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DON BOSCO LIVED HERE

*Tours and visits based on history,
geography and spirituality*

This interactive pdf version is based on the 2nd edition (2004) of the Italian original, *Qui è vissuto Don Bosco* by Frs Aldo Giraudo and Giuseppe Biancardi.

It has been translated with their permission. The section dealing with the Casa Don Bosco Museum, which came later, has been rewritten for this English edition by the Museum's Vice-Director, Fr Michael Pace.

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Presentation

The first edition of this guidebook was printed in 1988 within the context of the many activities the Salesian Family had put in place to celebrate the Centenary of Don Bosco's death.

Fifteen years later it was offered in updated form, prior to the celebrations for the Golden Jubilee of Dominic Savio's canonisation. Dominic represents the most successful result of Don Bosco's educational activity for young people.

Though updated, corrected and added to in certain areas, the text has not substantially altered in character and purpose.

It is still a guidebook to places where Don Bosco carried out his wonderful human and Christian venture. More than just a tourist's or visitor's handbook, it is an aid to understanding Don Bosco's historical and geographical context, and attempts to encompass the spiritual and pedagogical message that emerged from his experience and which is of ongoing universal worth.

This is why, along with historical notes and biographies related to the various places, one also finds passages which illustrate some of the more significant events that took place in these settings. Don Bosco's choices, the values which inspired him, his spiritual and educational pointers as well as what he achieved, thus take on a particularly evocative potential. As far as possible we let Don Bosco speak in first person by drawing from his autobiographical *Memoirs of the Oratory* (MO) and other writings of his; you will also find frequent use of the *Biographical Memoirs* put together by G. B. Lemoyne, A. Amadei and E. Ceria.

This *guidebook* is in 4 parts, corresponding to stages of St John Bosco's life:

1. *His childhood and early teenage years* lived around *Colle*, which means “hill” in English, where he was born at the *Becchi* (1815–1831).
2. *His time as a student in Chieri* at the public school then the seminary: this was the period of John Bosco’s mid-to-late teenage years and early adulthood, during which he made his basic choices for later life (1831–1841).
3. *His first eight years as a priest*. As a young priest he completed his pastoral formation at the Pastoral Institute (*Convitto Ecclesiastico*) and amidst a range of difficulties and problems began his apostolate amongst the young (1841–1849).
4. *His mature years with Valdocco at their heart*: nearly forty years of prodigious activity on Don Bosco’s part, beginning with its local impact but then taking on global dimensions. The Oratory at Valdocco becomes the seed-bed of the Saint’s general educational, specific scholastic, and broad-ranging publishing activity. This is where his religious families and lay associations were founded to take up social and apostolic involvement; it was from here that his great missionary venture on behalf of the Church and human society went out (1850–1888).

Each section or part is structured in the same way:

- First of all it presents the significance of places and times within the overall context of Don Bosco’s life and highlights the teachings, spiritual and pedagogical reminders which remain particularly fruitful even today: *some details and their significance*.
- These are followed by some general *historical, geographical and biographical notes* regarding Don Bosco’s life which provide a useful framework for visits to the various spots. Then a *timeline* which sums up the most salient events and dates. This is followed by some suggestions for different visits, depending on the group making the visit and the aims they are pursuing: *suggestions for visits and tours*.
- Then comes the guide properly so-called for visiting one or other place, accompanied by useful excerpts: *tours to the various places*.

Because of geographical similarity and his spiritual affinity with Don Bosco, the guidebook also offers material on places which pertain to St Dominic Savio.

As one can easily appreciate, this book does not substitute for a good life of the Saint. Indeed it presumes that you have read one. This work merely complements such reading.

It is our hope that it will be useful for you and help you in your visits to the various places which gave birth and growth to the Salesian charism while at the same time providing a basis for understanding just how many people are involved in the educational and pastoral service that follows in Don Bosco's footsteps. We offer this in a spirit of fraternal service.

Translator's notes:

1. References

References to the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, the *Life of Dominic Savio* and the *Biographical Memoirs* are to the English editions. References to the *MO* and *Life of Dominic Savio* have been simplified to chapters rather than pages, since there are various editions available. Where readers have access to the printed English editions of these references (not all items exist in English print editions) they can check them out, and in many instances can find them online. The *Biographical Memoirs* references are to the American print edition (online scanned versions are not reliable).

2. Proper names

Although it is a descriptive, not prescriptive science, translation science dictates inner consistency in translation choices throughout a text. There is no clear descriptive or prescriptive rule concerning "name" translation, but the modern tendency is not to translate modern names of people or places – always with exceptions, however, and there are many of these! Salesian readers in English are by now accustomed to "John" rather than "Giovanni", (and so on for other names which

have direct English counterparts) for our major figures, so expect John, Joseph, Anthony Bosco, Michael Rua etc., but Secondo or Evaristo, etc., will remain as such. Where the figures are less known to the Salesian reader, the original names will be retained in most instances. “Don” has mostly been replaced by “Father” – except for Don Bosco.

3. Current developments

Given that more than thirty years have passed since the first edition, and that major developments have occurred regarding the various sites described in this text (e.g. the *Casa Don Bosco Museum*, but not only this) it is understandable that some elements of the description contained in the text refer to how things were rather than how things are today (2022), though in the case of the Casa Don Bosco Museum, we now have an updated section thanks to the efforts of the Museum’s Vice-Director, Fr Michael Pace.

The original Giraud-Biancardi text has been retained (and translated here with their permission). Where there have been new developments, based on the considerations of GC27 “that the historical and charismatic importance of the Salesian places which are the inheritance of the entire Congregation be preserved, promoted and valued” and that there was a “need for a project that can utilize fully the places of Salesian origins in pastoral and vocational terms for the young and for the Salesian Family, especially in view of the bicentenary of the birth of Don Bosco”, these developments have been added as a brief set of notes at relevant points in the text, under the heading of “Recent developments”. In general terms, these developments concern the internal restructuring of community and pastoral areas at Valdocco, e.g. the Basilica, and changes affecting Colle Don Bosco.

Abbreviations

- BM *The Biographical Memoirs of St John Bosco*. An American edition translated from the original Italian. All 19 volumes. Salesiana Publishers, Inc., New Rochelle, New York 1965. Cf. MB below.
- DS G. BOSCO, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico allievo dell'Oratorio di san Francesco di Sales*, Torino, Tip . G.B. Paravia e Comp. 1859. (Note: there are both print and online editions of this in English)
- MB G.B. LEMOYNE, *Memorie biografiche di Don Giovanni Bosco*, and: *Memorie biografiche del Venerabile Servo di Dio Don Giovanni Bosco*, vols. 1–9, S. Benigno Canavese - Torino 1898–1917; G.B. LEMOYNE - A. AMADEI, *Memorie biografiche di San Giovanni Bosco*, vol. 10, Torino 1939; E. CERIA, *Memorie biografiche del Beato Giovanni Bosco*, vols. 11–15, Torino 1930–1934; ID., *Memorie biografiche di San Giovanni Bosco*, vols. 16–19, Torino 1935–1939.
- MO G. BOSCO, *Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855*. Introduction, notes and critical text by A. da Silva Ferriera, Roma, LAS 1991. (Note: Print and online editions of the MO exist in English. Quotations are taken from the Salesiana Publishers New Rochelle edition 2010.).
- ODB F. GIRAUDI, *L'Oratorio di Don Bosco. Inizio e progressivo sviluppo edilizio della casa madre dei Salesiani in Torino*, Torino, SEI 1935².
- OE G. BOSCO, *Opere edite*, reprints vol. 37, Roma, LAS 1976–1977.

Abbreviations

- RSS “Ricerche Storiche Salesiane”. A twice yearly Journal of religious and civil history produced by the Istituto Storico Salesiano in Rome. Published by LAS since 1982.
- SM G.B. LEMOYNE, *Scene morali di famiglia esposte nella vita di Margherita Bosco. Racconto ameno ed edificante*, Torino, Libreria Salesiana 1886.

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- ID., *Don Bosco nella storia economica e sociale*, Roma, LAS 1980.
- A. VIRIGLIO, *Torino e i torinesi. Minuzie e memorie*, Torino, A. Viglongo and C. Ed. 1980³.

Part One

**THE BECCHI, CASTELNUOVO
AND SURROUNDS**

(1815–1831)

Childhood and early teenage years



Some details and their significance

CHILDHOOD AND EARLY TEENAGE YEARS

John Bosco spent his early childhood and first few years as a teenager around the region of Castelnuovo, between the Becchi, Morialdo, Capriglio and Moncucco. The native and human stuff of which he was formed, so rich in potential, was further moulded under the influence of family and the intense religious spirit that were part of the environment and events, as well as the peasant farmer mentality and its culture, seasonal rhythms, demands of work but also the warm human contacts and tendency to see that values and ideals were put into practice.

From the biographical reconstruction evident in the *Memoirs of the Oratory* (written between 1873 and 1875) we note how Don Bosco gave decisive importance to these first fifteen years of his life. Here he locates the basis for his human and Christian personality, as well as his fundamental choices and his spirituality. But there were other encounters and experiences, in his opinion, that would have an important influence on his vocation and mission. There would be other decisive influences in his youth and his early maturing – where he begins to glimpse, whether in terms of his spiritual or his educational development, the providential beginnings of an adventure willed by God and constantly accompanied by Him until it is fully accomplished. So it becomes very interesting to analyse his early steps in life, discover values, principles of educational method or of relationships which, in the Saint's own interpretation, worked together in building his personality.

The years of John's early childhood were undeniably tough ones, marked by difficulties and toil, but not unhappy ones just the same. In fact, a certain serenity and capacity to confront difficulties positively and with a fighting spirit but also with joy, dominated the situation.

His mother, Margaret Occhiena (1788–1856) had an undeniably determining role in forming his mentality and attitudes. On the death of her husband Francis, at just 29 years of age she found herself alone in charge of the family; there were share-farming commitments already undertaken which had to be completed at a most critical time due to the great famine afflicting all of Piedmont; there was the problem of supporting her children and, for her the most important of all, that of providing for their education and general formation.

The evidence left us in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, and from Don Bosco's own lips as compiled by Fr Lemoyne, present us with a strong woman with clear ideas, determined in the choices she made and with a philosophy of life that was unpretentious but of substance, and religiously focused. In her relationships with her children she was both demanding and kind, concerned about providing motivation for each value and behaviour, so that their behaviour would be guided by personal judgement. She found herself needing to help three children with quite different temperaments, as they grew up. Of these three, Anthony and John in particular demonstrated contrasting and marked personal characteristics. She succeeded in not treating them all at the same level or making one or the other suffer. The immediate economic demands, the present and future of her children, were all tackled in a most balanced fashion. At times she was forced to make dramatic and risky choices, like, for example, when she sent John away from home when things were particularly difficult, and the decision that followed to send him to school at Castelnuovo, notwithstanding the complete lack of even the most minimal financial guarantees. With wisdom comprised of a mixture of faith and firm courage, she was supportive of her children's needs, helped them to be responsible, without ever abandoning them.

It was under her guidance that John learned, little by little, to overcome the negative aspects of his character, channel his energies, discover his resources and develop his sense of vitality. As he tells us, from his earliest years he was educated to be moderate, responsible in

life, and to be formed through *hard work*. Hard, constant work is one of life's necessities, but it is also a value through which one can express and build one's individuality.

One characteristic of farming activity is the constant, daily care and the way they *patiently awaited the harvest*: this was one of the best factors for forming someone like John who would be called to the mission of educator, formator and promoter of initiatives that needed both constancy and due time. Famine and climatic disasters, epidemics that destroyed crops and livestock, became challenges and a motivating force. Mamma Margaret faced up to them and overcame them together with her children, in the certainty that with nature nothing is entirely lost; one can start out again and the results will come sooner or later, thanks above all to the providential action of God who never fails to bless human effort.

The religious meaning of life, the certainty of the continual and active presence of God in our lives and of his demanding love which makes us responsible for things: these perhaps are the most precious values that young John learned from his mother. If the Lord accompanies us and speaks to us, then it is necessary to understand his presence and to discern where it is he calls on us. Margaret initiated her children into *prayer*, prayer that touched each daily action from waking up until retiring to bed, and prayer that, together with community worship and the sacraments, had its place throughout each year and through all of life. *The Mother of God* was there from the outset of young John's life, presented by Margaret as a helper, a consolation, a strength along the Christian journey of life led in view of Paradise.

His mother, who was illiterate, encouraged *a thirst for culture and learning* in her children, and she put up with sacrifices of every kind when she noticed its requirements, or a keen desire, or the consistency of a calling that resisted every obstacle, even the most serious ones. After the difficulties involving the Moglia farm period, and faced with the precocious nature of this young teenager, she had no further hesitation and offered him her complete trust and support.

It is interesting to point out further elements of education imparted by his mother. Although she demanded much from her children in terms of work and this in turn required much from her by way of assistance for their needs, she respected the requirements of their very young age: she approved of the *pastimes and cheerful gatherings* organised by young John and allowed him to busy himself in the search for the necessary pocket money to support his simple magic tricks. Then she educated him to *a careful choice of friends*, to good manners in dealing with others, to an active sensitivity and sense of duty towards the poor. John learned balance from her, but courage in making choices as well, along with tenacity and perseverance.

The *spirit of solidarity* that binds farming families together and that shows up in times of need, had much to do with the formation of Don Bosco's mentality. The long winter evenings, too, played a part in creating an inclination in him towards human contacts, savouring friendly acceptance, mutual confidence. These occasions nurtured the fascinating art of story-telling in him and his taste for dramatisation.

Going back over these first years of life as depicted in Don Bosco's memory of them, we can note the positive and active approach that transforms adverse situations and difficulties into occasions for growth. Poverty and the generally precarious circumstances, working for a boss, difficulties in attending school and finding time for study all helped forge his personality, stimulate his creativity, consolidate and help him to come to love the goals he had dreamed of. Even the hostility of his older step-brother, Anthony, understandable to some extent, helped him develop his capacity for dialogue and adaptation; it made him attentive to the other's point of view and led him to adopt an intelligent approach to obstacles by looking for alternatives and regulating available time. It made him cleverer at getting the best out of occasions where there were only limited choices.

The human and spiritual outcome was considerable, even if results from a scholastic and cultural point of view could be little other than fragmentary.

Towards the conclusion of these early years, just as he was approaching adolescence, the meeting and friendship struck up with the elderly *Fr Calosso* offered John an excellent circumstance for cultural consolidation, but above all for an awakening to a more conscious spiritual life. His horizons were widened under the guidance of this wise priest, and his vocational yearnings became more real. Mamma Margaret, by this stage, faced with her own experience and the advice from *Fr Calosso*, was able to confirm that her son's hopes and aspirations were more than just wild fantasies and human ambition. She courageously decided on dividing her modest family patrimony amongst the three sons: a decisive and rather unusual step given the patriarchal nature of those times. Anthony was then able to follow his own path; Joseph, barely eighteen, became a share-farmer at Sussambrino; John was free to decide more peacefully to pursue his studies. For Mamma Margaret, however, between the Becchi and Sussambrino, the workload had now doubled, along with financial worries.

While he was attending *classes in Castelnuovo* (1830–1831), the young Bosco had a chance to gain new experiences including those beyond the ambit of studies. Free time became a treasure for him, where he learned from the head of the house the art of cutting and sewing garments. He became familiar with the tools used by the smithy at the forge run by Evasio Savio. He learned singing, how to play the cymbals and the violin. His ability to observe, along with the greater critical awareness he now had, enabled him to become aware of – so we see from the *Memoirs of the Oratory* – elements of teaching and educational method, whether it was through the successful approach employed by his teacher *Fr Emanuele Virano*, or the lack of expertise of his successor, *Fr Moglia*. Little by little, then, the first items in that treasure-trove of experience, values and methods that make up the educational system of Piedmont's saintly priest, were built up.

EMERGING EDUCATIONAL AND SPIRITUAL VALUES

The family, social and religious environment in which young John grew up and built his identity, the significant persons who guided his first steps, his positive and receptive attitude – all these things suggest to us a series of spiritual and educational pointers that even today can stimulate reflection and inspire action.

Here is a list, for example, of some of the values and attitudes that can be elicited through visiting the places and recalling the facts.

- Duties regarding education carried out by Mamma Margaret despite serious financial problems.
- Attention to and respect for the personal originality of each of her sons, but also clear-mindedness in noting failures and a determination to correct them.
- Ability to develop in her children a correct moral conscience and a sense of personal responsibility and honesty.
- Ability to create a climate of confidence, sincerity, transparency in relationships between parent and child through dialogue, kindness, patience, attention.
- Formation to a sense of work, the need to be useful at home from the earliest years, with little tasks adapted to their age.
- Beginning to be consistent in doing one's duty, gradually becoming methodical; the instilling of the need to complete tasks once begun.
- Becoming used to moderation in life, to a certain austerity without indulging in too much comfort, laziness, whims.
- Appreciating the value of school and culture in formation, encouraging and helping it along.
- Providing appropriate room for play, cheerfulness, to what children like to do, but in conjunction with doing one's duties.
- Encouraging being with others and friendships carefully chosen and weighed up.
- Forming a heart that is welcoming, hospitable, generous.

Some details and their significance

- Sensitising the youngsters to the needs of their neighbour, the sufferings of the poorest, and getting them to engage in acts of practical charity.
- Educating to a sense of God the Creator, to contemplating his greatness in the wonders of creation, and to trust in His Providence.
- Looking after their growth in faith and hope.
- Introduction to personal and community prayer through example and the involvement of the whole family.
- Introduction to the regular celebration of the Sacrament of Penance, forming moral conscience through frequent revision of life or daily examination of conscience.
- The personal involvement of the parents in catechesis, preparing their children for sacraments and Christian formation, together with priests and teachers.
- In early adolescence the facilitation of friendly and trusting contacts with a priest.
- Appreciation of the value of youthful spiritual direction.

Historical, geographical and biographical notes

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

John Bosco was born on 16 August 1815. Just two months previously (9 June) the *Congress of Vienna* had taken place. This put in place a reorganised Europe after the experiences of revolution and the days of Napoleon. We are at the dawn of an historical period called the Restoration, given the desire of governments to re-institute social and political institutions from the *ancien régime*. King Victor Emmanuel I had returned from Sardinia to his home states of Piedmont, Savoy, Nice, to which the Congress of Vienna had also annexed Liguria. On 21 May 1814, he abrogated by edict all the laws, decrees and general orders of the French government and restored the juridical force of the Charles Emmanuel III Constitution of 1770, and the legislation formulated up to 23 June 1880. This attempt, carried out by strengthening the nobility to the detriment of the middle class which had been compromised by the previous government, was doomed to early failure and gave rise to division, resentment and discontent.

The social and political climate was made worse by a huge *economic crisis*, partly brought on by the previous years of war, which peaked in 1816–17 following a terrible famine that struck Piedmont. The rural population of Monferrato had to put up with sacrifices and suffering especially because of the agricultural crisis. They were less affected by the political and social change; in fact they gained some advantage from it with the suppression of the levy to which all had been obligated, and with some minor financial relief. The life of the farming family continued to be regulated by the seasonal rhythms and the hard physical labour of farming, tied to traditional subsistence requirements.

The phenomenon of mass migration had not taken on the massive form that it would assume in decades to come, at least not yet. The Piedmontese rural population showed itself to be firmly anchored to traditional Christian, social and family values. It continued to be a reservoir of healthy human resources for both State and Church.

In the capital and in provincial cities meanwhile, the middle class, intellectuals, young officials and the more open of the heirs of the nobility projected a future with a careful eye to ideas, yearnings and experiences from other European countries. Circulars, cultural journals and secret societies, all with a new national conscience, prepared the ground for a substantial change that, in the course of thirty or so years, would lead, via the *Risorgimento* or Restoration, to the Statute proclaimed by Charles Albert, and the wars of independence.

In the ecclesiastical field we should mention the appointment (1818) of the Camaldolese monk Columbano Chiaveroti (1754–1831) as Archbishop of Turin. A well qualified man culturally and spiritually, he committed himself to his pastoral task notwithstanding his age and poor health. He reorganised the diocese with clear and methodical actions, put in place an extensive re-Christianisation of the people by giving an impetus to catechesis and supporting, especially, the preaching of “missions” for the moral renewal of the people. His major efforts he put towards reorganising clerical discipline and the pastoral, cultural and spiritual preparation of his clerics. This he did by means of careful selection of young candidates and a more demanding seminary formation. He was responsible for the new management of the Turin seminary, the re-opening of the seminary at Bra and the founding of the seminary in Chieri (1829). In a short time the vocational crisis that had afflicted the diocese was overcome. In the latter years of the Napoleonic government, in fact, priestly ordinations were down to single numbers; by the end of Archbishop Chiaveroti’s episcopate they had risen to more than 50 a year. In particular, the Archbishop supported and encouraged the work of Luigi Guala (1775–1848), who founded the

Convitto Ecclesiastico or Pastoral Institute for the pastoral preparation of young priests.

A thirst for education had grown amongst the working class over this period, and a desire to overcome the barriers of illiteracy, in awareness of the new demands and opportunities for social and economic growth that had opened up. The return to obsolete pre-Napoleonic school regulations had thrown primary education into confusion to the point where it was often abandoned. This situation was corrected with the scholastic reform put in place by Charles Felix in 1822. He obliged shire administrations to open one or more primary schools. Every local school was divided into two classes whereby the children had to be taught reading, scripture, Christian doctrine (first year) and the basics of Italian language and arithmetic (second year). Lessons commenced on 3 November and finished the following September, but in agricultural areas in fact, the greater part of the student body came to school only over the winter period when farm work wasn't so demanding. The organisation of the teaching – entrusted mostly to ecclesiastics for reasons pertaining both to ideals and to economics – underwent minor retouching and modification over the course of years until the more systematic legislation (the Boncompagni legislation) of 1848. This led to the definitive reform brought about by the Casati legislation (1859) which determined the shape of Italian schooling into the first decades of the 20th Century.

Young John Bosco grew up in this context and was part of the desires, hopes and efforts of his people in a period of rapid socio-political, cultural and scientific change were the base of a modern Europe. As an adult he also would contribute especially in giving a Christian soul, and a spirituality soaked in new as well as old values to generations of young people who – especially at lower and middle class levels – would be the backbone of the new Europe.

SUGGESTIONS FOR VISITS AND TOURS

Colle Don Bosco is at the heart of any visit to the area where St John Bosco spent his childhood and early adolescence. Here it is important to give time and attention to specifics. Other places depend on the type and interests of the group or the reasons and arrangements of the pilgrimage and the time available. Of all the places, it seems to us that *Mondonio* is the most meaningful and also the most convenient for those travelling by coach. *Cascina Moglia* (the Moglia Farm) has particular symbolic value and evokes many a memory but it is advisable only for small, well-knit groups. Also advisable is a previous understanding with the Rector of the Basilica at the Becchi and a phone call to the owners (possibly different now that the Past Pupils have taken over responsibility for this property).

Here we limit ourselves to suggesting a *standard tour* and some ideas about *particular visits*.

STANDARD TOUR (*a day or half day*)

For any group, highlighting whatever aspect particularly interests people.

A. Visit the historical centre: begin with the *Casetta*, (**page 39**), making use of the display materials and possibly the audiovisuals. From there to the *Farming Life Museum* (**page 49**) → and *Joseph's House*, with time for a short prayer in the *Rosary Chapel* (**page 46**) → Then visit the farmyard with stable, portico hay loft, the *monument to Young John the Juggler* (**page 51**) and the *pillar of the dream* (**page 52**) → then back up to the small *sanctuary of Mary Help of Christians* (**page 50**) a good place for reflection and prayer → finish by visiting the old water pump used by Mamma Margaret (**page 54**) and the monument dedicated to her (**page 54**).

B. Visit to the *Basilica and nearby areas*: begin in the lower Church with a brief historical note about the Biglione farmstead (**page 37**), the reasons for building the church and the message it offers (**page 55**) →

Then tour both the *lower and upper church*: you will find the materials in the church or in the entrance hall helpful. → Finish by noting the history of the Salesian *Bernardi-Semeria Institute*: boarding school, vocational training centre, hospitality for visitors (**page 63**); speak about *the novitiate* (the “Boy of the Dream” house, Scaiota) and visit the *Missionary museum of ethnology* (**page 64**).

C. If time allows and the group is interested, you can finish with a short trip to *Morialdo* (**page 67**), *Mondonio* (**page 88**), *Castelnuovo* (**page 81**).

PARTICULAR VISITS (*time to be determined by your schedule*).

For groups with particular aims of an educational, spiritual or vocational kind.

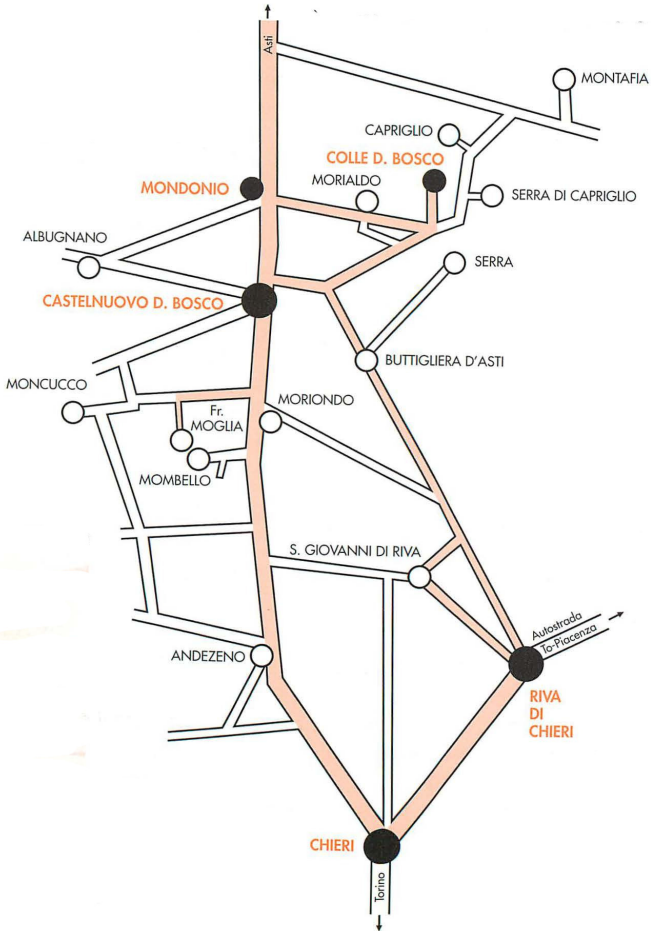
Here are two suggestions:

A. Leaving from Turin with a day at your disposal: S. Giovanni di Riva (**page 101**) → to Buttigliera (**page 93**) → Sussambrino (**page 74**) and Renenta fountain (**page 77**) → Colle (**page 36**) → Morialdo (**page 67**) → Mondonio (**page 88**) → Castelnuovo (**page 81**) → Moglia Farm (**page 98**).

B. Leaving from Colle you could organise some “walks” along the lines of Don Bosco’s Autumn Walks, possibly on foot or bike, to surrounding towns: Capriglio (**page 77**); Morialdo (**page 67**); Mondonio (**page 88**); Castelnuovo (**page 81**); Buttigliera (**page 93**).

Historical, geographical and biographical notes

Fig. 1: Childhood places - Don Bosco and Dominic Savio



TIMELINE

Dates	Places	People	Events
16.08.1815	Becchi: Biglione farmstead	John Bosco	Birth
17.08.1815	Castelnuovo: parish	John Bosco	Baptism
08.02.1817	Becchi: <i>Casetta</i>	Francis Bosco	Acquired
11.05.1817	Becchi: Biglione farmstead	Francis Bosco	Death
13.11.1817	Becchi: <i>Casetta</i>	Margaret and children	Moved
1823	Becchi: <i>Casetta</i>	John Bosco	Dream at 9 years of age
1824–1827	Capriglio	John Bosco	Attends school run by Fr Giuseppe Lacqua
Easter 1826	Castelnuovo: parish	John Bosco	First Communion
Feb. 1828 to Nov. 1829	Moncuoco: Moglia farm	John Bosco	Farmhand
5–9 Nov. 1829	Buttiglieria	John Bosco	Meets Fr Giovanni Calosso after Missions sermon
Nov. 1829–Nov. 1830	Morialdo	John Bosco and Fr Calosso	Latin class and formation
21.11.1830	Morialdo	Fr Calosso	Death

Historical, geographical and biographical notes

Dates	Places	People	Events
Dec. 1830–Aug. 1831	Castelnuovo	Roberto Sarto Fr Virano and Fr Moglia	Hospitality Teachers
1831	Sussambrino	Joseph, Margaret, John	Share farmers
04.08.1833	Buttiglieria	John Bosco	Confirmation
25.10.1835	Castelnuovo: parish	John Bosco	Clerical clothing
10.06.1841	Castelnuovo: parish	Fr John Bosco	First Mass
02.04.1842	S. Giovanni di Riva	Dominic Savio	Birth
1843-1853	Morialdo	Dominic Savio	Lived
08.04.1849	Morialdo	Dominic Savio	First Communion
Feb. 1853	Mondonio	Dominic Savio	Family moved
13.04.1853	Castelnuovo: parish	Dominic Savio	Confirmation
02.10.1854	Becchi	Dominic Savio	Met Don Bosco
09.03.1857	Mondonio	Dominic Savio	Death

Tours to the various places

COLLE DON BOSCO AND THE BECCHI

John Bosco was born on 16 August 1815 in the Becchi hamlet, part of the village of Morialdo, belonging to the town of Castelnuovo d'Asti (today Castenuovo Don Bosco), province of Asti, diocese of Turin. The small group of houses is built on a hill universally known as Colle Don Bosco, 259 metres above sea-level. It nestles amongst the towns of Castelnuovo, Buttigliera and Capriglio.

We find ourselves here in the heart of Piedmont, in the vast hill area called Monferrato that extends through the provinces of Turin, Asti and Alexandria. The inhabited centres, usually small, are mostly built on hilltops, grouped around the parish church and often the remains of ancient fortifications.

The area, essentially agricultural, is cultivated with vineyards, wheat, maize and feed crops, or covered with green woodlands of acacias and poplar plantations. Along the creeks and the tracks you also find mulberry trees, testifying to the once-flourishing silk-worm trade, now completely vanished. Amongst the typical products of the region are famous wines like Frèisa, Malvasia, Grignolino and Moscato (Muscat), as well as the more common Barbera.

Four small villages make up the township of Castelnuovo: Bardella, Nevissano, Ranello (Savio's father's hometown) and Morialdo. This last-named, amongst its clusters of hamlets, includes the Becchi, a name derived from the Bechis family who then lived and still today live in that area.

Biglione farmstead (where Don Bosco was actually born)

Don Bosco's paternal grandfather, Filippo Antonio (1735–1802), originally of Chieri, moved to The Becchi in 1793, as a share farmer at the Biglione farm. This building no longer exists: it was torn down between 1957–8 and was replaced by the huge Basilica. It was only in 1972 that archival research by Secondo Caselle revealed that it was actually here in this house that young John was born.

The building, initially followed a straight line (two floors), and was extended northwards with a three-storied extension for the owners as a holiday house. The entire construction then became L-shaped and the oldest section turned over to the living quarters for the share-farmers. There were just a few poor rooms: on the ground floor a kitchen and pantry, a dining room of sorts and stairs going up to two upstairs bedrooms. Filippo Antonio lived here with his children, amongst whom Francesco Luigi (1784–1817). They farmed more than 12 hectares of the owner's land.

Francesco Luigi Bosco married Margherita Cagliero at age 21 (1805) and had two children by her: Antonio Giuseppe (1808–1849) and Teresa Maria (16–18 February 1810). Widowed in 1811 he remarried on 6 June 1812 – Margaret Occhiena (1788–1856). Thus were born Joseph Louis (1813–1862) and John Melchior, the future Don Bosco (1815–1888).

