonisation was opened, and he was granted the title of Servant of God. On 27 February 2017, Pope Francis recognised his heroic virtues, declaring him Venerable.

The Venerable Bishop Ottavio Ortiz Arrieta Coya spent the first part of his life as an Oratory boy, a student and then became a Salesian himself, engaged in the works of the Sons of Don Bosco in Peru. He was the first Salesian formed in the first Salesian house in Peru, founded in Rimac, a poor neighbourhood, where he learned to live an austere life of sacrifice. Among the first Salesians to arrive in Peru in 1891, he got to know the spirit of Don Bosco and the

Preventive System. As a Salesian of the first generation he learnt that service and the gift of self would be the horizon of his life; that is why as a young Salesian he took on important responsibilities, such as opening new works and directing others, with simplicity, sacrifice and total dedication to the poor.

He lived the second part of his life, from the beginning of the 1920s, as bishop of Chachapoyas, an immense diocese, vacant for years, where the prohibitive conditions of the territory added up to a certain closure, especially in the most remote villages. Here the field and the challenges of the apostolate were immense. Ortiz Arrieta was of a lively temperament, accustomed to community life; moreover, he was delicate of spirit, to the point of being called "pecadito" in his younger years, for his exactitude in detecting shortcomings and helping himself and others to amend themselves. He also possessed an innate sense of rigour and moral duty. The conditions under which he had to carry out his episcopal ministry, however, were diametrically opposed to him: loneliness and the substantial impossibility of sharing a Salesian and priestly life, despite repeated and almost pleading requests to his own Congregation; the need to reconcile his own moral rigour with an increasingly docile and almost disarmed firmness; a fine moral conscience continually put to the test by coarseness of choices and lukewarmness in following, on the part of some collaborators less heroic than himself, and of a people of God that knew how to oppose the bishop when his word became a denunciation of injustice and a diagnosis of spiritual evils. The Venerable's path towards the fullness of holiness, in the exercise of the virtues, was therefore marked by hardships, difficulties and the continual need to convert his gaze and heart, under the action of the Spirit.

While we certainly find episodes in his life that can be defined as heroic in the strict sense, we must also, and perhaps above all, highlight those moments in his virtuous journey when he could have acted differently, but did not;

giving in to human despair, while renewing hope; being content with great charity, but not fully willing to exercise that heroic charity that he practised with exemplary fidelity for several decades. When, twice, he was offered a change of See, and in the second case he was offered the primatial See of Lima, he decided to remain among his poor, those whom no one wanted, truly on the periphery of the world, remaining in the diocese he had always espoused and loved as it was, committing himself wholeheartedly to making it even a little better. He was a 'modern' pastor in his style of presence and in his use of means of action such as associationism and the press. A man of decisive temperament and firm convictions of faith, Bishop Ortiz Arrieta certainly made use of this "don de gobierno" (gift of leadership) in his leadership, always combined, however, with respect and charity, expressed with extraordinary consistency.

Although he lived before the Second Vatican Council, the way in which he planned and carried out the pastoral tasks entrusted to him is still relevant today: from the pastoral care of vocations to the concrete support of his seminarians and priests; from the catechetical and human formation of the youngest to the pastoral care of families through which he met married couples in crisis or cohabiting couples reluctant to regularise their union. Bishop Ortiz Arrieta, on the other hand, did not only educate by his concrete pastoral action, but by his very behaviour: by his ability to discern for himself, first of all, what it means and what it entails to renew fidelity to the path taken. He truly persevered in heroic poverty, in fortitude through the many trials of life, and in radical fidelity to the diocese to which he had been assigned. Humble, simple, always serene; between the serious and the gentle; the gentleness of his gaze let all the tranquillity of his spirit shine through: this was the path of holiness he travelled.

The beautiful characteristics that his Salesian superiors found in him before his ordination to the priesthood – when they described him as a 'Salesian pearl' and praised

his spirit of sacrifice – returned as a constant throughout his life, including as a bishop. Indeed, Ortiz Arrieta can be said to have “made himself all things to all people, in order to save someone at any cost” (1 Cor 9:22): authoritative with the authorities, simple with children, poor among the poor; meek with those who insulted him or tried to delegitimise him out of resentment; always ready not to return evil for evil, but to overcome evil with good (cf. Rom 12:21). His whole life was dominated by the primacy of the salvation of souls: a salvation to which he would also like to actively dedicate his priests, whose temptation to retreat into easy security or entrench themselves behind more prestigious positions, to commit them instead to pastoral service, he tried to fight. He can truly be said to have placed himself in that “high” measure of Christian life which makes him a pastor who embodied pastoral charity in an original way, seeking communion among the people of God, reaching out to those most in need and witnessing a poor evangelical life.

