

Salesians in Tijuana. A house on the border

Just 30 metres from the border with the United States, a Salesian house in Mexico offers many services to young people, the poor and migrants, in the world's busiest land border area, in a city whose population has tripled over the last 30 years, and in an area famous worldwide for the wall separating Mexico from the United States.

The Salesians arrived in the city of [Tijuana](#), Baja California (Mexico), on the feast of St Joseph, 19 March 1987.

It was at the end of the 1980s that the then Provincial looked towards the northern border of Mexico, emphasising that the presence in the North would have to represent “lungs” to guarantee purified air for the mission and the apostolic and religious life of the Salesian Province.

With this intention, and wanting to respond to the many needs of the city, the Salesians undertook to find spaces to build oratories in the city. In less than a decade, nine oratories were built where young people found a home, a playground, a school and a church.

As time went by, attention was focused on different needs, **six work-residences** were created in different working-class neighbourhoods of the city, forming the [Salesian Tijuana Project](#). Each of them houses several institutions, giving rise to more than ten work fronts.



The first of the works was the [Maria Auxiliadora Parish and](#)

Oratory, located in the 'Colonia Herrera'. Both the parish and the oratory deal with various problems in the area. Steps are being taken towards an agreement with the IOM (International Organisation for Migration) to offer a community health centre with legal and psychological counselling and medical assistance. There is a home for migrant families in the parish called "**Pro amore DEI**", which is accompanied by various activities. This Oratory of Mary Help of Christians offers short and flexible workshops that provide various learning opportunities, all for the benefit of families; these workshops are attended by children and families in vulnerable situations. Some of these workshops are: tailoring workshop, beauty workshop, football workshop, zumba workshop, guitar workshop and computer workshop, psychological counselling and training for adults or young people outside the school environment, in agreement with the INEA (National Institute for Adult Education).

Another presence, located in the city centre, is the Oratorio San Francisco de Sales, located in the Castillo area. This presence also houses several institutions, including one of the religious community's residences, the Oratory, the offices of COMAR (Mexican Commission for Aid to Refugees) which, in collaboration with UNHCR (United Nations Refugee Agency), provides services to asylum seekers (identity cards, job offers, legal support) and the offices of the Tijuana Salesian Project. This is a set of services for the most disadvantaged, i.e. foreigners who come to the city seeking refuge with a dignified regard for their rights. In the oratory, the local families are assisted with flexible and agile workshops, offering a space for growth (it is a workers' area that has suffered greatly in recent years from drug dealing and murders due to this situation). For the Tijuana Salesian Project it has been and continues to be of great importance to be open to the creation of networks and alliances with various institutions that strengthen and promote help for young

people, migrants and families in vulnerable situations.



The [Domingo Savio Oratory](#) is [located](#) in the heart of the 'SánchezTaboada' area. This area is very special. According to recent statistics, the Sanchez Taboada neighbourhood ranks first in violence in the city. In this neighbourhood, 146 people were killed in less than five months, making it the most violent area; the highest number of intentional murders was recorded here. This is where [our Salesian presence](#) is located, developing various services: a presence that seeks above all to bring hope to families and opportunities to children. The situation of violence, poverty and location of the Salesian house require constant financial support to maintain the facilities and to find the appropriate personnel to provide the educational services. Among the activities currently offered are: football workshop, guitar workshop, volleyball workshop, school regulation workshop for children and adolescents, English workshop and computer workshop. In this oratory, as in the other five presences, sacramental catechesis and liturgical services and celebrations are offered in the chapel.



[The San José Obrero Oratory](#) is [located](#) in the eastern part of the city, in the area known as "Ejido Matamoros". It has sports facilities that offer services to a large number of young people, children and adults who come to play football; in the course of a week, more than a thousand users pass through this sports centre. In this oratory, the [Salesian Youth Movement](#) is also very active, especially for adolescents and children, with the Friends of Dominic Savio movement, altar servers and choirs. The Oratory Chapel offers daily liturgical services open to the community. The Salesian presence in this Oratory also includes a high school, which,

being located in an area of such great growth in the city, can continue to provide an indispensable educational service and, in perspective, should grow in the number of students and the quality of its educational services.

