

2019

SALESIAN MISSION DAY

INITIAL PROCLAMATION AMONG REFUGEES
AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE IN AFRICA

**"...WITHOUT REALISING IT,
THEY WELCOMED ANGELS"**

(HEB 13,2)



SALESIAN MISSIONS SECTOR

WWW.SDB.ORG

THE POSTER EXPLAINED

HERE IS THE THEME OF THE SMD 2019:

**“WITHOUT REALISING IT,
THEY WELCOMED ANGELS”** (Hebrews 13,2)

The poster presents **two African girls**. One welcomes the other. It is a symbol of the value of African hospitality: Africa that welcomes Africa. They are two serene girls with a beautiful dress. It represents the joy of welcoming and being welcomed, and also the dignity with which is clothed every human person we welcome. The missionary theme is expressed in the biblical text of Hebrews 13,2 which speaks of the biblical virtue of hospitality, connected with the well-known episode in which Abraham welcomes the three messengers of God, indeed his own God. The Eastern iconography in many forms has expressed the mystery of the Holy Trinity represented by these mysterious guests. The image of these angels in the girls also reflects the high number of girls in the camps, who flee for many reasons and for the violence they are subjected to in places of conflict.

The theme is powerfully current: **Migrations**. All countries are involved in one form or another in this reality, which calls upon our faith. But the greatest migration, of our days, is the intra-African one, where millions of people are forced to move (about 24 million) as refugees and internally displaced people, without counting the millions of people who leave their place of origin for economic and climatic reasons.

In the background, one can see the **refugee camps or settlements** in their precarious state: the tents, the hard work, the search for the essential: water and food, the massive presence of children and women. Pastoral and educational activities are also seen, especially vocational training; and the Salesians present who share their lives with refugees and displaced persons. The proclamation and reception of the Gospel are extremely meaningful for refugees: they are a breath of hope, and feeling oneself part of a community-Church gathered in strength, in faith, in hope and in love.

The theme focuses our attention on the challenge of this **frontier full of young people**, who await the friendship of the Salesians, their oratories, schools, vocational training ... and the Good News of Jesus.

The theme is a precious opportunity for our educative-pastoral communities to live the promotion of the evangelical virtue of hospitality, that capacity to welcome, receive, to open our homes, our hands, our hearts to others, especially to whoever is most in need. In doing so, we host angels ... indeed, the Lord himself



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LETTER OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

I had already communicated to all the confreres, at the conclusion of the bicentennial year of the birth of our Father Don Bosco, that my dream is of a **congregation** – and also of the whole Salesian family – that is each time increasingly more **missionary**. Our presence among young refugees throughout the world is undoubtedly a clear sign that this dream is already a conspicuous and convincing reality.

What can we do in these contexts and in the midst of these neediest young people and this people so marginalised, and often even persecuted? I have been able to see this on each of my visits: our Salesian authoritativeness is our **presence**, up to the last consequences. The Salesians, especially in Africa, do not go to seek refugees simply to distribute things to them, say nice words and then leave. The sons of Don Bosco are already today present in each of these contexts, first of all, in order to stay on.



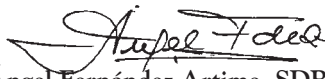
But this presence and this staying on have at the same time a clear identity. We are amid the poorest – and we must be there each time even more so and everywhere – among the most dramatically poor, as is the case with people who find themselves in refugee camps in Africa, but we are there with a **clear Salesian identity**. We are in the refugee camps, first of all, as “signs and bearers of God’s love for the young.”

Not just as “efficient carriers” of safety, food, shelter, water, health, education, etc., but as signs, first of all. We are not there to solve all their problems, but as consecrated people, and following the appeal of Pope Francis, we are there to help “wake up the world” that often sleeps, hypnotized by indifference or in the selfish search for mere comfort.

In the light of this year’s **Strenna**, dear confreres, I would like to add: it is possible to become a **saint in a refugee camp**. The consecrated people and the missionaries who live and work there already bear witness to it. The young and many people make of their Calvary a true walk of Salesian holiness. You shall listen to it and you shall see it by following attentively, and with emotion, the testimonies in the videos the Missions Sector has diligently prepared for this Salesian Mission Day 2019.

From the missionary heart of our dear father Don Bosco may every Salesian community in the world draw abundant inspirations to be able to respond with prompt creativity to the insistent appeals of the poorest and most abandoned young people.

With immense affection,


Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, SDB
Rector Major



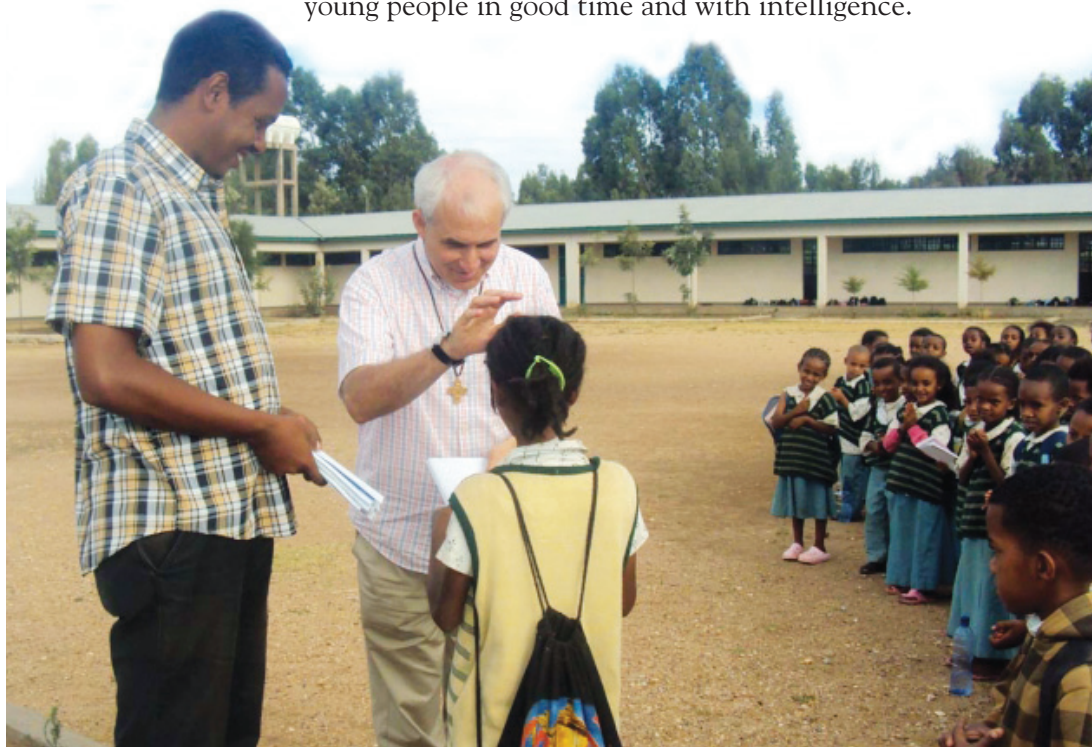
LETTER OF THE COUNCILLOR FOR THE SALESIAN MISSIONS

The theme and material of the Salesian Mission Day of each year is a precious tool and a “weapon” in the hands of the Provincial Delegate for Missionary Animation. Rather than wanting to arouse curiosity in the Congregation towards areas, cultures or situations that have never been seen or thought about, SMD wants to be, for all communities, a unique opportunity to keep the missionary spirit alive in the Province.

This year I, therefore, invite each Provincial Delegate for Missionary Animation to:

1. develop each time and increasingly more his **being a “sentinel”** within the Province, as the revised Manual clearly states: *“the PDMA is the missionary sentinel of every Province. He promotes the missionary culture in the Province as well as the commitment to the mission ad gentes, the initial proclamation and the new evangelization.”* (n.6).

The Salesian presence among the refugees, especially in Africa, has always been the fruit and consequence of Salesians who have been able to be attentive and to respond to the dramatic situations of the poorest, especially the young. In the last case experienced by the Congregation in reference to South Sudanese refugees present in northern Uganda, the timely and generous answer was also the result of an explicit call by the Rector Major. In any case, it is up to each PDMA within his Province to help confreres and communities not to close in on themselves, but rather to be dynamic and to courageously open up to respond to the needs of the poorest young people in good time and with intelligence.





This “being sentinel” thus becomes an expression of Salesian optimism: “*the Salesian does not give way to discouragement by difficulties (...) and does not bewail his own times.*” (Constitutions n.17)

2. *To awaken in young confreres in initial formation a true love for the poorest young people*, the passion to donate their lives to their very last breath in favour of the most forgotten and discarded.

The whole process of initial formation must help to reinforce or arouse this disposition and these abilities. I ask the PDMA's to know how to interact responsibly with the Provincial Delegates for Formation and their teams, and with the different teams of the initial formation houses to ensure, in the gradualness of their apostolic experiences, this initiation to Salesian work among

the poorest young people. It is necessary to prepare *ad hoc* programmes at this level. Every Salesian should arrive at the end of his initial formation having made significant and properly evaluated experiences. This effective and real love of the young Salesian for the poorest young people is undoubtedly a decisive element for discernment and for vocational accompaniment.

3. Finally, I invite every PDMA to make of this Salesian Mission Day 2019 a unique opportunity to ***promote effective solidarity***. Through various initiatives, it is possible to involve many young people, children, families and lay people in concrete gestures of closeness and of help to the Salesian communities working in Africa today with young refugees. But at the same time the Day becomes an opportunity to reinforce or relaunch programmes of education for the world and for the effective promotion of what Pope Francis likes to call the “globalization of solidarity”. Knowledge, interest, a sincere affection for our dear youngsters who today find themselves in different refugee camps are already small steps towards a less indifferent and more supportive Congregation and Church.

Thank you, and wishing you a fruitful mission,


 Fr Guillermo Basañes, SDB
 Councillor for the Missions



Salesian Mission Day

A tradition that continues

What does it mean?

Since 1926, World Mission Sunday is celebrated in the universal Church. Since 1988, a missionary theme is proposed to the whole Salesian Congregation. All the Salesian communities have the opportunity to learn about a specific missionary reality. It is a powerful moment for Missionary Animation in the Provincial and local Salesian communities, in the Youth Groups and in the Salesian Family. It is an opportunity to involve the SDB communities and the educative-pastoral communities (EPC) in the dynamics of the universal Church, **empowering missionary culture**.

Why?

To give an impulse to Missionary Animation by offering a proposal that shall become a concrete annual project. To help the whole Salesian Family to know the missionary commitment of the Congregation, to open our eyes to new missionary realities, to overcome every temptation to close oneself within one's own territory or context and to remember the universal breath of the Salesian charism. *"The activities of missionary animation must always be oriented to their specific ends: to inform and to form the people of God in the universal mission of the Church, to give rise to missionary vocations ad gentes, to foster cooperation in evangelization."* (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 83).

When?

The proposal is that, around November 11th, the date of the first missionary sending, we try to create communion in this missionary animation, just as it is done during missionary October for the Universal Church. If this date is not really possible, the Province shall choose a date or period which is more suited

to its own rhythm and calendar. It is important to offer an educational-pastoral itinerary of a few weeks – of which the Salesian Mission Day is the culminating point. The SMD is the expression of the missionary spirit of the whole Educative-Pastoral Community, kept alive throughout the year through various initiatives.

How is it animated?

Starting from a meeting of the Rectors where the Delegate for Missionary Animation explains the objective and distributes the tools available for the SMD in the Province (provincial web page or a link to the www.sdb.org - SMD). Thus, all SDB communities are the first recipients of SMD dynamics. Every year, focus is placed on a concrete aspect of missionary culture; praying for the missionaries presented in the SMD, offering concrete economic support to the mission.

Who celebrates?

The first recipient is the SDB community. Then, according to the various possibilities of the Provinces, there are various ways of organizing, adapting to the Salesian mission environments (schools, vocational training centres, parishes, youth groups, especially groups or missionary volunteering) and of the Salesian Family (Salesian Co-operators, Past Pupils, ADMA Groups, etc.), and open to the whole Salesian movement and to the friends of Don Bosco.

By what means?

As in the previous pastoral year, all the Salesian communities are offered: a poster, printouts, videos on the subject, teaching and audio-visual material in various languages. For the printed material, please contact the

Dicastery for Missions, Rome: cagliero11@gmail.com. The videos are produced by Missioni Don Bosco, Turin, and are available on Youtube: (<http://www.settoremissioni>).

The importance of prayer for the Missions

All members of the EPC contribute to the missionary action of the Congregation and of the Church through prayer accompanied by sacrifices for Salesian missionaries and for missionary vocations. Every 11th of the month is an opportunity to pray according to the Salesian Mission Intention. Every year a specific prayer is proposed, featuring the theme of the SMD. Missionary action flows from and is sustained by the encounter with God.

The Project for SMD 2019

Every year a project is proposed for the whole Congregation. This is an important part of

the dynamic of the SMD. The primary purpose of the SMD project is not just to raise funds. Rather, it wants to be an educational experience of concrete solidarity for young people. The PDMA promotes solidarity through various initiatives, especially during the intense liturgical seasons of Advent and Lent and during the month of October, or as part of SMD celebrations. The whole provincial community is also invited to make a monetary contribution as an expression of missionary solidarity.

Evaluation

Evaluation after the SMD is as important as preparation and celebration. What needs to be considered is how the SMD fosters a missionary culture in the local or provincial community through the year's proposed theme, keeping in mind corrective suggestions for the future. ■

SMD: A tradition that continues (1988 - 2019)

Year	Theme	
1988	Guinea-Conakry: The Dream continues	2006 Sudan: The Salesian Mission in Sudan
1989	Zambia: Lufubu Project	2007 Sudan: The Salesian Mission in Sudan
1990	Timor Leste - Venilale: Young Evangelizers	2008 HIV/AIDS: Salesian Answer – Educating for Life
1991	Paraguay: Street Kids	2009 Missionary Animation - Keep your missionary flame alive
1992	Peru-Valle Sagrado Incas: Christ lives on the paths of the Incas	2010 Europe: The Salesians of Don Bosco walk with the Rom-Sinti
1993	Togo-Kara: Don Bosco and Africa - a dream come true	2011 America: Volunteers to Proclaim the Gospel
1994	Cambodia-Phnom Penh: Peace-building Missionaries	2012 Asia: Narrating Jesus (Telling the Story of Jesus)
1995	India - Gujarat: In dialogue to share the Faith	2013 Africa: Faith Journey
1996	Russia - Yakutsk: Lights of Hope in Siberia	2014 Europe: The Others are Us – Salesian attention to Migrants
1997	Madagascar: Boy, I'm telling you, rise!	2015 Lord, send me! - Salesian Missionary Vocation
1998	Brazil-Yanomami: New Life in Christ	2016 Come to our Help! The Initial Proclamation and the New Frontiers in Oceania
1999	Japan: The difficult Initial Proclamation of Christ in Japan	2017 ... And they stayed with us: The Initial Proclamation and the Indigenous Peoples of America
2000	Angola: Gospel, seed of Reconciliation	2018 Whisper the Good News. The Initial Proclamation and Vocational Training in Asia
2001	Papua New Guinea: Walking with the Young	2019 "Without realising it, they welcomed angels". The Initial Proclamation amidst Refugees and displaced persons in Africa
2002	Missionaries among young refugees	
2003	Commitment to human promotion in the mission	
2004	India - Arunachal Pradesh: the Awakening of a People	
2005	Mongolia: A New Mission Frontier	



General theme for this six-year period:

Initial Proclamation

Path of the Congregation.

