 Reading time: 10 min.

Fr Nelson is 57 years old and was born in the city of Concepción on 11 September 1965. He met the Salesians at the Salesian College in Concepción, where he was a student and was involved in youth groups and pastoral activities.
His parents Fabriciano Moreno and María Mercedes Ruiz currently live in the city of Concepción.
He did all his initial formation in the city of Santiago. He made his perpetual profession on 8 August 1992 in Santiago (La Florida). He was ordained a priest on 6 August 1994 in Santiago. His first years as a priest were spent in the Salesian presence at Colegio San José de Punta Arenas and at the Salesian school in Concepción, where he worked in pastoral ministry. From 2001 to 2006 he was rector in Puerto Natales and from 2006 to 2012 rector in Puerto Montt.
From 2012 to 2017 he was provincial economer and rector of the provincial house. In 2018 he was rector of the Salesian house in Gratitud Nacional in the city centre of Santiago and from 2019 rector in Puerto Montt, where he is currently located.
Fr Moreno Ruiz succeeds Fr Carlo Lira Airola, who completed his six-year term in January 2024.

Can you present yourself?
I am a Salesian happy with life, who in the Salesian religious vocation has found the presence of God in the young people, whom I serve and accompany as a educator and pastor.
I am Father Nelson Moreno Ruiz, Provincial of the Chilean Province. I was called to this service of animation by the Rector Major Cardinal Ángel Fernández Artime, taking up this responsibility in January this year.
I got to know the Salesians at a young age, when I entered the Salesian school in the city of Concepción, which is the first work in our country, where the missionaries sent by Don Bosco arrived from Argentina to Chile in 1887.
In this Salesian school environment, I grew up around the educative and pastoral proposal offered by the school; sports meetings, missionary activities and many social service activities, all of which had an echo in my life as a young man; it was also important to see and meet Salesians in the school yard, and with these experiences my vocation developed and over time I felt called to follow in Don Bosco’s footsteps as a Salesian.
My family consists of my parents, now elderly – my father Fabriciano aged 93 and my mother aged 83 – my four brothers, the three boys who studied at the Salesian

school, and my older sister, who often had the task of looking after us. We are a relatively small family, completed by four grandchildren, who are now young professionals.
As a Salesian, I made my first religious profession on 31 January 1987, then I was a religious for 37 years and was ordained a priest on 6 August 1994. In my religious life, I had the opportunity to animate some communities as director of works, as well as serving as provincial economer before becoming provincial.
I consider that one of my characteristics is to be attentive to rendering good service wherever the Lord wants it, so I spent time preparing and studying for the mission. After graduating from high school at the Salesian school in Concepción, I entered the Congregation where I studied Philosophy, then obtained a Licentiate in Theology at the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, a Degree in Religious Education and a Licentiate in Education in School Management at the Raúl Silva Henríquez Catholic University; later, I obtained a Master's Degree in Educational Management from the University of Concepción in Chile, a Master's Degree in Quality and Excellence in Education from the University of Santiago de Compostela in Spain, and a Doctorate in Educational Sciences from the University of Seville, Spain.
And now, with humility and simplicity, I serve my Province, the confreres and animation of the works.

What did you dream of as a child?
As a child, along with my brothers and friends, I had a very normal and happy childhood. I loved sport, I played football regularly in a local club and this led me to dream of taking up sport in the future. What I liked most was sharing and having friends, and this was what sport offered me.
When I entered school and joined the various pastoral activities, I realised that I also enjoyed teaching the children and young people I had contact with in these pastoral activities. The educational and pedagogical theme made a lot of sense to me and became part of my life project, as I saw it as a dream that was possible to realise. These concerns mingled with my inclination to study something related to the area of health; this motivation was very present, since some in my family were engaged in professions in this area.
I see that the common thread of these inclinations that I have felt from childhood to adolescence were always oriented towards working with people, being of service to them, serving them, teaching them, accompanying them.

