

□ Reading time: 12 min.

On 28 May 2026, Salesian China Province of Mary Help of Christians (CIN) became 100 years old. This good old age prompts us to thank God from the bottom of our hearts. It also prompts us to review these 100 years in order to “count our blessings”. All God’s blessing, like the supreme blessing given us by God the Father in his Son Our Lord Jesus Christ, are paschal in nature, i.e. given within the Paschal Mystery at work in human history: “Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” (Luke 24:26) and “through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

Our review of CIN 100 years, like Don Bosco’s “Memoirs of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales”, will be divided into “Decades”. While Don Bosco’s Decades are 5, our Decades are 10. We shall preface these 10 Decades, again like Don Bosco (who prefaces his 5 Decades with “Ten Years of Infancy”), with, not ten, but eighty years of “CIN infancy”.

CIN: conception, birth, and infancy

The ten years of infancy of Don Bosco end with the narration of his “9-year old dream”. The eighty years of CIN conception, birth, and infancy have at their centre Don Bosco’s missionary dreams, in particular, the 1886 Barcelona dream, in which he saw Hong Kong and Peking. However, Don Bosco’s China dream had begun already in 1841, the year of his priestly ordination, when he heard the news that Vincentian young missionary Gabriel Perboyre (now a canonized Saint) had been martyred in 1839 in China for the faith. This year 1841 CIN was conceived in the heart of Don Bosco. From this time on, Don Bosco kept China in his heart. In the early 70’s he began corresponding with first Bishop of Hong Kong Msgr. Timoleone Raimondi PIME, about the West Point Reformatory established in 1863-1864 by the zealous missionary for boys coming from the streets and from juvenile prisons. In the end the plan to accept this work did not materialize, but this did not take China out of Don Bosco’s heart, who, in the last years of his life, kept thinking and talking about China. In his Spiritual Testament’s last-but-four paragraph (probably written in the last months of 1886), Don Bosco wrote: “In due course our mission field will extend to China – to Peking, to be exact. But let us not forget that we exist for poor

and abandoned boys. Amongst those who know little or nothing of the true God you will see taking place wonders formerly thought incredible but which almighty God will make manifest to the world”.

The task to begin Salesian missions in China fell to St. John Bosco's successor, Blessed Michael Rua. His task was facilitated by the zealous initiative of an Italian missionary to China, Fr. Francesco Saverio Rondina S.J. Expelled, under Masonic instigation, from Macau in 1871, he met Don Bosco in Rome and spoke to him about China. After Don Bosco's death, Fr. Rondina kept in touch with Salesians and with the Bishop of Macau, who in 1904 invited the Salesians to Macau. The first batch of Salesians landed in Macau on 13 February 1906. They were 6, led by Fr. Luigi Versiglia: three Coadjutor Salesians (Brothers) and three Priest Salesians (French-born Fr. Ludovic Olive one of them). The first 4 years in Macau saw a struggling slow growth of the work entrusted to the Salesians, the Orfanato da Imaculada Conceição. This left Fr. Versiglia very unsatisfied. The 1910 Masonic expulsion of all consecrated religious from Macau was for Fr. Versiglia a blessing in disguise: in 1911 Salesians were offered the Macau Diocese mission territory in neighbouring Heung Shan (mainland China) and in 1912 they were recalled to Macau and offered much better conditions for work.

To face up to this new missionary challenge, a second and third batch of missionaries were sent from Turin. In the second batch (1911) were Fr. Vincenzo Bernardini and Fr. Giovanni Pedrazzini. In the third batch (1912) were, among others, Fr. Ignaz Canazei and Br. Ottavio Fantini. These will be protagonists of the first decades of CIN history. In 1917 M.E.P Canton Diocese asked the Holy See to entrust the Northernmost part of its very large mission to the Salesians. To serve there, two missionary expeditions were sent from Turin to China in 1918 and 1919. Most of these missionaries had served as military chaplains during World War I, people like Fr. Bassano Larena-Faccini, Fr. Galdino Bardelli, Fr. Luigi Boccassino, Fr. Stefano Bosio, Fr. Carlo Braga, Fr. Giuseppe Cucchiara i.e. Salesians that will animate CIN until the fourth and fifth decade of her history. In 1919 the first Salesian to die in China, Fr. Ludovic Olive, dies prematurely in Canton, aged 52. In 1921 Fr. Luigi Versiglia is ordained Bishop of Shiuchow in Canton's Sacred Heart Cathedral. Consequently, in 1920 he relinquishes leadership of Salesians in China to Fr. Vincenzo Bernardini, Rector of Mother House in Macau. This leadership, in 1923, passes to Fr. Ignaz Canazei, appointed Visitor of newly established China Vice-Province that sees the expansion of Salesian work to Shanghai and the arrival of the first Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (FMA) in Shiuchow. On 11 January 1926,