From 2015 until 2020 the main theme of the Salesian Mission Day concerns the “Initial Proclamation” (IP) in different cultural contexts. This year is dedicated to the Initial Proclamation in Africa, and, particularly, among refugees, displaced persons, migrants.

This issue has been the subject of reflection by the SDB and the FMA in all the Regions of the world: Europe (Prague 2010), South Asia (Kolkata 2011), East Asia (Sam Phran 2011), Oceania (Port Moresby 2011), Africa (Addis Ababa 2012), America (Los Teques 2013), in the Muslim context (Rome 2012) and in the City (Rome 2015). Starting from a summary of previous seminars, a process of Regional Seminars began to identify its applications in the various sectors and environments of the mission (parishes, ethnic minorities, schools, oratories, vocational training centres, etc.); thus, in 2018, all the meetings have already been held: Brazil (Belo Horizonte), Thailand (Sam Phran), Portugal (Fatima), and Africa (Johannesburg).

We have considered the concept of Initial Proclamation in relation to the **witness** of every Christian and of the whole Christian community; every activity or set of activities that foster an overwhelming and exhilarating **experience of Jesus** who, under the action of the **Holy Spirit**, inspires a **search** for God and stirs up an interest in His Person, while safeguarding **freedom** of conscience, which, ultimately, leads to an **initial adhesion** to Him, or to the revitalization of **faith** in Him.

Initial Proclamation is promoted with a gradual pedagogy, attentive to the historical, social and cultural context of the other person. It leads one to live life as a Christian “permanently in a state of mission”, in such a way that

every person and every community becomes a centre of irradiation of Christian life. Initial Proclamation is addressed to diverse recipients:

- 1) those who **do not know Jesus Christ** (non-Christians);
- 2) **Christians who have received insufficiently** the first proclamation of the Gospel; hence:
 - a) persons who have known Jesus and then abandoned him;
 - b) those who call themselves Christians or Catholics, but do not practise it with the community, or do not receive the sacraments or do not get involved in the life and activities of the parish;
 - c) those who are weak and vulnerable in their Christian identity;
 - d) those who believe that they already known Jesus enough, but live their faith as a routine or simply as a part of their culture;
- 3) those who are **looking for someone** or something they perceive but to which they are unable to give a name;
- 4) those who live a **meaningless daily life**.

Our capacity to listen carefully will make us intuitively sensitive to that unexpected moment when our life, activity, presence or witness of believers and of the Church triggers an interest in knowing the Person of Jesus Christ and having faith in Him.

St Francis de Sales would often repeat a beautiful phrase: “**Cor ad cor loquitur**”: “The Heart speaks to the Heart.” We want, on one side, that the Heart of the Gospel may speak to the heart of culture and to the heart of every person. And also give each of us missionaries, this capacity for empathy: to have that respectful trust and intimacy to tune in with the hearts of our recipients to enable us to communicate what we love most: Jesus Christ.

Concrete proposals made by the SDB in Africa

From the continental meeting of Africa, held in Johannesburg in August 2018, among the many riches that emerged during the meeting on the Initial Proclamation in Africa, we would like to emphasize several features indicated by various sectors:

Oratory - Youth Centre

- The Oratory is the ideal site for Initial Proclamation because of its spontaneity, witness, personal contact and gradualness.
- Our evangelizing educational presence among the young is the main means of our sanctification.
- Verify how to include the visit to families in the educative plan.
- Offer a serious catechesis to prepare for the sacraments of Christian initiation.

Schools

- Offer a witness that is personal, credible, of the community (pastoral and spiritual conversion).
- Our pastoral care must be contagious.
- Be open to all young people, including those of different origins and religions.
- Assign religious formation to the person in charge of the School Ministry.
- Each school must have a Youth Ministry in charge, with his/her team.
- Take religious education in schools seriously and systematically.
- Openness in the territory to other people working with youth.
- Have the courage to take on new fron-

tiers without remaining closed inside one's own structures.

- Promote small groups and associative movements so that they may open spaces to Initial Proclamation.
- There must be effective collaboration between Youth Ministry and Social Communication.
- Involve the families of pupils through periodic meetings.
- Insist on family spirit of, assistance and presence in the playground (Have the courage to close the offices during recess.)
- Have an Educative Pastoral Plan in every school where lay people are involved.
- Make known the seminar on Initial Proclamation.
- Work in synergy: SF groups, young people.
- Accompany young people – and also past pupils – right to the end.

Urban and rural parishes

- Promote Small Christian Communities and accompany their leaders.
- There is a need to prepare catechists and pastoral agents well and to accompany them.
- Foster a variety of youth groups.
- Establish the ministry of visits to families.
- Many lukewarm Christians need to encounter their faith again through serious catechetical itineraries.
- It is necessary to specify which activities of our work are more appropriate for Initial Proclamation.
- Every Salesian House must have its own missionary group with popular missionary activities. ■



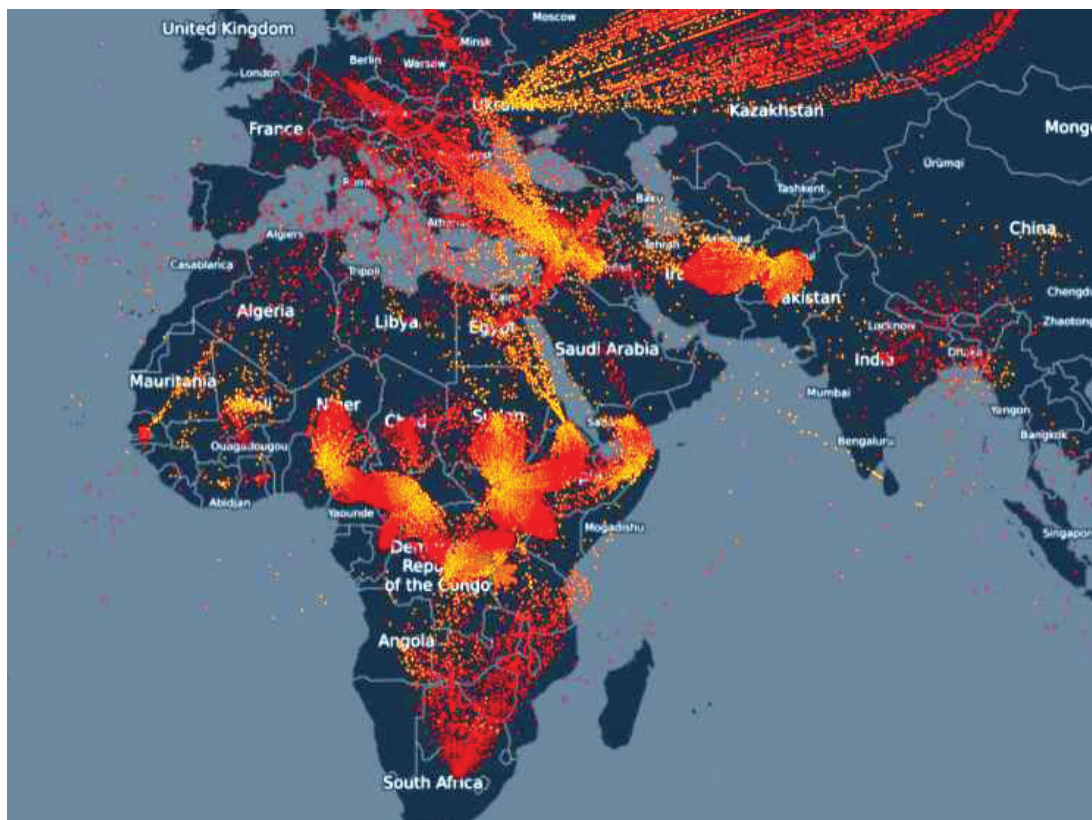


Human mobility TODAY

1. A global phenomenon

The migration phenomenon that today involves almost **one billion people** is the greatest movement of people of all time. It has become a structural reality of contemporary societies. It is an increasingly complex reality from the social, cultural and religious points of view; and it is further exacerbated by the existence of irregular migration. The causes of the phenom-

According to UN figures¹, in 2016 there were **244 million international migrants**, that is 3.3% of the world's population. This is constantly increasing, both in number and in percentage. 72% of them are of working age between 20 and 64 years. 52% are men and 48% are women. 79 million are under 25 years old.



enon are many: the global level of social and economic imbalances, the political and social crises that trigger armed conflicts and persecutions, as well as climatic reasons, such as the desertification of various parts of the planet. Migration has been accelerated today by the enormous structures and possibilities of travel.

According to the 2009 data, **internal migration** is estimated at **740 million people**.

The most dramatic situation is that of the 71.4 million people in a situation of **forced mobility**. Of these, **43.3 million are internally displaced**. These people, for various reasons, especially wars, have had to emigrate

within their own countries. While these figures are official statistics by the UN and several governments, everyone knows the real figures to be higher. It is thought that half of these forced migrants are under the age of 18.

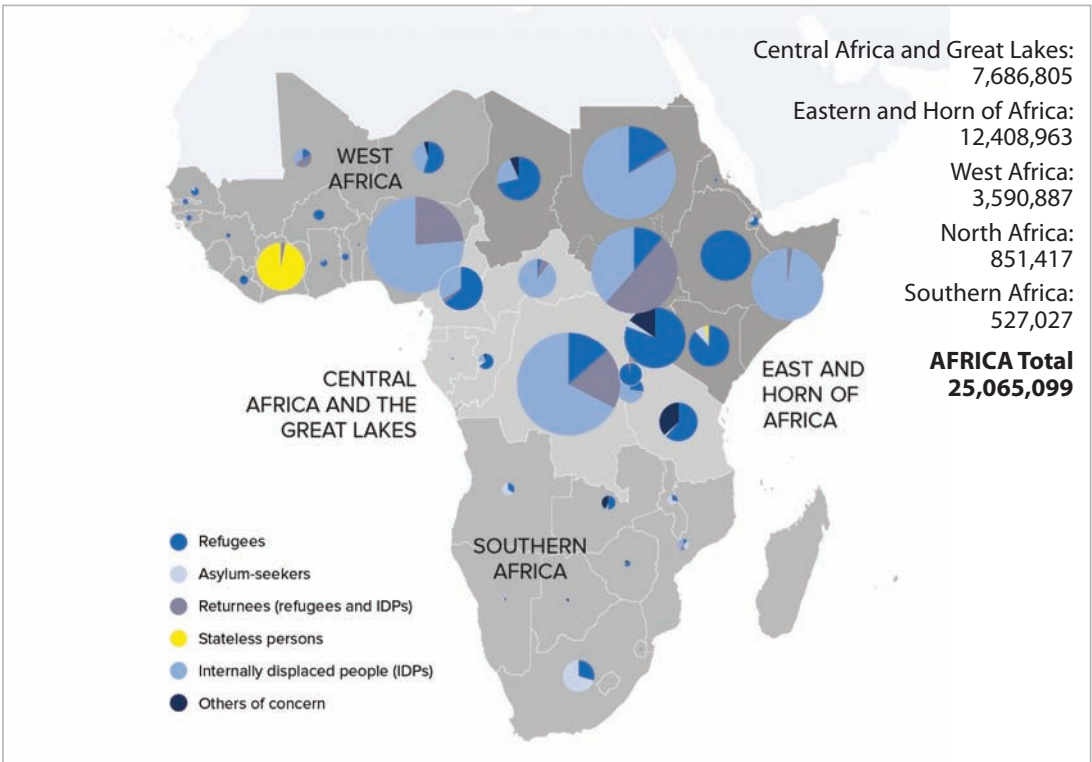
The UNHCR report (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) found in December 2017 that an average of **31 people per minute** were forced to leave their homes and seek protection elsewhere, within the borders of their country, or in other countries. Refugees and displaced persons have increased

for the fifth consecutive year. Also this year, the number of people who have had to flee their homes due to wars, armed conflicts, persecution and human rights violations reaches a sad record: to be the year when the greatest number of people are unable to return home since the time of the Second World War.

The wars in South Sudan and Syria, along with the increase in violence against the Rohingya in Myanmar in the second half of the year, are the main causes of the strong increase in these data.

2. Africa

34% of refugees and displaced persons worldwide, due to conflicts, are in Africa.



The worst scenario on this continent is in South Sudan, where 4.5 million people have fled their homes. IOM have stated there are 16 million migrants from Africa to other continents and 16 million international intra-African migrants.

We could say that we have “discovered” a new “continent”. This continent is a new mis-

sion territory for us, Salesians, because most of its inhabitants are young and vulnerable. What better field of mission for the Salesian charism?

3. A complex and differentiated phenomenon

The phenomenon is complex and varied; every situation has its own specific character-



istics. In one way or another, the Congregation is present in all these different realities. **Many Salesian communities on all continents have in some way responded with care and creativity to the millions of children, adolescents, young people and adults on the move.** Here are a few examples of these efforts. The picture is certainly not exhaustive.

- First of all, there are the “**refugees**” – young people who have to flee their country because of serious emergencies, usually armed conflicts. In Africa, we have Kakuma (Kenya) with about 186,000 refugees. We are starting our new presence in Palabek, Uganda, for young refugees from South Sudan.

There are also other important initiatives in Ethiopia, Rwanda, India, Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey and various European countries.

- A similar reality, but internal to the country itself, is that of **internally displaced persons (IDPs)**. For reasons similar to those of the refugees, they have had to leave their communities for safer areas, but remained within the borders of their own nation. Our confreres take care of this reality in Syria, South Sudan, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, India, Myanmar and Colombia.

- An enormous number of young people emigrate for **economic reasons**. They are looking for more favourable working and economic conditions. This is the case of millions of people, mostly young, seeking a new future in the more industrialized countries of Europe,



Canada, USA and Australia. Many move only to neighbouring countries, as in the case of emigration to Argentina and Chile, or from Bangladesh to India, or from Ukraine to Poland, or large intra-African migrations.

The migration from countries like Cuba, Haiti and Central America to Mexico is similar. There is a very significant Salesian presence on the border between Mexico and the United States. With its wide variety of educational, preventive, welcoming and promotional offers, it provides an invaluable service to thousands of people. The Salesians are in eight of

the ten border cities, namely: Tijuana, Mexicali, Nogales, Ciudad Juárez, Piedras Negras, Ciudad Acuña, Nuevo Laredo and Reynosa. There are educational presences, centres for social inclusion and hospitality.

- In some situations the **distinction between refugee and economic migrant is unclear**; like the young people who leave their country not only because of economic and working conditions, but also because of the endemic violence in which they do not want to be involved. Examples of these are the large migrations in some Central American countries (Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras). They go to Mexico hoping to proceed further north.

- There are intense waves of migration **from rural to urban areas**. There are people who pay a high price for the supposedly better economic conditions in big cities: the loss of

their roots and their family; the breaking from community and religious values; excessive overcrowding and loss of privacy; the physical stink and loss of personal dignity. One could list a “constellation” of Salesian houses located in the outskirts of the big cities of all five continents. With great creativity and an oratorian heart, they try to respond to this section of young people – those in movement.