Young John's father died in this house on 11 May 1817, struck down by pneumonia caused by going into the cold cellar while hot and sweaty. He was almost 34 years of age.

This was young John's first unforgettable memory:

I was not yet two years old when the merciful Lord hit us with a sad bereavement. My dearly beloved father died unexpectedly. He was strong and healthy, still young and actively interested in promoting a good Christian upbringing for his offspring. One day he came home from work covered in sweat and imprudently went down into a cold cellar. That night he developed a high temperature, the first sign of a

serious illness. Every effort to cure him proved vain. Within a few days he was at death's door. Strengthened by all the comforts of religion, he recommended to my mother confidence in God, then died, aged only thirty-four, on 12 May 1817 [*note*: in fact it was the 11th, as we see from archival documents].

I do not know how I reacted on that sad occasion. One thing only do I remember, and it is my earliest memory. We were all going out from the room where he had died, and I insisted on staying behind. My grieving mother addressed me, "Come, John, come with me." "If papa's not coming, I don't want to come," I answered. "My poor son," my mother replied, "come with me; you no longer have a father." Having said this she broke down and started crying as she took me by the hand and led me away. I began crying too because she was crying. At that age I could not really understand what a tragedy had fallen on us in our father's death (MO Ch. 1).

To this serious loss we can add the difficulties stemming from an especially critical moment for the Piedmontese economy, given that the years 1816–17 were years of famine and hunger:

This event threw the whole family into difficulty. Five people had to be supported [*note*: Mamma Margaret, her mother-in-law and three children]; The crops failed that year because of a drought[and that was our only source of income; the prices of foodstuffs soared ... Some people who lived at that time have assured me that beggars hesitated to ask for even a little bran to put in broth of chickpeas or beans for nourishment. People were found dead in the fields, their mouths stuffed with grass, with which they had tried to quell their ravenous hunger.

My mother often used to tell me that she fed the family until she exhausted all her food. She then gave money to a neighbour, Bernardo Cavallo, to go looking for food to buy. This friend went round to various markets but was unable to buy anything, even at exorbitant prices My mother, not allowing herself to be discouraged, went round to the neighbours to try to borrow some food. She did not find anyone able to help. "My dying husband," she told us, "said I must have confidence in God. Let's kneel then and pray." After a brief prayer she got up and said, "Drastic circumstances demand drastic means." Then she went to the stable and, helped by Mr Cavallo, she killed a calf. Part of that calf was immediately cooked and the worst of

the family's hunger satisfied. In the days that followed, cereals bought at a very high price from more distant places enabled us to survive (MO Ch. 1).

The Casetta

On the same hillside as the Becchi, about 200 metres below the Biglione farmstead, is a small cluster of houses which were occupied by four families (Graviglia, Cavallo, Bechis and Ronco) and formed the *Cavallo Canton*. Francis Louis Bosco, on 8 February 1817, just three months before he died, bought a very poor little house with a northerly aspect, for 100 lire (the price of an ox). This house comprised “a stable and croft, hayloft above, extending to the ground”, “tiled but in a bad state, with wheat stored in front of about ten tables”, as described in the purchasing deed (8 February 1817) and the inventory of goods as listed in Francis Bosco's Last Will and Testament (18 May 1817). The building measured 12 metres long by 3 wide and 4.5 metres high. There was a dividing wall separating it from the Cavallo family. Nearby, a few metres to the west, was where the Graglias lived (demolished in order to build the staircase that now allows one to visit the upper floor).

The purchase was motivated by the fact that Francis came to know that the Biglione family intended to sell the farmstead (the workshop, we learn from the property register documents, was given to the Chiardi family in 1818, from there in 1846 it passed on to the Damevino family who would sell it to the Salesians in 1929) and, furthermore, from his desire to set up a patrimony in immovable goods. This is already, note, a time of strong economic crisis, along with the famine that struck the area in 1816–17.

After her husband's death, Mamma Margaret continued to live in the Biglione farmstead with her children, the old mother-in-law and two farmhands from the Biglione farm, until halfway through November, the time when the share-farming contract finished. In the meantime she

reorganised the simple dwelling bought by Francis and transferred the family there on 13 November 1817.

The Boscos at the Casetta

After this re-organisation, the small dwelling comprised the following rooms (from left to right standing in front of the building): a shed for use as a storeroom, stable, kitchen and verandah on the ground floor; on the upper floor a bedroom shared by Mamma Margaret and her mother-in-law Margaret Zucca, a small bedroom for the two children (the room of the “dream”, gained access to by a staircase from the kitchen), and the hayloft. On the outside was a wooden staircase leading to Mamma Margaret’s room. At the bottom of this a brick alcove beneath the stairs which served as a hen-house.

They lived together here until 1831, the year that Anthony married. Mamma Margaret gave her room over to the couple, and moved to the children’s room. Joseph, meanwhile, after the dividing of the family goods that took place the previous year (1830) had taken on share-farming at Sussambrino, on the hill between the Becchi and Castlenuovo towards Buttigliera, and moved across there. Mamma Margaret and Joseph’s brother John followed him there, since John was attending school in Castlenuovo. They remained there for nine years.

As for the reasons that made Mamma Margaret decide to divide up the family heritage, Don Bosco writes:

My mother, seeing how upset I was because of the obstacles in the way of my studies, and not having any hope of getting the consent of Anthony, who was now over twenty, thought about dividing our inheritance. There were serious difficulties, however, since Joseph and I were minors. There were serious difficulties, however, since Joseph and I were minors. Nevertheless she went ahead. My grandmother had died some years previously, so our family now consisted of my mother, and Joseph who did not want to be separated from me (MO Ch. 6).

Some years later, Anthony built a place better suited for his growing family on the land in front of the *Casetta*.

This was pulled down in 1915 to construct the Sanctuary to Mary Help of Christians. Joseph too, in 1839, built near the *Casetta*. The old paternal cottage then became a stable and store shed for agricultural implements.

At various stages Don Bosco's nephews sold the *Casetta*, some of the surrounding land and Anthony's and Joseph's houses to the Salesians. In 1901, Fr Michael Rua, Don Bosco's first successor, ordered the first restoration of the *Casetta*, consisting of the division of the verandah next to the kitchen into two rooms, and closed up the hayloft to give the building a consistent look. Following the purchase of the Cavallo house (1919) and that of the Graglia family (1920) for the Beatification of Don Bosco (1929) there was a second and more radical restoration of the *Casetta*, now open to visitors.

Family life scenes

These poor rooms are witness to the wisdom of Margaret Occhiena's education of her children. Scarce financial resources and her relatively young age would have justified a second marriage. The occasion did arise in fact, and most conveniently. But she absolutely did not want to detach herself from her children (who would have been provided with a good tutor), and she was generously ready to put up with any sacrifice, trusting in Divine Providence (cf. MO Ch. 1).

She placed religious formation at the basis of everything, as Don Bosco indicates:

Her greatest care was given to instructing her sons in their religion, making them value obedience, and keeping them busy with tasks suited to their age. When I was still very small, she herself taught me to pray. As soon as I was old enough to join my brothers, she made me kneel with them morning and evening. We would all recite our prayers together, including the rosary. I remember well how she

herself prepared me for my first confession. She took me to church, made her own confession first, then presented me to the confessor. Afterwards, she helped me to make my thanksgiving (MO Ch. 1).

She instilled in her children a lively sense of the presence of God the provident Creator and Lord:

“Remember that God sees you and also sees your innermost thoughts” she often told them. “It is God who created the world and put so many stars up there. If the firmament is so beautiful what will heaven be like?”; and again: “How grateful we should be to the Lord who provides us with everything we need; God really is our father. Our father who art in heaven!” (SM, 28–30).

From their earliest years she prepared them for work:

She could not bear to see her sons idle. Even as very young children she entrusted them with simple chores. At four, John was already stripping hemp canes that his mother would give him. With his work done he would busy himself making playthings (BM I, 38).

She formed them to obedience motivated by love and to a sense of responsibility and reflection before acting or speaking. She was consistent in correction, mixing it with kindness and moral strength. She did not avoid punishment, if needed, a symbol of which was “a stick placed in one corner of the room. She never used it however, never gave it to her children, not the slightest whack” (SM 36). Instead she used her own particular way, prudently, that bore results. And her children learned to be accountable for their actions.

We recall, for example, a small episode involving John at just 4 years of age:

One day, when John was only four, he came home from a walk with his brother Joseph. It was summer and both were very thirsty. Margaret went to draw water and gave it first to Joseph, who was older. John was a bit piqued at this act of preference and when it was his turn he refused to drink. Margaret put the water away without a word. John stood there for a moment then timidly said:

“Mom!”

“Yes...?”

“Are you going to give me some water too?”

“I thought you weren't thirsty!”

“I'm sorry, Mom!”

“Now, that's a good boy!” She went back to the water and gave it to him, smiling (BM I, 44–45).

One day – John was eight years old – while his mother was out on business in a neighboring village, he tried to get at something that she had stored away on a high shelf. Since he could not reach it he took a chair and while climbing on it, he overturned an oil jar and it fell to the ground in pieces. Little John anxiously tried to clean up the mess by mopping up the spilt oil, but upon realizing that he would not be able to get rid of its stain and the smell, he figured out how best he could avoid displeasing his mother. Breaking off a rod from a hedge, he stripped the green bark in several places, and tried to make it look as pretty as he could. When it was time for his mother to return, he ran to meet her down in the valley. As soon as he came up to her he asked: “How are you, Mamma? Did you have a nice walk?”

“Yes John dear! How are you? Is everything all right? Have you been a good boy?”

“Oh Mamma! Look!” So saying, John handed her the rod.

“Ah, that means you have been a naughty boy.”

“Yes I have. This time I really deserve a whipping.”

“What did you do?”

“I was climbing up to the high shelf and accidentally broke the oil jar. I know I deserve a whipping, and so I brought you this stick to hit me with and save you the trouble of fetching one.”

Meanwhile, John handed her the nicely decorated rod and looked up into her face with an expression at once shy, cunning and mischievous. Margaret looked from her son to the rod and broke into laughter, amused by his childish wiles. Finally she said: “It's too bad about the oil jar, but I'll forgive you because your behavior shows you didn't do it on purpose. But always remember this: before you do anything, always think of the possible consequences” (BM I, 55–56).

The Bosco family's poverty did not prevent Margaret from exercising charity towards those who were very poor: "Neighbours would come to borrow live coals, water or wood. If a sick person needed wine, she was bountiful with it, refusing any compensation. Margaret would graciously give oil, bread, wheat or cornflour to neighbors without any annoyance" (BM I, 113). Passing beggars, lost travellers, business folk, even fugitives and bandits and the police looking for them were made welcome and were given refreshments. Practical, cheerful and prompt charity from their mother was the school for the future priest of poor and abandoned youngsters.

Young John soon began to imitate her:

A boy named Secundus Matta was another of John's cowering companions in the pasture. John's own age, he was a young farmhand on one of the surrounding estates. Matta would come down every morning with his master's cow; he carried along his breakfast, a piece of coarse bread. John would be munching on a piece of tasty white bread that Mamma Margaret always took great pains to keep in the house.

One fine day John asked Matta: "Want to do me a favor?"

"Sure," Matta replied.

"How about swapping bread with me?"

"Why?"

"Because your bread must taste better than mine and I like it better."

In his simplicity, Matta really believed that John preferred coarse bread. Since he liked his friend's white bread better, he eagerly agreed to the exchange. From that day onward for two successive spring seasons, they exchanged bread every morning in the meadow. Later on, a grown man, Matta often thought about this. He would often discuss it with his nephew, Fr Secundus Marchisio, a Salesian, observing that John's motive for the exchange could only have been to practice self-denial (BM I, 67-68).

A visit to the Casetta

The *Casetta* was restored and reinforced for the centenary of Don Bosco's death. It was returned to its original size, based on photographs from the end of the 19th Century. The "hayloft above extending to the ground" where the access staircase to the first floor rooms had been added in 1929, was re-opened; the old barn where young John Bosco entertained his friends was restored. The stable and kitchen remained as they were (ground floor) as did the rooms on the upper floor (Mamma Margaret's room and the room where the dream took place).

The adjoining house (Cavallo) was turned into an entrance area for visits to the *Casetta*, with information panels on Don Bosco's and his family's life. There is also a bronze statue here, the work of sculptor Enrico Manfrini, dedicated to Mamma Margaret as educator of her children; she is smiling, hands around young John who is offering her the stick spoken of above in punishment for some prank.

A view of the surrounds is made possible by windows let into the western wall of the Cavallo house. There is no direct access from that point because it would affect the overall stability of the building.

His brother Joseph's house

John Bosco's brother Joseph Louis married Maria Calosso at age 21 (1833), by whom he had ten children, most of whom died at an early age. Over the nine years of work (1830–1839) as a share-farmer at Sussambrino he succeeded in scraping the necessary means together to buy some land on The Becchi hill and to build a poor but dignified home, adequate for his large family. He moved there in 1839 and remained until his death in 1862.

The building, situated more or less in front of the *Casetta*, beside the Sanctuary to Mary Help of Christians, has two floors. At the front, next to the stone recording the building's importance, is a sundial (*Meridiana Astronomica Geografica Universale*) made by specialist

builders Giorgio Mesturini and Mario Tebenghi, with an inscription taken from the famous sundial in the seminary at Chieri, the one which measured the cleric Bosco's study time with the words: *Afflictis lentae – celeres gaudentibus horae*, or, "Time passes slowly for the those who are sad – quickly for those who are joyful".

Ground floor

On the ground floor, connected to the Farming Life Museum, two areas separated by a staircase show us, respectively, the rebuilding of the Bosco family's kitchen (shown as *Sala T*) and bedroom (shown as *Sala S*).

Our Lady of the Rosary Chapel

Still at ground floor level, at the western corner of the building, Joseph had adapted a small room for use as a chapel, and Don Bosco dedicated it to Our Lady of the Rosary. He inaugurated this little chapel on 8 October 1848. Up till 1869, the Saint celebrated the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary there each year, giving it solemnity with the presence of the boys' band and choir from Valdocco. This was Don Bosco's first site for encouraging devotion to Mary and a privileged spot also for the beginnings of the Salesian Congregation. It was here, in fact, on 3 October 1852, that Michael Rua and Joseph Rocchiatti received the clerical habit. Dominic Savio certainly prayed at this spot too on 2 October 1854 when he first met Don Bosco, and subsequently during Autumn walks to The Becchi.

This is how Don Bosco describes his first meeting with Dominic Savio:

Early on the first Monday in October I saw lad accompanied by his father coming to speak with me. His cheerful but respectful nature attracted my gaze.

"Who are you?" I asked him, "Where do you come from?"

“I am Dominic Savio,” he replied, “whom Fr Cugliero, my teacher, has spoken about, and we come from Mondonio.”

I called him aside to find out what studies he had done, how he had lived up till then, and we soon began to trust one other.

I could see in him a soul that was animated by the Lord’s spirit, and I was not a little surprised to see what divine grace had already achieved in such a tender heart.

After talking a little longer, before I called his father, he said these exact words to me: “So what do you think? Will you take me to Turin to study?”

“Well! It seems to me there is good material here.”

“What could you use this material for?”

“To make a nice garment to give the Lord.”

“So I am the material: you are the tailor; so take me with you and let’s make a good garment for the Lord.”

“I am not sure you are strong enough for study.”

“Have no fear of that; the Lord has given me health and grace up till now, and will help me in the future.”

“But when you finish studying Latin, what will you do?”

“If the Lord will give me the grace I would like to embrace the ecclesiastical state.”

“Okay. Now I want to see if you have what it takes to study: Take this little book (it was an edition of the Catholic Readings) and study this page for today, and tomorrow you can recite it back to me.” Having said that I left him free to go and play with the other boys, and I went to speak with his father. No more than eight minutes went by before Dominic came back to me smiling and told me: “If you want I can give you that page now.” I took the book and to my surprise I saw that he had not only studied the page, but understood the meaning of the contents.

“Well done,” I told him, “You anticipated your study of this lesson so I will anticipate my reply. Yes; I will take you to Turin and from now on you are enrolled as one of my dear boys” (DS Ch. 7).

First restored by Fr Rua, the chapel witnessed some minor work in 2002, thanks to benefactors and others belonging to the Salesian Family.

A small plaque commemorates their effort; it can be found in the area behind the altar.

A glass case (also behind the altar) contains some vestments and sacred vessels from the first days of the chapel.

Upper floor

Joseph kept a *room especially for Don Bosco* on the upper level, and Don Bosco used this each time he stayed at the Becchi especially during Autumn holiday time. This room is found at the south west corner of the building (*Sala Z*) and items used by the Saint are preserved there. You pass two other rooms before getting there: (*Sala V*), smaller, and used as a little study room by the Saint, and (*Sala U*), larger, where the Bosco family furniture is kept.

Stable and hayloft

On the eastern side of the house you find the stable (*Sala R*) and hayloft (today rebuilt) where the boys from Turin would sleep during the “autumn walks”. They were also accommodated in the granary (room at the top of the stairs) and attic, large enough and well-ventilated by two dormer windows which were built with a contribution from Don Bosco (and removed during the restoration of the building at that time in 1929).

Michael Magone, too, was a guest at the Becchi (1858). Don Bosco tells us a nice little episode that happened in this part of the building:

One evening while our boys were all asleep, I heard someone crying and sighing. I crept up to the window and saw Magone in one corner of the hay shed looking at the moon and crying. “What’s up, Magone, are you ill?” I asked him.

He had thought he was alone and nobody could see him so he was upset and didn’t know how to answer; but then he said:

“I am crying because I am looking at the moon that has for so many centuries appeared each evening to dispel the darkness of the night without every disobeying its Creator, while I am so young, have reason, and should have been faithful to my God’s law, but I have disobeyed him so often and offended him in a thousand ways.” And saying that he began crying again. I consoled him with a few words and he calmed down and went back to sleep again.

(G. Bosco, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele allievo dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, Torino. Tip. G.B. Paravia e Comp. 1861, pp. 64–65. Or Ch. 12 in English editions).

Museum of 19th Century Farming Life

Between the Graglia house and Joseph’s house, beneath ground level, a hall has been built with wide arches overlooking the valley. It is modelled on the large rural wine-cellars.

This is where the Farming Life Museum is situated. It shows what life was like for farming families on these Piedmontese hills in the 19th Century. There are some six hundred antique items housed here: furniture, work tools, items in daily use, all collected patiently and preserved by Salesian Brother Teresio Chiesa. The items testify to customs, life and working techniques (vines and wines, wheat and bread, milk and cheese, wood...) in use by the families around the Asti, Cuneo and Turinese regions in the 19th Century. Linking this with Joseph’s house highlights the value of the reconstruction in its recalling of earlier times.

A visit to the Museum is of particular historical and cultural interest. With help from illustrated panels and photographs, we can make ourselves more aware of the real environment, the lifestyle and working style that families like the Boscoss led in the Piedmont of yesteryear.

The materials on display are grouped under various themes: Farmers’ customs (*Zone A*), items recovered from bedrooms (*Zone B*), the family hearth (*Zone C*), kitchen (*Zone D*), ploughing implements (*Zone E*), grain cultivation (*Zone F*), hay making and animal yokes

(*Zone G*), weights and tools for working hemp and wood (*Zone H*), animal harness (*Zone I*), lighting equipment (*Zone L*), washing, laundry materials (*Zone M*), grape-growing and wine-making (*Zone N*), Bottling (*Zone O*), equipment for poultry, bee-keeping (*Zone Q*). Joseph Bosco's wine cellar contains items typical of any such cellar in that region in the 19th Century (*Zone P*).

During the excavation work to build the museum the ancient dome-shaped oven came to light, used for baking bread. Joseph had built it. In fact the hamlet's bake-house, located at the Biglione's, was never big enough for when Don Bosco came to Colle with his boys. That could be found down beyond the house on the western side of the hill, and was discovered during rebuilding in the Twenties. It has been rebuilt near the Museum entrance.

Small sanctuary to Mary Help of Christians

Filippo Crispolti, a Salesian Cooperator, had suggested the construction of this building to Fr Paul Albera, Don Bosco's second successor. Building commenced on 16 August 1915, and Anthony's house was pulled down to make way for it. The Church was consecrated on 2 August 1918. There were three reasons for the construction: to celebrate the birth centenary of the Saint; to commemorate the centenary of the institution of the Feast of Mary Help of Christians, set for 24 May by Pius VII who had returned from imprisonment by Napoleon; and finally to pray for peace for a world so affected by the First World War. For this third purpose, children around the world were invited to send in their symbolic small offerings. The national emblems painted beneath the eaves, leading to behind where the statue of Our Lady is placed, are a record of this gesture of youthful hope.

The building, in neo-Gothic style, is the work of the architect Giulio Valotti, a Salesian Brother. The Church is built in the shape of a Greek Cross (10 metres by 15). Large windows either side allow a chance to pilgrims to take part in functions even if standing outside

the building. The statue of Mary Help of Christians comes from the sculpture workshops of the Salesian School at Sarrià, Barcelona. Off to the side, below, are two statues which are the work of sculptor Riccardo Cordero and show Don Bosco and Mary Domenica Mazzarello.

The contemporary set-up of the sanctuary area is the work of the architect Graziano Romaldi. Replacing the previous neo-Gothic altar there is now a brick facade, tent-like in shape, surrounding the large crucifix and the tabernacle.

From 1918, a small Salesian community lived in some of the adjacent rooms and saw to religious services and looking after pilgrims.

The Mary of Nazareth Contemplative Fraternity arrived here in 1991 from Uruguay. This was at the wish of Fr Viganó. As well as developing the apostolate that is proper to this Group of the Salesian Family, they look after the smooth running of the Shrine (pilgrims, masses, adoration).

Monument to John the Juggler

In the south-east corner between the old Graglia house and the farming museum, we find the juggler monument, first constructed 1929, the year of the Beatification, and then revamped by Crida. Nowadays it has been replaced by a bronze version, the work of Ennio Tesei: it recalls young John Bosco who used show off his skills in front of the youngsters from the hamlet, after some prayer and catechetics.

When the weather was fine, especially on Sundays and feast days, a few strangers would come along to swell the ranks. Things were getting a bit more serious now. The entertainment now extended to tricks I had picked up from acrobats and magicians I had watched in the marketplaces and at fairs I used to watch them closely to get the hang of the tricks, then go home and practise till I had mastered the skill. You can imagine all the falls and tumbles and bumps and crashes I was always having! But would you believe that by the time I was eleven I could juggle, do midair somersaults and the swallow trick, and walk

on my hands. I could walk, jump, and even dance on the tightrope like a professional acrobat. From the programme of one holiday in particular you can get an idea of our general routine.

At Becchi there was a field in which grew several trees. One of them, a pear tree that is still there, was very helpful to me then. I used to sling a rope from it to another tree some distance away. I had a table with a haversack on it, and on the ground a mat for the jumps. When I had everything set up and everyone was eager to marvel at my latest feats, I would invite them to recite the rosary and sing a hymn. Then standing on the chair, I preached to them or, better, repeated as much as I could remember from the explanation of the gospel I had heard in church that morning; or sometimes I recalled episodes from something I had heard or read. After the sermon there was a short prayer, and then the show began. At that point you would have seen, just as I am telling you, the preacher transformed into a professional acrobat. I did the swallow trick and somersaults, walked on my hands, tied the pouch around my waist, swallowed coins and then produced them from someone's nose. I multiplied balls and eggs, changed water into wine, killed and chopped up a chicken and then brought it back to life again so that it crowed better than before. These were part of my stock in trade. I walked the tightrope like an ordinary path, jumped and danced on it. and hung by one foot or one hand, sometimes by two. At the end of it I was tired. A short prayer brought proceedings to a close, and everyone went about his business (MO Ch. 3).

The Dream Post or Pillar

Built in 1929, this is on the western slope of the hillside about 20 metres from the *Casetta*. It is a reminder of the famous dream at nine years of age, and features the work of artist Pietro Favaro, copied from the original kept in the Church of the Salesian Institute at Alassio.

This is how Don Bosco describes the dream:

It was at that age that I had a dream. All my life this remained deeply impressed on my mind. In this dream I seemed to be near my home in a fairly large yard. A crowd of children were playing there. Some were laughing, some were playing games, and quite a few were swearing.

When I heard these evil words, I jumped immediately amongst them and tried to stop them by using my words and my fists.

At that moment a dignified man appeared, a nobly dressed adult. He wore a white cloak, and his face shone so that I could not look directly at him. He called me by name, told me to take charge of these children, and added these words: "You will have to win these friends of yours not by blows but by gentleness and love. Start right away to teach them the ugliness of sin and the value of virtue." Confused and frightened, I replied that I was a poor, ignorant child. I was unable to talk to those youngsters about religion. At that moment the kids stopped their fighting, shouting, and swearing; they gathered round the man who was speaking.

Hardly knowing what I was saying, I asked, "Who are you, ordering me to do the impossible?"

"Precisely because it seems impossible to you, you must make it possible through obedience and the acquisition of knowledge."

"Where, by what means, can I acquire knowledge?"

"I will give you a teacher. Under her guidance you can become wise. Without her, all wisdom is foolishness."

"But who are you that speak so?"

"I am the son of the woman whom your mother has taught you to greet three times a day."

"My mother tells me not to mix with people I don't know unless I have her permission. So tell me your name."

"Ask my mother what my name is."

At that moment, I saw a lady of stately appearance standing beside him. She was wearing a mantle that sparkled all over as though covered with bright stars. Seeing from my questions and answers that I was more confused than ever, she beckoned me to approach her. She took me kindly by the hand and said, "Look." Glancing round, I realised that the youngsters had all apparently run away. A large number of goats, dogs, cats, bears, and other animals had taken their place.

"This is the field of your work. Make yourself humble, strong, and energetic. And what you will see happening to these animals in a moment is what you must do for my children."

I looked round again, and where before I had seen wild animals, I now saw gentle lambs. They were all jumping and bleating as if to welcome that man and lady.

At that point, still dreaming, I began crying. I begged the lady to speak so that I could understand her, because I did not know what all this could mean. She then placed her hand on my head and said, "In good time you will understand everything."

With that, a noise woke me up and everything disappeared (MO Ch. 2).

The old Becchi water fountain

In front of the Cavallo house, not far from the Dream Post, was the well used for the hamlet. It was re-discovered during the work of widening the square in front of the large Church, at the beginning of the Sixties. Now it has been rebuilt. You get there by walking down from the Dream Post and turning left below the square. This is where Mamma Margaret would draw water for daily needs. It was while doing just this that Don Bosco saw her in a dream on 1 March 1886 (cf. BM XVIII, 12–13). This dream is also considered to be a prophecy of the future Bernardi Semeria Institute.

Monument to Mamma Margaret

Walking back up towards the square in front of the church (Basilica) you find the monument honouring Mamma Margaret, completed in 1992 by Enrico Manfrini. This large bronze statue depicts Don Bosco's mother in working attire, intent on her housework, bucket in hand, standing in front of the domestic animals. At shoulder height, some panels fixed to a rustic little fence-enclosure tell about the most important moments in her life: the death of her husband, John's dream at nine years of age, her charity towards the needy, and her arrival at Valdocco with her son the priest.

The monument is meant as a sign of gratitude of the Salesian Family to the one who provided the essential formation for the young people's Saint. The first panel puts it thus: "A peasant woman of enormous courage and lively faith in Providence, she brought her children up according to the Gospel and with reason, religion and love. Understanding John's vocation, from his telling his mysterious dreams, she formed his heart to a charity towards God and the poorest of the young. A volunteer and helper at the Oratory, she was "Mamma Margaret" to everyone, and remains thus for so many youngsters from Europe, America, Asia and Africa.

Church (Basilica) in honour of Don Bosco

During the Second World War the Salesian superiors agreed to build a large church in honour of the Saint, near his birthplace, to obtain Divine protection on Salesian works throughout the world. But the project didn't begin to be realised until the end of the Fifties, when Fr Renato Ziggotti, fifth successor of Don Bosco, was Rector Major. To prepare the ground, the Biglione-Damevino house was pulled down without realising what its historical significance was.

The building, designed by Enea Ronca and then re-interpreted by architect Giovanni Rubatto, a Salesian Brother, was built between June 1961 and March 1966.

It offers two floors: the lower Church and the upper church. Internally, the whole complex is 70 metres long by 37 wide. Externally it is 110 metres, including the steps. Above is a cupola 16 metres in diameter and 80 reaching to a height of 80 metres.

The cupola is framed by two bell-towers where, since the Jubilee Year 2000, 12 bells have been installed, the work of a firm called Capanni from Castelnuovo ne' Monti (Regio Emilia). The bells have been named after the Salesian Family Saints who "sing the Lord God's glory throughout time and history". The largest of the bells, in memory

of the Jubilee, has a diameter of 1.55 metres and weighs 2,300 kg. The designs on it are the work of Salesian Brother Luigi Zonta.

Three huge mosaics constructed by the Bernasconi firm from Como, based on drawings by Mario Bogani, adorn the external walls of the church.

On the western side we find a large welcoming Don Bosco traced out in the background. He visibly translates the love of Christ the Good Shepherd, welcoming all who climb up this hill where he was born.

On the wall facing east towards Capriglio instead, we see John with his friends playing and teaching under Mamma Margaret's watchful eye.

Finally, the mosaic on the southern side overlooking the courtyard belonging to the Bernardi Semeria Institute, takes us to the Valdocco field where the youngsters met up with and played with Don Bosco. Here too we find a sundial which is a reminder of the Saint's spirituality of joy in reference to when he first entered the seminary in Chieri. Above is the Virgin Mary, the "teacher" who would inspire and guide all of Don Bosco's and his sons' activity.

Lower church

This was solemnly opened by Fr Louis Ricceri the sixth successor of Don Bosco, on 15 August 1965, on the eve of the 150th anniversary of the Saint's birth.

The inside, 7 metres high, offers us a ceiling made of rhomboid-shaped tiles and is adorned with marble and also windows which create an atmosphere of recollection.

As one enters, one's gaze is naturally attracted by the main altar and the wall behind it. This was painted by Mario Càffaro Rore (1910–2001) on the theme of Don Bosco and his Autumn walks.

Behind the sanctuary there is a relic of Don Bosco placed approximately at the spot where the house where the Saint was born had stood. Two

large paintings by Mario Bogani form the corners of the reliquary. On the left the artist has drawn three scenes: the wedding of Francis Bosco and Margaret Occhiena, celebrated in front of the civil authority according to the Napoleonic law of the day; John's baptism; the old house where he was born. On the right hand side the painting depicts the difficult and frequent efforts of farming life and Francis Bosco's death.

Built before the period of liturgical reform, the church has a number of side chapels, with windows depicting various saints dear to the Salesian tradition.

Moving from the sanctuary towards the back of the church we find on the left: a picture of St Aloysius Gonzaga (whom Don Bosco offered to his boys as a model) with St Ignatius and the Virgin Mary; the Blessed Sacrament altar with its painting by Càffaro Rore depicting St Francis de Sales (patron of the Salesian Family), and side windows with St Joseph Cafasso (friend and spiritual guide of our Saint) and St Joseph Benedict Cottolengo (founder of the Little Home of Divine Providence, near the Oratory in Valdocco). The other altars: St John the Baptist (celebrated at the Oratory as Don Bosco's name day); Saint Mary Domenica Mazzarello (co-founder of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians); St Cecilia (patron of music, an important element in the Salesian educational system).

Down the right hand side, coming away from the sanctuary: Saint Dominic Savio (the best result of Salesian pedagogy); the choir chapel with its organ built by the Tamburini firm from Crema (2,500 pipes) with two windows at the side depicting St John the Evangelist (dear to Don Bosco because he was young and a special favourite of the Lord's); Don Bosco with the young; the crucified Jesus with the patrons of Italy, Francis of Assisi and Catherine of Siena.

