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of the General Council  
of the Salesian Society  
of St John Bosco

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OFFICIAL ORGAN OF ANIMATION AND COMMUNICATION FOR THE SALESIAN CONGREGATION

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Tipolitografia Istituto Salesiano Pio XI - Via Umbertide, 11 - 00181 Roma  
Tel. 06.78.27.819 - Fax 06.78.48.333 - E-mail: [tipolito@pcn.net](mailto:tipolito@pcn.net)  
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**«I HAVE COME SO THAT THEY MAY HAVE LIFE  
AND HAVE IT TO THE FULL»**

(Jn 10, 10b)

***Presentation of the Africa-Madagascar Region***

**The Africa-Madagascar Region. 1. Africa-Madagascar today.** 1.1. *Salesians in the Continent of Africa.* 1.2. *Salesian works.* 1.3. *The social-political and religious background against which our works are set.* **2. History of the development of Salesian works in Africa.** 2.1. *Before Project Africa.* 2.2. *Project Africa.* 2.3. *Project Africa, fruit of Congregational synergy.* **3. The Salesian charism and the African situation.** 3.1. *Youth Ministry.* 3.2. *Parishes and Missions.* 3.3. *Social Communication.* 3.4. *The Salesian Family.* 3.5. *Economy and administration.* 3.6. *Formation.* **4. Towards the Future.** 4.1. *Challenges.* 4.2. *Relaunching Project Africa.* **Conclusion.**

Rome, 8 September 2007  
*Feast of the Birth of Mary*

Dear confreres,

I am writing to you with the affection of Don Bosco, as we are preparing to celebrate the beatification of the 63 Salesian Spanish Martyrs on 28 October in Rome, and that of Zeffirino Namuncurá, on 11 November at Chimpay, in Argentina. The witness of our confreres even to shedding their blood, and that of Zeffirino, who represents another example of Salesian youth holiness begun by Dominic Savio, are a call to the total giving of ourselves to the Lord and to fidelity until our last breath like Don Bosco and those Salesians and young people at the Oratory in Valdocco following in his footsteps.

It is my hope that in all parts of the Congregation these two events will be celebrated, both in the Salesian community and in our educative and pastoral works. We mustn't lose this opportunity to thank God for the gift of Salesian holiness with which He has enriched the spiritual and apostolic family of Don Bosco, and to renew our commitment to place before our young people the heights to strive for.

This time I am writing to you about the Africa – Madagascar Region, with which I conclude the presentation of the eight Regions in the Congregation. I do so with particular enthusiasm, because the Lord has indeed been very good to us in sending us to this immense and stupendous continent. There we have found the opportunity to make of the whole of Africa the largest Oratory in the world. And Africa is enriching the Congregation with so many vocations, and at the same time with inculturated expressions of the charism.

Ever since my first visit to Africa, in 1987, to Conakry and Kankan, when I was Rector of the Theologate in Tlaquepaque, I have become aware that if the most important value to which the Africans are most sensitive is life, paradoxically in no other part of the world is it so threatened by poverty, by hunger and thirst, by disease, AIDS/HIV in particular, by wars and inter-tribal conflicts, by slavery and forced emigration, by drug-trafficking and by the traffic in human beings.

It is natural therefore to hear as a word of comfort and of hope, indeed as a special mandate, the parable of the Good Shepherd, in which Jesus sums up the whole purpose of his life in that beautiful expression: *«I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full »* (Jn 10,10b). We Salesians arrived in Africa in order to “incarnate” Jesus the Good Shepherd, whose coming ensures abundant life, in order to collaborate in defeating the culture of death and helping life to begin, to grow and to reach its fullness. Our collaboration in the building of the Kingdom is achieved through our commitment to promote life, peace, and freedom in the different countries of Africa and in Madagascar, through our concern for the young, for their education, for their meeting with Christ, for the development of their life projects. Real human development as we Salesians carry it out cannot be divorced from education and evangelisation. Therefore we must not limit our presence to social work, even though there are many urgent social problems where our contribution and our generous and effective dedication are needed. We have been sent to evangelise, to be able to speak to



the young and give them the One who can ensure their abundant life, Jesus Christ.

The text quoted above that I have chosen for this letter of mine and in itself a real programme, «*I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full* » (Jn 10, 10b), is part of the address in which Jesus presents in stark contrast the difference between the thief, the brigand, the stranger and the shepherd. The contrast between the two is seen in their different ways of acting when they approach the sheep, the way they enter the sheepfold, their relationship with them and naturally, their way of going out followed by the sheep or not. While the thief climbs in by another way and comes to steal, kill and destroy, the good shepherd enters by the door, in daytime, his voice is familiar, he knows his sheep by name, he goes before them guiding them to good pasture and quenching their thirst with clear water. So the good shepherd is totally dedicated so that his sheep may have life to the extent of giving his own life so that they may have life to the full.

I believe that this is a text that helps us critically interpret the past and the present in Africa and that becomes a message of hope for these peoples, and a real life project for us. I now invite you to explore this marvellous Region.

## **The Africa-Madagascar Region**

The Region of Africa-MDG continues to attract the attention of Salesians today for various reasons. It is the youngest Region of the Congregation and a good many Provinces still have strong links with it even emotional ones because of the active role they played in building it up. It arouses special interest also because it is one of the few areas where the Congregation is still growing numerically at the present time. It is indeed a Region of great promise and of even greater challenges and opportunities for the Salesian charism.

Fr Egidio Viganò launched “Project Africa” in 1980 and ever since there has been a great force of expansion and growth of Salesian foundations in Africa-MDG. The 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the launching of this project has been, or is still being celebrated in many countries of the continent, depending on the year of entry of the Salesians for the first time into these countries. A commemorative volume entitled “*Project Africa 25 –1980-2005*” has been published in several languages to mark this 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It gives a wealth of information about the project itself and looks at the past and the future of Salesian presence in Africa-MDG. I recommend that all take a good look at this informative and thought-provoking volume, as it could very well supplement what I am presenting here in a summary fashion.

Talk about possible Salesian foundations in Africa began during the lifetime of Don Bosco. From 1864 onwards he was in correspondence with St Daniel Comboni, pioneer missionary in Africa, and Archbishop Charles Lavigerie, great apostle of Algeria, concerning possible Salesian initiatives in Africa. Because of his inability to send Salesians immediately to the places suggested by either of them Don Bosco was content with accepting a few orphans into the Oratory of Valdocco (BM 9: 348-349). In 1886 in the course of a meeting of what was then known as the Superior Council, Don Bosco affirmed that the African Mission (or more precisely the plan to open a foundation in Cairo) “forms part of my plans, and is one of my dreams” (BM 18: 109). In fact he did have a dream about Africa in July 1885 (BM 17: 594ff).

Don Bosco’s dream for Africa began to be gradually realized in the time of Fr Michael Rua in the overall context of the worldwide expansion of the Salesian Society. The very first foundation in Africa goes back to 1891 when a group of French Salesians went to Algeria to begin the Oratory of St. Louis at Oran. In 1894 there was a Salesian foundation in Tunisia and in 1896 others followed in Egypt and South Africa.

Other foundations were opened in different countries between 1907 and 1975, but one must admit that there was no concerted effort to reach out to the length and breadth of Africa.

