

PRESENTATION OF THE STRENNNA FOR 2025

Anchored in hope, pilgrims with young people

Dear Brothers,
Dear Sisters,
Dear Salesian Family of Don Bosco,

As I do every year in July, I am sending out a simple outline presenting the theme of the Strenna for the new year. In this way, those who have to plan the new educative and pastoral year starting in September in some countries, will already find some guidance.

This time the presentation is written “with four hands” (like when two people play a piece of music together on the same piano). In fact it is the Rector Major and his Vicar who have sketched out these lines which later (certainly starting from October and November) Father Stefano Martoglio himself, at the head of the Salesian Congregation and, therefore, as animator of the Salesian Family of Don Bosco, will prepare and develop in the text of the commentary on the Strenna which he will present to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and to the entire Salesian Family.

When, together with a team, we gave thought to the Strenna for 2025, we immediately agreed on one point: the theme should be in tune with the great ecclesial event of the *Ordinary Jubilee of the Year 2025* which the Holy Father Francis announced with his Bull *Spes Non Confundit* (Rom 5:5), [Hope does not disappoint]. The Pope then points out an interesting perspective in the subtitle: “To all who read this letter, may hope fill your hearts.”¹

At the same time, let us not forget that 2025 also marks the 150th anniversary of the first missionary expedition sent by Don Bosco to Argentina. 2025 will therefore be an extraordinary year.

All this has led us to think that the Strenna for 2025 must have “hope” at its core, and the path that we will follow with the young. This justifies the title “Anchored in hope, pilgrims with young people”.

1. A hope that takes us beyond fear

The Holy Father writes in the Bull of Indiction of the Jubilee: “In the spirit of hope, the Apostle Paul addressed these words of encouragement to the Christian community

¹ FRANCIS, *Spes Non Confundit, Bull of Indiction of the Ordinary Jubilee of the Year 2025*, Rome 9 May 2024.

of Rome.”² Thinking about the Jubilee means thinking of everyone as *pilgrims of hope*. We will be so many pilgrims of hope in every part of the world, in many particular Churches; we will be on a pilgrimage with young people, on a journey that will lead us to a personal and living encounter with Jesus, who is the “door” of salvation (Cf. *Jn 10:7,9*). Together we will be able to witness that he, Jesus, is “our hope” (*1 Tim 1:1*).

And again in the Pope’s words: “Everyone knows what it is to hope. In the heart of each person, hope dwells as the desire and expectation of good things to come, despite our not knowing what the future may bring. Even so, uncertainty about the future may at times give rise to conflicting feelings, ranging from confident trust to apprehensiveness, from serenity to anxiety, from firm conviction to hesitation and doubt. Often we come across people who are discouraged, pessimistic and cynical about the future, as if nothing could possibly bring them happiness.”³ Faced with this reality that is part of life, of our lives, of the families of young people and of the young people themselves, we believe that the new year and in it, this Jubilee, will be *a magnificent opportunity for everyone to renew hope*.

Together with young people we will discover – and we will help them to discover, personally and as a community – that hope, true hope anchored in the Lord does not succumb in the face of difficulties because it is “founded on faith and nurtured by charity.”⁴ Thus we can continue on the path of life, not just any old how, not simply surviving, but living with Christian authenticity. Saint Augustine puts it perfectly: “Whatever our state of life, we cannot live without these three dispositions of the soul, namely, to believe, to hope and to love.”⁵

2. We will walk this path anchored in Christian hope.

Christian hope does not disappoint, does not deceive, because it is based on the certainty that nothing and no one can ever separate us from the love of God. This certainty is recalled by the Apostle Paul (*Romans 8: 35,37*). Therefore, the word of God assures us that in the midst of darkness we perceive the light and acquire the strength that come from the Lord himself and his resurrection.

Certainly it is the path of life, of every life, and above all of the life of every Christian, *a path* that must be supported by special moments, special occasions, strong opportunities. These are necessary to nourish and strengthen the hope that leads us to meet the Lord and to live with true and full meaning.

Going on pilgrimage – something that we will experience in a thousand ways and in a thousand places with young people throughout the Jubilee year – is something common for those who want and need to leave their places of comfort, to abandon those places

² *Ibid.*, 1.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵ AUGUSTINE, *Discourses*, 198 augm., 2.

in which each of us has comfortably settled and which have perhaps even made us feel disenchanted, demotivated. Going on pilgrimage will require us to make an *effort* on many occasions, *to be silent* and choose to *go to the essentials*.