What is the story of your vocation?
My vocational story, without a doubt, begins in my family, I come from a home

where the faith was lived, through devotion to St Sebastian and St Rita of Cascia, and it was my parents who inculcated the faith in us, allowing us to receive the sacrament of baptism and confirmation. My vocation began at home, in a very simple way, with a sense of God perceived naturally and without any great religious practices, but with a deep sense of gratitude to God in everyday life.
At the Salesian school in Concepción, I discovered a new world, because it was a huge and prestigious school in the city. When I arrived, I immediately felt welcomed and motivated to participate in the proposals it had for its students, especially the pastoral activities, in which I was gradually involved, as well as sport, which was an important part of my life at that age.
When I was studying at Salesian school, I was very interested in all the pastoral activities, and in my last year of primary school, I had the opportunity to participate as a monitor in the 'Summer Camps – Villa Feliz', where I discovered that I could be useful and give something to the poorest children; from then on, I made a commitment to continue on this path of service, which gave a lot of meaning to my adolescent concerns.

It was in the youth groups that my vocation to religious life became more clearly defined, I became part of the sacramental ministry, as a Confirmation monk, where I reaffirmed my call to serve.
All this pastoral life gave me the opportunity to meet and share with the Salesians who, with their witness and closeness, presented me with a vocational proposal that caught my attention, as they were beautiful testimonies of a service close to young people. This was already the seed of my religious vocation, which gave me the impetus to decide to enter the Congregation, the beginning of the vocational journey in the call the Lord made to me, where I have been a Salesian priest for 30 years, accompanied by the motto I chose for my priestly ordination: 'Lord, you know everything, you know that I love you' (Jn 21:17),

Why Salesian?
Why Salesian? Because it was in a school of the Congregation where I studied, where I grew up, where my convictions, my certainties and my life project were formed.
With the Salesians, through pastoral activities, I got to know the mission of the Church more deeply, all this environment gave full meaning to my life, confirming that the charism of joy, youth and education, was the path that the Lord presented to me, in which I actively participated, because it responded to my concerns and desires, and made me happy; there was no possibility of another answer, because

the Salesians were what covered everything I was looking for and desired, and that I had known since my childhood.
During my formation, I had contacts with other congregations and charisms, which helped me to confirm, even more, that Salesian spirituality was my style, what covered the meaning of what I wanted to do; the life of Don Bosco, work with young people, pastoral work, everything, the fruit of the experience I had with them, where I was formed, where I served and where my vocation was formed and consolidated.
The Lord gave me the gift of getting to know Don Bosco and Salesian spirituality, it was the proposal he invited me to follow and I accepted it, I consecrated my life here, and today I feel that my vocation as a Salesian makes me all that I am.

How did your family react?
Once I made the decision to take the step of joining the Salesians, I told my family, especially my parents. They were surprised, and it was my mother who first understood, supported and accompanied me, inviting me to take this step.
My father, worried, asked me if I was really sure, if it was what I really wanted, what made me happy and if it was my path; to all these questions I answered yes. He confirmed that if it was what I wanted and was willing to see if it was really my future, and made it clear that I could always count on them and not to forget that I would always have my home, in case it was not my path, and told me that I could count on all his support.
Hearing my parents' support so clearly was very nice, it gave me a lot of joy and serenity, since I was starting out on a path without being sure that it was really the path for a young person.
My siblings were also surprised, because I had a very natural life, tied to sports, with friends, but when they were sure that I really wanted to follow the Lord's call, they supported me.
I always felt very accompanied and supported by my parents and brothers, which gave me a lot of serenity to start the formation process; to this day, I count on them, I know they accompany me with love made prayer.

