

# Caught between admiration and sorrow

*Today I bid you farewell for the last time from this page of the Salesian Bulletin. On 16 August, the day we commemorate Don Bosco's birth, my service as Rector Major of the Salesians of Don Bosco ends.*

*It is always a reason to give thanks! First of all to God, to the Congregation and the Salesian Family, to so many dear people and friends, to so many friends of Don Bosco's charism, the many benefactors.*

On this occasion too, my greeting conveys something I have experienced recently. Hence the title of this greeting: A mixture of admiration and sorrow. Let me tell you about the joy that filled my heart in Goma, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, wounded by an interminable war, and the joy and testimony I received yesterday.

Three weeks ago, after visiting Uganda (in the Palabek refugee camp which, thanks to Salesian help and work in recent years, is no longer a camp for Sudanese refugees but a place where tens of thousands of people have settled and found a new life), I crossed Rwanda and arrived at the border in the region of Goma, a wonderful area, beautiful and rich in nature (and precisely for this reason so desired and desirable). Well, because of the armed conflicts, there are more than a million displaced people in that region who have had to leave their homes and their land. We too had to leave our Salesian presence in Sha-Sha, which was occupied militarily.

This million displaced people arrived in the city of Goma. In Gangi, one of the districts, there is the Don Bosco Salesian work. I was immensely happy to see the good that is being done there. Hundreds of boys and girls have a home. Dozens of teenagers have been taken off the streets and

are living in the Don Bosco house. It was there, because of the war, that 82 newborn babies and young boys and girls who lost their parents or were left behind ('abandoned') because their parents could not look after them, found a home.

And there, in that new Valdocco, one of the many Valdocco's around the world, a community of three Sisters from San Salvador, together with a group of women, all supported by the Salesian house with aid that arrives thanks to the generosity of benefactors and Providence, take care of these little boys and girls. When I went to visit them, the Sisters had dressed everyone up, even the children sleeping in their cots. How could I not feel my heart filled with joy at this reality of goodness, despite the pain caused by abandonment and war!

But my heart was touched when I met several hundred people who came to greet me on the occasion of my visit. They are among the 32,000 displaced people who left their homes and their land because of the bombs and came to seek refuge. They found it in the fields and grounds of the Don Bosco house in Gangi. They have nothing, they live in shacks of a few square metres. This is their reality. Together every day we look for a way to find food for them. But do you know what struck me most? What impressed me most was that when I was with these hundreds of people, mostly elderly people and mothers with children, they had not lost their dignity and had not lost their joy or their smile. I was amazed and my heart was saddened by so much suffering and poverty, even though we are doing our part in the name of the Lord.

### **An extraordinary concert**

I experienced another great joy when I received a testimony of life that made me think of the teenagers and young people in our presence, and of the many children of parents who may be reading me and who feel that their children are unmotivated, bored by life, or have no passion for almost anything. Among the guests in our house these days was an extraordinary pianist who has toured the world giving concerts

and has been part of great philharmonic orchestras. She is a former pupil of the Salesians and had a Salesian, now deceased, as a great reference and model. She wanted to offer us this concert in the atrium of the Sacred Heart Church as a homage to Mary Help of Christians, whom she loves so much, and as a thank you for all that her life has been so far.

And I say the latter because our dear friend gave us a wonderful concert, with exceptional quality at the age of 81. She was accompanied by her daughter. And at that age, perhaps when some of our elders in the family have long since said that they no longer want to do anything, or do anything that requires effort, our dear friend, who practises the piano every day, moved her hands with wonderful agility and was immersed in the beauty of music and its performance. Good music, a generous smile at the end of her performance, and the handing over of orchids to Our Lady Help of Christians were all we needed on that wonderful morning. And my Salesian heart could not help but think of those boys, girls and young people who perhaps have had or no longer have anything to motivate them in their lives. She, our concert pianist friend, lives with great serenity at 81 years of age and, as she told me, continues to offer the gift God has given her and every day she finds more and more reasons to do so.

Another lesson in life and another testimony that does not leave one's heart indifferent.

Thank you, my friends, thank you from the bottom of my heart for all the good we are doing together. However small it may be, it contributes to making our world a little more human and more beautiful. May the good Lord bless you.

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# **Patagonia, in the letters of the first missionaries**

## **Arrival in Patagones and start of the work**

The first Salesians finally established their mission in Patagonia on 20 January 1880. Accompanied by Monsignor Antonio Espinosa, vicar of Archbishop Federico Aneyros, Fr Giuseppe Fagnano, Fr Emilio Rizzo, Fr Luigi Chiaria, catechist Bro. Luciani and another “young pupil of theirs”, who has remained unknown, arrived in Carmen de Patagones; with them were also four Daughters of Mary Help of Christians: Giovanna Borgo, Angela Vallese, Angiolina Cassolo and Laura Rodriguez.

The missionaries committed themselves to the catechesis and formation of the inhabitants of Patagones and Viedma by opening a college dedicated to St Joseph, while the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians founded an institute dedicated to Santa Maria de Las Indias. Expeditions were then launched to the colonies along the Rio Negro, with the aim of guaranteeing spiritual and catechetical support to the emigrants living in those regions and, at the same time, to systematically start catechesis for the conversion of the native communities of Patagonia.

The presence of the Salesians in Argentina was favoured and followed with interest by the Argentine government, which was obviously not driven in this choice by a fervent desire to see the indigenous communities converted to Christianity, but by the need to calm public opinion outraged by the indiscriminate killings and the sale of prisoners: the military campaigns of 1879 to expand the borders had clashed with the resistance of the communities living in the territories of the Pampas and Patagonia.

## **Habits and customs of the indigenous communities of Patagonia**

Getting to know the customs, culture and beliefs

of the communities they intended to convert was an important task for the first missionaries: Fr Giacomo Costamagna, during his exploratory mission to Patagones in 1879, noted that, once he had crossed the Rio Colorado, he had come across a tree “laden with drapes, or better put, rags, which the Indians had hung as votive offerings.” The missionary explained that the tree was not considered a deity, but simply the abode “of the gods or good spirits” and that the rags were supposed to be a kind of offering to appease them and make them benevolent. Costamagna later discovered that communities worshipped a “supreme God” called Gùnechen.

Knowledge increased over the years. With time, the missionaries realised that the communities in Patagonia believed in a “Supreme Being” who administered and ruled the universe and that their concept of a benevolent deity, however – when compared to the Christian one – appeared confused, as it was often not possible to “distinguish the principle of good, which is God, from the evil genius, which is the devil”. The members of the community only feared “the influences of the evil mind”, so that in the end the Indians only implored the evil deity to refrain from all evil.