The back wall is completely taken up by a photographic colour reproduction of the Last Supper by Leonardo Da Vinci, the same size as the original to be found in St Mary of Graces (Milan). It was a gift (1965) from ILFORD in Saronno (Varese).

Upper church

The upper church was only completed internally in 1984, almost twenty years after the lower church, according to the plan produced by the engineer Augusto Agostino, and decorated with paintings by Luigi Zonta. Its consecration took place on 1 May 1984 by Cardinal Anastasio Ballestrero, Archbishop of Turin.

The first church, however, left a number of problems unresolved including acoustics and heating. It meant further work needed to be done. This was made possible thanks to the generosity of a man from Castelnuovo who had emigrated to America, John Filipello. Deeply connected to his place of origin, he offered part of his inheritance to completely rebuild the sacred building. The work came to an end at the conclusion of the Holy Year 2000 and the upper church, completely renovated and known as the Jubilee Church, was able to be solemnly opened on 3 January 2000 by the Rector Major, Fr Juan Edmund Vecchi, the eighth successor of Don Bosco.

On 12 April 2010, Pope Benedict XVI raised the church to the dignity of a Minor Basilica with a decree signed by the Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (Cardinal Antonio Cañizares). On 23 May 2010, the solemnity of Pentecost, this decree was made official with a solemn ceremony led by Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, a Salesian and Secretary of State of the Holy See. There were many other Salesian bishops and cardinals present.

One approaches the church via a broad set of steps dominated by a statue of Don Bosco. Donated in 1920 by the Italian Catholic Teachers Association in honour of the great educator of children and young people, it used to be located between Joseph's and the Graglia House. To highlight its value it was relocated to where it is now in 1986 on the vigil of the centenary celebrations for the birth of the Saint.

Above the entrances to the Church, a fresco by Mario Bogani depicts the faces of various tribes, emphasising the universality of Don Bosco's work. Flanking the right hand doorway a stone recalls the visit by

John Paul II, who came up to Colle on 3 September 1988 to honour the Saint for young people in the centenary of his birth and to beatify Laura Vicuña. The stone bears the words used on that occasion by the Pope to describe Don Bosco's birthplace: "the hill of youthful beatitudes".

Inside

Designed by Stefano Trucco from Turin, the upper church can hold 1,500 people or thereabouts and has been completely decked out in beech wood. Overall it has a warm and yet restrained feeling, together with the diffusion of light and all this makes it an inviting environment well adapted to prayer and recollection. The curved wooden panelling held in place by twenty six vertical beams suggest to the faithful the image of the Church as the Ark of Salvation.

The pilgrim's gaze is immediately caught by the wall behind the sanctuary featuring a statue of Christ the Redeemer in the glory of the Resurrection, arms flung wide embracing all of humanity. This gigantic sculpture, weighing 30 quintals (a quintal is 100 kg), is 8 metres high, and 6 metres across from finger-tip to finger-tip. It was sculptured from wood from a linden tree by Corrado Piazza from Demetz di Ortisei (Val Gardena). Its central position reminds everyone that Don Bosco's mission was to lead young people to Christ, the "nobly-dressed man" he saw in his dream when he was nine years old.

Going down the Church towards the altar, on the right side of the entrance one admires a reproduction of the *Madonna Consolata* (Our Lady of Consolation), patroness of the archdiocese of Turin, at whose Shrine Don Bosco often used to spend time in prayer. He also went to the Consolata the morning that Mamma Margaret died, to entrust himself and his boys to their heavenly Mother. The painting is the work of Piero Ribezzo of Alba (Cuneo).

On the right hand wall near the entrance we see some wooden reliefs, the Stations of the *Via Lucis* (from the 8th to the 14th Station), based

on the mysteries of the Resurrection. Just as the traditional Stations of the Cross lead us to meditate on the Passion and Death of Christ, these wooden panels help the believer to meditate on Easter and its fruits. They depict events which are basic to Christian faith from the Resurrection to the Easter appearances, to Pentecost. They are a good accompaniment to the Risen Christ towering over the nave; they are the work of Ortisei (Bolzano) based on drawings by Giovanni Dragoni of Rome.

Approaching the altar, in the right transept we see three of the Bogani canvases. The central one shows the dream at nine years of age, while in the same painting, lower down in the foreground we see the first realisations of that dream. The artist has depicted the celebrated episode which occurred on 8 December 1841, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, in the sacristy of St Francis Assisi Church in Turin: Don Bosco, a young priest getting ready to say Mass, defends young Bartholomew Garelli from the sacristan who was chasing him away. To the right we get a glimpse of the Pinaridi house where, at Easter 1846, the Oratory began to be set up.

On the left, the painter has shown us Don Bosco the Founder of two Religious Congregations dedicated to the education of the young. In the foreground we see Don Bosco surrounded by youngsters and, in the background, those who continue the educational mission: the Salesians and the Salesian Sisters. St Dominic Savio, Blessed Laura Vicuña and Ceferino Namancurà above remind us of the fruits of educational activity inspired by the Salesian charism.

On the right a third painting recalls the strict bonds of affection that existed between Don Bosco and his boys. They are carrying him in triumph because he has completely given over his life for all of them, especially the poorest of them: those left to themselves, imprisoned, workers... Don Bosco reached out to them all, moved by his apostolic concern, but also thanks to the help of so many friends and benefactors who have rightly been portrayed in the painting: St Joseph Cafasso his spiritual director, St Joseph Cottolengo, a fine model of charity towards

the poor, Fr John Borel who was his right arm during those first years at the Oratory.

This painted triptych is completed by a group in bronze which sums up one of the cardinal aspects of the Saint's educational system: loving kindness. Mamma Margaret is reaching out to her priest son who in turn has his arms around one of the youngsters entrusted to him. This is the work of sculptor Riccardo Cordero.

These works pick up light from the windows, made by the Alesso Bravo firm and designed essentially in symbolic style, in soft colours, by Luigi Zonta. The dominant motif is the acacia leaves which abound in the woods around Colle. But each of these ornaments has its own special significance.

On the right of the dream painting the Eucharist is recalled (grapes, vines, hosts); on the left, devotion to Mary Immaculate and Help of Christians (lily, crown, sun, moon and stars). Beside the sanctuary, still looking to the right, a small side chapel is where the Blessed Sacrament is kept and invites us to prayer and adoration.

On the other side of the huge marble altar is a bronze statue of Our Lady in natural dimensions. The work of Cordero, it expresses the Virgin's motherly kindness and her powerful intercession with her Son whom she holds to herself and who is looking and listening.

In the left transept we admire another two of Bogani's paintings. To the right of the organ one of the Saint's many activities: builder of churches, trusting in the help of Divine Providence. We recognise the facades of the two Basilicas – Mary Help of Christians in Turin and Sacred Heart in Rome; the church of St Francis de Sales and St John the Evangelist in Turin. Mary Help of Christians Basilica stands over them all, the one which Don Bosco considered to be the real masterpiece of all his works. Finally, high on the right, the cupola of St Peter's, indicating faithfulness to the Holy Father and Don Bosco's strong sense of ecclesial communion.

On the left we find depicted Don Bosco's commitment to the missions. A large boat in the centre of the painting recalls the missionary expeditions he sent off in 1875, while on the top, a few basic details recall the peoples and cultures that Salesian missionary activity took place amongst. In the foreground, some well known Salesian missionaries: Bishop John Cagliero on horseback, leading the first missionary expedition in 1875 to Argentina and first Cardinal of the Congregation; at his side Bishop Louis Versiglia and Fr Callistus Caravario martyred in China in 1930; in front of them with the white beard, Monsignor Vincent Cimatti who headed up the first Salesian missions in Japan.

On the window to the right are some stylised depictions of young people, those to whom the Salesian mission is addressed.; the one on the left is the dream at nine years of age but expressed through symbols – sun (God's intervention), the hand (Mary as guide) transforming the wolves into lambs.

The central part of the transept is taken up by the organ. Built by the Pinchi Firm from Foligno (Perugia) it is a project of Maestro Arturo Sacchetti, and was inaugurated in the Jubilee Year 2000. It is mechanical and has three keyboards and 3,332 pipes.

Turning back towards the entrance we meet the *Via Lucis* panels again (from 1 to 7) and a painting of Our Lady of Czestochowa. This is the work of a Polish Salesian, Father Henryk Kaszcycki. It was a gift of Pope John Paul II on the occasion of his visit to Colle in September 1988.

On the back wall, above the entrance, is the final one of Bogani's paintings depicting the gospel episode of the Disciples of Emmaus. In one frame we see the various moments of that event: above, to the left, normal daily life, while the events of the death and resurrection of Christ came in to determine all of history; in the foreground the two disciples meeting the risen Christ; the supper during which the Lord reveals himself in the breaking of the bread; the witness of the two disciples to Peter and the first group of believers. Peter's clothes are the same colour

as those of the mysterious traveller: a sign that Christ has given his power to the first of the Apostles to guide the Church with the same authority.

The location of the painting at the exit to the Temple has a precise intent: it is an invitation to the pilgrim to give witness in life to the risen Christ encountered in the Church and especially in the Eucharist, as the disciples of Emmaus came to understand.

Above the painting is a rose window representing the four Evangelists, and the Salesian coat of arms with the motto Don Bosco chose for his apostolic work: *Da mihi animas cetera tolle*: “(O Lord) give me souls and take away the rest”. Brightly lit colours dominate, especially red, symbol of charity.

Bernardi Semeria Salesian Institute

When the small Shrine of Mary Help of Christians was being built (1918) the first group of Salesians and aspirants to Salesian life came to live nearby.

On the eve of Don Bosco’s Beatification (2 June 1929), Fr Philip Rinaldi, third successor of the Saint, thought about building a centre for education and technical education of young people at Colle. With this in mind, and also thinking of future pilgrimages, he bought (24 January 1929) the Biglione-Damevino farmstead with all its land but not including the portion to the north of the *Casetta* as he would have liked to have done. Here, in 1938-1943, through the efforts of Fr Peter Ricaldone, fourth successor of Don Bosco, they built the large institute donated by lawyer Pietro Bernardi, an Uncle to Father Semeria, a Barnabite, well known writer and preacher.

For decades this institute took in boys, many of them poor or orphaned, who wanted to become Salesians. After they had learned a trade (agriculture, mechanics, graphics, woodwork) hundreds of missionaries and apostles to the young left from here. It became a

famous centre for technical formation of Salesians coming from all over the world.

These days the Salesian Community at Colle uses the institute to accommodate pilgrims, tourists, youth groups. Until recently there was a Technical Centre specialising in graphic arts, very much at the service of the *Centro Catechistico Salesiano* and the Elledici Publishing House. The community also provides support for many of the surrounding parishes.

The ethnological and missionary museum

Nearby the Salesian Institute we find the Ethnological and Missionary Museum. The material kept there was gathered by Salesian missionaries and originally exhibited in Rome in 1925 on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the first Salesian missionary expedition. When the Roman exhibition was over most of the items were used in smaller exhibitions in Turin (1926), Barcelona (1930), Naples (1934), Bari (1935) and then Bologna, Padua, and Milan. Unfortunately in the course of these various exhibitions, some pieces were lost trace of.

In 1941 the remaining material (perhaps only about half of that exhibited in Rome in 1925) was brought to Colle to be put on permanent display. For the centenary of Don Bosco's death, the old museum was replaced by a more appropriate modern building. The most recent re-arrangement of materials was in 2000.

Items on exhibit

The pieces preserved in the museum number 6,810, but only around 2,500 of these are on show.

The first group of items, from Patagonia, Tierra del Fuego and Paraguay, go back to 1901–10 and were donated to the Salesian Institute

in Valsalice (Turin) where from 1887 to 1925 there was a Salesian seminary for Foreign Missions.

Most of the collection was gathered between 1923–24 from various missionary areas. The items from the Far East were added in 1930.

The succession of display boxes shows the historical development of the Salesian missions, especially the part relating to Latin America. Going around you see displays dedicated to: Argentina (Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego with the Onas, Alakaluffi, Yanages tribes); Paraguay (especially the Moros tribe); and Bolivia; Ecuador (the Shuar); Brasil (Bororo, Chavantes and Karaja); Venezuela (Rio Negro and Yanomani).

There are showcases for Africa (Kenya especially), Oceania, China, Japan, Vietnam, Burma, Thailand, Assam/India, Australia.

Two displays in particular are set apart – half way along, the one showing the larger fauna of various nations and continents, and towards the exit, one showing the smaller fauna: especially insects. The visit is accompanied by texts, graphics and photographs which help give a Salesian and missionary interpretation

Recent developments

The museum

In view of the Centenary of St John Bosco's death, substantial renovations took place and in 2016, multimedia content was added to the displays. To celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Salesian missionary expeditions (1875–2025), an additional small ethnographical museum, connected with this one at *Colle*, has been opened at Valdocco in rooms associated with *Missioni Don Bosco* .

The novitiate

An important recent development at Colle Don Bosco has been the establishment of the novitiate in the *Cascina Scaiota*, or Scaiota farmstead, located to the southeast of the main institute. The original building was demolished in 1950 and replaced with two buildings in 1956 enclosing a courtyard. All the agricultural activity of the estate then moved to this area. This then allowed for the demolition of the Cascina Biglione-Damevino (at the time they were unaware that John Bosco was born there!) to make way for construction of the new church, now Basilica.

In 2019 the interprovincial novitiate dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus moved from Pinerolo to this Scaiota area. Since 2022 it is the only novitiate in Italy, the interprovincial novitiate at Genzano di Roma having been suspended.

Via biblica walking track

Starting out from the *Casetta*, it is now possible to take a walking track that eventually arrives at Dominic Savio's house in Morialdo. There are fourteen "stations" along the way that help the walker to reflect on the lives of young people mentioned in the Bible.

The cross atop the Hill of Beatitudes

The hill of youthful beatitudes is so named after the address given by Pope St John Paul II during his visit to Colle Don Bosco on 3 September 1988. The cross that now stands atop this hill recalls Don Bosco's final missionary dream in Barcelona in April 1886, and was blessed by the then Rector Major, Fr Pascual Chávez, on Pentecost Sunday, 23 May 2010.

MORIALDO

To the north of the Sanctuary of Mary Help of Christians and Joseph's house there is a road that heads up to the top of the hill and around 2 kms further on reaches a group of houses that make up the small hamlet of Morialdo.

St Dominic Savio's House

Coming from Colle, on the right you will come across a building with a plaque from 1910 which recalls the fact that the Savio family lived here. At that time the house belonged to the Viale family. St Dominic Savio lived here from November 1843 to February 1853 (you will note that the dates on the plaque are not precise: 1842–1857). His father Carlo, an ironmonger, and his mother Brigida, a seamstress, had moved there from S. Giovanni di Riva presso Chieri when Dominic was only one year old. Following this they moved to Mondonio as a permanent residence. These moves were all the result of needing to find work, since the family had no fixed assets.

The building you see is testimony to Dominic's relatively peaceful childhood and the solid upbringing he had from his parents and the local priest.

Don Bosco, when he tells the story of his pupil, offers us a series of episodes to do with this house. For example we recall the gestures of affection Dominic showed his father coming home after work and the time he refused to sit at table with a guest who did not say his grace before meals. But the most meaningful recollection is certainly Dominic's First Communion which probably took place at the little church at Morialdo (8 April 1849), while the young Saint was living there:

It was a wonderful and never-to-be-forgotten day for him; it was a renewal of his life for God, a life that can be taken as an example by

anyone. If one got him to talk about his First Communion several years later, his face lit up with joy and happiness as he said:

“That was the happiest and most wonderful day of my life.”

He made some promises on that day which he preserved carefully in a little book, and often re-read them. He let me have this little book to look at and I give them here just as he wrote them.

Promises made by me, Dominic Savio, when I made my First Communion in 1849 at seven years of age:

I will go often to Confession and I will go to Holy Communion as often as I am allowed.

I will try to give the Sundays and holy days completely to God.

My best friends will be Jesus and Mary. Death, but not sin.

These promises were the guiding light of his life until he died (DS Ch. 3).

There are other recollections concerning Dominic’s stay at Morialdo found in a letter that Fr John Zucca, the priest and teacher there, wrote to Don Bosco:

Murialdo, 5 May 1857

Dear Don Bosco,

You wanted me to write something about the recently deceased Savio, referring to the fact that he lived nearby and attended the school and St Peter’s village church.

I am happy to do this. In the early days when I came to Murialdo I often saw a child maybe five years old or so walking with his mother and they would kneel and pray at the entrance to the little church. I noted the boy’s rare attitude of recollection. Coming and going we would often meet and he greeted me respectfully each time, and I was so struck by this that I wanted to find out who he was and they told me he was the child of Savio, the blacksmith and was known as Minot.

The following year he began attending school. He was regular, obedient and diligent; and since he seemed clever enough, he soon made good progress. His piety, which I had already seen at the entrance to the church when he was praying with his mother, grew with the years and this also helped him quickly pick up how to serve at Mass, and I could say he came almost daily for this. His love for

religious functions then led him to also come to serve at Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament and help with the singing – he would come with a school mate and alternate at times with his father. He would practise the hymns at home and in the stable.

He would come to confession a number of times a year, and as soon as he was able to distinguish Bread from bread, he was admitted to Holy Communion, which he received with a devotion that was admirable for such a young lad. He often had to mix with wilder boys but I don't recall him ever having serious problems with them and even less was he ever drawn to follow their example and engage in less savoury or indecent amusements; he wasn't into stealing the neighbours' fruit like other would often do, or cause damage, or annoy the elderly or very young.

Seeing him I often said to myself: Here is a boy that offers good hope for the future, as long as he has a chance to get away from here because few of the kids here, boys or girls, do well due to their parents' laziness, etc. etc. Unfortunately there are too many of these, and experience has given me first-hand examples. It seems the Marquis Breme was right when he said: Parental love, like other love, goes round with its eyes shut and often without realising it causes more harm than good...

Your dear and devoted friend Fr Zucca.

(From M. Molineris, *Nuova vita di Domenico Savio*, Colle Don Bosco 1974, pp. 63–64).

It is possible to visit the building or even use it for retreats and prayer with small groups, so long as there are prior arrangements with the office at the Basilica at Colle.

St Peter's church and the little presbytery

Continuing on a bit further we reach the little chapel dedicated to St Peter.

It was the church that families from the Becchi usually attended, since they were too far from the parish at Castelnuovo. In the houses attached to it on the eastern wall lived the chaplain who was paid by the families from the area. He operated under the parish priest and had responsibility for the pastoral care of the immediate area.

It was here to that young John, when he was eleven or twelve years of age, had tried to get the people to break off their fun and games and come to the evening service during the village patronal festivities (cf. BM I, 110–111). But the place is especially connected with the memory of two people who played a decisive role in Don Bosco's life: Fr John Calosso and St Joseph Cafasso.

Fr Calosso and young John Bosco

In the summer of 1829 Fr John Melchior Calosso (Chieri 1760–Morialdo 1830) came to Morialdo as chaplain with responsibility for the pastoral care of that area. He had been parish priest at Bruino (1791–1813), then, due to a series of calumnies and misunderstandings, he had lost that appointment and then went and helped his brother Carlo Vincenzo first of all, who was parish priest at Berzano di San Pietro (Asti), and then helped the parish priest at Carignano. He lived in the little presbytery that we can still see.

He played an important role in John's life as a young teenager when he returned from the Moglia farm and found getting on with Anthony very difficult.

They first met coming down the road from Buttigliera to Morialdo, between 5 and 9 November 1829, coming home after being at the mission that was being preached as part of the Extraordinary Jubilee Year announced by Pius VIII. In their discussions Fr Calosso discovered that John was a bright and good lad and offered to help him with his studies. This was the beginning of a deep and constructive friendship. The elderly priest, even more than teaching John the rudiments of Latin, also taught this fourteen year old farming lad the early steps for a genuinely spiritual life.

Don Bosco recalls this with special emotion:

I put myself completely into Fr Calosso's hands. He had become chaplain at Morialdo only a few months before. I bared my soul to

him. Every word, thought, and act I revealed to him promptly. This pleased him because it made it possible for him to have an influence on both my spiritual and temporal welfare.

It was then that I came to realise what it was to have a regular spiritual director. a faithful friend of one's soul. I had not had one up till then. Amongst other things he forbade a penance I used to practise: he deemed it unsuited to my age and circumstances. He encouraged frequent confession and communion. He taught me how to make a short daily meditation, or more accurately, a spiritual reading. I spent all the time I could with him; I stayed with him on feast days. I went to serve his Mass during the week when I could. From then on I began to savour the spiritual life; up to then I had acted in a purely mechanical way, not knowing the reasons. In mid-September, I began a regular study of Italian grammar, and soon I was able to write fairly good compositions, At Christmas I went on to study Latin. By Easter I was attempting Italian-Latin and Latin-Italian translations. All this time I persevered with my usual acrobatics in the field, or in the barn during the winter; everything my teacher said or did – his every word, I could say – provided edifying material for my audiences (MO Ch. 4).

After moving between home and presbytery for a while, dividing his time between work in the fields and study, John went and lived with the chaplain, offering his services in exchange. Thus he spent some months in peace and study while continuing to help at home (cf. MO Ch. 5).

Unfortunately, on 21 November 1830 Fr Calosso was struck down by a heart attack. John gave the key to the small safe to the priest's relatives. The dying man had given it to him. There was something like 6000 lire in the safe (cf. BM I, 162), a considerable amount when one considers that the annual salary of a public school teacher at the time was around 600-700 lire.

He found himself on his own again dealing with his studies and the growth in his idea of his vocation, even though his ideas were now clearer and his spirit stronger and more mature:

Fr Calosso's death was a great loss to me. I wept inconsolably over my dead benefactor. I thought of him in my waking hours and dreamt of him when I was asleep. It affected me so badly that my mother feared

for my health. She sent me for a while to my grandfather in Capriglio. At this time I had another dream. In it I was sorely reproached for having put my hope in men and not in our good heavenly Father (MO Ch. 6).

The encounter between the cleric Cafasso and John Bosco as a boy

At Morialdo, during one of the religious feasts (maybe in 1830?), in front of the church door, John first got to know Joseph Cafasso who was then a young cleric and this foreshadowed another very fruitful friendship:

It was the second Sunday of October, 1827, and the people of Murialdo were celebrating their patronal feast, the Motherhood of Mary. There was a great air of activity about the place; some were preparing the church, others engaged in family chores; some were playing games, others looking on.

One person I noticed was taking no part in the festivities. He was a slightly-built, bright-eyed cleric, kindly and pure in appearance. He was leaning against the church door. Though I was only twelve years old, I was struck by his appearance and felt I would like to meet him. I went over and spoke to him.

“Father,” I said, “would you care to see what’s going on at our feast? I’d like to act as your guide.”

He kindly beckoned me closer. He asked me how old I was, what studies I had done, if I had made my first communion, how often I went to confession, where I went to catechism, and so on. I was spellbound by his manner of speaking and answered all his questions without hesitation. To show my gratitude for his friendliness, I once more offered to show him round the various entertainments and novelties.

“My dear friend,” he replied, “the entertainments of a priest are church ceremonies. The more devoutly they are celebrated, the more pleasurable do they turn out for us. The new attractions are the practices of religion. These are ever new and therefore should be diligently attended. I’m only waiting for the church to open so I can go in.”

I plucked up my courage to add to the discussion. “But Father,” I suggested, “though what you say is true, there’s a time for everything, a time to pray and a time to play.” He smiled. But I have never forgotten his parting words, which were his plan of action for his whole life: “A cleric gives himself to the Lord. Nothing in the world must be more important to him than the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls (MO Ch. 6).

St Joseph Cafasso (1811–1860) would end up being his teacher of pastoral theology, confessor and spiritual director for the first twenty years of Don Bosco’s priesthood. In 1841, after his priestly ordination, when John Bosco was deciding on what pastoral activity to choose – which included the possibility of the chaplaincy at Morialdo – Cafasso convinced him to go to the Pastoral Institute in Turin to round off his pastoral and cultural studies. In fact he had understood the special mission the Lord was reserving for the young priest from the Becchi.

At the end of the holidays, I had three situations to choose from. I could have taken a post as tutor in the house of a Genoese gentleman with a salary of a thousand francs a year. The good people of Murialdo were so anxious to have me as their chaplain that they were prepared to double the salary paid to chaplains up to then. Last, I could have become a curate in my native parish. Before I made a final choice, I sought out Fr Caffasso [*note*: Don Bosco always spelt it this way instead of “Cafasso”]. For several years now he had been my guide in matters both spiritual and temporal. That holy priest listened to everything, the good money offers, the pressures from relatives and friends, my own goodwill to work. Without a moment’s hesitation, this is what he said: “You need to study moral theology and homiletics. For the present, forget all these offers and come to the Convitto.”

I willingly followed his wise advice; on 3 November 1841, I enrolled at the Convitto (MO Ch. 27).

St Peter’s church and Dominic Savio

Some years later this little village church was also a place of prayer and fervour for Dominic Savio as a child. In the ten or so years he

lived at Morialdo he learned to served the chaplain's, Fr Zucca's Mass (1818–1878) there. In his Life of Dominic Savio Don Bosco has this little scene:

He was only five years old when he learned to serve Mass and he always did so with great attention. He tried to be at Mass every day, and if there was someone else serving he would hear Mass from the benches. As he was rather small, he could not reach the missal when it was on the altar. It brought a smile to one's lips to see him anxiously coming up to the altar, standing on tip-toe and reaching as far as he could in the effort to get hold of the missal-stand. If the priest saying Mass wanted to please him, on no account should he change the missal over himself, but pull the stand right to the edge where Dominic could get hold of it and carry it triumphantly to the other side (DS Ch. 2).

Fr Zucca was also the primary school teacher for the children in the village. The school – opened in 1847-1848 after legislation based on the Boncompagni Law 1848 – was in a room on the first floor of the presbytery. The entrance to this was from inside the church to the right of the church entrance. Dominic attended there from 1848 to 1850. When his age and health allowed him, he continued his upper primary schooling at Castelnuovo (1852–1853).

From 1838 to 1852, the family of Giuseppe Bergoglio and Maria Arma Giachino, the great-great-grandparents of Pope Francis, lived on the Amaud farm near St Peter's Church. During this period they had five children. They then moved a few kilometres away from Porto Comaro.

These dates coincide with the presence of the Savio family in Morialdo (1843–1853). Therefore, they knew and dealt with each other. Moreover, the children were of Dominic's age. And, we can venture to say – without being certain of it – that Don Bosco himself could have met both the Savio and Bergoglio families.

The Sussambrino hillside

Along the main road, on the right as you go from the Becchi to Castelnuovo, and just in front of the turnoff to Buttigliera, there is a

hillside covered in flourishing vineyards and on that hill is the house at Sussambrino.

The farm house

In 1830 Joseph Bosco, just turned 18, rented this property along with Joseph Febbraro and moved to the house there, bringing his mother Margaret and brother John with him. So peace and quiet returned to the family scene, and a little more financial security, although the workload had doubled. The mother and her younger son, in fact, would alternate between here and the Becchi, depending on the needs of both farms.

Following Fr Calosso's death John had enrolled in the school at Castelnuovo and began attending there from halfway through December 1830. It was slightly less far from Sussambrino. Just the same, by foot and four times a day, it was a difficult road to travel, especially in the snow and ice of winter. To help him, Margaret found him a place to stay in Castelnuovo.

The Boscos were here for nine years. Meanwhile Joseph married Maria Calosso (9 May 1833). They gave birth to Marghereta (1834, who only lived two and a half months), Filomena (1835–1926) and Rosa Domenica (1838–1878). Another seven children were born at the new house at the Becchi, between 1841 and 1856.

John transferred to Chieri in 1831 to attend school there and after went to the seminary. He would return to Sussambrino for summer and autumn holidays. By now he was a strong young man who could lend a hand on the farm, though he would also find some time for study. There is a bronze bust on the wall of the old house recalling these happy and busy years.

Don Bosco tells us about his holidays while he was at the seminary:

Holidays were dangerous times for clerical students. In those days our summer break ran to four and a half months. I spent my time reading and writing; but not having as yet learnt how to use my days profitably,

I wasted many of them in fruitless activity. I tried to kill time by sheer manual labor. On the lathe I turned spindles, pegs, spinning tops, and wooden balls. I made clothes and shoes and I worked wood and iron. To this very day there are in my house at Murialdo a writing desk, a dinner table, and some chairs, masterpieces to remind me of my summer holiday activities. I worked in the fields, too, harvesting hay and wheat. I trimmed the vines, harvested the grapes, and made the wine, and so on. I also found time for my youngsters, as I used to, but this was possible only on feast days. It was a great consolation for me to catechise many of my companions who were sixteen or seventeen years old but were deprived of the truths of the faith. I also taught some of them quite successfully to read and write. They were so anxious to learn that many youngsters of a variety of ages surrounded me. I charged no tuition, but I insisted on *diligence, concentration, and monthly confession*. At first some were not inclined to accept these conditions. They went their own way, but their departure served to inspire and spur on those who stayed.

I also began to preach and to lecture with the permission of my parish priest, and with his help (MO Ch. 20).

It is also worth recalling his discussion with his mother at Sussambrino the day before he entered the seminary:

On the evening before my departure she called me to her and spoke to me these unforgettable words:

“My dear John, you have put on the priestly habit. I feel all the happiness that any mother could feel in her son’s good fortune. Do remember this, however: it’s not the habit that honours your state, but the practice of virtue. If you should ever begin to doubt your vocation, then – for heaven’s sake! – do not dishonor this habit. Put it aside immediately. I would much rather have a poor farmer for a son, than a priest who neglects his duties.

“When you came into the world, I consecrated you to the Blessed Virgin. When you began your studies, I recommended to you devotion to this Mother of ours. Now I say to you, be completely hers; love those of your companions who have devotion to Mary; and if you become a priest, always preach and promote devotion to Mary.”

My mother was deeply moved as she finished these words, and I cried. “Mother,” I replied, “I thank you for all you have said and done for

me. These words of yours will not prove vain; I will treasure them all my life” (MO Ch. 18).

The vineyards and water-fountain at Renenta

On the sunny side of the hill there were – and something of them still remains – thriving vineyards. There was the one that belonged to his old friend Joseph Turco. While looking after the grapes at harvest time, John had revealed to him why he was studying: to become a priest for poor and abandoned boys. He also told him about a dream he had at Sussambrino. He saw the valley changed into a large city with crowds of boys squabbling in the streets and squares. Like in the dream when he was nine, a noble man and a woman appeared and told him how to turn them into good Christians (cf. BM I, 315–317).

At the foot of the hill, right on the road, there is a brick arch covering an old basin which collected waters from a nearby spring. This is the so-called *Renenta fountain*, named after the hillside that runs from Sussambrino in the direction of the Becchi. The road there now is higher than the original track and a little removed from it. During drought times this was the only place the local farmers could find water. We can imagine how John Bosco had drunk from here more than once, and also taken water from there for the animals.

Joseph Turco’s vineyard, so dear to Don Bosco, was very close by and later he would say: “I pursued my studies in Joseph Turco’s vineyard at Renenta” (BM I, 315).

CAPRIGLIO

House where Mamma Margaret was born

Two kilometres from the Becchi we find Capriglio (230 metres above sea-level), a small village made up of hamlets spread around those

hills. At Cecca (on the right for someone coming from the Becchi towards Capriglio), we can still find the house where Don Bosco's mother Margaret was born on 1 April 1788, the sixth child of Melchior Occhiena and Domenica Bossone.

It is a simple rural home, well-restored today and with new owners. There is a plaque visible on the wall recalling the event. There is a well in the garden, still visible, where they got water for daily needs.