We will have to place ourselves in this attitude of availability, together with the young. This will do us much good and allow the Lord to encounter each of us when and where he sees fit, but always touching the most precious and deepest part of our heart, our spirit, our being. And we have to be available for the encounter at that point. We must not be afraid to “*take risks*” when it comes to encountering the Lord. He never disappoints, especially if we are clinging to him, *anchored in him*.

3. There are many young people who *dream* with authentic hope

For us Salesians and all members of the Salesian Family, it would be impossible to talk about the life of Don Bosco, about him, without talking about his dreams. He kept his dreams in his mind and heart throughout his life, even after achieving them.

Inspired by Don Bosco’s dream and by what they are living and experiencing in our Salesian settings, young people will discover that their beautiful desires are the driving force that makes them capable of great things and they will learn that every challenge can be overcome with courage and self-confidence. Young people have big dreams, but they must be encouraged to dream! And we educators have this task: to accompany them on the authentic path of life.

Young people have the right to dream of a better tomorrow; they have in their hands the possibility of being reborn and of always starting over, of studying and working, of building a future rich in humanity and *hope*.

The young people with whom we share our lives, those who are to be found in Salesian houses, in the houses of the entire Salesian Family, the young people who have dreams (some of which they share with us)⁶, are the artisans of tomorrow, those who will shape the world with their young hands. They are the face of a humanity that advances and wants to improve. A humanity wounded by war, poverty and pain, but a humanity that has the face of charity and love. A humanity capable of getting up again and hoping, of getting up from the ground and starting to walk again. A humanity capable of welcoming and giving, without ever ceasing to smile and love.

Through these stories and these hidden desires that everyone carries within themselves, all of us can discover how we can overcome limitations, face the biggest problems and how, even in the most difficult moments, we must not let ourselves be overcome but find the personal resources, and resources from different social contexts, to face any challenge. Not all dreams are the same, but one thing is certain: we all have dreams!

⁶ Cf. SALESIAN YOUTH MINISTRY, *Diamanti nascosti (Hidden Diamonds)*, Rome 2024, 225.

Among the hundreds of dreams young people have, let us present some by way of example. Like them, day after day, we must continue our daily pilgrimage, following a path that leads young people to live in *hope*, because young people know that it is possible to dream, convinced that, when dreams are guaranteed by the Lord who supports them, they will become reality.

The dream of **Ámar Gazel Hernández**, 18, from San José, Costa Rica, could have as its title: ***Lost Stars***.

Ámar tells us: “If you had asked me six years ago what my life’s dream was, I would probably have replied that I dreamed of being a dancer, of wearing ballet shoes and dancing on stage. However, with the passage of time and the changing circumstances of life, that dream took a back seat. Today, at seventeen, I realise that my dream is still there, but the attention I give it is different; the reality is that today society asks too much of us, and on many occasions these dreams end up becoming frustrations, because we are faced with high expectations, high levels of stress and requirements that end up being irrational. For me, dreaming is finding happiness in small things, in achieving goals however small they may be, in going against the demands of the world, because after all we are all ‘lost stars’ in the sky trying to achieve fullness and show their light. Finally, my answer to the question ‘what is my dream’ is: my dream is to achieve my goals, so that I can also give happiness to those around me. So I find not only the meaning of life, but also the satisfaction of being able to do what I want, the joy of knowing that I am moving forward, no matter how difficult it may be and that every night my reason for life supported by hope and joy is made of those small conquests that make my loved ones proud. This is where my dreams have evolved: in the constant struggle to thrive, in the awareness of everything I have done to get here, but enjoying what the moment offers me. I cannot answer this question specifically because, like everyone, I am that ‘lost star’ in the immense sky that is still looking for its splendour, but that never stops working for what it wants and eagerly awaits what it could achieve on this journey called life.”

From the Ivory Coast, 18-year-old **Anani Henry Joël Kouadio** tells us that his dream could be called ***The Choice***.