Announcement from the Rector Major at the end of his term of office

To my Salesian Brothers SDB

To my brothers and sisters in the Salesian Family

My dear brothers and sisters: Please accept my fraternal and affectionate greetings on this day when we remember our Father Don Bosco’s birth. I am sending you these words a few minutes after solemnly celebrating the liturgical feast of Don Bosco’s birth at the Becchi, Colle Don Bosco, where he was born on 16

August 1815. This child was a wonderful instrument of the Spirit of God to give life to the great movement that is the Don Bosco Family.

This morning, in the presence of the Vicar of the Rector Major and many of my Salesian brothers and sisters, the Salesian Family, lay friends of Don Bosco, civil and public service authorities and 375 young people from all over the world who took part in the Youth Synod, I signed my resignation from the service as Rector Major, as established by the Constitutions and Regulations of the Salesians of Don Bosco, given that I have been called by the Holy Father, Pope Francis, to another service.

I would like to communicate to the whole Salesian world, in these words, what has taken place. I would like to express my outlook of faith and hope in the Lord who has guided us, and I wish to express my gratitude for so much good received over these ten and a half years as Rector Major of the Congregation and, in the name of Don Bosco, as Father of the entire Salesian Family.

1. First of all, dear brothers and sisters, in addressing you I would like to express my deep gratitude to God for these years in which he has blessed our Congregation and the Salesian Family. Over a decade we have certainly experienced very different events and situations, especially in a Congregation that is present in 136 nations; I think I can say that we have approached everything from a perspective of faith, with great hope and determination, always for the good of the mission and in fidelity to the charism we have received.

2. I am grateful to the Lord for the fact that over these years I have not lacked, nor have we lacked, the serenity and strength that comes from him. For how true is what the risen Lord says to St Paul: "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Cor 12:9). This is how I have experienced, and this is how we as

the General Council have experienced our service of animation and government. In particular, I would like to thank the two General Councils that have accompanied me over these ten and a half years for their loyalty to our common project, for their dedication and their service.

3. At the end of this period at the head of the Salesian Congregation, I express particular thanks to the Vicar of the Rector Major, Fr Stefano Martoglio, who takes up his service at the head of the Congregation with total dedication and generosity. In the coming months there will be much work and great responsibility, but his personality, his fraternal approach, his ability and optimism, with the help of the General Council and guided by the Lord, will facilitate the journey that remains until the 29th General Chapter.

4. I express my deep gratitude to all my Salesian confreres around the world. I have always felt welcomed, loved and fraternally accepted, and I have found collaboration and generosity. It is true that the Salesians of Don Bosco love and care for the Rector Major as they would for Don Bosco himself, as he asked of us in his spiritual testament. Thank you for your generosity.

5. I would also like to express my gratitude to the Salesian Family spread throughout the world: to our sisters the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, to the Salesian Cooperators, to the Association of Mary Help of Christians (ADMA) – all founded by Don Bosco – and so on up to the 32 groups that today make up this great charismatic tree. These were years of growth and blessing. Thank you to all the people who, through faith in the Lord, have made all this possible.

6. And over these ten years of my service of animation and government, during which I have been able to visit 120 of the countries in which the Congregation and the Salesian Family are present, I have received the great gift of meeting young people around the world: little ones, teenagers, young adults,

boys and girls of every nation. I was able to “see with my own eyes, feel with my heart”, first-hand, how “the educational miracles that heal and transform lives” continue to happen every day in many Salesian presences and in our family. And I was able to meet thousands and thousands of young people from all continents and cultures. They were one of my profoundest joys.

7. And I have one last thank you to make. Throughout these years, I have always felt encouraged and supported by the unconditional love of my biological family. For nine of these years my parents, now with God, accompanied me lovingly, serenely, and with their prayers, always telling me not to worry about them. They and all the rest of my family have always been there for me, supporting me with their presence and representing a safe haven to reach so that I never forget my humble origins.

8. Let me conclude by referring to what I said on 25 March 2014 when the then Rector Major, Fr Pascual Chavez, asked me, on behalf of the 27th General Chapter which had elected me in the voting, whether I would accept the service of Rector Major.