- In this context of rural migration, one particular case to take into consideration is the emigration of young people belonging to **ethnic minorities**. Here, in addition to the economic drama, there is the crisis of cultural identity and integration. The phenomenon exists in various parts of the world. We are particularly aware of the situation of young people in the Amazon. So many of them leave their villages and their cultural universe, settle in the peripheries of cities, lose their identity and dignity and become victims of alcoholism, prostitution and exploitation – and some, even reach the point of committing suicide.

- Another special case, to which the

Congregation is sensitive, is that of **foreign unaccompanied immigrant minors**. They arrive “irregularly” in countries of transit or destination, in a situation of great physical and moral vulnerability. This is currently happening in Europe where the Salesian Provinces of Italy, Spain, Portugal, France, Germany and others have given generous and institutionalized answers. This phenomenon has been, and still is, a reality even in the Mexican border area.

- Another painful reality in this universe is **human trafficking**. Often it is children and adolescents who suffer all kinds of abuse in this business. The situation in Mexico is painful. In Europe and Africa, the NGO VIS has conducted an awareness-raising and prevention campaign on the traffic routes between these two continents.

4. The Church and its Magisterium

The issue of migrants has been very much alive in the Church, above all because of the great European migrations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Various documents and messages from the magisterium have shed





much light on this: the **World Day of the Emigrant**, congresses, and so on. A very rich document that offers us the description of the phenomenon and of the Christian attitude towards it is *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi*²: since 2004, it has offered us a wealth of biblical and theological references, as well as concrete pastoral proposals.



seen this in many people, especially young people, throughout Europe and in the world who have come forward to help you.³

Pope Francis indicated four significant verbs on which to build a ministry for migrants: to welcome, protect, promote and integrate.⁴ The response to migration is centred on these four verbs. It is with this proposal that the Catholic Church has made its contribution to the United Nations for the elaboration of the *Global Compact* of 2018. There are twenty points derived from these four verbs. The contribution of the Holy See to the worldwide reflection on the migratory question and on refugees has been greatly appreciated. From this perspective, the following priorities emerge:

The issue of migration has become even more prominent in the pontificate of **Pope Francis**. It has become one of its universal pastoral priorities. In addition to his frequent verbal interventions, we can think of his prophetic visits to the islands of Lampedusa and Lesbos. It also reminds us that migration is not just a problem; it is also an opportunity for the development of the countries in which migrants arrive. They also offer an opportunity to awaken the best in us, such as solidarity and volunteering:

“God created humanity to be a family: when one of our brothers and sisters suffers, we are all affected. We all know from experience, how easily some ignore the sufferings of others or even take advantage of their vulnerability and that these crises can awaken the best in us. You yourselves have demonstrated that this is true, and the Greek people, who responded generously to your needs in spite of their difficulties. You have also

Welcome: increase the legal and safe routes for migrants and refugees.

Protect: defend the rights and dignity of migrants and refugees.

Promote: foster the promotion of integral human development of migrants and refugees.

Integrate: offer greater social participation of migrants and refugees to enrich their communities.

Martin Lasarte, SDB

¹ <http://www.acnur.org/recursos/estadisticas/>. INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION (IOM). *World Migration Report 2018* (Geneva 2017). United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) *Global Report 2016* (Geneva 2017).

² AAS XCVI (2004) 762-822.

³ Visit of the Holy Father Pope Francis to Lesbos – Greece. Visit to the Refugees. *Address by His Holiness Pope Francis in the refugee camp of Moria, Lesbos, 16 April 2016.*

⁴ Pope Francis, *Message of the Holy Father Francis for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees* (14 January 2018). “To welcome, protect, promote and integrate with migrants and refugees.”

Without realising it, they welcomed angels (Hb 13,1-3)

¹*Continue to love each other like brothers,*
²*and remember always to welcome strangers,*
for by doing this, some people have entertained angels without knowing it. ³Keep in mind those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; and those who are being badly treated, since you too are in the one body.

Lectio

The last chapter of the letter to the Hebrews is clearly exhortative. These exhortative texts are in harmony with the style and theology of the whole letter: the Christian community has practical indications for **fulfilling the authentic worship inaugurated by Jesus**. The adoration that pleases God is the fulfillment of *charis* (grace), which is the soul of the correct relationship with God and one's neighbour (13,15-16). The adoration pleasing to God leads us to discern between true and false religiosity. True religion is possible through faith, which takes the path inaugurated by Christ in his saving offering and is fulfilled in self-gift to God and to one's neighbour. False religiosity is formal and external; it reduces relations with God to a set of rites and practices that do not touch the depth of reality, the conscience of the people, nor do they modify their relationships with others.

Not surprisingly, this chapter concludes the whole letter, with a realistic speech on the just relationship with others. It is an appeal to firmness and stability, sought as a "grace" that derives from the death of Christ (13,8-14).

Among other things, this brief practical

"directory" of the community insists on fraternal love: "*philadelphia*". Here are two concrete expressions on how to act in fraternal love, through **hospitality** and **solidarity** with prisoners.

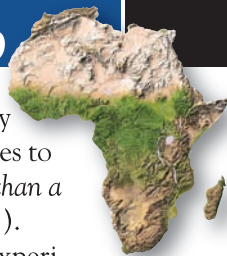
The practice of **hospitality** is very much appreciated in the ancient world and in the Christian tradition (Mt 10,40-42,25.44). This is confirmed by biblical tradition, which recalls the episodes of Abraham (Gen 18), Lot (Gen 19), Manoah (Gdc 13) and Tobias (5-12) who welcomed the messengers of God. The paradigm is the reception of Abraham who manifests a great concern for unknown guests, whom the patristic tradition identifies with the Most Holy Trinity.

Guests and **prisoners** are two categories especially underscored by Christian practice. Attention to those who were hungry, thirsty and without clothes was more common in the Jewish or Middle Eastern exhortative lists. But the particular attention to these two realities responds, firstly, to the **reception of itinerant missionaries**. They relied on Christian hospitality, and in case of imprisonment – common to those who spread the new "Jewish sect" (10, 34), who usually lacked close relatives – they depended totally on Christian brotherhood.

The theme of **hospitality** and, even more, of the **spirituality of the pilgrim**, is very much present in the letter.

In Chapter 11, the faith of the pilgrim Abraham is praised. "*By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was*





to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith, he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has solid foundations, whose architect and builder is God.” (11,8-10)

Rahab also appears as a model of faith and hospitality:

“By faith Rahab the prostitute did not die with those who were disobedient, because she had welcomed the spies with a greeting of peace.” (11,31)

St. Clement takes up this combination: **faith** and **hospitality** (1Clem 10-12). Hospitality will be the cause of salvation for Lot and Rahab and for the fertility and fulfilment of the promises to Abraham.

We are pilgrims heading to the Promised Land “... for here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.” (13,14)

• The value of hospitality

The Old Testament has beautiful pages dedicated to the hospitality of foreigners. The book of the Covenant guarantees their protection (Lv 19,33ss; Ex 22,20; 23,9). Dt says: “God loves the foreigner” (10,18) and, moreover, it urges Israel to “love the foreigner” (10,19). God threatens anyone who violates the foreigner’s dignity: “Cursed be anyone who perverts the justice due to the stranger, the orphan, and the widow. And all the people shall say: ‘Amen.’” (Deut. 27,19).

Job says, “No stranger had to spend the night in the street, for my door was always open to the traveller.” (31,32). True hospitality was practiced without the imposition of any compensation, since it was considered an obvious duty. While post-exilic Judaism

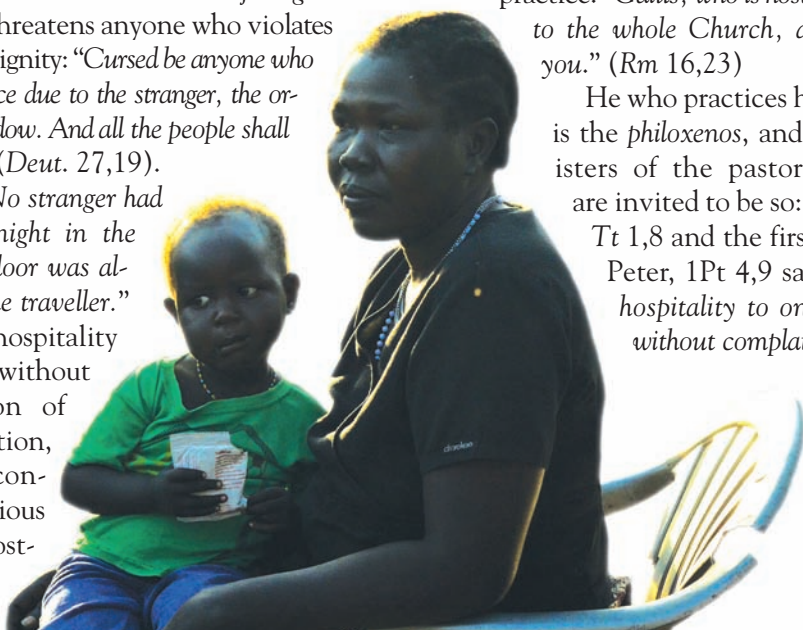
reduced the practice of hospitality to the foreigner, rabbinism continues to value it: “Hospitality is worth more than a vision of the Shekinah.” (Shebu 127).

Christ, historically, lives the experience of being an “alien”, a “fugitive”. He asks to be received in Bethlehem (Luke 2,7), escapes as a fugitive to Egypt (Mt 2,14). Jesus did not have a place to rest his head (Mt 8, 20). To Zacchaeus, He would say: “I must stop at your house today” (Lk 19,5). He sends his disciples on a mission and says, “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes him who sent me.” (Mt 10,40). Mt 25,35 insists: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” But it is the hospitality of God that is revealed as essential for the Gospel message, which manifests itself for its goodness (Lk 14,16ss; 12,37; 13,29; 15,23).

• Philoxenia

The term that translates the virtue of “hospitality” (as in our text in Heb 12,2) is **philoxenia**; it is the opposite of **xenophobia** (fear or hatred of strangers). In Rm 12,13, it appears in the expression: “Share with the saints in their needs; be considerate in hospitality.” The same letter reveals the ecclesial reception practice: “Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole Church, also greets you.” (Rm 16,23)

He who practices hospitality is the **philoxenos**, and the ministers of the pastoral letters are invited to be so: 1Tim 3,2; Tt 1,8 and the first letter of Peter, 1Pt 4,9 says, “Offer hospitality to one another without complaint.”



The action of exercising hospitality is common in Acts (10,23, 28,7) and 1Tim 5,10.

- **Philoxenia arises from love** (*agape*) as from fraternal love (*philadelphia*), in Hebrews 12,1 and Rm 12,10. It is a test of authentic Christian love (Mt 25,35f), which covers a multitude of sins. (1Pt 4,8)

- The **precept** of hospitality is **addressed to all** the disciples, but in the Pastoral Letters, the bishops and widows are encouraged to fulfil this office in the community.

- The **recipients** of hospitality are, first of all, “*brothers in the faith*” (Hebrews 13,2, Gal 6,10, 1Pt 4,9). They are those who carry out itinerant missions as witnessed by the *Didachè*: “*Whoever comes to you in the name of the Lord, receive him*” (12,1); or those who during the persecutions were welcomed into Christian families. This does not deny a more universal sense of hospitality. The exhortation of Rom 12,13 is interposed between the “*saint*” and the “*persecutors*”. An example of this is St Polycarp who houses his persecutors (Eusebius, Hist. Eccl. 4,14 to 15). But the story of the Good Samaritan is clear (Lk 10,30), which breaks with Jewish restrictions. *Who is my neighbour?* The Samaritan, a man of another nation, race and religion, who ceases to be a stranger to become a neighbour. Paul would say, “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male*

and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal 3,28).

- The **motivations** for hospitality find their roots in the NT.

- **Charismatic.** Hospitality is a charism to be fulfilled with fidelity. It is a gift from God (Eph 2: 10) which, as we have seen, is born of love.

- **Eschatology.** In the light of their experience as foreigners in Egypt, the Israelites consider important hospitality to foreigners (Lv 19,34; Deut 10,19). The Christian vision offers a powerful eschatological tension with regard to the fact that we are all foreigners heading towards our definitive homeland.

- **Mystic.** The text of Heb 12,2 sees guests as potential angels. One goes beyond the persons of foreigners, to be aware of a divine presence: angels in Abraham, Tobias and Lot; the same Christ in Mt 25,35ss and 10,40. Paul, recognizing the thoughtful and caring hospitality of the Galatians, says that he was welcomed as an angel of God, like Christ Jesus (Gal 4,14).

- **Missionary.** From the historical viewpoint, this is the main reason. It is a fundamental service for evangelization. Thus 3Jn 5-8 says, “*Dearest, you behave faithfully in all that you do in favour of brothers, albeit strangers. They have given testimony of your charity before the Church; you will do well to provide them with whatever is*





necessary for the journey in a way worthy of God. For His name, in fact, they left without accepting anything from the pagans. We must, therefore, welcome these people to become collaborators with the truth.” This is what Jesus himself organized (Mt 10,11ss, Lk 10,5ss). This is the hospitality the apostles experienced (Acts 10,6.18.32.48, 16.15.34; 17,7; 18,2; 21,8s; 1Cor 16,19; Rm 16,23; Phl 22). The fulfilment of this commandment by the Lord (Mk 16,15) on evangelization is so important in the NT that almost always, when one speaks of hospitality, it is necessary to understand it in this apostolic and missionary sense.

Meditatio

Some reflections for our Salesian life and mission.

- **“Persevere in fraternal love.”** (v. 1) (*philadelphia*). We are invited to live and practice fraternal love, not occasionally, but constantly. The verb *menô* indicates stability, permanence, steadfastness, continuity. Fraternity is not a likelihood, but a constant permanent behaviour and commitment for life. Fraternity is a constitutive aspect of our Christian identity. The practice of this virtue at work, in the family, in our surroundings, is much more than the expression of a good character, of good manners or of a civic sense; it is a need and practice

of the Spirit in our own daily life.

- **“Do not forget to practice hospitality.”** From a Salesian perspective, hospitality profoundly affects our Preventive System and the ability to welcome and receive everyone, especially the young. This impels us to have communities, groups, families with a great sense of hospitality, to be people whose doors are open.

- **“Without realising it, they welcomed angels.”** (v. 2). Angels are the bearers of a message. For us, the Salesian Family, the message is clear: *“We believe that God is waiting for us in the young to offer us the grace of meeting with Him and prepare us to serve Him in them, acknowledging their dignity and educating them in the fullness of life.”* (GC23, n.95)

Another message consists in the fact that “the other” helps me to understand my identity and to eliminate my aversion to what is different: *“Once I have discovered the stranger within myself I cannot hate the stranger outside of myself, because he has ceased to be a stranger to me.”* (Erich Fromm)

Famous Eastern icons depict the Holy Trinity at the table of Abraham, and for this reason, they are called “Hospitality of Abraham”. In the reception of the stranger, there is a powerful theological message: it is receiving God. The divine stranger enters the tent



and makes it fertile. *“He who loves me will be faithful to my word and my Father will love him, we will go to Him and live in Him.”* (Jn 14,23).