The missionaries sadly noted that the indigenous communities “know nothing to ask the Lord about spiritual things” and also described how the illness and death of a community member was dealt with. According to the common belief, the demon, called Gualicho, took possession of the sick and, in the case of the death of the sick person, the demon “had won”: “and so they weep, pray and sing lamentations accompanied by a thousand exorcisms, with which they pretend to obtain that the evil genius leave the deceased in peace.”

Once the corpse was buried, the period of mourning began, which usually lasted six days in which the Indians “threw themselves with their faces to the ground” and sang “a kind of lamentation”; living where the deceased had resided and coming into contact with any of his personal effects was strongly discouraged, because Gualicho had lived there.

There were no shared cemeteries and above the

graves it was possible to see "either two or three skeletons of horses'", which were sacrificed to the deceased to be of help and support to him in the afterlife. The horses were thus killed above the grave, leaving the corpses there so that the dead could enjoy their flesh, while the saddle, various supplies and jewellery were buried with the corpse.

In ordinary life, only the richest had square, mud-brick dwellings, with nothing "but the door to enter them, and an opening in the middle of the roof for light and for the smoke to go out", while the communities along the Rio Negro were established by rivers or lagoons and the dwellings were mostly simple tents: "horse or guanaco leather suspended above with a few sticks fixed in the ground". For those who had surrendered, the Argentine government had ordered them to build themselves "a more or less large room usually made of wolfsbane, plants with which the field abounds in damp places". The most fortunate had built houses with willow poles and mortar.

In 1883, the missionaries noted: "Nowadays, and especially in the bad season, it is rare to see an Indian not dressed from head to toe, even among those who have not yet surrendered. The men dress more or less like ours, minus the cleanliness, which they do not have, and the trousers they wear ordinarily like the Garci, in the manner, as they say, of Ciripà. The poorest, if they have nothing else, wrap themselves in a kind of mantle of the most ordinary cloth. The women wear the manta, and it is a surcoat, which covers the whole body." The women remained faithful to the traditional costumes for longer: "the women have the ambition to wear large silver earrings, several rings on their fingers, and a kind of bracelet on their wrists, made of silver filigree with several loops around the arm. Some of them and the more affluent also wear several turns of filigree over their chests. They are by nature very shy, and when any unknown stranger approaches their home, they hastily hide."

Marriages followed tradition: the groom would give his future wife's parents "various precious objects in gold

and silver, such as rings, bracelets, stirrups, brakes and the like", or he could simply pay "a sum of money agreed between them": fathers would only give their daughters in marriage for money, and what is more, the groom was obliged to stay at the bride's home and provide for the maintenance of the entire family.

Polygamy was widespread among the chiefs or caciques and consequently, as Fr Costamagna stated in a letter published in January 1880, it was difficult to convince them to renounce it in order to become Christians.

Evangelising the native communities: "you will have to win these friends of yours not by blows but with gentleness and love".

A fundamental role in the work of catechesis and evangelisation in Patagonia was played by Fr Domenico Milanesio, also for his work as mediator between the communities and the Argentine government.

The missionary joined the confreres on 8 November 1880 after being appointed vicar of the parish of Our Lady of Mercede in Viedma, and in a letter to Fr Michele Rua dated 28 March 1881 he recounted his first mission among "the Indians in the area", underlining the considerable difficulties encountered in the attempt to instruct and catechise: the native communities lived far from each other and Fr Domenico had to go in person to their *toldos*, or homes. Sometimes he managed to gather several families together and then catechesis was held outside where, sitting on the lawns, the Patagonians listened to the catechism lesson.

Fr Domenico recounted that even a simple prayer such as "My Jesus, mercy", which he considered simple and easy to memorise, actually took a long time to understand: although it was repeated between fifty and a hundred times, it was often forgotten within a couple of days. However, the desire to see the native communities converted and sincerely Christian was more than sufficient motivation to continue the mission: "But our Religion commands us to love them as our

brothers, as children of the Heavenly Father, as souls redeemed by the Blood of Jesus Christ; and therefore with patient, loving charity that hopes everything, we say, we repeat things one day, two, ten, twenty until it is enough, and finally we succeed in making them learn the necessary things. If you could only see how happy they are afterwards; it is a real consolation for them and for us, which rewards us for everything."

It was not easy to get these communities to accept the truths of the Catholic faith: Fr Domenico, in a report published in the Bulletin in November 1883, recounted that during a mission to the community of the cacique (chief) Willamay, near Norquin, he seriously risked his life when the assembly to which he was preaching began to discuss the teachings he had received up to that point. Willamay himself, describing Milanesio as "a dream teller in the manner of old women", withdrew to his *toldo*, while there were those who sided with the missionary and those who were of the same opinion as the cacique. Faced with this situation, Milanesio preferred to remain aloof and as he himself noted, "I then stood silently waiting for the outcome of that agitation of minds, which was a harbinger of more sinister things. At a certain point, I truly believed that the time had come for me to at least take a beating from those barbarians, and perhaps even leave my own skin among them." Fortunately, the party that supported the missionary prevailed in the end, so the Salesian was able to conclude his catechesis to the thanks of the community.

Catechising these populations was not an easy task and the Salesians were hindered by the Argentine military, whose attitudes and habits offered negative examples of Christian living.

Fr Fagnano recorded: "The conversion of the Indians is not so easy to obtain when they are obliged to live with certain soldiers who do not give them a good example of morality; and it is not possible to enter their *toldos* for the moment without risk to one's life, because these savages use



all means to take revenge against the Christians who, according to them, have come to take possession of their fields and their livestock.” The same Salesian also wrote of two communities who, having settled a short distance from an Argentine camp where “liquor shops” had been opened, indulged “in the vice of drunkenness”. Fr Fagnano reproached the military who, “for cowardly gain”, laid the groundwork to make the Indians even more likely to indulge in “bestial disorder”.

Fr Fagnano and Fr Milanesio continued, however, to approach, catechise and form these communities, to “instruct them in the truths of the Gospel, educate them by word, but more by good example”, despite the risks, so that, as Don Bosco wished, they could become “good Christians and upright citizens.”

*Giacomo Bosco*

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## **Preparations for the 150th Anniversary of the First Salesian Missionary Expedition (1875-2025)**

*Next year, 2025, is the 150th anniversary of the departure of the first Salesian missionary expedition. In view of this anniversary, the Salesian Missions Department wants to prepare for the event and launches an introduction for the Salesian communities. This event is proposed as: Give Thanks, Rethink, Relaunch.*

**Give Thanks:** We give thanks to God for the gift of missionary vocation which enables the sons of Don Bosco today to reach

out to poor and abandoned youth in 136 countries.

**Rethink:** This is an opportune occasion to rethink and develop a renewed vision on the Salesian Missions in the light of new challenges and new perspectives which led to new missiological reflections.