I remember that in my poor Italian of that time I said, not without deep emotion, that “trusting in the Grace of the Lord and in faith, with the certainty that I will always be supported by my Salesian confreres, and because I truly love the young people whom I carry in my Salesian heart, I accept what is asked of me.” Today, with these words of thanks, I can tell you that everything I had hoped for has come true with God’s grace.

My final words are addressed to our Father Don Bosco and the Help of Christians. There is no doubt that Don Bosco has watched over and supported his Congregation and his Family over these years. And I have no doubt that in all this time what he himself had assured us has been achieved: “She did

everything". This was the case with Don Bosco. This has been the case in the recent years to which I refer, and this will undoubtedly continue to be the case. To her, our Mother and Help of Christians, we entrust ourselves.

From the bottom of my heart, thank you and greetings from this brother of yours who is and always will be a Salesian of Don Bosco. With all my affection,

Ángel Fernández Cardinale Artime

Prot. 24/0427

Colle Don Bosco, 16 August 2024

Let us also add the office termination act.

I, the undersigned, Ángel Fernández Cardinale Artime, Rector Major of the Society of St Francis de Sales,

– whereas in the Consistory of 30 September 2023 the Holy Father Francis created and proclaimed me Cardinal of the Deaconry of Santa Maria Ausiliatrice in Via Tuscolana; whereas on 5 March 2024 he assigned me the titular see of Ursona, with the dignity of archbishop, and whereas on 20 April 2024 I received Episcopal Ordination in the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome;

– considering that the religious elevated to the Episcopate is subject only to the Roman Pontiff (can. 705);

– taking into account that, in accordance with can. 184 §1 CIC "*An ecclesiastical office is lost by the lapse of a predetermined time*" and that, by decree of 19 April 2024, the Holy Father ordered "*by exception and only for this case*" the continuation of my service as Rector Major after episcopal ordination, until 16 August 2024, hereby

I DECLARE

that, since the time established by the aforementioned decree

has expired, from today's date I have ceased to hold the office of Rector Major of the Society of St Francis de Sales.

In accordance with art. 143 of the Constitutions, the Vicar, Father Stefano Martoglio, will simultaneously take over the governance of the Society *ad interim*, until the election of the Rector Major that will take place during the 29th General Chapter convened in Turin from 16 February to 12 April 2025.

Ángel Fernández Cardinale Arttime

Prot. 24/0406

Rome, 16 August 2024

Caught between admiration and sorrow

Today I bid you farewell for the last time from this page of the Salesian Bulletin. On 16 August, the day we commemorate Don Bosco's birth, my service as Rector Major of the Salesians of Don Bosco ends.

It is always a reason to give thanks! First of all to God, to the Congregation and the Salesian Family, to so many dear people and friends, to so many friends of Don Bosco's charism, the many benefactors.

On this occasion too, my greeting conveys something I have experienced recently. Hence the title of this greeting: A mixture of admiration and sorrow. Let me tell you about the joy that filled my heart in Goma, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, wounded by an interminable war, and the joy and testimony I received yesterday.

Three weeks ago, after visiting Uganda (in the Palabek refugee camp which, thanks to Salesian help and work

in recent years, is no longer a camp for Sudanese refugees but a place where tens of thousands of people have settled and found a new life), I crossed Rwanda and arrived at the border in the region of Goma, a wonderful area, beautiful and rich in nature (and precisely for this reason so desired and desirable). Well, because of the armed conflicts, there are more than a million displaced people in that region who have had to leave their homes and their land. We too had to leave our Salesian presence in Sha-Sha, which was occupied militarily.

This million displaced people arrived in the city of Goma. In Gangi, one of the districts, there is the Don Bosco Salesian work. I was immensely happy to see the good that is being done there. Hundreds of boys and girls have a home. Dozens of teenagers have been taken off the streets and are living in the Don Bosco house. It was there, because of the war, that 82 newborn babies and young boys and girls who lost their parents or were left behind ('abandoned') because their parents could not look after them, found a home.

And there, in that new Valdocco, one of the many Valdocco's around the world, a community of three Sisters from San Salvador, together with a group of women, all supported by the Salesian house with aid that arrives thanks to the generosity of benefactors and Providence, take care of these little boys and girls. When I went to visit them, the Sisters had dressed everyone up, even the children sleeping in their cots. How could I not feel my heart filled with joy at this reality of goodness, despite the pain caused by abandonment and war!

