 Reading time: 5 min.

The Jubilee Year of Hope offered the Church in Ecuador a special occasion for remembrance and gratitude: the 75th anniversary of the missionary presence of the ***Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary (HHSSCC),*** *the female religious Institute founded by the blessed Salesian Fr. Luigi Variara.*
On 27 February 1950, a small group of Colombian religious Sisters arrived on the Ecuadorian coast, bringing with them the treasure of the ***Salesian sacrificial charism****. Since then, this presence has taken root and spread, becoming a living part of the history of the local Church and contributing with silent and tireless dedication to the spiritual and human growth of entire generations.*

The origins of the Salesian sacrificial charism
The history of the Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary is rooted in the extraordinary work of Blessed Luigi Variara (1875-1923), an Italian Salesian priest who dedicated his life to the service of the marginalised, particularly lepers in Colombia. Luigi Variara was born on 15 January 1875 in Viarigi, Asti, Piedmont region, and his vocation soon led him to the South American missions.
As a special manifestation of his love for lepers, together with Mother Ana María Lozano Díaz, he founded the Congregation of the “Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary”. The official foundation of the Institute dates back to 7 May 1905, born from Variara’s direct experience in the leper colony of *Agua de Dios*, Colombia, where the blessed Salesian developed a unique charism that is called “Salesian sacrificial”, characterised by total dedication to the suffering and marginalised.
Blessed Luigi Variara developed a particular spirituality, inspired by Fr. Beltrami and shaping the Salesian sacrificial charism. This charism is characterised by a deep union between love for the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary and concrete service to the poorest and most suffering in society.
After the founder’s death, the Institute grew slowly but with solid roots. In 1928, it obtained ecclesiastical approval and, in the following years, opened up to the missionary horizon, finally arriving in Ecuador in 1950.

The Salesian sacrificial charism in action
The charism of the Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary is characterised by some distinctive elements that make it unique in the panorama of religious life. **Devotion to the Sacred Hearts**: love for the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary represents the spiritual foundation of the Congregation. It is not merely

sentimental devotion, but a path of configuration to the mystery of divine love that becomes a total gift for humanity.
Service to the poorest: following the example of the founder, the sisters dedicate themselves particularly to the service of those whom society tends to exclude: the sick, abandoned children, the elderly, the poor. This service is not welfare, but authentic evangelisation through works of mercy.
The missionary spirit: the missionary dimension is intrinsic to the charism. As Blessed Variara wrote in his letter of 11 June 1919, “How beautiful the feasts are: first of all, the great harmony, then the spiritual part, and finally the music…”. This harmony translates into the ability to create welcoming communities where every person can feel loved and valued.
Integral education: following the Salesian tradition, the Daughters of the Sacred Hearts dedicate themselves to the education of young people, with particular attention to human and Christian formation, promoting the complete development of the person.

The arrival in Ecuador and the development of the mission
Ecuador represents a fundamental stage in the history of the Congregation, being the **first nation in the world** where the Salesian sacrificial charism of the Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary spread outside Colombia. On 27 February 1950, thanks to the impetus of key figures such as Father José María Bertola and Monsignor Efrem Forni, then apostolic nuncio in Ecuador, this extraordinary missionary adventure began.
A decisive role was played by the **Servant of God Mother Ana María Lozano Díaz**, the Superior General at the time, who with courage and prophetic vision sent the first group of Colombian missionary sisters to Ecuadorian lands. Four courageous women – María Amada Lizcano, Zoila Argüello, María Trinidad Gómez, and Camila Acevedo – crossed the borders to bring the founder’s charism to a new nation.
These young consecrated women arrived in an unknown land, driven only by their love for Christ and their desire to serve. Their life, made up of daily sacrifices, adaptations, and unwavering faith, is the root from which everything originated.

Between 1959 and 1977, while the Sisters were working in Guayaquil at the invitation of Father Ángel Correa SDB, the Salesian Provincial at the time, an event of great significance occurred, the birth of the first Ecuadorian vocations, **Sister Elsa Hallón Burgos and Sister Victoria de San José Alvarado Almeida**, who today live in the House of Prayer in Playas de Villamil. From them sprang all the

subsequent vocational flourishing, which allowed the HHSSCC to become an integral part of the local Church.

The celebration of the 75th anniversary

The celebration of this important anniversary took place in the context of the Jubilee Year of Hope and the II Delegational Assembly, with the participation of **Mother Eulalia Marín Rueda**, Superior General of the Institute, and all the Sisters present in Ecuador who make up the national Delegation.

The event was attended by representatives of the entire Salesian Family of Ecuador, testifying to the belonging of the Daughters of the Sacred Hearts to the great family founded by Saint John Bosco. Present were **Monsignor Iván Minda**, bishop of the diocese of Santa Elena; **Father Marcelo Farfán**, Salesian Provincial; along with Salesian priests, Capuchin fathers, diocesan priests, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and members of ADMA Guayaquil, lay groups and collaborators of the works.

During the celebration, Monsignor Minda read the Apostolic Blessing sent by Pope Francis, a sign of the union of the universal Church with this small Institute that continues to give life and hope.

And indeed, at this celebration, one breathed the harmony between generations, the depth of the spiritual dimension, and the simple joy of reuniting as a family.

A spirituality for today's world

What does it mean today to live the Salesian sacrificial charism? In a world marked by indifference, individualism, and conflicts, the HHSSCC testify that ***love can transform suffering***. Their mission is not limited to assisting, but is a call **to transfigure suffering into a redemptive offering**, uniting with Christ who gives His life for all.

This style, born among the lepers of Colombia, retains an extraordinary relevance. It invites us to look at the sick, the discarded, the poor, not as burdens, but as privileged places of God's presence. In this sense, the Daughters of the Sacred Hearts offer the contemporary world a prophetic message: weakness is not an end, but a seed of new life.

Seventy-five years are an immense gift. They are proof that the small seed planted has borne abundant fruit and that Fr. Variara's charism is alive and fruitful.

The Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, with their discreet presence and their silent love, have written pages of the Gospel in Ecuador. And they will continue to do so, because their mission is not over. The world still needs hearts that give themselves, lives that offer themselves, people who testify that **the love**

of Christ is stronger than any suffering.
May their story be an inspiration for new vocations and an encouragement for all who believe that love can change the world.
And may the flame that was lit 75 years ago continue to illuminate the path of future generations, as a sign of hope and mercy.

by Sister Carmen Alicia Sánchez
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