 Reading time: 5 min.

On Sunday 29 September, at 12:30 p.m. (UTC+2),
at the basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Valdocco, 27 Salesians of Don Bosco and 8 Daughters of Mary Help of Christians will receive the missionary crucifix, renewing their apostolic generosity in favour of so many young people throughout the world.

As is the case every year, on the last Sunday of September, Don Bosco's missionary heart is renewed through the availability of the Salesians of Don Bosco and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians sent as missionaries ad gentes.
So much time has passed since that 11 November 1875, the day on which a fundamental step was taken: the first group of Salesian missionaries headed for Argentina began the transformation of the Salesians into a worldwide congregation, now spread over 138 countries. Two years later, the FMA also crossed the ocean, beginning the work of spreading beyond the Italian borders.

As we approach the 150th anniversary of the first missionary expedition, we can take a closer look at the preparation of the Salesian new missionaries, which is developed in the 'Germoglio' course organised by the Missions Sector team and coordinated by Fr Reginaldo Cordeiro. The course runs for five weeks, immediately before the missionary expedition. In prayer, in listening to testimonies, in sharing experiences, in personal reflection and in joyful coexistence with the other course participants, the new missionaries are helped to verify, deepen and, at times, discover the profound reasons for their going on mission.

Obviously, the discernment of a missionary vocation begins much earlier. Traditionally, on 18 December, the day of the founding of the Salesian Congregation, the Rector Major issues a missionary appeal indicating the missionary priorities to be addressed. In response to the appeal, many Salesians write their availability, after listening to God's will, helped by their spiritual guide and the director of their community, following the guidelines of the Missions Sector. A profound re-reading of one's own life and a careful journey of discernment are required for the missionary vocation ad gentes, ad exteros, ad vitam to mature. The missionary, in fact,

leaves for a lifelong project, with the prospect of inculturation in a different country and incardination in a new Province, in a context that will become ‘home’, despite the many challenges and difficulties.
On the other hand, it is important that there is a well-structured missionary project in the Provinces, which allows the arriving missionary to be accompanied, to fit in and to serve in the best possible way.

The Germoglio Course begins in Rome, with an introductory core, which aims to provide departing missionaries with the basic skills and attitudes necessary for a successful completion of the course. The motivations for the missionary choice are addressed, in a gradual journey of awareness and purification. Each missionary is invited to draw up a personal missionary life project, highlighting the essential elements and the steps to be taken to respond adequately to God’s call. Then an introduction to Italian culture and a meeting on ‘emotional literacy’, fundamental for the experience of living to the full in a context different from one’s own, and a session on missionary animation and Salesian missionary voluntary work. All this in a community context, where informal moments are precious and participation in community moments of prayer is vital, in a Pentecost style where languages and cultures mix for the enrichment of all. In these days, a pilgrimage to the places of Christian faith helps to retrace the roots of one’s own faith, together with the closeness to the universal Church, also manifested in participation in a papal audience. This year, on 28 August, the pope showed closeness to missionaries, reminding them in a brief conversation during a group photo of the figure of St Artemides Zatti, together with the beauty and importance of the vocation of Salesian brothers.

The second part of the course moves to Colle Don Bosco, Don Bosco’s birthplace, where we get to the heart of the experience by going deep into the preparation from an anthropological, theological/missiological and Salesian charismatic point of view. Preparing oneself for the inevitable culture shock, being aware of the importance and effort of getting to know a new culture and a new language, and being open to intercultural dialogue, knowing that one will have to face conflicts and misunderstandings, are fundamental elements for living a true, human and full experience. Some missiological fundamentals help to understand what the mission is for the Church, and notions on First Announcement and integral evangelisation complete the perspective of the missionary. Finally, the typically Salesian characteristics, starting with some

historical notes and then focusing on the present situation, discernment and Salesian spirituality.
The group of missionaries then has the opportunity to visit Don Bosco's places, in a week of spiritual exercises on the move, in which they can face up to the saint of youth and entrust their missionary dream to him.
The experience continues with a pilgrimage to Mornese, where the missionary charism in the female version of St Mary Domenica Mazzarello is presented, together with the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. The last few days are spent in Valdocco, where the itinerary around Don Bosco's places is completed and preparation for the 'yes' to the missionary call is completed. A conversation with the Rector Major (his Vicar in this case) and the Mother General closes the programme before Sunday, when the missionary crucifixes are handed over to the departed during the 12:30 mass.