Thanks to Project Africa, today Africa-MDG is a flourishing Salesian reality. As I write, it consists of 2 Provinces, 10 Vice Provinces and one Delegation, which are organized into the Conference of the Provinces and Vice Provinces of Africa-Madagascar (CIVAM). According to the statistics published in January 2007 in this Region there is a total of 1241 professed Salesians and 89 novices, distributed in 168 communities and 11 other foundations, some of them having several works in their care. The best part of these statistics is that about 52% of the professed are of African origin and every year with the new professions of young African Salesians this percentage keeps rising. The African face of the Salesian Congregation that Don Bosco had dreamed of is becoming more of a reality year by year.

It is the unfolding of this beautiful Salesian saga that I would like to bring to your attention in this letter.

## 1. Africa-MDG Today

To start with, let me give you some idea of the African situation as we find it at the present day.

### 1.1 *Salesians in the Continent of Africa*

After Asia, **Africa** is the world's second largest and most-populous continent. Having an area of about 30,221,532 km<sup>2</sup> including adjacent islands, it covers 6.0% of the Earth's total surface area, and 24% of the total land area. With almost 900,000,000 people in 53 independent countries and 3 dependent territories, it accounts for about 14% of the world's human population.

We Salesians are present and working in 42 of these countries. The Sahara, the vast desert in the northern part of the continent is the largest desert in the world covering some 9 million km<sup>2</sup>. More than two thirds of the population of Africa is to be found in the countries situated to the South of the Sahara. Salesian foundations dot the entire sub-Saharan region, with the exception of Botswana, Gambia, Guinea Bissau and Somalia.

Of the 42 countries where we are present, Egypt is a part of the Middle East Province and as such is included in the Italy-MOR Region. Capo Verde is attached to the Portuguese Province, Morocco to France and Tunisia to the Delegation of Malta dependent on the Irish Province. As such they form part of the three European Regions. At present there is no Salesian community in Libya, but a confrere on special assignment helps out in the Vicariate of Bengasi. A recent study of the General Council on the Salesian situation in these countries considered it wiser to leave these dependencies as they are for the present, while awaiting more opportune times for a reorganization favouring their integration into the Africa-MDG Region.

Because of their colonial past, the 37 countries that are included in the Africa-MDG Region are divided into three language groups: *Englishspeaking* – AET, AFE, AFM, AFW, ZMB; *Frenchspeaking* – AFC, AFO, AGL, ATE, MDG; and *Portuguesespeaking* – ANG, MOZ.

With the exception of Central Africa, AFC, Angola, ANG and Mozambique, MOZ, all the Provinces and Vice Provinces include two or more countries.

- AFO is composed of Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Ivory Cost, Mali, Senegal and Togo, the Provincial house being situated in Abidjan in the Ivory Coast.
- Next comes ATE with six countries: Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo Brazzaville, Equatorial

Guinea and Gabon. The Provincial house is in Yaoundé, Cameroon. While French is the lingua franca in five of these countries, Spanish is used in Equatorial Guinea.

- AFW is composed of four countries: Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. The Provincial house is in Ashaiman in Ghana.
- ZMB too has four countries: Malawi, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe, with the Provincial house in Lusaka, Zambia.
- AFE now has three countries: Kenya, Tanzania and the Sudan. However, the Sudan is a semi autonomous Delegation with special statutes approved by the Rector Major.
- AFM contains Lesotho and Swaziland in addition to South Africa. The Provincial house is in Johannesburg.
- AGL is a recently erected Vice Province composed of Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda. This last country has English as its common language, making the Vice Province bilingual in its communications. The Provincial house is in Kimihurura, Rwanda.
- AET contains Ethiopia and Eritrea, but the relationship between the two countries is so tense that travel between them is extremely difficult and for Provincial level meetings they are forced to seek a neutral country in order to ensure the participation of everyone. Even this is not always successful. The Provincial house is in Addis Ababa.
- MDG consists chiefly of the island nation of Madagascar, where the majority of the houses and the Provincial house are situated, and just one community in the smaller island nation of Mauritius.

I have presented in some detail the international character of these juridical circumscriptions in Africa-MDG to show the extremely difficult situation of these Salesian foundations. Diversity of language, long distances and the lack of easy communication and transport facilities add to the ordinary difficulties of animating and governing a Province. The Provincials of

most of these circumscriptions spend most of their time in preparing travel documents and in travel itself to visit their communities. Expenses for the animation and administration of the Provinces, too, tend to run into astronomical figures, mainly because of the need to travel from country to country. You can well imagine the fatigue involved in this work of animation!

## ***1.2 The Salesian Works***

Looking back at the Salesian experience in Africa-MDG since its inception, and in particular during the last 30 years or so, we can say that Africa and the Salesian charism are truly made for each other. It is a continent teeming with young people, most of them in extreme need and therefore the ideal subjects of our apostolic action. The last 40 years have seen a rapid increase in the population of the continent; with the result that a good percentage of it is relatively young. It is estimated that in some African countries half or more of the population is under 25 years of age. Another estimate claims that about 60% of Africans are children and young people.

In 1988, referring to our entry into Africa, Fr Egidio Viganò remarked: "We are late arrivals for the task of evangelising the continent of Africa; we have a lot to learn from everyone, but we have a treasure which others perhaps do not have. We are the bearers of a particular way of evangelising youth, with a predilection for young people and a style and method that is unique." The focus on youth and their needs has therefore marked Salesian expansion in Africa as a whole.

The bulk of our activities in Africa-MDG in fact, has concentrated on services to young people and the pastoral care of parishes. In the field of education, great stress has been put on setting up Technical Schools or Professional Training Centres,

even though in recent decades it had been quite difficult to establish them. The parishes are numerous and some of them have many substations attached to the main centre. The third major field of activity is the oratory or youth centre through which we reach out to countless young people.

There are other fields of activity in different parts of Africa and Madagascar, but all in all, we could say that Africa-MDG still awaits the full flowering of the Salesian charism in its various forms.

### ***1.3 The Social-political and religious background against which our works are set***

In the world at large it has become more or less fashionable to speak about the many problems of Africa, starting with its many forms of poverty and destitution right up to the spread of HIV-AIDS as if this were only an African sickness. It is true that some of these situations cannot be denied as they constantly stare us in the face. But behind this façade of poverty and sickness there are peoples who have a history and a cultural heritage that is comparable to any in the world.

For many centuries Africans have suffered great injustice and unimaginable oppression as a consequence of the colonial outlook of European nations and especially of the detestable slave trade. Now the peoples of Africa are in the process of shaking off the shackles of the past in order to build a more promising future.

It should be said that not the whole of Africa is equally poor and destitute. At one extreme one finds the highly industrialised South Africa or parts of the main cities of many nations. At the other we have the vast majority of the poor who have access to nothing more than a subsistence economy. The divide between the few rich and the many poor is perhaps at its starkest in the continent of Africa.

A rich tapestry of an infinity of tribes, languages and cultures makes up the population of Africa. Music and dance are so integral to the life-style of any African nation that it is difficult not to be caught up by the festive attitude of the people. There is no time-limit when there is a celebration, whether religious or secular. "You have the watch, but we have the time:" they seem to be admonishing the time-conscious, appointment-conditioned people of the so-called developed countries. No wonder, then, that a Sunday Mass in an African parish lasts not less than two hours. It has always been my joy to celebrate the Eucharist with the people in different parts of Africa. Poverty and privation have not robbed the people of their joy and the will to live. This is indeed an excellent characteristic that our Salesian educational system can very well exploit in the education of the young.