**Relaunch:** We have not only a glorious history to remember and be grateful for, but also a great history still to be accomplished! We look to the future with missionary zeal and enthusiasm so that we may reach out to even more poor and abandoned youth.

**The official logo:** The *globe* crossed by waves which symbolise courage and new challenges, but also energy and boldness. At the centre is a *ship*, symbol of the first Salesian Missionary Expedition (1875), and, at the same time, the *fire* of a renewed missionary enthusiasm. The *shape of the wheel* alludes to unity and mutual connection. *The logo may be used only in the official version without making any changes or alterations to any part of the logo.* It is available in different formats and can be downloaded (<http://tinyurl.com/33nt6y3b>) or requested by email (cagliero11 @ sdb.org).

**Objective of the 2025 celebrations:**

***Keep the missionary spirit and enthusiasm alive in the Congregation in order to foster greater missionary zeal and generosity among the Salesians and the whole EPC ( Educational and Pastoral Community) (cf. [Rector Major's Guidelines for the Salesian Congregation after General Chapter 28, no. 7, ACG 433/2020](#)).***

**Not an event but a *process* of missionary renewal**

The 150th anniversary of the first missionary expedition ought not be only a commemorative event but a *process* of missionary renewal that already started with the drawing up of the six-year plan of missionary animation. Its high moment is 2025 but continues in the succeeding years. This takes place at three

levels.

### 1. At the province level

*Celebrations will be mainly at the Province level.* Through the RCMA (**R**egional **C**oordinator for **M**issionary **A**nimation) the Missions Sector will continue to follow-up on each Province's Plan of missionary animation, of which the initiatives at the Province level for 2025 are part of.

In the context of the celebration, through the PDMA (**P**rovincial **D**elegates for **M**issionary **A**nimation) each Province will be actively encouraged to evaluate how it has put into practice the *Rector Major's Guidelines* Nos. 2, 5, 7.

"It is urgent that we give absolute priority to the commitment to evangelise the young with conscious, intentional, and explicit proposals. [...] We respond to the **"urgency of offering initial proclamation with more conviction**, because 'Nothing is more solid, profound, secure, meaningful and wisdom-filled than that initial proclamation' ([\*Christus Vivit\*](#), no. 214) (*Guidelines*, n. 2)

Let all Provinces make the *radical, preferential, personal and institutional option* – meaning on the part of every Salesian, on behalf of the most in need, boys, girls and poor and excluded youth, giving particular attention to the defence of those who are exploited and victims of what-ever abuse and violence ("the abuse of power, the abuse of conscience, sexual and financial abuse") (*Guidelines* n. 5).

We made the missionary appeal concrete by inviting *each Province to open a missionary project* (refugees, immigrants, border crossings, exploited children...) during the previous six years, giving priority to the significance and the real requests for help from today's youth (*Guidelines* n. 7)."

Each Province is asked to make a concrete initiative for 2025 (e.g., the Provinces of ARS and ARN are preparing a Historical Congress; the ZMB Vice Province has initiated the opening of a new presence in Botswana, etc.). This will be made known

through [ANS](#), etc.

## **2. At the missions sector level**

2025 will be an occasion to make known the result of the work now underway on refugees, gypsies, Identity of Salesian Missionary Museums, Identity of Provincial Mission Offices, conclusions of roundtable discussion of missiologists and theologians on Salesian missions today, Salesian Missionary Volunteering, *Bosco Food* (to create an intercultural mindset), Missionary Animation materials, SMD (**S**alesian **M**ission **D**ay) 2025, etc.

## **3. At the Congregation level**

Missionary send-off (156th missionary expedition) on November 11, 2025 in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, Valdocco. This is a celebration through which the Congregation renews its missionary commitment in front of Mary Help of Christians.

The Rector Major invites each Province to send the PDMA for the celebration. They will spend a few days (9-12 Nov 2025) in Valdocco and Genoa to “Give Thanks, Rethink, Relaunch.

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# **Souls and horsepower**

*Don Bosco wrote at night by candlelight, after a day spent in prayer, talks, meetings, study, courtesy visits. Always practical, tenacious, with a prodigious vision of the future.*

“Da mihi animas, cetera tolle” is the motto that inspired all of Don Bosco’s life and action from time of the wandering Oratory in Turin (1844) to his final initiatives on his deathbed (January 1888) for the Salesians to go to England and Ecuador. But for him souls were not separated from bodies, so much so that since the 1950s he had proposed to dedicate his

life so that young people would be “happy on earth and then in heaven.” Earthly happiness for his “poor and abandoned” young people consisted in having a roof, a family, a school, a playground, friendships and pleasant activities (games, music, theatre, outings...) and above all a profession that would guarantee them a serene future.

This explains the “arts and trades” workshops at Valdocco – the future vocational schools – that Don Bosco created from nothing: an authentic start-up, to put it in today’s terms. He had initially offered himself as the first instructor for tailoring, bookbinding, shoemaking... but progress did not stop and Don Bosco wanted to be at the forefront.

### **The availability of engines**

Starting in 1868, at the initiative of the mayor of Turin, Giovanni Filippo Galvagno, some of the Ceronda stream, which had its source at an altitude of 1,350 m, were captured by the Ceronda Canal to be distributed to various industries that were springing up in the northern area of the Piedmontese capital, Valdocco to be precise. The canal was then divided into two branches at the height of the Lucento district, the one on the right, completed in 1873, after crossing the Dora Riparia with a canal, continued to run parallel to what is now Corso Regina Margherita and Via San Donato to then discharge into the Po. Don Bosco, ever vigilant to what was happening in the city, immediately asked the City Hall for “the concession of at least 20 horsepower of water power” from the canal that would pass alongside Valdocco. Once the request was granted, he had the two inlets built at his own expense, arranged the machines in the workshops so that they could easily receive the motive power, and had an engineer study the engines needed for the purpose. When everything was ready, he asked the authorities on 4 July 1874 to proceed with the connection at his own expense. For several months he received no answer, so on 7 November he renewed his request. The response this time came fairly quickly. It seemed positive, but he asked for some clarifications first. Don Bosco replied in the following

terms:

"Your Excellency the Mayor,

I hasten to convey to Your Excellency, the clarifications that I was pleased to ask you for in your letter of the 19th of this month, and I have the honour of notifying you that the industries to which the horsepower from the Ceronda water will be applied are:

1st Printing works for which no fewer than 100 workers are employed.

2nd Pulp factory with no fewer than 26 workers.

3rd Typeface foundry, copper engraving with no fewer than 30 workers.

4th Iron workshop with no fewer than 30 workers.

5th Carpenters, cabinet-makers, turners with hydraulic saw: no fewer than 40 workers.

Total workers more than 220."

