 Reading time: 3 min.

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

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

Today we find ourselves in a vastly different context from Don Bosco’s time. Today “missions” cannot be understood solely as a movement towards “mission lands” as in the past. Today Salesian missionaries come from the five continents and are sent by the Rector Major to the five continents. In a world where borders are in danger of closing more and more, Salesian missionaries are sent not only to respond to the need for personnel but, above all, to bear witness that for us there are no borders, to contribute to intercultural dialogue, to the inculturation of faith and of our charism, and to trigger processes that can generate new local vocations.



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

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



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

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

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

I invite the Provincials, together with their Delegates for missionary animation

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

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

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

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

Turin Valdocco, 18th December 2022