Margaret lived here until the day she was married, and probably her brother, Uncle Michael (1795–1867), continued living there. He was a good help at difficult moments. It was Michael who brought John back from the Moglia farm, helping him to find a school and a place to live in Chieri.

It is interesting to note that Don Bosco's maternal grandfather, Melchiorre, died on 11 January 1844 at 92; so he had the joy of seeing his grandson ordained.

Parish church and Fr Joseph Lacqua's presbytery

About a kilometre from the Occhiena house is the parish square at Capriglio. Margaret, baptised there the day she was born, attended this church all the time she lived in the area and this is where she married Francis Bosco on 6 June 1812.

Next to the square beside the church is the house where Fr Joseph Lacqua lived. He was also the village teacher. These days you can find the Mamma Margaret Museum in this area. The teacher taught all the children from the surrounding area. John was one of his little pupils for two winters. Although he belonged to another shire, he attended there thanks to his Aunt Marianna Occhiena (1785–1857), who was Fr Lacqua's housekeeper. We are not sure of the dates, but it was probably between 1824 and 1827. This was the future Don Bosco's first experience of school. He lived with his grandparents and uncles and aunts at Cecca during this time.

Don Bosco writes in his *Memoirs*:

I had reached my ninth year. My mother wanted to send me to school, but she felt very uneasy because of the distance. The distance to Castelnuovo from where we lived was more than three miles; my brother Anthony was opposed to my boarding there. A compromise was eventually agreed upon. During the winter season I would attend school at the nearby village of Capriglio. In this way I was able to learn the basic elements of reading and writing. My teacher was a devout priest called Joseph Delacqua. He was very attentive to my needs, seeing to my instruction and even more to my Christian education. During the summer months I went along with what my brother wanted by working in the fields (MO Ch. 1).

He was always very fond of his first teacher. In 1841, as a new priest, he went and visited him at Ponzano, where Fr Lacqua had transferred as a teacher. He died at Godio (hamlet belonging to Castelletto Merli in Alessandria), on 3 January 1847, at 83 years of age. Aunt Marianna, at Don Bosco's invitation, spent her last years at Valdocco, helping Mamma Margaret, and died there on 21 June 1857.

During the holidays, while studying theology at Chieri, the cleric Bosco was invited to Capriglio to give the homily on the feast of Mary's birthday:

In Alfiano I preached on the Holy Rosary in the holidays after my year of physics. In Castelnuovo d'Asti, at the end of my first year of theology, I spoke on St Bartholomew the Apostle. In Capriglio I preached about the nativity of Mary. But I do not know how much fruit this bore. Everywhere I got high praise. In fact vainglory somewhat carried me away, till I was brought down to earth as follows:

One day, after my sermon on the birth of Mary, I asked someone who seemed to be one of the more intelligent what he thought of it. He was full of praise for it but spoiled it by saying, "Your sermon was on the souls in purgatory." And I had preached the glories of Mary! (MO Ch. 20).

Recent developments

The old school building was transformed in 2006 into the Mamma Margaret Civic Museum. Although the museum is dedicated to Don Bosco's mother, the different rooms of the museum describe, above all, what rural life was like in Capriglio two hundred years ago; and it allows us to contemplate the traditions of the area, the plaster ceilings and the use of herbs to cure small daily ailments. The museum covers several floors. The visit begins in the entrance hall, with souvenirs of the school that John attended as a small boy, documents regarding his mother, historical photos of the house where he was born and genealogical records.

From here we can access the basement where there is a reconstruction of the cellar belonging to Melchiorre Occhiena, Margaret's father, while in an adjoining cellar there are posters and photographs describing local viticulture. A series of tunnels dug into the rock, now no longer passable, and that once connected houses and land in the district, lead from these rooms. In another room at ground floor level you can see paintings with votive scenes by Massimo Bracco, souvenirs and religious furnishings.

On the stairs leading to the next floor there are photographs of the votive pillars found in the area. Three of the four rooms on this floor contain a photographic collection on the families and peasant traditions of Capriglio and mannequins with costumes from the late nineteenth century. The aim is to highlight the use of plaster in the Asti area, the development of ceilings made of this material with the help of carved wooden matrices. The fourth room preserves the memories of Sister Vera Occhiena and Don Mario Caustico, Salesian martyrs. The staircase leading to this floor contains photographs of the Capriglio area, trails, green ways, fountains and mills, while the two rooms that can be accessed contain panels on medicinal herbs and a number of displays with fossils from the area.

There is a statue of Mamma Margaret placed on a stone pedestal in front of the museum, the work of artist Riccardo Cordero. It was blessed on Sunday 3 April 2006. The statue is made of bronze. It is 175 centimetres high and weighs 172 kilograms. It is a gift of Sister Margherita Occhiena, a distant relative of Don Bosco's mother and, like her, from Serra de Capriglio.

CASTELNUOVO DON BOSCO

This fertile agricultural centre in Asti Province, well-known for its viticulture and associated products, stands on a hill in the lower Monferrato, at 240 metres above sea level and is fed by the Traversola stream. It is 30 km from Asti but leans towards Turin by preference, only 20 kms away or thereabouts. Today it has some 2,800 inhabitants, while in Don Bosco's time it would have been closer to 3,000. It includes four other largish villages: Bardella, Nevissano, Ranello (where Dominic Savio's grandparents lived) and Morialdo. It was the chief town in the local district with jurisdiction over Albugnano, Berzano, Buttigliera, Moncucco, Mondonio, Pino and Primeglio.

In the nineteenth century there was a market there every Thursday and two fairs a year, one on the first Tuesday after Easter and the other on the last Monday of November. These were especially for beef sales, but also for haberdashery – cloth, canvas etc.

This was Don Bosco's home town, now named after him, but it was also the birthplace of other famous people in the 19th century. We can remember: St Joseph Cafasso (1811–1860), confessor and friend of Don Bosco's, and a great spiritual director and formator for priests; Blessed Joseph Allamano (1851–1926), nephew of Cafasso's, pupil of Don Bosco's and founder of the Consolata missionaries; Cardinal John Cagliero (1838–1926), one of Don Bosco's first disciples and who began the Salesian work in South America; Bishop John Baptist Bertagna (1828–1905), the first cleric to live in at the Oratory, then became

professor of moral theology and Rector of the Pastoral Institute and finally auxiliary bishop and rector of the seminary in Turin.

While living at Morialdo (1844–1853), Dominic Savio went to the upper primary school at Castelnuovo (from 21 June 1852 to February 1853 when he moved to Mondonio with his parents).

Don Bosco's grandfather, Filippo Antonio, who came from Chieri, lived in Castelnuovo for some time before finally moving to the Becchi (1793).

In the square (*Piazza Don Bosco*) at the bottom of the road leading up to the town hall and parish church there is a marble statue showing Don Bosco amongst his boys: one a European the other a South American native boy. It is the work of Giovanni Antonio Stuardi (sculptor from Poirino), and was erected by the people of Castelnuovo in 1898, ten years after the Saint's death, the first monument built in his honour.

St Andrew's parish church

The parish church is built above the town near the ruins of the Rivalba castle and other ancient buildings. It was originally a Gothic building but was altered to the Baroque in the early 17th century and rebuilt. Inside it has 17th century paintings by Guglielmo Caccia known as Moncalvo (1568–1625), while the oval icon on the main altar, representing the Patron Saint Andrew, is attributed to Rassoso (Vittorio Amedeo Rapous?).

This church, too, is a reminder of some of Don Bosco's important religious stages.

He was baptised there on 17 August 1815. His godparents were his maternal grandfather Melchiorre Occhiena and his paternal Aunt Maddalena Bosco. The baptismal font in the first chapel on the right as you enter the church was replaced in 1873. Only a fragment remains

of the old one – fixed to the wall. Saint Joseph Cafasso and the other famous individuals from Castelnuovo were also baptised here.

At Easter 1826, when he was eleven, John Bosco made his First Communion here after being carefully prepared by his mother Margaret.

This was one of Don Bosco's clearest memories:

I was eleven years old when I made my first holy communion. I knew my catechism well. The minimum age for first communion was twelve years. Because we lived far from the parish church, the parish priest did not know us, and my mother had to do almost all the religious instruction. She did not want me to get any older before my admission to that great act of our religion, so she took upon herself the task of preparing me as best she could. She sent me to catechism class every day of Lent. I passed my examination, and the date was fixed. It was the day on which all the children were to make their Easter duty.

In the big crowd, it was impossible to avoid distractions. My mother coached me for days and brought me to confession three times during that Lent.

"My dear John," she would say, "God is going to give you a wonderful gift. Make sure you prepare well for it. Go to confession and don't keep anything back. Tell all your sins to the priest, be sorry for them all, and promise God to do better in the future." I promised all that. God alone knows whether I have been faithful to my resolution.

At home, she saw to it that I said my prayers and read good books; and she always came up with the advice which a diligent mother knows how to give her children.

On the morning of my first communion, my mother did not permit me to speak to anyone. She accompanied me to the altar and together we made our preparation and thanksgiving. These were led by Father Sismondi, the vicar forane, in a loud voice, alternating responses with everyone.

It was my mother's wish for that day that I should refrain from manual work. Instead, she kept me occupied reading and praying. Amongst the many things that my mother repeated to me many times was this: "My dear son, this is a great day for you. I am convinced that God has really taken possession of your heart. Now promise him to be good

as long as you live. Go to communion frequently in the future, but beware of sacrilege. Always be frank in confession, be obedient always, go willingly to catechism and sermons. But for the love of God, avoid like the plague those who indulge in bad talk. (MO Ch. 4).

On 25 October 1835, a few days before he entered the seminary, when Bosco was twenty, the parish priest, Fr Anthony Cinzano, gave him the cassock. “Many young boys and young men had come from neighboring villages to witness the ceremony” (BM I, 369).

On this occasion John Bosco wrote down the following Rule of life:

For the future I will never take part in public shows during fairs or at markets. Nor will I attend dances or the theatre, and as far as possible I will not partake of the dinners usual on such occasions.

I will no longer play games of dice or do conjuring tricks, acrobatics, sleight of hand, tightrope walking. I will give up my violin-playing and hunting. These things I hold totally contrary to ecclesiastical dignity and spirit.

I will love and practice a retiring life, temperance in eating and drinking. I will allow myself only those hours of rest strictly necessary for health.

In the past I have served the world by reading secular literature. Henceforth I will try to serve God by devoting myself to religious reading.

I will combat with all my strength everything, all reading, thoughts, conversations, words, and deeds contrary to the virtue of chastity. On the contrary, I will practice all those things, even the smallest, which contribute to preserving this virtue.

Besides the ordinary practices of piety, I will never neglect to make a little meditation daily and a little spiritual reading.

Every day I will relate some story or some maxim advantageous to the souls of others. I will do this with my companions, friends, relatives, and when I cannot do it with others, I will speak with my mother (MO Ch. 17).

On Thursday 10 June 1841, the Feast of Corpus Christi, Don Bosco sang his first Solemn Mass in this church. This was the fifth Mass he celebrated after his ordination on 5 June.

Here too he served as assistant priest for five months, until he entered the Pastoral Institute the following November:

I found the work a great pleasure. I preached every Sunday. I visited the sick and administered the holy sacraments to them, except penance since I had not yet taken the exam. I buried the dead, kept the parish records, wrote out certificates of poverty, and so on. My delight was to make contact with the children and teach them catechism. They used to come from Murialdo to see me, and on my visits home they crowded round me. I was also beginning to make companions and friends in town. Whenever I left the presbytery there was a group of boys, and everywhere I went my little friends gave me a warm welcome (MO Ch. 26).

Dominic Savio, too, was confirmed in this church on 13 April 1853, his family already at Mondonio. He was confirmed with another 800(!) from around neighbouring towns. The Bishop was Luigi Moreno, Bishop of Ivrea.

The Baroque pulpit, sculptured from walnut, reminds us of Don Bosco's first experiences as a preacher. And as a young cantor he would have learned to sing at the organ under the guidance of tailor John Roberto (cf. MO Ch. 6).

The presbytery

The presbytery is on the left after leaving the square and heading down towards the town. According to information collected by Fr Lemoyne, John went there in the holidays in 1832, after his first year at school in Chieri, because the parish priest, Fr Bartolomeo Dassano – having seen him study while he was looking after the animals – admired him for this and offered him some extra work in Latin, with the help also of the assistant priest. The young student paid him back by looking after his horse, and that also gave him a chance to learn a bit of horsemanship (BM I, 205).

The next parish priest, Fr Anthony Cinzano, whom he was very fond of, took him in for the five months after his ordination and would have liked him to stay on as assistant priest. But following Fr Cafasso's advice, he decided to go to Turin and finish off his studies. Their relationship however remained strong and Don Bosco considered the presbytery as his second home. During the famous "autumn walks", the presbytery at Castelnuovo was always the first stop. Fr Lemoyne tells us that Fr Cinzano, invited to celebrate the Feast of the Holy Rosary at the Becchi, demanded that Don Bosco and his boys make a return visit, and inviting his helpers and setting up a stove in one corner of the courtyard, he would prepare a huge pot of polenta. While they were waiting, the choir boys would keep the good priest happy. He was always keen to hear good classical music, so they would perform pieces especially reserved for that occasion (BM V, 225).

The baptismal register is kept in the parish archives, including reference to John Bosco's baptism.

The public school

A few metres further down the hill we find the Castelnuovo school on the right, built exactly in the same place as the old school building attended by Joseph Cafasso and John Bosco. The latter went there in 1830–1831.

At the time, since the local council had few financial resources, there were only two teachers: the teacher at the *council school* (meaning the two primary years) and the teacher at the *public school* (in Castelnuovo they had the so-called "*lower grammar (Latinitas)*": Sixth, Fifth and Fourth class (note how the classes were named in reverse order to what we are used to). He would have had as many as seventy pupils all doing different things according to the course they were attending.

Fr Emanuele Virano was John's teacher. He was a young and very capable and energetic priest and teacher and got on very well with

his oldest pupil (older than the other boys anyway) and encouraged him. But he was made parish priest of Mondonio in April and the seventy-year-old Fr Nicola Moglia took his place, an uncle of Luigi Moglia who had taken John in as a farmhand at the farm in Moncucco. The new teacher was unable to control such a large class and may have been biased against the young Bosco who was in Sixth Class. John made little progress and “whatever was learned in the earlier months was blown away” (MO Ch. 6).

After the first days of attending school, seeing how difficult it was to make the walk every day, Mamma Margaret solved the situation with the assistance of a tailor at Castelnuovo, John Roberto. He began by offering John lunch, then full board. This way as a student he could use his time better, and during free moments learned how to cut and stitch. The tailor was also an organist and choirmaster. John had a good voice and was also quick to pick up music, so he learned to play the cymbals and violin and sang at parish functions.

Don Bosco tells us about his time with John Roberto:

I found lodgings with an upright man, a tailor, John Roberto; he had a taste for singing, especially plain chant. I Since I had a good voice, I took up music wholeheartedly. In a few months, I could go up to the choir loft and sing the solo parts. Eager to use my free time, I took up tailoring. Before long I was able to make buttonholes and hems and sew simple and double seams. Later I learned how to cut out underwear, waistcoats, trousers, and coats. I fancied myself already a master tailor (MO Ch. 6).

When he was free of homework young Bosco also helped Evasio Savio the blacksmith (+ 1868). In 1834 he would play a decisive role in seeing that John did not become a Franciscan, encouraging him to ask Fr Cafasso for advice and insisting with the new parish priest, Fr Cinzano that he help him go to the seminary (cf. BM V, 227–228).

John Roberto’s house and blacksmith Evasio Savio’s forge are located on the slope leading to the church, before the school.

St Bartholomew's chapel

In front of the school a street leads down to the town square. In 1834 the Mayor was Cavaliere John Pescarmona. Together with Mr Sartoris and Fr Cinzano, they gave John Bosco the financial help he needed to complete his schooling at Chieri and the following year helped him as he moved to the seminary (cf. BM I, 227).

On the left there is a ramp leading up to St Bartholomew's church. There is some evidence that this is where the young cleric Bosco preached some of his early sermons, one which had great success: on 24 August 1840, the preacher who was supposed to be preaching on the Saint's feast day was not able to be there, and John took his place at the last moment, with brilliant results (cf. BM I, 363-364).

The church of Our Lady of the Castle

In the highest part of the town where the medieval castle of Rivalba stood, there is a small church to Our Lady: *Madonna del castello* or *della cintura*, a feast celebrated on 15 August. John often went up there, especially for Feasts of Our Lady.

MONDONIO

Dominic Savio's house

Two kilometres from Castelnuovo, on the road to Gallareto and Montechiaro (4 kms from Morialdo if you take the road across the hill), we come across Mondonio, the village where, on 9 March 1857, Dominic Savio died. Charles Savio (1815–1891) and Brigid Gajato (1820–1871), married on 1 March 1840, moved here with their children in February 1853, and lived in the first house you see on the left as you climb up the steep little road into the village. The house was rented

out by the Bertello brothers, and the Savios lived there until 1879. The Salesians bought it in 1917, paying 2,000 lire for it.

On the *ground floor*, we find the kitchen (you can see the fireplace in the wall) which leads to the room where Dominic died on 9 March 1857.

Don Bosco describes Dominic's death in these words:

He said some prayers with the boy and then as he was about to go Dominic said to him:

"Father, before going, leave me a parting thought to keep with me."

"Really I don't know what to suggest."

"Something that will strengthen and comfort me."

"All right; try to keep in mind the Passion of Our Saviour."

"Deo gratias," replied Dominic, "May the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ be always in my mind and heart and on my lips. Jesus, Mary and Joseph help me now when I am dying; Jesus, Mary and Joseph, may I die at peace with you."

After that he fell asleep for half an hour. When he woke up he looked round him and said:

"Dad, are you there?"

"Here I am son, what do you want?"

"Dad, it is time; get my *The Companion of Youth*. He was indicating a book addressed entirely to young people, with the title: *The Companion of Youth in fulfilling their duties, for the exercises of Christian piety, for reciting the Office of the Blessed Virgin, Vespers throughout the year*, etc. and read me the prayers for the Exercise of a Happy Death."

At these words his mother burst into tears and hurried from the room. His father's eyes filled with tears, but choking back his sobs, he got the book and read the prayers. As he went through them Dominic answered clearly. "Merciful Jesus, have mercy on me"

When his father reached the final part which runs: "When for the first time my soul will see the wonderful majesty of God, do not drive it away, but take it to heaven to sing your praises for all eternity . . ." he said:

“Yes, Dad - that is what I want so much, to sing the praises of Jesus for all eternity.”

He dropped off to sleep again, but it was like he was reflecting on things of great importance. He awoke after a short while. Then in a clear voice he said:

“Goodbye, Dad, goodbye . . . what was it the parish priest suggested to me ... I don't seem to remember . . . Oh, what wonderful things I see”

And so saying, with a beautiful smile on his face, and his hands joined on his breast he gave up his soul to God without any struggle (DS Ch.24)

From this room where Dominic died (it was probably where his mother Brigida worked as a seamstress), a wooden staircase led to the upper floor. It is no longer there but you can guess where it was from a door that was located on the north wall and opened into an area used at the time as a storage area.

Today we reach the upper floor by a more recently built staircase which is part of the neighbouring house. The external balcony you see did not exist then either.

On the *upper floor*, the parents' bedroom was above the kitchen and the children's bedroom next to it. The area above the storage space mentioned earlier and which could also be reached directly from the road behind the house, was used by his father Charles as a workshop for his father's work as a smithy.

The Savios had ten children. Six died as children or at a very young age: Domenico Giuseppe Carlo (3–18 November 1840), (Saint) Dominic Joseph (1842–1857), Carlo (15–16 February 1844), M. Teresa Adelaide (1847–1859), Giuseppe Guglielmo (1853–1865), Maria Luigia (1863–1864).

After his wife Brigida died (1871), Carlo went to Valdocco with Don Bosco after seeing that his daughters were successfully married off: Maria Caterina Raimonda (1845–1912), Maria Caterina Elisabetta

(1856–1915?) and Maria Firmina Teresa (1859–1933), in 1878, leaving just Giovanni Pietro, the remaining son (1850–1894). Carlo died at Valdocco on 16 December 1891 at 76 years of age.

In front of the house we find the first monument ever erected to Dominic Savio. It was blessed in 1920 by Cardinal John Cagliero who had been Dominic's assistant and music teacher at the Oratory in Valdocco.

Parish church and school

If we climb up the road hugging the Savio house we reach the parish church of St James. Until he left for Valdocco Dominic attended Mass here each day and also during his holidays. He liked to pray before the statue to Our Lady of the Rosary, in a niche at the back of the church on the right as you enter. The statue is no longer there today: in 1863 it was taken to the little church of Saint Maria di Rasetto, near Castelnuovo, where Dominic's grandfather lived. The village celebrated its feast day on Our Lady of the Rosary feast which was then the first Sunday in October, as Don Bosco had begun to do at the Becchi from 1848 onwards 1848. On Monday 2 October 1854, the day after the feast, Dominic and his father – through the intercession of Fr Cugliero, the school teacher in the village – went over to the Becchi to meet Don Bosco.

The parish priest at Mondonio, Fr Dominic Grassi (1804–1860), attended the Savio family during Dominic's final illness, heard his confession, brought him Viaticum and on the morning of 9 March 1857 gave him the Final Anointing and the Papal blessing. That same evening towards half past eight, he visited Dominic for the last time and after having said some prayers and asked him for a little thought to remember him by, he suggested to the dying boy that he think of Our Lord's passion.

A little further on from the church facade there is a small lane running up on the left that leads to a building that since the 19th century and until fairly recent times was used as the village *primary school*. Dominic Savio went there from February 1853 to June 1854, taught by Fr Joseph Cugliero.

This is where the event that Don Bosco recalls took place. Unjustly accused of playing up, he put up with the blame and punishment from his teacher without a word, to ensure that those really to blame would not be expelled. There is a plaque on the wall of this little building, put there in 1952, recalling the event (but the date on the stone is wrong: not 1852, but 1853).

Cemetery chapel

Below the Savio house, near the main road, we still find the old chapel that was part of the village cemetery and this is where Dominic was buried, as also his mother and the other children. The cemetery was dismantled in 1942. Dominic's remains stayed there until 1914 when they were transferred to the Basilica in Turin for the opening of his Cause of Beatification.

Dominic had been buried in a simple grave. Two years later, a pious gentleman from Genoa who had read Don Bosco's *Life of Dominic* (1859), and admired his virtue had a marble slab placed on the grave with the inscription: "*Dominic Savio - model of virtue - for youth - died - 9 March - MDCCCLVII - at 15 years of age*". In 1866 the body was exhumed and placed in a new casket which was then brought into the chapel and placed at the same level as the base of the altar. The stone given by the man from Genoa was fixed to the outside wall of the chapel. Today you can find it in the little garden behind the chapel where the original grave site was. In 1907, on the fiftieth anniversary of his death, the boy's remains were placed in a white marble sarcophagus still visible in the chapel. The Latin inscription, provided by Fr John Baptist Francesia (1838-1930), his old teacher, runs this way: "*Hic - in*

pace Christi quiescit - Dominicus Savio - Joannis Bosco sac. - alumnus piissimus - anno MCMVII - ad ejus excessu L”, or: “Here in the peace of Christ lies Dominic Savio, pious pupil of St John Bosco. 1907, fiftieth anniversary of his death”. and below is a verse from Ecclesiasticus (51:35): “*Modicum laboravi et inveni mihi multam requiem*” (How slight my efforts have been to win so much peace).

The transferral of the body to Turin in 1914 was an adventurous one! On 19 October, when religious and civic authorities came to Mondonio to take the body away, they found all the village people lined up around the chapel to stop them, and somewhat threateningly: they did not want to lose their young protector. So the formal recognition part of the ceremony was carried out but not the transferral. Fr Caesar Albisetti, a future great missionary who was almost due to leave for Brazil, was given the task of recovering the body! He came from the Salesian house at Castelnuovo, arriving at Mondonio on foot (27 October); he found the chapel open so picked up the small casket that had already been taken out of the sarcophagus for the recognition, and brought it to Turin with the help of a pre-arranged driver and vehicle. The inhabitants of Mondonio quickly became aware of what was happening but were not in time to stop him.

BUTTIGLIERA D'ASTI

Agricultural centre located on the edge of the fertile Chieri plain, 299 metres above sea level, had around 1,600 inhabitants in the 19th century (today closer to 2,000). It is on the road from Riva di Chieri to Castelnuovo, 4 km from the Becchi.

Parish church

The parish church of St Blaise, still showing vestiges of its earlier Gothic construction on its outer walls, was rebuilt in Baroque style, designed by Guarini, in 1686. The choir and sacristy were extended in 1785 designed

by Mario Ludovico Quarini from Chieri. He also designed the splendid belltower, completed in 1790. The facade is more recent (1960–64).

The 1829 Jubilee Year and the meeting between Fr Calosso and the young John Bosco

In 1829, from 5 to 9 November, a triduum was preached at Buttigliera to gain the indulgences granted by Pius VIII for the extraordinary Jubilee year. People from nearby villages attended, amongst them Fr Calosso, the new chaplain at Morialdo, and John Bosco, who had just returned from his time at the Moglia farm. On the way back the priest had an opportunity to see some of the boy's gifts and he offered him help. It was an encounter between the old man's wisdom and spiritual experience and the fresh receptivity of the teenager, and it would be a fruitful and providential meeting.

Don Bosco tells us about it in all its detail:

That year (1826) there was a solemn mission in Buttigliera. It gave me a chance to hear several sermons, The preachers were well known and drew people from everywhere. I went with many others. We had an instruction and a meditation in the evening, after which we were free to return home. On one of these April evenings [*note: although we know now that it was actually in November*], as I was making my way home amid the crowd, one of those who walked along with us was Fr Calosso of Chieri, a very devout priest. Although he was old and bent, he made the long walk to hear the missionaries. He was the chaplain of Murialdo. He noticed a capless, curly-headed lad amidst the others but walking in complete silence. He looked me over and then began to talk with me:

“Where are you from, my son? I gather you were at the mission?”

“Yes, Father, I went to hear the missionaries' sermons.”

“Now, what could you understand of it? I'm sure your mother could give you a better sermon, couldn't she?”

“Yes, my mother does give me fine instructions. But I like to hear the missionaries as well. And I think I understand them.”

“If you can remember anything from this evening’s sermons, I’ll give you two pence.”

“Just tell me whether you wish to hear the first sermon, or the second.”

“Just as you wish,” he said, “as long as you tell me anything from it. Do you remember what the first sermon was about?”

“It was about the necessity of giving oneself to God in good time and not putting off one’s conversion.”

“And what was in the sermon?” the venerable old man asked, somewhat surprised,

“Oh, I remember quite well. If you wish I will recite it all.” Without further ado, I launched into the preamble and went on to the three points. The preacher stressed that it was risky to put off conversion because one could run out of time, or one might lack the grace or the will to make the change. There, amidst the crowd, he let me rattle on for half an hour.

Then came a flurry of questions from Father Calosso: “What’s your name? Who are your family? How much schooling have you had?”

“My name is John Bosco. My father died when I was very young. My mother is a widow with a family of five to support. I’ve learned to read, and to write a little.”

“You haven’t studied Donato or grammar, have you?”

“I don’t know what they are, Father.”

“Would you like to study?”

“Oh, indeed I would.”

“What’s stopping you?”

“My brother Anthony.”

“And why doesn’t Anthony want you to study?”

“Because he never liked school himself. He says he doesn’t want anyone else to waste time on books the way he did. But if I could only get to school, I would certainly study and not waste time.”

“Why do you want to study?”

“I’d like to become a priest.”

“And why do you want to become a priest?”

“I’d like to attract my companions, talk to them, and teach them our religion. They’re not bad, but they become bad because they have no one to guide them.”

These bold words impressed the holy priest. He never took his eyes off me while I was speaking. When our ways parted, he left me with these words: “Cheer up now. I’ll provide for you and your education. Come to see me on Sunday with your mother. We’ll arrange something.”

The following Sunday my mother and I went along to see him. He undertook to take me for one lesson a day (MO Ch. 4).

John Bosco’s Confirmation

The parish church also witnessed another basic step in John’s Christian life. He was 18 when he was confirmed (Sunday 4 August 1833), along with 1335 others, by Archbishop Giovanni Antonio Gianotti (1784–1863), from Sassari and later Saluzzo. The sponsors for all those being confirmed were the mayor, Giuseppe Marzano and a noble woman called Giuseppina Melyna Countess of Capriglio.

There is a description of the event in an extended item by Fr Giuseppe Vaccarino (1805–1891) who was parish priest at Buttigliera for 59 years (1832–1891). This document, published by Prof. Elso Gramaglia for the early celebrations of the Centenary of Don Bosco’s death, has the following to say amongst other things:

After Mass he and another priest ... went (Archbishop Gianotti, that is) to the presbytery to have a coffee; then he came back to the church vested in a surplice – it was so hot – with mitre and crozier, and they sang the Veni Creator then said a few prayers for those about to be confirmed, and the ceremony began.

There were two groups: the first made up of people from Buttigliera, lasted from 8 until 11 or longer; the second session began at 11.30 after the Archbishop had taken a short break at the noble woman’s home (note.: Countess Melyna), and finished at 2 in the afternoon. The number confirmed was 1335, of whom 618 are from Buttigliera, 467 from Castelnuovo, 184 from Moriondo and the rest from other villages and towns.

(From E. Gramaglia [ed.], *La Cresima di Don Bosco a Buttigliera*, in *Grandangolo* 4 [1987] 3, p. 3)

Buttigliera's connection with Don Bosco and the Salesian Family

Don Bosco was always fond of Buttigliera and its people because of his friendship with the parish priest, Fr Vaccarino and with Countess Melyna, who would become one of his benefactors. Walking from Turin to Becchi or the other way around, he would visit them always. When they came back from the Autumn walks each year the Countess and the Parish Priest would always welcome the boys from Valdocco and offer them refreshments. Don Bosco was a good friend of Fr Vaccarino, a zealous priest who was close to his people: not only did he introduce a homespun textile industry to the people but he founded a small hospital and an oratory, inspired by the one at Valdocco, and also a kindergarten.

Buttigliera also reminds us of one of the first Salesian Sisters, Blessed Madeleine Morano (Chieri 1847 – Catania 1908). Her family moved here when Madeleine was just two. Her father died in 1855, when she was working and also studying to be a teacher. Fr Vaccarino had opened a kindergarten and took her on as the teacher there when she was 14. After getting her teacher's certificate she looked after the girls schools at Montaldo Torinese until the time when the Jesuit priest Fr Francesco Pellico, Silvio's brother, advised her to join Don Bosco's Sisters. Then as the first Superior in Sicily and later, from 1886, as the Provincial, she founded a number of works for young girls.

The Càmpora farm

Some 2 kms from there, along the ridge of the hill, we find the Càmpora farm which is part of the Serra hamlet. Mamma Margaret knew the owner, a certain Turco from Castelnuovo. In Autumn 1827, when finances were not good and there was all the tension with Anthony, John's mother sent him here for a while as a farmhand. He was only there

for a few weeks because it was late in the season and work and food were scarce including for the owners.

Crivelle

Not far from Buttigliera lies Crivelle, which Don Bosco calls *Craveglia*. A maternal Uncle of John's lived here. One year, during the summer holidays, the young cleric Bosco was invited to festivities. This is where the famous violin incident took place, during lunch:

It was the feast of St Bartholomew. I was invited by another uncle to assist at the church services, to sing, and even to play the violin, which I had given up, though it was my favourite instrument. The church services went very well. My uncle was in charge of the celebrations, and the dinner was at his house. So far, so good. Dinner over, the guests asked me to play something of a light nature for them. I refused. "At least," one of the musicians said, "play along with me. I'll take the lead, and you play the accompaniment."

