

□ Reading time: 5 min.

*Within the “Project Europe,” Italy South has launched a new missionary project in the regions of Calabria and Basilicata, welcoming the first missionaries “ad gentes”, a sign of missionary generosity and an opportunity for growth in the global outreach of the charism of Don Bosco.*

Europe as a land of mission: in a new Salesian missiological perspective, missions are increasingly losing a geographical connotation, as a movement towards “the lands of mission”. Today, missionaries come from all five continents and are sent to all five continents. This multidirectional missionary movement is already taking place in many dioceses and congregations. With the “Project Europe,” Salesians have confronted this change in the missionary paradigm, for which a journey of conversion of mind and heart is necessary. The “Project Europe,” in the idea of Fr. Pascual Chávez, is an act of apostolic courage and an opportunity for charismatic rebirth in the European continent to be inserted into the broader context of the new evangelisation. The goal is to engage the entire Salesian congregation in strengthening the Salesian charism in Europe, especially through a profound spiritual and pastoral renewal of the confreres and communities, in order to continue Don Bosco’s project in favour of young people, especially the poorest.

The Salesian provinces involved are called to rethink their Salesian presence for a more effective evangelisation that responds to today’s context. Among them, the province of Italy South has developed a new missionary project that involves the regions of Basilicata and Campania. Starting from an analysis of the territory, it can be observed that southern Italy is characterised by a fairly consistent presence of young people, with a lower birth rate compared to other Italian regions, and that emigration is a phenomenon that is very present, causing many young people to leave to study or work elsewhere. Religious and family traditions, which have always constituted an important identity reference for the community, are less relevant than in the past, and many young people experience faith as distant from their lives, although they do not show themselves as being totally opposed to it. The Salesians experience good participation in youth spiritual experiences but, at the same time, a poor receptivity to systematic paths and definitive life proposals. Other issues affecting the youth world include emotional and affective illiteracy, relational crises in families, abandoning school, and unemployment. All of this fuels phenomena of widespread poverty and the growth of criminal organisations that

find fertile ground to involve and deviate the youth.

In this context, many young people express a strong desire for social commitment, particularly in political and ecological fields and in the world of volunteerism.

In recent years, the Salesian province has reflected upon what can be done to be relevant in the territory and has made several important choices, including the development of works and projects for the poorest young people, such as family homes and day centres that directly and clearly manifest the choice in favour of at-risk youth. The integral care of young people must aim for a formation that is not only theoretical so that the young person can discover or become aware of his/her own abilities. Furthermore, a more courageous missionary practice is required to realise paths of education in faith that help young people fulfil their Christian vocation.

All this must be realised with the active involvement of all: consecrated, laypeople, young people, families, members of the Salesian family... in a fully synodal style that promotes co-responsibility and participation.

Basilicata and Calabria have been chosen as charismatically significant areas in need of consolidation and new educational-pastoral momentum. These are territories to bet upon by opening new pastoral frontiers and resizing some already present. The Salesian presences are six: Potenza, Bova Marina, Corigliano Rossano, Locri, Soverato, and Vibo Valentia. What kind of Salesians are needed for this missionary project? Salesians willing to work in poor, popular, and densely populated contexts, with economic difficulties and sometimes a lack of cultural stimuli, and particularly attentive to the initial announcement. Salesians should be well-prepared, at the spiritual, Salesian, cultural, and charismatic levels. It is necessary to be well aware of the reason why this project has been developed, that is namely to take care of Basilicata and Calabria, two poor regions with few systematic pastoral proposals in favour of the neediest young people, where the first announcement increasingly becomes a necessity even in contexts of Catholic tradition. The educational and pastoral work of the Salesians seeks to give hope to many young people who are often forced to leave their homes and move north in search of a better life. The contrast of this reality with pastoral and formative offers with a look to the future, particularly vocational training, attention to youth distress, and collaboration with institutions to find answers becomes increasingly urgent. In addition to the consecrated Salesians, this territory is enriched by the beautiful presence of laypeople and members of the Salesian Family, and the local church, as well as the social reality, that nurtures great respect and consideration for the

children of Don Bosco.

Welcoming new *ad gentes* missionaries is a blessing and a challenge that fits within this pastoral project. This year the Italy South province (IME) received four missionaries, who were sent in the 155th Salesian missionary expedition. Among them, two have become members of the new provincial delegation AKM (Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro), while the other two have been assigned to Italy South and will take part in the new missionary project of IME for Basilicata and Campania: Henri Mufele Ngankwini and Guy Roger Mutombo, from the Democratic Republic of Congo (ACC province). To best accompany the arriving missionaries, the IME province is committed to ensuring that they feel at home and are steadily integrated into the new community and social reality. The missionaries are gradually blended into the history and culture of the place that will become their home, and from the very first days, they attend Italian language and culture courses for a duration of at least two years, which will help them achieve full inculturation. At the same time, they are introduced into the formative processes and take the first steps in the educational-pastoral action of the province with young people and children. A fundamental dimension is the attention towards the personal spiritual journey: each missionary is guaranteed adequate moments of personal and communal prayer, spiritual accompaniment and guidance, confession, preferably in a language they understand, and time for updating and formation. In a later phase, the missionary is guaranteed ongoing formation for an even fuller integration into the provincial dynamics, maintaining some specific attentions. The missionary experience will be periodically evaluated to identify strengths, weaknesses, and any corrective measures, in a fraternal spirit.

As Fr. Alfred Maravilla, General Councillor for the Missions, reminds us, “being missionaries in a secularised Europe poses significant internal and external challenges. Goodwill is not enough.” “Looking back with the eyes of faith, we realise that through the launch of the ‘Project Europe,’ the Spirit was preparing the Salesian Society to face the new reality of Europe, so that we could be more aware of our resources as well as the challenges, and with hope to relaunch the Salesian charism throughout the Continent.”

Let us pray that in the regions of Basilicata and Calabria, may the Salesian presence be inspired by the Spirit for the good of the young people most in need.

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