

□ Reading time: 3 min.

*This year's Salesian missionary theme is Salesian missionary solidarity and the precious work of the Mission Offices. As a first look, we welcome the words of Fr. Luca Barone, SDB, the new president of Missions Don Bosco.*

The most immediate image that comes to mind when thinking of the “Missions Don Bosco Valdocco” Mission Office is that of a bridge, a space for passage, for connection, for facilitation. The stories, needs, and necessities of many Salesian missions around the world pass through. They are the stories of the lives of missionaries, young people, individuals, communities, and Countries. Prayers, generosity, altruism, donations, bequests, and inheritances from many benefactors and beneficiaries who trust in Don Bosco and his sons, transit over this bridge and, through them, bring future and hope to different parts of the planet.

The missionary procurator, president of “Missions Don Bosco,” on behalf of the Rector Major of the Salesian Congregation who appoints him, “directs the traffic” on this bridge and, with the “Missions Don Bosco” team, unites people, resources, and professional skills to serve the most disadvantaged.

Missions Don Bosco was founded in Turin in 1991, with the goal of supporting Salesian missionaries who today in 137 Countries, bring education and vocational training to young people in difficulty. Following in the footsteps of Saint John Bosco, the missionaries dedicate their lives to people in disadvantaged situations, living in close contact with the poorest and most marginalized segments of the population.

For 30 years, our goal has been to bring development to the countries of the Global South. We manage emergency responses in cases of natural disasters, famines, and wars; we build wells in the most arid areas. We help refugees and migrants; we build and manage shelters for street children, hospitals, and clinics. We want to help disadvantaged minors so they can become active agents in the social development of their own Country, in the full conviction that young people are the future of the world. We build schools of all levels, vocational training centres, support dozens of oratories around the world, promote scholarships for the education of needy youth, and work grants to enable them to learn a trade. We support the work of evangelization and education typical of the Salesian charism.

For a few months now, I have been in this service of the presidency, which I feel is both a gift and a responsibility. A gift that has been granted to me to broaden my

heart and mind, expanding them to the scale of the Congregation. In fact, the projects supported by the Turin Mission Office last year exceed 180 and are implemented on five continents in service of the missions, and this allows me to marvel at the miracles that happen daily when real needs meet authentic generosity.

I also feel the full responsibility of this role due to the urgency and concreteness of many needs we learn about, for the respect and attention deserved by the sacrifice of the people from whom the donations come, and for the recipients of our interventions who are, above all, in the Salesian spirit, boys, girls, and young people who dream of a better future to which they are entitled.

An African proverb says that in the fight between two elephants, it is always the grass that gets crushed. In the struggles of the strong and powerful, it is the poor and the small who are overwhelmed and crushed. Missions Don Bosco tries to act on three levels: emergency intervention with immediate aid where needs require it; support for development and planning aimed at populations and Countries; and finally, support for local missionaries so they can act in a social and political sense to improve the underlying conditions of a Country, taking charge of the youth and their present and future needs.

On the great chessboard of history, the game is always played on two boards: one local and one global. What you can do in your small way has a worldwide consequence that goes beyond your expectations, because it becomes part of the great movement of good that may not make noise but exists and sustains the world. For this reason, I take the liberty of asking each of us for a renewed and contagious capacity to do good and to be generous. It will be our way of building a peace that is “unarmed and disarming, humble and persevering,” as our Pope told us at the beginning of his pontificate.

fr. Luca Barone, sdb