• **“Remember those who are in prison...”** (v. 3). The question of solidarity challenges us. This solidarity with prisoners is not just “doing” something for them, but an invitation to participate in their condition by putting ourselves in their place. “... “Keep in mind those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; and those who are being badly treated, since you too are in the one body.” We are not called to be simply a charity, something external, but to true participation and communion, becoming poor

with the poor, refugees with refugees, migrants with migrants, prisoners with prisoners.

The letter to the Hebrews presents us with a supportive Christ, who became completely our brother. Jesus *“therefore, had to make Himself in all things like His brothers and sisters, to become a merciful and faithful high priest in matters pertaining to God, to make atonement for the sins of the people. Because He himself suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted.”* (Heb 2,17-18). *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses; He himself has been tested in all things, just as we have, yet He did not sin.”* (Heb 4,15).

Martin Lasarte, SDB

Psalm 15

**¹ Lord, who may dwell in your sacred tent?
Who may dwell on your holy mountain?**

² He who walks without guilt,
does what is righteous
and speaks the truth from his heart,
³ whose tongue speaks no slander,
who does no harm to a neighbour
and casts no slurs on others.
⁴ In whose eyes, despicable are the wicked,
but he honours those who fear the Lord.
Who keeps his word, even to his own injury,
and does not change their mind;
⁵ who lends his money without usury
and does not accept a bribe against the innocent.
Whoever does these things
shall never be shaken.



Questions:

In addition to sharing some thoughts on the Word of God, which caught my attention, we can take into consideration the following questions:

- **What does the theme of hospitality suggest to my Salesian mission?**
- **How do I see those who are “different”, the “foreigners”, the “migrants”?**
- **What challenges does the solidarity of Christ provoke in us?**



From the message of the Holy Father, FRANCIS

For the World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2018

***Welcoming, protecting,
promoting and integrating
migrants and refugees***

Dear brothers and sisters!

“You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God” (*Leviticus* 19,34).

Throughout the first years of my pontificate, I have repeatedly expressed my particular concern for the lamentable situation of many migrants and refugees fleeing from war, persecution, natural disasters and poverty. This situation is undoubtedly a “sign of the times” which I have tried to interpret, with the help of the Holy Spirit, ever since my visit to Lampedusa on 8 July 2013. When I instituted the new Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, I wanted a particular section – under my personal direction for the time being – to express the Church’s concern for migrants, displaced people, refugees and victims of human trafficking.

Every stranger who knocks at our door is an opportunity for an encounter with Jesus Christ, who identifies with the welcomed and

rejected strangers of every age (*Matthew* 25,35-43). The Lord entrusts to the Church’s motherly love every person forced to leave their homeland in search of a better future. This solidarity must be concretely expressed at every stage of the migratory experience – from departure through journey to arrival and return. This is a great responsibility, which the Church intends to share with all believers and men and women of good will, who are called to respond to the many challenges of contemporary migration with generosity, promptness, wisdom and foresight, each according to their own abilities.

In this regard, I wish to reaffirm that “our shared response may be articulated by four verbs: *to welcome, to protect, to promote and to integrate*”.

Considering the current situation, **welcoming** means, above all, offering broader options for migrants and refugees to enter destination countries safely and legally. This calls for a concrete commitment to increase and simplify the process for granting humanitarian visas and for reunifying families. At the same time, I hope that a greater number of countries will adopt private and community sponsorship programmes, and open humanitarian corridors for particularly vulnerable refugees. Fur-





thermore, special temporary visas should be granted to people fleeing conflicts in neighbouring countries. Collective and arbitrary expulsions of migrants and refugees are not suitable solutions, particularly where people are returned to countries which cannot guarantee respect for human dignity and fundamental rights. Once again, I want to emphasise the importance of offering migrants and refugees adequate and dignified initial accommodation. “More widespread programmes of welcome, already initiated in different places, seem to favour a personal encounter and allow for greater quality of service and increased guarantees of success”. The principle of the centrality of the human person, firmly stated by my beloved Predecessor, Benedict XVI, obliges us to always prioritise personal safety over national security. It is necessary, therefore, to ensure that agents in charge of border control are properly trained. The situation of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees requires that they be guaranteed personal safety and access to basic services. For the sake of the fundamental dignity of every human person, we must strive to find alternative solutions to detention for those who enter a country without authorisation.

The second verb – **protecting** – may be understood as a series of steps intended to defend the rights and dignity of migrants and refugees, independent of their legal status. Such protection begins in the country of origin, and consists in offering reliable and ver-

ified information before departure, and in providing safety from illegal recruitment practices. This must be ongoing, as far as possible, in the country of migration, guaranteeing them adequate consular assistance, the right to personally retain their documents of identification at all times, fair access to justice, the possibility of opening a personal bank account, and a minimum sufficient to live on. When duly recognised and valued, the potential and skills of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees are a true resource for the communities that welcome them. This is why I hope that, in countries of arrival, migrants may be offered freedom of movement, work opportunities, and access to means of communication, out of respect for their dignity. For those who decide to return to their homeland, I want to emphasise the need to develop social and professional reintegration programmes. The *International Convention on the Rights of the Child* provides a universal legal basis for the protection of underage migrants. They must be spared any form of detention related to migratory status, and must be guaranteed regular access to primary and secondary education. Equally, when they come of age they must be guaranteed the right to remain and to enjoy the possibility of continuing their studies. Temporary custody or foster programmes should be provided for unaccompanied minors and minors separated from their families. The universal right to a nationality should be recognised and duly cer-



tified for all children at birth. The statelessness which migrants and refugees sometimes fall into can easily be avoided with the adoption of “nationality legislation that is in conformity with the fundamental principles of international law”. Migratory status should not limit access to national healthcare and pension plans, nor affect the transfer of their contributions if repatriated.

Promoting essentially means a determined effort to ensure that all migrants and refugees – as well as the communities which welcome them – are empowered to achieve their potential as human beings, in all the dimensions which constitute the humanity intended by the Creator. Among these, we must recognize the true value of the religious dimension, ensuring to all foreigners in any country the freedom of religious belief and practice. Many migrants and refugees have abilities which must be appropriately recognised and valued. Since “work, by its nature, is meant to unite peoples”, I encourage a determined effort to promote the social and professional inclusion of migrants and refugees, guaranteeing for all – including those seeking asylum – the possibility of employment, language instruction and active citizenship, together with sufficient information provided in their mother tongue. In the case of underage migrants, their involvement in labour must be regulated to prevent exploitation and risks to their normal growth and development. In 2006, Benedict XVI highlighted how, in the con-

text of migration, the family is “a place and resource of the culture of life and a factor for the integration of values”. The family’s integrity must always be promoted, supporting family reunifications – including grandparents, grandchildren and siblings – independent of financial requirements. Migrants, asylum seekers and refugees with disabilities must be granted greater assistance and support. While I recognize the praiseworthy efforts, thus far, of many countries, in terms of international cooperation and humanitarian aid, I hope that the offering of this assistance will take into account the needs (such as medical and social assistance, as well as education) of developing countries which receive a significant influx of migrants and refugees. I also hope that local communities which are vulnerable and facing material hardship will be included among aid beneficiaries.

The final verb – **integrating** – concerns the opportunities for intercultural enrichment brought about by the presence of migrants and refugees. Integration is not “an assimilation that leads migrants to suppress or to forget their own cultural identity. Rather, contact with others leads to discovering their ‘secret’, to being open to them in order to welcome their valid aspects and thus contribute to knowing each one better. This is a lengthy process that aims to shape societies and cultures, making them more and more a reflection of the multi-faceted gifts of God to



human beings". This process can be accelerated by granting citizenship free of financial or linguistic requirements, and by offering the possibility of special legalisation to migrants who can claim a long period of residence in the country of arrival. I reiterate the need to foster a culture of encounter in every way possible – by increasing opportunities for intercultural exchange, documenting and disseminating best practices of integration, and developing programmes to prepare local communities for integration processes. I wish to stress the special case of people forced to abandon their country of arrival due to a humanitarian crisis. These people must be ensured adequate assistance for repatriation and effective reintegration programmes in their home countries.

In line with her pastoral tradition, the Church is ready to commit herself to realising all the initiatives proposed above. Yet in order to achieve the desired outcome, the contribution of political communities and civil societies is indispensable, each according to their own responsibilities.

At the United Nations Summit held in New York on 29 September 2016, world leaders clearly expressed their desire to take decisive action in support of migrants and refugees to save their lives and protect their



rights, sharing this responsibility on a global level. To this end, the states committed themselves to drafting and approving, before the end of 2018, two Global Compacts, one for refugees and the other for migrants.

Dear brothers and sisters, in light of these processes currently underway, the coming months offer a unique opportunity to advocate and support the concrete actions which I have described with four verbs. I invite you, therefore, to use every occasion to share this message with all political and

social actors involved (or who seek to be involved) in the process which will lead to the approval of the two Global Compacts.

Today, 15 August, we celebrate the Feast of the Assumption of Mary. The Holy Mother of God herself experienced the hardship of exile (*Matthew 2,13-15*), lovingly accompanied her Son's journey to Calvary, and now shares eternally his glory. To her maternal intercession we entrust the hopes of all the world's migrants and refugees and the aspirations of the communities which welcome them, so that, responding to the Lord's supreme commandment, we may all learn to love the other, the stranger, as ourselves.

Vatican City, 15 August 2017
*Solemnity of the Assumption
 of the Blessed Virgin Mary*



Hospitality is the mission

An African reading

"If a resident alien lives with you in your land, you are not to mistreat him. You are to treat the resident alien the same way you treat the native born among you – love him like yourself, since you were foreigners in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord, your God."

(Lv 19,33-34)

In African societies, the reception of a foreigner is not only a human act of kindness, but also an act of faith, strongly marked in cultures because a welcomed visitor can also be a messenger of God. *"Hospitality is one of the main laws of African ethics: this imposes duties and rights both on the guest and on the visitor. The abuse of hospitality is forbidden. This hospitality is still respected today despite the socio-economic upheavals."*⁵ In today's world, with its problems of migration and insecurity, welcoming the other, especially if he or she is foreign, is not always easy. In fact, if, in a positive sense, the one we welcome may be an envoy of God who brings us peace and blessing, in the negative sense, a foreigner welcomed at home may also become a source of tribulation, desolation and even death. However, the mission of the Church, in its form of a dynamic interaction between peoples and cultures, has a powerful relationship with hospitality.

context, while stressing that the reception of the other is not an exclusively African value. It is part of the human structure and has a strong meaning in biblical culture. The particularity of the acceptance of the other in African cultures is found in African community anthropology, which believes that, as Hampaté Bâ emphasizes, *"the individual is inseparable from his lineage, which continues to live through him and of which he is only an extension."*⁶ In this sense, the welcome and acceptance of the other is not only an initiative born of individual goodness but in some ways it becomes a fundamental element of the family, the clan and consequently of culture. Hospitality could even be a criterion for defining the sanctity of a family or a community. The reception of the other, then, stems from the family, whose first act is the reception of children, whom they in turn offer to the community, which will become

involved in their education. In fact, *"in African culture and tradition, the role of the family is universally regarded as fundamental. Open to this sense of family, love and respect for life, the African loves children, who are joyfully welcomed as a*

Welcoming and hospitality in African societies

To understand the Church's mission in the perspective of hospitality, we wanted to start from the African



gift from God.”⁷

During all the phases of his/her life the child, then the adult, shall follow a process of integration in the peer group and in associations; this will allow him or her to welcome others,



especially the stranger who is looking for help. He or she is helped in this by the family and community tradition. Several proverbs serve to inculcate the importance of hospitality. To underline the duty of hospitality, the Malinke of Senegal say, for example, “As full as the public square may be, a place to put the big drum is needed”, to express this saying known in Africa, “*When there is food for one, there is for two*”, because many are convinced that, “*as the guest is an envoy of God, we must welcome him with great respect (Ibo-Nigeria)*.”⁸ In African societies, hospitality is part of the network of relationships that take into consideration the indigence of individuals, generating a network of solidarity.⁹

For example, in the Ewe culture of West Africa it is interesting to note that the guest is indicated by the word “*Amedzro*”¹⁰ composed of “*Ame*” which means “(one) person” and “*dzro*” which means “desire, to desire, to want ...”; *amedzro* is, therefore, a desired person who is accepted, welcomed. One could also say that the guest who comes to our house is a “foreigner”, but he is not a “stranger”; he is a **desired and beloved person**; he or she must be accepted irrespective of their physical appearance, which can be noble or miserable due to the circumstances of the journey and the suffering he/she has undergone; his reception is at the same time a duty, a consolation and an opportunity. This is why we must do

everything possible to ensure that this person with his or her situation of being needy feels at home thanks to our welcome and **hospitality**.

In order for the person to feel welcome, there are some gestures

that ought to be highlighted: **human warmth** manifested by joy on the face of the host through greetings, kindness and sweetness; the **offer of water** or some foods such as cola nut, coconut water or other items depending on the culture; a **meal** to restore the visitor's strength: this aspect is important because in most families there is always a place reserved for an unexpected visitor; and finally the exchange of **words**, which is a moment of listening, a very important aspect, as listening allows one to understand what help can be given, but above all it allows one to see if this help is temporary or long-term and if it is appropriate for the good of the person in question and for the community. It is with this logic of hospitality that many missionaries are welcomed in Africa. Despite some hostility that may be met here and there, the success of the mission in Africa, especially the Salesian one, is partly due to this culture of hospitality that, in truth, must be reciprocal, because the reception is always in two directions: the person who welcomes and the person who is welcomed are in a dynamic interaction.

Mission as hospitality

In the biblical tradition, hospitality is a requirement for Israel not only because it has experienced being a foreigner or an exile (Lev 19,33; cf. Acts 7,6; 13,11,12,13,14); but it is also a labour of mercy and witness; hospitality is also a condition for entering the



kingdom of God at the end of time (Rom 12, 13, 13,8, Mt 25).¹¹ The New Testament recommends welcoming and hospitality because, by welcoming the stranger, it is God Himself whom we welcome. Jesus did not hesitate to declare that, “whoever receives the one I send, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives him who sent me.” (Jn 13,20). The author of the letter to the Hebrews urges us not to forget hospitality because “some, practicing it, have unknowingly received angels (Heb 13,2), a hospitality of which Abraham is one of the awesome examples (Gn 18,1-8) This welcome must also be offered to every person, because all that we have done for the poor and the needy, it is for Him, Jesus, that we would do it (Mt 18,5; Lk 9,47) The Christian mission has a strong relationship with the acceptance of the other in one’s diversity. In a globalized and migratory world that may see the other as a threat to one’s own life and wellbeing, the prophecy of hospitality becomes an imperative for the mission of the Church. For the Christian, in fact, welcoming the other is a divine command, because he is invited to see in the stranger he welcomes “not only a messenger of God, an angel (Gen 19,1ss), but the Lord himself (Mt 10,40; Mk 9,37).”¹²

The Church’s mission is characterized by sending and welcoming. The great missionary

expeditions are part of this logic in which Jesus sends his disciples on a mission (Mt 28,19, Mk 16,15, Lk 24,44-48, Jn 20,21). In the theology of the mission, the act of welcoming always comes from God who sends us and precedes us in the mission. He is the source of our love¹³. It is in this sense that all missionary activity consists, first of all, in welcoming His will. In this perspective, welcoming diversity in the mission, it is God Himself whom we welcome. For a deep missionary spirituality and communion, we are called to “*be capable of grasping the light of the mystery of the Trinity on the face of the brothers who are at our side [...], be capable, furthermore, to recognize what is positive in the other in order to welcome and value him as a gift that God gives to me through him who received it, well beyond his person who then becomes an administrator of divine graces.*”¹⁴ For us Salesians, welcoming young people, especially the poorest, is a mission not to be neglected. In situations of migration and of wars, the oratory and the Salesian communities distinguish themselves by being welcoming homes. This welcome should not be reserved only for the young, but also for the missionaries sent by God and the congregation. In doing this, we become collaborators with God (3 Jn 1,5-8).