The wretch that I was! I did not have it in me to say no. Taking up the violin, I played for a while. Then I heard the murmur of voices and the sound of a lot of dancing feet. I went to the window, and out in the courtyard was a crowd dancing happily to the sound of my violin. Words could not describe the anger that welled up in me at that moment. Turning on the dinner guests, I addressed them vehemently: "How is it, after I have so often spoken against public shows, that I should have become their promoter? It will never happen again." I smashed the violin into a thousand pieces. I never wanted to use it again, though opportunities for doing so were not lacking at sacred ceremonies (MO Ch. 21).

MONCUCCO AND THE MOGLIAS

Along the road from Castelnuovo to Chieri, shortly after Moriondo, there is a turn off to the right leading to Moncucco and Cinzano. About a kilometre before the village you turn left for the Moglia hamlet named after the family who lived there.

The Moglia homestead

In February 1828, one of the most critical times in financial terms but also because the problems with Anthony (as the older brother he felt responsibility for managing the family's affairs), Mamma Margaret thought it best to send John away from home for a while. Given the failed effort to do this at the Càmpora farm in Buttigliera, she sent him off again in the direction of Mondonio and Moncucco to find work. Perhaps the Moglias, since they knew him and had good fertile land, would accept him. The hamlet was well located between Moncucco and Mombello. Louis, who was the head of the family, had married Dorothy Filippello from Castelnuovo and they had two children: Catherine, five and George, three. The uncles, John and Joseph, lived with them and their sisters Anna and Teresa, who were 18 and 15 respectively.

The boy had knocked at various doors along the way but without luck, and arrived towards evening, where he spoke to Louis Moglia. He told him there was little work in the winter months, even for family members, and wanted to send him away. But through his wife Dorothy's insistence and also his sister's Teresa, who wanted him to look after the animals, he was convinced to give him a trial run. John soon won everyone over. A few days later Dorothy asked him to lead the Rosary and night prayers, which they said in front of a statue of Our Lady now kept at the Becchi in Joseph's house. The following week Louis contacted Mamma Margaret to work out a wage, which was established as fifteen lire a year plus upkeep. A couple of years later when John came back to the home (at the beginning of November 1829) he was accepted as a member of the family.

In autumn, the village teacher, Fr Nicola, also came to the Moglias. He too was an uncle. In his free moments he would help John go back over things he had picked up at school in Capriglio. Three years later he would come across him again at the school in Castelnuovo, but he was less encouraging in John's regard at that stage.

George, the owner's son, liked John and followed him around everywhere. Don Bosco continued this friendship in later years; he often invited him to lunch at the Oratory, and would bring the boys to see him in autumn, and perform for him. He died in Turin in 1923 at almost a hundred years of age. He was the one who has given us so many details about that period and about Don Bosco's friendship with the Moglias.

Mary, George's daughter, married Ottavio Casalegno. Charles, their son, was father to John Casalegno, the last of the original owners at the Moglia home.

The ancient stable, hayloft and vineyard behind the house have been preserved. This is where John had worked so hard. The large kitchen of those days is much smaller today, but the room in which he slept with little George has been kept as it was. Outside there is a hundred-year-old mulberry tree: it is thought to be the one in whose shade John would teach the local kids their catechism and tell them stories. The well and cellar are also the same.

In the early days of November 1829 his uncle Michael Occhiena visited. He saw his nephew and also noted how keen he was to continue with studies, so he encouraged him to come back to the Becchi and said he would help ease any tensions with Anthony, and help him. That's how John came to leave the Moglia farm. This providential invitation from his uncle was what led to the encounter, a few days later, with Fr Calosso on the road from Buttigliera.

The church at Moncucco

Half an hour's walk from the Moglias along little local lanes, you can reach Moncucco. Every Saturday evening John would ask permission to go to the parish church of St John the Baptist so he could be ready for the early morning Mass on Sunday. They could never understand why he wanted to go so early, seeing he would also be at the main Mass later and all the afternoon functions. So one Sunday Dorothy went up

there early and stayed at a friend's place. She saw him go into the church and followed him: John had gone to the confession to the priest, Fr Francesco Cottino (1768–1840), and then received Communion which in those days was also distributed before Mass. From that day onwards they gave him full freedom to go where he wanted.

Seeing how committed he was and how good he was at attracting the children, Fr Cottino gave him encouragement. He gave him the village schoolroom on wet and cold days and this became an early pattern for the oratory.

SAN GIOVANNI DI RIVA

Dominic Savio's birthplace

Two kms from Riva di Chieri, in a tiny hamlet belonging to S. Giovanni, lies the house where Dominic Savio was born (2 April 1842). It has been carefully restored in recent years by young Salesian Cooperators and Past Pupils from Turin. They have restored some parts but also transformed other parts into something entirely different, a spirituality centre and camp site for youth groups.

Once upon a time the house which Carlo Savio rented from Gaetano Gastaldi was like this: on the *ground floor* there was the kitchen and behind it an area used as a cellar or storage area from which you could go through a door (still there) into a portico which has now been torn down; on the *upper floor* above the kitchen was the parents' bedroom (where, on 2 April 1842 Dominic was born) and behind it the childrens' bedroom. You reached the upper floor by a wooden staircase from outside the house, just like it was at the cottage at the Becchi.

Carlo's blacksmith shop was presumably in the area behind the house, between the kitchen and the portico. Today's staircase was built in 1930 by the then owner Giuseppe Gastaldi (1891–1964), grandson of Gaetano who had first rented the property to Carlo Savio. That was

when they restored the place generally including the roof which sloped across the nearby house as well. They created four separate parts to the roof and gave it all new trusses. Giuseppe Gastaldi then, in 1954, gave the land to the Salesians including where the statue to Dominic stands.

The Savios only lived there a couple of years, until November 1843, when they moved to Morialdo.

The youth centre

The house and nearby farm area, bought in 1978 from the relatives of Joseph Gastaldi to be used by the then Salesian Central Province, was then entrusted in 1981 to lay members of the Salesian family, Cooperators and Past Pupils, to look after it and to use it for youth events.

The work took place in two stages. In 1983, the part where the Gastaldi's lived was completely renovated: kitchen, dining area, some bedrooms, toilets and heating, and was fitted out to be able to accommodate 22 people. In 1985, work began on re-stumping the house and rebuilding other nearby buildings. This provided three large areas for overnight stay, three meeting halls, sleeping areas and other services. This brought the sleeping capacity up to 50. It was opened in May 1987.

The work has three aims: 1) to preserve the place where Don Bosco's young pupil once lived; 2) to preserve his memory by using the place for youth activities; 3) to give lay members of the Salesian Family an opportunity to carry out an effective educational and pastoral activity for young people.

The former kitchen in the now restored home of Dominic Savio has been fitted out as a small chapel. Beside it is a small museum showing his father's work as a blacksmith and also something of the farming culture at the time. The two rooms on the upper floor have reminders of the young Saint's life, objects that would have been in use at the time, and some devotional items especially those which are to do with Dominic Savio's interest in mothers giving birth (the so-called scapular many pregnant mothers ask for when they pray to Dominic to help them.

Part Two

JOHN BOSCO AT CHERI

(1831–1841)

Mid-teenage and early adulthood years



Some details and their significance

THE TEN YEARS AT CHERI IN DON BOSCO'S LIFE

John Bosco lived in Chieri from November 1831 to May 1841: they were the decisive years as a teenager and young adult for his personality.

He had turned 16, was a country lad full of good will when he arrived there. He left there as a twenty-six-year-old priest, on a firm spiritual footing, culturally prepared and ready to plunge into pastoral ministry especially for youth.

A tour in two stages: the *public school* (1831–1835) and the *seminary* (1835–1841).

His years at the *public school* were difficult but lively ones. Difficult because he had little money, plenty of work and sacrifice, long nights studying and reading, but there was also the spiritual tension of finding out what his true vocation was. But they were also lively years filled with interests, an explosion of human and spiritual gifts, exuberance, warmth and happy times. The calm city setting was ideal for him to grow up in. Students were followed up throughout the day in a fairly demanding but also a humane and friendly way by their teachers, the Prefect of Studies (responsible for discipline) and the Spiritual Director. The influence of this school setting was complemented by the interest shown by the students' families or the families they were boarding with, and the deep friendships formed, with all the noise and friendly banter of these groups and their time together (the Society for a Good Time is one such).

During his *seminary days*, gradually leaving behind the lively and happy rhythm of the earlier years, the cleric Bosco focused on cultural improvement and his spiritual duties so he could be a priest according

to the model that was offered him there, but without losing any of his human warmth.

His starting point was to be faithful to his daily duties as laid down by the strict seminary regime. To the scholastic tasks implied by the courses he was taking he added his voracious reading of all kinds: historical, biblical, theological, ascetic, using up every spare moment of time. At the same time he was becoming more refined in human and spiritual terms. He was obedient to and fond of his superiors, was available for all the demands of community life and struck up deep friendships with the very best of his fellow seminarians. He shared recreation, study prayer and ascetic ideals with them. As the years passed, his spiritual energy increased and he broadened his cultural interests. He immersed himself in increasingly more demanding reading, even using the autumn break for this.

His efforts, intense work, the ascetic tenor of his life weakened his health and more than once he was at the point of falling seriously ill; but John's robust mettle did not give in. His friend Louis Comollo, instead, could not handle it and died even before he turned twenty-two.

On 5 June 1841 when Don Bosco was ordained priest in Turin, his cultural and spiritual formation was well-established. Fr Cafasso invited him to the Pastoral Institute to round off his pastoral formation, but the solid basis already in the ten years at Chieri and the gifts he had developed over these hidden and intense years proved their worth for the rest of his years as an educator and pastor of the young.

EMERGING PEDAGOGICAL AND SPIRITUAL VALUES

Don Bosco's teenage and early adult years in Chieri offer us excellent pedagogical and spiritual pointers. Here are some:

- Study and culture are an essential ascetic process in building up one's personality, especially when pursued with constant and daily fidelity.
- Manual work and personal initiative in actively cooperating with parents' concerns.
- Sport, play, active life – with a wise dose of duty – for physical development and spiritual and psychological harmony.
- Friendships that are well-chosen and enriching; being part of a group, shared interests; mutual help, making one's gifts available to others.
- Friendly relationships with significant adults who can be teachers and models of life and values.
- Choice of a regular confessor with whom we have frequent and confident encounters.
- The humility to question oneself and ask advice on important questions regarding one's future.
- A solid life of prayer with established times for prayer and personal meditation each day.
- Weekly and even daily Mass.
- Devotion to Our Lady, mother, help and model of life.
- The energy to discern God's will and one's vocation in life, the mission God wants to entrust to us.

Historical, geographical and biographical notes

JOHN BOSCO COMES TO CHERI

After the division of the family's assets (1830), the move to Sussambrino and Anthony's marriage (1831), the Bosco family situation had improved. Mamma Margaret, supported by her brother Michael, makes the courageous decision to enrol John in the public schools in Chieri.

This choice brings new problems, especially financial ones. Although the expenses were reasonable they were a serious imposition on the family finances. Thought had to be given to food and lodging, school fees, buying books, stationery and clothing.

Margaret was not discouraged: "she gave him this joyful news with her usual smile and immediately set to work to pack the things he would need. But John, understanding the difficulties she faced owing to the family's straitened circumstances, frankly suggested: 'If you don't mind, mother, let me take two sacks with me and make the rounds of every family in our hamlet. This way I'll make a collection.' Margaret gave her consent. This was to be a difficult test for John's pride. But he overcame his reluctance to go begging and faced its humiliation" (BM I, 183).

The farmers' sense of solidarity and the spirit of Christian charity of the people, the parish priest, Fr Dassano and some gentlemen from Castelnuovo meant he could have what he needed for clothing and the early expenses. John Bechis, having nothing he could give, said he would see to transporting the trunk and two sacks of wheat (two *emine* or 46 litres) and half a *miglio* (= 11.5 litres) in his cart. These could be part-payment for board. On 3 November 1831 the young student went off to Chieri and found lodging in *piazza san Guglielmo* at the Marchisio house.

TIMELINE

School year	Class	Teacher	Stayed with	Events
1831–1832	Sixth Fifth Fourth	Dr Pugnetti Fr Valimberti Mr Cima	Lucy Matta	Society for a Good Time Paul Braja dies
1832-1833	Grammar	G. Giusiana	Lucy Matta	
1833-1834	Humanities	Fr Banaudi	Cafe Pianta	Friendship with Jonah Contest with acrobat Admitted to the Franciscans
1834-1835	Rhetoric	G.F. Bosco	Cumino	Meets L. Comollo Decides on vocation Clothing exam
1835-1836	1st Philos.	I. Arduino	Seminary	Holidays: extra Greek study at Montaldo
1836-1837	2nd Philos.	I. Arduino	Seminary	L. Comollo in Seminary
1837-1838	1st Theol.	L. Prialis I. Arduini	Seminary	
1838-1839	2nd Theol.	Seminary	L. Prialis G.B. Appendini	Sacristan 02.04.1839: Comollo dies

School year	Class	Teacher	Stayed with	Events
1839-1840	3rd Theol.	Seminary	L. Prialis G.B. Appendini	25.04.1840: Tonsure and Minor Orders autumn: exams, 4th Theology
1840-1841	5th Theol.	Seminary	L. Prialis G.B. Appendini	Dormitory Prefect 19.09.1840: Subdiaconate 29.03.1841: Diaconate 05.06.1841: Priesthood

SUGGESTIONS FOR VISITS AND TOURS

Very keen research by Secondo Caselle (+ 1992) has thrown light on names and places tied to the ten years John Bosco spent in Chieri. It is thanks to him that we can follow the traces of his presence in the city.

For practical reasons we would suggest visiting the places where John Bosco was a student and seminarian at Chieri by beginning from the Salesian community of S. Luigi (St Aloysius).

Don Bosco Lived Here

Fig. 2: John Bosco in Chieri (1831-1841)

1. S. Luigi's Salesian Institute 2. House where M. Maddalena Morano was born 3. St Dominic's church and convent 4. Via della Pace and Elijah the bookseller's house 5. Convento della Pace 6. Seminary and St Phillip's church 7. St William's church 8. Fr Malorio's house 9. The Marchisio house 10. Former town hall (palazzo municipale) 11. Cabinetmaker Barzochino's shop 12. Public schools 13. St Anthony's church 14. Muletto inn

15. Cafe Pianta
16. Cumino the tailor's house
17. Michael Cavallo's stable
18. Cathedral
19. Bertinetti's house
20. Viale di Porta Torino



LONG TOUR (*ca. 3 hours*).

Small, well-prepared group of adults or young adults.

San Luigi's and the Church of St Margaret (**page 112**) → M. Maddalena Morano's house (**page 114**) → Church and convent of St Dominic (**page 114**) → Via della Pace (**page 115**: old Ghetto: Elijah's bookshop and Jonah's house; convent of Peace) → Seminary and St Philip's church (*S. Filippo*) (**page 118**) → St William's (*S. Guglielmo*) church (**page 130**) → Fr Maloria's house (**page 131**) → Marchisio house where Lucy Matta lived (**page 131**) → old City Hall (**page 133**) → Barzochino cabinetmaker's shop (**page 134**) → Public school (**page 134**) → *piazza Cavour* and adjacent areas (**page 141**: St Anthony's church; Muletto tavern; cafe Pianta; Tailor Cumino's house; baker M. Cavallo's place) → Cathedral (*Duomo*) (**page 146**) → Bertinetti house and St Teresa Institute (**page 149**) → the old *viale di Porta Torino* (**page 150**: only to walk along, either coming to or leaving from Chieri).

SHORTER TOUR (*ca. 2 hours*).

For relatively small groups of adults or young people.

San Luigi Salesian Institute and St Margaret's church (**page 112**) → church and convent of St Dominic's (**page 114**) → Seminary and St Philip's church (**page 118**) → St William's (**page 130**) → Fr Maloria's house (**page 131**) → Marchisio house where Lucy Matta lived (**page 131**) → Public schools (**page 134**) → *piazza Cavour* and adjacent areas (**page 141** : St Anthony's church; Muletto tavern; Cafe Pianta) → Cathedral (*Duomo*) (**page 146**).

Good spots for reflection, prayer or Mass: Salesian Institute - St Philip's – Cathedral.

Tours to the various places

SAN LUIGI SALESIAN INSTITUTE AND ST MARGARET'S CHURCH

(via Vittorio Emanuele, no. 80)

School

The Salesian work opened in 1891 when Fr Michael Rua, Don Bosco's first successor, wanted to open an oratory for young people in Chieri, named after St Aloysius Gonzaga. The church, buildings, and a paddock were all part of the former Dominic Sisters' convent which was suppressed by Napoleon in 1802, and then became the property of Count Balbiano. In 1891 Fr Rua, having received the Gamennone farmstead as a legacy from Canon Angelo Giuseppe Caselle (who had been a classmate of Don Bosco's at the public schools in Chieri), made a swap with Count Balbiano's property. The other property was between Chieri and Andezeno. He set up a festive oratory and boarding house for senior students here. Thus he was able to do what Don Bosco had wanted to do earlier but couldn't because of opposition from the parish priest of the cathedral, Canon Andrea Oddenino (1829–1890).

Then the Salesian theologate was attached to the oratory (1926–1938) and when this moved elsewhere, it became an aspirantate and today is a Middle school for day students only.

St Margaret's church

A beautiful Baroque building, the church was completed in 1671 following the plans drawn up by Pellegrino Tibaldi (1527–1596), then restored in 1851, the only remaining part of the old Dominican convent.

The inside is in the shape of a Greek cross and decorated with fine stuccoes by Giovanni Battista Barberini (1666) who is also responsible for the statues in the four corners representing David, Solomon, Esther and Judith. The frescoes on the cupola are by Gianpaolo Recchi (1670), while the altar front, representing the coronation of Our Lady amongst the angels and saints, is by Guglielmo Caccia known as Moncalvo (1568–1625).

On the side altars there are two paintings by Mario Càffaro Rore, one of the Sacred Heart with St Francis de Sales and St Aloysius Gonzaga; the other of Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco, Dominic Savio and Don Rua.

In a small chapel at the back of the church, on the left as you enter, is a wooden statue of the Immaculate Conception, by Ignazio Perrucca (1750), which was located in the Seminary chapel at one stage. For six years the young cleric Bosco had nurtured his devotion to Mary before this statue.

Over the door is a stone recalling Mamma Margaret, given that she bore the same name as the one whom the church was named after.

Salesian Oratory

The oratory is between the church of St Margaret's and some other buildings which go back to the 18th century. These include the ruins of St Leonard's chapel and the small chapel belonging to the Holy Cross hospital attached to the Templars' preceptory, with early 15th century frescoes in bad condition.

BIRTHPLACE OF MOTHER MADELEINE MORANO

(Via Vittorio Emanuele, no. 101)

On the main road, opposite the oratory, is the house where, on 15 November 1847 the now Blessed Madeleine Morano was born. She was one of the first Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and founded many of their works in Sicily. Her father was a cloth merchant and in 1849, moved with his family to Buttigliera d'Asti. Madeleine studied to be a teacher and taught at Montaldo. She wanted to consecrate herself to God in religious life but could not find a congregation to accept her since she was no longer young. On the advice of Fr Francesco Pellico S.J., Silvio's brother, she entrusted herself to Don Bosco who accepted her into the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, just starting (1879). In 1886 she was appointed as Provincial in Sicily. She died at Catania on 26 March 1908. Because of her virtues, pastoral zeal and charity and her strong spiritual quality she was beatified in 1994 by Pope John Paul II.

CHURCH AND CONVENT OF ST DOMINIC

(on the corner of via Vittorio Emanuele and via san Domenico)

The church, perhaps completed around 1317 and consecrated in 1388, underwent a number of alterations. The bell tower and spire, with mullioned windows, was finished in 1381, while the current facade was built in the 15th century, as also the great wooden Gothic portal. Inside there are three naves with cruciform pillars whose capitals (the load-bearing top part of the pillar) carries the date 1317.

The sanctuary and choir were rebuilt at the beginning of the 1600s by Archbishop Carlo Broglia (+ 1617), who belonged to a powerful family in Chieri. They shifted to France halfway through the century and altered their name to *de Broglie*. The paintings on the side and the frescoes above are scenes from the Gospel and the life of St Dominic.

These are by Moncalvo (1606). The elegantly carved choir stalls are from 1613.

On the left as you look at the sanctuary is the chapel to St Thomas Aquinas where a Gothic style reliquary (1892) still holds the chastity belt which, according to tradition, the angels gave the Saint after he had overcome temptation.

On the right, towards the centre, is the *Our Lady of the Rosary chapel*, where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved. The splendid wooden Baroque altar comes from a confraternity from Riva di Chieri. The central painting is by Moncalvo (1606–1608).

On 8 June 1841 Don Bosco celebrated his third Mass after his ordination at this altar, having been invited by Fr Giacinto Giusiana O.P. who had been his teacher when he was in his Grammar year (1832–1833). “He became emotional and cried,” Don Bosco writes. “I spent that entire day with him, a day that I can describe as heavenly” (MO Ch. 25).

VIA DELLA PACE

Leaving St Dominic’s we turn left into *via Vittorio Emanuele*. A little further ahead on the right we meet *via della Pace*. The buildings here were part of the Jewish Ghetto.

Elijah’s Bookshop

Halfway along this lane on the right (no. 10) we find the house and bookshop that belonged to Foa Elijah, a friend of John Bosco’s who was a student of humanities and rhetoric. Paying just one *soldo* each, here he borrowed books from the *Biblioteca Popolare Pomba*, reading them voraciously, one per day. Later he wrote:

In Year Four Secondary I began reading Italian authors. In my Rhetoric year I began studying the Latin classics and began reading

Cornelius Nipote, Cicero, Salustio (*sic*), Quinto Curzio, Livid, Tacitus, Ovid, Virgil, Horace and others. I was reading these books for enjoyment and felt that I had fully understood them. It was only later I became aware that this was not true, because when I became a priest and began explaining these famous classics to other I began to see that only with so much study and preparation could we begin to understand their meaning and beauty (MO Ch. 15).

Jonah's house

On the same side, in the building further down the street on the corner with *via di Albussano* (enter from no. 14 *via della Pace*), Jacob Levi or Jonah lived. His friendship with John led to him embracing Christianity and he was baptised in 1834, changing his name to Luigi Bolmida (cf. MO Ch. 12).

Franciscan monastery and the church of Peace

The street leads to the *convento della Pace*. While John Bosco was living in Chieri there was a Franciscan community here with a large novitiate.

In his humanities year, when he was 19, he found himself at a critical moment of decision regarding his vocation. He felt the Lord was calling him to the priesthood but family finances gave him no hope of pursuing his studies: he still had a year of public school ahead of him, two of philosophy and another five of theology. So he was asking himself what god was really calling him to. His contact with the Franciscans suggested the thought of embracing religious life in that Order. He made his request in March 1834 and successfully sat the exam for entrance to the novitiate at the convent of Mary of the Angels in Turin, on the 18th of that month.

He sat this exam with another school friend, Eugenio Nicco da Poirino, who subsequently went to the novitiate.

Two events led him to put a hold on his entry into the Franciscan novitiate: one was a strange dream that left him confused and the other was his meeting Evasio Savio. Don Bosco recalls this difficult moment of vocational discernment in all its detail:

So the end of the rhetoric year I approached, the time when students usually think about their vocations. The dream I had had in Murialdo was deeply imprinted on my mind; in fact it had recurred several times more in ever clearer terms, so that if I wanted to put faith in it I would have to choose the priesthood towards which I actually felt inclined. But I did not want to believe dreams, and my own manner of life, certain habits of my heart, and the absolute lack of the virtues necessary to that state, filled me with doubts and made the decision very difficult.

Oh, if only I had had a guide to care for my vocation! What a great treasure he would have been for me; but I lacked that treasure. I had a good confessor who sought to make me a good Christian, but who never chose to get involved in the question of my vocation.

Thinking things over myself, after reading some books which dealt with the choice of a state in life, I decided to enter the Franciscan Order. "If I become a secular priest," I told myself, "my vocation runs a great risk of shipwreck. I will embrace the priesthood, renounce the world, enter the cloister, and dedicate myself to study and meditation; thus in solitude I will be able to combat my passions, especially my pride," which had put down deep roots in my heart. So I applied to enter the Reformed Conventuals. I took the examination and was accepted. All was ready for my entry into Chieri's Monastery of Peace. A few days before I was due to enter, I had a very strange dream. I seemed to see a multitude of these friars, clad in threadbare habits, all dashing about helter-skelter. One of them came up to me and said: "You're looking for peace, but you won't find it here. See what goes on! God's preparing another place, another harvest for you." I wanted to question this religious but a noise awakened me and I saw nothing more (MO Ch. 16).

He went back to Castelnuovo to ask the parish priest for the documents he needed and not finding them, he met up with the blacksmith, Evasio Savio, who was his friend and whom he admired. Knowing the reason why he was there, he advised him not to go ahead

and set about finding what was necessary for John to continue his studies (cf. BM I, 301–307).

Then Fr Giuseppe Comollo, Louis' uncle, gave him the same advice as Fr Cafasso, which was to go to the Seminary.

The old Franciscan monastery is now owned by the Vincentians or priests of the Mission.

SEMINARY AND ST PHILIP NERI'S CHURCH

(via Vittorio Emanuele, no. 63)

The Seminary

This building, which had once belonged to the Oratorians of St Philip Neri, was where the third major seminary for the Turin archdiocese was opened in 1829 (the others were in Turin and Bra). Archbishop Colombano Chiaveroti had done this so that the increasing number of students of philosophy and theology would be better taken care of. St Joseph Cafasso did all of his studies here. Don Bosco lived there for six years (1835–1841). Later on Blessed Joseph Allamano, canon and founder of the Consolata Missionaries, would also be there.

The building

Most of the building goes back to the 17th century. It belonged to the Broglia family who donated it to the Oratorian Fathers who extended it and set up a community there also building the beautiful church of St Philip Neri (1664–1673). The work was encouraged and supported by Blessed Sebastian Valfrè (1629–1710), one of the founders of the Oratorian Fathers' Oratory in Turin and a model, along with St Francis de Sales, for Piedmontese priests.

The Oratory Fathers lived here until the community was suppressed by Napoleon in 1802. During the Restoration they tried in vain to

rebuild the community. Until 1828 the building was used by the city administration as a school, for civic archives and also as a police station. It then was given to the diocese.

In 1949 the seminary was moved to Rivoli and the building was given over to the Salvatorians who turned it into a boarding school. It was then bought by the Chieri city council who restored it and turned it into a school.

The building is in a U-shape around a large internal courtyard where the sundial had attracted the attention of cleric Bosco and his friend Garigliano when they first entered. They saw the inscription: *Afflictis lentae – celeres gaudentibus horae*, meaning “The hours drag for the sad, fly for the happy”. The two of them chose this as a motto for their time there: “That’s it,” I said to my friend, “that’s our programme; let’s always be cheerful, and the time will pass quickly.” (MO Ch. 18).

The reception and parlour are on the ground floor, as well as the kitchen, refectory, chapel and some classrooms. Upstairs there are study rooms, two dormitories, the rector’s living quarters and the library. The top floor had the superiors’ rooms, infirmary and other dormitories.

The large area where Don Bosco and his friends slept when Louis Comollo died is on the first floor looking out on the sundial. A plaque in the corridor recalls that loud “manifestation” one night. Don Bosco recalls the whole event:

Given our friendship and the unlimited trust between Comollo and me, we often spoke about the separation that death could possibly bring upon us at any time. One day, after we had read a long passage from the lives of the saints, we talked, half in jest and half in earnest, of what a consolation it would be if the one of us who died first were to return with news about his condition. We talked of this so often that we drew up this contract: “Whichever of us is the first to die will, if God permits it, bring back word of his salvation to his surviving companion” ...

Comollo died on 2 April 1839. Next evening he was solemnly buried in Saint Filippo’s Church. ... That night, after I went to bed in the

big dormitory which I shared with some twenty other seminarians, I was restless. I was convinced that this was to be the night when our promise would be fulfilled. About 11:30 a deep rumble was heard in the corridor. It sounded as if a heavy wagon drawn by many horses were coming up to the dormitory door. It got louder and louder, like thunder, and the whole dormitory shook. The clerics tumbled out of bed in terror and huddled together for comfort. Then, above the violent and thundering noise, the voice of Comollo was heard clearly. Three times he repeated very distinctly: *Bosco, I am saved*. All heard the noise; some recognised the voice without understanding the meaning; others understood it as well as I did, as is proved by the length of time the event was talked about in the seminary. It was the first time in my life I remember being afraid. The fear and terror were so bad that I fell ill and was at death's door (MO Ch. 22).

How the seminary was organised

In November 1835, when the cleric Bosco entered the seminary the rector was Canon Sebastiano Mottura (1795–1876), an able and good administrator, severe but balanced as a superior; he ran the seminary for 31 years, from when it was founded (1829–1830) until the summer of 1860. Four other superiors helped him: the spiritual director, professor of philosophy and theology, and the rector of the church of St Philip. In 1835 the superiors were Fr Giuseppe Mottura (26, spiritual director), Fr Lorenzo Prialis (32, professor of theology), Fr Innocente Arduino (30, professor of philosophy, who took over from Fr Ternavasio at the beginning of the school year) and Fr Matteo Testa (48, rector of St Philip's). In 1837–1838 Fr Arduino became the Prefect and *Tutor* in theology; the chair of philosophy was given to Fr Giovanni Battista Appendini (30).

There were a number of minor roles, like assistance in the dormitories and study halls, leading prayers in the chapel, choir practice (Gregorian chant). Assistance for the sick and sacristan were given to the senior seminarians to look after. In exchange for these services fees were reduced for up to 30 lire a month. John Bosco looked after the sacristy

for a time and in 1840–1841 was appointed *dormitory prefect*, or assistant.

Important stages in the seminary year were the triduum at the beginning of the year (a special retreat for entering into the atmosphere of formation in the seminary), the autumn exams, conferring of minor and major orders which took place in the spring (the Saturday before Palm Sunday) and in summer (Saturday after Pentecost), the retreat from Wednesday of Holy Week until Holy Saturday and the final exams.

The rhythm of life and work at the seminary was controlled by a detailed and demanding set of rules. Study, prayer, obedience and discipline were the pillars of seminary formation.

A *student's day* was laid down in every minute detail. In the *morning*, rising was at 5:30 in winter (from 1st November till 15 March), then a quarter of an hour earlier every fortnight, and at 4:30 a.m. during summer (from 1 May to 30 June). Seminarians would go down to the chapel for morning prayers, half an hour's meditation and Mass. An hour of study followed. Breakfast (a bread roll) was around 8:15 then after a short recreation, three hours of school (8:45–11:45). Lunch (12:00) was after the *Angelus* was said in the chapel, which was followed by a quarter of an hour's visit to the Blessed Sacrament before the afternoon recreation which lasted for an hour.

There was a *similar schedule* in the afternoon: half an hour of personal study and half an hour together, known as the *circolo* or study group (1:45–2:45), two hours of school followed by Rosary in the chapel; another two hours of study plus an hour of tutorial work (5:00–8:00); supper; three quarters of an hour of recreation then night prayers. At 9:30 p.m. they went to bed and by 10:00 p.m. all lights had to be out.

Seminarians were in silence for most of lunch and supper, listening to a reading by one of their fellow seminarians. From the first week of Advent until the end of Lent the Saturday evening reading was replaced

by a brief sermonette on the Sunday Gospel which subdeacons and deacons took turns to present as a way of practising homiletics.

On *Thursdays*, philosophy and theology classes were replaced by an hour of Gregorian chant, another hour of sacred ceremonies and an hour of moral instruction; in place of the afternoon lessons there was a walk in groups around the city and relatives or friends of the seminarians were allowed to visit.

