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«Newsletter for Salesian Missionary Animation»

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CETERA TOLLE: I escaped from Czechoslovakia to be a missionary !

One night, on August 21, 1984, as a young salesian I crossed the Alps between Yugoslavia and Italy, so I could contribute to Project Africa. It was an adventure that marked out my missionary vocation, one told hundreds of times over in various languages.

It took two years to plan this flight from a communist country – Czechoslovakia, to Italy – so I could set out as a missionary *ad gentes*. Now 25 years after this ‘exodus’ I can share its results with you.

A Good Night on the mission vocation back in 1982 changed my entire life, focused all my energies on responding to this call from God. Following that Good Night I could not sleep. The challenge was a simple one – “how shameful that over the past 25 years no confrere from the Prague Province had left for the missions!” That was the moment I understood that the Lord had given me good health (1), a facility in learning languages (2), a passion to share my faith with non-Christians (3) – three basic and essential conditions for mission *ad gentes*.



In August 1984 it took two days by bus as a tourist from Prague to the Adriatic coast at Istria (in Yugoslavia in those days), one day of walking in the direction of the mountains - without documents – and towards the borders with Italy; a night climb up the mountains accompanied by a Salesian Cooperator (now in the Slovenian Province) then across the mountains to Trieste, the first canonical Salesian House I had encountered in my Salesian life.

Without a passport and with just a small bag, a few summer clothes and a single book - the New Testament - I left everything behind – and for safety reasons without telling my parents, friends, even other Salesians. It was a journey that had been prepared for by the Central Europe regional of the time - Fr. Roger Van Severen (+1984) and some other Slovenian and Italian Salesians.

Why leave everything behind? To go to the missions, since I had understood that the Lord had prepared me in many ways to be an instrument for bringing the Gospel to others. even though my original dream of Africa was changed by the superiors to being destined for South Korea, my overall life direction did not change. Leaving everything behind to become all things to all people.

Telling the story of this adventure many times to young people, confreres, as a testimony over the past 25 years, there is one thing I have come to understand more and more. From those first moments in Italy, then at the beginnings of my life as a missionary in Korea I have always found it relatively easily to gather the energy for effort, enthusiasm amidst difficulties and zeal for apostolic work. Only many years later did I come to understand that leaving everything behind– «Cetera tolle» – brought me ever closer to the souls of the young and of the confreres, closer to their hearts, to walk patiently and perseveringly with them.

When interviewing some of our outstanding missionaries I have sensed something similar: “In my 75 years as a missionary I never really thought about the «Cetera tolle»”. Missionary life, complete self-giving - to joyfully bring the Gospel to the young even to ‘the ends of the earth’ – this helps one to put up with fatigue, helps one act without being so much aware of so many sacrifices

I thank the Lord for his call to the missions. I have never received a missionary cross from the Rector Major, and I was never able to do a course for new missionaries, but total obedience to the call has been a daily gift of so much strength to be able to give myself completely to Jesus – Everything for Jesus, Jesus for everyone!

In his first Good Night after his re-election at CG 26, the Rector Major shared with us three conditions to guarantee the future of the Salesian Congregation The first is unconditional availability for our mission. Let us ask the Lord that many Salesians can experience the «Cetera tolle» joyfully!

Václav Klement, SDB

Consigliere Generale per le Missioni

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Bangladesh: A New Salesian Frontier

Bangladesh is Islamic in faith terms (89,7%) but it is one of the few democratic Islamic countries, with a free press and political freedom. It is also allowed for people to change religions: whoever wants to do this goes to a judge and declares that he is doing so of his or her own free will, without being pressured by anyone. There is no persecution of Christians, and this explains why the missionary can work freely amidst the people. The first Bangladeshi Christians were converted by the Portuguese in the 16th and 17th centuries but the majority of Christians hail from the aborigines, the (adibasis) who, converted to Christianity from animism. Today the Catholic Church in Bangladesh numbers around 300,000 faithful, or 0.3% of the population. There are six Catholic dioceses, each with its local Bishop, and around a hundred parishes, with an average of 300-500 catechumens in each. Salesians were there before Bangladesh was separated from India in 1947. Our parishes and institutes were under the Calcutta province and the then Krishnagar diocese. In 1947 many Christians fled to India and set themselves up near Calcutta. This is why there are so many Salesians who were born in Bangladesh. Bishop Joseph Gomes of Krishnagar and Archbishop Lucas Sirkar of Calcutta were born in Bangladesh. This year the Rector Major sent Fr Francis Alencherry, former General Councillor for the Missions, to Bangladesh to begin a new Salesian presence.

