 Reading time: 5 min.

We are approaching the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the First Salesian Missionary Expedition (1875-2025). The missionary dimension of the Salesian Society is part of its 'DNA'. It was so desired by Don Bosco from the very beginning, and today the Congregation is in 136 countries. This initial impetus continues today and is supported by the Missions Sector. Let us briefly present their activities and organisation.

Although Don Bosco never set out for distant lands as a missionary *ad gentes*, he always had a missionary heart and an ardent desire to share the Salesian charism in order to reach all the borders of the world and contribute to the salvation of the young.
This has been possible thanks to the availability of so many Salesians sent on missionary expeditions (at the end of September this year the 155th will be celebrated) who, working with locals and lay people, have allowed the Salesian charism to be spread and inculturated. Compared to the first 'pioneers', today the figure of the missionary must respond to different challenges, and the missionary paradigm has been updated to be an effective vehicle of evangelisation in today's world. First of all, as Fr Alfred Maravilla, General Councillor for the Missions, reminds us (in 2021 he wrote a letter, "The Salesian missionary vocation"), missions no longer respond to geographical criteria as they once did, and today's missionaries come from and are sent to the five continents, so there is no longer a clear separation between "mission lands" and other Salesian presences. Furthermore, there is the very important distinction between the Salesian missionary vocation, i.e. the call that some Salesians receive to be sent for a lifetime in another place as missionaries, and the missionary spirit, typical of all Salesians and of all members of an educative-pastoral community, which manifests itself in the oratorian heart and in the drive for the evangelisation of the young.

The task of promoting the missionary spirit and keeping it alive in the Salesians and the laity is entrusted above all to the "Provincial Delegates for Missionary Animation" (DIAM), i.e. those Salesians, or lay people, who receive from the Inspector, the Salesian superior of the province in question, the task of taking care of missionary animation. The DIAM has a very important role, he is the "missionary sentinel" who, through his sensitivity and experience, is committed to spreading missionary culture at various levels (see *Salesian Missionary Animation.*

Handbook of the Provincial Delegate, Rome, 2019).

The DIAM triggers missionary sensitivity in all the communities of the Province and works in synergy with the leaders of the other areas to testify to the importance of this dimension, common to every Christian. On a practical level, it organises a number of initiatives, promotes prayer for the missions on the 11th of the month, in memory of the first missionary expedition on 11th November 1875, promotes "Salesian Mission Day" in the Province every year, disseminates the materials prepared by the Congregation on missionary themes, such as the "Cagliero11" bulletin or the "CaglieroLife" video. Salesian Mission Day, which has been recurring since 1988, is a beautiful occasion to stop and reflect and relaunch missionary animation. It does not necessarily have to be a day, it can be an itinerary of several days, and it does not have a fixed date, so that everyone can choose the best time of the year that suits the rhythm and calendar of the Province. Each year a common theme is chosen and some animation materials are prepared as food for thought and activities, which can be adapted and modified. This year the theme is "builders of dialogue", while in 2025 the focus will be on the 150th anniversary of the first missionary expedition according to the three verbs "Give Thanks, Rethink, Relaunch". "Cagliero11", on the other hand, is a simple missionary animation bulletin, created in 2009 and published every month, two pages containing missionary reflections, interviews, news, curiosities and the monthly prayer that is proposed. "CaglieroLife" is a one-minute video based on the missionary prayer of the month (in turn based on the monthly intention proposed by the Pope), that helps to reflect on the theme. These are all tools that enable DIAM to carry out its task of promoting the missionary spirit well, in line with today's times.

The DIAM collaborates or coordinates the Salesian Missionary Volunteer Service, that is, youth experiences of solidarity and free service in a community other than one's own for a continuous period of time (in summer, for several months, a year…), motivated by faith, with a missionary style and according to the pedagogy and spirituality of Don Bosco (*The Volunteer Service in the Salesian Mission. Identity and Orientations of Salesian Missionary Volunteering*, Rome, 2019).

This year, in March, a first meeting of MissionVolunteering coordinators was held in Rome, attended by about fifty participants, including lay people and Salesians, under the guidance of a mixed team that took care of the organisation. Among the salient points that came out of the meeting, which was very rich especially in terms of sharing experiences, were the exploration of the identity of the Salesian missionary volunteer, the training of volunteers and coordinators,

collaboration between lay and religious, accompaniment at all levels, and networking. A new symbolic cross was presented, which can be used by all volunteers in the various experiences around the world, and the draft of a new website, which will serve as a data and networking platform.

The DIAM also visits the communities of the province and accompanies them from a missionary point of view, taking care especially of Salesians who are seeing if they are called to become missionaries *ad gentes*.

Obviously, all this work cannot be done by a single person. Teamwork and project mentality are important. Each Province has a missionary animation commission made up of Salesians, lay people and young people, which formulates proposals, creative suggestions and coordinates activities. It also draws up the provincial missionary animation project, to be presented to the Provincial, which is the compass to be followed with objectives, timetables, resources and concrete steps. In this way, improvisation is avoided and action is taken following a structured and strategic plan on the basis of the broader Salesian Educative and Pastoral Plan (SEPP), promoting a shared vision of missionary animation. In the Province times for ongoing formation, reflection and discussion are organised, and a missionary culture is promoted at various levels. These structures that have been created over time enable more effective animation and coordination, with a view to always giving the best for the good of the young.

Another important aspect is the sharing between DIAMs from different countries and provinces. Each Region (there are seven: America South Cone, Interamerica, Central-Northern Europe, Mediterranean, Africa – Madagascar, East Asia – Oceania and South Asia) meet regularly, in person once a year and on-line about every three months, to pool their riches, share challenges and work out a regional path. The on-line meetings, which began a few years ago, allow greater knowledge of the DIAMs and the contexts in which they operate, continuous quality updating, and a fruitful exchange that enriches everyone. In each Region there is a coordinator who convenes the meetings, promotes the regional journey and moderates the common processes, together with the Salesian contact person of the central team of the Sector for the Missions, who represents the General Councillor for the Missions, bringing ideas, insights and suggestions to the group.

This great commitment, tiring but very useful and full of true joy, is one of the pieces that joins the many pieces of the Salesian mosaic, and ensures that Don Bosco’s dream can continue today.

Marco Fulgaro