

□ Reading time: 6 min.

“An Appeal for Renewed Charismatic Fidelity and Missionary Generosity”

Dear Confreres,

A fraternal and heartfelt greeting from the historic port city of Genova, where we conclude the celebrations of the 150th anniversary of the first missionary expedition. Exactly 150 years ago, from this very shore, Don Bosco, moved by the fire of apostolic love, entrusted the first group of missionaries to the embrace of Divine Providence and to the maternal care of Mary Help of Christians, as they embarked for Argentina. That small beginning has grown into a mighty tree, whose branches now stretch across 137 countries, bearing fruit through the lives and service of about 14,000 Salesians on five continents.

This Jubilee is much more than a historical remembrance of the past, it is a prophetic moment. It calls us, first of all, to **GIVE THANKS**, awakening in us a profound sense of gratitude. It also urges us to look ahead with courage, to **RETHINK** our response in the light of hope and faith, and to **RELAUNCH** our missionary zeal, rekindling within us the same fire that ignited Don Bosco's heart, a missionary spirit that is bold, creative, and unwavering in fidelity to Christ and to the young.

1. The Missionary Heart of Don Bosco

From its very beginning, Don Bosco's vocation, had an intrinsic missionary character. His vocational journey that started with the dream at the age of 9 at Becchi, his formative years at Chieri and his mission at Valdocco, manifest his yearning for missions. His five “missionary dreams” reveal this burning desire. These dreams were not mere visions of expansion, but a prophetic expression of the Congregation's universal vocation: to educate and evangelize the young everywhere, making the missionary spirit its very soul.

When Don Bosco sent the first missionaries in 1875, that journey was not merely a new geographical expansion; it was a spiritual and apostolic adventure revealing the deepest essence of our Salesian identity. Though Don Bosco remained in Turin, he lived with the heart of a missionary, constantly looking toward the frontiers of the world where young people awaited love, education, and faith.

When Don Bosco announced the first missionary expedition, a wave of joy and zeal swept through Valdocco. Fr Ceria writes, “what Don Bosco said and did for the missions created a great deal of wholesome enthusiasm among pupils and Salesians. Visible effects were a noticeable increase in vocations to the priesthood

and in requests to join the Congregation. A good number of members were inflamed with a new zeal for the apostolate" (BM XI, 134). It was a moment of Pentecost for the congregation. Today, we are called to another Pentecost. Secularization, digital saturation, social unrest, injustices and wars, added to these the cries of the poor demand missionaries whose presence communicates hope.

If Don Bosco and his first missionaries had remained confined to Valdocco, content with security, familiarity and safety, the Salesian charism would have had a different path. But their holy audacity, their willingness to risk everything for the Gospel, transformed our Congregation into a global sign of God's love for the young.

2. Missionaries - Prophets of hope

To our beloved missionaries scattered across the world: you are the living continuation of Don Bosco's missionary dream. With humility and perseverance, through fidelity amid hardship, in contexts of violence and wars, the Congregation communicates its true identity. Hidden and heroic sacrifices nurture the vitality of our charism far more than one can ever know. The serenity with which challenges are faced is a testament of faith that is an inspiration to all. The experience lived by the missionaries is a timely reminder that the mission is not ours; it is God's. It is He who accompanies His servants with the quiet strength of the Spirit and the maternal presence of Mary Help of Christians.

3. The Missionary Urgency of Our Times

We stand today at a crossroads of history. The world is changing rapidly, yet the cry of the young is more urgent than ever. Wars, violence, forced migrations, ecological crises, digital distractions, artificial intelligence, and cultural fragmentation challenge each one of us daily. Pope Francis referred to it as growing up "in a world in ashes" (*Christus Vivit*, 216). The cries of today's young people take on concrete "faces" of Christ that become a missionary call: the faces of young migrants uprooted by forced displacement; the faces of youth scarred by war and violence; the faces of the excluded, trapped in poverty and denied opportunities for work and study; the faces of those burdened by ecological and social crises; the faces of the spiritually abandoned, weighed down by loneliness, despair, or a sense of meaninglessness; and the faces of children living on the streets or suffering exploitation. Each face is a call, each cry is a mission, and each young person is Christ Himself, waiting to be loved.