This number included instructors and young students. Given the situation, besides being subjected to unnecessary physical exertion, they would not have been able to withstand the competition. In fact, Don Bosco added: "These works are now done at the expense of a steam engine for the printing works, but for the other workshops they are done by manpower, in such a way that they could not withstand the competition of those who use water power."

And in order to avoid possible delays and fears on the part of the public authorities, he immediately offered a warning: "We do not object to depositing a bill of public debt as security, as soon as it can be known what it should be."

### **He always thought big... but was content with the possible**

He had to think about the future, about new laboratories, new machines and so the demand for electricity would necessarily increase. Don Bosco then raised the demand and cited existential and contextual reasons:

"But while I accept the theoretical strength of ten horsepower, I find myself needing to note that this is totally

insufficient for my needs, since the project which is being carried out was based on 30 [?] as I had the honour of expounding in my letter of November last. For this reason, I would ask you to take into consideration the construction work already underway, the nature of this institute, which lives on charity alone, the number of workers involved, the fact that we were among the first to subscribe and therefore be willing to grant us, if not the 30 horsepower promised, at least the largest amount available...”

“Word to the wise, one might say.

### **A successful entrepreneur**

The amount of water granted to the Oratory on that occasion has not come down to us. The fact remains that Don Bosco once again demonstrates the qualities of a capable entrepreneur that everyone at the time recognised and still recognises in him today: a story of moral integrity, the right mix of humility and self-confidence, determination and courage, communication skills and an eye to the future. Obviously, the fuel for all his ambitions and aspirations was a single passion: souls. He had many collaborators, but somehow everything fell on his shoulders. Tangible proof of this are the thousands of letters, just one of which we have published here, corrected and re-corrected several times: letters he usually wrote in the evening or at night by candlelight, after a day spent in prayer, talks, meetings, study, courtesy calls. While drawing up his plans by day, by night he was then able to dream up how they would develop. And these would come in the following decades, with the hundreds of Salesian vocational schools scattered around the world, with tens of thousands of boys (and then girls) who would find a springboard to a future full of hope in them.

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# South Asia. Don Bosco among the young

*Living today don Bosco's mission to the young especially those who are resource-poor in South Asia*

The Lord made clear to Don Bosco that he was to direct his mission first and foremost to the young, especially to those who are poorer. This mission to the young, especially the poorer ones became the reason for the existence of the Salesian Congregation.

Like our Father Don Bosco, every Salesian says to God on the day of his religious profession: "I offer myself totally to you. I pledge myself to devote all my strength to those to whom you will send me, especially to young people who are poorer". Every Salesian collaborator is committed to this same mission.

The latest General Chapter of the Congregation made renewed call for absolute priority to be given to the poorest, most abandoned and defenceless.

When I was given the opportunity to submit an article for the Salesian Bulletin, my thoughts immediately went to what I consider to be one of the largest interventions on behalf of the poorer youth in the South Asia Region of the Salesian Congregation, namely, preparing poor young people for employment through short-term skills training. After the 28th General Chapter, the South Asia Region made a choice to help young people remove abject poverty from their families. But before I present that, let me present to you the South Asia Region of the Salesian Congregation.

The South Asia Region comprises all Salesian works in India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Kuwait and UAE. There are 11 Provinces and 1 Vice Province. With more than 3.000 professed



Salesians the South Asia Region accounts for 21.5% of Salesians in the world working in 413 Salesian Religious Houses, accounting for 23.8% of Salesian Houses in the Congregation. The median age of confreres is 45. It is providential that so many Salesians are working in the region that has the largest populations of youth and poor youth in the world.

The Salesian Family in the Region comprises in addition to the Salesians, the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (1.789), Association of the Salesian Co-operators (3.652), World Confederation of the Past Pupils (34.091), Secular Institute of the Volunteers of Don Bosco (15), Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians (915), Association of Mary Help of Christians (905), Catechist Sisters of Mary Immaculate Help of Christians (748), The Disciples – Don Bosco Secular Institute (317), Sisters of Maria Auxiliatrix (102), and Visitation Sisters of Don Bosco (109).

The works of the Salesians in collaboration with other members of the Salesian Family and other Religious and laity reach out to over 21.170.893 beneficiaries. A variety of works (formal and non-formal technical education, works for youth at risk (YaR), Schools, Higher Education, Parishes, Youth Centres, Oratories Social work etc) are directed to serving the beneficiaries. The other Salesian Family members have independent works that reach out to many more.

The world, under the leadership of the United Nations has set the goal to “end poverty in all its forms everywhere” as the first of its Sustainable development Goals. The Salesian works achieve these goals in manifold ways, but one prominent work among them is short term skill training offered to poor youth who are then helped to get employed and earn a living to be the protagonists who bring their families out of poverty.

The Salesian Provincial Conference of South Asia (SPCSA) set

up Don Bosco Tech (DBTech) as a vehicle to coordinate the efforts of all Salesian Provinces in this area of work. Established in 2006, the DBTech model and its name has been imitated in other parts of the world. In these years the network (DBTech India) has trained over 440.000 young people. The work is done through the various Salesian institutions as well as through a large network of collaborative work with other Diocesan and Religious Congregations and with a large pool of highly motivated lay collaborators who are committed to working for the poorer section of youth.

While the achievements over the years on behalf of the poorest youth, has been great, I would like to point to the achievements of 2022-2023 to appreciate the work of all Salesians and their collaborators to carry on the dream of Don Bosco to dedicate ourselves to young people especially those who are poorer.

I have chosen this work to be presented since it above all achieves the largest and best outcome for the poorest families.

Here we have a network with 26.243 students being trained in one year! Very few large institutions in the world would have so many students graduating (20.121) in one year. Even if they had, the graduates would rarely be in such numbers from the poorest sections of society.

Of these approximately 18.370 are employed as they finish their skills training (approximately 70% of those trained).

All these students have been given totally free training and job placement without charging fees. This is achieved through the generous contribution of benefactors and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) partners. DBTech has over 30 funding partners including Corporates, Foundations and Government.

The Salesian predilection for poorer youth is evidenced in the fact that almost all the trainees come from the "Economically

Weaker Sections” of society – 98%.

Even more important to note is that 10.987 (55%) of the already graduated 20.121 students (others being in training, awaiting conclusion of their classes) are coming from families who have an annual income less than Rs.100.000, that is approximately 1.111 Euro per year (calculated at 1 Euro = Rs.90). This is family income less than 100 Euro per month. This would mean families living on less than 3 Euro per day. We are speaking of families and not individuals!

