



from Poland and Italy, many of whom are still working alongside local confreres in the cities of Vilnius and Kaunas.

The social and religious circumstances were strongly influenced by the years of Soviet occupation, and particularly among young people there is a strong tendency to relativism, materialism and religious indifference. And this is precisely the setting for Salesian pastoral activities.

## Vilnius

The capital of Lithuania has a population of 600,000, divided between ethnic Lithuanians (60%), Poles (30%) and Russians (10%), often at loggerheads with one another. The Salesians are in the working-class suburb of Lazdynai, where they have the St John Bosco parish with 45,000 inhabitants. The parish ministry is bilingual, Lithuanian and Polish, and in addition to the typical work of catechetics for young people, and charitable support, service to parishioners, the parish has become known over the years for its youth focus through the weekend oratory, after-school care for children in need, the summer camps and day activities, youth centre, youth and pastoral ministry groups, and religious education in

state schools. Another activity regarded as important and much appreciated throughout Lithuania is the Salesian Bulletin, published in Lithuanian since 1927 and distributed free to all readers. The Salesians also provide spiritual assistance for the Lithuanian Don Bosco Volunteers group.

## Kaunas

The Salesian community at Kaunas is situated in the poor suburb of Palemonas, once famous for its industrial setting which has now fallen into disuse. Our Lady of the Rosary Parish, with 10,000 inhabitants, does its best to meet the religious, social and financial needs of the people. Besides the normal activities of the parish, catechetics, and Caritas, we could highlight the other more typical Salesian daily oratory and recreational summer camps held both in the parish and in the countryside. A great treasure is the common effort between the Salesian community and the Salesian Sisters, who run an after-school program each day for children in need and manage the teaching of the Catholic religion in the two local primary schools. Linked to the Salesian community there is also a small group of Salesian Cooperators and another group, ADMA.

## Prospects for the Future

The various youth activities result in the Salesian charism being increasingly more appreciated and better known. Young people have shown much interest and not a few want to help as leaders. Also thanks to the Salesian Bulletin making us more widely known nationally, we have taken in several young people who want to learn more about Salesian life, though for the moment there are no new vocations. We are confident for the future, provided we can strengthen our works and our visibility. Given the amount of work facing us, the physical forces of the Salesians operating in Lithuania are meagre. A major difficulty in strengthening the Salesian presence in Lithuania is that the language is not easy and it requires several years for someone to be able to work independently. Moreover, the shortage of personnel is being felt everywhere and sending people abroad is not so straightforward a solution. The Lithuanian people, who have undergone various occupations, have always had to defend their identity tenaciously and this also affects full acceptance of outsiders, especially if they are far from the local mentality. . . it is a challenge for the Salesian future in this country: being able to fit in in a visible way, while respecting local traditions and values.