I address you today with a renewed missionary appeal to every Salesian heart, in every corner of the world: the mission is not over. The mission is now. Missionary life is born from intimacy with the Heart of Christ, a heart that "loved us first." That

love calls us to go beyond ourselves, to bring the joy of the Gospel to the young, especially the poorest and most abandoned. It is not a task for a select few; it is the very DNA of our Salesian vocation. Article 30 of our Constitutions reminds us that our Society recognizes “missionary work as an essential feature of our Congregation.” To lose the missionary spirit would be to lose something vital from our soul. As the Church is missionary by nature, so too is every Salesian.

4. An Appeal to Provincials and Delegates of Missionary Animation

While we are all custodians of Don Bosco’s missionary dream, you are entrusted with that special task of awakening and promoting the missionary heart within your Provinces. Be bold in your encouragement. Be careful in discernment processes and generous in accompaniment. Let us feel committed to this journey knowing that the presence of passionate and prepared Salesians who offer themselves to go to the missions demand great sacrifice on the Provinces. I would like to recall the missionary appeal made by Fr. Ricceri in 1972, an appeal that continues to inspire and challenge us today:

I intend with this letter, at a decisive moment in the history and life of the Congregation, to make a solemn, heartfelt and formal invitation to the whole Congregation so that, by reawakening the best energies and uniting the forces of all Salesians who love the Congregation, a concrete, courageous and enthusiastic RENEWAL of our SPIRIT and our missionary ACTION may take place.

While **giving thanks** to this journey of self-dedication and missionary pastoral zeal, let us **rethink** and **relaunch** our missionary commitment, personally and as a Congregation. Rethinking means opening our hearts to listen anew to the voice of the Spirit, calling us to leave behind our comfort zones and to embrace the radicality of the Gospel. **Relaunching** means to begin again, with trust; not counting our weaknesses but placing our faith in the One who calls. As Pope Francis reminds us: “The Church grows by attraction” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 14) by that witness of those who have encountered Christ, whose presence radiates joy. The future of our Congregation depends on this very capacity to move forward with passion and courage, allowing ourselves to be drawn toward the frontiers where Christ wishes to be encountered and announced.

Dear Confreres, we are all called to take seriously this appeal. Like the parable of the five loaves and two fish, Don Bosco with the limited resources and personnel in 1875, in spite of knowing that the Congregation was still small and fragile with just 171 Salesians, sent missionaries. He trusted not in numbers, but in God’s

Providence and in the unfailing help of Mary. That same faith and fire must inflame our hearts today.

Dear young Salesians, I invite you to a courageous, prayerful and sincere discernment allowing the Spirit to show the way, and the courage to follow Him. Like Mary, the first missionary, who went with haste to bring Christ to others, may we too allow the presence of Christ within our hearts to lead us, full of joy and hope, to be signs and bearers of the Gospel to the young, especially those most in need. For the coming 157th missionary expedition I issue a call for generous confreres ready to be sent to the peripheries where Christ already waits:

- Africa: North Africa (CAN), Southern Africa (AFM), West Africa (AON, AOS), Mozambique (MOZ).
- South America: Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentina, Chile, Bolivia.
- Europe: Romania-Moldavia, Albania-Kosovo-Montenegro, Sardinia, Slovenia, Hungary.
- Middle East: Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Egypt (MOR).
- Asia: Mongolia, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Cambodia.
- Apostolic Vicariates: Baku (Azerbaijan), Chaco Paraguayo (Paraguay), Gambella (Ethiopia), Méndez (Ecuador), Mixes (Mexico), Petén (Guatemala), Pucallpa (Peru), Puerto Ayacucho (Venezuela).
- New Frontiers: Greece, Vanuatu, Niger.

“The harvest is abundant, but the labourers are few” (Lk 10:2). My dear confreres, let us not be afraid to answer this call. The Lord who calls is also the Lord who equips with grace, strength, and joy.

As we close this Jubilee Year of Hope, I entrust this renewed missionary appeal to Mary Help of Christians, our mother and guide. May she intercede for each of us, that the Salesian Congregation may continue to breathe with missionary lungs, and that every confrere may rediscover the joy of being sent, the joy of being Salesian, and the joy of giving one's life for Christ and for the young.

With fraternal affection and encouragement,

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