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# SALESIAN SPOTLIGHT

**E-NEWS CHRISTMAS 2025**



**OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE SALESIAN MISSIONS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA FOR 36 YEARS**



**May the Blessings of the Divine Child  
 and the Love of His Mother  
 be yours, at Christmas  
 and every day of the New Year.  
 From all at Salesian Missions.**



*“And she wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room at the inn.”*

**Dear Friends** Somebody asked me once whether the greater suffering was with physical or mental pain. At the time I said mental pain, but I am not so sure anymore. When we lose a loved one the pain never goes away and when we are ill and have physical pain, and there is no relief, life becomes so difficult, especially if we do not have help, and we can almost think that God has abandoned us.

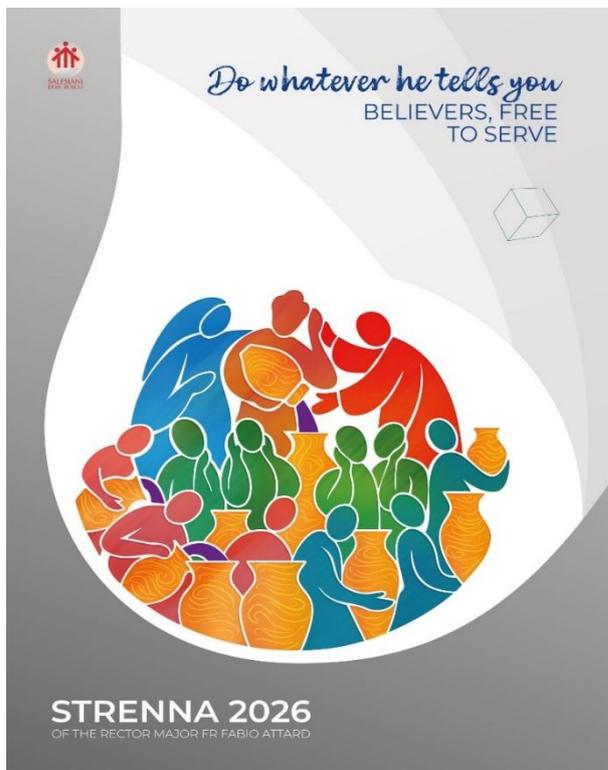
And so, once again, as we prepare to celebrate the beautiful season of Christmas, the re-enactment of the Birth of a Special Child – a Child Who would become our Saviour, let us try to do so with love and peace in our hearts. St Peter Chrysologus tells us that “God wished to be born as a little Babe, in order that He might teach us to love and not fear Him.”

Whatever your circumstances, I would love everyone who reads this newsletter to have a wonderful Christmas. And so my thoughts this year are with all of those who have lost a loved one and are mourning; with all those who cannot buy a gift for their children because they have been retrenched or have no work; with all those mothers who suffer as a result of the abuse of alcohol, drugs or gambling; with all those who are ill and in hospital; with all those who are lonely and long for communication from their loved ones; and with all of you who by your prayers and donations help us to support and encourage all of these wonderful people. I pray that our Blessed Lady will comfort you in your need and that the Baby Jesus in the crib will lift your spirits and fill your hearts with joy, as you look on Him and think of Him.

Special thanks to all of you, for your wonderful support and prayers during the year. We need you, so please don't go away! Pray for me as I do for you. A Blessed Christmas and much love to you all. Denise Hards



# THE STRENNA FOR 2026



(ANS – Rome) The poster for STRENNA 2026, with the theme "DO WHATEVER HE TELLS YOU, Believers, free to serve", visually recounts the passage from the GOSPEL about the Wedding at Cana. Following the four-part structure proposed by the Rector Major, the illustration highlights:

**Mary (at left) looks and perceives the need; she turns that awareness toward Don Bosco (centre), representing the Salesian mission's faith-filled discernment and compassionate action, and together they look to Jesus, who points the way; the foreground shows the servants — listening, choosing, and finally sharing the transformed wine from the jars — so that the community receives the abundance of God.**

Colours and grouping emphasize communion, service, and attentiveness: Mary's gaze awakens awareness (TO LOOK), the presence of Christ gives depth and direction (TO LISTEN), the servants' free and trusting gestures reveal interior assent (TO CHOOSE), and their act of carrying the wine manifests joyful service (TO ACT).