The tribal setting and background of the African peoples is indeed a double-edged sword. On the one hand it gives stability and cohesion to the various groups of people. Tribal loyalty guards against social disintegration. It instils a sense of discipline into all its members and preserves customs and traditions, which often are capable of withstanding the onslaught of extraneous and apparently more attractive cultures.

On the other hand tribalism has been the cause of many wars in different parts of Africa, degenerating even into horrible genocide. And wars are one of the chief causes of the seemingly incurable poverty of Africa. Even at this moment several wars are in progress in different parts of Africa, bringing untold misery and hardship to millions of people. The wars in the Darfur region of the Sudan or in Somalia are well known to all, but there are also forgotten wars in Uganda and parts of the Congo.

Tribalism is also one of the causes of political instability in most of the young democracies of Africa. It often stands in



the way of a true integration of peoples. In the imparting of a truly “catholic” education in our numerous centres, particularly in the cities, this is no mean difficulty. In this context, themes such as reconciliation, mutual acceptance and unity in diversity become constant topics in education and evangelisation.

Among the many social problems afflicting Africa-MDG, I cannot gloss over a particular malady that brings Africa into the headlines quite often these days. HIV-AIDS is a fast-spreading sickness and it is affecting millions of Africans. While it is true that HIV-AIDS is not a speciality of Africa alone, it is also true that the proportions this scourge is assuming in Africa go far beyond that of other continents. It is estimated that in some countries of Africa such as Zimbabwe and Swaziland 25 to 30% of the population is affected by AIDS. According to the information provided by the UN, of the 3 million or so people who died of AIDS in 2005, one third were in sub-Saharan Africa, and half a million were children. This social problem is our concern too because only through sound holistic education can one truly combat the plague. Added to that an increasing number of children and young people are victims of AIDS. It could rightly be considered one of our new frontiers for evangelisation and education.

With regard to religion, Christianity and Islam are the most widespread in Africa-MDG. According to one estimate,<sup>1</sup> in a population of about 900 million people approximately 40% are Muslims and 34% are Christians. In addition Africans practise various indigenous African religions, which are commonly put together under the generic term “animism”. A very small number of Africans are Hindu, or have beliefs from the Judaic tradition. Catholics in Africa are about 17 percent of the total

<sup>1</sup> This is a statistic from 2004 quoted during a presentation of the Africa-Madagascar Region in the General Council.

population.<sup>2</sup> But often it is not important what religion the people belong to because unfortunately there is a great tendency to mix traditional religious customs with the newly accepted faith. This is very evident in the hundreds of religious sects that are constantly multiplying on African soil.

The sub-Saharan region is dominated by Christianity, while the north of the continent has a majority Muslim population. This also partially explains the abundance of Salesian foundations in the sub-Saharan region in comparison to the north. It should also be noted that the type of Islam one finds in the north and in the sub-Saharan region are qualitatively different. Whereas the north tends to be more orthodox, verging on the fundamentalist approach to the practice of Islam, the Muslims in the sub-Saharan region are more tolerant and do not stand in the way of the activities of the Church.

The development of the Church in Africa is relatively recent. In 1900 there were about nine million Christians in the whole continent. In 2005, according to Vatican figures, the number of Catholics was about 154 million. In contrast to what had happened in the past today the strong growth of Christianity in Africa, at least in part, is due to the activities of local evangelisers rather than foreign missionaries.

On the religious front today one notices a concerted effort to Islamise certain parts of Africa, for example the Sudan, and the prolific spread of sects of all kinds. In fact, the need of the African people to celebrate and to take an active part in celebrations attracts many of them to the numerous Christian sects that hold no bar to free expression in the context of worship. This is indeed a challenge to our own commitment to evangelisation, which is seen to be as necessary today as when the Gospel was first preached in the continent. We need to rise

<sup>2</sup> The percentage is taken from the Annual Statistics of the Holy See in 2005.

to the challenge to adopt methods of evangelisation that appeal to the culture and sensitivities of the people, to preserve and deepen the faith of the baptised as well as to reach out to the millions who have not yet heard the Good News.

## **2. History of the Development of Salesian Works in Africa**

### ***2.1 Before Project Africa***

We have already recalled the beginning of the Salesian presence in Africa with the opening of an oratory in Oran in Algeria in 1891. In the decades that followed two other foundations were made in Algeria, but the Salesians had to retreat from the country in 1976 because of the hostile political climate.

Tunisia was the second country to welcome a Salesian presence in 1894. Through the ups and downs of history, of the three foundations made in Tunisia, today only the school opened in 1988 in Manouba survives and is attached to the Delegation of Malta. The students are all Muslims. And proselytism of any kind is absolutely forbidden.

1907 saw the beginning of a Salesian foundation in Mozambique, but it had a very short life span as, in the wake of the republican revolution in Portugal, the Salesians were expelled in 1913 and the school taken over by the government. The reopening of a Salesian presence in Mozambique would have to wait till 1952.

1911 marks the beginning of the Salesian presence in the Belgian Congo. The seeds of the charism sown in this part of Africa have germinated and borne abundant fruits, resulting in the creation of the Province of Central Africa in 1959 and the Vice Province of Africa Great Lakes in 2006. Until the laun-

ching of Project Africa, the Central African Province was the point of reference for Salesian centres in Africa as a whole.

It must be recognised that between 1891 and 1978 the Salesian charism made slow progress in different African countries. At the death of Don Rua in 1910 there were Salesian foundations in Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, South Africa and Mozambique. Fr. Paul Albera sent Salesians to the Belgian Congo. During Fr. Philip Rinaldi's Rectorship the Salesians opened houses in the Canary Islands (1923) and Morocco (1929). Fr. Peter Ricaldone was responsible for their entry into Libya (1939) and Cape Verde (1946). When Fr. Renato Ziggioni was Rector Major Salesian foundations were established in Rwanda and Swaziland (1953), Congo Brazzaville (1959), Burundi (1962) and Gabon (1964). Fr. Aloysius Ricceri added two more countries to the Salesian map of Africa, namely Equatorial Guinea (1972) and Ethiopia (1975). Preparations for a Salesian foundation in the Ivory Coast were already begun in 1973 through the presence of a single Salesian.

Of all these foundations – from the first arrival of the Salesians in Africa until the launch of “Project Africa” some no longer exist, but they prepared the way for the great expansion of the charism in the continent. In all these years most of the confreres were missionaries coming from Europe. The pioneers had to face difficulties of all kinds on account of the social and political situation but also because in some cases ecclesiastical authorities failed to understand the specific nature of the Salesian charism. It should also be noted that in many places the work of the Salesians was primarily directed towards the children of immigrant Europeans, though efforts were not lacking to reach out to indigenous African youth. The Salesians accepted elementary schools, opened technical schools or schools of arts and trades as they were then called and engaged in parish activities. They founded missions in order to cater for the needs of those in the rural areas. In statistical terms, in 1978 the Salesians in Africa numbered 330, in 52 centres spread

across 13 countries. There were just five novices. Only 35 of these Salesians were of African origin, including two bishops.

## ***2.2 Project Africa***

With the launching of Project Africa by Fr Egidio Viganò in 1980 the Salesian charism made great strides throughout the African continent.