Samuel Komlanvi Amaglo, SDB

⁵ M. CABAKULU, *Dictionnaire des proverbes africains*, L'Harmattan, 1992, p. 132.

⁶ A. HAMPATÉ BÂ, *Amkoullel, l'enfant peul: mémoires*, Paris, Actes Sud, 1992, p. 17.

⁷ GIOVANNI PAOLO II, *Ecclesia in Africa* (1995), n. 43.

⁸ Cfr. M. CABAKULU, *Dictionnaire des proverbes africains*, pp. 133-134.

⁹ Cfr. G. G. TATA, *Vivere-insieme: aspetti etico-sociali dell'antropologia africana*, Roma, Urbaniana University Press, 2014, p. 123.

¹⁰ R. JACQUES, *Dictionnaire éwé-français*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2015, p. 161.

¹¹ Cfr. X. LÉON-DUFOUR - J. DUPLACY (Éd.), *Dizionario di teologia biblica*, Marietti, Torino, 1976, pp. 720-722.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Cfr. *Ad Gentes*, nn. 2-5.

¹⁴ BENEDETTO XVI, *Africae Munus*, n. 35.

Don Bosco and the migrants

For the Congregation, the phenomenon of migration is not something new from the charismatic point of view. Ever since the beginning, Don Bosco faced this reality. **The first young people he received in his oratory were migrants** – seasonal or permanent migrants – between 18 and 25 years of age. They came from rural areas to look for work in the large city of Turin. They were young foreigners who did not speak Italian or Piedmontese, the local dialect. In a discussion with some parish priests of Turin who thought that Don Bosco was taking young people away from their parishes, the saint replied that they were all foreigners:

*"Because they [young people] are almost all foreigners, who are abandoned by relatives in this city, or come here to find work, which they could not get, dwellers of Savoy, Switzerland, Valle d'Aosta, Biella, Novara, Lombardy are those that ordinarily attend my meetings [...] The distance from their homeland, the diversity of language, the uncertainty of where they will reside, and the fact of being unfamiliar with the place make it difficult, not to say impossible, for them to go to the parishes."*¹⁵

The **Salesian missionary adventure** began with the care of Italian emigrants to Argentina. In the first expedition of 1875, Don Bosco addressed his exhortation to the missionaries with these words:

*"Go, look for these brothers of ours, whom misery or misfortune brought to a foreign land, and strive to let them know how great is the mercy of that God, who sends you to them for the good of their souls, to help them know and follow that road."*¹⁶



The Congregation at the time of Father Rua and Father Albera consolidated this focus on Italian emigrants, but also on Poles and Germans. The greatness of the work done among the emigrants was incredible. In 1904, only in America, the Salesians took care of 450,000 emigrants. Already at the time of Father Rua, a **"Salesian Commission on emigration"** was created; it was led by Fr

Stefano Tirone, who did this job for several years. The service to European immigrants to America, Africa or the Middle East was enormous. Within Europe itself, there were migrants who fled from Eastern Europe to Western Europe during the communist period.

Certainly, the matrix of this ministry was ethnic-national, that is, the accompaniment of citizens with the service of chaplaincies, schools and various works of human promotion. Such service sometimes risked being more sensitive to a nationalist rather than evangelical logic. This is a datum we must be aware of.¹⁷

Moreover, **the migratory phenomenon, in one form or another, has always been present in our Salesian mission.** The challenge of youth and human mobility is today much broader and more complex in its cultural, social and religious aspects, in its great demographic impact, in the new problems linked to information technology, globalization and transport. Furthermore, the ministry of communion (more inclusion and integration) has become more necessary than before when it was ethnic-national (focus on one's own citizens). Now there are also new and dramatic phenomena such as unaccompanied minors among refugees. All of this offers new challenges to the Congregation before this vast



continent of young people, many of whom know little or nothing about Jesus Christ.

This frontier, this continent in movement, strongly challenges the Salesians and the Salesian Family of the 21st century. Just as *Project Africa* – a great missionary dream – contributed to revitalizing the Congregation decades ago, so today, a congregational commitment that is well projected towards this new continent in motion can be a real source of pastoral, charismatic and professional renewal.

Criteria of our educational-pastoral action among migrants and refugees

We indicate some pastoral criteria for this challenge deriving from migration. Of course, these are not very original elements, because they are the same as for every authentic Salesian mission in any field.

1. We address **children, adolescents and young people** as priority recipients.

2. We concentrate our intervention more on educational processes than on emergency activities alone.

3. We carry forward our mission starting from an integral and comprehensive approach of human promotion: we see **education and evangelization** as complementary. If we are not vigilant, we run the risk of reducing our mission in this field to a good social service, devoid of proposals of faith. We could become an excellent NGO, ceasing to be Salesians.

4. The engine in every intervention in this field must be an **educative-pastoral community** (local, provincial) where Salesians and lay people participate in a joint effort through a plan that is well developed and fully implemented.

5. Our action is characterized as an educative “**presence**” of hope. Therefore, we insert ourselves within the recipients’ **geographic and existential space** as much as possible. It is important that they see us as friends, who are among them, who share their lives, rather than as humanitarian agents who come from outside to perform a few services in their favour for a few hours a day.

6. It is important to take into consideration the fundamental right of every human being to migrate, if he or she so wishes, and the equally fundamental right not to be forced to migrate. In this dimension, as Salesians, with our criterion of prevention, we are called to **invest in “local development.”** Our educational proposal for vocational training and job placement offers an invaluable service to young people and society, precisely in this direction.

7. Migrants are logically an important field of action for the SYM. It is a field in which our non-migrant youth can be active among migrants as part of the SYM. It must be a **Salesian youth movement for young people on the move**. It is an excellent field for Salesian Missionary Volunteering.

8. This commitment, like no other, requires collaboration between various Salesian provinces and various countries (either of origin, of passage, or of destination). It requires that we start thinking about more **flexible and more international presences**.

9. The problem of human mobility requires **professional consultancy** on legal, social and psychological issues that enable incisive and efficient protection. Therefore, we need specific training for this service on the one hand and, on the other, the collaboration of lay professionals.

10. At the Congregation level, we see the need for a more **institutional, coordinated and visible presence** capable of creating networks and better advising, encouraging, coordinating, representing and systematizing the work of the Salesians of Don Bosco with refugees and migrants.

¹⁵ BOSCO G., *Memorias del Oratorio*, in ISTITUTO STORICO SALESIANO (ed.) *Fonti Salesiane. Don Bosco e la sua opera* (Roma 2014) 1250.

¹⁶ CERIA E., *Memorie Biografiche del beato don Bosco*, Vol. XI, Torino 1930, 385.

¹⁷ MOTTO F., *Bosco (Don) Giovanni e la missione dei Salesiani per i migranti*, in BATTISTELLA G. (a cura di), *Migrazioni. Dizionario Socio-Pastorale*, Cinisello Balsamo (Milano) 2010, 62.

GAMBELLA

Ethiopia's Western Frontier

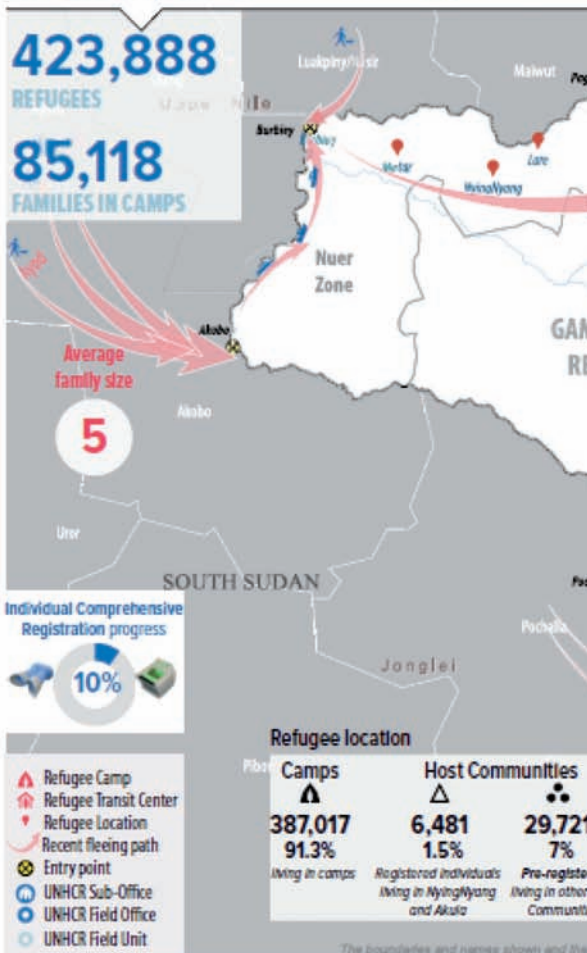
Speaking of Gambella, a city and region located in the western part of Ethiopia, recalls to mind the problem of refugees and displaced people, which has been influencing the region's socio-political and economic structure for almost thirty years, not without tensions and violence, which have always been part of the scenario of this whole area.

Of the circa 850,000 refugees estimated in Ethiopia as a whole, almost a third are concentrated in this border area with the then Sudan – now South Sudan – the last country officially recognized [in Africa] after the 2011 referendum. It soon after plunged into a civil war between different local ethnic groups, which mostly share the Christian faith.

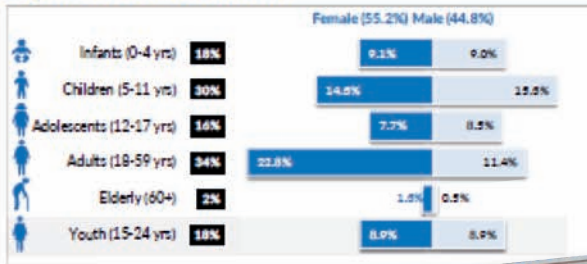
The Apostolic Vicariate of Gambella was entrusted by the Holy See to the sons of Don Bosco at the start of 2000. Msgr. Angelo Moreschi, a Salesian from Brescia, Italy, was appointed as its pastor. The Salesians of Don Bosco, in addition to the various ordinary educational and evangelizing activities, are en-

SOUTH SUDAN SITUATION

Refugee population in Gambella region



Age/Sex breakdown





as of 31 May 2018

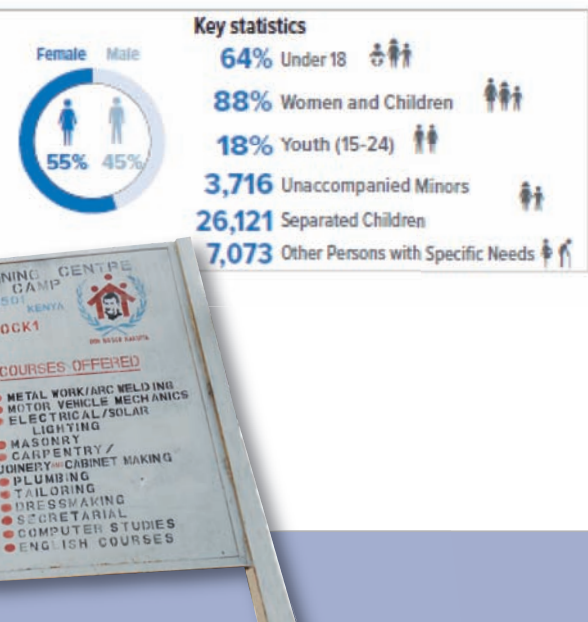


gaged in three different refugee camps, with activities not only of first evangelization, but at the same time of formation, specifically vocational training.

Let us look at the three different types of current intervention in detail:

1. REFUGEE CAMPS OF PUGNIDO

Pugnido, a town located more than 100 km from Gambella in the region's hinterland, has been an important Catholic presence since the 1980s. In the early 90s when the Missionary Sisters of Charity of Mother Teresa were called to manage the humanitarian interventions in favour of the displaced persons from Sudan in the war, they were faced with the emergence of a refugee camp of the Nuer ethnic group in the territory that is mostly ethnic Anyuak. Soon, the ethnic tensions advised the sisters of Mother Teresa to settle in Gambella city; only in 2006 could the Salesians, who were in Gambella since 2001, guarantee a stable presence in the current Mission of Pugnido, where the two Salesians present – Fr Giorgio Pontiggia and Fr Filippo Perin – besides offering pastoral care to around fifteen Anyuak chapels, also do the same in the current two ethnic Nuer camps. There is another ethnic Anyuak camp – an 'open' camp – whose people can





move and visit the nearby mission of Pugnido and take advantage of its services, such as a kindergarten, the daily oratory and the parish. The three camps have a total population of 50,000 people.

2. JAWI REFUGEE CAMP

Twenty km from Gambella, on the main road leading to Addis Ababa, the local authorities have identified, about 4 years ago, an area for hosting Nuer refugees, who have escaped from South Sudan mainly due to the civil war in the country and, secondly, because of the difficulty in accessing means of survival in an area that for 4-5 months of the year is flooded by seasonal rains. And that is how 80,000 people, assisted by the main governmental and non-governmental organizations, find themselves amassed in this area, which is also in Anyuak territory. From the beginning,

the Catholic Church of the Gambella Vicariate was asked to intervene in the field of education, which led to the opening of two elementary schools. Meanwhile, the South-Sudanese Catholics present in the camp met for prayer during weekends in two different tents set up for the occasion; the next step consisted in the request for a priest to offer the possibility of Confessions and Holy Mass on Sundays; for over a year the Salesians of Gambella, first with Fr Miroslaw, now replaced by Fr Joemary, assure spiritual assistance to the two Catholic chapels (about 2,000 faithful) inside the Jawi Camp, one dedicated to St Matthew and the other to St John.

3. NGUENYIEL CAMP

Along the main tarmac road connecting South Sudan and Ethiopia, about 40 km from Gambella, about 10 km inside the aforemen-





tioned main road, this new refugee camp was inaugurated about three years ago. It is now home to about 90,000 people coming from neighbouring South Sudan, thus of the Nuer ethnic group, people fleeing war and hunger. The camp, given the high number of refugees, has been divided into three areas, to facilitate interventions. From the point of view of religious assistance, a diocesan priest regularly visits the camp.

