 Reading time: 5 min.

From 15 to 18 January 2026, Valdocco hosted the 44th Spirituality Days of the Salesian Family, bringing together multiple groups that share the charism of Don Bosco. The theme, "Do whatever he tells you. Believers, free to serve", taken from the 2026 Strenna of the new Rector Major, Fr. Fabio Attard, guided a journey of listening, prayer and communion. These Days represent much more than an annual event: they are the beating heart of a charismatic family returning to its origins to refocus its educational mission.

Valdocco, mid-January 2026. Turin has that clear, crisp winter air, but inside the Salesian "heart", the atmosphere is different; a sense of family that comes from afar and is promptly rekindled whenever the Salesian Family gathers again around Don Bosco. From **15 to 18 January 2026, the 44th Spirituality Days of the Salesian Family** brought together around 350 participants in Valdocco, from different Countries and belonging to the many groups that share the same charismatic source.
The title that accompanied these days – **"Do whatever he tells you. Believers, free to serve"** – did not sound like a conference slogan, but like a word entrusted to life. It is the 2026 Strenna of the Rector Major, Fr. Fabio Attard, and the very fact that the 2026 Days were the first edition he led gave the gathering a special feel, like a family that, in passing the baton, renews its trust and re-reads its mission in the light of the Gospel.

An echo from Cana that reaches Valdocco

"Do whatever he tells you": Mary's words at Cana (John 2:5) carry a concrete image – the feast, the lack of wine, the risk of embarrassment, the discreet and decisive intervention – and, above all, a spiritual method: listen to Jesus and act. In the commentary on the 2026 Strenna, this phrase is presented as an invitation to real listening, one capable of navigating crises and transforming into service.
In Valdocco, that Gospel echo found a setting that was almost "Salesian" in the fullest sense: the opening in the Teatro Grande, the different faces and languages, the joy that was not manufactured but spontaneous. The theme was even represented with **gestures and symbols** – a choreography prepared by the students of Valdocco – as if to say that for Don Bosco, spirituality never remains disembodied: it takes form, it educates, it involves.
Among those present were prominent figures who, by themselves, speak to the

breadth of the communion: Mother Chiara Cazzuola (Superior General of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians), Sr Leslie Sándigo (General Councillor for the Salesian Family), and other leaders and delegates from the various groups. But the point was not “representation”; it was the experience of a living body that recognises itself as a family when it prays, listens and discerns together.

“**Days of family and communion”: not an event, but a way of being Church**
In a message shared for the occasion, Fr. Joan Lluís Playà – the Rector Major’s Central Delegate for the Salesian Family – defined these Days as **“days of family and communion”**, made up of in-depth study, sharing, prayer, and a readiness to encounter others, in the style of Mary at Cana: putting faith on the line to open up new paths. It is an expression that helps to understand why, after more than forty years, the Days have not lost their vigour; they do not “add” something to the mission, but refocus it.
The 2026 programme, moreover, showed this clearly: lectio divina, dialogue and sharing between groups, presentation and study of the Strenna, celebrations and times of fellowship. Even some of the “optional” activities on the afternoon of 16 January – visits to exhibitions and sites, or listening to testimonies – took the form of a cultural and spiritual pilgrimage: from the memory of saintly figures (like Maria Troncatti) to the roots of the charism in the Casa Museo Don Bosco, and to the stories of young people whose faith has been tested by trial.
And within this, a significant emphasis: special attention to young people, laity, and Salesian Cooperators, in the context of the 150th anniversary of their foundation. This detail is more than just a celebratory note; it points to a direction. The Salesian Family increasingly recognises itself as an ecclesial body in which vocations support one another, and in which the educational mission is truly shared.

Why Valdocco? Why January?
The 2026 Days confirmed what the foundational texts already highlight: Valdocco is not simply a “convenient location”, but a foundational symbol. It was here that Don Bosco began his work; it is here that the charism returns home each year to rediscover its essential grammar: welcome, education, the Gospel, Mary, the young.
And January, with the feast of Don Bosco just around the corner, has the power of a “family” liturgical season. The starting point is not a to-do list, but a memory to be inhabited. It is as if the Salesian Family were saying to itself: before we run, let’s stop and look at the source; before we plan, let’s listen to the Word; before we multiply activities, let’s rediscover our inner unity.

A long history: the echo of 2026 resonates with the origins

Looking back at the 2026 Days, one also better understands their genealogy. The Salesian Family, especially in the post-Council period, progressively developed an awareness of being a plural reality united by a single charism; and it was during the rectorate of Fr. Egidio Viganò that the idea of an annual gathering for common spirituality solidified into a stable point of reference.

From 1986 – when they began – until 2026, it has become abundantly clear that the Salesian Family is not an organisational federation, but a **charismatic communion**.

This is where the structural link with the **Strenna** comes in. The Strenna provides direction; the Days help to internalise it, to give spiritual flesh to what might otherwise remain a programme. The texts state it frankly; without the Days, the Strenna would risk being just a slogan; without the Strenna, the Days would risk being self-referential.

The year 2026 showed this in an almost "didactic" way. The theme did not remain a title, but became a path: **believers** (rooted in Christ), **free** (not imprisoned), **to serve** (with Gospel concreteness).

A faith that liberates: from hope to service

A recurring theme in the account of the 2026 Days is this: from hope in Jesus comes a trust that drives us to serve. This is not a formula, but a liberating criterion – from spiritual narcissism, from rigidity, from sterile complaints – then it does not become service; and if service is not born of faith, it turns into an activism that burns out.

From this perspective, even the moments of fellowship are not just "window dressing"; they are substance. Because the Salesian mission is not sustained by soloists, but by a family that, to remain so, must return to talking to each other, praying together, and finding itself in the same Gospel. In 2026, gathered around Fr. Fabio Attard and the various leaders, Valdocco visibly reaffirmed that Don Bosco's charism is shareable. It unites consecrated and lay people, different generations, and distant histories.

The echo that remains

When the lights of the Teatro Grande go out and everyone departs for their own land, the echo of the Days is not measured by nostalgia, but by what changes in daily life. If "**Do whatever he tells you**" becomes a way of life, then it changes the way we educate, accompany the young, work together, and exist within the Church.

Perhaps this, ultimately, is the deepest meaning of the Spirituality Days. Not to add an event to the calendar, but to safeguard a centre. In January 2026, Valdocco reminded the Salesian Family that unity is not born of strategies, but of listening to the Lord; that Christian freedom is not autonomy, but availability; and that service, to be Salesian, must have the concrete face of the young, especially the most vulnerable.

It is an echo that returns every year. But in 2026, with the new step of a Rector Major just beginning his ministry and with the direct call of Mary at Cana, that echo resounded like a simple yet demanding charge: **if you want the “wine” of the mission not to run out, listen to Jesus – and do what he tells you.**