The origins of Project Africa can be traced back to an appeal made by Fr Jacques Ntamitalizo, in one of the sessions of GC21. He was the only African present at the General Chapter as the delegate of the Central African Province. He made a moving appeal to the Chapter to consider that the time had come for the Salesian Congregation to do something more for Africa with greater commitment and planning. His simple message made a deep impression on all present and in the six-year period that followed the Chapter Fr Egidio Viganò formulated the response in the form of "Project Africa."

After the preliminary studies made between 1978 and 1980 Fr Viganò launched the Project with his circular entitled "Our African Commitment" (ASC 297). In it the Rector Major declared his conviction that "Project Africa is for us Salesians a grace from God," and invited all the members of the Salesian Family "to share this conviction". Subsequent events showed that his invitation did not fall on deaf ears.

The strategy followed by the Rector Major and his Council was to entrust certain parts of Africa to groups of Provinces so that they could send confreres to open new foundations and support them financially. It would require much space to go into the details of this intricate planning which involved the whole Congregation in one way or another. It is not my intention to give a country by country account of the implanting of the Salesian charism in Africa. On the other hand, I think not

to mention at least the bare outlines of this Congregational effort would be an affront to the dedication and generosity of those who were involved in it.

Three distinct phases are discernible in the realization of Project Africa. The first is obviously the ***Phase of Foundation*** in many new countries.

Already in 1979 the Province of Great Britain made a foundation in *Liberia*. The following year new foundations were opened in seven countries: The Spanish Provinces of León, Bilbao and Madrid opened foundations in *Senegal*, *Benin* and *Equatorial Guinea* respectively. The Indian Provinces and the Italian Central Province opened foundations in *Kenya*. The Irish Salesians went to *Lesotho* and the Indians to the *Sudan*. *Tanzania* received fourteen confreres and a cooperator from India to begin four foundations.

1981 saw four more countries added to the Salesian map of Africa to which was added Madagascar. The combined efforts of the Provinces of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay sent a group of 10 confreres to open three foundations in *Angola*. The Spanish Province of Barcelona assumed responsibility for a foundation in the *Ivory Coast*, whereas several Italian Provinces took the initiative to open foundations in different parts of *Madagascar*. *Mali* was favoured with two Salesian foundations with confreres from the Spanish Province of Valencia.

1982 witnessed further expansion of Salesian houses in five more countries. Salesians from two Italian Provinces (the Subalpine and Novara) entered *Nigeria* and pitched camp in Akure and Ondo, while two other Spanish Provinces ventured into *Togo* and took over a parish at Lomé. It was then the turn of the Polish Salesians to enter *Zambia* with 12 confreres to make several foundations. *Ethiopia*, where Salesians from the Province of the Middle East were already active received a fresh input of Salesian life with the arrival of Salesians from the Province of Milan.

1983 can be considered the final year of the first phase of planting the charism and the expansion of Salesian works in Africa. In this year there were six more requests for new foundations.

The newly erected foundations continued to depend on the mother Provinces. Some of them were organized into Provincial delegations still under the mother Province. Fr Viganò's strategy of entrusting particular mission territories to mother Provinces in Europe, India and America paid rich dividends, the overall result being that by 1984 the number of Salesians had swelled to 507 in 91 foundations spread over 29 countries. The number of novices, all of them African, too, rose to 10.

1985-1990 could be considered the second phase of Project Africa, namely, the ***phase of consolidation and structural organization***.

With the growing number of foundations, confreres and indigenous vocations, it was necessary to give more attention to the consolidation and structural organization of the scattered centres owing juridical allegiance to mother Provinces in far away countries. Hence a process of weaning the African communities from the jurisdiction of the mother Provinces was gradually introduced by grouping them together first into semi-autonomous delegations and then into Vice Provinces. Just before the GC23 the Delegations of Southern Africa and Eastern Africa were erected into Vice Provinces, each consisting of several countries. By 1990 the number of Salesians had risen to 711 distributed in 129 foundations in 33 countries. The number of novices too had swelled to 37. The result was very consoling indeed, as far as the Project was concerned.

This phase of consolidation continued without let up during the six-year period after the GC23. By 1995 there were five independent circumscriptions and seven delegations in Africa. Salesians were already offering their service in 38 African countries and their number was steadily growing.

The third phase could be called the ***phase of the unification of Salesian Africa with the creation of the Region of Africa-Madagascar***.

The steady growth, consolidation and the structural organization of the Salesian work in Africa led to the bold decision of the GC24 in 1996 to create the Africa-MDG Region. The Project thus became a Region in just 16 years! Fr Antonio Rodríguez Tallón, who was completing a six-year period as Councillor for the Region of Spain and Portugal, was elected the first Regional for Africa-MDG. The Chapter also provided some criteria for the ongoing consolidation and organization of the region, emphasising *Unity, Inculturation, Missionary reciprocity* and other concrete organizational aspects.

In the six-year period that followed (1996-2002) the Africa-MDG Region showed further signs of growth and consolidation. More new works were opened, the number of African confreres increased to a significant 231, and several more independent Circumscriptions were created.

The GC25 went one step further and recommended the grouping of the African Circumscriptions into a Conference. Fr. Valentin de Pablo, of happy memory, as Regional Councillor for Africa-MDG, oversaw the organization of the Conference of the Provinces and Vice Provinces of Africa and Madagascar, with the acronym *CIVAM* and the approval of its Statutes.

Today the Project is a part of history, but the Region of Africa-Madagascar keeps moving forward, tackling new problems and trying to maintain its vocational fruitfulness, and with the determination to grow ever stronger. The Region can boast of structures at the regional level consisting of a Secretariat, Commissions for Youth Ministry and Formation and Coordinators for Communications and Professional Formation.



### ***2.3 Project Africa – Fruit of Congregational Synergy***

My dear confreres, in spite of this sketchy presentation of the spectacular saga of the implementation of “Project Africa,” it must be evident to you that this would not have been possible had not the Lord chosen to work through our confreres. Fr Viganò launched Project Africa in response to what he called an inspiration from above and indeed an invisible hand guided us through swift and sure paths to make it a reality.

I would like to highlight a few important factors that account for the success of this Project.

- a) The speed with which we were able to spread throughout Africa was due to the enthusiasm with which all the Provinces accepted the invitation of the Rector Major to participate in the Project. It generated great missionary enthusiasm in the whole Congregation. We can truly say that it was a project of the entire Congregation. I would think that it is one of the best examples of synergy at world level for the realization of a common project and could also serve as an example for other projects.
- b) The generosity and the self-sacrificing spirit of the missionaries deserve all our admiration. Most of them had immense difficulties to face in getting themselves started and inserted in the new places to which they were sent. They courageously faced them all and persevered in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Many of these pioneers are still working in different places in Africa – a wonderful sign of their love for the African people and their identification with the cause of Africa.
- c) The financial help organized by the mother Provinces, by various Salesian Mission Offices and NGOs and the myriad ways in which Divine Providence came to our assistance is another factor that cannot be overlooked. Don Bosco’s assurance that as long as we work for the poor and for the sal-

vation of souls Divine Providence will never desert us has been literally verified in the realization of Project Africa. The African “miracle” of the Salesians continues even today precisely because of our commitment to the poor youth of the continent. With hardly any exception all our beneficiaries are the truly poor and the needy.

- d) Africa now has an African face. The number of African Salesians is steadily on the increase. This is due to the commitment of our confreres to finding local vocations right from the beginning of the Project. The result is that today there are well established formation structures all over the Region and every year there are between 80 and 100 novices. In fact, in 2004 there were as many as 104 novices. All has been made possible with well-planned vocation pastoral work.

