 Reading time: 4 min.

Beneath the Caribbean sun, in villages full of life and joy, Don Bosco continues to be a significant response for the young people of these lands.

For more than one hundred years, the Salesian presence has found both a fertile environment and climate in some Caribbean countries which today, as in the past, confirm their importance in the presence of their young people, in their joyful, affectionate and simple people, in their religious sensitivity and in the welcome they offer others: Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico have offered and continue to offer a propitious environment for the Salesian mission and a fertile land for Don Bosco's charism.

The Salesians, organised into two Provinces, the Antilles and Haiti, together with many other members of the Salesian Family, make this presence concrete today. They are the fruit of the generosity and passion of great missionaries with good will, big dreams, trust in Providence and commitment to the education and evangelisation of the young; this is how Don Bosco's presence was consolidated. There were also natural or social historical events that motivated the decisions that led to its current conformation.

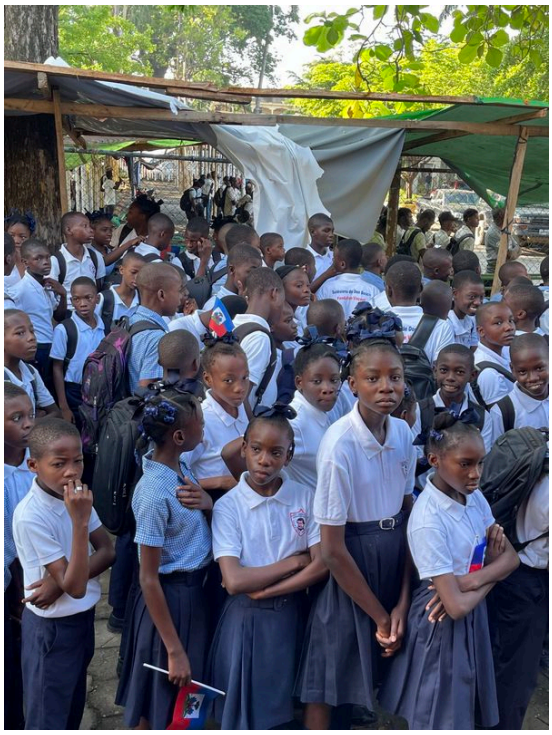
A bit of history

Although the first request for Salesians in the West Indies dates back to 1896, the first country to receive a Salesian presence was Cuba in 1916, followed by the Dominican Republic in 1933, then Haiti in 1936 and finally Puerto Rico in 1947.

Dolores Betancourt, a native of Camagüey, had signed a private agreement in Turin with Fr Paul Albera regarding a foundation in her home town. The first Salesians arrived in Cuba on 4 April 1917 to open a work in Camagüey.

Fr José Calasanz (1872-1936), originally from Azanuy, Spain, a Salesian since 1890, was sent as a missionary to promote foundations in Cuba, Peru and Bolivia. In 1917, the first Salesians entered Cuba, together with Fr Esteban Capra and two Brothers (Bros Ullivarri and Celaya). In 1917, the Salesians were entrusted with the church dedicated to Our Lady of Charity in a rural area of Camagüey, from where they

coordinated the first school of arts and trades.



Haiti, Cap-Haïtien

Salesian communities began to grow and consolidate in Cuba, first sharing canonical property with the Salesian Province of Tarragona, Spain. In 1924, it passed to the Province of Mexico and three years later, due to the religious persecution suffered in Mexico, the headquarters of the Province was transferred to Havana, Cuba.

Father Pittini carried out the duties of Provincial in the eastern part of the United States and there he received instructions from the Superior General, Fr Peter Ricaldone, to move to Santo Domingo to examine the possibility of the Congregation establishing itself in the Dominican Republic.

On 16 August 1933, Fr Pittini arrived in the port of San Pedro de Macorís. In February 1934, Fr Pittini took on the role of Superior of the Salesians who had just arrived in the Dominican Republic; he supervised the work of the school under construction and got to know the people. On 11 October 1935, Pope Pius XI appointed him Archbishop of Santo Domingo.