the first Chinese Salesian, Cantonese Br. Simon Tse Ping Yuen, dies tragically by ship-wreck with three aspirants he was accompanying to Shanghai to begin their novitiate.

First Decade (1926-1936). Gospel Sowing Watered by Martyrs' Blood

On 28 May 1926, China Province of Mary Help of Christians (CIN) is established by Rector Major Fr. Philip Rinaldi (now Blessed), with Fr. Ignaz Canazei as first Provincial. This China Province is born and lives for one year as Sino-Japanese Province (CIN-GIA), until Salesian Japan becomes independent. In 1927, from Macau and Shiuchow Salesians are sent to begin Salesian missions in Thailand and in Timor Leste (where some missionaries also come from closed-down Kimberly Mission in West Australia). Also in 1927, Salesians are invited by Hong Kong Diocese to take over, from Maryknoll Fathers & Brothers, St. Louis Industrial School (former West Point Reformatory of Bishop Raimondi and Don Bosco's times!)

On 25 February 1930 Msgr. Luigi Versiglia and young missionary Fr. Callisto Caravario are martyred *in odium fidei* and for their attempt to protect the dignity of three young women. Msgr. Versiglia is succeeded as Bishop of Shiuchow by Msgr. Ignaz Canazei, who, in his turn, is succeeded as CIN Provincial by Fr. Carlo Braga.

At the end of same year, Salesian Missionary House is opened in Shau Kei Wan Hong Kong. In 1932 Don Bosco Salesian Institute is opened in Shanghai-Yangtsepoo. In 1934 Salesian (Primary) School is opened in Shanghai-Neziang. In 1935 Aberdeen Trade School is opened in Aberdeen Hong Kong. In the same year Institut Salesien is opened in Kun Ming (Yunnan). In 1936, Sisters Announcers of the Lord, initially founded by Msgr. Versiglia in 1924, are formally established as a religious congregation of diocesan right by Bishop Ignaz Canazei. In 1936 Salesians in China are about 150, of whom 17 are local.

Second Decade (1936-1946). Vibrant Development against All Odds

Under the charismatically dynamic leadership of Don Carlo Braga (now Servant of God), notwithstanding the 1937 break out of War of Resistance against Japanese invasion and, in 1939, of World War II, Salesian work continues to develop rapidly

throughout mainland China with communities set up Shanghai-Chapei (1938), Shanghai-Nantao (1940, several institutions), Suchow (1943), Peking (1946).

In Macau in 1940 Salesians begin Colégio Dom Bosco; in 1942 they take over, from two zealous Protestant ladies, Yuet Wah College; in 1943 they begin Salesian Press, whose dynamic “Apostolate of the Press” will flood mainland China with good Catholic and Salesian publications. In same year they establish Casa Agricola Sacrada Familia in Coloane for poorest boys.

In the final years of WWII (1944-1945) CIN Province loses 4 missionaries, murdered in the very exercise of their pastoral ministry. They are: Hungarian Fr. Giovanni Matkowics, aged 36; Italian Fr. Bassano Larenio-Faccini, aged 55; Sicilian Fr. Vincenzo Munda, aged 56; and French Fr. François Dupont, aged 37. Perhaps heart-broken by these tragic events, in 1946 Msgr. Ignaz Canazei prematurely dies in Shiuchow, aged 63. The number of Salesians in China grows to 210, 57 of them locals.

Third Decade (1946-1956). Expansion Stimulated by Oppression

In these years Salesian CIN work, on the one hand, spreads to Philippines (Tarlac 1947-1951, Victorias 1951, Cebu 1954, Makati 1954, Montinglupa 1956), to Taiwan (Taipei 1951), and to Vietnam (Hanoi 1944-1952, Thu Duc 1952, Go Vap 1955). On the other hand, Salesian work is devastated in the mainland by the change of regime: the 1956 CIN Directory registers 10 Houses “temporarily closed” (up to now) in the mainland. In Shiuchow, deceased Msgr. Canazei is succeeded in 1948 by Bishop Michele Arduino who will be expelled in 1951.