<i>Annual Family Income</i>	<i>Approximate Daily Income of Families</i>	<i>Total Youth Trained</i>	<i>% of Youth Trained</i>
Below 1 Lakh / Below 1.111 Euro	Below 3 Euro	10.987	55%
1-3 Lakh	Below 3-9 Euro	8.144	40%
3-5 Lakh	Below 9-15 Euro	469	2%
5-7 Lakh	Below 15-21 Euro	161	1%
7 Lakh and above	21 Euro and more	360	2%
Grand Total		20.121 (+ 6.302 in class)	

Note: Euro calculated to be 1 = Rs.90

Dopo la formazione gratuita, questi giovani poveri guadagnano oggi in media 10.000 rupie al mese, il che ha reso il loro reddito personale annuo superiore al reddito familiare annuo delle loro famiglie.

After free skill training, these poor youth are today earning an average of Rs.10.000 per month which has made their personal annual income above the annual family income of their own families.

In the context of the need for outcome based transformative

interventions, the Salesian Family of South Asia with the primary role played by the young people who get skilled and employed are truly forming “honest citizens”. The young people who have been trained and placed in jobs are today contributing to nation building. The annual income generated by these students employed after free training is approximately Rs. 2.204.400.000 which is equivalent to approximately 24.493.333 Euros annually.

The training duration varies according to sectors. The trainings are provided in various sectors: Agriculture and Allied; Apparel, Made Ups and Home Furnishing; Automotive; Banking and Finance; Beauty & Wellness; Capital Goods; Construction; Electronics & IT Hardware; Food Processing; Furniture & Fittings; Green Jobs; Handicrafts and Carpet; Healthcare; IT-ITES; Logistics; Media and Entertainment; Office Management; Plumbing Industry; Power; Retail; Tourism and Hospitality and, Others.

It is also to be noted that in developing nations where girls and women are the weaker and more defenceless, the services offered by the Salesians are serving the females more. More than 53% of the trainees who completed their course are female.



Le storie dei giovani che hanno trasformato la loro vita cogliendo le opportunità offerte dalle opere salesiane sono molto importanti nella narrazione dell'attenzione salesiana verso i più poveri.

The stories of the youth who have transformed their lives through taking the opportunities provided by the Salesian works stand tall in the narrative of Salesian focus on the poorest.

The Salesians have truly received support from many generous people, foundations, corporations and government to achieve

the transformation of so many underprivileged youths to become honest and productive citizens. We are truly grateful to all of them. God has been blessing the Region with growth in Salesian Vocations too.

For more information, one could visit the website of DBTech India at <https://dbtech.in>.

Such work, as Don Bosco would tell us, is “our greatest satisfaction”! It is addressed to the poorest. It involves largescale collaboration between Religious and Secular bodies. It is a great example of lay collaboration. It is addressed to all youth – 72% of the beneficiary youth belong to Hindu religion which is the largest religion in the South Asia Region.

In the *Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco* we read Don Bosco’s words: “Make sure you always stick to the poor children of the people. Do not fail in your prime purpose and let your society always have it in view: do not aspire to greater things. [...] If you educate the poor, if you are poor, if you do not make noise, no one will envy you, no one will seek you out, they will leave you alone and you will do good.” (MB IX,566).

We also present some young people whose encounter with Don Bosco’s charism has changed their lives.

### **Adna Javaid**

Adna Javaid’s struggles began at a very young age. She grew up in poverty. She was born in Bemina, a region in the heart of Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir, India. Adna’s father Javaid Ahmad Bhat was a shopkeeper who could hardly support his family. She dropped her studies after completing 12th grade and remained in her home for some years. She wanted to chase her dreams, but could not find a way to fulfil them.

Despite her difficult circumstances, she began writing plays and performing them in small venues in her locality. However, her early efforts were unsuccessful, and she faced rejection after rejection. In 2021, Adna staged her first play, "I Know I've Been a Girl," in her community. The play was poorly received, and Adna lost all of her savings. However, she continued to have faith and slowly built up her future.

During the Don Bosco Tech Srinagar mobilization near her locality, Adna saw the Don Bosco Tech team and spoke to them about her problems. The team convinced her to join the training and assured job assistance, and she decided to join the CRM Domestic Voice Domain.



Adna's breakthrough came in 2021 when she realized that she was closer to her dreams after training at Don Bosco Tech Training Centre Srinagar.

Since then, Adna has become one of the most successful and influential figures in the BPO sector. Despite facing significant obstacles and setbacks, she persevered, continued to work hard, and believed in herself and her vision.

She is now working as a Customer Care Executive Process, at J&K Bank, supported by DigiTech, Call System Pvt. Ltd, with Rs 12,101 CTC monthly remuneration.

Adna is so happy about her life now, and she is also helping many girls to join the job-oriented course at Don Bosco Tech Training Centre, Rajbagh, Srinagar.

## **Peesara Niharika**

Peesara Niharika hails from a rural place located far away from Don Bosco Tech, Karunapuram center. She completed her graduation with the support of her parents, who are daily wage workers. Difficulties and shortcomings were the watchwords in her life from a very young age. At a point in life, she even

dropped her studies and supported her parents financially, by working in agri-farms with the villagers. But she longed to pursue higher studies, whenever she watched her school friends go to college, while she was working in the paddy field.

One day, as she was looking for an employment opportunity, Niharika came across the mobilization wing at Karnuapuram, organized by the staff of Don Bosco Tech Centre and made a firm decision to enrol herself in the Skill Training Program. Having an interest in Customer Relationship Management, she got herself enrolled in the CRM Domestic Non-Voice program at Don Bosco Tech, Karunapuram center.

She was found to be very active and agile during the training program, trying to efficiently communicate with everyone in her batch. She is multitalented with skills such as dancing, singing, and playing games, and also enthusiastically spreads positivity around her. Through life skill sessions, she could get rid of her timidity and stage fear.



At the time of the interview, she was hired by Ratnadeep, in Hyderabad for the role of Customer Service Representative with a pay scale of INR 14,600/- per month including ESI and PF. Now she has the capacity to lead her family and support her parents who are extremely grateful to Don Bosco Tech Society for the huge transformation in their daughter's life. Niharika overwhelmingly says that her journey at Don Bosco Tech Karunapuram center will forever remain a happy memory for the rest of her life.

### **Chanti V.**

"The difference between who you are and who you want to be is what you do".

Chanti is from a low-income family in Vepagunta, Vishkapattanam. After he completed his intermediate, he wanted

to go for higher studies but could not afford the fees. Then, he got to know about the Don Bosco Tech training centre, Sabbavaram through his neighbourhood friend and the mobilization activity in his village. He came to know from the counsellors that this institute provides free training with NSDC certifications.

After joining Don Bosco Tech, along with the E-commerce course, Chanti also learned spoken English and computer. The trainers still remember that on his first day at Don Bosco Tech, his poor communication skills and less than minimum knowledge of Computers were vividly noticed by them. There was no proper education system or facilities in his village for him to learn such skills. But his desperation towards learning a new subject and need for a better job convinced the trainers to include him in the E-Commerce Domain.

