

□ Reading time: 4 min.

*Located in a beautiful mountainous area at the foot of the Alps, close to Switzerland, the [Salesian House at Châtillon](#) has a special and successful history.*

In the region of Valle d'Aosta, there is a municipality called Châtillon (the name comes from the Latin "Castellum") located between Mount Zerbion to the north and Mount Barbeston to the south; it is the third most populated municipality in the region.

In 1917, during the First World War, a company, Soie de Châtillon (English "Silk of Châtillon"), was founded in this locality and started to work in the field of technofibres with modern technology. The presence of nearby hydroelectric power stations that supplied electricity conditioned the choice of location for the company, as there were still no extensive power grids to transport electricity.

In 1942, the company came under the ownership of Società Saifta (*Società Anonima Italiana per le Fibre Tessili Artificiali S.p.A.*).

After the Second World War, the Saifta Company, which managed the Soie factory in Châtillon, initially intended as a boarding school for female workers, called in the Salesians and put these buildings at their disposal to take in war orphans and children of Soie employees as boarders. Thus began the Salesian *Don Bosco Orphanage in Châtillon*, a name that has remained to this day, even though the orphans are no longer there.

At the end of August 1948, 33 boys began an Industrial Vocational Training course in the two specialisations for Mechanics-Adjusters and Carpenters-Cabinetmakers: the latter specialisation was very useful in the mountainous, wooded area.

A few months later, on 5 February 1949, the Don Bosco Orphanage was officially inaugurated, destined to take in the poor youngsters of the Aosta Valley and initiate them into learning a profession.

With the introduction of compulsory schooling in 1965, the Vocational School was replaced by the Middle School, and the Technical School by the Professional Institute for Industry and Handicrafts (IPIA), in the two specialisations: Mechanical Carpenters and Cabinet-Makers.

At the end of the 1970s, the Saifta Company went into crisis, stopped supporting the Orphanage financially and put the Soie structure up for sale. The Valle d'Aosta Region, in May 1980, realising the importance and value of the work – which had developed so much in the meantime – bought the entire educational structure and offered it for management to the Salesians.

Educational activities continued, developing into the vocational school, the result of the Salesians' collaboration with local companies.

Since 1997, the Vocational Training Centre (VTC) has offered courses for carpenters, mechanics and graphic designers.

In 2004 the CFP offered courses for electrical installers and also post diploma courses.

Since 2006 there have been courses for electrical fitters, mechanics, post diploma courses and car mechanics.

From the 2010-2011 school year, with the Gelmini reform, the Professional Institute changed from a three-year to a five-year course.

Currently, the Salesian House called the Don Bosco Salesian Orphanage Institute, has various educational areas

- a Vocational Training Centre: a three-year course in car mechanics and bodywork; courses for workers and businesses (daytime initial post-diploma training courses and evening refresher courses for the employed), which are part of the CNOS/FAP Valle d'Aosta Region federation, set up in July 2001
- a Vocational Institute for Industry and Craftsmanship (IPIA), with two addresses: MAT (Maintenance-Technical Assistance-Mechanical); PIA (Production-Industrial Handicraft-Made in Italy-wood);
- a middle school, an equal secondary school, which welcomes boys and girls from the lower-middle valley;
- a Don Bosco boarding school, reserved for students attending the IPIA, which hosts, from Monday to Friday, young people from nearby Piedmont or the valleys.

The preparation of these young people is entrusted to an educating community, whose primary protagonists are the Salesian community, the lay teachers, educators, collaborators, and also the parents and groups of the Salesian family (cooperators, alumni).

However, the educational focus has not only stopped at human and professional preparation to form upright citizens, but also to make good Christians.

Even though the house – being too small – did not allow for Christian formation activities, a solution was found for these and for important celebrations. Further up and a short distance from the Salesian House in Châtillon is the ancient parish of St Peter (attested to go back as early as the 12th century), which has a large church. The agreement with the parish has brought many fruits, including the propagation of devotion to Don Bosco's Madonna, Mary Help of Christians, an invocation dear to

the Salesians. The fruit of this devotion also manifested itself in the recovery of the health of various people (Blanchod Martina, Emma Vuillermoz, Pession Paolina, etc.), attested to by the writings of the times.

The sincere desire to do good on the part of all those who contributed to the development led to the success of this Salesian work.

First of all, the entrepreneurs who understood the need and importance of the education of at-risk children, and at the same time promoted the training of possible future employees. They not only offered their facilities, but also financially supported the educational activities.

Then there was the wisdom of the local authorities, who understood the importance of the work carried out over more than 30 years and immediately offered to continue providing support for the children and also for the companies in the area, thus providing them with qualified workers.

Last but not least, recognition must be given to the work carried out by the Salesians and their collaborators of all kinds, who have done their utmost to ensure that the hope of the future is not extinguished: young people and their integral education.

This professionalism in the preparation of the young, together with the care of the logistical structures (classrooms, laboratories, gyms, courtyards), the careful and constant maintenance of the premises, the connection with the territory, have led to widespread recognition that is also reflected in the fact that a street and a square in Châtillon are dedicated to St John Bosco.

When people sincerely seek good and strive for it, God gives his blessing.