During study on a Saturday evening six or seven priests from around the city would be in the chapel to hear the seminarians' confessions. The rule was they had to go to confession at least once a fortnight. Following the custom of the time, Communion was not distributed during weekday Masses. Those who had permission from their confessor and wanted to receive it could go to St Philip's church from 8:15 to 8:45, in other words during breakfast.

There were some changes to this timetable during summer months; because rising was at 4:30, they could take a rest for three quarters of an hour in the afternoon.

The *weekend timetable* was less demanding, but still full: rising half an hour later; morning office and the office of the Blessed Virgin Mary and *Mass with communion*. an hour and a half of study followed breakfast then they all went to the cathedral for the *sung Mass*. Study in the afternoon was given to the New Testament and *Roman Catechism*; meanwhile seminarians in their final year went to the cathedral to teach catechism to the youngsters. Then the community would celebrate sung Vespers, listen to a religious instruction and say the Rosary. An hour and a half's study followed, an hour of tutorials, supper, recreation, prayer then bed.

How studies were arranged

There were two years of philosophy and five of theology. Classes were run by the appointed teacher assisted by the *tutor*. There were no text

books: the treatises, in Latin, were dictated and explained by the teacher while students took notes; in the evening tutorials the tutor went back over the morning lessons so students could check their notes and ask questions or clarification.

The school year began on 1 November with an introductory triduum and finished at the end of June.

John Bosco as a cleric at the seminary

For John Bosco, accustomed to a very lively existence, it would have cost not a little effort to settle into the highly regulated and more withdrawn seminary life. He accepted this with good will, and in the light of his priestly goal, study, and his spiritual sense of self-discipline. He wanted to make maximum use of opportunities offered by the seminary for study and reading, so he would use any little moment he could find after getting up or at other times. He also gave up recreation activities that might distract him too much from his formation:

The game known as Bara rotta was the most popular game we played. I used to play it in the beginning, but since this game was very similar to those acrobatics which I had absolutely given up, I wanted to give this up too. There was another game called tarots which was permitted on certain days, and for a while I also played this game. Even here sweetness and bitterness intermingled... I should add that my mind would become so fixed during a game that afterwards I could neither pray nor study. The troubling images of the King of Clubs and the Jack of Spades, the 13 or 15 of tarots filled my imagination. So I resolved to give up this game as I had given up the others. This was in 1836, mid-way through my second year of philosophy.

In the longer recreation periods, the seminarians went for walks to the many delightful places round Chieri. These walks were useful for learning too. We tried to improve our academic knowledge by quizzing one another as we walked...

During the long recreations, we often gathered in the refectory for what we called the "study circle." At this session, one could ask questions about things he did not know or had not grasped in our

lectures or lessons. I liked this exercise and found it very helpful for study, piety, and health...

Comollo often interrupted my recreation time, I leading me by the sleeve of my cassock and telling me to come along with him to the chapel. There we would make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament for the dying, saying the rosary or the Little Office of Our Lady for the souls in purgatory (MO Ch. 19).

The results of this constant effort were good, but it did little for Bosco's health and on a couple of occasions he found himself in serious trouble healthwise. His friend Louis Comollo was less robust and during the first year of theology he became seriously ill and died.

Although seminary discipline and the daily tasks of the cleric were tackled with good will and a spirit of adaptation, some aspects of seminary life did not leave him fully satisfied: there was a certain barrier between staff and students that made him want "even more," he wrote, "to quickly become a priest and be in the midst of young people, help them, satisfy all their needs" (MO Ch. 19); secondly there was a superficiality and lack of signs of a vocation in some of his fellow seminarians. Right from the outset he chose the best amongst them and struck up firm friendships with them (amongst whom Garigliano, Giacomelli and Comollo), and treated the rest with a courteous but reserved approach (cf. MO Ch. 19). But his conciliatory, kind and available approach won over the affection of his fellow seminarians and the superiors: "I was very fortunate at the seminary and always enjoyed the affection of friends and all the superiors" (MO Ch. 23).

We recall some events from those years that were important in Don Bosco's life.

During the holidays in his first year at the seminary (1835–1836) he spent three months at the castle at Montaldo Torinese where the Jesuits had relocated their students from Turin, the boarders at the Royal Carmel College, due to the outbreak of cholera. Through the good offices of Fr Cafasso, John was invited to be a tutor in Greek and also dormitory assistant (cf. MO Ch. 24). This put him in touch with

a number of boys who belonged to well-known and noble Piedmontese families and he kept up these friendships which would then become very important in his future ministry.

At the beginning of the second year of philosophy (1836–1837), John discovered the worth of the *Imitation of Christ*, and this marked the beginning of a fruitful period when he read more ascetic, religious and historical works which rounded off his cultural education and also helped shape his way of thinking.

In the second year of theology (1838–1839) Louis Comollo died. It was a dramatic event (2 April 1839, Easter Tuesday); he was just 22 years old.

John was given the sacristy job this year, at the time of the retreat, and this is when he first met Fr John Borel (1801–1873), who would support him in the initial stages of the Oratory:

In the second year of theology I was made sacristan. It was not a post that carried much weight, but it showed one was appreciated by the superiors and it did carry with it another sixty francs [*note*: discount on seminary fees]. All this meant that I could provide for half my fees, while good Fr Caffasso provided the rest...

This was the year in which I had the good fortune of making the acquaintance of a man who was really zealous in the sacred ministry. He had come to preach our seminary retreat. He appeared in the sacristy with a smiling face and a joking manner of speaking, but always seasoned with moral thoughts. When I saw the way he celebrated Mass, his bearing, his preparation, and his thanksgiving, I realized at once that here was a worthy priest. He turned out to be Fr John Borrelli [*note*: Don Bosco always wrote the name of his great friend and collaborator this way] from Turin. When he began to preach, I noted the simplicity, liveliness, clarity, and fire of charity that filled all his words; we were unanimous in rating him a man of real holiness.

In fact we all raced to go to confession to him in order to speak of our vocations and receive some advice. I too wanted to discuss the affairs of my soul with him. When, at the end, I asked him for some advice on how best to preserve the spirit of my vocation during the year and

particularly during the holidays, he left these memorable words with me: “A vocation is perfected and preserved, and a real priestly spirit is formed, by a climate of recollection and by frequent communion.” (MO Ch. 23).

After his third year of theology (1839–1840) Bosco went directly into the fifth year by sitting for the fourth year exams at the end of summer:

With this in mind and without telling anyone, I presented myself to Archbishop Frasoni to ask permission to study the fourth-year texts during the holidays. In the following school year (1840–1) I would complete the quinquennium. I quoted my advanced age – I was 24 – as the reason for my request. The holy Bishop... granted the favour I was asking on condition that I take all the treatises in the course I wanted to take. Fr Cinzano, my vicar forane, was charged with carrying out the wishes of our superior. After two months of study, I finished the prescribed treatises, and for the autumn ordinations I was admitted to the subdiaconate. (MO Ch. 25).

Don Bosco’s overall judgement on the time spent at the seminary – despite highlighting the standoffish approach of the superiors and the poor example given by some seminarians – is not a negative one. He enjoyed the six years. Later he would write:

I found the day I had to leave the seminary for the last time very difficult. My superiors loved me and showed continual marks of benevolence. My companions were very affectionate towards me. You could say that I lived for them and they lived for me. If anyone wanted a shave or his tonsure renewed, he ran to Bosco. If he wanted someone to make a biretta for him, to sew or patch his clothes, Bosco was the man he turned to. So you can imagine how sad was the parting from that place where I had lived for six years, where I received education, knowledge, an ecclesiastical spirit, and all the tokens of kindness and affection one could desire (MO Ch. 25).

It was here that he absorbed the most important elements of the spirituality offered to seminarians: a profound and substantial piety, a priestly mentality gained through the discipline of the place and

self-discipline, a solid commitment to study and duty in the light of the future ministry, response to the Lord's call in wanting to spend one's entire life for the salvation and sanctification of one's neighbour.

S. Filippo (St Philip's) church

This Baroque structure was begun in 1664, completed in 1673 and consecrated in 1681. The inside is the work of architect Antonio Bettino from Ticino (who worked in Turin in the second half of the 1600s), but the facade which fronts onto *via Vittorio Emanuele* was built later following the design of architect and engraver Mario Ludovico Quarini (1736–1800).

The first altar on the right used to have a beautiful painting by Claudio Francesco Beaumont (1694–1766) of St Francis de Sales before the Virgin and Child; it was linked with a Confraternity dedicated to the Saint, and which was very active in the 18th and 19th centuries. They used this church for their religious practices. Today this painting is in the sacristy at the cathedral. The second altar is dedicated to St Philip Neri, with a painting by Stefano Maria Legnani known as *Il Legnanino*, from Milan (1660–1715). There is a splendid altar-piece on the main altar of the Immaculate Conception (and the church is actually dedicated to her), by Daniel Seyter (1649–1705). The sacristy is furnished with precious 17th century items which have been carved by artists from Chieri.

Under the sanctuary, on the left near the communion rails and in a small burial crypt we find the body of Louis Comollo. In Autumn 1986, with the help of Cav. Secondo Caselle and the parish priest at the cathedral, Mons. Gianni Carrù, the place of burial was finally discovered. There is now a glass panel in the floor which enables you to see the seminarian's remains.

In the 19th century there was a passageway between the seminary and the church. That was where every morning during breakfasts,

John Bosco and some other seminarians would go through to receive communion from the church's Rector. In those days they could go to Communion only with permission from their confessor, since the normal custom was for seminarians to receive Communion only at the first Mass on Sunday (cf. MO 93).

Seminarians usually prayed and attended liturgy at another chapel *inside*, dedicated to the Immaculate Conception, located beside St Philip's. John Bosco was the sacristan. John Bosco and Louis Comollo prayed daily before her beautiful wooden statue by Ignazio Perrucca (1750) on the altar. The present parish priest of the collegiate church has entrusted the statue to the Salesians of Chieri. This chapel still exists, though the apse was extended towards the end of last century. Since the Salvatorians left it has been used for conferences and exhibitions and is in poor condition. You can gain access to it from the passageway that links the building with the portal looking out on *corso Vittorio Emanuele* (no. 63).

Don Bosco Visitors Centre

Here we find a museum space dedicated to the figure of St John Bosco, recalling the ten years he lived in the city of Chieri. It is located inside the former seminary of St Philip, which represented a fundamental step in the young Bosco's faith journey.

In the place where the Saint received an important scholastic formation, it is possible to retrace some moments of his life, such as his deep friendship with Louis Comollo, who died prematurely and revealed to him, shortly after his death, that he had been saved.

The tour begins with a first stop in the reception room, where a video dedicated to the city of Chieri and its territory is projected; it then continues along the corridor, where a plaque commemorates the miraculous episode that happened between the Saint and his friend Comollo.

It continues in the room of the dream, which was the seminary's dormitory, where four thematic spaces with panels and video projections are presented:

- *Chieri in the 19th century*: description of the urban context in which the young Bosco lived, from a historical, socio-political, economic, cultural and religious point of view.
- *School and work*: description of the context in which John Bosco studied, was spiritually formed and worked to support his studies, in a setting where a corner of a nineteenth-century classroom is reproduced; the theme of work is represented by tools from a small carpentry workshop and objects of tailoring.
- *em Friendship and the Society for a Good Time*, founded by John Bosco together with the young people of Chieri with the aim of creating an opportunity to gather, study and moral formation.
- *The seminary*: the last room is entirely dedicated to the years John Bosco spent in the seminary between discipline, study and prayer.

PIAZZA MAZZINI AND ADJACENT BUILDINGS

Going up *via san Filippo*, on the left of the church, you see the beautiful 16th century terracotta facade (modified in 1780) of the former Oratorian Father's residence before arriving at *piazza Mazzini*, earlier known as *piazza san Guglielmo*.

This used be the city centre in the early 1800s. The city hall was here and there was a busy weekly market and two annual fairs held on the days of Sts Basilissa and Julian and St Leonard.

There are a number of buildings around this square which recall Bosco's time in Chieri: St William's church, Fr Maloria's house, Lucia Matta's place where he lived for some time, City Hall, cabinetmaker Barzochino's shop.

S. Guglielmo (St William's) church

The church from which the square took its name has very early origins and has been rebuilt a number of times, most recently in 1837. It used to be the headquarters of the *Confraternity of Disciples of the Holy Spirit* who included looking after Jewish converts to the faith amongst their tasks.

In 1833–1834 John Bosco, then living at Cafe Pianta, made friends with a young Jew called *Jonah*, or Jacob Levi, and helped him convert. The Jesuits at St Anthony's prepared him for Baptism. On 10 August 1834 Jonah went in procession to the cathedral with members of the Confraternity and many other people, and was baptised as Luigi (Aloysius) and took Bolmida as his surname in honour of Giacinto (Hyacinth) Bolmida, a banker, who was his godfather. His godmother was Mrs Ottavia Maria Bertinetti. according to custom and its statutes, the Confraternity of the Holy Spirit enrolled the newly converted members and gave them 400 lire as soon as the Jewish community expelled them from their ranks.

The Rector of St William's was Fr Placid Valimberti (Don Bosco calls him Eustachio in the MO), the first priest whom John met when he arrived in Chieri. He wrote: "He gave me a lot of good advice on how to keep out of trouble. He invited me to serve his Mass and thus he could always advise me well. He brought me to see the headmaster in Chieri and introduced me to my other teachers." (MO Ch. 7). He used to live in the house beside the church at no. 4.

Fr Valimberti was also the teacher of Fifth Class. John had him as his teacher when he was promoted to that class two months after the school year began. Two years later the priest asked him to tutor his younger brother Louis, who was a student in *Latinitas* (Grammar). The results here were as good as on other occasions, and the Valimberti family were so grateful that they regarded him as a member of the family, inviting him to lunch every Sunday (cf. BM I, 268–269).

Fr Maloria's house

(*piazza Mazzini, no. 8*)

Fr Giuseppe Maria Maloria (1802–1857), a learned cleric, canon at the cathedral, lived at *casa Gozio*, opposite the church. In 1835 he was only 29 when John Bosco chose him as his confessor. The young student would continue to go regularly to Fr Maloria for confession all the time he was in Chieri, including during his seminary years.

John had great respect for him. We read in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*:

I had the great good fortune of choosing as my regular confessor Doctor Maloria, canon of the chapter in Chieri. He always had a warm welcome for me. Indeed, he encouraged me to go to confession and communion more often, advice not too commonly given in those days, I do not remember that any of my teachers ever advised me along these lines. Those who went to confession and communion more than once a month were considered very virtuous; and many confessors would not permit it. Consequently, I have to thank my confessor if I was not led by companions into certain unfortunate pitfalls that inexperienced boys in large schools have to regret (MO Ch 9).

Nevertheless, for reasons that escaped Don Bosco and also us, Fr Maloria was of no help to him when it came to deciding on his vocation (cf. MO Ch 16).

Casa Marchisio where Lucy Matta lived

(*piazza Mazzini, no. 1*)

Note: the entrance was off the former *via Mercanti*, today *via Carlo Alberto*.

This was where a friend of Mamma Margaret lived during the school year, Lucia Pianta also known as the widow Matta, originally from Morialdo. When her older daughter married, she moved to Chieri so she

could follow up her son, John Baptist (1809–1878) a school student, and rented a house belonging to James Marchisio. She also took in a few other boys to help balance the family budget. In 1831–1832 and 1832–1833 she gave John board and lodging for 21 lire a month. This amount could also be paid in kind, but it was still a fair amount given the Bosco family's meagre resources. So John did what he could to find the money by taking on any little domestic chores he could.

He won Lucy over quickly because of his excellent behaviour, and she asked him to tutor her son who was already 21 but was a bit wayward (We note here that it was not unusual for someone of this age to still be at school). The result was so satisfactory that John no longer needed to pay board.

John Baptist Matta became a chemist, and was a long-time Mayor of Castelnuovo. He had great regard for Don Bosco; in 1867 he sent his son, Edward Henry, to school at Valdocco.

It was probably in his first year at Chieri that John founded the *Society for a Good Time*:

All this time I had to use my own initiative to learn how to deal with my companions. I put them in three groups: the good, the indifferent, and the bad. As soon as I spotted the bad ones, I avoided them absolutely and always. The indifferent I associated with only when necessary, but I was always courteous with them. I made friends with the good ones, and then only when I was sure of them. As I knew few people in the town, I made it a rule to keep to myself. I sometimes had to discourage people I did not know too well. Some wanted to get me to a show, others into some gambling, and still others to go swimming. And there were suggestions that I should steal fruit from the town gardens or country orchards...

Since the companions who tried to coax me into their escapades were the most careless about everything, they began to come to me with the request that I do them the kindness of lending them my homework or dictating it to them. The teachers frowned on this. They said that it was a false kindness that only encouraged laziness, and they strictly forbade me to do it. I then resorted to less obvious ways of helping them, such as explaining problems to them and lending a helping

hand to those who needed it. Thus I made everyone happy and won the goodwill and affection of my companions. At first they came to play, then to listen to stories or to do their homework, and finally for no reason at all, just as the boys at Murialdo and Castelnuovo used to do. That these gatherings might have a name, we called ourselves the Society for a Good Time. There was a reason for the name, because everyone was obliged to look for such books, discuss such subjects, or play such games as would contribute to the happiness of the members. Whatever would induce sadness was forbidden, especially things contrary to God's law. Those who swore, used God's name in vain, or indulged in bad talk were turned away from the club at once. So it was that I found myself the leader of a crowd of companions. Two basic rules were adopted:

- (1) Each member of the Society for a Good Time should avoid language and actions unbecoming a good Christian;
- (2) Exactness in the performance of scholastic and religious duties...

During the week, the Society for a Good Time used to meet at the home of one of the members to talk about religious matters. Anyone was welcome to come to these gatherings. Garigliano and Braje were amongst the most conscientious. We entertained ourselves with some pleasant recreation, with discussions on religious topics, spiritual reading, and prayer. We exchanged good advice, and if there were any personal corrections we felt we should hand out to each other, whether these were our own personal observations or criticisms we had heard others make, we did that" (MO Ch 8,9).

The former City Hall

(via Giacomo Nel, no. 2)

On the left of St William's, and fronting the square – the classic facade by architect Mario Ludovico Quarini on *via Giacomo Nel*. The Council met here. It was such until 1842 when it transferred to the former St Francis convent where it still is today.

This is probably where the two literary academies took place in honour of Chieri's Mayor, recorded by Fr Lemoyne as involving John Bosco reciting a number of classic poems (cf. BM I, 233).

Cabinetmaker Barzochino's shop

(via san Giorgio, no. 2)

From *piazza Mazzini*, going past the City Hall, we come to *via san Giorgio*. The first building on the right showing traces of Gothic architecture, is palazzo Valfrè, formerly palazzo Ferreri. On the ground floor, where you can see large wooden doors was Bernard Barzochino's workshop. This belonged to a famous family of wood craftsmen and artists in Chieri.

It was probably here that John Bosco came to offer his services in free moments and also to learn how to make furniture. In fact Fr Lemoyne, who says he learned this directly from Don Bosco says: "Near his lodging there was a cabinetmaker's shop, and there he learned to use the plane, the square, the saw and other tools. Soon he was able to make articles of furniture..." (BM I, 193).

PUBLIC SCHOOL, CHIERI

(via Vittorio Emanuele, no. 45/inside)

From *piazza Mazzini* we go down *vicolo Romano* back to *via Vittorio Emanuele*. On the right, a few steps along, at no. 45, there is a laneway leading to the buildings that were used for the Chieri public school. The laneway leads to a courtyard known as the *cortile civile*; on the left, beyond an architrave and entrance with panelled ceiling, there is another courtyard known as the *cortile rustico*. All this area has now been rebuilt as private dwellings.

The Chieri City Council had acquired this area – though in truth it was barely appropriate for classrooms – in 1829, and only later shifted to the former Oratorian Father's building used as the seminary. The renovations of the area continued until autumn 1831. Meanwhile, the

Council were able to use some parts of the seminary for the schools, separated from the rest of the building and accessed off *via san Filippo*.

When John Bosco came to Chieri in November 1831, the new public school buildings were ready and remained there until the 1838–1839 school year when in November 1839 they moved to the *palazzo Tana*.

How this area was arranged

In the *cortile civile*, the two ground floor rooms were for Sixth and Fifth Class, while the upper floor was for Fourth and Grammar Classes. In the *cortile rustico*, the ground floor area was the school chapel (called the *Student Congregation*), where every morning, including weekends, pupils said their prayers and attended Mass. On the first floor were Humanities and Rhetoric year classrooms taken by just one teacher.

How the schools were set up

Secondary schooling in the State of Savoy, until the Minister Boncompagni reform (1848), were divided into six classes of *Latinitas* (Sixth, Fifth, Fourth, Grammar, Humanities and Rhetoric) plus two years philosophy. They were known as the *Royal schools* (the city schools were more important and were under royal financing), or *Public Schools* (those in smaller towns and under local financing). Each class had one teacher. Seventy was the maximum number of students in a class. When the number exceeded this, they could split into two classes – but still under the same teacher.

The school year began on 3 November and finished at end of June for philosophy, and 15 August for Rhetoric and end of August for the others.

Timetable: Mass was obligatory each morning, celebrated by the Spiritual Director, then three hours of school followed and a further two

and a half in the afternoon. In the two years of philosophy there was one and a half hours class in the morning and similarly in the afternoon.

Exams: were run by a teacher other than the normal one. The first exam was catechism and unless you passed that you couldn't do the others. Examinable subjects were:

For Sixth, Fifth and Fourth:

1. One item in Italian to be translated into Latin
2. One item in Latin to be translated into Italian
3. An oral exam.

In the Grammar year:

1. 1 as above
2. 2 as above
3. Some Latin prose which had to be put into a particular Latin poetic metre
4. Write a letter in Italian
5. Oral exam on what had been learned by rote during the year.

Humanities:

1. 1 as above
2. 2 as above
3. composition of a letter or an essay on some topic
4. as above for Latin prose into Latin poetry
5. Same but this time Italian prose to poetry in free verse form
6. Oral exam as above.

Rhetoric:

As above, except for no. 3: "a speech which could be written as the examinee wanted in Latin or Italian" on an assigned topic, but respecting the rules and rhetorical features.

Marks were given in Latin: *male, nescit, medie, fere bene, fere optime, optime, egregie* Students who failed *nescit* twice were expelled from school.

Disciplinary aspects

Discipline was given special attention both in school and outside the school timetable. The Prefect of Studies was *in charge of discipline*, and while John Bosco was at school, this post was held by the Dominican, Pio Eusebio Sibilla. Any student misbehaviour was referred to the Prefect of Studies. Disobedience or lack of respect for teachers were given a three day suspension and a public apology to the whole class. The regulations strictly forbade students to go swimming, or to the theatre or take part in “tricks” (sleight of hand), wear masks, go dancing, frequent cafes or eat and drink in inns and restaurants, or play any games in the streets around town. Any absence in excess of a fortnight that was not for reasons of health meant automatic exclusion from school. Books too came under the Prefect’s control: students could only keep or read books that he knew about and had given permission for.

It was also up to the Prefect of Studies to approve arrangements for students to stay with private families.

Religious formation

Religious formation was entrusted to the *Spiritual Director*. Other than daily Mass students had to front up for Confession once a month and at least once a year for Communion, and had to actually hand in a “ticket” to that effect (“Confession and Communion tickets”) to the Prefect of Studies, otherwise they could not sit for the exams.

Every Saturday each teacher would question the students on the catechism lesson that had been given them by the Spiritual Director the previous Sunday. Then during Lent there was a Catechism lesson every day before classes began.

On Sundays and feast days, students would come with their prayer book to the *Congregation*, meaning they would assemble in the school chapel. The Congregation was run as follows:

Morning:

- spiritual reading for the first quarter of an hour
- the *Veni Creator* was sung
- “Nocturn” and reading, then the “Ambrosian hymn” (the *Te Deum*) from the Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary
- Mass
- Litany of Our Lady (sung)
- religious instruction
- the psalm *Laudate Dominum omnes gentes*, with chorus and “prayer for his Majesty”.

Afternoon:

- spiritual reading for the first quarter of an hour
- “usual prayers with acts of faith, hope and charity and contrition”
- catechism for three quarters of an hour.

In *preparation for Christmas* there was a triduum with two sermons per day.

Each school year there was also a *retreat*, from Friday evening before Palm Sunday to the morning of Wednesday in Holy Week, following this structure:

- introduction (Friday evening)
- four talks a day (two “meditations” and two “instructions”)
- daily Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary
- conclusion on Wednesday with the Easter Communion.

In the light of these arrangements, we can understand how Don Bosco had written:

This strict discipline produced wonderful results. Even years could pass without you hearing a blasphemy or bad talk. Pupils were obedient and respectful both during school time and at home with their families. And it often happened that in the large classes everyone was promoted to the next grade at the end of the year. In third, Humanities and Rhetoric, all my class mates were promoted....

I want to note one thing here that will certainly enable us to understand how the spirit of piety was nurtured in the college in Chieri. Over the four years that I attended these schools I never recall hearing a conversation or even a word out of place or against religion. When the Rhetoric year was over, out of 25 pupils in that group, 21 embraced the ecclesiastical state; three became doctors, one a businessman (MO Ch. 16).

John Bosco as a student

In the 1831–1832 school year John went into Sixth Class (taught by Fr Valeriano Pugnetti), because his schooling at Castelnuovo was rather poor. However, two months later he was promoted to Fifth (taught by his friend Fr Placido Valimberti) and in the same year was again promoted to Fourth (the teacher was Vincenzo Cima). In fact it was common practice that if a student showed a grasp of the subjects in a particular class, he could go on to a higher one even during the school year. It was in Cima's class where the famous episode took place when John had his grammar book in hand, and read out a passage from a Latin author he had just heard as if he was reading it from the book, but in fact he had left it at home (cf. MO Ch. 7).

Over the next three years he was in, and largely successfully at Grammar (1832–1833; the teacher was Giacinto Giusiana, a Dominican); Humanities (1833–1834; the teacher was Fr Pietro Banaudi); Rhetoric (1834–1835; the teacher was Fr Giovanni Francesco Bosco).

He was on *good terms* with the teachers, especially Fr Giusiana, who was also a good influence on his formation; Don Bosco, grateful for this, would celebrate one of his first Masses in the monastery where his former teacher lived. We can recall amongst other things the important

role Giusiana played in the final exams that year (1833) when John risked failing because he had lent his homework to some classmates.

Fr Peter Banaudi would be remembered as “a true model of the teacher. He never used any punishment, Don Bosco recalls: “He was feared and loved by all his pupils. He loved them as if they were his own sons and loved them as a tender father” (MO Ch. 11). The end of the year with Fr Banaudi was highlighted by a cheerful walk the students had in the countryside. Unfortunately towards the evening one of them, Filippo Camandona, who had secretly wanted to go swimming at the *Fontana Rossa* (along the road between Chieri and Pino Torinese), was a victim of his disobedience (cf. MO Ch. 11). The following year (1834–1835) Fr Banaudi was transferred to Barge (Cuneo) and during the Easter holidays John – a sign of the affection between them – spent two days with him; there is a moving account of this which John wrote up later (cf. BM I, 262-265). John also had a very good relationship with his rhetoric teacher who bore the same surname. Fr John Francis Bosco, “as soon as he had finished the course in rhetoric... asked him to be his friend and to be addressed informally” (BM I, 273). Later he would tell the Salesians that he admired “young Bosco busily hoeing in the vineyard of his landlord Cumino. On a branch in front of him he had placed a book from which he was studying his lessons” (BM I, 268).

The four years of public schooling were full of good friendships with his *class mates*. Probably already in 1831–1832 he had begun to set up the *Society for a Good Time*, copying the enthusiasm that was around at the time for similar kinds of groups everywhere: there were patriotic secret societies, but also literary and religious ones.

Amongst his friends in his first year at school Don Bosco had chosen Guglielmo Garigliano (1818–1902), who would be with him in the seminary and at the Pastoral Institute, and Paolo Braja (1819–1832), who died in July that same year, “a true model of piety, resignation, and living faith” (MO Ch. 10).

But the most outstanding friendship was with Louis Comollo who attended the Public Schools in Chieri in 1834–1835. Physically weak he had great spiritual strength and played an important role in young Bosco as he grew to maturity, to the point where the latter said: “... he became my close friend and I can say that from him I began to learn how to live as a Christian. I trusted him completely and he trusted me” (MO Ch. 10). For his part John defended him against his school mates, on one occasion even by manhandling them (cf. MO Ch. 10). Thanks to this friendship he began to clarify his vocation and took on a life style that was more in line with such. He wrote: “My life in the past had not been wicked, but I had been proud and dissipated, given over to amusements, games, acrobatics and other such things. These pursuits gave passing joy but did not satisfy the heart” (MO Ch. 17).

John’s leaning to friendship and personal contact made him available to everyone. He was even asked to help tutor students in higher classes (cf. BM I, 206). His patience, his “teacher’s” instinct and his warm nature brought good results, and not only in the scholastic field. We can recall once again his influence on Giovanni Battista Matta, the son of the lady whose place he was staying at, and on the brother of Fr Valimberti, his teacher. For two years John helped Carlo Palazzolo, the thirty-five-year-old sacristan at the cathedral, who was privately sitting for his Rhetoric Year so he could receive the clerical habit (cassock) (cf. BM I, 219).

PIAZZA CAVOUR AND SURROUNDING AREA

If we continue along *via Vittorio Emanuele* towards Turin we come to *piazza Cavour*, then known as *piazza d’Arme*. On the right, on the higher part, is the church of San Bernardino, built in the early 17th century. Architect Bernardo Antonio Vittone also helped with some renovation and totally rebuilt the original cupola (1740–1744). The facade with its two low bell towers with statues on top was completed in 1792. This was the work of Mario Ludovico Quarini. Inside are two

wonderful canvases by Moncalvo, one at the main altar and the other on the right-hand side altar.

Church of Sant'Antonio Abate (St Anthony Abbot)

On the corner of the *piazza*, and facing onto *via Vittorio Emanuele*. It was rebuilt following the design of Filippo Juvarra (1767) over an earlier building of Gothic design – only the bell tower of that remains (1445). Worthy of interest inside: carved wooden pulpit from 1470; ceiling fresco by Vittorio Blanseri (1735–1775), the apotheosis of St Anthony; the *Via Crucis* (Stations of the Cross) in bas-relief, by Giovanni Battista Bernero (1736–1796). In 1628 the church and attached buildings were given to the Jesuits by Cardinal Maurizio di Savoia. This was the *Jesuit Scholasticate*.

This also holds memories of John Bosco in Chieri: “On feast days, after the practices of piety in common, at the college, we used to go along to St Anthony’s church, where the Jesuits gave marvellous catechetical instructions with plenty of stories that I still recall” (MO Ch. 9).

A plaque on the side of the church looking over the *piazza*, recalls this and when John attended with members of the *Society for a Good Time*.

Muletto inn

On the southern end of *piazza Cavour*, on the corner with *via Vittorio Emanuele* and *via Palazzo di Città*, where today you find the *Caffè Nazionale*, there was a tavern known as the *Muletto*. It reminds us of the happy conclusion to the epic challenge between the young Bosco and an acrobatic performer. the contest, urged on by his friends, took place along the *Porta Torinese* and involved four activities: a race, acrobatics, magic and climbing a tree. John beat the performer in all four and won the considerable amount of 240 lire. So he wouldn’t ruin the poor fellow

who could see all his earnings going up in smoke, he gave him back the money on condition that he treat all the members of the *Society for a Good Time* to a meal. The performer willingly accepted this and invited John and his friends (twenty two of them in all) to the *Muletto* (cf. MO Ch. 14).

Cafe Pianta

Just a short few steps from *piazza Cavour*, in the casa Vergnano, we would have found *caffè Pianta* [Cafe Pianta in English]. Giovanni Pianta, brother of Lucia the widow Matta, originally from Morialdo, came to Chieri in the autumn of 1833 and opened a cafe with attached billiards room. Since he was just beginning, he insisted with Mamma Margaret that John stay with him and help him in the many things that were needed for running a public place.