But my heart was touched when I met several hundred people who came to greet me on the occasion of my visit. They are among the 32,000 displaced people who left their homes and their land because of the bombs and came to seek refuge. They found it in the fields and grounds of the Don Bosco house in Gangi. They have nothing, they live in shacks of a few square metres. This is their reality. Together every day we look for a way to find food for them. But do you

know what struck me most? What impressed me most was that when I was with these hundreds of people, mostly elderly people and mothers with children, they had not lost their dignity and had not lost their joy or their smile. I was amazed and my heart was saddened by so much suffering and poverty, even though we are doing our part in the name of the Lord.

An extraordinary concert

I experienced another great joy when I received a testimony of life that made me think of the teenagers and young people in our presence, and of the many children of parents who may be reading me and who feel that their children are unmotivated, bored by life, or have no passion for almost anything. Among the guests in our house these days was an extraordinary pianist who has toured the world giving concerts and has been part of great philharmonic orchestras. She is a former pupil of the Salesians and had a Salesian, now deceased, as a great reference and model. She wanted to offer us this concert in the atrium of the Sacred Heart Church as a homage to Mary Help of Christians, whom she loves so much, and as a thank you for all that her life has been so far.

And I say the latter because our dear friend gave us a wonderful concert, with exceptional quality at the age of 81. She was accompanied by her daughter. And at that age, perhaps when some of our elders in the family have long since said that they no longer want to do anything, or do anything that requires effort, our dear friend, who practises the piano every day, moved her hands with wonderful agility and was immersed in the beauty of music and its performance. Good music, a generous smile at the end of her performance, and the handing over of orchids to Our Lady Help of Christians were all we needed on that wonderful morning. And my Salesian heart could not help but think of those boys, girls and young people who perhaps have had or no longer have anything to motivate them in their lives. She, our concert pianist friend, lives with great serenity at 81 years of age and, as she told me, continues to offer the gift God has given her and every day

she finds more and more reasons to do so.

Another lesson in life and another testimony that does not leave one's heart indifferent.

Thank you, my friends, thank you from the bottom of my heart for all the good we are doing together. However small it may be, it contributes to making our world a little more human and more beautiful. May the good Lord bless you.

When an educator touches the hearts of his children

The art of being like Don Bosco: "Remember that education is a matter of the heart, of which God alone is the master, and that we can achieve nothing unless God teaches us the art and hands us the key" (BM XVI, 376).

Dear friends, readers of the Salesian Bulletin and friends of Don Bosco's charism. I am writing you this greeting, I would say almost in real time before this issue goes to press.

I say this because the scene I am about to describe to you happened only four hours ago.

I recently arrived in Lubumbashi. For the past ten days I have been visiting very significant Salesian presences, such as the displaced people and refugees in Palabek – today in much more humane conditions than when they came to us, thank God – and from Uganda I moved on to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to the tortured and crucified region of Goma.

The Salesian presence there is full of life. Several times I have said that my heart was "touched" (*touché*), that is, moved to see the good that is being done, to see that there is a presence of God even in the greatest poverty. But my heart was

touched with pain and sadness when I met some of the 32,000 people (mostly elderly, women and children) who are housed in the grounds of the Salesian presence at Don Bosco-Gangi.

But I will tell you about that next time, because I need to let it rest in my heart.

The “papa” of the Goma urchins

Now I just want to mention a beautiful scene I witnessed on the flight that took us to Lubumbashi.

It was an extra-commercial flight in a medium-sized plane. But the captain was someone familiar, not to me, but to the local Salesians. When I greeted the captain on the plane, he told me that he had studied vocational training at our school here in Goma. He told me that those had been years that had changed his life, but he added something else, telling me and telling us: and here is the one who has been a “papa” to us.

In African culture, when you say someone is a papa, you are saying something quite strong. And not infrequently the papa is not the person who fathered that son or daughter, but the one who actually cared for, supported and accompanied him or her.

Who was the captain, a man of about 45, with his now young pilot son accompanying him on the flight, referring to? He was referring to our Salesian brother (a coadjutor, i.e. not a priest but a consecrated layman, a masterpiece of the Salesian charism).

This Salesian, Brother Onorato, a Spanish missionary, has been a missionary in the Goma region for more than 40 years. He has done everything to make this vocational school and many other things possible, certainly together with other Salesians. He got to know our pilot and some of his friends when they were just lost boys in the neighbourhood (i.e. among hundreds and hundreds of boys). In fact, the captain told me that four of his friends, who were practically on the street in those years, managed to study mechanics in Don Bosco’s house and are now engineers and take care of the mechanical and technical maintenance of their company’s small planes.