“My dream is to become a doctor. First of all, why this choice? I can say that all those who aspire to this kind of work do so to save lives. That’s the main idea that comes to mind. But for me personally the motivation is greater. Seeing people who are sick, who do not have the means to treat themselves and who die for lack of doctors, put this question to me as a Christian: ‘Why not be an instrument through which God heals and saves lives?’ What drives me is the fact that my father is a doctor and at his side I feel more stimulated, more motivated, more interested. This makes me hope to be a part of the group who call themselves doctors. I would like to become a neurologist, a specialist in neurology. My great desire is to realise my dream according to the will of God, and the Don Bosco’s example motivates me.”

Anita Martòn is 24 years old. She is an Italian from Mogliano Veneto and today she tells us about her dream that came true: she calls it ***All my life***.

“I was in *terza superiore* (Year 11 approximately, or the equivalent to the last years of high school), and we were studying Dante. The teacher was lazy and explained it without passion. All she did was to convey boredom and impatience, and we were learning to hate Dante.

Teachers “leave a mark” on the children *in front of them* and if it is their moods rather than their loves that they bring to class, as D’Avenia says, these are what attach themselves to the thirsty souls in front of them and dull them. Instead, I wanted my classmates to discover beauty. At that moment I realised that this was my dream, the call I had to answer. Eight years have passed since that day, and after eight years this dream has come true. Today I am in a classroom teaching. I see these young people sitting in front of me and I see myself in search of a dream towards which to point life’s compass. Who knows what desires dwell in their hearts. Who knows what hopes and fears. Here I am in front of these young people: they do not know that for all my life I have dreamed of being with them.”

From India, in the State of Tripura, in Agartala, thirty-year-old **Bipasha** Hrangkhawl continues to realise her dream: *A light along someone’s path*.

Here are her words: “I dream of shining a better light on the lives of some disadvantaged people in this world, in any way I can. Growing up, I realised that there are many people in this world whose path is dark, hope is closed for them, the future is gloomy, and happiness is far away.

Being luckier and with better opportunities, I realised that I could do my small part to help improve the lives of some people, at least a little.

Charity begins at home, and only by doing small deeds will I eventually be able to realise my dream on a grander scale.

I dream of a society of happy people who love their lives and who, despite differences, live together in love and peace. I dream of being a happy part of it, an effective tool to give meaning and purpose and at the same time to make this world a better place to live in: a light on the path of someone who calls me to action and discipline. I will walk in the light, in my enchanting path where God himself is my light that I will radiate along the way, so that the path others follow is lit up.”

Clarissa Budianto lives in Indonesia, in Asia-Oceania, more precisely in Jakarta. She is 26 years old and her dream is to become a **true educator**.

She says, “Hang your dreams as high as the sky! Dream as high as the sky. If you fall, you will fall among the stars – as Soekarno Hatta, the first President of Indonesia, said. My dream is to accompany young people when life becomes complex and difficult for them. To be by their side not because they depend on me, but because through me they may see hope in God and in humanity. I know what it’s like to be alone and confused. The desire to be there for others like me, to accompany them through their dreams and to face the complexity of life is what keeps me awake. What keeps me going are the surprises of the Holy Spirit on my life’s journey. It is these that remind me of the dream at times and also the small and significant rewards of life, while I continue to follow it.

My dream is to be a kind, sincere and capable educator, getting to know my students in depth, above all being a teacher able to help young minds find their dreams and achieve them.”

And then there is **Daniel Flores**, 28 years old, a Venezuelan originally from Caracas. He has a deep conviction: **if you can dream it, you can do it.**

Here are his words: “I come from Venezuela. Ever since I was a child, I dreamed of becoming a doctor. I studied in a Salesian school and the missionary experience fueled my dream of serving others. In 2016, one year after graduating in medicine, my family decided to emigrate to Chile due to the situation in my country. Despite the difficulties, I worked and studied at the same time; so in 2022 I graduated in general medicine and, thanks to the good grades obtained, I won a scholarship to pursue a specialisation in pediatrics, which I am currently following. I practice my profession in a low-income area of Santiago de Chile, but I dream of returning to help the children of Venezuela, a dream that, little by little, is coming true, since with the help of friends from the University of Caracas, I am sending some supplies from Chile to support medical assistance days in the suburbs. I also plan, upon my return to Venezuela, to create a community pediatric care centre.”