The cafe opened shortly after the beginning of the school year. John meanwhile had left casa Marchisio and had stayed briefly with the baker, Michele Cavallo, at the casa Ricci next to tailor Cumino's place.

The Cafe Pianta had two rooms, one which opened out to the public, and the other was used for billiards and a piano, located towards the inner courtyard. There was a long passageway between them (3.50 metres), from under the staircase where there was also a small brick stove for preparing sweets and coffee. There was a small area under the stairs where John could stay.

At free moments during the school year he helped Mr Pianta with his work and learned how to prepare coffee, sweets and liqueurs. He was also a waiter in the billiards room and this helped raise the tone a little and lesson the language problem!

It was here that John Bosco developed his friendship with Jonah the Jewish lad, whom he had already got to know from Elijah's bookshop. The two would often sing, play the piano, and chat: and it was here the the young Jewish lad's journey of faith began.

John got no wage at the Cafe Pianta but only a place to stay, a plate of soup and some time to study. His mother, as was customary at the time, gave him bread and something else to eat, but her finances did not allow her to give him money. For clothing and anything else he needed, also to supplement his diet, John earned what he could from tutoring. In his Humanities year (1833–1834) things were very tough.

The Blanchard family lived in the same house on the first floor. Their place looked over the inner courtyard, and even today you can still see the wooden balcony. Joseph, one of their children, and a friend of John's (13 years old), would often bring him so fruit to ease his hunger, at the mother's insistence. Don Bosco would never forget this act of charity and friendship (cf. BM I, 223-225).

To financial limitations we need to add that this was the year when his vocational decision was at its most crucial and difficult stage: in March John decides to enter the Franciscans and was admitted, but then puts it on hold so he could discern things more clearly.

Despite all these things his life was calm, active and of service, as Joseph Blanchard and Clotilde Vergnano tells us. She was the daughter of the house's owner. Other than study and working at the cafe, his generosity meant he was ready to be useful to anyone: he would bring water from the well each day (now bricked over but still visible under the corridor that goes into the courtyard). He brought the water to elderly Fr Carlo Arnaud who lived on the upper floor; he also mixed with a group of six or seven boys who he would spend time with or help with their homework; they were boarding with veterinarian Torta in a nearby house (cf. BM I, 218-219).

The cafe, however, was not the best place to be benefiting from studies. Domenico Pogliano, the bell-ringer at the cathedral, and who admired John for his devotion and apostolate amongst his peers invited him to stay with him so he could study more. But he saw the need for different arrangements for the following year (cf. BM I, 220).

Recent developments

The Salesian Family eventually took over these rooms and now, as well as reminding us of some significant moments of John Bosco's life in Chieri, they have been placed at the service of Chieri's youth ministry.

Tommaso Cumino's house

(via Vittorio Emanuele, no. 24)

The next year (1834–1835) John was in Rhetoric. The decision to enter the Franciscans was on hold, with the help of the parish priest at Castelnuovo, Fr Cinzano, who had agreed to help out financially, and also because of Fr Cafasso's advice. Cafasso found him a place at tailor Tommaso Cumino's home, near where he himself was staying; Fr Cinzano for his part paid the board, 8 lire a month (cf. BM I, 248).

John spent some months in an underground section that had earlier been used as a stable. He could get there through an entrance off the courtyard at Cumino's place; this has been completely rebuilt today.

With Fr Cafasso's help, he was later offered a room on the first floor.

During Rhetoric year his teach was the young Fr Giovanni Francesco Bosco, a good friend, and it was here that he met Louis Comollo from Cinzano for the first time. Comollo was in the year below (Humanities), but in the same classroom. In fact the two classes were together at Chieri, under the one teacher.

Cumino the tailor (who died in 1840 at 74 years of age) was a cheerful person, loved a joke, but a bit naive and John used enjoy playing his magic tricks on him. "Good Tommaso never knew what to say," Don Bosco tells us. "Men," he would say to himself, "can't possibly do these kinds of things; God would not waste time on silly things like this so it has to be the devil who is doing it." So feeling scrupulous he raised the matter with Fr Bertinetti, and he took it to the archpriest Canon

Burzio, Prefect of the schools. This latter questioned John who gave him an example of his skills. “The good canon had a hearty laugh. He asked me to give him a demonstration of sleight of hand, and how to make things appear and disappear. He enjoyed it all and gave me a little gift. Finally he told me, ‘go and tell all your friends that wonder is the result of ignorance.’” (MO Ch. 13).

Baker Michele Cavallo's stable

(vicolo B. Valimberti)

Coming out of the courtyard of Cumino's place, back towards *piazza Cavour*, on the right we find *vicolo B. Valimberti* and, after a shop (household products), towards the end of the building is an old brick wall around a tiny courtyard. This gave entrance to Michele Cavallo's stable. John lived there for several years before going to Cafe Pianta (autumn 1833). He paid in kind by looking after the vineyard and the horses.

A farrier is currently working at this location.

DUOMO, COLLEGIATE CHURCH

From *via Palazzo di Città*, turn left at the first road into *via Cottolengo*, and there is the house where Saint Joseph Benedict Cottolengo died (30 April 1842), where his brother Luigi, Canon at the Chieri collegiate church, lived. Continuing we reach the *piazza* where the collegiate church is, the principal church in Chieri. It is one of the best-known examples of Gothic architecture in Piedmont. It is dedicated to *Santa Maria della Scala*.

It was built between 1405 and 1436, taking the place of an 11th century church built over Roman ruins. The bell tower is on the right (built between 1329 and 1492) and the baptistery, renovated in the

15th century but built over an early Christian baptistery. Inside we find splendid artwork from many centuries. Here we just mention – because it concerns Don Bosco – the fourth chapel on the left dedicated to *Our Lady of Graces*.

The chapel was built because of a vow made by the City Council on 2 August 1630 during a terrible plague. It is by Bernardo Antonio Vittone (1757–1759), embellished in 1780 for the 150th celebrations of the vow. The wooden statue (1642) is by Pietro Botto da Savigliano (1603–1662); the four panels, with scenes from the plague, are by Giuseppe Sariga from Ticino (+ 1782). Each year at the time of the vow the municipal authorities pay homage to the Virgin on her feast day by singing the *Salve Regina*.

John Bosco, a student at the public school, came here morning and evenings to pray before this statue, mindful of what his mother had told him: “be devoted to the Madonna!” (BM I, 201). He prayed here along with Comollo asking for enlightenment about his vocation. He tells us:

Since the obstacles were many and difficult, I decided to reveal it all to my friend Comollo. He advised me to make a novena. Meanwhile he would write to his uncle the provost. On the last day of my novena I went to Confession and Communion with this incomparable friend. I attended one Mass and served another at the altar of Our Lady of Grace in the Cathedral. Then we went home and found a letter from Fr Comollo which went something like this: “Having given careful consideration to what you wrote me, I advise your friend not to enter a monastery at this time. Let him don the clerical habit. As he goes on with his studies he will better understand what God wants him to do. He must not fear to lose his vocation because aloofness from the world and earnest piety will help him overcome every obstacle (MO Ch. 16).

In the area near the sacristy John helped the sacristan Carlo Palazzolo with his exams for Rhetoric. He also got to know the bell-ringer, Domenico Pogliano, who invited him to come to his house and study.

As a seminarian, every Sunday he would come to this church for the main Mass with the others and in his final year of theology (1840–1841), helped out with teaching catechism there.

On 9 June 1841, at the altar of Our Lady of Grace, he celebrated his fourth Mass as a new priest. We can also recall that in this church on 18 September 1735, Filippo Antonio Bosco was baptised, John's paternal grandfather.

Recent developments

On the left wall of the last chapel on the Gospel side, there is a modern triptych measuring 3.50 x 5.50 metre, which commemorates the visit of Pope St John Paul II to Chieri on September 3, 1988, on the occasion of the centenary of the death of St John Bosco. It is a painting with acrylic colours on metal support, painted by Luigi Benedicenti in 1989.

In the background we see the *Duomo*, with its facade, baptistery and bell tower; in the foreground (with a bold but significant approach, and in a dynamic attitude that recalls the attitude of the Piedmontese saints in the painting by Mario Càffaro-Rore, visible three chapels further on), Pope St John Paul II and St John Bosco, with the Archbishop of Turin, Cardinal Anastasio Ballestrero, and the then parish priest of the *Duomo*, Gianni Carrù, behind them. On the sides, boys and girls are crowded together bringing gifts.

On the right side, in the background, the artist can be recognised in the act of observing the scene before reproducing it on the table in his hands. This is not the only autobiographical element: in the characters surrounding the Pope, he wanted to portray his daughter and his many grandchildren. Luigi Benedicenti, born in Chieri on April 2, 1948, was first a student of Mario Càffaro Rore. Starting from the realism of his master, he gradually arrived at Hyperrealism (or Photorealism), as we can see in this work. He passed away on 4 March 2015.

CASA BERTINETTI AND SANTA TERESA INSTITUTE

(via Palazzo di Città, no. 5)

The Salesian Sisters work in this building, where they have had an oratory and school for girls since 1878, sent there by Don Bosco and Saint Mary Domenica Mazzarello. Carlo and Ottavia Bertinetti, this latter who was Jonah's godmother, in 1868 had left the building to Don Bosco along with the land around it, to open a work for youngsters in Chieri. But a number of problems, particularly opposition from Fr Andrea Oddenino, the parish priest at the cathedral, held this foundation up for a while.

The boys' oratory was set up in the San Giorgio parish, under the direction of Frs Matteo Sona and Domenico Cumino, both priests from Chieri. Later, Carlotta Braja, sister of his old friend Paolo Braja (who died on 10 July 1832), with the help of her friends Rosa Ciceri, Maddalena Avataneo, set up a small girls' oratory on the last Sunday in October 1876 in *casa Bertinetti*. Don Bosco sent a Salesian to open the place on the 8th December that year, and he blessed a statue of Mary Help of Christians still kept at Santa Teresa's. The statue was Don Bosco's gift and when he offered it he said: "For now I'm sending the Mother; later I will send the Daughters." It was two years later when the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians took possession of the house, where they included the oratory then later opened a boarding school. Over the years it became a house of formation and at various times has been an FMA aspiranate, postulancy, novitiate and juniorate. Many of the early Sisters were formed here, and then went out to spread Salesian work throughout the world.

Don Bosco often came here: a desk and chair he used have been preserved.

But even while he was younger 1835, John had entered this house at least twice. Once was when he was called by Canon Massimo Burzio (who lived in the house next door, bought by Carlo Bertinetti in 1848)

to explain the “secrets” of his magic tricks. Then when he had completed his Rhetoric Year, this was where he sat the exam to be admitted to his clerical clothing. This was usually done in Turin at the Archbishop’s palace. But that year because of cholera they had advised young men not to come to the city from around the archdiocese and Canon Burzio was given the task of examining candidates from Chieri, amongst whom John.

Today, only some parts of *casa Bertinetti* remain – the rest has been incorporated into newer constructions. The only part left is a large hall from the 15th century with panelled ceiling decorated with the coats of arms (maybe) of Piedmontese crusaders.

It used to be connected to the former palazzo Tana, and St Aloysius Gonzaga’s mother came from this family. This noble Saint, according to one tradition, lived for a time in Chieri with his grandparents. The room where he slept at palazzo Tana has been preserved, and this is also where he would have scourged himself. St Aloysius has always been venerated in Chieri with special devotion: in Don Bosco’s time there he was presented as a model of Christian living and virtue for young people. The public schools had a novena of preparation for his feast day, with solemn functions and an academy of literature and music. Don Bosco kept this devotion going by fostering it amongst his boys.

Palazzo Tana, which belonged to Gustavo and Camillo Cavour at one stage, also became a boarding school for the public school and a student hostel, from 1839.

In very recent times, a careful restoration of the oldest part of the palazzo, especially its roofs, has been carried out.

FORMER VIALE PORTA TORINO

If we continue along *via Vittorio Emanuele* towards Turin, once we leave the old city we see a line of linden and plane trees: this is all that remains of the old *viale di Porta Torino*, which in Don Bosco’s time

would have been shaded by large elm trees. It was here, during the 1833–1834 school year, that the challenge to the performer took place when John was in his Humanities year (cf. MO Ch. 14).

A plaque at the beginning of the promenade recalls this event.

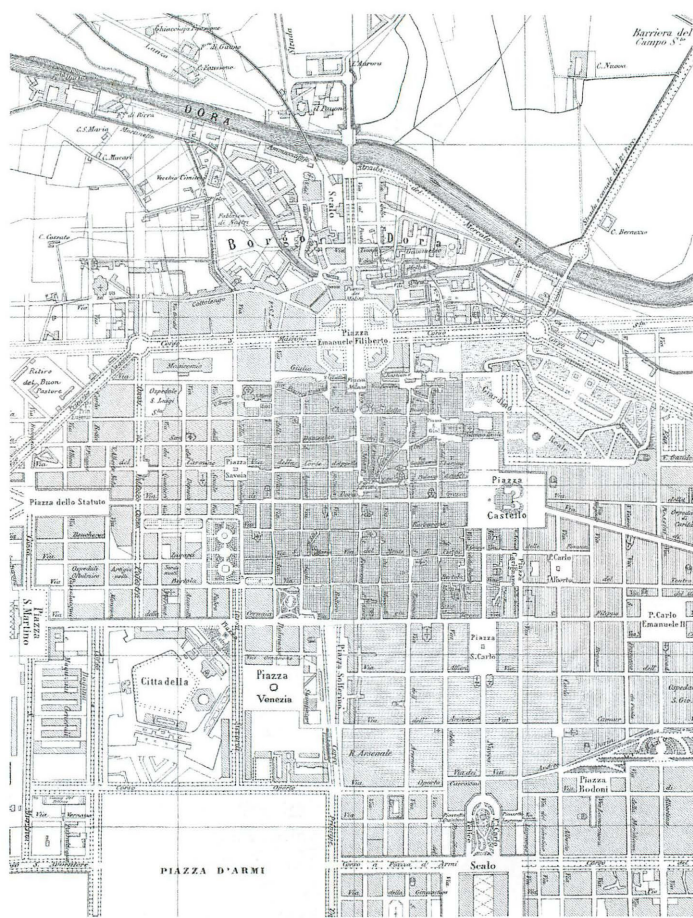
Part Three

THE BECCHI, CASTELNUOVO AND SURROUNDS

(1841–1849)

His early years of pastoral experience





P. BARICCO, *Torino descritta*, Torino, Tip. G.B. Paravia e Comp. 1869

Some details and their significance

FURTHER STUDIES AND PASTORAL CHOICE

After ordination and five months of pastoral experience at Castelnuovo, Fr John Bosco entered the St Francis of Assisi Pastoral Institute to round off his *studies of moral theology*, which he needed to do the Confessions exam.

Fr Luigi Guala (1775–1848) and Fr Giuseppe Cafasso had given the Institute a serious approach to study, discipline and the spiritual care of young priests, but one that was also open to a variety of pastoral options. The school followed St Alphonsus' line of thinking, other appropriate spiritual masters, and community and personal reading, spiritual direction and the daily rhythm were all aimed at producing a priest who was spiritually well-based, zealous and tireless for his apostolic work, and open to the religious and material needs of the people.

Instructions and meditations prepared by Cafasso for the clergy retreat throw considerable light on the ascetic and priestly model in place for priestly formation: the spiritual and pastoral aspect were so much part of this school that it would seem there was no other way for the priest to achieve holiness than an indefatigable concern for the souls entrusted to him, a concern inflamed with charity and affection.

In the three years he was at the Pastoral Institute, Don Bosco was shaped by this model which had at its core frequent Confession, the Eucharist, union with God, intense prayer spread throughout the day through simple devout practices (and also daily, weekly, monthly and annually), and also with a strong Marian emphasis.

From the early days he spent in the city, Don Bosco was able to see the complex *socio-religious situation in Turin*, very different from

the quiet, traditional setting he had been used to until then. The Institute helped him to interpret this situation. In fact it was an excellent *training ground for apostolic activities*, including the frontier type, and an observatory for pastoral issues, experiences and attempts at solutions around the city. Traditional priestly roles such as confessions, catechism and preaching now took on new approaches in an ecclesial setting that was different because of the new cultural atmosphere and emerging social classes within the Christian population.

Don Bosco was guided by Cafasso and Dr Borel, who also introduced him to the very lively world of “charity” in Turin.

There were many welfare and charitable initiatives – amongst which very new types such as those by Cottolengo and the Marchioness Barolo who were exploring a kind of “Christian charity” which had already begun the previous century, where religious welfare was built on an orderly social base. It was a question of providing immediate response to material and social needs in order to overcome casual responses and arrive at stable solutions. The aim then was to take the very poor, most needy and also the wayward away from the socio-religious fringes and help them to integrate themselves by enlightening them through values and goals (preventive education) and then giving them the tools which would enable them to achieve these.

“*Good Christians and upright, hard-working citizens*”, is the expression Don Bosco would use to sum up the purpose of his work. In the first nine years of pastoral work he was gradually clarifying this aim and the method that followed it. Faced with orphans who had been neglected, marginalised, and who had primary needs to satisfy as well as religious and moral gaps to be filled, he immediately offered responses that human sensitivity, his priestly role, his culture and the means he had available suggested and allowed him to employ. Then gradually, through imagination and good intuition, he articulated his activity, developed initiatives, invented and created.

But right from the outset in the sacristy at St Francis of Assisi's, he put his most characteristic approach into motion: heartfelt and demonstrated affection as a response to the thirst for love; the consideration he showed neglected young people immediately resulted in a positive response, the desire to start afresh, get involved and show responsibility.

It was a case not only of giving poor youth a means of survival but to encourage their energy and potential, make them independent and active players in their own right. This aim, Don Bosco had understood, could only be achieved by looking after the individual in all his dimensions: civil and professional, cultural and relational, moral and spiritual. So as well as Confession, catechetics, religious instruction and prayer he included early literacy, work preparation, singing, music and festivity; and this is why he built up a lively community of young people where everyone was involved and helping to run it.

His *preferred choice of marginalised young people at risk* was something all priests who ran oratories shared (Fr Cocchi, Fr Borel, Don Bosco, Fr Cârpano, Fr Trivero, Fr Vola, Fr Ponte, the Murialdo cousins and so many others) though they did not always agree on the methods. Don Bosco, who in these early years of his ministry was still shaping clear ideas, soon became aware of this and immediately focused on form collaborators who were imbued with his spirit, and on administrative and organisational independence for his three oratories: St Francis de Sales at Valdocco (1846), St Aloysius at Porta Nuova (1847) and the Guardian Angel at Vanchiglia, which he took over from Fr Cocchi in 1849.

Archbishop Luigi Fransoni understood him and supported him. The 1848–1849 crisis contributed decisively to clarifying the various positions. Don Bosco – and others with him – made an exclusive choice for education and ministry and withdrew his work from the vagaries of political interests and enthusiasm; he set about defining his objectives, content, and to developing an approach that would give his oratory both stability and flexibility. This gave it life, an ability to adapt and made it

effective in tackling the problems of youth then, and that subsequently became a feature of all Salesian work.

EMERGING PEDAGOGICAL AND SPIRITUAL VALUES

These early years of Don Bosco's pastoral activity are characteristic ones because they show us the young priest refining his formation along with the pastor and educator already benefiting from the insight, pedagogical and spiritual experiences he had had.

The values that emerged from how he understood this period encouraged people who were focused on their growth as human beings and Christians and those ready to dedicate themselves to a mission of ministry and education.

The list below is just an example of the fruitful suggestions and teachings we can pick out by comparing Don Bosco's historical experience with today's variegated life contexts.

- Constantly seeking and discerning God's will in our life and in the mission he entrusts us with.
- Unflagging concern for personal growth as relational, cultural, spiritual, professional human beings.
- Frequent confession and spiritual direction as opportunities for advice, reviewing our life, discernment and restoring spiritual energies.
- Awareness of the radical nature of the choice we have made and the unconditional dedication that follows from this.
- Being anchored in history and faithful to our time; able to read the "signs of the times" and focus on the appeals that come from events and people.
- Giving timely, practical responses to the needs of the moment along with intelligently seeking aims and long-term strategies.
- The central place of the youngster taken as a whole and the focus on the individual in formation.

- Taking a preventive approach to the world of young people.
- “Loving-kindness”: willingness to develop friendship, familiarity and sympathetic understanding between the educator and those being educated.
- The important role of religion in forming personality: a simple, rationally motivated, freely accepted and gradually internalised kind of religion.
- Ability to involve young people and adults in educational and pastoral activity, in the belief that education and formation are the work of a community.
- Belief in the decisive role of cultural formation and ideas for personal growth to maturity with a view to seeing the individual engaged in both society and Church.
- Cheerfulness, play, festivity as essential elements for building a personality and in an educational and formation setting.

Historical, geographical and biographical notes

SOCIAL AND PASTORAL PROBLEMS IN TURIN IN THE 1840S

The decade from 1840–1850 was marked by two sets of problems in Turin: one was of a political nature, the other socio-economic, but both had important pastoral implications.

Liberal moves towards a new notion of the State and a yearning for national unity developed a situation that saw the various parties taking clear sides. Supporters of new political approaches opposed the conservatives and reactionaries tied up with the *ancien régime*.

After the 1848 incidents the neo-Guelphian myth collapsed and with it the hopes of those who longed for a confederal, statutory solution to the Italian problem which would harmonise patriotic yearnings and hoped for political and social reform with ideal Christian values. Turin's clergy were also in disagreement over ideas and choices.

Because of the different idea of the State and society being propagated by the emerging political class, with its liberal inspiration, there was an increasing gap between opposing sides (the liberal and the Catholic, and each of these had a range a views within them) and all was in readiness for a face-off between Church and State. This clash – initially showing up in some opposition from laity and certain clergy for example to Archbishop Luigi Fransoni, regarding issues that touched on were really to do with the freedom allowed by Charles Albert's Statute – would soon harden irreversibly through laws affecting the Church (1850 and 1855).

The huge economic crisis affecting all of Europe since 1815 was gradually being overcome towards the end of the 1830s and by 1840

there were signs of a recovery. In Turin the middle and more open aristocratic classes were engaging in *entrepreneurial, commercial and financial activities* set up on new foundations from which emerged the future industrial development of the city.

Consequently, urban society was changing in economic terms also. There was a *growing urbanisation* of the rural masses, something that had begun with the crisis in agriculture, and this was becoming more pronounced. At first it was a mainly *seasonal phenomenon*, then, towards the end of the decade, it became a *decisive migration* leading to rapid *demographic development*. The traditional civil and parochial structures were unprepared for this and were not able to successfully integrate the first waves of migration. There was concern about the falling numbers of those attending Sunday Mass or fulfilling their Easter duty, people abandoning parish catechism, the increase in blasphemy, spread of alcoholism, and increased number of illegitimate children.

Over these years the city saw the *growth of outer suburbs*, the setting up of small industries and the *first industrial factories*, the development of commercial enterprises of various kinds.

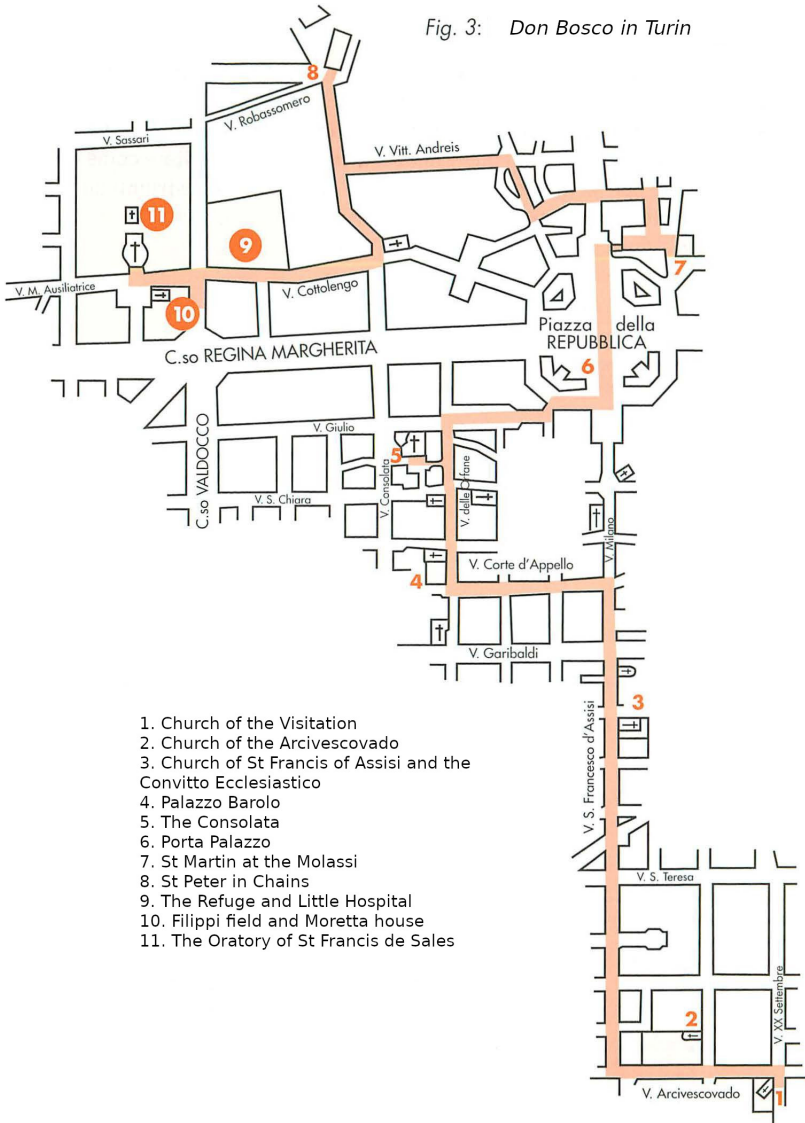
There was a growth in the number *below the poverty line* and in the population of unskilled workers, most of them seeking work on a daily basis, to be found in the poorer areas of Borgo Vanchiglia and Borgo Dora, in *very poor housing*. These people were living *a life of real poverty*.

Working hours, according to the season and the kind of manufacturing activity, went from 11 to 14 hours a day and even more at certain moments; pay was miserable and meant that children were often pressed into work prematurely that was often brutal work and consequently physically and morally damaging.

Nutrition was poor and inadequate; hygiene was non-existent, with sad consequences: there were many epidemics and a high infant mortality rate. The only relief was to be found in pubs and low dives, wine, betting, and sexual licence.

Historical, geographical and biographical notes

Fig. 3: Don Bosco in Turin



Youth gangs, manual labourers or apprentices, flooded the squares and streets at weekends, or gathered in the fields out in the suburbs. They were filthy, completely neglected, illiterate, given to alcohol, theft and immoral behaviour, and heading for a sad future.

People in government, the clergy, and the middle and upper classes more attentive to the social problem watched this with alarm. Some were concerned by the social consequences, others the political ones, and others still the religious and moral ones. They reflected, put up proposals and sought both *immediate and long-term solutions*. Private and public charities, literacy, instruction of the masses, professional qualification, religious attention, social initiatives and the first cooperatives marked the interventions by many, prevalently but not only in the Catholic arena, who tried concrete responses, though nothing was yet moving at a legislative level.

In this context, the problem of *instruction of the masses* took on special importance. Two things converged: on the one hand the belief of many that schooling was the most effective remedy for the social ills listed earlier, on the other hand there was a popular yearning for social improvement through education. From here on initiatives intensified, both private and public, with roots in the Enlightenment and revolutionary period and that had already shown some results in earlier decades. From 1835 to 1847 for example there was a considerable increase in advertising for public education; there were associations spreading the idea of kindergartens and literacy for the rural classes; in 1844 Fr Aporti gave his famous lessons on *Teaching Method* at the University; in 1845 the *l'Educatore primario*, was first published, run by a lively group of Turin's pedagogues; at the same time we saw the beginning of Sunday and evening classes for workers.

Faced with this ferment, State authorities began to take more direct interest in the problem. The various presidents of the *Magistrato della Riforma* (the body in charge of public education), ordered a series of surveys and censuses so they could get an accurate picture of the school situation. There were various decrees resulting and *Instructions*

for teachers, especially primary teachers. Finally, on 30 November 1847 a *Secretariat of State for Public Education* was put in place, and the Minister in charge, Carlo Boncompagni, gained approval for an important reform of state schools (4 October 1848).

Don Bosco came to Turin in 1841, just as the political, social and religious problems indicated above were emerging. He interpreted them through his practical mindset, and his innate sensitivity as an educator, pastoral concern and the huge affection that marked him out. He felt he needed to act immediately, provide real responses and invent ways to redeem and prevent; and this offered youngsters the chance – as was the case with him as a teenager – to emerge, build a worthy future and one which was in line with their own aspirations.

TIMELINE

Dates	Places	People and events
26.05.1841	Church of the Visitation	Don Bosco begins ordination retreat
05.06.1841	Archbishop's church	Arch. Fransoni ordains Don Bosco priest
06.06.1841	Church of St Francis of Assisi	Don Bosco's first Mass
07.06.1841	The Consolata	Don Bosco's second Mass
03.11.1841	St Francis of Assisi	Fr Guala and Fr Cafasso accept Don Bosco for Moral Theology (1841-1844)
08.12.1841	Sacristy at St Francis of Assisi	Don Bosco meets Bartholomew Garelli
Dec. 1841–Oct. 1844	St Francis of Assisi	Don Bosco gathers youngsters

Don Bosco Lived Here

Dates	Places	People and events
20.10.1844	Barolo Refuge	Don Bosco lives there and brings the oratory
08.12.1844	<i>Ospedaletto</i> Little hospital of St Philomena	Borel and Don Bosco bless the chapel of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales
Dec. 1844–May 1845	Little hospital of St Philomena	Festive oratory
25.05.1845	St Peter in Chains	Don Bosco, the Oratory boys and Fr Tesio's housekeeper
June-early July 1845	<i>Ospedaletto</i> and other churches	Wandering Oratory
13.07.–Dec. 1845	St Martins at the Molassi (Mills)	Don Bosco and Borel gather the boys in the afternoon
	Churches around city and beyond	Mass and Confession in mornings
Nov. 1845–Feb. 1846	<i>Casa Moretta</i>	Don Bosco offers weekend and evening school and catechism
	Churches around city and beyond	Mass and Confession in mornings
Feb. 5.04.1846	<i>Prato Filippi</i> Filippi field	Don Bosco and Borel gather the boys in the afternoons
	Churches around city and beyond	Mass and Confession in the mornings
08.03.1846	<i>Prato Filippi</i> Filippi field	Don Bosco meets Pancrazio Soave

Dates	Places	People and events
Between 4 and 13.03.1846	Pinardi shed	Borel and Don Bosco rent the shed at <i>casa Pinardi</i> (contract postdated on 1st Apr.)
Mar.-Apr. 1846	Pinardi shed	Adjustments made
12.04.1846	Pinardi chapel and land	Oratory begins at <i>casa Pinardi</i>
05.06.1846	<i>casa Pinardi</i>	Borel and Don Bosco rent 3 rooms
End May 1846	<i>Palazzo Barolo</i>	Barolo “sacks” Don Bosco at end of August
July 1846	<i>Ospedaletto</i>	Don Bosco seriously ill
Begin. August 1846	<i>casa Pinardi</i>	Rents one more room
Aug.–Oct. 1846	the Becchi	Don Bosco convalesces
03.11.1846	<i>casa Pinardi</i>	Don Bosco and Mamma Margaret move in
01.12.1846	<i>casa Pinardi</i>	Whole house rented
May 1847	<i>casa Pinardi</i>	Orphan from Valsesia taken in by Don Bosco
20.06.1847	Pinardi chapel	Arch. Fransonì administers Confirmation
08.12.1847	St Aloysius Oratory	Opened at Porta Nuova
19.02.1851	<i>casa Pinardi</i>	Don Bosco buys house and land

SUGGESTIONS FOR VISITS AND TOURS

Other than the rebuilt Pinardi chapel, the most meaningful place of all those offered in this third part is, of course, the church of St Francis of Assisi. It is worth spending time and detail on this. The three suggested routes (the first beginning from the church of the Visitation) are especially good if done on foot.