Near the top of the composition, the small floating cube serves as a subtle provocation — a reminder of how we can sometimes allow

ourselves to be confined by inner fears, rigid attitudes, or even by new ideologies and modern systems that promise progress yet quietly limit our openness to the Spirit and to genuine human freedom.

The whole image is a reminder that when love listens to Christ's word, the heart finds freedom to choose, to serve, and to share God's transforming joy.

## THE PRINTING PRESS AT VALDOCCO



In October 1861, Don Bosco started the procedures to open a Printers Workshop in the Oratory. The government presented obstacles and objections, but eventually granted permission.

Precisely **on 2 January 1862**, after several attempts, Don Bosco obtained government permission for the Printers Workshop. Typesetting, printing and rotary press were run by young apprentices under the direction of the master printer Federico Oreglia. Don Bosco began his great publishing work.

The Printing press books and dictionaries. In **1876** Don Bosco also founded a branch in Sampierdarena, Genoa and in **August 1877** he started the Salesian Bulletin.

After the early days of the Workshop, the first real printing press was built in **1883**, where the editions usually printed outside Turin were produced. The print shop was in operation until 2012, when it was closed in the aftermath of the celebrations for the 150th anniversary of its foundation. Since 2013, antique machines have been on display there, recreating the environment of the typography as it was in Don Bosco's time.



### MAMMA MARGARET

Behind every great saint stands a mentor, and behind Don Bosco stood a woman whose quiet strength, unwavering faith, and maternal genius sculpted not just a son, but an entire movement that would transform millions of lives. Mamma Margaret – Margherita Occhiena – was far more than Don Bosco's mother. She was the first teacher, spiritual guide, co-architect of his educational vision, and the living embodiment of the Preventive System that became the hallmark of Salesian education worldwide.



## Mary Help of Christians Primary School Christmas Concert - Booyens



### Salesian Institute Youth Projects

NO means NO – Stop harming our women and children. Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is a devastating reality in South Africa, affecting millions of women and children every year and day. Raising awareness is crucial to challenge harmful behaviours, break the cycle of abuse, and empower survivors to speak out. By standing together, educating communities, and promoting respect and accountability, we can protect the vulnerable and create safer spaces for all. Every act of awareness brings us one step closer to a society where no one has to live in fear. Be an ally. Speak up. Purple is the colour of support. See something. Say something. ACT NOW



### MANZINI HIGH SCHOOL eSWATINI

We welcome Mr Mabila, the new principal of Manzini Salesian High school. (Third from the left.)

### BOOYSENS, JOHANNESBURG

On Sunday 16 November, in the chapel of the Provincial House in Booyens, Johannesburg, four new Salesian Cooperators - Nathalie, Innocent, Quida and Julian - made their promises in the presence of Father Bongzi Nhleko, Delegate for the Salesian Family of the AFM Vice-Province. Sister Cecelia Motanya, FMA Provincial in South Africa, and Imelda Mace, Coordinator of Salesian Cooperators in AFM, also attended the celebration. In his homily, Father Nhleko encouraged the new Salesian Cooperators to imitate Don Bosco in the search for souls.



# Pope Leo XIV: ‘Defeating hunger is the path to peace’

Pope Leo XIV visits the headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in Rome to mark World Food Day and the 80th anniversary of the organization’s founding. In his address he reaffirms the Holy See’s closeness to the institution and calls for a shared global commitment to end hunger and malnutrition.



## “WHOEVER SUFFERS FROM HUNGER IS MY BROTHER”

Choosing to speak both in Spanish and in English, the Pope said that the fight against hunger “is not only a political or economic task but a profoundly human and moral duty.” “Whoever suffers from hunger is not a stranger,” he said. “He is my brother, and I must help him without delay.”

He recalled that eighty years after the FAO’s creation, millions of people still lack adequate food and nutrition.

“Ending these evils,” he said, “requires the contribution of all: governments, institutions, civil society, and every individual person.”

*Leave no one behind*” — calls all people to act together.

“At a time marked by division and indifference, unity through cooperation is not just an ideal but a duty,” he said. “Only by joining hands can we build a future in which food security is a right, not a privilege.”