If we look at who the Salesians of the 155th missionary expedition are, we immediately notice how the paradigm shift is evident: all Provinces, and all countries, can be recipients and senders at the same time. The missionaries are no longer only Italian, as was the case at the beginning, or European, but come from the five continents, in particular from Asia (11 missionaries, from the two regions of South Asia and East Asia-Oceania) and Africa (8 missionaries), while the Mediterranean region will welcome the largest number of missionaries in this expedition. For some years now, the Missions Sector has been preparing a map to graphically help visualise the distribution of new missionaries around the world (you can download it here). This year there are five priests, two brothers, one deacon and 19 Salesian students. Joining them are a few missionaries from past expeditions, who were unable to attend the preparation course.
Below is a detailed list of the new missionaries:

Donatien Martial Balezou, from Central African Rep. (ATE) to Brazil – Belo Horizonte (BBH);
Guy Roger Mutombo, from Congo Dem. Rep. (ACC) to Italy (IME);
Henri Mufele Ngandwini, from Congo Dem. Rep. (ACC) to Italy (EMI);
Brother Alain Josaphat Mutima Balekage, from the Rep. Dem. of Congo (AFC) to Uruguay (URU);
Clovis Muhindo Tsongo, from Rep. Dem. of Congo (AFC) to Brazil (BPA);
Confiance Kakule Kataliko, from Congo Dem. Rep. (AFC) to Uruguay (URU);
Fr Ephrem Kisenga Mwangwa, from the Democratic Republic of Congo (AFC) to

Taiwan (CIN);
Ernest Kirunda Menya, from Uganda (AGL) to Romania (INE);
Éric Umurundi Ndayicariye, from Burundi (AGL) to Mongolia (KOR);
Daniel Armando Nuñez, from El Salvador (CAM) to North Africa (CNA);
Marko Dropuljić, from Croatia (CRO) to Mongolia (KOR);
Krešo Maria Gabričević, from Croatia (CRO) to Papua New Guinea – Solomon Islands (PGS);
Rafael Gašpar, from Croatia (CRO) to Brazil (BBH);
Fr Marijan Zovak, from Croatia (CRO) to the Dominican Republic (ANT);
Fr Enrico Bituin Mercado, from the Philippines (FIN) to Southern Africa (AFM);
Alan Andrew Manuel, from India (INB) to North Africa (CNA);
Fr Joseph Reddy Vanga, from India (INH) to Papua New Guinea – Solomon Islands (PGS);
Fr Hubard Thyrniang, from India (INS) to North West Africa (AON);
Fr Albert Tron Mawa, from India (INS) to Sri Lanka (LKC);
Eruthaya Valan Arockiaraj, from India (INT) to Congo (ACC);
Herimamponona Dorisse Angelot Rakotonirina, from Madagascar (MDG) to Albania/Kosovo/Montenegro (AKM);
Brother Mouzinho Domingos Joaquim Mouzinho, from Mozambique (MOZ) to Albania/Kosovo/Montenegro (AKM);
Nelson Alves Cabral, from East Timor (TLS) to the Democratic Republic of Congo (AFC);
Elisio Ilidio Guterres Dos Santos, from East Timor (TLS) to Romania (INE);
Francisco Armindo Viana, from East Timor (TLS) to Congo (ACC);
Tuấn Anh Joseph Vũ, from Vietnam (VIE) to Chile (CIL);
Trong Hữu Francis Đỗ, from Vietnam (VIE) to Chile (CIL).

These are the SDB members of the 155th Salesian missionary expedition, while the FMA will have its 147th expedition.

The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians new issionaries are:
Sr Cecilia Gayo, from Uruguay;
Sr Maria Goretti Tran Thi Hong Loan, from Vietnam;
Sr Sagma Beronica, from India, Province of Shillong;
Sr Serah Njeri Ndung’u, from the East Africa Province, sent to South Sudan;
Sr Lai Marie Pham Thi, from Vietnam;
Sr Maria Bosco Tran Thi Huyen, from Vietnam;
Sr Philina Kholar, from India, Shillong Province, sent to Italy (Sicily);

Sr Catherine Ramírez Sánchez, from Chile.
Most of them still do not know their missionary destination, which will be communicated after the formation course.

This year, a group belonging to the Community of the Mission of Don Bosco (CMB), a group of the Salesian Family led by Deacon Guido Pedroni, will also receive the missionary cross together with the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

Let us pray that this varied vocational availability bears fruit throughout the world!

Marco Fulgaro