He managed to get placed in the company, Ecom Express as a delivery boy. After witnessing his talent, the company gave him higher responsibility and now he gets INR 20,000/- per month.



He and his parents were extremely happy about his achievement. He is very grateful to the institute for making him what he is today. Now, he has become an inspiration for young boys in his village who are struggling to get a decent job. He has informed many of them about DB Tech, Sabbavaram, and many have expressed their desire to join the institute.

### **Klerina N Areng**

Klerina N Areng from Meghalaya she completed her 10th in the year 2009 as a private candidate. Then she heard about the Don Bosco Tech Society giving free training plus placement out of State. She was very interested and decided to join the training.



She was enrolled under Skill Meghalaya F& B Service Associate Batch-2 in the Don Bosco Tech, Shillong Centre. All her classmates were younger than her so most of them made fun of her and called her mommy, but she just ignored them.

She was very punctual, respectful, and was a very good learner. She learned everything faster than her batch mates. In the whole 2 months of training, she showed discipline and excellent results. Finally, after the completion of her training, DB Tech offered her a job at JW Marriott Sahar Mumbai, as a Steward with a monthly salary of CTC Rs 15000.

She is very much thankful to DBTech and MSSDS Skill Meghalaya for providing her an opportunity to earn her livelihood in a decent way. Now, with the salary she will be able to support her parents financially.



*Fr Biju Michael, SDB*  
*General Councillor for South Asia*

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## **Fr Giulio Barberis and his “Cronichetta”: day by day at Valdocco with Don Bosco**

On 21 February 1875 some Salesians decided to set up an “historical commission” to “collect memories of Don Bosco’s life”, committing themselves to “write down and together read what we write in order to ensure the greatest possible accuracy” (so we read in the minutes written by Fr Michael Rua). Among them was a young 28-year-old priest who had

recently been appointed by Don Bosco to organise and direct the Salesian Congregation's novitiate, in accordance with the Constitutions officially approved the previous year. His name was Fr Giulio Barberis, best known for being the first novice master of Don Bosco's Salesians, a role he held for twenty-five years. He was later Provincial and then Spiritual Director of the Congregation from 1910 until his death in 1927.

He was more involved than the others in the "historical commission", preserving memories and testimonies of Don Bosco's activities and life at the Valdocco Oratory from May 1875 to June 1879, when he left Turin to move to the new novitiate site in San Benigno Canavese. He left us copious documentation that is still preserved in the Central Salesian Archives, among which the fifteen handwritten notebooks he entitled *Cronichetta* stand out for their significance. Many scholars and biographers of St John Bosco have drawn from them (starting with Fr Lemoyne for his *Biographical Memoirs*), but until now they have remained unpublished. A critical edition was published last year, making this important and direct testimony on Don Bosco and the beginnings of the Congregation he founded available to everyone.

Fr Giulio Barberis, a graduate of the University of Turin, was an attentive and precise man in his work, and reading the pages of his *Cronichetta* one can see how passionately and carefully he tried to complete this work as well. Unfortunately, with regret and sorrow, he repeatedly points out that either for health reasons or because of his numerous other commitments, he had to suspend the drafting of the notebooks or limit himself to summarising or merely hinting at certain facts. At one point he finds himself having to write: "What a painful suspension. Forgive me, my dear *Cronichetta*: if I suspend you so many times and with such long suspensions, it is not that I do not love you above all other work, but it is out of necessity, that is, to complete my duties first, at least in the main" (Notebook XI, p. 36). Therefore, we are not

surprised if the form of his entries is not always neat, with some ill-constructed sentences or some spelling inaccuracies; this in no way detracts from what he has passed on to us.

The notebooks are a mine of information with the advantage of immediacy compared to other later narratives, which are more literary, but necessarily reworked and reinterpreted. We find evidence of important events, such as the first missionary expedition of 1875, the preparation, departure and effects of which are recounted in detail.



The most important feasts are described (e.g. Mary Help of Christians or the birth of St John the Baptist, Don Bosco's name day) and how they were celebrated. We can learn about the ordinary and extraordinary activities at Valdocco (the school, the theatre, music, visits from various personalities...): how they were prepared and managed, what worked well and what needed to be improved, how the Salesians under Don Bosco's guidance organised themselves and worked together, without hiding some critical aspects. There are also small aspects of everyday life: health, food, the economy and many other details. From these chronicles, however, the spirit that animated the whole work also emerges: the passion that sustained the often overwhelming commitment, the affection for Don Bosco by both Salesians and boys, the style and educational choices, the care for the growth of vocations and the formation of young Salesians. At a certain point the author notes: "Oh, that we might consume our whole life to the last breath in working in the Congregation for the greater glory of God, but in such a way that not a single breath in our life might have any other purpose" (Notebook VII, pg. 9).

The *Cronichetta* also presents a precise portrait of Don Bosco in his mature years. On 15 August 1878 Fr Barberis wrote: "Don Bosco's birthday. Born as he was in 1815, he turned 63. A

celebration was held. He made use of this occasion to distribute prizes to the artisans. Poems were printed as usual and many were read out" (Notebook XIII, p. 82). Many records dwell on the personality characteristics of the father and teacher of boys, including certain aspects that have been lost in later biographical narratives, such as his interest in the archaeological and scientific discoveries of his time. But above all, the total dedication to his work appears, in those years in particular the commitment to consolidate the Salesian Congregation and to expand its range of activity more and more with the foundation of new houses in Italy and abroad.

It is, however, difficult to summarise the very rich content of these notebooks. An attempt has been made in the introduction to the volume to identify some core ideas that range from the history of the Salesian Congregation and the life of Don Bosco (there are several passages in which Barberis mentions "former matters at the oratory") to the formation model at Valdocco and management and organisational aspects. The introduction also deals with other issues related to the document: the use made of it, with special reference to the *Biographical Memoirs*, the historical value to be given to the information, the purpose for which it was written, and the language and style used. Regarding this last point, we note how the author, according to what he learned from Don Bosco himself, has enriched his chronicle with dialogues, amusing episodes, "good nights" and dreams of Don Bosco, thus making the reading also interesting and pleasant.



The volume also bears more general witness to the historical time in which it was written, in particular the troubled period following Italian unification. In March 1876 there was a change of government for the first time led by the party of the historical Left. In the eighth notebook of the *Cronichetta* on 6 August 1876 we find a record of the reception held at the Salesian boarding school in Lanzo on the occasion of the

inauguration of the new railway, at which various ministers took part. Don Bosco's interaction with politicians and his interest in the affairs of Italy and other states is well documented and the historical notes at the end of each notebook provide essential information. Even more mundane news items find a place in the various entries, such as the laying of submarine cables for the electric telegraph or some health and medical beliefs of the time.