He paid special tribute to women, whom he described as “the silent architects of survival, the first to sow hope and the careful stewards of creation.”

Recognizing their contribution, he said, is “not only a matter of justice, but a guarantee of a more humane and lasting food system.”

## RENEWING MULTILATERAL COOPERATION

Pope Leo reaffirmed the importance of multilateralism and dialogue among nations, urging that the voices of the poor be heard directly. “We must build a vision that allows every actor in the international community to respond effectively to the genuine needs of those we are called to serve,” he said.

He also made a heartfelt appeal for the many peoples suffering hunger and violence in Ukraine, Gaza, Haiti, Afghanistan, Mali, the Central African Republic, Yemen, and South Sudan, insisting that “the international community cannot look the other way.”

## “GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT”

Ending his address, the Holy Father quoted Jesus’ words to His disciples, “*Give them something to eat*” (Mk 6:37). This Gospel command, he added, “remains a pressing challenge for the international community.”

“Do not tire of asking God,” he concluded, “for the courage and the energy to work for a justice that will yield lasting and beneficial results. You can always count on the solidarity of the Holy See and of the entire Church, which stands ready to serve the poorest and most disadvantaged throughout the world.”

## A COLLECTIVE MORAL FAILURE

Citing current data that show over 673 million people go to bed hungry and 2.3 billion lack a nutritious diet, the Pope said these are not abstract numbers but “broken lives and mothers unable to feed their children.”

He denounced “an economy without a soul” and a system of resource distribution that leaves vast populations in misery, calling the persistence of hunger in an age of abundance “a collective moral failure and a historical fault.”

## “FOOD MUST NEVER BE A WEAPON”

Pope Leo expressed deep concern that food is once again being used as a weapon of war, calling this a “cruel strategy that denies men, women, and children their most basic right — the right to life.”

Recalling the UN Security Council’s past condemnation of starvation as a war crime, he lamented that “this consensus seems to have faded.”

The silence of those dying of hunger, he said, “cries out in the conscience of humanity,” urging all nations to act decisively.

“Hunger is not humanity’s destiny but its downfall,” the Pope said. “It is not just a problem to be solved; it is a cry that rises to heaven.”

## AN ETHICAL VISION OF POLITICS

The Pope did not neglect to reaffirm a concept that was dear to his predecessor, Pope Francis, who never tired of pointing out that to throw food away means to throw people away.

He too condemned the waste of food while others starve, and urged world leaders to end “outrageous paradoxes” and to “awaken from the lethargy that dulls our compassion.”

## “WATER IS LIFE, WATER IS FOOD”

Referring to this year’s World Food Day theme, the Pope said the message — “*Water is life, water is food*.”





## THE CHRISTMAS MESSAGE OF THE RECTOR MAJOR, FATHER FABIO ATTARD, SDB

The mystery of Christmas begins with a “scandal of love”: the Great One who makes Himself little. It's not a poetic image, but the most shocking reality in human history.

God, the Infinite, chooses to become finite; the Almighty chooses the fragility of a new born baby who cannot yet speak, walk, or defend Himself. It is pure gratuitousness made manifest, a gift that seeks nothing in return, that imposes no conditions in order to gain access.

### God Comes Without Conditions

The cave of Bethlehem is the humblest human crossroad imaginable. It is not a palace, not a majestic temple, not even a dignified home. It is a cave, a refuge for animals, where the cold penetrates and the smell is that of earth and straw. Here there are no barriers to entry, no need for an invitation, and no need for special clothing. The door is open to all: to the shepherds with their threadbare cloaks, to the poor, the excluded, and those who have nothing to offer except their own wounded humanity.

### God Enters Our History

The second movement of Christmas is that of radical closeness. God does not observe human history from afar, as a detached spectator. He enters into history, with its protagonists just as they are: imperfect, contradictory, fragile. Joseph with His doubts, Mary with her fears, the shepherds with their social marginalization, and the Magi with their restless quest.

### Truth Knocks at the Door of Freedom

Here is the third action, perhaps the most sensitive: that of welcoming. The game of our lives is played out in the grotto. This is not a rhetorical exaggeration, but the deepest truth of our existence. That grotto is the image of every “interior grotto,” of those hidden spaces of the heart where we decide who we wish to be.

