 Reading time: 6 min.

The Mission Sector of the Salesian Congregation prepared the usual materials for Salesian Mission Day 2025 “Give Thanks, Rethink, Relaunch”, remembering the 1875, the year of the first missionary expedition.

150 years is a long period of time and the Salesian Family is preparing to celebrate it appropriately. The booklet of Salesian Mission Day 2025 is a rich and useful tool to give thanks, rethink and relaunch the Salesian missions, together with the poster, the prayer and the video (available at the link Youtube Settore per le Missioni Salesiane).

The first Salesian Mission Day (SMD) was in 1988 and, despite the changes, it keeps on being an opportunity offered to SDB communities, Educative and Pastoral Communities (EPCs), all young people and members of the Salesian Family to live this aspect of the Salesian charism well and spread missionary awareness. The name, however, may be misleading: it is not a particular day, there is no single date because each Province can choose the period that best suits its own rhythm and calendar to experience this powerful moment of missionary animation to the full. Moreover, the SMD is the culmination of educative and pastoral processes, and is not an activity detached from the rest.

The booklet starts with some words of Fr. Stefano Martoglio SDB, vicar: “During this year we have the gift of celebrating the 150th anniversary of the Salesian Congregation’s first missionary expedition, undertaken by Don Bosco in 1875. Celebrating this expedition means renewing the same spirit and asking the Lord for Don Bosco’s missionary heart. This expedition, and all those that followed, are not just items of chronology for us. It is fidelity to the spirit of Don Bosco, in obedience to God’s Gift, that has marked and continues to mark the growth in fidelity of the Salesian Congregation under the aegis and Dream of Don Bosco.”

Fr. Alfred Maravilla SDB, General Councillor for the Missions, shares a reflection about the Missionary Option of Don Bosco. Even if Don Bosco had never left as missionary *ad gentes, ad exteros, ad vitam*, we can find his missionary spirit since his childhood.
Don Bosco lived in Piedmont during a vibrant missionary reawakening and as early as 1848 he talked to his boys about sending missionaries to distant regions,

speaking often about his desire of evangelizing those who do not know Christ in Africa, America and Asia. Don Bosco's missionary option was a confluence of three factors: firstly, it was the realization of his own long-held personal desire 'to go to the missions' expressed in his five 'missionary dreams'. Secondly, Don Bosco felt that the missionary commitment of his newly approved Congregation would prevent the members from falling into the real danger of a soft and easy lifestyle. Above all, his Congregation's missionary commitment is the fullest expression of his charism summed up in his own and the Congregation's motto: *Da mihi animas, caetera tolle*.

Some contributions came from different perspectives: the Strenna 2025 "Anchored in hope, pilgrims with young people", the Jubilee of the Sacred Heart of Jesus with some points from the encyclical "Dilexit nos," written by Pope Francis and, of course, The Holy Year of the Church, the Jubilee. We can read all these inputs as an invitation of the Holy Spirit to become "more missionary" in our daily life, with faith and hope.

We know that, among many events of 2025, one will be very special for the Salesians: the 29th General Chapter of the SDB Congregation. Fr. Alphonse Owoudou SDB will be the regulator of GCXXIX and he made a prophetic reflection of the Salesian missions in light of the General Chapter. "The theme of the 29th General Chapter Passionate about Jesus Christ, dedicated to young people offers us a privileged lens through which to reflect on our mission, articulated around three key dimensions: vocation and prophetic fidelity (give thanks), community as a prophecy of fraternity (rethink), and the institutional reorganization of the Congregation (relaunch). The Salesian mission is not only a heritage to be preserved but a challenge to be taken up with renewed enthusiasm and a prophetic vision.
With gratitude for the past, discernment for the present, and boldness for the future, let us continue walking together, inspired by the same missionary zeal that drove the first Salesian missionaries beyond borders, motivated by the desire to make God's love visible among young people."
Then, the presentation of the members of the first expedition of 1875, known above all thanks to the famous photo taken by Michele Schemboche, a professional photographer: Giovanni Battista Allavena, Fr. Giovanni Battista Baccino, Fr. Valentino Cassini, Fr.Domenico Tomatis, Stephen Belmonte, Vincenzo Gioia, Bartolomeo Molinari, Bartolomeo Scavini, Fr. Joseph Fagnano and Fr. John Cagliero, the leader of the missionary expedition.

11 November 1875 was a solemn and emotional day. Don Bosco prepared a sermon to accompany his sons who would be the first to cross the ocean to Argentina. “Our Divine Saviour, when he was on this earth, before going to the Heavenly Father, gathered his Apostles and said to them: *Ite in mundum universum… docete omnes gentes… Praedicate evangelium meum omni creaturae*. With these words our Savior was giving His Apostles not a suggestion, but an order to go and bring the light of the Gospel to all parts of the earth.”