What are the most urgent local and youth needs?
In Chile today, the population up to 17 years of age is 4,259,115, 24% of the country's total population. And we Salesians are particularly dedicated to the formal education of this segment of the population. We have 22 schools, where children and young people from 4 to 19 years old study, with a total of 31,000 students being educated in our schools. Today, it is the largest school network in the country

offering this service to young people.
In addition, there is a University which serves some 7,000 students, and the Don Bosco Foundation, which is dedicated to taking in and accompanying street children, the most vulnerable segment among them, and serves more than 7,000 children and young people.
The most urgent need that our young people experience and suffer is that they are highly exposed to alcohol and drug consumption, as well as the indiscriminate use of technology. This, together with the loneliness they experience due to the disintegration of their families, often leads them to suffer from ‘mental health’ situations, depression, anxiety, panic attacks and the like.
This reality prompts us to try to accompany them in their search for meaning, emotional well-being and emotional stability, all basic needs of human beings, especially those who are developing and growing. We also try to provide them with Christian values, so that step by step they commit to living their faith in youth communities and the Chilean Church, as well as providing them with the education they need to integrate into society.
Young people are Don Bosco’s favourite portion and we owe it to them to provide them with education and tools so that they can become ‘good Christians and honest citizens’.

What are the most significant works in your area?
The Chilean Province has a varied range of works: parishes, youth pastoral centres, reception centres, schools and universities. But the pastoral proposal has focused fundamentally on formal education in schools, which provide education from pre-school age – 4 years of age – to secondary education – 19 years of age.
Chilean education provides training both to prepare young people to enter higher education, universities, and to provide technical vocational education, where students graduate with a technical diploma in a career of their choice.
We can say that vocational technical education is one of the most significant jobs we have, because it is a real promotion of young people, allowing them to enter the world of work with a technical diploma, which, although it is true that it is not everything, makes it easier for them to work with their families, and often finances their continuation in higher education.
I would also like to emphasise the work we do in the Fundación don Bosco, which takes care of children on the street who do not have or do not have a family, working with them to contain, rehabilitate, promote and socially integrate them, creating – as Don Bosco did – evangelised children and young people with values.

Do you communicate through magazines, blogs, Facebook or other media?
Social media today are very important and of great help in reaching many young people and adults. I regularly communicate with the Salesian Family through the Salesian Bulletin, the Agorà blog, the official websites of the Province, the website and Instagram.

What are the most important areas?
Of the mission that I have to carry out today in the Province, I believe that the most important thing is to accompany and animate the lives of my confreres, especially those with whom I work and share responsibility for the Province as councillors, and the confreres who have the responsibility of animating and accompanying the confreres as rectors of communities and works. In short, the priority is to accompany my Salesian confreres.
In the same way, the task of animating the life of the Salesian Family seems relevant to me, an important task, animating in fidelity to the charism, all those who are part of it; consecrated Salesians, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Salesian Cooperators, Volunteers of Don Bosco, Association of Mary Help of Christians and others.
We cannot fail to mention as a relevant task, that of animating the lives of young people, through youth pastoral work, associations and the various groups that can exist under the Salesian charism, giving an important place among these, to the pastoral work for vocations, and to those young people who feel the desire to respond to the Lord’s call in our Congregation.

How do you view the future?
Faced with a society thirsting for meaning it seems to me that we Salesians are called to respond to these quests and to give meaning to what we do, to give meaning to life, especially for the young.
We have a fundamental task, which is to educate the young, and those who educate them and work with them must certainly be bearers of dreams and hope. The world is constantly being built, and it is up to us Salesians to contribute, with our lives, our actions and our mission, to its construction, through the education of today’s young people, so that, knowing that they are loved, valuable, capable and bringing out the best in them, they can give meaning to their lives and be builders of hope in their families and in society.

Do you have a message for the Salesian Family?
The message that I can share with the entire Salesian Family, first of all, is that we

are custodians and bearers of a gift, a gift that God gives to the Church, which is the Salesian charism, a gift and a task for each of us.
This year, the Cardinal and Rector Major of the Congregation, Ángel Fernández Artime, invites us to dream, in imitation of our father Don Bosco, a dreamer father. Don Bosco dreamed of things that seemed impossible, but his great trust in Mary Help of Christians and his persevering and tenacious work led him to realise his dreams. We too, worthy sons of this father, are called to dream and to add young people to these dreams, which are nothing more than desiring a better world for them, where they can fit in, building a society that is more amiable and more sensitive to human and Christian values. Together with them, we want to contribute and become good Christians and upright citizens, feeling deeply loved by God.