Christmas, therefore, is this threefold movement that engages us entirely: recognizing the “scandalous” gratuitousness of a God who makes Himself little; interpreting the closeness of He who enters our concrete history; choosing to welcome and open the door of our heart to the Truth that knocks. All is decided within the grotto of Bethlehem as within the grotto of our hearts. Every Christmas is an opportunity to answer anew that ancient yet ever-new question: “Is there room for Him?”



## THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION



The solemnity of the Immaculate Conception is like a “birthday” in Salesian history. It marks the beginning of Don Bosco’s Oratory, the foundation of the Congregation, and a permanent Marian key for Salesian spirituality and mission. All the successors of Don Bosco have repeatedly returned to the 8th December to rediscover in it the style, hope, and maternal presence of our Immaculate mother that continues renewing the Salesian Family today.



## Booyens – Blessing of Southern Africa Provincial House and Assembly



On 29 October 2025 Cardinal Stephen Brislin, Archbishop of Johannesburg, presided over the Solemn Eucharist at the St John Bosco Chapel (Booyens) and blessed a new Salesian Provincial House of Southern Africa (eSwatini, Lesotho, South Africa) in the

presence of more than 50 members of the Salesian Family from these 3 countries (Salesians of Don Bosco - SDB, Salesian Sisters - FMA, Salesian Cooperators, Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians and Past Pupils) and LCCL-SA Secretary General, Sister Thao Phi, FMM.

In the solemn Mass in honour of Blessed Michael Rua (the first successor of Don Bosco) the Archbishop of Johannesburg underlined the consistent and faithful commitment of the Salesians to the education of the youth, especially those most in need. Southern Africa Salesian superior, Father Vaclav Klement, SDB presented a few characteristics of the holy patron of this province, who sent the first Salesian missionaries to Cape Town in 1896. Father Michael Rua accompanied the first expansion and rapid growth of the Salesians from 700+ to 4000+ members in 20 years, sending the first Salesian generations as missionaries to four continents and with his deep spirituality, also fostered a solid charismatic growth of the whole Salesian Family.

The Mass was followed by the blessing of the new Salesian provincial house. ANS



The new report on religious freedom, prepared by the Pontifical 'Aid to the Church in Need' (ACS) Foundation, has been presented in Rome. It is a biennial study that monitors religious freedom on a global level.

According to the data, more than 5.4 billion people, or two thirds of humanity, live in nations where the right to freely profess one's faith is systematically denied.

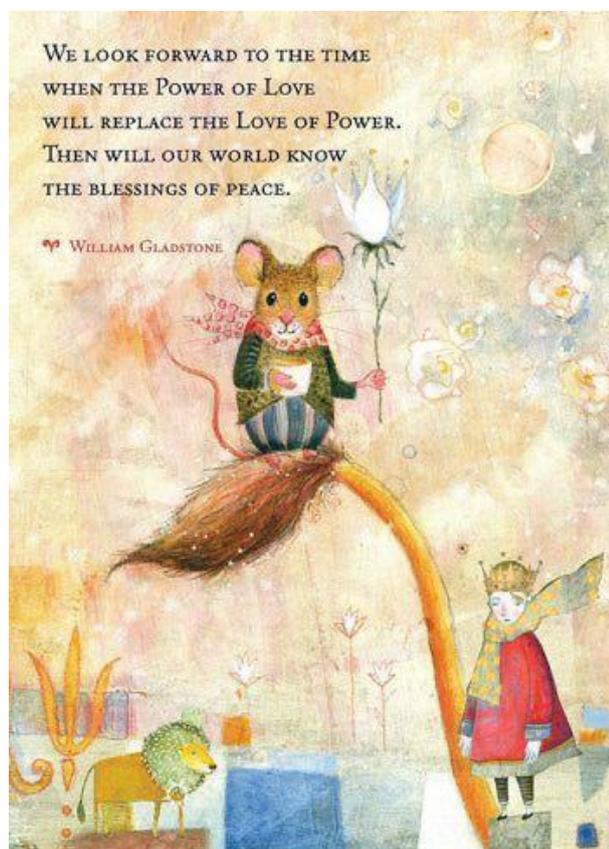
Out of 196 countries analysed, 62

show serious violations: 24 classified as countries of persecution, 38 as countries of discrimination.