In 1952 Fr. Carlo Braga, who is sent to the Philippines, is succeeded as CIN Provincial by Peking Rector Fr. Mario Acquistapace. The latter is succeeded in Peking as Rector by first CIN Chinese Rector, Fr. Paul Fong Ting Chung, who in 1954 will be arrested and kept in prison and labour camps for 37 years. Similar is the fate of 15 other Chinese confreres, six of whom die in prison, confessors, even martyrs, of the faith; they are: Sc. Peter Yeh Ming Zen, aged 30; Fr. Simon Leong Shu Tchi, aged 43; Fr. Joseph Fu Yuk Tong, aged 44; Br. Francis Tsiang Si Zhung, aged 56; Fr. Barnabas Ly Wun Pin, aged 38; Br. Jerome Yip Kat Kwong, aged 55.

As a providential compensation for the loss of mainland works, in 1951 Salesian

School is opened in Shau Kei Wan, mature fruit of Salesian Orphanage that operated during and after WWII in Salesian Missionary House. In 1952, great technical Tang King Po School is opened in Kowloon. Next to this school, newly-established Salesian Catechetical Centre continues the work begun by Salesian Press in Macau. In these years St. Anthony's Parish in West Point gets its own St. Anthony's Primary School. This decade ends with first CIN visit of a Rector Major, Fr. Renato Ziggotti in 1955. The Salesians in the three territories (China, Philippines, Vietnam) number 294, of whom 127 are locals.

Fourth Decade (1956-1966). Development on All Fronts!

In 1957 Studentate of Philosophy (Salesian House of Studies) is relocated in outlying island of Cheung Chau and is opened to young Salesians from neighbouring Provinces, first of all from newly-born Filipino Visitatory on the way to become an independent Province. Soon the well-attended Cheung Chau Don Bosco Sunday Oratory is begun. The relocation of the Studentate leaves Salesian Missionary House in Shau Kei Wan available for about 70 aspirants who call their new residence Savio Juniorate or Savio House. Set up at first in three small houses, Salesian House of Studies in Cheung Chau in 1963 gets three new blocks capable to house up to 70 students of philosophy. The solemn inauguration is done under the leadership of first Cheung Chau Rector Fr. Luigi Massimino who is now CIN Provincial (1962-1968) in succession to Fr. Bernard Tohill, Provincial from 1958 to 1962. At the end of 1962, Fr. Tohill, before the end of his term as CIN Provincial, is called to be Provincial of USA Western Province; subsequently he is elected by General Chapters first as first Regional of English-speaking Region in 1965 and then, for two successive terms, as General Councillor for Missions in 1972 and 1978. Fr. Luigi Massimino who succeeds him in CIN as Provincial makes sure that to succeed him as Provincial will be a Chinese, the first Chinese CIN Provincial, Mexican-born Fr. Alejandro Ma Yiu Hon (Machuy).

In these years Salesians of Salesian House of Studies begin prison visiting services that will be continued, to a greater or lesser extent, without interruption up to now. Also in these years the already 40-year old "Inter nos" sharing of news among Salesians becomes the CIN Newsletter published uninterruptedly up to now. The same happens to the Chinese-language Salesian Bulletin, also uninterruptedly published up to now, a precious instrument to promote the vitality of CIN Salesian Family.

In 1963 Fr. Gaetano Nicosia (now Servant of God) begins his 47-year long service to hansenian patients (leprosy) in Our Lady's Village in Coloane, Macau. Also in 1963 Salesians return to Taiwan (after the short-lived 1951-1953 presence) to found what will become big Tainan Salesian Technical School and Mary Help missionary Parish (Houjia, Tuku, Kweiren, Kwanmiao), followed in 1964 by St. John Bosco Parish in Taipei.

In 1965 Hong Kong Tang King Po College is opened, on a piece of land donated by the same great benefactor Tang King Po that made possible Tang King Po School in Kowloon. In same year Don Bosco Technical School is opened in Kwai Chung, New Territories (in 1968 it becomes Ng Siu Mui Secondary School).