To understand better the context of the Salesian missionaries, you will find on the booklet an article about the correspondence with Don Bosco and a synthesis of the five missionary dreams. Among the hundreds of letters from Don Bosco that crossed the Atlantic Ocean from 1874 to 1887, most were addressed to the Salesians, from Fr. Cagliero to Fr. Fagnano, from Fr. Bodrato to Fr. Vespignani, from Fr. Costamagna to Fr. Tomatis and so on to many of the 150 Salesians, priests, brothers, clerics, who left during the 12 missionary expeditions organized from 1875.

As the Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales said in article 138, “the Councillor for the Missions fosters the missionary spirit and commitment throughout the whole Society. He coordinates initiatives and directs activity in the missions so that it may respond in a Salesian way to the urgent needs of the peoples to be evangelized. It is also his duty to see that provision is made for the specific preparation and updating of missionaries”. So, we have the opportunity to know better and remind the eight General Councillor for the Missions up to 2025: Fr. Modesto Bellido Iñigo (1948-1965), Fr. Bernard Tohill (1971-1983); Fr. Luc Van Looy (1984-1990); Fr. Luciano Odorico (1990-2002); Fr. Francis Alencherry (2002-2008); Fr. Václav Klement (2008-2014), Fr. Guillermo Basañes (2014-2020) and Fr. Alfred Maravilla (2020-2025).

Moreover, we would like to present some figures of lesser-known Salesian ‘pioneers’ who have contributed to spreading the Salesian charism in the five continents: Fr. Francisque Dupont, the initiator of the Salesian mission in Vietnam, Fr. Valeriano Barbero, the sower of the Salesian charism in Papua New Guinea, Fr. Jacques Ntamitalizo, the inspirer of Project Africa, Fr. Raffaele Piperni, the forerunner of the Salesians in U.S.A., Fr. Pascual Chavez, as the concept of Project Europe, and Fr. Bronisław Chodanionek, the undercover pioneer in Moldavia.

The growth of the Salesian Family is a sign of the fruitfulness of the Salesian charism and, in particular, many Salesian Family groups were founded by Salesian

missionaries: in the booklet there is a brief presentation of each one of them. Also, it is good to see the missionary holiness of the Salesian Family, with a growing number of people walking in the path of the sanctity. Another tangible fruit of the Salesian missions is the life of four young people who can be considered as young witnesses of Christian hope: Ceferino Namuncurá, Laura Vicuña, Simão Bororo and Akash Bashir.

New Salesian presences, especially in countries where Salesians are not present yet, are indications of the missionary impetus of the Salesian Congregation that invigorates faith, gives new vocational enthusiasm and revitalises the charismatic identity of the Salesians in the Province that takes responsibility for the new presence as well as in the Province that sends and in the Province that receives missionaries. In addition, the missionary impetus of the Congregation frees us from the dangers of a middle-class lifestyle, spiritual superficiality and genericism, forces us to go out of our comfort zones and leads us forward into the future with hope. With this spirit, we can know more about the new Salesian missionary frontiers: Niger, Botswana, Algeria, Greece and Vanuatu.

The richness of Salesian missions overcomes the borders and reaches many fields: the Salesian missionary museums, as custodians of the Salesian cultural heritage, the Salesian Missionary Volunteers, who donate time and life donated to the others, the missionary groups, like the ones spread in Democratic Republic of Congo, AFC Province.

Each SMD proposes a project, linked to the theme of the year, as a concrete opportunity for solidarity and missionary animation. This year we chose the opening of an oratory in Pagos, Greece, one of the new Salesian missionary frontiers.
The opening of an oratory in Pagos, on the island of Syros, will be one of the keys to involving young Greek Catholics and migrants in the area and starting Salesian work with them. All the funds raised will be used to start up pastoral activities, arrange the premises and purchase animation materials. The involvement of Salesians in the diocese’s youth ministry will allow us to share our charism to enrich the local Church, a small minority in need of animation.

The booklet ends with some games to have fun and improve the knowledge about Salesian missions, the presentation of the members of the Mission Sector, who help the General Councillor to fulfil his role of promoting the missionary spirit and missionary commitment in the Salesian Congregation, and the final prayer.

Praised be God our Father,
for the missionary spirit
that you have infused in Don Bosco’s heart
as an essential element of his charism.

We thank you for 150 years of Salesian missions,
and for so many Salesian missionaries
who have given their lives
bringing the Gospel and the Salesian charism
to 137 countries worldwide.

Send your Spirit to guide us
in rethinking a renewed vision of the Salesian missions,
with tireless missionary creativity.

Enkindle our hearts with the fire of your love
so that, passionate about Jesus Christ,
we may relaunch ourselves
with missionary zeal and enthusiasm
to proclaim him to all,
especially to poor and abandoned youth.

All Salesian missionary saints,
pray for us!

SMD 2025 materials are available at the link Salesian Mission Day 2025, for more info write to cagliero11@sdb.org.

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