I could point to other factors that account for this success, but I think these are sufficient. Let me now tell you something about the implementation of the Salesian mission in Africa-MDG in the various sectors of activity.

### **3. The Salesian Charism and the African Situation**

#### ***3.1 Youth Ministry***

As I have already observed, Africa is teeming with youth, and poor youth at that. It is indeed very fertile ground for the realization of the Salesian charism.

When it comes to the practical expression of our charism in Africa, I think *technical schools and professional training centres* take precedence over the others. There is a great demand for these centres of training. Our Salesian response has been a very practical one. In fact we have more than 82 of them spread out all over Africa-MDG, thanks also to the

interest taken by many Salesian NGOs in finding finance for them. Most of them are well set up and very well equipped, but their ongoing maintenance and improvement are constant headaches.

Even in a difficult country like Eritrea there is a well-equipped technical school in Dekemhare. All its courses are well attended. The kind of service it offers to the young people of this impoverished nation is emblematic of the wonderful help given by all the technical schools and centres of professional training in Africa-Madagascar. Deserving of particular mention are the three professional training centres run by the Salesians for young people in the extensive refugee camp of Kakuma in Kenya. A short time ago this camp had close to 90,000 refugees from different countries, but mainly from the Sudan. Of the different services provided by many humanitarian agencies working in the camp the contribution of the Salesians was one of the most appreciated, as it prepared the young people for life after the camp.

In the field of Technical education and professional training the Vice Province of Mozambique is perhaps the best organized at Provincial level. All the technical schools are coordinated through a centralised organization and they do much for the training of teachers and instructors in technical education. The Government has recognized this and the Salesians have had an important role to play in developing the Government's policy on technical education. The most recent sign of this appreciation is the request of the government to set up a university-level institution to train teachers for technical schools. This new institution could very well be at the service of the Region to prepare our own confreres and other teachers for our technical schools.

The academic school has not yet caught on in a big way in Salesian Africa. In fact there are only 78 primary schools and 36 secondary schools under our care. A small number indeed,

when compared with other Regions. Centres of higher education are practically non-existent. In the future, perhaps, these sectors too will need greater attention to be paid to them in order to provide a good education for many poor young people and especially to train those young people who can be leaders loyal to Christian ideals in society and particularly in politics. Worthy of special mention is the massive literacy programme undertaken by the Salesians in Angola. This programme has been very successful and has reached out to thousands of young people and even adults. It is to the credit of our confreres that they have developed their own textbooks to be used in these literacy programmes. Though not considered formal schooling, this programme is connected with school in so far as it prepares candidates to start formal school training.

The *Youth Centre* is another major sector of activity, and the majority of our houses have some kind of an oratory or youth centre. In fact there are 123 of them in the Region. Each place has its own particular way of running an oratory or youth centre. I think I would need to say that in general recreational activities dominate over other formative initiatives in these centres, so that a full fledged oratory as a place for the overall human and Christian formation of youth in the way Don Bosco would be proud of is still something to be achieved. In spite of this, there is no doubt about the excellent service the Salesians are offering the young people of Africa. A leap in quality is what needs to be aimed at.

There are a variety of groups active in the oratories, youth centres and other places. They all form part of the *Salesian Youth Movement*, which has started making an impact in a few Circumscriptions, while in others every effort is being made to introduce it. It will be an excellent way of uniting the young people of different countries within a Province and among different Provinces. However, the difficulties of travel and the expenses involved restrict and stand in the way of dreams in this field. The vitality of the SYM in Africa will very much depend

on the capacity of Salesians to unite and animate the young people at the local level with practical formation programmes.

I would like to highlight a particular youth ministry activity, not because of the number of centres engaged in it, but because of the quality of the service provided. I am referring to the *centres for the rehabilitation and training of young people at risk*, a good many of whom come to us from the streets. In most Circumscriptions of the Region there are centres that cater for these marginalised young people, even though their number is still quite small. Each centre has its own particular characteristics while striving to carry out the one Salesian mission on behalf of these most needy and deserving of our little brothers and sisters.

The Central African Province (AFC) is one of the Provinces with the largest number of works of this kind. To quote just one example, in Lubumbashi (AFC) there is a well-organized work for street-children. It is known as the Bakanja-Magone, but in fact there are three interconnected areas of activity: Bakanja Ville, Bakanja-Centre and Bakanja-Magone. The first is a drop-in centre for youngsters roaming the streets. It is situated in the city itself and is easily accessible. The children and youngsters move in and out of the place and have facilities they could not dream of having in the street. Those who want to stay for the night are offered the opportunity, and there is no doubt that typical Salesian kindness induces many to do so. Bakanja Centre is a second stage in the rehabilitation of these youngsters. It has a school, a dispensary and a kitchen at their service. Every Sunday, Mass is organized specifically for them. One step further is the Magone Centre, which has residential facilities for children who at one time were on the streets, together with a centre to train them in different trades. The patient work of loving accompaniment, education and training have borne wonderful results in all the years of the existence of this Salesian enterprise. Several other works in the Province are organized on similar lines.

Considering the vastness of the continent, the poverty of the people, and the large number of destitute children and young people, I would tend to think that such works will need to increase in the future, not necessarily by opening new foundations but by directing the existing works in their favour.

A pastoral initiative that deserves special attention and commendation is the effort being made in some parts of Salesian Africa to combat the widespread plague of HIV-AIDS. Many of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa where our confreres work have a large number of HIV-AIDS patients and an increasing number of them are children and young people. Two different pastoral approaches to the problem have been adopted by the Vice Provinces of AFM and ATE. AFM has evolved a weeklong formation programme entitled "Love Matters" which has made a significant impact on the lives of thousands of youngsters who have participated in the course at the youth training centre in Walkerville. A different type of initiative has come developed in the Vice Province of ATE, whose Provincial, Fr José Antonio Vega, has gained wide recognition for his expertise on education to prevent HIV-AIDS. The Vice Province has produced a series of manuals and other material to sensitise people about the illness and to educate them in the Christian way of preventing it. It is to the credit of our confreres that these booklets are used not only in Salesian institutions, but also in other places. Following the lead given by these two Vice Provinces and using and adapting the material produced by them other African Circumscriptions too have introduced HIV-AIDS prevention programmes. Obviously, the apocalyptic dimensions this sickness is assuming in Africa calls for more commitment on the part of all our centres to give more serious thought to this aspect of education and evangelisation.

It is very encouraging to note that over the years the youth ministry sector has become better organized in the Region. In most Circumscriptions there is a Commission for Youth Mini-

stry. For the last few years at Regional level there is a Commission for Youth Ministry with a designated Regional Delegate. One of the Provincials represents it at the CIVAM. Even though the delegate is not yet working full time on this, he acts as the liaison between the youth commissions of the different Provinces and organizes meetings at Regional level. In its annual meetings during this six-year period the Commission has devoted much attention to various aspects of youth ministry and offered valuable suggestions for improvement. The proposals coming from these meetings are taken up in the CIVAM for practical decisions that have a ripple effect on all the Provinces.