The [San Juan Bosco Oratory](#) is [located](#) in the Mariano Matamoros area in El Florido. It is an oasis of peace in the eastern part of the city and we call it that because in 2022, 92 murders were also recorded here. This Salesian [presence](#) is located in an area of settlements of families working in the “maquilas” and there the Salesian work has developed a wide and complex presence, consisting of four institutions: the **Don Bosco reception house** (a home for women and children, operational since December 2021), the **Don Bosco school** (a school with 200 pupils, both boys and girls, attending primary education) **the oratory – youth centre** (accommodates children, youth groups, football and basketball league athletes, folkloric ballet group, workshops), **the San Juan Bosco chapel** (offers liturgical services with a large influx of families and children attending catechesis). Together, these institutions create a centre of integration for the local community, being a space for a variety of people (migrants, children, young people, families) that offers the opportunity to actualise the Salesian mission, responding to social needs. In order to realise these institutions of **great social work**, the Salesians work through collaboration agreements with various civil and governmental organisations and by creating agreements with United Nations agencies (UNHCR, IOM, UNICEF); they also work with great openness and flexibility with other institutions that provide support and assistance in the areas of health and education.

[The Salesian Desayunador](#) is a social welfare work that gives rise to two institutions (a breakfast centre and a home for migrant men), which in turn provide a wide range of services to its beneficiaries. [This Salesian work](#) is [located](#) in the

north-central area of the city of Tijuana. Its beginnings date back to 1999, but before that year some “tacos” were already being offered in the Salesian project offices. This service of feeding the poor and migrants wandering around the city has developed and evolved, and in 2007-2008 it was established with its own premises for this activity where it currently operates: here, attention is paid to vulnerable migrants (deportees/returnees, foreigners from central and southern Mexico), the homeless, the elderly, poor or extremely poor families, and hungry men, women and children.



Among the variety of services offered are breakfasts (between 900 and 1200 per day), phone calls abroad (25 per day), showers (up to 150 per day, three times a week), haircuts, delivery of food to poor families (3-5 per day), offering to change clothes (up to 150 per day, three times a week) medical assistance (40-60 per day), legal counselling (8-20 per day) on migration issues, psychological assistance, emotional support and support, workshops for the prevention of violence against women, workshops (graphic art, Byzantine mosaic, alebrijes and piñatas, radio workshop, etc.), formal and informal work exchange, and a radio workshop.), formal and informal work exchange (8-20 a day), links with rehabilitation centres. The activities of the Desayunador and the shelter are supported with the help of daily volunteers (local, national and international) in various forms or periods, developing a great openness to inter-institutional collaboration.



The Salesian commitment in this great **Tijuana Salesian Project** is fundamental because the city continues to grow, continues to be the border city with the greatest number of people in mobility and migration situations; to speak of Tijuana as a border is to speak of **the most crossed land border in the**

world. More than 20 million vehicles pass through and more than 60 million people enter the United States through this border in one year. Migration remains a highly topical issue. In this border city, with so many migrants, there are problems with human trafficking, involvement in the world of drug sales and consumption. The city of Tijuana continues to offer great opportunities for the fulfilment of dreams, with a wide range of jobs, but it also continues to be a city with a high level of crime, one of the most violent in the country.

Without a doubt, migrants, children, youth and families look to the Salesian Project in Tijuana for help and hope in building their future. The Salesian mission in Tijuana continues to be a place where Don Bosco's dreams and the realisation of the Salesian Family's charism can come to life.

It is also possible to follow the Salesian presence in Tijuana through its social networks: [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [Youtube](#).

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