The Salesian “sacrament”

Well, when I heard the captain, a former Salesian student, say that Onorato had been his father, the father of them all, I was deeply moved and immediately thought of Don Bosco, whom his boys felt and considered as their father.

In the letters of Fr Rua and Bishop Cagliero, Don Bosco is always called “*papà*” On the evening of 7 December 1887, when Don Bosco’s health deteriorated, Fr Rua simply telegraphed Bishop Cagliero, “Papà is in an alarming state.” An old song ended: “Long live Don Bosco our Papà!”

And I thought how true it is that education is a matter of the heart. And I confirmed among my convictions that being present among boys, girls and young people is for us almost a “sacrament” through which we also come to God. That is why over the years I have spoken with such passion and conviction to my Salesian brothers and sisters and to the Salesian Family about the Salesian “sacrament” of presence.

And I know that in the Salesian world, in our family throughout the world, among our brothers and sisters there are so many “papas” and so many “mamas” who, with their presence and their affection, with their knowledge of education, reach the hearts of young people, who today are in so much need, I would say more and more, of these presences that can change a life for the better.

Greetings from Africa and all the Lord’s blessings to the friends of the Salesian charism.

God bless you all.

Mary Help of Christians, from

here to the world

Friends, readers of the Salesian Bulletin, my affectionate and warm greeting at this Easter time. In a troubled world, shaken by wars and no small amount of violence, we continue to declare, announce and proclaim that Jesus is the Lord, raised by the Father and who IS ALIVE. And we badly need his presence in hearts ready to welcome him.

At the same time, I could see the content of this month's Bulletin, always rich and full of Salesian life. I am grateful to those who produce it. And as I read the pages, before writing my greeting, I came across the presentation of so many Salesian places around the world where Mary Help of Christians has arrived.

I must confess that when I found myself in Valdocco, inside the magnificent Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, in this holy place where everything speaks of the presence of God, of the maternal protection of our Mother and Don Bosco, I could not imagine how the announcement of Mary Help of Christians to Don Bosco had come true, saying that from here, from this Marian church, her glory would spread throughout the world. And so it did.

In my service over these ten years as Rector Major I have met hundreds of Salesian presences around the world where our Mother was present. And once again I would like to tell you about my latest experience. It was during my last visit to the Salesian presences among the Xavante people that I was able to "touch with my own hands" the Providence of God and the good that continues to be done and that we continue to do among all of us.

I was able to visit several villages and towns in the State of Mato Grosso. I was in San Marcos, the village of Fatima, Sangradouro, and around these three large centres we visited others, including the place where the first settlement took place with the Xavante people, a people that was afflicted by disease and in danger of extinction, and that thanks to the

help of those missionaries, to their medicines and to dozens of years of loving presence among them, it has been possible to reach the situation today with more than 23,000 members of the Xavante people. This is Providence, the proclamation of the Gospel and at the same time a journey with a people and their culture, preserved today as never before.

I had the opportunity to speak with several civil authorities. I was grateful for all that we can do together for the good of this people and others. And at the same time I took the liberty of reminding them, simply but with honesty and legitimate pride, that those who have accompanied this people for 130 years, as the Church has done in this case through the sons and daughters of Don Bosco, are worthy of a respectful gaze, and of listening to his word.

We have done all we can to join the voices calling for land for these settlers. The defence of their land and the faith lived with these peoples (in this case with the Boi-Bororo) was the cause of the martyrdom of Salesian Rodolfo Lunkenbein and Indian Simao in Meruri.

Driving hundreds of kilometres of road, I was happy to see so many signs announcing: "Territorio de Reserva Indígena" (Territory of Indigenous Reserve). And I thought this was the best guarantee of peace and prosperity for these people.

And what does what I am describing have to do with Mary Help of Christians? Simply everything, because it is hard to imagine a century of Salesian presence (sdb and fma) among the indigenous Xavantes without them passing on the love for the mother of our Lord, and our mother.

The Help of Christians in the jungle

In San Marcos, all or most of the villagers, together with our guests, ended the day of our arrival with a procession and the rosary. The image of the Virgin was illuminated in the middle of the night in the middle of the jungle. Elderly people, adults, young people and many mothers carrying sleeping children in a basket on their shoulders were

on pilgrimage. We made several stops in different parts of the village. No doubt our Mother at that moment, and no doubt at many other times, was passing through the village of San Marcos and blessing her indigenous sons and daughters.

