

□ Reading time: 5 min.

*Salesian missions are not a chapter of history: they are names, faces, biographies in progress. This article opens a series of four encounters with Salesian missionaries sent in recent years to the four corners of the world. We begin with Asia, with Fr Andre Delimarta, Indonesian, 57 years old, in charge of the community of Kuching, in Malaysia. He carried the desire to leave in his heart since his novitiate, but the opportunity only arrived at the age of 53: when the Congregation asked for an Indonesian Salesian for Malaysia, his response was immediate. Today he works in a small parish without a courtyard or playground, alongside Indonesian and Filipino migrants, and tells how Don Bosco's charism knows how to create a family beyond every border.*

## **Four faces, a single call**

Salesian missions are found in every corner of the world: missionaries (men and women), young people, laymen and laywomen, sisters, members of the Salesian Family, families and collaborators spend their energy every day so that the Salesian charism continues to generate life.

Among them, the missionaries *ad gentes, ad vitam, ad exteros* make an all-encompassing choice: they leave their own country to put their lives at the service of distant peoples. A choice that is not improvised. Discernment, adequate formation and accompaniment are decisive: precisely for this reason, since last year, a global rethinking of missionary formation has been initiated at the Congregation level, which has involved many people, starting with the missionaries themselves.

This year, the missionaries sent in the last five years met by continent: in Sihanoukville, Cambodia; in Nairobi, Kenya; in Genzano, Italy; in Montevideo, Uruguay. Together with the members of the Missions Sector, those responsible for their formation and some speakers and guests, they experienced days of fraternity, sharing, mutual listening, formation and reflection. We asked some of them to tell us about their missionary experience and the fruits of that meeting.

We begin with Asia. Fr Andre Delimarta, originally from Indonesia, is in charge of the community of Kuching, in Malaysia, where the Salesians arrived in 2017. His missionary calling matured after the age of fifty, but the desire had always accompanied him.

### **‘I grew up with Salesian missionaries’**

Greetings to all readers of the Bollettino Salesiano OnLine. My name is Andre Delimarta, I am 57 years old, originally from Indonesia and currently carrying out my service in Malaysia.

I grew up with Salesian missionaries from my secondary school days: they always spoke to me about Don Bosco and the other Salesian saints. After finishing school, I entered the Salesian community in East Timor and shared community life with them. During my initial formation, their loving kindness, hard work, commitment and spirit of sacrifice left a deep mark on me. It is thanks to them that my vocation and my love for Don Bosco were strengthened.

### **‘Here I am, I will go’**

I only became a missionary *ad gentes* at a mature age, at 53. The desire was already in my heart since I was a novice, but the opportunity only presented itself a few years ago, when the Congregation needed an Indonesian Salesian for Malaysia. I consulted my Provincial and, having obtained his approval, I offered myself without hesitation: ‘Here I am, I will go’.

I had no formal preparation or specific training to become a missionary. My formators, however, were missionaries: through them I learned what the mission is and how one becomes a missionary. Then I spent half my life in formation, preparing my confreres for the mission, and for several years I worked in mission territories. After all, many Salesian works in Indonesia are still, in themselves, part of the mission *ad gentes*.

### **A parish without a courtyard**

Indonesia and Malaysia are neighbouring countries, yet there remain differences in the way people live their daily lives, in the way they communicate, in the pastoral approach of the Church. Here the Salesian work does not fit into traditional contexts – schools, boarding houses, training centres. We have only been entrusted with a small parish, lacking even a playground or a football or basketball pitch. It is there that we carry out our mission, for the faithful and for the young people who come to us. Shortly after my arrival, I was also entrusted with the service to the communities of Indonesian, Filipino and various other nationalities of migrants.

The biggest challenge, in this new context, was not adapting to the culture, the language and the mentality, but learning to work together with local authorities, both civil and ecclesiastical. And there is a tension that remains open, especially in the ministry with migrants: between the desire to help and accompany them practically and the respect for legal limits, institutional boundaries and the different priorities within the local Church.

### **Young people in search of belonging**

Malaysia is a multicultural and multireligious country: different ethnicities, mentalities, languages and religions coexist. A diversity that is both beautiful and demanding, because it requires openness, respect and dialogue.

Young people are energetic, talented, open to technology; but many also have to deal with the pressure of academic competition, family problems, economic difficulties, and uncertainty about the future. Some are in search of identity, belonging, and hope. The Salesian mission therefore remains as relevant as ever: accompanying young people, especially the poorest and most in need, through pastoral care and personal presence. Don Bosco's Preventive System continues to speak powerfully to today's young people.

### **'I felt at home'**

I was warmly welcomed by both the Salesians and the local population. The confreres supported me with fraternity and patience, making me feel part of the community and the mission. The local people also proved to be kind, open and

generous: I experienced hospitality, respect, and friendship. Through simple daily encounters, conversations, ministry in the parish and then with the migrants, I gradually felt at home in the mission. It was a confirmation: the Salesian charism creates a family spirit that goes beyond nationality and culture.

### **The meeting in Cambodia**

This year I was able to meet other Salesians, younger than me, sent in recent years as missionaries to different countries in Asia. What struck me most, in that meeting in Cambodia, was the simplicity, joy and missionary zeal of so many young confreres. Listening to their experiences made me realise that, however different our contexts may be, we share the same mission and the same love for Don Bosco, for the Congregation and for the young. The moments of prayer, sharing, reflection and fraternity were also very significant.

The meeting renewed a conviction in me: missionary life does not just consist of working in another country, but of giving oneself completely to God and to the young.

### **‘Keep praying for the missionaries’**

I believe that the Salesian missionaries of the future must continue to be signs of hope, fraternity and joy, for anyone and wherever we are sent. They will also have to be prepared to operate in pastoral contexts different from the traditionally Salesian ones – schools, boarding houses, training centres. What matters is becoming signs of God’s love in the spirit of Don Bosco.

I ask you to continue to pray for missionaries all over the world. Missionary life is beautiful because it allows us to experience God’s love through service to others. May Don Bosco continue to inspire us to be joyful witnesses of the Gospel wherever we find ourselves. Thank you from the bottom of my heart and may God bless you!

*Marco Fulgaro*