In Vietnam, in 1962, given the numerous vocations, Novitiate is established in Tram Hanh and in 1965 CIN begins to be called Sino-Vietnamese Province. The highest number of confreres in CIN history will be reached in the next decade (school year 1969-1970), when, without counting Salesians coming from other Provinces, there will be 340 Salesians in Sino-Vietnamese Province, of whom locals are 254 (152 Chinese and 102 Vietnamese).

Fifth Decade (1966-1976). Further Services to Poor Youth & Sudden Decline in Membership

Following upon previous promotion of "Salesian Sodalities", in these years Salesian Youth Movement begins to take shape, with its full flowering in the last decades of 20th Century and first decades of 21st Century.

In 1972 Salesians join Jesuits, Hong Kong Diocese, and Macau Diocese to establish interdiocesan and interreligious Holy Spirit Seminary College of Philosophy and Theology in Aberdeen, Hong Kong. To adapt to this common initiative, Salesian House of Studies leaves Cheung Chau (that becomes Salesian Retreat House) and returns to Salesian Missionary House in Shau Kei Wan, aspirants' Savio House being relocated in neighbouring Salesian School.

Also in 1972 Vietnam becomes an autonomous Delegation that depends directly on Rector Major and that will be called to face tremendous challenges in 1975. In 1974 Salesians accept from Diocese of Macau the pastoral care of St. Francis Xavier Parish in Coloane. In Hong Kong Kowloon, Shek Lei Don Bosco Youth Centre (Sunday

Oratory) continues the work of the FMA-SDB Sunday Oratory in Tsz Wan Shan.

In Hong Kong this is also the era when “Satellite Schools” are born to respond to the needs of youth in depressed popular areas: St. John Bosco School (Block 47, Tsz Wan Shan, Kowloon); St John Bosco School (Block 4, Lower Ngau Tau Kok Estate, Kowloon); Shek Yam Salesian Primary School (Block 1, Shek Yam Estate, Kwai Chung, Tsuen Wan, New Territories). This last satellite school in 1993 will become the present Salesian Yip Hon Primary School.

With the independence of Vietnam, but also because of the blood-letting of personnel caused by the ecclesial turmoil of the 70’s, membership of CIN Province drops sharply to 182 members in 1976 (average age: 47.9, as calculated by the 1976-1977 Annual Provincial Directory).

Sixth Decade (1976-1986). Further Expansion, Notwithstanding Decline in Personnel

In 1976 Salesians take over management of “St. Francis Xavier Professional School” (a juvenile prison) in Coloane. In 1979 in Hong Kong Salesian School chapel becomes Our Lady of Assumption Salesian Mass Centre. In 1980 Salesians take over in Chaochou (Ping Tung, Taiwan) the Boystown founded by Maryknoll Father Justin McCabe, who then becomes a Trappist. At the end of 1980 Fr. Silvio Lomazzi, martyr of charity, after 20 years of dedicated care for rehabilitation of drug addicts, is murdered by one of them. Also at the end of 1980, Fr. Gaetano Nicosia extends his Hansenian services to the mainland. In 1983 Salesians accept from Hong Kong Diocese the pastoral care of Our Lady of China Church in Tai Kok Tsui, Kowloon. In 1986 the total CIN membership is down to 152.

Seventh Decade (1986-1996). New Horizons Open Up

In 1987 Jockey Club Cheung Chau Don Bosco Youth Centre is inaugurated. In 1991 Don Bosco Learning Centre is opened in West Point and Fr. Peter Newbery, supported by CIN Provincial Fr. John Baptist Zen Shing Yeh, formally founds Youth Outreach. In same year, Tang King Po School open chapel is established by Hong Kong Diocese as Mary Help of Christians Parish. In 1993 Salesian Community of

Hong Kong Tang King Po College is closed down. In 1995 Our Lady of Assumption Salesian Mass Centre in Salesian School is acknowledged by Holy Cross Parish as one of its Mass Centres. In 1996 CIN membership drops to 133.

Eighth Decade (1996-2006). Retrenching and Diversification

In 1996 former CIN Provincial Fr. Joseph Zen Ze Kiun is appointed by Pope John Paul II Coadjutor Bishop of Hong Kong. In 1997 CIN in Hong Kong begins to cope with the change of national sovereignty. In Macau it will do so in 1999, when Colégio Dom Bosco belonging to the Portuguese Province is closed down and that Colégio's Chinese Section, begun in 1998, takes over all the premises as Colégio Dom Bosco (Yuet Wah) Primary School.