I cannot know if Don Bosco dreamed this scene of the Virgin in the middle of the Xavante village. But there is no doubt that in his heart was this desire, with this people and with many others, whether in Patagonia, whether in the Amazon, whether on the river Paraguay...

And that desire and that missionary dream has been fulfilled in Amazonia for 130 years. As I wrote in the commentary to the Strenna, the feminine-maternal-Marian dimension is perhaps one of the most challenging dimensions of Don Bosco's dream. It is Jesus himself who gives him a teacher, who is his Mother, and that "he must ask her for his name"; John must work "with her children", and it will be "She" who will take care of the continuity of the dream in life, who will take him by the hand until the end of his days, until the moment when he will truly understand everything.

There is an enormous intentionality in wanting to say that in the Salesian charism on behalf of the poorest, most deprived and neglected children, the dimension of treating them with "gentleness", meekness and charity, as well as the "Marian" dimension, are essential elements for those who want to live this charism. Without Mary of Nazareth we would be talking about another charism, not the Salesian charism, not about the sons and daughters of Don Bosco.

On this feast of Mary Help of Christians, on 24 May, at different times Mary Help of Christians will be present in the hearts of her sons and daughters all over the world, be it in Taiwan or East Timor, be it in India, or Nairobi (Kenya), be it in Valdocco, be it in Amazonia or in the small village of San Marcos, which is nothing to the world but is a whole world to this people who have come to know Mary Help of Christians.

Happy Mary's month. Happy Feast of Mary Help of Christians to all, from Valdocco to the whole world.

Letter from Rector Major Cardinal Ángel Fernández Artime

For the attention of my Salesian confreres, for the attention of our dear Salesian Family

My dear Salesian confreres, my dear brothers and sisters in the Salesian Family throughout the world: please accept my warm and affectionate greetings, especially at this time.

The reasons for my writing to you today, right on the eve of my Episcopal Ordination, at the nomination of the Holy Father Pope Francis, is to officially and definitively pass on to you my personal situation with regard to our Congregation and the Salesian Family.

Some time ago, Pope Francis expressed to me his wish that my Episcopal Ordination would take place during this Easter season together with our Salesian confrere Archbishop-elect Giordano Piccinotti, and that I could continue my service until the appropriate date. So, trusting always in the Lord, who is the only guarantor of our lives, the following is definitive:

1. The Holy Father has prepared a document for me with the 'deroga' (an Italian term meaning "an exception to what is legislated", in which he authorises me to continue for a further period as Rector Major, after having received episcopal consecration). This document containing the Holy Father's authorisation has already reached us and is in the archives of the Congregation.
2. In agreement with Pope Francis, I will conclude my service

as Rector major towards the evening of 16 August this year, 2024, following the celebration of the 209th anniversary of the birth of our father at Colle Don Bosco. On the same day we will celebrate the closing of the Youth Synod' with the young people, a Synod in which 370 young people from all over the world will have participated on the occasion of the bicentenary of the dream at 9 years of age, an event for Don Bosco that was a dream-vision and a programme for life that has come down to us.

On that afternoon, in a simple act, I will sign my letter of renunciation in accordance with Article 128 of our Constitutions, and I will hand over this document to the Vicar of the Rector Major Father Stefano Martoglio who, according to Article 143, will assume the government of our Congregation 'ad interim' until the election of the Rector Major at GC29 to be held in Valdocco (Turin) from 16 February 2025.

3. Certainly from now on, but particularly from that date onwards, I will be attending to the service that the Holy Father will indicate to me.

I wish to thank the Lord, together with all of you, my dear brothers and sisters, for how blessed we have been over these last ten years, both as a Salesian Congregation and as the Family of Don Bosco. The Lord has assisted us in his Spirit and our Mother the Help of Christians has never let go of our hand. And we are certain that this will continue to be the case in the future because "She has done everything".

My final word at this moment is addressed to Don Bosco who will undoubtedly continue to look after his Congregation and his precious Family.

With true affection and united in the Lord,

Cardinal Ángel FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME, sdb

Rector Major

Society of St Francis de Sales

Rome, 19 April 2024

I am a Salesian and I am a Bororo

Diary of a happy and blessed missionary day

Dear friends of the Salesian Bulletin, I am writing to you from Meruri, in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul. I write this greeting almost as if it were a journalistic chronicle, because 24 hours have passed since I arrived in the middle of this city.