This publication is a critical edition, therefore mainly aimed at scholars of Salesian history, but also those who wish to delve deeper into certain aspects of the person of the holy founder of the Salesians and his work will find great benefit from reading it. Once one overcomes the obstacle of reading 19th century Italian, it is often enjoyable.

*Fr. Massimo SCHWARZEL, sdb*

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## **A protection centre for street children: in Lagos, Nigeria**

*In Lagos, Nigeria, in an overpopulated and growing city where more than 40 per cent of the population are young people under 18, the Salesians have opened a home for street children.*

[Lagos](#) is one of the 36 states of federal [Nigeria](#). It is practically a city-state, capital of the country until 1991, when the new capital, Abuja, was officially recognised in the centre of the country. With its 16 million inhabitants, it is the second most populous urban area in Africa after Cairo, and

with its metropolitan area of 21 million inhabitants, it is one of the most populous in the world. Moreover, it is continuously growing, so much so that it has become the first city in Africa and seventh in the world in terms of the speed of population growth.

With a very warm climate, lying just 6° north of the Equator, it is located on the mainland, opening onto Lake Lagoon and the Atlantic Ocean. Thanks to its location, it has always been a commercial city, so much so that, even though the capital has been relocated, it remains the commercial and economic centre of the state and one of the most important ports in West Africa.

With 230 million inhabitants, Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and the sixth most populous country in the world. Nigeria has the third largest youth population in the world, after India and China, with over 90 million inhabitants under the age of 18.

The youth situation in this city is comparable to Turin in Don Bosco's time. Many poor rural and urban youth flock to the city of Lagos in search of work and a better life, but they are subject to exploitation, neglect, poverty and deprivation. They are at risk of being left on the street, of being abused, of being trafficked, of coming into conflict with the law or abusing drugs.

The Salesians have come to the aid of these children and young adults, with a [Don Bosco House](#), a protection centre for street children, approved by the Ministry of Youth and Social Development of Lagos State as a rehabilitation home for boys at risk. It is a Home that is dedicated to improving the lives of street children, vulnerable boys, by providing them with an alternative family environment, shelter, education, emotional support, protection and life skills enhancement. The starting point is the belief that every child has positive potential and that young people represent the future of the country. If the environment is good, if they receive a good education and see good examples, they too can grow to become a hope for

others.



Don Bosco House includes residential and non-residential guests.

Residential children are those who live in the home, attend school within the home and participate in all the activities that will lead them to become better people and reintegrate into their families and communities. Some of the programmes run in the home, in the area of skills acquisition and empowerment, are tailoring, barbering, shoe making, while in the area of talent development there are music, theatre, dance and choreography. The children are also engaged in various therapeutic, sports and recreational activities to foster their social and physical development.

In their work with these children the Salesians have realised the potential of music, especially in the rehabilitation of the youngest children. By helping them to get to know and use musical instruments, relief is offered from the burden of their experience, helping them to overcome various traumas, and also strengthening a good family relationship between them. The same happens with dance. The children are very attracted to choreography, they want to try and are not discouraged when they realise they have made a mistake, but try again with perseverance until they succeed, learning from their mistakes. Dance encourages the children to experiment and find different paths to forget their problems.



But the Don Bosco House does not close its doors to those who do not want to stay. Non-residential guests are those who live on the streets and often come to seek temporary shelter. The house serves as a stop-off point for them to rest, play, take a shower, change clothes, receive medication and food. On these occasions, they are also offered follow-up activities: counselling and psychological rehabilitation, family tracing and reintegration, continuation of education, acquisition of skills, complex medical and health care and job placement.

This is a valuable help, because most of these young people are aged between 14 and 24. Many of them are engaged in some kind of work, which allows them to earn something to cover their daily expenses for food, clothing and other necessities. A good number of them work in the unorganised sector, helping at weddings, on construction sites, carrying loads in bus car parks, selling bags of water and drinks on the street, doing the most menial jobs. And it is good to see this, because it means that they want to earn an honest living, but do not always find someone to help them.

As you can guess, the girls' situation is no better and this presents a challenge for the Salesians: to think of them in some way. This is also why the Salesians ask for support to improve the skills of their staff and management in general, and are open to receiving assistance to improve the quality of work. Alone they can do little, but together with others they can do a lot.



*Fr Raphael AIROBOMAN, sdb*

*Director of the Don Bosco Home Child Protection Centre, Lagos, Nigeria*



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# Don Bosco in Cambodia

*Cooperation between lay people and religious for the education of the youth of Cambodia.*

Cambodia is a country in Southeast Asia with over 90% of its population Buddhist and a very small Christian minority.

The presence of the Salesians of Don Bosco in Cambodia dates back to 1991, when the Salesians arrived from Thailand where they were taking care of the technical education of war refugees along the border between the two countries, under the leadership of Salesian Brother Roberto Panetto and Salesian past pupils from Bangkok.

After training some 3,000 young people, the latter, who were about to be repatriated to Cambodia, asked the Salesians to go with them. The Salesians did not let that invitation fall on deaf ears, realising that that was where God wanted them at that moment, and that those were the young people calling on Don Bosco. The challenges were and are many, in a non-Christian cultural environment and in a very poor society.

On 24 May 1991, feast of Mary Help of Christians, the Salesian presence began in Cambodia, with an orphanage and the Don Bosco technical school in Phnom Penh, officially opened on the feast of Don Bosco, 31 January 1994. In 1992, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians also reached the country and their work offers hope to many poor and abandoned girls in a country where more than half the total population is female and where women are victims of violence, abuse and human trafficking.

The Salesians have established technical institutes and schools in five provinces of the country: Phnom Penh, Kep, Sihanoukville, Battambang and Poipet. The enormous educational

and pastoral work is only made possible thanks to the invaluable contribution of the laity. Almost all the staff involved in the Salesian structures are former students who are continuously committed to giving the best to the students in formation. This is a concrete application of shared responsibility and of the many invitations to share the mission.

The Salesians have established an NGO in Cambodia with no religious affiliation. Commonly known as the fathers, brothers and sisters of Don Bosco, they are loved and respected by all. There is a great love and partnership between the Salesians and past pupils in Cambodia, which contributes to the popularity and 100% placement rate of the students over the last ten years, as Fr Arun Charles, an Indian missionary in Cambodia since 2010, recently appointed as coordinator of missionary animation in the East Asia-Oceania region, tells us. The Salesians encourage minors to complete the primary education cycle, through support projects for children, the construction of primary school buildings in poor villages, and the management of some literacy centres. In Battambang, brick factories retain children to work as labourers, and there Salesian education aims to offer an alternative and hope for a different future.