In 1998 Salesian Community of Don Bosco Technical School in Kwai Chung is closed down. In same year, CIN takes over Escola Dom Luís Versiglia founded by Fr. Gaetano Nicosia in 1985. On the hill in front of it, in 1999 Don Bosco Village with annexed youth services is inaugurated.

In 2002 Coadjutor Bishop Joseph Zen Zen Kiun becomes Bishop of Hong Kong until 2009. Also in 2002, Mary Help of Christians Parish in Kowloon takes over the pastoral care of neighbouring Holy Spirit Mass Centre and Ling To Mass Centre. In 2003 Bosco Spirituality Centre is set up as an annex of Savio House. In 2004 Salesians accept management of C & W District St. Anthony's School as an extension of St. Anthony's School in our Parish in West Point. Also in 2004, satellite Ngau Tau Kok Primary School is shut down by the Government. In 2005 Salesians accept management of Salesian Yip Hon Millennium Primary School as an extension of satellite Salesian Yip Hon Primary School.

In 2006 membership of CIN is 131.

Ninth Decade (2006-2016). Redimensioning

In 2006 the Centenary of arrival of Salesians in China is solemnly celebrated. Also in 2006 Pope Benedict XVI makes the Bishop of Hong Kong Joseph Zen Ze Kiun Cardinal of Holy Roman Church. In 2009 Card. Joseph Zen Ze Kiun resigns as Bishop of Hong Kong. In Macau in 2010 the Valdocco Salesian Youth Pastoral Centre

and the Salesian Educative Pastoral Centre for Youth and Family are opened. In 2011 Pope Benedict XVI consecrates former CIN Provincial Fr. Savio Hon Tai Fai Archbishop and appoints him Secretary of Congregation for Propagation of the Faith. Also in 2011 Salesian Community of Salesian School in Shau Kei Wan is closed down. In 2013 Salesian Community of Yuet Wah College is closed and merged. In 2014 Salesian Community of Boystown in Chaochou (Taiwan) is closed down and merged. In same year, Salesian Community of Cheung Chau Salesian House, after 42 years, is re-established. In 2016 membership of CIN is 118.

Tenth Decade (2016-2026). Redimensioning Continues

In 2017 Salesian Community of St. Louis School is closed down and merged. In 2018 Taipei Priest Salesian Specific Formation Phase is opened in St. John Bosco Parish Salesian Community; it is closed down in 2024. In 2020 Salesian Community of St. Louis School is established again, while newly re-established Salesian Community of Cheung Chau Salesian House is again closed down.

In 2020-2022 the Covid19 crisis brings to a halt several minor Salesian enterprises specially focused on service to poor and abandoned youth. After the crisis, some of these re-open, like 95-year old St. Louis Sunday Oratory, now entrusted to the Cooperator Salesians; others do not re-open, like 70-year old Shau Kei Wan Don Bosco Youth Centre (Sunday Oratory). In 2022 Salesian Community of Escola Dom Luís Versiglia is closed down. In 2023 64-year old Cheung Chau Don Bosco Oratory is temporarily closed. In July 2026 52-year old Shek Lei Don Bosco Youth Centre (Sunday Oratory) will shut down. Beginning in 2025 and continuing in 2026, the 120th Anniversary of arrival of Salesians in China is being celebrated in all three CIN territories with a variety of meaningful events.

In 2026, owing a) to more numerous of deaths of elderly confreres, and b) to scarcity of new blood, membership of CIN is down to 75.

Conclusion

The history of the CIN is truly a Paschal story: a story in which sacrifice has become a proof of faithfulness, every loss has opened new paths, and every seed sown with

hardship has borne fruits of grace. Celebrating the 120th anniversary of the arrival of the Salesians in China and the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the CIN as a Province, we look to the past with gratitude and to the future with renewed confidence. The blood of the martyrs, the sweat of so many generations of Salesians, and the dedication of the lay people, the young, and the Salesian Family continue to enrich this land loved by Don Bosco. In the Paschal Mystery of Christ, we recognise that nothing given out of love is ever lost: everything becomes promise, hope, and new life.