The Report identifies political authoritarianism as the main cause of religious repression in the world. In 19 of the 24 countries where there is persecution and in 33 out of 38 where there is discrimination, governments adopt systematic strategies to control or silence religious life.

The loss of religious freedom is aggravated by armed conflicts.

Organised crime is also becoming a new factor in persecution. ANS



## PRAYERS PLEASE

For all Readers, Donors and Friends of the Spotlight.  
For those who have been retrenched.  
For starving children and families, the world over.  
For all women who are used and abused.  
For children who suffer at the hands of abusive adults.  
For the protection of Our Blessed Mother and Her Son.  
For an end to corruption in our Government.  
For our dedicated Priests, Brothers and Religious.  
For all those who will be lonely this Christmas.  
For all those who have gone before us. May they rest in peace.  
For the sweet blessing of rain for our farmers

Let our prayer rise like incense before you, Lord, so that we may come in humility and purity to celebrate the mystery of your Son's incarnation. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

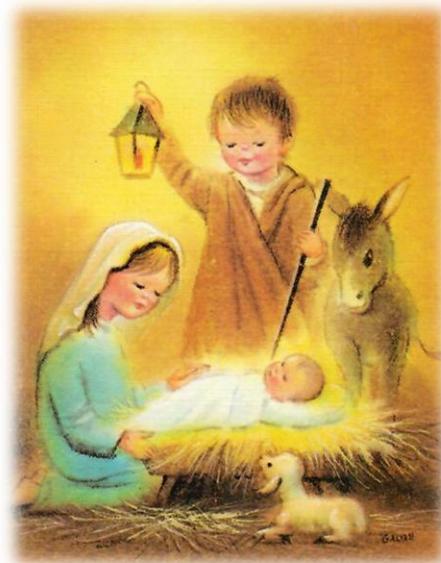
### PRICELESS REMINDERS

- Kindness is in our power even when fondness is not.
- Carry a heart that never hates, a smile that never fades and a touch that never hurts.
- Never look down on anyone unless you are helping them up.
- A good character is the best tombstone.
- Carve your name on hearts, not on marble.
- If you want others to be happy, practice compassion.
- Real generosity is doing something nice for someone who will never find out.
- The best things in life are free – hugs, smiles, friends, kisses, family, sleep,

The work of Salesian Missions is supported by the generosity of benefactors, whose contributions small or large make a difference to the young, especially the poor, disadvantaged and marginalised. This is most effectively manifested through education and evangelisation. Please consider giving us a donation. We would be grateful if you could also send us an email message, so that we can "THANK YOU."

The humble, simple souls, who are little enough to see the bigness of God in the littleness of a Babe, are therefore the only ones who will ever understand the reason of His visitation. He came to this poor earth of ours to carry on an exchange; to say to us, as only the Good God could say: 'you give me your humanity, and I will give you my Divinity; you give me your time, and I will give you My eternity; you give me your broken heart, and I will give you Love; you give me your nothingness, and I will give you My all.

*Fulton Sheen*



"Passionate about Jesus and Dedicated to the Young" SINCE 1896



SALESIAN FAMILY  
of  
DON BOSCO



### LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

Perhaps you would like to leave something to SALESIAN MISSIONS in your Will.

An enquiry can be made, and the necessary information can be given to you.

Tel: 27 (0) 11 476 8315

We would be extremely grateful.

*Glory to God in the Highest and on earth Peace to people of good will*

My very sincere thanks once again to all our friends, donors and families. To our monthly donors, our anonymous donors and to those who give when they can. May I wish you all the most blessed Christmas and good health, good fortune and happiness in the New Year. I will pray for all of you at the crib when I look on the infant Jesus, His Mother and Saint Joseph. Please say a wee prayer for me. With much love, Denise. And not to forget: FROM THE CHILDREN IN OUR PROJECTS:

**"A VERY HAPPY CHRISTMAS AND SINCERE THANKS FOR ALL THAT YOU DO FOR US DURING THE YEAR"**