### ***3.2 Parishes and Missions***

*Parishes*, many of them with missions attached to them, form a major field of activity in Africa-MDG. There are some 105 of them under our care. We did not pioneer most of these, for we inherited them from other religious Congregations. Thanks to the hard work of these pioneer missionaries, we were able to easily organize the pastoral care of these parishes and gradually conform them to our Salesian style. Most of these parishes have a large number of faithful. In Angola, for example, we have two parishes in the city of Luanda which have over 75000 faithful. It is indeed wonderful to hear that we have churches that can accommodate 2000 to 3000 people in places like Tulear (Madagascar), Kinshasa (D.R.Congo) or Cotonou (Benin), where our confreres arrange for well-attended celebrations of Sunday Masses in which large masses of people pray, sing and dance together to praise and glorify the Lord of life and the giver of all good things. It is even more encouraging to hear of parishes like the one we have in Pointe Noire (Congo Brazzaville) where daily morning Mass is celebrated with more than 1000 in the congregation.

Catechesis is an important aspect of pastoral life in our parishes. Some of them have several hundred catechumens, most of them young people, preparing for baptism over a period of three to four years. Lay involvement is seen in the different groups that are active in the parishes and the numerous catechists and lay leaders who help in their administration. Some parishes have indeed as many as 20 or more active groups.

Though we are mainly engaged in pastoral ministry in already established parishes, there is no lack of *pioneering mission work* in several Provinces. Some city parishes are very much engaged in the mission *ad gentes* and have hundreds of catechumens every year. A good many parishes all over Africa have several rural substations attached to them. Often each substation is as good as a small parish.

Kandi in Benin (AFO), Luena in Angola and the prefecture of Gambella in Ethiopia are good examples of pioneering missionary work. In the mission of Kandi our confreres are gradually bringing the light of the Gospel to the Mokolé tribe. Until some years ago these people had hardly any contact with the rest of the world.

Luena is perhaps the largest single missionary parish we have in the Congregation. The furthest mission station is about 600 km away from the centre with very poor connecting roads. It is estimated that only about 5% of the 400,000 or so people who live in this region in very poor conditions has been evangelised. I am told that they are waiting for the Catholic missionaries (read Salesians) just because we stayed with them through thick and thin during the long and difficult years of the civil war and helped them to survive. Our confreres are held in high esteem and they have started to reach out to the people with the Gospel through the activities of lay catechists since we Salesians are too few in number.

Gambella is for the most part virgin mission territory. Under the leadership of Mgr Angelo Moreschi SDB, the Prefect



Apostolic, a host of missionary activities have been started and the Church is growing steadily. Had we more missionaries, the fruits of evangelisation would certainly be very abundant.

The reports coming from these missions remind me of apostolic times. These are but some examples of the possibilities for the mission *ad gentes* in the African continent.

I think this is the appropriate moment to speak about a new project we have launched. The Project Africa launched by Fr Viganò has now become the Region of Africa-MDG and can be considered as officially concluded with the celebration of its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. However, two years ago we launched "*Project Sudan*" because of the great need in this war-torn country. The long years of war have brought the southern part of the Sudan, which is predominantly Catholic, to the depths of human misery and socio-economic collapse. For almost 25 years children and young people have had no opportunity to go to school. The mining of roads and the prevailing situation of war prevented priests and catechists from visiting the villages. Consequently, during all these years the life of faith of the people was not sufficiently nourished and deepened, even though the vast majority of them remained faithful in their Christian faith. Over and above all this at present there is a concerted effort to Islamise the south. Our parish in Tonj has 160 villages to look after, but after reopening this presence in the year 2000, as yet our confreres have been able to reach out to only 80 of them. The harvest is great, but the labourers are few.

In short, the Sudan has need of urgent attention to rebuild a people that were on the brink of complete destruction. To this end, in 2006 the Department for the Missions launched "Project Sudan" and invited the entire Congregation to make it the theme of the annual Salesian Missionary Day (DOMISAL). Seeing the urgent needs, the Sudan has been re-proposed as the theme for 2007 as well. In collaboration with the various Salesian International NGOs a comprehensive project has been

drawn up for Salesian operations in the Sudan. The consolidation of present foundations, the opening of new ones in the most needy areas and reaching out to the much neglected rural poor, particularly the children and young people, are all important features of this Project, which should continue for a few more years even though it may not be re-proposed as the theme of the DOMISAL. Taking a cue from the successful outcome of Project Africa, if all the Provinces can take this new Project Sudan seriously and generously, I think we will be able to work wonders in a short time.

While we are on the theme of the missions it gives me great joy to point out that Salesians of African origin have already started to go to other countries as missionaries. There is a movement of missionaries within the continent and from Africa to other continents. Most recently, a priest and a practical trainee from AFC went as missionaries to ATE and AFM respectively, whereas two other practical trainees, one from ANG and the other from AET went to Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. We are hopeful that as the years go by the number of missionaries from Africa will increase.

### ***3.3 Social Communications***

At the meeting of the CIVAM in 2003 the theme of social communications was studied against the African background and some practical proposals were made to invest more resources in this sector. Last year, at the Regional level a coordinator for Social Communications was appointed. This marks the good will and determination of the Provincials to become better organized in this sector in the future. It must be admitted, however, that in spite of all the efforts made so far, in Africa as a whole, the sector of social communications is still to receive the attention it deserves. Nevertheless, what has already been achieved in the different Provinces, though modest, is quite impressive.

With varying frequencies several editions of the Salesian Bulletin are published in the different Provinces. A single Salesian Bulletin with the title "Salesian Family Bulletin" is published in English from Nairobi. Two other English Salesian Bulletins come out from AFW and ZMB. Three French editions of the Bulletin are published from AFC, AFO and ATE and a Portuguese edition from Mozambique.

Modest efforts to publish useful booklets have been made in several Circumscriptions. DBYES (Don Bosco Youth Educational Services) in Nairobi (AFE), though a centre for the overall formation of young people and the training of youth animators, has a department of communications as well, which takes care of various publications for the benefit of young people. This centre has also produced a programme of formation to train young people in the use of the media. Periodically various publications come out in other Provinces as well. No doubt much more could be done if the publication activity of the various Provinces could be coordinated at the Regional or inter-Provincial level.

The "Colombe" Centre in Lubumbashi (AFC) in collaboration with the local television station offers a range of prime time television programmes in French as well as Swahili, particularly for young people.

There are at least two radio stations run by the Salesians in the Region. "Radio Don Bosco" Ebolowa (ATE) is small in size and serves the nearby rural population. On the other hand, "Radio Don Bosco" in Ivato (MDG) is indeed a communications service of which the Congregation can be truly proud! I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that it is one of the best radio stations we have at present in the Congregation. Without doubt it is the number one radio in Madagascar. Indeed, reliable surveys show that among all the radios broadcasting in the country, including that of the state, Radio Don Bosco has the largest number of listeners. Through its satellite connections it

reaches out to practically the whole island nation and is linked to most of the 20 dioceses of Madagascar.

Radio Don Bosco was started in 1996 as the Salesian response to the situation and needs of Madagascar and to make known the presence of the Salesians in the territory and within the culture of the country. It forms part of a strategy to enhance the quality of the service offered by the Salesians to the youth and to the people of Madagascar. Through its daily 24 hour broadcasts in the Malagasy language it provides a variety of programmes for the people in general and for the young people in particular. With its emphasis on programmes in the field of education, evangelisation and social development it is in all senses a youthful Salesian radio station at the service of the Salesian charism.

The means of social communication are evidently the means par excellence for education and evangelisation. By investing more in them we can make our mission more effective and reach out to the greatest number of people.