4. Missionaries in the world. Missionaries of Life

As we have already pointed out, this Jubilee Holy Year runs parallel with something else that is at the origin of what the Family of Don Bosco is today in the world because – and let us restate this firmly and with certainty – none of us and none of the institutions that today form the great tree that is the Salesian Family, the Family of Don Bosco, would exist in the Church had the Holy Spirit not given rise to its missionary zeal from the beginning.

This jubilee year marks the 150th anniversary of the first missionary expedition to Argentina, promoted by Don Bosco in 1875.

The celebration of this very important event in the Jubilee Holy Year 2025 therefore puts us in a favourable position to **recognise, rethink and relaunch:**

- **Recognise:** we thank God for the gift of the missionary vocation that today allows the children of Don Bosco and his family to reach poor and abandoned young people in 136 countries.
- **Rethink:** because it is an opportunity to rethink and develop a renewed vision of Salesian missions in light of the new challenges and perspectives that have led to new missiological reflections.
- **Relaunch:** because we not only have a glorious story to remember and to be grateful for, but also a great story to do and still to write! We look to the future with missionary zeal and renewed enthusiasm to reach out to even more poor and

abandoned young people, so that they can live with hope and with a true sense of life, a life in God.

Recognise, rethink and relaunch: three verbs that revive and feed **hope**, urging us towards new missionary frontiers of the Congregation and the Salesian Family, especially to encounter the poorest and most marginalised young people.

Recognising, rethinking and relaunching are not verbs of facile optimism. They are actions rooted in faith in Jesus Christ, who is always with us even when we experience moments of worry, fear and difficulties that arise in the proclamation of the Gospel.

Recognising, rethinking and relaunching revive and nurture the hope that launches us towards new missionary frontiers. There are and always will be challenges and missionary difficulties, but, endowed with hope “filled with faith”, they will courageously urge us towards new socio-cultural, digital and geographical frontiers, so that we ourselves become a small torch of hope for others, especially for the poorest and most needy young people; because today we are called above all to be *true Missionaries of Life*.

5. A jubilee and missionary hope that translates into genuine results.

Pope Francis, in the Bull of Indiction for the Jubilee 2025, tells us that “The signs of the times, which include the yearning of human hearts in need of God’s saving presence, ought to become signs of hope”⁷ and invites the Church – and ourselves as part of the Church – to live this 2025 Jubilee and missionary year by committing ourselves to becoming tangible signs of hope. Signs that materialise in the following results to be pursued⁸:

- The first sign of hope *translates into peace in our world*, a world once again immersed in the tragedy of war.
- Looking to the future with hope entails *having a vision of life filled with enthusiasm* to share with others. As Christians we cannot fail to contribute to *a social covenant for hope*.
- In this jubilee year we are called to be *tangible signs of hope* for many brothers and sisters who **experience hardships of any kind**.
- Offering *signs of hope to the sick* in their homes or in hospitals.
- This *hope* is also needed by those who are the very embodiment of hope: namely, the young (Pope Francis tells us): “We must not disappoint them... With renewed passion, let us demonstrate care and concern for adolescents, students and young

⁷ FRANCIS, *op. cit.*, 7.

⁸Cf. *Ibid.*, 8,9,10, 11,12,13, 14, 15.

couples, the rising generation... Let us draw close to the young, for they are the joy and hope of the Church and of the world!"⁹

- There should also be *signs of hope for migrants, for the elderly* who often experience loneliness and feel abandoned.
- Finally, the Pope asks us that the signs of hope of this jubilee year be translated into *hope for the thousands of poor people* who do not have the most basic goods to live with dignity.

The Pope invites us – and we make his invitation our own – *to live anchored in hope*¹⁰ because this, together with faith and charity, constitutes the essence of Christian life, but above all “hope is the virtue that, so to speak, gives inward direction and purpose to the life of believers... we need to ‘abound in hope’ (cf. *Rom 15: 13*),¹¹ and in this Jubilee Year we want and we must do so with young people, as a Salesian Family, so that with them we can give a more credible and attractive witness of faith, perhaps of our poor faith, so that “each of us may be able to offer a smile, a small gesture of friendship, a kind look, a ready ear, a good deed, in the knowledge that, in the Spirit of Jesus, these can become, for those who receive them, rich seeds of hope.”¹²

May Mary, Mother of the Lord, Mother of the Church and our Help, who was also a pilgrim of hope, accompany us on this journey.

Ángel Fernández Card. Artime, sdb
Rector Major

⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*