

□ Reading time: 3 min.

We asked Fr Philippe BAUZIÈRE, the new Provincial of Brazil Manaus (BMA) to answer a few questions for readers of the OnLine Salesian Bulletin.

Fr Philippe Bauzière was born in Tournai, Belgium, on 2 February 1968. He did his Salesian novitiate at the house in Woluwe-Saint-Lambert (Brussels) and made his first profession, also in Brussels, on 9 September 1989. In 1994 he arrived in Brazil for the first time, in Manaus, where he made his perpetual profession on 5 August the following year.

He was ordained a deacon in Ananindeua on 15 November 1997, and a year later, on 28 June 1998, he was ordained a priest in the cathedral of his home town, Tournai.

His first years as a priest were spent at the Salesian presence in Manaus Alvorada (1998-2003). From 2004 to 2008, he then lived in Porto Velho, first as parish priest and then as Rector (2007-2008). In the following years, he lived in Belém, São Gabriel de Cachoeira and Ananindeua. From 2013-2018 he was in Manicoré as Parish Priest and Rector. Back in Manaus, he lived in the houses in Alvorada, Domingos Savio and Aleixo until 2022. This year, 2023, he is in Ananindeua, where he accompanies the Salesian School of Work. Since 2019, he has been a member of the Provincial Council, where he has held various positions of responsibility: since 2021, he has been Vice-Provincial and also Provincial Delegate for the Salesian Family and for Formation.

Fr Bauzière succeeds Fr Jefferson Luís da Silva Santos who has completed his six-year term as Superior of the Province of Brazil-Manaus.

Can you present yourself?

I am Philippe Bauzière, a Salesian of Don Bosco, a missionary for thirty years in Brazil and a priest for twenty-six. I understood my vocation, the Lord's call, especially through the missionary aspect. A great influence was the parish priest of my village in Belgium: he was an Oblate of Mary Immaculate who had lived for many years in Sri Lanka and Haiti, who shared his missionary experience... So, at the age of eighteen, after discernment, I realised that the Lord was calling me to religious life and the priesthood.

A curiosity: I am the eldest of my two brothers, and at the time they were attending a Salesian school; I was attending a diocesan school... Yet it was I who discovered the Salesians! And it was the Salesian spirit that won me over.

In September 1989 I made my first religious profession, asking to go to the missions. The Councillor for the Missions at the time, Fr Luciano Odorico, sent me to the Amazon Province (Manaus, Brazil), where I arrived on 30 June 1994.

The first challenges were those of adaptation: a new language, the equatorial climate, different mentalities... But everything was counterbalanced by a beautiful surprise, that of the welcome I received from my confreres and the people.

After my ordination, I was sent to work in social works and parishes, where I had the opportunity to meet many young people and simple people. As a Salesian, I am very happy about this contact, to be able to serve the Lord together with young people and families. I feel small before the Lord's action in so many young people, and also the Lord's action in myself.

What are the greatest difficulties you have encountered?

Today we Salesians in Amazonia feel the powerful challenges that young people face: the lack of opportunities, training and work; the burden of drug trafficking, addictions and violence; many young people who do not feel loved in their homes or families (they feel more at home in our Salesian works, than in their own homes...); the major mental health problems (depression, anxiety, alcoholism, suicide, etc.); the lack of a sense of life among young people; the lack of guidelines for the proper use of new technologies.

We also feel the challenge of ensuring that ethnic groups in Brazil do not lose their cultural identity, especially young people. Faced with this picture, we understand that our life must be given to the Lord, at the service of defending the LIFE of so many people, especially the young. May the Lord enlighten us! May Don Bosco intercede for us!

What are the most urgent local needs?

Times are changing rapidly – as you can understand – and we must respond appropriately to these new times. Our works need a lot of financial resources (especially since our location in Amazonia entails very high costs, due to the great distances involved), as well as adequate and renewed training for our human resources (Salesians and lay people). The demands are many: we need more Salesians! It would be a great good if we had vocations, even indigenous ones.

What place does Mary Help of Christians occupy in your life?

I believe that, as in Don Bosco's life, Our Lady is our Help of Christians; she is present and helps us.