### ***3.4 The Salesian Family***

Many groups of the Salesian Family are present and active in different parts of Africa-Madagascar.

The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians have communities in all our Provinces, although not in all the countries where the Salesians are present. The arrangement of their eight Provinces does not always coincide with ours.

The Cooperators have their centres in almost all the Circumscriptions, but the Past Pupils are still to be well-organized in most countries. The other groups of the Salesian Family present in Africa are the Sisters of Mary Immaculate who have a Province in Tanzania, the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians who have just one foundation in Swaziland and the

Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary who work beside the Salesians in Cameroon. Other groups such as ADMA, VDB and CDB have small groups in a few Circumscriptions.

It needs to be said that the potential of the Salesian Family is still to be fully explored in Africa. In the most recent meeting of the CIVAM in Dar Es Salaam with Fr. Adriano Bregolin and his team an assessment was made of the present state of the Salesian Family in the Region, with a view to giving it a greater impact and dynamism. From the reports presented at the meeting it was evident that in most African Circumscriptions the Salesian Family is rather weak. Much more needs to be done to promote it and to make it into a true movement for the carrying out of the Salesian mission. The Provincials present at the meeting have already drafted a plan for the promotion of the Salesian Family and suggested ways of achieving greater synergy among its various groups. I dare say that the future impact and efficacy of the Salesian charism in Africa will depend to a great extent on the capacity of the Salesian Family to work together for the implementation of a common mission while guaranteeing and respecting the specific characteristics and autonomy of each group.

### ***3.5 Economy and Administration***

This is an important aspect in the carrying out of our mission in every part of the world. We have already referred to the wonderful and massive way in which Divine Providence has come to our assistance for the implementation of Project Africa. Such assistance continues today as most of the Provinces still depend almost exclusively on the help of funding agencies and individual benefactors in Europe and America. A good number of the mother Provinces that were responsible for the establishment of Salesian foundations in the different Circumscriptions

continue to assist the new African Provinces financially according to the agreements that have been made between them. I feel the need to say a special word of thanks to these Provinces for their continued financial support and interest.

In the foundational stage it was quite easy to find finance for the establishment of the works. Now it is a question of maintenance and daily running, for which it is more difficult to find the needed funds. In this regard in particular the ongoing maintenance of the technical schools tends to become a heavy burden, even though through them we can give the best service to the poor youth of the Region. The Circumscriptions are already studying various possibilities to raise funds locally for the support of our works. For the moment the self-support of our works in Africa-MDG is a big dream and it is not possible to predict when it will become reality. We are confident, however, that Divine Providence will continue to be at work in this poor continent and will never abandon us.

The sound administration of the resources Divine Providence sends us is the test of our fidelity as religious. It is the guarantee that we shall never lack the means needed for the fulfilment of our God-given mission. I dare to say, with Don Bosco, that our own frugal way of life and the witness we give to evangelical poverty coupled with unwavering commitment to the poor and the marginalised will ensure for us a privileged place at the bank of Divine Providence.

### ***3.6 Formation***

And now we come to the most important topic of formation. On it depends the dynamism and the charismatic effectiveness of the Region in the present as well as in the future. After my presentation above of the different ways of carrying out our mission in Africa-MDG and having referred to some of the numerous challenges involved in deepening the roots of the cha-

rism in this continent, it should be clear what type of formation is required for the new generations of African Salesians.

During these last 25 years the Region has seen a consistent growth in the number of formation houses at all levels of initial formation. Whereas in 1980 the Salesian Directory enumerated only 2 houses of formation in the whole of Africa at Butare in Rwanda and Kansebula in Congo, in 2007 there are as many as 41 formation communities in the Region.

There are 18 pre-novitiate communities because of the complex international character of several Circumscriptions, some of which have several pre-novitiates in the various countries. There are 10 novitiates and 9 post-novitiate communities at the service of the 12 Circumscriptions. It is to be noted that because of the difficult political situation prevailing between the two countries of which it is composed, and the impossibility for those in formation to travel outside Eritrea, AET has no other option than to have all the phases of formation in Eritrea itself as well as in Ethiopia. It is the only Vice Province that has 2 novitiates and two postnovitiates.

There are 4 communities for students of theology in Lubumbashi, Yaoundé, Utume (Nairobi) and Fianarantsoa. This last is combined with the post-novitiate community in the same house. With the exception of Lubumbashi, where the classes are held in our own centre, the students of theology attend theological institutes that are at the service of the dioceses or religious Congregations.

Very recently a community for the specific formation of Salesian Brothers has been opened in Nairobi for the English-speaking Circumscriptions.

As recommended by the *Ratio*, the inter-provincial formation communities are regulated by their respective governing bodies (*Curatorium*) composed of the Provincials of the participating Provinces.

Impressive as the number of formation communities is, it must also be mentioned that a good many of them do not have an adequate number of competent formation guides. Providing competent and holy staff for these communities and improving the quality of the initial formation in all its stages will remain great challenges for many more years to come. No wonder, then, that the number of Salesians seeking academic qualifications in different universities outside the Region is constantly on the increase.

The Regional Formation Commission has been well-organised during this six-year period and is providing a great service by studying topics of common interest to all the Circumscriptions. The Commission functions according to the statutes approved by the CIVAM and has one of the Provincials as its referent. The role of this Commission cannot be overestimated, given the number of formation houses in the Region and the importance of initial and ongoing formation for a true inculturation of the Salesian charism in Africa-MDG.

#### ***4. Towards the Future***

With our hearts full of joy we need to raise a hymn of praise and thanksgiving to God for all that has been done in Africa-MDG from the first Salesian foundation in 1891 until the present day, but in a very special way for the last 30 years of intense activity. However, we must humbly admit that what has been done so far is only the tip of the iceberg. So much more needs to be done and could be done.

The challenges facing Africa and Salesian Africa in particular are many and complex. They require of us fresh energy and renewed commitment in a spirit of optimism and creativity that are essential characteristics of our spirituality. I would like to sum up all these challenges and needs under one broad title: ***a more profound inculturation of the Salesian charism in Africa and Madagascar.***



Until now the responsibility for the implanting of the Salesian charism in Africa-MDG rested on the shoulders of the expatriate missionaries. From now on it is shifting gradually on to the new generations of Salesians of African origin. The African face of the Salesian charism about which Don Viganò spoke does not consist only in the numerical increase of Salesians of African origin, but even more in the inculturation of our charism in the African world so that it can bring about the transformation of African society according to the vision of the Gospel and in our Salesian style.

#### 4.1 Challenges

Speaking of challenges and prospects, rather than giving new formulations, I prefer to draw from and expand on what I have already written in the concluding document of the Team Visit held in Johannesburg in February 2006. I think it captures well the crux of the problem.

*The mission* is for us Salesians the centre of gravity and the driving force of our life. It is crucial therefore to understand what our mission is. The mission is not to be identified with the works, activities or undertakings. It is rather the expression of our *zeal for the salvation of youth*, the “passion” of *‘Da mihi animas coetera tolle’*, a zeal that has its source “in the heart of Christ, apostle of the Father” (C. 11).

We want the Salesian mission and its inculturation in Africa and Madagascar to be the reason for our religious life and therefore for all our efforts to renew our presence in this vast and impoverished continent. We have been called by God to be here so that young people, especially those who are poor, abandoned and most at risk, “have life to the full” (cf. John 10,10) through the gift of human development, education and evangelisation.