One of the specialities of the Salesian mission in Cambodia is the hotel school, which provides instruction in hospitality, cooking and hotel management, having a full hotel to enable students to gain practical experience in their field, in addition to workshops and exercises.

The visit of the Rector Major Fr Juan Edmundo Vecchi in 1997, a very important moment of encouragement, focused on the exhortation to build an educative and pastoral community and to put Don Bosco's Preventive System into practice, has remained in their memory.

Don Bosco's missionary gaze continues to to be alive almost

10,000 km from Valdocco, always with and for the young, in the Salesian presences in Phnom Penh, Poipet and Sihanoukville.

Marco Fulgaro

## Photo gallery Don Bosco in Cambodia

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## Life

*'Life' is a group of young people which began in 1975 in Sicily, who want to live human and Christian values with commitment and express them through artistic language. Shows, music, songs, dances to propose a message to the public, to say something that helps people reflect and pray. They want to bring the Christian proposal to theatres and squares in a new way of evangelising.*

I had seen them at work on the stage of one of the biggest theatres in Catania, in front of more than 1,800 young people from the city's schools. They were presenting a musical that helped to reflect on the value of life in youthful language.

Singing, dancing, lights, special effects kept the youngsters nailed to their seats all morning. On my way out, I wanted to mingle with the spectators to catch a few comments: "Really cool! I loved the ballets!"... "Did you see that there was also a live orchestra? I'd like to ask if I could join"... "They're about my age, but what voices!..."

I, too, was impressed by that group of young actors, not only because of the quality of their performance, but also because even before the audience arrived I had seen that they were working hard to get everything in order: there were some positioning the floodlights, some testing out the microphones, some setting out the costumes, some at the last rehearsal of a ballet and some doing vocals to get their voices ready. Everyone knew what they had to do and carried out their task responsibly. When the theatre was full, before kicking off, they all disappeared behind the closed curtain. I wanted to peek in and saw that they were all there in a circle for a short prayer before the performance began. I was struck by this fact. I knew that it was a Salesian group belonging to the CGS Association (*Cinecircoli Giovanili Socioculturali*); so, I decided to go and see them at their headquarters to find out more and get to know them better.

I found a very simple setting: a small room for rehearsals and meetings, a small room for recordings, a mezzanine with wardrobes for costumes, a storage room for scenes and lighting and sound equipment, but above all I found a lot of creativity and Salesian spirit. Welcoming me was Armando B., founder and head of the group, as well as composer of all the music, and five other young men. I asked them to tell me a little about their story.

"Our group," Armando said, "is called LIFE, *Vita*! Yes, because we are together to discover the meaning of life and to announce the joy of life to the world. We began in 1975 out of the desire some of us had (we were 15 years old then) to be together, bound by our love for music. We have come a long way since then! Over the years, the need has gradually matured to

deepen our faith, to live human and Christian values in a committed way, and to express them through artistic language. Thus, our musicals were born, shows entirely conceived and produced by us: from the music to the lyrics, the costumes to the sets, from the lighting to the sound... and we have also recorded many cassettes and CDs." "See here on the walls the posters and photos of our shows over all these years," Paolo added.



'**Life**' was the first original show that tackled the problem of drugs and dialogue within the family; then there was '**Welcome Poverty**', which helps us reflect on consumerism and the true freedom that comes from detachment from riches; there juvenile delinquency and Don Bosco's educational proposals in '**My name too is John**'; the choice in the last in the musical '**The Girl from Poitiers**', the culture of life versus the culture of death in '**Open up to Life**'; the wisdom of the Gospel overlapping the wisdom of the world in '**What if it wasn't a Dream?**'; '**Stories for Living**', small stories of today and yesterday in the light of Salesian spirituality; '**3P**' – Padre Pino Puglisi, the story of the priest victim of the Mafia; '**On the Wings of Love**', presenting the experience of the Servant of God Nino Baglieri; and '**What Remains is Love**' on the message of St Paul.

"Recently we staged '**Baraccopoli**,'" Giuseppe said, "a musical that touches on the theme of the marginalised and solidarity. The latest, however, is a play about Pope Francis and his message to the people of our time. It is entitled '**From the End of the World**'."

Sara interrupted him and, showing me some DVDs, added:

"You see, we have also tried our hand at film production and, in addition to the film versions of '**Stories for Living**' and '**Open to Life**', we have made three other films – '**God's Athlete, Placido and Nicolò**' -, which have received special

prizes and awards.

I was truly amazed at the material documenting so many years of activity, and ventured a question:

"What drives you to do all this?"

Alessandra smiled and answered:

"Ours seeks to be a new way of doing evangelisation, of bringing the Christian proposal to the theatres and squares. The experience of our tours is always exciting: we have travelled from one end of Italy to the other and we have also been abroad. Each time it is a new boost for us because at the same time as we 'announce' something, the awareness and conviction of what we are proposing to others grows."

Armando added:

"In order to be able to say something to others, it is essential to have lived it in real time first! This is why our CGS. invests a lot in formation: every Saturday we meet to pray together and every Sunday we have our formation meeting. In the summer we set aside ten days or so for 'expression camp', days in which we reflect on God's word and express our reflections creatively (music, dance, mime...). At times during the liturgical year, we meet for a day of retreat. It is a proposal, ours, that we offer to many young people in our area and beyond, of different age groups. The older ones accompany the younger ones. Many come to us attracted by the music and the desire to find friends and form a group, and gradually become involved in a journey of faith.

"Yes," Simone said, "I can testify with my own story: at the beginning I came to the group only because I liked acting and also wanted to learn to play an instrument. Here I found both, but above all I met people who knew how to listen to me and who showed me a way of life different from the one I had experienced until then. Here I also began to get to know the Gospel."

I felt good with them and stayed to chat until the evening. I learned about the many experiences of these young people, such as going to pubs to play music and engaging young customers in

conversations on certain topics that would encourage them to reflect on their lives, or going to bring help to the homeless on particularly cold evenings, or running an oratory in the neighbourhood in the Don Bosco manner, or animating youth gatherings at diocesan or regional gatherings.

I went back again one Saturday to see them. It was all a construction site: Joseph was animating the meeting of the pre-adolescents who were crammed into the small room usually used for recordings, three other young people were painting the scenes of the show being planned, a small group was rehearsing the various voices of a song, while two were intent on writing on sheets of paper. "Let's prepare tomorrow night's meeting for the families," they said. "There will be couples who belong to the group, but also the parents of our boys. We also want to involve them in a formative journey."

So much life in this group, I said to myself; they really have chosen the right name: LIFE!

## Photo gallery "Life"

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# 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](#).

Agustín NOVOA LEYVA, sdb  
director of the Salesian House Tijuana, Mexico