Starting in 2018, the Salesians of Gambella have been asked to participate in the field of vocational training in partnership with VIS, an Italian NGO that has worked with the Salesians even since. In dialogue with local managers, the specific need was to foster the acquisition of vocational skills, which would then be used practically within the refugee camp itself. From February to May 2018, short vocational training courses were

offered in the following sectors: carpentry, building construction, tailoring, and hair-dressing for women. Each course involved 35 students chosen by a local Camp committee, for a total of 140 students (mostly young women) who completed the course. Upon graduation, they were awarded a Certificate. Furthermore, at the end of the course, the 140 young people received a tool kit and materials to enable them to start working on their own, which was one of the objectives set by this intervention.

To us Salesians, alongside our presence and project supervision, the contribution of our instructors was also requested, especially in the field of carpentry and building construction. In total, about a dozen people from the Don Bosco Gambella College moved every day to the Nguenyiel Camp to teach, then returning to the city in the evening. The ceremony of awarding the Certificates, simple and touching, put a seal to this project that, in the future, may also be repeated.

We, Salesians of Gambella, present in this frontier land, which is so not only geographically but also in human terms, in the young refugees present here we seem to identify the poor to whom the next General Chapter refers us; it is up to us to open to them new horizons of future and hope.

Filippo Perin, SDB



KAKUMA “No place”

It was the civil war in Sudan that in 1992 forced thousands of people to flee to the North of Kenya and give rise to what is now a town – and a home – for many.

Kakuma – which in one of the local languages means “**no place**” – was thus born in the desert on the border between Sudan, Uganda and Ethiopia, to welcome refugees fleeing wars, civil and religious persecutions, and from the continent’s famines: Sudan and Somalia mainly, then South Sudan, Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, Ethiopia, Eritrea and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

With its nearly 195,000 inhabitants, Kakuma is among the largest refugee camps in the world. The camp is a shantytown threatened by heat, sandstorms, floods in the rainy season, lack of water and services, and is mainly managed by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Red Cross.

The Salesians arrived in Kakuma as early as 1991 and began their activities in 1993. Currently, they are the only ones – from 2000, to be precise – to have the permission to live permanently in the camp alongside the people, trying to share their difficulties and helping them build opportunities for growth.

Life here flows very slowly. People live in a perennial condition of waiting wherein it is difficult to build, plan, dream. This is how some lose the sense of their existence and tragically take their own lives. The Salesians try to respond to the emptiness that often reigns in the hearts of many refugees, giving them hope through recreational activities and educational and vocational training, especially for the many young people. In fact, as many as 50% of the population are between 15 and 35 years of age.

One can spend many years in the camp but that endless time can be used constructively: one can learn to read and write, to count and, above all, one can learn a trade that is useful once they leave the camp, or during one’s stay, because Kakuma is, in fact, a true and proper city.

Vocational training, school, opportunities. Every year the Salesians and their collaborators form about 4,100 students. Despite international aid, food is insufficient and, therefore, one must somehow manage to work. To do so, it is necessary to learn and know a trade and, at least, the English or Swahili language to communicate in an international environment. The students are boys, girls, men and women from 18 to





35 years of age. Some come with their children, and there are mothers with their new-born babies. Others are former boy-soldiers. Since the beginning of the Salesian presence, about 40,000 young people

have been trained who, on returning home, have been able to start working.

There are currently four vocational training centres in the camp. Another centre is being built in town to offer the possibility of formation to the local (host) community as it is not easy for the locals to enter the camp; hence, we decided to open a centre that accommodates both refugees and the local community. This will be the fifth centre of Don Bosco.

The Salesians have a Youth Centre. It is



nice to see that, even if ailing from different countries and ethnic groups, the young people come together here at the centre and together they perform various activities. We teach them moral prin-

ciples and sports activities: above all, football, volleyball and basketball. After the recreational activities, we bring them together and give them the “Good Night” by which we try to encourage them towards facing the next day.

In this context, often full of despair, Christian hope finds a way to grow. Without impositions, the evangelization by Salesians is proposed through personal witness: we evangelize by sharing with the refugees the same difficulties of life, but with the hope of

My name is **Gendanie Manaste Nionkoru**. I am Congolese. I belong to the Banyamulenge tribe.

While I was working in the fields, in 2009, a man from the Bembe tribe came and told me that in the Karunja village, the Mai Mai guerrillas had attacked and killed all the people belonging to the Banyamulenge tribe. He told me to run to the village if I had relatives because they had killed all the people. While he was giving me this information, I felt confused because my brother lived there and also my wife and children. At that moment, I decided to rush to the village.

Once I arrived, I went straight to my brother's house and saw that he and his wife had been killed. It had happened the night before. Then I went to his children's room, which was dripping with blood. All his children had been massacred. My brother's house was on the opposite side of mine. When I arrived at my house, to find out how my wife and children were, I realized that they were not



there. As I was going there, I saw that there were some canoes carrying the people who had survived the massacre.

Later on, I also climbed into one of the canoes and was brought to Tanzania, where I looked for my family. Then, I was moved to the Kakuma refugee camp where, happily, I found my wife and four children.

My dream is that my children may go to school. That's why I asked the priest to help me buy a blackboard. He accepted. One of my

children has a scholarship. I prayed to God for this and I thank him.

God has worked a miracle. She managed to get into school and the expenses were settled. She was taken in the school of Angelina Jolie where there is also a boarding school. Our dream is to be able to return home in peace.

those who have Christ within their hearts. In the camp, human promotion, evangelization, initial proclamation and interreligious dialogue are harmoniously integrated. Refugees have a great religious and community sense, thus evangelization reveals itself as a powerful integrative component.

One evangelizes by showing a different, trusting and industrious lifestyle, even in poverty. We propose to all, but above all to the young, specific educational and formative activities through the parish ministry at the camp, which gets especially lively on Sunday for Holy Mass. An appropriate pastoral strategy is the spiritual accompaniment of



Christians through the Small Christian Communities. They are small groupings, in which some families who live nearby gather for prayer and share the Word of God. They are more than a hundred.

But Kakuma remains a refugee camp, one that is immense and immersed in the semi-desert between North Kenya and South Sudan. It is developing almost as an independent town, but without the presence of humanitarian aid, and especially without educational interventions and vocational training, such as those offered by the Salesians, it would be a huge prison without any hope for human redemption.

Majros is 29 years old. He had always lived with his paternal uncle and tended goats. Majros was a fragile child with poor health. Only when his father returned briefly from the war could Majros receive treatment and recover from the illness that had accompanied him for years. Majros arrived in Kakuma in 2006 and gratefully remembers the meeting with the Salesians.

I lived with my father. My mother and the other brothers were not with us. In my family, we are eight children. We are four males; in fact, we would have been five but one died, and four females. My mother left us with my father. He took care of us, worked as a soldier and took care of all other matters.

In Kakuma, one tries to survive. And as far as possible — in this “non-place” in the middle of the desert — we try to plan a future, when our country will be safe and we will be able to return. I do not feel at home here because the camp is not safe. Here



your life is not so protected. Even if we are in a refugee camp, you can be assaulted, especially at night.

Being with the Salesians has helped me a lot to get involved, to interact and get to know many people within the Salesian context. Even before I worked for them, I was already part of the Don Bosco family— and this helped me grow as a person.

What I miss most here are my parents. Living with many people is not difficult for me because the Salesians have helped me to socialize with others. If I think of the idea of home, immediately I feel the desire to return to stay with my family and

also to help it them.

I was baptized in Sudan and then when I came here in 2007 I decided to receive confirmation. I followed the course throughout the year and in 2008 I was confirmed as a Christian in the parish. My dream is to become a Salesian one day.



PALABEK

To the west of the Horn of Africa, between South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo, in the area of the Great Lakes, the small state of Uganda now welcomes over 1.5 million human beings fleeing from the small and large conflicts that have led to the development of refugee camps.

The camp is Palabek, almost at the northern border of the country; it has become a landing place for thousands of South Sudanese men, women and children. This was possible thanks to the generosity of the local government and the population that opened their nation to the reception of their African brothers and sisters. In fact, refugees in Uganda are facilitated as regards documentation, work permits and mobility. Most of the inhabitants of Palabek's humanitarian settlement are women, children and the elderly who managed to escape. The men remained to fight and defend the little that was there.

In Uganda, the **life of refugees** is more humane than in other countries. The camps, for example, are called settlements and, little

by little, a plot of land of 30 square meters is allocated to refugees so they may build a small house and cultivate some crops.

There is very much work to be done. The number of refugees has grown rapidly. Currently it is estimated that there are more than 43,000 coming from South Sudan. They are people who need everything because they escaped with nothing but the clothes they were wearing and their children in their arms.

The Salesians have been present in Palabek since the opening of the camp in 2017 and have already conquered the hearts of the people. Today there is an international missionary community: 2 Salesians from D.R. of Congo, 1 from the Congo, 2 from India and another one from Venezuela. They take care of animation in the Christian commu-



nities scattered in the settlement, evangelising with simplicity. They educate children and young people through schooling, offering themselves as a reference point for their growth, in support of families.

Work is incessant. The Salesian community shares the difficulties of the people and bears witness to the Gospel by welcoming and paying attention to the most marginalized and weak, i.e. the young, the elderly and the sick.

A vocational training centre was recently inaugurated with the possibility of educating 750 students per year.

- There are plans to start a secondary school in 2019 for 700 pupils per year, to give special attention to adolescent girls.
- There is a dynamic Youth Centre for cultural and sporting activities. It is active in part, without many facilities yet, with about 600 young people and children.
- Together with the Vocational Training



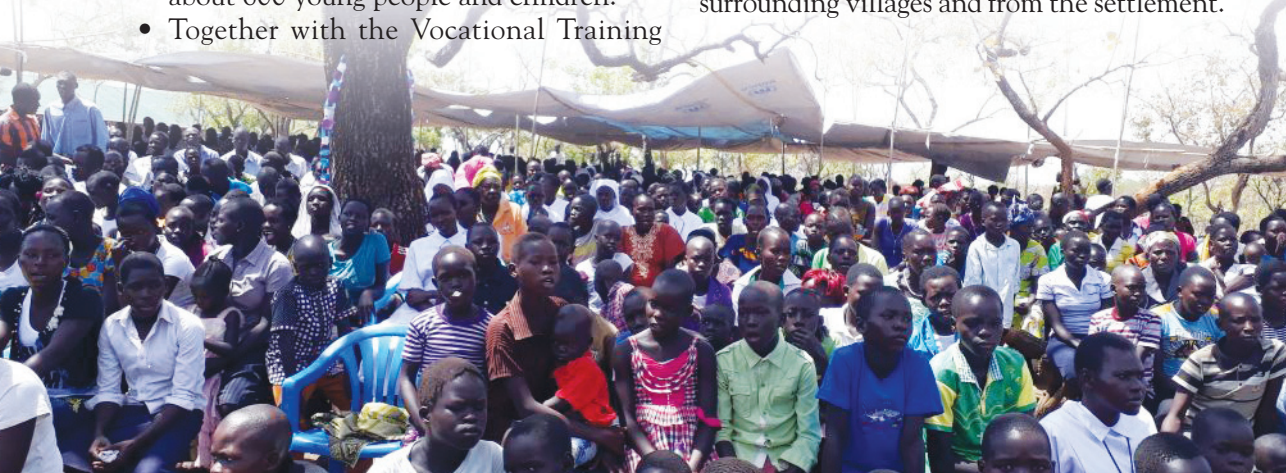
Centre, Agricultural Cooperatives are being organized in 20 villages around the settlement to give attention to refugees and local communities.

- There is a commission for the prevention and resolution of conflicts.
- Drilling of water wells is being undertaken.
- The installation of a community radio is also being dreamed of for 2020.

With regard to **Evangelization**, in the settlement there are already eight centres of evangelization, and visits to other settlements or refugee camps

are beginning. In Palabek more than 50% of refugees are Catholics.

The Salesian community is taking care of the recipients along with a very committed group of lay people. There are 6,100 children and young people, plus 300 families from surrounding villages and from the settlement.





Rose "I'm a teacher of kindergarten and primary school. When the war started in Pajok the soldiers arrived. They surrounded us and at that moment we started to hear gunshots everywhere. I ran home, and there was no one, so I went back to school, but when I arrived, I did not find them. I started running everywhere because the children were gone. I ran until I reached Ngomoromo, where I found some of my children, but others were arrested: one of my daughters was arrested and imprisoned. That's what happened at Pajok."



Moses "I come from Pajok. When the soldiers arrived, I had to leave my house that was destroyed. Only the elderly remained. They told us to leave and I told them it was just a poor hut. My wife and I fell to the ground in the bushes. They came back and laughed and said, 'These are old, we won't kill them, they will die because their children are gone and they have no help. Let's not waste our bullets.' So we elders remained, with nothing to eat and drink." "We escaped to Uganda and reached Ngomoromo. We had to move slowly. Now we try to survive:



Fr Lazar Arasu "I saw a small community of Christians praying under the trees. I approached the catechist, introduced myself and said, 'I am a priest and I want to celebrate Mass.' It was the day of Corpus Christi, 18 June 2017. In a few minutes, we prepared a wonderful Eucharistic celebration. At the end of the Mass, the catechist asked me to come back the following week. I looked around and answered, 'Of course, I will come.' Returning the following week, I found a group of nearly 400 people under a huge tree. I was moved. They told me they had not attended a Mass for almost a year. Since then I have started coming to the settlement almost every week." "86% of the camp's population consists of women, children and young people. And over 60% are either teenagers, or children. Obviously, there are children who are less than 3 years old; there are hundreds and thousands of them. These vulnerable young people who live in the camp are the motivation for which we are here, the motivation to commit ourselves to their education and evangelization, to take care of them and give them an integral formation."



there is no wood to cook, nor products to buy. We eat beans and polenta and when they finish we ask neighbours. Only God helps us stay alive."

Bishop I am very happy with the work of the Salesians because they answered very quickly to the pastoral needs of refugees. They are planning to set up schools and so the future of the new generations who have fled here is assured, because they will be educated and when they return to their country, they will have the responsibility to lead their country. Then they are building the technical school which is very useful for people because they can learn professional skills. I believe this is a holistic approach. We are not concerned only with the needs of the body, but also with those of the spirit. The biggest challenge I am facing, when reflecting on the war, is to understand how we can awaken to the sense of humanity, to being humane towards one another so that no one is a stranger in the company of another human being, because we are truly a unique species on this planet. And we should learn to live as one family, united, in harmony and in peace.

Testimony of Fr Papi Reddy, sdb

Father Papi Reddy is a young Salesian missionary from Guwahati Province, India (ING). Immediately after his priestly ordination, he was sent for the opening of the Salesian presence in the refugee settlement in Palabek, Uganda, in 2017. He is currently a missionary in South Sudan.



I'm Father Papi Reddy. I am Indian and I came to Uganda to work in the Palabek refugee camp. I come from the North-Eastern Province which is called the Guwahati Province. I am a new priest. I was ordained three months ago and I came as a new missionary. The place is called "Don Bosco Palabek refugee settlement" and is located on the border between Uganda and South Sudan, in the district of Lamwo. From the Ugandan border to South Sudan, there are only 40 km. There are 43,000 people in the camp. Most speak Acholi, Lutuku, Lango, Bari and a few Dinka. They come from the dioceses of Pajok and Torit in South Sudan.