But my Salesian confreres arrived 122 years ago and since then we have always been in this mission in the middle of the forests and fields, accompanying the life of this indigenous people.

In 1976, a Salesian and an Indian were robbed of their lives with two gunshots (by *facendeiros* or big landowners), because they thought that the Salesians at the mission were a problem so they could take over other properties in these lands that belong to the Boi-Bororo people. They were the Servant of God Rodolfo Lunkenbein, a Salesian, and an Indian Simao Bororo.

And here we were able to experience many simple moments yesterday: we were welcomed by the indigenous community on our arrival, we greeted them – without haste – because everything is peaceful here. We celebrated Sunday Eucharist, shared rice and feijoada (bean stew), and enjoyed amiable and warm conversation.

In the afternoon, I had prepared a meeting with the leaders of the various communities; some women leaders were present (in several villages it is the woman who has

ultimate authority). We had a sincere and profound dialogue. They gave me their thoughts and presented me with some of their needs.

In one of these moments, a young Boi Bororo Salesian took the floor. He is the first Bororo to become a Salesian after 122 years of Salesian presence. This invites us to reflect on the need to give time to everything; things are not as we think and want them to be in today's efficient and impatient way.

And this young Salesian spoke like this in front of his people, his people and his leaders or authorities: 'I am Salesian but I am also Bororo; I am Bororo but I am also Salesian, and the most important thing for me is that I was born in this very place, that I met the missionaries, that I heard about the two martyrs, Father Rodolfo and Simao, and I saw my people and my people grow, thanks to the fact that **my people walked together with the Salesian mission and the mission walked together with my people**. That is still the most important thing for us, to walk together.'

I thought for a moment how proud and happy Don Bosco would have been to hear that one of his Salesian sons belonged to this people (like other Salesians who come from the Xavante or Yanomani people).

At the same time, in my address I assured them that we want to continue to walk alongside them, that we want them to do everything possible to continue to care for and save their culture – and their language – with all our help. I told them that I am convinced that our presence has helped them, but I am also convinced of how good it is for us to be with them.

"Go ahead!" said the Shepherdess

I thought of Don Bosco's last missionary dream: and that Little Shepherdess, who stopped beside Don Bosco and said to him, "Do you remember the dream you had when you were nine? Look now, what do you see?" "I see mountains, then seas, then hills, then mountains and seas again."

“Good,” said the Shepherdess, “now draw a single line from one end to the other, from Santiago to Peking, make a centre in the middle of Africa, and you will have an exact idea of what the Salesians have to do.” “But how to do all this?” Don Bosco exclaimed, “The distances are immense, the places difficult and the Salesians few.” “Don’t be upset. Your children, your children’s children and their children will do this.” They are doing it.

From the beginning of our journey as a Congregation, guided (and lovingly “urged on”) by Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco sent the first missionaries to Argentina. We are a recognised congregation with the charism of education and evangelisation of the young, but we are also a very missionary congregation and family. From the beginning until today, there have been more than eleven thousand Salesian SDB missionaries and several thousand Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. And today, our presence among this indigenous people, which has 1940 members and continues to grow little by little, makes perfect sense after 122 years, because they are on the periphery of the world, but a world that sometimes does not understand that it must respect what they are.

I also spoke with the matriarch, the oldest of them all, who came to greet me and tell me about her people. And after a torrential rainstorm, in the place of martyrdom, with great serenity we sat and prayed the rosary on a beautiful Sunday evening (it was already dark). There were many of us representing the reality of this mission: grandmothers, grandparents, adults, young mothers, babies, small children, consecrated religious, lay people... A richness in the simplicity of this small part of the world that has no power but is also chosen and favoured by the Lord, as He tells us in the Gospel.

And I know that we will continue in this way, God willing, for many years to come, because one can be a Bororo and a son of Don Bosco, and be a son of Don Bosco and a Bororo who loves and cares for his people and his people.

In the simplicity of this meeting, today was a great day of shared life with the indigenous peoples. A great missionary day.

Don Bosco's dream is more alive than ever

Faced with everything that I am seeing in the Salesian world, I feel I can say with some authority: Beloved Don Bosco, your Dream continues to be fulfilled.

Dear friends, readers of the Salesian Bulletin, as I do every month I send you my personal greetings from my heart and I am offering you my reflections, motivated by what I am experiencing, because I believe that life comes to us all and that what we share, if it is good, does us good and gives us new enthusiasm.