Before our eyes and in the depth of our hearts we have the drama of the tremendous poverty of the people and of the social

and political instability; the devastating new epidemic of HIV-AIDS; the lack of opportunities for the young people; the menacing expansion of Islam, etc. And it is precisely in this context marked by the anti-culture of death that we Salesians want to be “signs and bearers of God’s love” putting our trust in youth, believing in education, being missionaries.

The challenges that apostolic Consecrated Life faces in Africa and Madagascar come from:

- *cultural tendencies*: secularism, materialism and consumerism that promote a life without God, without spiritual values and without a capacity to make our lives self-less offerings to the young;
- *personal temptations*: individualism that destroys the Christian sense of communion, puts at risk the social experience of solidarity, produces departmentalisation in our works and fragmentation in our lives, and activism that leads confreres to give more importance to doing than to being, which causes physical tiredness, psychological stress and spiritual emptiness;
- *institutional and organisational problems*: a certain resistance to the change necessary to respond adequately to external circumstances that are changing rapidly and profoundly; the emergence of an internal situation, characterised by the increase in local vocations accompanied by the scarcity of personnel for the roles of leadership, which requires on our part a restructuring of our works, with an increase in co-responsibility of the young confreres and a change in our way of operating. Community life in Africa and Madagascar, whose protagonists are confreres from different countries, cultures and ethnic groups, is a prophetic witness to countries torn apart by wars; it is evangelisation in action, an expression of love that overcomes every kind of racial antagonism.

To be effective as religious in today's Africa, Salesians must become *more zealous, more religious and more Salesian*. Therefore we need people full of pastoral fire, of deep spirituality, with a sense of identity and with a planning mentality, that is to say, men whose most powerful incentive is pastoral charity, who allow themselves to be led by the Holy Spirit, who make Don Bosco their point of reference and the norm of their lives, and who know how to network and collaborate with other educational and pastoral agencies present in their area, and so create synergy.

It is indeed a challenge worth taking up to ***give the Salesian charism deeper and firmer roots in the Region***. The interaction between African cultures and the Salesian charism should result in mutual enrichment for the benefit of the young people of Africa and Madagascar. In this context *vocation animation* and *Formation* both initial and ongoing take on their real importance. There is still a long way to go before we can staff every formation community with suitable and competent staff. Only a concerted effort in this matter, even at the cost of great sacrifices, will ensure the charismatic integrity of the Region.

*Further consolidation and a more complete expression of the Salesian mission* in its different aspects is yet another challenge and a task for the coming years. This consolidation implies among other things giving particular attention to the numerical consistency of each community, ensuring a high level of community life and the qualification of the confreres for the roles entrusted to them. Consolidation alone, however, could tend to make us fall into monotonous routine and lead eventually to death. Reckless expansion, on the other hand, weakens the very fabric of our mission. The happy marriage between consolidation and a healthy expansion requires wisdom and discernment guided by extreme sensitivity to the needs of the times. Expansion cannot be seen only in terms of new works and new communities, but should also mean the

reorganization and reorientation of our existing works in a creative manner, in order to give more convincing responses to the needs of the poor and the young at risk.

Poverty is another reality that stares us in the face in the entire continent and demands our attention. It invites us to a more authentic life of evangelical poverty so that as individuals and communities we can be witnesses to those with whom and for whom we interact and work. At the same time it challenges us to find the economic means necessary to place the poor on the path of development and dignified self-sufficiency.

In this context the self-support of our works in Africa-MDG is not a small challenge. At present all our works depend heavily on foreign funds. Even though foreign funds cannot be dispensed with completely it is necessary to discover the presence of Divine Providence in Africa and Madagascar.

More urgently it is necessary to create a sense of Christian solidarity and mutual help among the millions of Africans, because I am convinced that the lasting transformation of African society can come about only from within African societies themselves, rather than as a result of the economic aid that may come from outside, even though this can help considerably if it is put to wise use without creating a mentality of dependence.

Don Bosco has assured us that as long as we work for the really poor we shall not lack the necessary means. This assurance, verified by the living experience of the Congregation, makes me believe that every effort must be made to make our works self-supporting as much as possible.

## **4.2 Relaunching Project Africa**

It is true that Project Africa as it was originally conceived has been officially concluded and attention is now focused on the Region of Africa-Madagascar. However, faced with the enor-

mous challenges facing Salesian Africa at the present day, and the many possibilities it offers to the Salesian charism, it has been suggested that we should relaunch Project Africa with a new focus. It seems to me a very good idea, but its successful implementation will now depend on the individual African Circumscriptions and the CIVAM as a whole.

Relaunching Project Africa in the context of present day challenges and possibilities would mean working towards the achievement of an Adult Salesian Africa from all points of view. One, that is, that not only sustains itself, but generates new life for the millions of poor youth in the continent. It should become a more active player in the overall transformation of African society according to the Christian vision of life and of human society.

This new Project Africa would have to give particular attention to various aspects of our life and activities.

- Keeping **evangelisation** always in the centre so that in all places and in every circumstance we can be true proclaimers of the Gospel and educators in the faith. Every Salesian in Africa-MDG, whether of foreign nationality or of local origin should feel himself a missionary, an evangeliser.
- Rethinking and improving our **educative commitment** so that with improved contents and methods we form new ways of thinking to create a more human and Christian society. In this respect, educating the young for responsible participation in the social and political life of their countries assumes an importance that cannot be overestimated.
- Making more strategic use of the different **means of communication** to enhance our services in evangelisation and education, linking the different communication centres at the Regional level for a greater impact on society.
- Ensuring that **formation** both initial and ongoing prepares the new generations of Salesians to take up the challenges

presented by the African scenario and for leadership in the communities and works in keeping with authentic Salesian traditions. Confreres in the active life need to be constantly stimulated and encouraged to recommit themselves creatively to answering the needs of the changing times.

- Creating a ***vast movement of people*** so that in synergy with others who share our vision and mission we can reach out to the maximum number of needy youth and the poor. For this the promotion of the Salesian Family and making it a centre of synergy at the service of the common Salesian mission assumes particular importance.
- In spite of the differences in languages, cultures and socio-economic status, focusing on ***synergy and solidarity*** among the communities within a Province or Vice Province and among the different Salesian Circumscriptions so that no one lives in splendid isolation. Together we can be better witnesses and evangelisers and reach out to many more deserving young people.
- ***Discovering the presence of Divine Providence in the African continent*** and fostering a sense of solidarity among the African peoples, so that all those for whom and with whom we work can live in dignity and the works undertaken for their benefit can with time become more self-dependent economically.

## Conclusion

It is difficult to foresee where this new Project Africa will take us in another 25 years. It will all depend on how faithful we can be to our religious and Salesian vocation and with what seriousness and commitment we can plan projects to address the many needs of the poor and the young people in Africa and Madagascar.

Mary has always been very much present in our work in Africa-Madagascar. Devotion to Mary Help of Christians has spread to different parts of the continent and artists have represented her in African garb and colours. Sanctuaries and pilgrimage centres have been built in her honour in different places or are still being planned. With her by our side as we continue our journey of evangelisation and education in Africa and Madagascar, we are certain that we shall never fail. May she lead us to higher levels of quality in our charismatic service to this continent, so that its peoples so loved by God “may have life and have it to the full.”

With affection, in Don Bosco,

  
Fr Pascual Chávez Villanueva  
*Rector Major*