Haiti, Pétion-Ville

The Salesians arrived in Haiti in 1936. The Rector Major delegated Fr Peter Gimbert, former Provincial of Lyon, to implant the Salesian charism in Haiti. He arrived on 27 May 1936, accompanied by Salesian Bro. Adriano Massa. Later, other confreres arrived to complete the community.

From its foundation, Haiti was successively part of the Salesian Province of Mexico-Antilles with its headquarters in Havana; later it became part of the Province of the Antilles – along with Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico – with its headquarters in Santo Domingo.


Haiti, Gressier

The foundation in Puerto Rico became a reality on 24 April 1947, when Fr Pedro M. Savani, former Provincial of Mexico-Antille, arrived to take charge of the Parish of St John Bosco in Santurce, Lutz Street. From here, he began the management of an Oratory on what is now Cantera land, where, in 1949, he began the construction of the chapel that would later become the imposing Church of Mary Help of Christians.

The canonical erection of the Antilles Province took place on 15 September 1953 when Fr Renato Ziggiotti was Rector Major, under the patronage of St John Bosco, with its headquarters in La Víbora (Havana, Cuba). It was later transferred to Compostela (Old Havana). After the Cuban Revolution, the provincial headquarters was transferred to Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, at the Don Bosco College where it remained until 1993, when it was moved to its present location at Calle 30 de Marzo #52, in the city of Santo Domingo.

Since January 1992, Haiti has been a Vice-Province based in Port-au-Prince.

Don Bosco in the Caribbean today

The Salesian Province of the Antilles is made up of three countries in the Caribbean region: Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. Haiti forms a separate Vice-Province. In total there are 169 Salesians of Don Bosco in the four countries: 15 in Cuba, 74 in Haiti, 67 in the Dominican Republic and 13 in Puerto Rico.

The works that animate the two Provinces in 32 communities include 41 educational centres (of which at least 20 are technical training centres), 33 oratories, 23 social works, 8 retreat-meeting houses, 1 environmental training centre, 3 formation houses, 4 social communication centres-recording studios, 2 radio stations and 18 parishes with 80 chapels and 44 mission houses.

The Salesian Family in the Caribbean has great vitality and is made up of various groups: Salesians of Don Bosco, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Salesian Cooperators, Association of Mary Help of Christians, Past Pupils (SDB-FMA), Daughters of the Sacred Hearts, Volunteers of Don Bosco, Damas Salesians and Parish Missionaries of Mary Help of Christians (the latter, a Pious Union, approved by the Archbishop of Santo Domingo, Archbishop Octavio A. Beras, was founded by Fr Andrés Nemeth, sdb, on 16 June 1961; although it is not part of the Salesian Family, but because of its closeness to it, it attends its meetings). Relations are warm, some pastoral projects are shared and they meet frequently.

In a very particular social and political climate, the four countries are experiencing a mass migration of their young people and entire families, motivated by hunger, lack of food and work, violence and the search for better paid opportunities. In these circumstances, the Salesian presence continues to be very committed to the processes of education, job training, citizenship and life of faith. There is a serious commitment to defending the rights to education, food and a dignified life for children, adolescents and young adults; playgrounds are used to accompany and encourage playful activities and encounters that allow people to make friends. Music and dance are natural expressions that find in Salesian oratories the stimulus and space to express themselves at their best. Their courtyards have always been places of encounter and refuge, even in the face of natural events.

This presence today is prophetic in sharing with people the social realities that each country is experiencing, deciding to remain close to those most in need, encouraging daily faith, a simple friendship that speaks of God, full of hope and comfort, with fraternal gestures of solidarity and love for the most vulnerable,

especially children and young people.



Santo Domingo, La Plaza

Fr Hugo OROZCO SÁNCHEZ, sdb
Regional Councillor for Interamerica