Fr Francis Alencherry tells of his arrival in Bangladesh: *"I have finally reached Bangladesh, my mission territory. I reached the Bishop's house in Mymensingh a little before midnight on 24th March, accompanied by Fr Joseph Pampadiyil, the vice provincial. The diocesan clergy were having their monthly recollection on 25th until midday on 26th. In the morning of the 26th there was also the Chrism Mass. This opportunity gave me a chance to get to know the Diocesan Clergy and be introduced to them. Praying with them, spending a day in prayer together was a good way to begin my ministry in this Diocese.*

"On the afternoon of the 26th the Bishop and the parish priest of Ranikhong, where my first Salesian presence will begin, took both of us to Utrail, the place chosen for this initial presence. The journey by car from Mymensingh to Utrail took a little over an hour and a half, even if it is only 55 km. One section of the road is in very bad condition at the moment, but there is a reasonable hope of it soon being repaired.

"After reaching Utrail we were warmly welcomed with flowers, singing and dancing from the children and the few people who had gathered there. We were introduced to the people and I saw that there was general satisfaction for the fact that the Salesians had come to stay with them.

"After the welcoming ceremony we went around studying the various possibilities and looking at the various sites that could be useful for our apostolate. We spent some three hours there and then returned to Mymensingh, for lack of accommodation at the place.

"My first thoughts were to prepare a place for the community in Utrail and buy some land for our work. I hope to stay in Utrail for Holy Week. This will give me the chance to meet the greatest number of people. According to the parish priest's calculations there should be around 3,000 faithful spread over some 18 villages in the parish entrusted to us.

"The Bishop and clergy have been very welcoming. They have received us with open arms and are expecting a lot from us. I am certain that with God's help the sons of Don Bosco will not leave them disappointed

"I am hoping that by 18th December this year we can solemnly open this new Salesian presence as a reminder of the 150th anniversary of the founding of our Congregation".

Australasia # 2389. See also # 1416, 604, 598.

Mission News

New frontiers for 2009 – first Salesians begin working in Bangladesh, Utrail parish – INC (Fr. Francis Alencherry), in New Zealand, Auckland - AUL (Fr. James Adayadiel) and in Guam [US territory in the Pacific] – school - FIN (Fr. Chito Dimaranan). This brings to 133 the number of countries we are working in this year!

96 candidates have offered themselves to the Rector Major to be ready to leave for the missions this year. After a preparatory course in Rome and a pilgrimage to the places of Don Bosco 34 will leave for their mission (Europe: 8, Africa: 10, America: 10, Asia: 4, Oceania: 2) on 27th September, while 62 will continue their initial formation in their own country, or will have a practical discernment time in a mission place belonging to their province.

Salesian mission intention August 2009

«That religious freedom for all citizens of South Asia be respected, and that Salesians may foster among the young the sense of God and respect for religious freedom in their educative institutions»

In South Asian countries (India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka) politicians try to divide the population on the basis of religion, caste, language and ethnic origin due to partisan motives and in order to keep them in power. Education is also instrumentalized for these reasons. Religious freedom in the countries of South Asia has been seriously attacked in the last two years. In fact many Christians in India suffer a real religious persecution. Fanaticism and religious fundamentalism can be faced only through an education to the universal respect for every human person. Thus through their ministry Salesians have the duty to oppose division, and to promote friendship, dialogue and collaboration among the various groups and influence the politics of the central and local governments as well as the world of culture in order to foster the sense of friendship among the various religions, people and ethnic groups.