A few months ago, while people were working in their fields, they heard shots and did not know exactly what to do inside their homes. They took the few children that were around and ran into the forest for two days without anything. When they reached the border between South Sudan and Uganda, the country was not ready to welcome them. After a few days, registration began and people started to arrive and this camp began to welcome a large number of people.

There are people who are coming even now for security problems, family problems, especially for education and food.

My experience in the camp in this short time has been strong and enriching. There were times when I sat with people and cried because their stories were so touching and moving. They do not have food, clothes.

They are worried about their children scattered in the camp. Some of their relatives died along the way. It was very hard to listen to these stories.

The most beautiful experience I had ... After two months that I was in the camp, on a Sunday I baptized 30 people in a small chapel that we called St Peter and Paul. After Mass, a blind woman came to me and asked me, "Father please open the Gospel of John and underline the verses in which he says, 'God has so loved the world that He gave His only Son.'" I was surprised as she was blind, she could not read or see. I did what she had asked me; I opened the Gospel, underlined the words and gave it to her. After a while, she took the Bible and went to the church entrance. Since Mass was over, people passed by; she stopped and invited every single person to join in a group, saying, 'God has so loved the world that He gave His only Son.' People sat down, listened to her and talked to her. For me it was one of the most beautiful experiences: what the woman did that special day was to catechize and lead more people to God. These people have a great deal of psychological suffering due to family problems, daily struggles in the camp. When someone talks to them about God, about forgiveness and love ... I looked at this woman and she was a great inspiration for me.

She was blind, and we did not expect a blind person to do something so great. This



woman was full of God's strength and went around spreading the good news. It was one of the most beautiful experiences that allowed me to see that God had sent me here with a purpose: to do something for these people, even in devastating situations. This was a huge encouragement for me.

Every Sunday this woman comes and we see each other: 'Father, how are you?' She repeats it also in the Acholi language. And this is the most beautiful experience.

My saddest experience in the camp ... I never use the car in the camp so people do not think there are rich Fathers. For this, I take the bicycle. I go, sit down, talk to them, move about.

After three and a half months of my stay, I created a group of young people in the camp. There were some young people who came to me and told me, "Father we need to talk to you". And I replied, "Certainly, no problem."

They took me aside and asked me, "Can we confide in you?" And I said, "Yes, I'm here to help you." They told me, "Seeing how you help the young we want to take you to a place where there are two guys who are very sick." And I said, "OK." They took me to a place where I opened a chapel called Domenico Savio. When I arrived there, there were two young boys lying down without clothes and without a proper place to live. I asked, "What happened? How is it possible that they are in these conditions?" "Father, they have no one. They arrived here after two days of walking in the forest. They have no food, they have no clothes and they are practically dying." When I ap-

proached, I sat down and could not help but cry.

I did not know what to do. I immediately went home to get something to eat for them. I took some clothes from the container and gave them the clothes. I realized that they were fearful and closed. I sat down. I listened to them and talked to them.

As I listened to their stories of how they had escaped from the war, from the situation in South Sudan, how they had arrived here, I did not really know what to do. I was sitting and crying. After a while, they told me, "Father, thank you, thank you for coming.

You came to us as God to help us." And I was very touched. I really felt why God sent me to this place. I believe there is a purpose for everything.

This dramatic but beautiful experience helped me to strengthen the bond with young

people. Now when I go

around the young call me, "Abuna, hello! Abuna, hi! Come, come!" And I'm happy to have learned their language. I celebrate Mass in their language. I can converse at a basic level in their language.

They are very happy, they are touched. You feel heart-to-heart in talking with them. You really can touch their lives and they are happy.

For me, it is beautiful and I thank God for this and for the experience I have had. I promise God that I will give my maximum as a missionary in this refugee camp in Palabek. I say to my superiors, "Please do not send me away too quickly from here." *Deo Gratias.*



Testimony of Fr Charles Taban, sdb

Charles is a Salesian priest and comes from Wau, South Sudan. He met the Salesians in Kenya, to where he had fled following the civil war in his country. At the moment, he is Economist in El Obeid (Sudan). He is very good at getting along with the young people in their environment.



The story of my vocation

We had heard so many war stories, but in the majority of these stories, the war was always fought in a faraway land. Although we had seen displaced people in my city in the 1990s, and had already heard horrible stories of bloodshed and seen the unmistakable scars of violence on their faces; and also the suffering of their malnourished children, I could not imagine that such a situation would have been at the door of our house in January 1998 when a real war reached our hearth and took place before our eyes. They were no longer the war movies we watched on television screens, which to see we sometimes pushed and shoved each other, but a real experience, to make the blood run cold.

It was in this heart-breaking confusion that I left my house with some of my friends, thinking we would be back in a couple of hours, as we were sure the rebels would re-

gain control and the order would return very soon to our city ... But that turned out to be only an illusion. While the news about the horrors perpetrated by the government's security organs, about the ruthless murders of young people kept coming, we convinced ourselves that it was time to escape and to give up the dream of returning home soon.

Encouraged by others, we had to travel hundreds of kilometres through the bush to a destination that could offer us peace and survival. Our journey went beyond my wildest imagination. Often my companions and I travelled on foot. We soon learned that it was better to walk in the evening and at night to avoid being captured by government forces or to be forced to join the various groups of rebels who were active in the territory. Walking at night, despite having the advantage of being cooler, had its risks, since wild animals – especially carnivores – are more active during those hours. We learned to recognize the different sounds of the night and we knew when to stop, when to change direction and when there was no danger and so proceed. Another advantage of walking at night was that snakes (especially poisonous ones) were usually not about. It soon became evident that life could not continue thus for long. After five months of living in the rebel-controlled areas and risking being forced to join the army and fight alongside the rebels, I decided to seek a better life in East Africa and so Kenya became my destination. After several days of





a tiring journey on foot and, from time to time, on the back of a truck, I finally found myself in the cold city of Nairobi with nothing to defend myself from the cold, except the love of God that had accompanied me in all those difficult days.

Even the parts of this voyage done in the trucks were rather adventurous. We usually travelled on the back of trucks transporting livestock. The cattle were on the truck bed and people stacked on top, clinging to the metal structure that originally had to support a tarpaulin ... The risk of being perched up there could be seen in this incident. Once, one of my friends was distracted and did not realize that the truck we were traveling on would be passing very close under a thorny acacia tree. He quickly lowered himself, but he was not quick enough, as he would discover later that night. In fact, when he was about to go to bed, while trying to take off his pants, he tripped over them and fell to the ground. What had happened? During the passage of the truck close to those branches, a sharp acacia thorn had crossed his pants, had slipped into his gluteal muscle and kept his pants firmly “anchored”, in a way that he did not realize all day! But now let's return to Nairobi ... After a sleepless night, due to the cold of the city, a good Samaritan found me and took me to his house for two days, while he helped me get in touch with various people. The last contact we tried was with the Salesians of Nairobi, who welcomed me without delay and treated me not as a stranger, but as a young man who desperately needed attention. Even though I was a foreigner and a refugee, I never felt excluded, but treated like any other Kenyan boy.

At the beginning of 1999, I was sent to Embu for secondary school and there began a new phase of experiences in my life. The family spirit lived by both the Salesians and the students of Don Bosco Embu ignited a kind of fire in my heart that led me to feel

completely at ease. In Embu, I never felt a stranger, but welcomed: the friendly conversation with the Salesians, the little gestures of kindness and love showed to me by the Salesians, ignited the desire in my heart to be like them, to be in turn close and attentive to other young people, in need of my attention.

The turning point in my vocation history came with the Easter Triduum of 2001 during a youth retreat in which I participated, in Nairobi. The experience of reflection and prayer allowed me to look at my life with a sense of gratitude to God for His protection during those days in the savannah of South Sudan as I walked among the land mines, the wild animals, on an empty stomach, without clean water.

He guided me and protected me on my way to my new home in Kenya and on many other occasions when He took care of me. The retreat, in the end, challenged me to do something tangible to express my gratitude to God. The tangible expression of my gratitude to God has become my final decision to consecrate my life to God as Salesian. The generosity and hospitality of many Kenyan families in the various places I lived in those days and the care, love and words of encouragement I received from the Salesians continued to convince me of the love God has shown me and it also contributed to nourishing my vocational journey towards a life of consecration for young people. The challenges encountered during my years of initial formation have been difficult, but the desire to become a Salesian to serve the less privileged young people has continually motivated me.

Now as a Salesian, the challenges of living my vocation today are different and more difficult than those of the days of initial formation, yet the Grace of God continues to guide me and the effort to remain faithful makes the difference. ■

Testimony of Daniel Kolonga, sdb

Daniel Kolonga is originally from Torit, South Sudan. He met the Salesians at the refugee camp in Kakuma, in the north of Kenya, where he had arrived as a boy with his grandmother, fleeing the war. He was impressed by the Salesians and their work and asked to become like them. To do so, he returned to South Sudan. At the moment, he is studying Philosophy in Nairobi, in preparation for his mission.

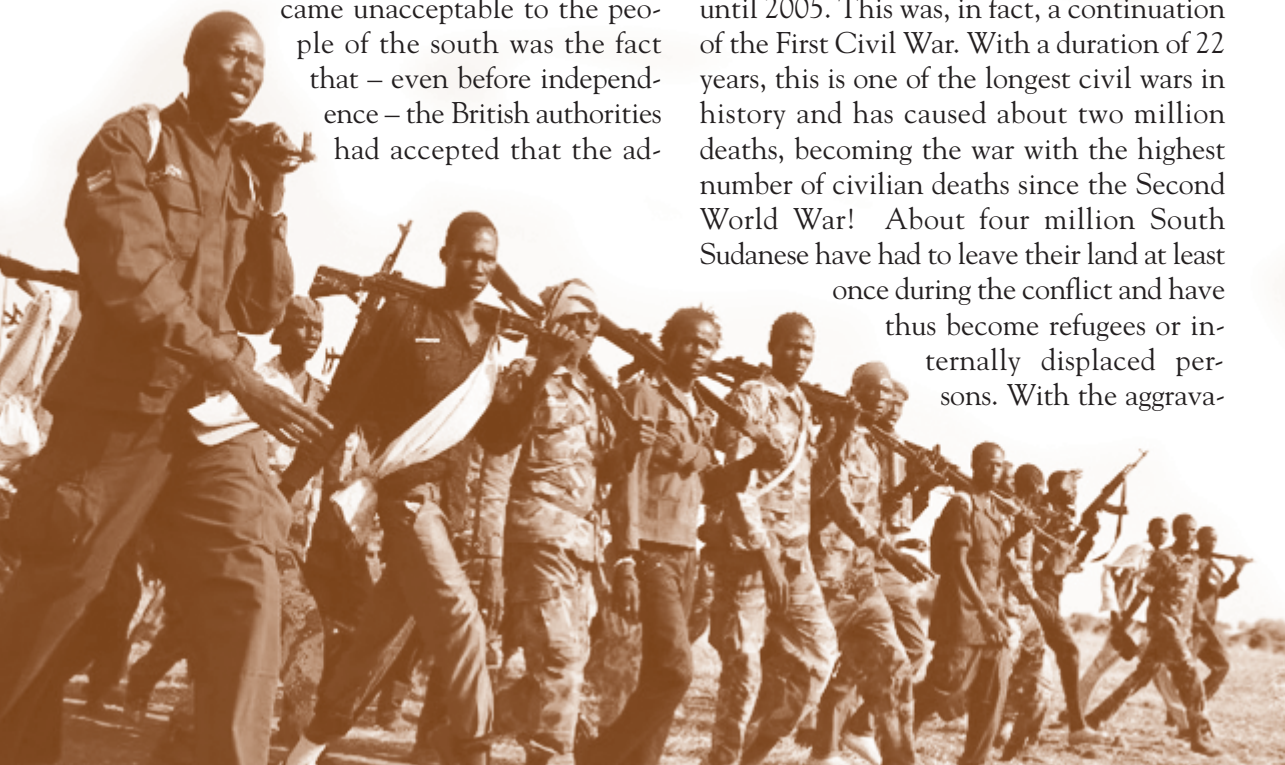


Salesian because I met witnesses

My country is at war “ever since” ... The first Sudanese civil war started in 1955 and lasted until 1972. It was a legacy of British domination and saw the “rebels” of southern Sudan fight against Sudanese from the north. Those in the south demanded more representation and more regional autonomy in the newly created state. In fact, the civil war began even before the Independence celebration, on January 1, 1956! What became unacceptable to the people of the south was the fact that – even before independence – the British authorities had accepted that the ad-

ministrative positions in the south were covered by Sudanese in the north, while there were capable administrators among the Sudanese in the south. Arabic was also imposed as a language in the South, where the language used for education had been English.

When the war ended in 1972, many in the south were still unhappy and the situation worsened until the Second Sudanese Civil War broke out in 1983, which lasted until 2005. This was, in fact, a continuation of the First Civil War. With a duration of 22 years, this is one of the longest civil wars in history and has caused about two million deaths, becoming the war with the highest number of civilian deaths since the Second World War! About four million South Sudanese have had to leave their land at least once during the conflict and have thus become refugees or internally displaced persons. With the aggrava-





tion of the political situation in Sudan due to the civil war, life had become so difficult I was forced to seek refuge somewhere. As a result, I escaped and found myself with my grandmother in the refugee camp of Kakuma, in the northern part of Kenya. There were people of many nationalities who lived in the camp for the same reason: social and political instability in their respective countries.



imation programs such as seminars, workshops, peace promotion programs, acquisition of life skills, theatrical performances, choirs and musical parties; and many other educational activities that kept the young involved and engaged. Although the other UN agencies also organized some of these activities, such

We settled in under the care of UNHCR which provided free education, health care, food, shelter and security within the camp. The food was given in rations. In addition to what was passed on to us by the UNHCR, there was nothing else, so it was not a life of well-being and cheerfulness, but barely enough to survive. We managed to survive with three kilos of food per person for two weeks or sometimes six kilos a month of both corn and wheat flour. This implies that one had to eat only once a day to arrive until the next distribution. Life was very hard, but it was better than living among the bullets.

UNHCR was not the only agency serving refugees. The Salesians of Don Bosco also provided another type of services, which were rather special because the Salesians were the only agency that lived with refugees in the camp. They took care of the spiritual side of human growth through a parish with ten chapels scattered around the camp. They also offered free technical courses. Furthermore, they helped us young people, to grow socially, humanly and to accept our identity through training courses and an-

as theatrical festivals and sports, it was not the same thing, because we could see the difference between the NGOs, who carried out these activities for financial reasons, and the Salesians who organized everything with much effort, but for free, with a sincere concern for our growth and development.

There were also many moments of formation of young people for the education to faith through catechism, biblical studies, prayer groups and even moments of house-to-house prayer with the members of the family, especially in the evening hours. The culmination of all these activities for me was when a Salesian baptized me in 2005. This was the beginning of my Christian life. I began to be involved in many Church activities, such as visiting patients in hospitals and also helping others in communities, through community work with the youth group.