Lent and Easter invite us to be born again. Every day. To be reborn to trust, to hope, serene peace, the desire to love, work and create, to cherish and cultivate people and talents and creatures, the entire little or large garden that God has entrusted to us.

For us Salesians, Easter always reminds us of the feast in 1846 at Valdocco, when Don Bosco went from the tears of the Filippi field to the poor Pinardi shed and the strip of land around it, where the dream began to become reality.

I have seen the dream continue being fulfilled.

I am writing to you now from Santo Domingo, in the Dominican Republic. I previously made a magnificent, very meaningful visit to Juazeiro do Norte (Recife, northeast Brazil) and these last few days have been in the Dominican Republic.

In a few hours I will continue on to Vietnam, and in the midst of this "hustle and bustle" which can also be experienced with much tranquillity, I have nourished my Salesian heart with beautiful experiences and comforting certainties.

I will tell you about them, because they speak of the Salesian mission, but let me start with an anecdote that a Salesian told me yesterday, which made me laugh, moved me and spoke to me of a "Salesian heart".

A little stone-thrower

A confrere told me that a few days ago, while travelling along one of the roads in the interior of this country, he passed by a place where some children had taken up the habit of throwing stones at cars to cause minor accidents – like breaking a window – and in the confusion, stealing something from the traveller.

Well, that is how it happened to him. He was driving through the village and a child threw a stone to break one of the car windows and succeeded. The Salesian got out of the car, picked up the child and let his parents take him. It was just that there was no father in the family (he had abandoned them long ago). There was only a suffering mother who was left alone with this child and a younger girl. When the Salesian told the mother that her son had broken the car window (which the boy admitted), and that it cost a lot of money, and that she would have to pay him back, the poor woman apologised tearfully, asking for forgiveness, but making him understand that she had no way to pay him back, that she was poor, that she would deal with her son... At that moment, the little girl, the sister of this 'Don Bosco's little Magone', timidly approached with her little fist closed, opened it and handed the Salesian the only almost worthless coin that she had. It was her entire treasure and she told him: "Here, sir, to pay for the glass." My confrere told me that he was so moved that he could no longer speak, and ended up giving the woman some money for a little help for the family.

I did not know quite how to interpret the story, but it was so full of life, pain, need and humanity that I vowed to share it with you. And a few hours later, very close to where I was staying in the Salesian house, I was shown another small Salesian house where we take in children who have no one and who are living on the streets.

Most of them are Haitians. We know well the tragedy that is unfolding in Haiti where there is no order, no government, no law.... Only mafias rule over everything. Well, to know that these children who arrived here (nobody knows how), who have nowhere to stay, are welcomed in our house (20 in all at the moment), to then move on to other houses, once stabilised, with other educational objectives (where we have, between various houses and always with Salesians and lay educators, another 90 children) – it filled my heart with joy and made me think that Valdocco in Turin, with Don Bosco, was born this way, and this is how we Salesians were born, and a small group of those Valdocco boys, together with Don Bosco, gave “de facto” life to the Salesian Congregation on that 18 December 1859.

How can one fail to see “the hand of God in all this”? How can one fail to see that all this work is the result of much more than a human strategy? How can one fail to see that here and in thousands of other Salesian places around the world, good continues to be done, always with the help of so many generous people and so many others who share a passion for education?

This year, in Madrid in Spain and other places (including America), the magnificent short film “Canillitas” was presented, showing the lives of so many of these young people. I was happy to touch this scene with my own hands and eyes. And it is indeed true, my friends, that Don Bosco’s dream is still being realised today, 200 years later.

Then yesterday I spent the whole day with young people from the Salesian world who call themselves and feel themselves to be leaders throughout Salesian Latin America of a movement that seeks to ensure that at least the Salesian

educational world takes care of creation and ecology very seriously with the sensitivity of Pope Francis expressed in *Laudato Si'*. Young people from 12 Latin American countries were there (in person or online) in their "Sustainable Latin America" movement. It is beautiful that young people dream and engage in something that is good for them, for the world and for all of us. So that the world may be saved: saving means preserving, and nothing will be lost, not a sigh, not a tear, not a blade of grass; no generous effort, no painful patience, no gesture of care, however small and hidden, will be lost: if we can prevent a Heart from breaking, we will not have lived in vain. If we can ease the Pain of a Life, or soothe a Pain, or help a child to grow, we shall not have lived in vain.

I feel, in the face of all this, that I can say with some authority: beloved Don Bosco, your Dream is still VERY MUCH ALIVE.

Stay well and be happy.