And right in the midst of these activities and in the interaction with the Salesians, I felt the call to share my life with others just like those Salesians who had dedicated themselves to us and helped us to accept our-

selves and feel ourselves to be complete human beings with dignity, faith, convictions, values and stories to tell. It was very difficult for me to say that I admired them and aspired to become Salesians, because I was afraid of being misunderstood and not being accepted by the Salesians, given that I was a refugee. However, I sought advice from the director and pastor of that time. After several interviews and prayer, he decided to start a vocational group in the camp. I joined the group and, together with a friend of mine, we led the group with the help of the catechist. It was a lively group; we worked very hard together to foster the growth of our Christian faith. We prayed the Rosary together every morning before the Eucharist and then we went to school.

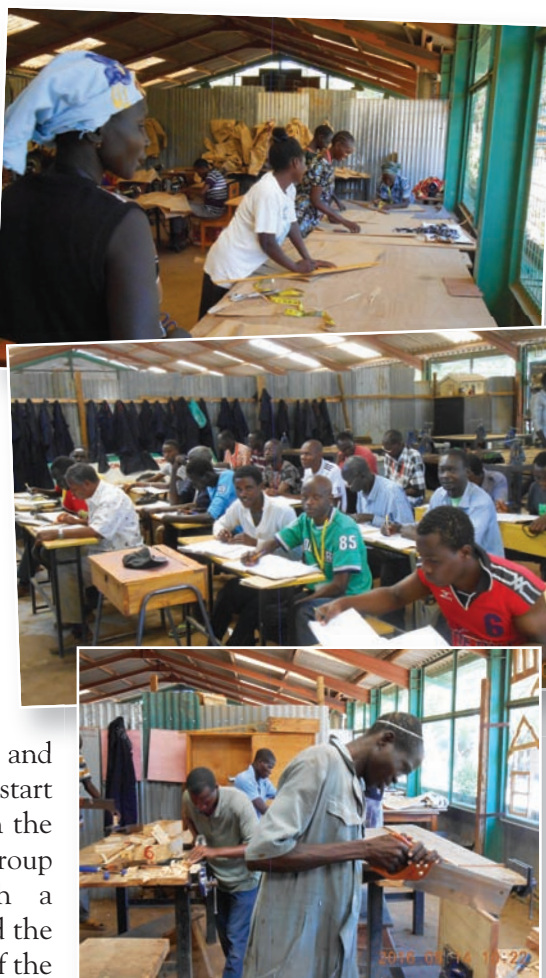
When I finally expressed the desire to become a Salesian, I was told that I should enter the Congregation in my country. Thanks to the connections established by the Rector, I was able to become a Salesian in South Sudan. Although it was difficult to convince my family about my vocation, finally after four years, they agreed to write the letter of recommendation from the family, as it was a requirement to enter the Congregation. The Superior of South Sudan then met my mother. Other Salesians met some members of my extended family. Finally, with five other

South Sudanese youths, we were the first group to begin pre-novitiate formation in Gumbo-Juba, South Sudan.

As a Salesian, today, finding myself among the young, I am grateful to the confreres who lived their Salesian vocation joyfully among us in the refugee camp, giving us hope for the future, reaching out to others, regardless of our troubled history. Indeed, God's call is for all those who respond with joy. Without a doubt, vocational accompaniment is crucial. I remember a Salesian who advised me to be

patient for three years when my family refused to accept my choice because they believed that, being the first born, I had to help my father take care of my younger siblings. It was not easy, but I thank the confreres who accompanied and guided me on my vocational journey. Their guide shaped my understanding of religious life and purified my initial vocational desire.

My vocation now means to be with the young, because I find in them the meaning of my life because it is through them that I can witness the love of God, which I have truly experienced through Salesians in the refugee camp. Reflecting on my vocational history, it is evident that the fact of living joyfully our Salesian vocation also edifies many other people. ■





Two Acholi angels: David and Gildo, martyrs

In the areas where there are several refugee camps of the Acholi people who flee from South Sudan to Uganda, there is already a tradition of evangelization, sanctity and martyrdom: that of the young Acholi martyrs.

It was 1911 when the Comboni missionaries erected their first mission in Gulu, in northern Uganda, in central Africa. Soon their action expanded into various directions in the country, which at the time was a British colony. In 1915, they founded the Kitgum mission station. But here the Fathers found the hostility of the Protestants, who arrived with the British, and the distrust of the local population.

Baptized and confirmed

Around the fire, the village's meeting point, the missionaries met the various clans of the Acholi, the tribe that lives in this region. Gradually, the distrust of the people towards them dissolved, so much so that the missionaries were seen as very differently from the Protestants. In short, the Acholi sent their children to Kitgum to learn Catholic catechism and receive baptism.

At the beginning of 1916, the first nine solemn baptisms were administered. It was a great joy, because the missionaries had gone there to convert souls to Jesus Christ and to baptize them in His Name, in the Catholic Church. In that year, from different villages, **David Okelo** and **Gildo Irwa** came to the mission. Father Gambaretto, one of

the missionaries, remembers how Gildo, who was still a child, had come to him joyfully.

The two boys attended catechism, opened themselves to the faith and became attached to Jesus, and in the end, they decided to be for Him. On June 16, 1916, they were baptized; on October 15th of the same year, always together, they received Jesus in the first Communion and were confirmed. David was between 14 and 16 years old, Gildo between 10 and 12: their age was calculated more or less by guessing, by the missionaries, as there were no written documents to certify their birthdate.

Having received the Sacraments, David returned to his village for some time; but one day, he returned to the mission to ask for money to help his brother Anthony's family, who from time to time went to teach catechism at Paimol and died there. During that visit, he asked the Fathers to take the place left vacant by Anthony and to be a catechist. His request was accepted and for a

few months, he went to Paimol to make Jesus and His Gospel known. Little Gildo, on the other hand, spent most of his time in the mission helping the Sisters with his small services.

In 1917, an epidemic of smallpox burst among the population, with the sorcerers of different villages invoking the spirits to ward off evil. But these meetings spread the contagion further.

Thus, at the mission of Kitgum a *lazaretto* also was opened.



We'll be together

On 1 November 1917, Gildo asked to be joined to David in his work as a catechist in Paimol. The two boys told Father Gambaretto, "If you want, we'll go to Paimol." The Father described the difficulties, the hunger and the barbarity of many members of the population, and concluded, "Come tomorrow. Meanwhile, let's think about it." The next day, the two introduced themselves with their mats and asked to be catechists as if they were asking for a great grace. Father Gambaretto replied, "So, are you prepared for Paimol? You know the people in that place are bad and you, Gildo, are so small!"

"But David is big and we will be together."

"But if they kill you?"

"We will go to Heaven."

"There is also Father Antonio," David added, "and I do not fear death. Did not Jesus die for us?"

The missionary was moved.

"Father, do not be afraid," said Gildo, "Jesus and Mary are with us."

The Father offered Catechisms, Rosaries and booklets to the two boys who, reciting together a Hail Mary, left for their mission.

In Paimol they were hosted by Boniface Okot, the chief catechist, and greeted with respect by the village authorities.

The day after, they began their work as catechists. David, together with Gildo, at the beginning of each day, gathered those who came to catechism, for morning prayers, followed by the Rosary to Our Lady, since the two catechists could not participate in daily Holy Mass. During the day, David and Gildo went from one village to another to proclaim Jesus, to teach catechism, to make Him known and loved. During the work breaks of their older "disciples", they taught catechism to children under a tree, or in the open plain. Gildo was extremely helpful to David in gathering the little ones. He knew how to talk about Jesus with particular charm, and even entertain them with funny games.

On Sundays, they participated together in the Holy Mass, always receiving Communion, after making their Confession to the missionary and they grew in union with Jesus, in ever stronger love for Him, ready for any good work and any sacrifice. They distinguished themselves, amid the vulgar customs of some of their compatriots, for the singular purity and goodness of their lives, so that they appeared like two angels in flesh and blood, descended from heaven.

The children of the village, little by little, were conquered by their simple testimony. They began to build a small chapel, and so the Christian community was slowly born, at the beginning of the *plantatio Ecclesiae*, by the two catechists.

Not because of the words of the whites

There are no difficulties with the population and life goes on serenely, with the first fruits of good that are about to be collected. Then suddenly, in October 1918, the struggle between the chiefs of the tribes of the area is unleashed and the sorcerers become more and more evil against Catholicism, the foreign religion, as they say. Between Saturday 19 and Sunday 20 October 1918, the main catechist Boniface arrives in Paimol to spend the Sunday with David and Gildo. But a violent agitation breaks out and hatred is unleashed against them. The true *odium fidei* is palpable in the air. There follows an exhausting discussion in which the boys affirm, "We are here not because the words of the white people, but because of our faith". Boniface tells them to flee, but David and Gildo reply, "We have worked in the same field for Our Lord Jesus Christ, we will die together for Him". Boniface manages to get on his bicycle and escape. Gildo and Davide remain.

On Monday, October 21, 1918, around 4:00 am, five fierce violent men arrived at the hut where the two boys were sleeping. After beating them, the men dragged them out



forcefully. David cried, “Help ... I will not see my mother again!” Gildo comforted him, “Why are you crying? If they kill you, you’re innocent, a friend of our God.”

They were wounded, bloodied. David, overcoming his despair, replied, “I am here not to take wealth from anyone, but to make my faith known and live in Jesus Christ, Son of God.”

Dragged out of the village, he was killed with the stroke of a spear.

Gildo protested, “I too am a religious teacher like David. We have worked together and together we must die.” He too was taken out of the town to be killed. With the last breath, blood rising in his throat, he declared, “Now we will go to Heaven.” Their executioners buried the bodies summarily in the soil still imbued with their blood.

Mons. Vignato collected what remained of their corpses. But when he came to Paimol, he found a large number of people. Many of them testified that they had become Christians

on the occasion of the double martyrdom of David and Gildo and still spoke to the Prelate of the two very young martyrs.

Their remains were then buried in the church of Kitgum where they still are today, at the foundation of the Catholic community that they too have helped to generate.

The blood of the martyrs, wrote Tertullian, is the seed of new Christians. This is true even in Africa.

The cause of beatification was started in 1962 and resumed in 1996. On 20 October 2002, World Mission Day, the Holy Father John Paul II enlisted among the Blessed of Heaven David Okelo and Gildo Irwa, martyrs, because in their short existence they loved the Lord Jesus and helped others love the Lord Jesus and were immolated for Him.

Both are the work of Divine Grace and of their unconditional response to the Lord Jesus.

Paolo Riso

St. Josephine Bakhita

The young Sudanese woman, Josephine Bakhita, is at the same time a paradigm of the suffering and current state of the Sudanese and South Sudanese people: conflicts, human trafficking, forced movements; and also the sign of Christian hope: the profound dignity of every human who is born – being son or daughter of God, redeemed by Christ. Even that Christ who taught Bakhita to love, to welcome, is the same Christ who today, on the African continent, encourages the solidarity of thousands of Christians and non-Christians who welcome and are close to those who have lost everything.

Bakhita was kidnapped between the age of seven and nine, from the areas of Darfur, which are still today areas of suffering, vio-

lations of human rights, refugee camps. She was sold in the markets of El Obeid and Khartoum, where she experienced physical and moral humiliations and the suffering of slavery. In the Sudanese capital, Khartoum, Bakhita was bought by the Italian vice-consul, Callixtus Legnani. For the first time since the day she was kidnapped, she had the pleasant surprise that no one was using the whip against her, giving her orders; instead, she was treated with love and cordiality in the Vice Consul’s residence. Bakhita experienced, for the first time, peace, warmth and joy, even if with a veiled nostalgia for her own family that, perhaps, she had lost forever.

Bakhita says, “During all these years in

which I stayed in that house [of a Turkish general, her fourth owner], I do not remember a day passed without wounds or humiliations." When a wound from the whip began to heal, other blows rained over me." She says that the most terrifying of all her memories was when she (together with other female slaves) was marked by a process of scarification similar to tattooing. They cut her skin and filled her wounds with salt to ensure permanent scars. They made a total of 114 intricate designs on her breasts, abdomen and her right arm.

When the Vice Consul and his family returned to Italy, Bakhita chose to follow them. The young African woman, who had reached the age of majority, enjoyed the freedom of choice guaranteed by Italian law. Bakhita went through the catechumenate and, after receiving the sacraments of initiation, experienced the call to be a religious and to give herself to the Lord in the Institute of St. Magdalene of Canossa, whose Sisters had taken care of her and had taught her the faith. She entered the novitiate and made her first profession in 1896. She was then assigned to the house of Schio where she spent the rest of her life. Aging, she lived long and painful years of illness. Mother Bakhita continued to bear witness to the good and to Christian hope. To those who visited her and asked how she was, she answered, "As the Master wishes." During her agony, her memories of the terrible days of her slavery reawakened and, more than once, she told the nurse who assisted her,



"Please, loosen my chains: they are too tight."

It was our Blessed Mother Mary who liberated her from pain. Her last words were, "I am so happy ... Our Lady, Our Lady", as if to bear witness of her encounter with the Mother of the Lord.

A young student once asked Bakhita, "What would you do if you had to meet your kidnappers?" She answered without hesitation, "If I had to meet those who kidnapped me, and even those who tortured me, I would kneel and kiss their hands because if these things had not happened, I would not have been a Christian and a religious."

Bakhita had come to know that God, whom she had already experienced in her heart without knowing who He was, since she was a child. Seeing the sun, the moon and the stars, she would say to herself, "Who could be the Master of these beautiful things?" And she felt a great desire to see Him, to know Him and to pay Him homage.

Bakhita's legacy is that transformation is possible through suffering. Her story of liberation from physical slavery enlightens also all those who find meaning and inspiration in her life for their own liberation from spiritual slavery. After her beatification, Pope John Paul II, while visiting Sudan, said: "Rejoice, all Africa! Bakhita has come back to you. Sudan's daughter, sold into slavery as live merchandise and yet still free. Free with the freedom of the saints." Her whole life story was an outstanding example of Christian hope.

Raymond Ladu, SDB



PALABEK PROJECT



In the settlement of Palabek, there are **8 large Christian communities** that include about 6,000 Catholics. Only **3 of these communities have a chapel, a simple one made of corrugated metal sheets.**

A chapel can accommodate between 500 and 600 people. The community contributes with its workforce to build these centres of worship and of community meeting. **The cost of the material for each construction:**

metal sheets, wood, nails, is € 9,500. Therefore, the current project is to offer Christians in the refugee camp a worthy though simple centre for celebrations. Palabek would need to build five such centres. Beyond Palabek, also in other refugee camps, where there are Congolese and South Sudanese refugees, they are requesting the pastoral presence of the Salesians. This project takes to heart a field in which, normally, humanitarian agencies cannot help.

**We thank
every Province
in advance for
their collaboration
in this project**

For your help, we ask that you can collect in your Provinces to the account:

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*May the Lord bless everyone
who contributes to this project.*



O God, Father of all,

in your love,

you remind us about the joy that we experience
in giving and receiving hospitality.

Help us to open our hearts to welcome everyone,
especially those who are far
from their country and their dear ones.

We present to you in particular the situation
of the migrants, refugees and internally displaced people
who are in Africa.

Grant that our hearts may allow your Spirit
to enlarge them, so that we too may
recognise angels in those we welcome
– the messengers of your presence –
whom you continue
to send into the world.

Amen.



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