LONGEST ROUTE (*from 3 to 4 hours*)

Small well-prepared adult or youth groups.

Church of the Visitation (**page 171**) → *via Arcivescovado* - right to *via Arsenale* → Church of the Arcivescovado (**page 172**) → *via Arsenale* - left to *via santa Teresa* - right to *via san Francesco* → Church of St Francis of Assisi and *Convitto Ecclesiastico* (**page 176**) → right to *via san Francesco* - *via Milano* - left to *via Corte d'Appello* - right to *via delle Orfane* → Palazzo Barolo (**page 188**) → *via delle Orfane* - left to *vicolo della Consolata* → Consolata (**page 240**) → *via delle Orfane* - right to *via Giulio* → *piazza della Repubblica* (Porta Palazzo) → cross heading north-east → *piazza Albera* (where Dora Mills were and St Martins: **page 199**) → left *via Noè* - *via Borgo Dora* - left *via Andreis* - right *via san Pietro in Vincoli* → cemetery of St Peter in Chains (**page 197**) → left *via Robassomero* - left *via Cigna* - left *via Cottolengo* → Rifugio (**page 191**) and Ospedaletto (**page 193**) → right *via Cottolengo* - *via Maria Ausiliatrice* → where the Filippi field was (**page 204**) and casa Moretta (**page 201**) → *via Maria Ausiliatrice* - *piazza Maria Ausiliatrice* → Pinardi chapel (**page 208**).

Good places for reflection, prayer, Mass: Church of the Visitation - St Francis of Assisi - Consolata - Pinardi chapel.

AVERAGE ROUTE (2 to 3 hours)

For a slightly larger group of adults, youth.

Pinardi chapel (**page 208**) → left *via Maria Ausiliatrice* → casa Moretta (**page 201**) and Filippi field (**page 204**) → *via Cottolengo* → Barolo work (outside: **page 191**) → right *via Ariosto* - cross *corso Regina - via della Consolata* → The Consolata (**page 240**) → left then right *via delle Orfane* → Palazzo Barolo (outside: **page 188**) → left *via Corte d'Appello* - right *via Milano - via san Francesco* → Church of St Francis of Assisi (francis).

Best places for reflection, prayer or Mass: Pinardi chapel - Consolata - St Francis of Assisi.

SHORT ROUTE (1 to 1½ hours)

Large or smaller group.

Pinardi chapel (**page 208**) → *corso Regina* - right *via della Consolata* → The Consolata (**page 240**) → *via della Consolata - piazza Savoia* - left *via Corte d'Appello* - right *via Milano - via san Francesco* → Church of St Francis of Assisi (**page 175**).

Best places for reflection, prayer or Mass: Pinardi chapel - Consolata - St Francis of Assisi.

Tours to the various places

CHURCH OF THE VISITATION

(corner via XX Settembre – via Arcivescovado)

As a cleric John Bosco made his ordination retreat in Turin. The task of preparing clerics for orders through a retreat was entrusted to the Vincentians in Turin, founded by St Vincent de Paul. Also known as the Priests of the Mission.

Priests of the Mission house

(via XX Settembre, no. 23)

The house we see today was rebuilt after the War on the ruins of the former Visitation monastery (St Francis de Sales), founded in 1638 by St Jane Frances Chantal who spent seven months in Turin for the occasion.

The Visitandines lived here until religious orders were suppressed by the French Government in 1802. Their being in Turin contributed to the spread of devotion to and the spirituality of St Francis de Sales, one of the most loved saints in the State of Savoy. During the Restoration the Sisters moved to the Santa Chiara (St Clare) monastery and this building was then given to the Vincentians (1830).

Under the leadership of Fr Marcantonio Durando, the Vincentians built a new wing (on *via XX Settembre*) to host clergy and laity for retreats. Works finished in 1832. Archbishop Colombano Chiaveroti, Archbishop of Turin (1818–1831), had in fact already asked the Vincentians some years earlier to look after formation of clerics in the city who did not live in the seminary and to preach retreats to anyone preparing for orders. It was a good choice since the Vincentians

had considerable positive influence on the clergy in Turin, and were a channel for some of the more vital elements of Italian and French priestly spirituality (especially that coming out of the French Bèrulle Oratory and from St Francis de Sales) and they promoted a model of priestly zeal in ministry and a holy personal life.

St John Bosco made a retreat here on 3 occasions: preparing for his subdiaconate (September 1840), diaconate (March 1841) and priesthood (from 26 May to 5 June 1841).

He wrote about the subdiaconate retreat:

For the autumn ordinations [*note*: 19 September 1840] I was admitted to the subdiaconate. When I think now of the virtues required for that most important step, I am convinced that I was not sufficiently prepared for it. But since I had no one to care directly for my vocation, I turned to Fr Caffasso. He advised me to go forward and trust in his advice. I made a ten-day retreat at the House of the Mission in Turin. During it I made a general confession so that my confessor would have a clear picture of my conscience and would be able to give me suitable advice (MO Ch 25)

The resolutions he made during his retreat for priesthood reflect the spiritual and priestly model offered by the Vincentians and also by Fr Cafasso, and they also reflect the pastoral approach of St Francis de Sales:

I began the retreat at the House of the Mission on 26 May, the Feast of St Philip Neri 1841 Conclusion I drew at the end of the retreat in preparation for my first Mass was: The priest does not go either to heaven or hell alone. If he does well he goes to heaven with the souls he has saved through his good example; if he does badly, gives scandal he goes to perdition with the souls damned through his scandal.

Resolutions:

1. Never go for walks unless seriously necessary: visit the sick etc.
2. Use time well.
3. Suffer, act and accept humiliations in everything and always if it is a case of saving souls.
4. The charity and kindness of St Francis de Sales will guide me in everything.

5. I will always be happy with the food that is put in front of me unless it is harmful to my health.
6. I will water down my wine and drink it only as a remedy: meaning only when and as much as is needed for my health.
7. Work is a powerful weapon against the soul's enemies, therefore I will not give my body more than five hours of sleep every night. During the day, especially after lunch, I will not take a rest. I will make some exception if ill.
8. Every day I will give some time to meditation and spiritual reading. During the day I will make a brief visit or at least a prayer to the Blessed Sacrament. I will give at least a quarter of an hour to preparation and another quarter of an hour of thanksgiving to Holy Mass.
9. I will not engage in conversations with women outside of confession or some other spiritual need.

(F. Motto [Ed.], *Memorie dal 1841 al 1884-5-6 pel Sac. Gio. Bosco a' suoi figliuoli Salesiani*, in RSS 4 [1985] 88-90).

In today's House of the Mission, on the ground floor there is a room with a number of reminders of St Vincent de Paul: relics, writings, clothing and other personal items. Of particular importance are some letters he sent to missionaries sent to Turin in 1655, and kept in the house archives.

Vincentian priest Blessed Marcantonio Durando (1801–1880) superior of the house until 1831 and Visitor of the Vincentian Province of Upper Italy from 1837, was one of the most significant and influential characters in the Church in Turin in the 19th century. He belonged to a middle class Piedmontese family. His two brothers were well-known liberals and played an active part in Italian unification: Giovanni (1804–1869) was the first General in the Papal Army (1847–1848), then the Piedmontese Army, then became a Senator in the new Kingdom of Italy (1860); Giacomo (1807–1894) was a general, parliamentarian, Minister for War and Foreign Minister (1862), and finally President of the Senate (1884).

Father Durando was actively engaged on many fronts: formation of young clergy; preaching retreats and missions to the people; direction

and organisation of the Daughters of Charity (under his guidance they increased from two to forty between 1831 and 1848); founding the Dames of Charity (1836); He gave great impulse to the Foreign Missions in North America, Ethiopia, Middle East and China; he spread the work of *Propaganda Fide* in Piedmont and Italy; he collaborated with Marchioness Barolo in founding the Maddalene (1839); he supported the founding of the Poor Clare-Cappuccine Sisters (1856); he founded the Nazarene Sisters with the help of Sister Luisa Borgiotti (1865); he encouraged and collaborated in many charitable works, amongst which the *Misericordie* and the Conferences of St Vincent de Paul. He was also adviser to Archbishop Frasoni, intervening actively, but in a balanced and prudent way, in defence of the Archbishop and the Church's rights at moments of tension with the civil authorities; also when the laws of suppression were passed (1855 and 1866), he helped reopen dialogue between the bishops and the liberal government.

Father Durando had warm relationships with Don Bosco and in 1864, asked by the diocesan authority, he examined the early drafts of the *Constitutions of the Salesian Society*, giving important support by clarifying problems of a legal nature and how religious life was set up (cf. BM VI, 421-422). He then also examined the *Constitutions of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*.

He was beatified by John Paul II on 20 October 2002.

Church of the Visitation

A small but attractive Baroque building in the shape of a Greek cross, on the corner of *via XX Settembre* and *via Arcivescovado*. According to Cibrario, it would have been built in 1661 following the design by Francesco Lanfranchi; others date it to 1667 and say the architect was Count Amedeo di Castellamonte. Originally the cupola had frescoes by Luigi Vannier, from Chambéry. The beautiful pulpit is by sculptor Giovanni Valle (1688). The central icon of Mary's Visitation to St Elizabeth is by Ignazio Nepote; The painting on the altar at left, of St

Francis de Sales offering the Constitutions to Chantal, is the work of Alessandro Trono; the one on the altar on the right, of St Vincent de Paul, is by Andrea Miglio from Novara. The smaller decorations on the columns are scenes from the life of St Francis de Sales.

Between 1860 and 1861 Father Durando had the church restored. The paintings on the cupola were redone by Morgari; the former Visitandine choir was turned into a chapel to the Lord's passion, decorated by Morgari (1866); even before that the choir had been a chapel for those making retreats.

This was the setting where Don Bosco spent hours in prayer and adoration during the days immediately preceding his priestly ordination.

CHURCH AT THE VESCOVADO ARCHBISHOP'S PALACE

(via Arsenale, no. 16; Palazzo: via Arcivescovado, no. 12)

It was in this Church of the Immaculate Conception that John Bosco received the tonsure and minor orders (29 March 1840), his subdiaconate (19 September 1840), diaconate (29 March 1841) and priesthood (5 June 1841) from Luigi Fransoni, Archbishop of Turin. His priestly ordination was the end of the first long and difficult stage on the journey Don Bosco followed while seeking God's will and in preparing for the mission entrusted to him.

The church, attached to the archbishop's palace, was built by the Vincentians who had been sent to Turin by St Vincent de Paul on 10 November 1655. The house was built between 1663 and 1667; the church, begun in 1675, was designed by Guarino Guarini, and completed in 1697. The facade was finished in 1730, the year Vincent de Paul was beatified.

The main altar, made of marble from Lugano, was completed in 1709, and has a beautiful oval icon of the Immaculate with Child.

There are some precious paintings in this building. On the right: on the first altar, St Peter freed from prison, in the Caravaggio school of painting; on the second altar, death of St Joseph, by Alessandro Mari (1650–1707). On the left: on the first altar, St Vincent de Paul preaching, by Alessandro Trono (1738) and on the ceiling, frescoes by Venetian Giovanni Battista Crosato (1685–1758); on the second altar, Ananias and St Paul, by Sebastiano Taricco (1641–1710).

The Vincentians were invited to leave this first residence of theirs in 1776, to take the place of the Jesuits, suppressed by Pope Clement XIV, in the nearby church of the Holy Martyrs in what is now *via Garibaldi*. The house, now empty, was then given to the Archbishop of Turin (1777) who had not had a stable residence for two hundred years.

Don Bosco and his archbishops

Archbishop Luigi Fransoni (1789–1862) lived in the palace from 1832 to 1850, the year he was forced into exile (he would die in Lyons). Don Bosco held him in esteem, and always sought his advice and approval from his most important decisions.

While still a cleric in the summer of 1840, John went to see the archbishop, “to ask permission to study the fourth-year texts during the holidays. In the following school year (1840–1) I would complete the quinquennium.” The welcome he received would remain indelibly impressed on his mind: “That holy bishop made me very welcome, and after verifying the results of the exams I had taken till then in the seminary, granted the favour I was asking...” (MO Ch. 25).

In the years to come he would often go to the archbishop’s palace, either for advice or to present his plans to Archbishop Fransoni for the Oratory, or to console him when he was being persecuted. Even during the time he was an exile in Lyons he kept in touch by letter. From the outset the archbishop encouraged Don Bosco’s work, knowing that he was a balanced and zealous priest, including some of the most

difficult times when he was being criticised by others, blocked by the authorities and abandoned by those working with him. In the *Memoirs of the Oratory* he notes a number of favourable interventions of the archbishop, some of which determined the future of the Oratory. His support was especially important when Marquis Michele Cavour (Camillo's father), the *City Vicar*, who was also a friend of Fr Borel's and Don Bosco's, had decided to shut down the Oratory. They were difficult times, with lots of popular uprisings and he looked askance at the noisy public Sunday gatherings of so many poor kids. Don Bosco tells us of one discussion that took place in the archbishop's palace:

Knowing that I had always proceeded with the consent of the archbishop, he [*note*: Marquis Cavour] called a city council meeting at the archbishop's residence because that prelate was rather ill just then...

When I saw all those dignitaries assembled in that hall, I thought I was at the last judgement. There was much discussion for and against, but in the end they decided that these meetings absolutely should be blocked and dispersed because they threatened public order...

Count Cottolengo had listened in silence to the whole lively debate. When he observed that they were resolved on the banning order and final break-up, he got to his feet and requested the floor. He conveyed the sovereign's wishes and let them know that the king meant to protect this tiny work.

These words silenced the vicar and silenced the city council (MO Ch. 41).

During Franson's exile, his Vicar General, Canon Giuseppe Zappata, continued to be good to Don Bosco. Of course, Don Bosco was providing good service to the archdiocese because when the seminary was closed he took a number in at Valdocco and looked after their formation; but also because many vocations for the archdiocese came from there.

But relationships between Don Bosco and his archbishops non were not always so good. There were some especially sad tensions that arose when Lorenzo Gastaldi was archbishop (1873–1883). The two had

actually been good friends, but through a series of misunderstandings which were exaggerated by *others around them*, they both suffered. The situation was resolved thanks to the direct intervention of Leo XIII and Don Bosco's great humility.

In the final years of the saint's life, Cardinal Gaetano Alimonda (1883–1891) was archbishop of Turin and relationships were excellent. The Cardinal, who had great veneration for him, visited him often, especially during his final illness.

ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI

(via san Francesco d'Assisi, no. 11)

On 6 June 1841, Holy Trinity Sunday, Don Bosco celebrated his first Mass in this church as a new priest at the Guardian Angel altar. His spiritual director, St Joseph Cafasso was with him. He and Fr Luigi Guala were involved in the running of the Pastoral Institute in the nearby building. Don Bosco lived there from the following November until summer 1844.

Church and convent of St Francis

The original building goes back to the 13th century and it is said that it was founded by St Francis himself, when he visited France (1215), or at least by members of his first group. The Conventuals (Friars Minor) lived there and gained importance in the city to the point where in the 13th and 14th centuries this place was also used for the city archives and treasury. The City Council often met in the large refectory and it was also where the public law exams were held.

Over the centuries the church and convent have undergone various restorations and renovations. From 1602 to 1610 there was an overall reconstruction that meant the loss of the original Gothic style. There was another major restoration in 1761: the facade and cupola were built

at this time following a design by architect Bernardo Vittone. The most recent changes go back to 1863–1865.

Amongst the art works we can indicate: the marble altar from 1673, frescoes (17th century) retouched by Morgari, and the stained glass window of Francis receiving the stigmata, by Bertini di Milano brothers (19th century); in the first chapel on the right, two canvases (Annunciation and Visitation) by Giovanni Antonio Molineri (1577–1645); in the second chapel on the right, a beautiful crucifixion by Carlo Giuseppe Plura (1655–1737) from Lugano; in the last chapel on the left, the painting of the Guardian Angel by Pietro Ayres (1794–1878).

The first confessional in the nave on the left is where St Joseph Cafasso spent many hours a day. It was through the sacrament of Penance that he gave spiritual direction to so many priests, influential citizens, and many others. He had a special insight into consciences and converted many a hard heart. Desperate cases would come his way; he was entrusted with the care of those condemned to death, especially those who most resisted conversion.

The *Convitto ecclesiastico* or Pastoral Institute

The Franciscans were forced out of the convent next to the church during the French occupation and much of the place was sold to private owners. The part adjacent to the church was used as a military barracks and also the residence for the rector of the church.

Fr Guala and the beginnings of the Institute

In 1808 Fr Luigi Guala (1775–1848) was appointed to begin this work. He was a member of the *Amicizie Cattoliche*, an association founded by former Jesuit Nicolao de Diessbach (1732–1798) in the final decades of the 18th century and then reorganised by Fr Pio Brunone Lanteri (1759–1830 founder of the Oblates of the Blessed Virgin). One of its

aims was the formation of young clergy and spreading good books among the people.

Guala, seeing the lacuna in formation of newly-ordained priests, especially due to historical difficulties, began teaching moral theology there as soon as he was appointed rector. During the Restoration this initiative gained strength and he was given the use of the unsold parts of the former convent. At Lanteri's suggestion he opened a Pastoral Institute (1817) with a view to improving the cultural, pastoral and spiritual formation of men finishing their basic seminary studies.

How the institute was set up

Courses lasted for two years and included lessons in speculative and practical moral theology, tackling ethical issues and how to hear confessions and give spiritual direction to a wide range of people. There was also homiletics.

The *theological school* that Lanteri and Guala adopted was Ignatian and Alphonsian, a more positive and benign one compared with the traditional rigorist line taught at the faculty of Theology at the University and pursued by most of the clergy in Turin.

Students were also given *pastoral opportunities* through a range of experiences in city parishes. Their spiritual life and life of prayer were given special attention. In view of this they made their retreat each year at the sanctuary of St Ignatius at Lanzo, which Guala had had restored. he had also been rector there.

The student priests' day followed a timetable thus:

Morning: 5:30 rising, prayer and meditation in common; from 6:45 to 9:00 was for study, during which each priest celebrated Mass and said his office; at 9.00 everyone attended a common mass; from 9:30 to 11:00 there was study again, followed by some work with the Tutor; at 12:00,

after the Angelus and midday prayer, lunch with reading, followed by recreation.

Afternoon: 2:00 brief visit to the Blessed Sacrament and a walk; 2:45 a public conference, open to priests from the city on moral theology; 14:15 walk; 5:00 Rosary in common and study; 7:00 moral conference and confession practice; 8:00 community spiritual reading (ascetic texts); 8:30 supper and recreation; 9:45 silence, prayer in common, examen of conscience, bed.

Fr Cafasso at the Convitto

Fr Joseph Cafasso, who entered the *Convitto* as a student in 1834, remained there as Guala's collaborator, then succeeded him first as a Tutor (1836), then as the main professor (1843), and finally, when he died (1848), as rector of the church and director of the *Convitto*. Archbishop Fransoni had such faith in the two priests that he gave them the job of choosing the assistant parish priests.

Under Cafasso's leadership (1848–1860) the *Convitto* had its golden period. He was an extremely balanced and wise man, a much sought-out spiritual director, a teacher of spiritual life for the clergy and he contributed in a decisive way to the flourishing of priestly holiness characteristic of 19th century Turin.

Some highlights of later events

After Cafasso's death the *Convitto* continued along the direction the Saint had taken it. However, in 1877 Archbishop Gastaldi – who did not share the overly benign approach followed by the then director Fr Giovanni Battista Bertagna – intervened rather heavy-handedly, first by appointing another director, then, given the students' reactions, closing the *Convitto* (1878).

It was reopened in 1882, under the same archbishop, and led by Canon Blessed Joseph Allamano (a nephew of Cafasso's and Founder of the Consolata Missionaries), in a building adjacent to the Consolata.

Don Bosco as a student at the Convitto

On 3 November 1841 Don Bosco, followed Cafasso's advice: "You need to study moral theology and homiletics. For the present, forget all these offers and come to the Convitto" (MO Ch. 27) – so he moved to Turin.

Don Bosco has this simple summary description of the place:

The Convitto Ecclesiastico completed, you might say, the study of theology. In the seminary we studied only dogma, and that speculative; and in moral theology only controversial issues. Here one learned to be a priest. Meditation, spiritual reading, two conferences a day, lessons in preaching, a secluded life, every convenience for study, reading good authors – these were the areas of learning to which we had to apply ourselves (MO Ch. 27).

Fr Guala took him in free of charge; Don Bosco had a fine impression of him:

An unselfish man, rich in knowledge, prudent, and fearless, he was everyone's friend in the days of the regime of Napoleon I... Amongst other topics the most controversial was the question of Probabilism and Probabiliorism [*note*: two schools of moral interpretation, one less the other more rigorous]. ... Dr Guala took a strong stance between the two parties; starting from the principle that the charity of O.L.J.C. should be the inspiration of all systems, he was able to bring the two extremes together. Things came together so well that, thanks to Doctor Guala, St Alphonsus become our theological patron. This was a salutary step, long desired, and now we are reaping its benefit (MO Ch. 27).

Fr Cafasso as Don Bosco's spiritual director

Fr Cafasso though was the true spiritual director for the young priest who abandoned himself into his hands with complete trust.

With this formator as his teacher Don Bosco grew in both an ecclesiastical and pastoral culture; he was initiated into a robust priestly spirituality; he was gradually introduced to an understanding, and analysis leading to tackling pastoral issues in completely different ways from the provincial settings he had come out of.

Fr Cafasso taught him to unite personal holiness, apostolic zeal and pastoral skill. In particular he set him on the path to looking after those categories of people always found on the fringes of parish pastoral activity. Knowing his prevalent tendency to work amongst the young, he put him in contact with the poorest and most neglected categories of young people in the city. He involved him in teaching catechism to your bricklayers and chimney sweeps; he got him to offer spiritual help to some of the new charitable institutes that were springing up in the capital (Cottolengo, *Opera Pia Barolo*, the Royal schools and *Opera della MendicITÀ Istruita* or work for educating the poor run by the Brothers of the Christians Schools (De La Salle); he took him with him to the prisons; he introduced Fr Cocchi and other priests to him, who at the time were beginning the oratory idea. Don Bosco has this to say about him:

Fr Caffasso, who for six years had been my guide, was especially my spiritual director. If I have been able to do any good, I owe it to this worthy priest in whose hands I placed every decision I made, all my study, and every activity of my life (MO Ch. 27).

Thanks to Cafasso and the pastoral experiences he involved him in, Don Bosco already began to understand the importance of an educational and pastoral approach which was “preventive”, especially for certain categories of young people most at risk:

The first thing he did was to begin to take me to the prisons where I soon learned how great was the malice and misery of mankind. I saw large numbers of young lads aged from 12 to 18, fine healthy youngsters, alert of mind, but seeing them idle there, infested with lice, lacking food for body and soul, horrified me... . What shocked me most was to see that many of them were released full of good

resolutions to go straight, and yet in a short time they landed back in prison, within a few days of their release.

On such occasions I found out how quite a few were brought back to that place; it was because they were abandoned to their own resources. "Who knows?" I thought to myself, "if these youngsters had a friend outside who would take care of them, help them, teach them religion on feast days ... Who knows but they could be steered away from ruin, or at least the number of those who return to prison could be lessened?" I talked this idea over with Fr Caffasso. With his encouragement and inspiration I began to work out in my mind how to put the idea into practice, leaving to the Lord's grace what the outcome would be. Without God's grace, all human effort is vain (MO Ch. 27).

The oratory comes into being

The fascination the youngsters had for the young priest became obvious from the first days he was in Turin: he saw this as a sign from the Lord to do something concrete for them:

Hardly had I registered at the *Convitto* of St Francis, when I met at once a crowd of boys who followed me in the streets and the squares and even into the sacristy of the church attached to the institute. But I could not take direct care of them since I had no premises (MO Ch. 28).

But the opportunity to begin was offered by a providential encounter with Bartholomew Garelli in the sacristy at St Francis, just a few months after he came to the *Convitto*, on 8 December 1841, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception:

On the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of Mary (8 December 1841), I was vesting to celebrate holy Mass at the appointed time. Joseph Comotti, the sacristan, seeing a boy in a corner, asked him to come and serve my Mass. "I don't know how," he answered, completely embarrassed. "Come on," repeated the sacristan, "I want you to serve Mass."

"I don't know how," the boy repeated. "I've never served Mass."

“You big blockhead,” said the sacristan, quite furious, “if you don’t know how to serve Mass, what are you doing in the sacristy?”

With that he grabbed a feather duster and hit the poor boy about the head and shoulders. As the boy beat a hasty retreat, I cried loudly, “What are you doing? Why are you beating him like that? What’s he done?”

“Why is he hanging round the sacristy if he doesn’t know how to serve Mass?”

“But you’ve done wrong.”

“What does it matter to you?”

“It matters plenty. He’s a friend of mine. Call him back at once. I need to speak with him.”

“*Tuder, tuder,*” he began to shout, as he ran after him. Promising him better treatment, he brought the lad back to me.

He came over trembling and tearful because of the blows he had received. “Have you attended Mass yet?” I asked him with as much loving kindness as I could.

“No,” he answered.

“Well, come to Mass now. Afterwards I’d like to talk to you about something that will please you.” He promised to do as I said. I wanted to calm down the poor fellow’s spirit and not leave him with that sad impression towards the people in charge of that sacristy. Once I had celebrated my Mass and made due thanksgiving, I took my candidate into a side chapel. Trying to allay any fear he might have of another beating, I started questioning him cheerfully:

“My good friend, what’s your name?”

“My name’s Bartholomew Garelli.”

“Where are you from?”

“Asti.”

“Is your father alive?”

“No, my father’s dead.”

“And your mother?”

“My mother’s dead too.”

“How old are you?”

“I’m sixteen.”

“Can you read and write?”

“I don’t know anything.”

“Have you made your first communion?”

“Not yet.”

“Have you ever been to confession?”

“Yes, when I was small.”

“Are you going to catechism classes now?”

“I don’t dare.”

“Why?”

“Because the other boys are smaller than I am, and they know their catechism. As big as I am, I don’t know anything, so I’m ashamed to go.”

“If I were to teach you catechism on your own, would you come?”

“I’d come very willingly.”

“Would you come willingly to this little room?”

“I’d come willingly enough, provided they don’t beat me.”

“Relax. No one will harm you. On the contrary, you’ll be my friend and you’ll be dealing with me and no one else. When would you like us to begin our catechism?”

“Whenever you wish.”

“This evening?”

“Okay.”

“Are you willing right now?”

“Yes, right now, with great pleasure.”

I stood up and made the sign of the cross to begin; but my pupil made no response because he did not know how to do it. In that first catechism lesson I taught him to make the sign of the cross. I also taught him to know God the Creator and why he created us (MO Ch. 28).

One detail which Don Bosco doesn’t talk about here, he did much later in 1885 when speaking to the Salesians. After the sign of the

cross, together they said a *Hail Mary*: “All the blessings that had been showered upon them were thanks to Our Lady and were the outcome of that first *Ave Maria* that had been recited together with the young Bartholomew Garelli there in the church of St Francis of Assisi with true fervor and the right intention” (BM XVII, 471).

Following this first meeting, every Sunday a small group of boys would meet at the *Convitto*, and it kept growing: by the following February there were twenty of them; thirty by the end of March; almost a hundred by the Feast of St Anne (26 July), patron saint of bricklayers.

The boys who were turning up at the oratory in these early days were mostly workers, labourers who were only in Turin for some months of the year when they didn't have to work on the farms (from late autumn until end of June). They were “Boys from Savoy, Switzerland, the Val d'Aosta, Biella, Novara, Lombardy” (MO Ch. 35). “As a rule the Oratory boys included stonecutters, bricklayers, stuccoers, road pavers, plasterers, and others who came from distant villages. They were not church-goers, and had few friends; so they were exposed to the dangers of perversion, especially on feast days” (MO Ch. 29).

These kinds of boys, seasonal workers, would continue to be the majority on Don Bosco's oratory until halfway through the 1850s, when immigration into Turin settled down.

Don Bosco talks about these weekly meetings at the *Convitto*:

Our Oratory programme ran along these lines. On every feast day, the boys were given a chance to receive the holy sacraments of confession and communion. But one Saturday and Sunday each month was set aside for fulfilling this religious duty. We came together in the evening at a fixed time, sang a hymn, had a catechism lesson followed by a story, and then the distribution of something, sometimes to all, sometimes by lot...

Good Doctor Guala and Fr Caffasso enjoyed these assemblies of the children. They gladly supplied me with holy pictures, leaflets, pamphlets, medals, small crucifixes to give as gifts. At times they provided me with the means to clothe some of those in greater

need, and to feed others for weeks at a time until they were able to support themselves by their work. Moreover, as the boys' numbers grew they sometimes gave me permission to gather my little army in the adjoining courtyard for recreation. If space had allowed, we would have been a hundred; but we had to restrict ourselves to about eighty.

When the boys were preparing for the holy sacraments, Dr Guala and Fr Caffasso would always come along for a visit and tell some edifying story (MO Ch. 29).

During the week and while they were free, Don Bosco kept contact with the boys:

I went to visit them at work in their workshops, in the factories. Not only the youngsters were happy to see a friend taking care of them; their employers were pleased, gladly retaining youngsters who were helped during the week, and even more on feast days, when they are in greater danger.

On Saturdays, my pockets stuffed sometimes with tobacco, sometimes with fruit, sometimes with rolls, I used to go to the prisons. with the object always to give special attention to the youngsters who had the misfortune to find themselves behind bars, help them, make friends with them, and thus encourage them to come to the Oratory when they had the good fortune of leaving that place of punishment (MO Ch. 29).

Friendship, help and personal attention earned unexpected results even for some of the most difficult boys and this convinced Don Bosco of the importance of developing a preventive pedagogical and pastoral approach based on "loving kindness, religion and reason":

I was beginning to learn from experience that if young lads just released from their place of punishment could find someone to befriend them, to look after them, to assist them on feast days, to help them get work with good employers, to visit them occasionally during the week, these young men soon forgot the past and began to mend their ways. They became good Christians and honest citizens (MO Ch. 28).

At the end of his three years at the *Convitto*, Don Bosco, who felt the call to be a pastor for the young even more strongly now, was still uncertain of the real direction the Lord was calling him to:

One day Don Caffasso took me aside and said, “Now that you’ve finished your studies, you must get to work. These days the harvest is abundant enough. What is your particular bent?”

“Whatever you would like to point me towards.”

“There are three posts open: curate at Buttigliera d’Asti, tutor in moral theology here at the *Convitto*, and director at the little hospital beside the Refuge. Which would you choose?”

“Whatever you judge best.”

“Don’t you feel any preference for one thing rather than for another?”

“My inclination is to work for young people. So do with me whatever you want: I shall know the Lord’s will in whatever you advise.”

“At the moment what’s the wish nearest your heart? What’s on your mind?”

“At this moment I see myself in the midst of a multitude of boys appealing to me for help.”

“Then go away for a few weeks’ holiday. When you come back I’ll tell you your destination.”

I came back from the holiday, but for several weeks Fr never said a word. And I asked him nothing. One day he said to me,

“Why don’t you ask me about your destination?”

“Because I want to see the will of God in your choice, and I don’t want my desires in it at all.”

“Pack your bag and go with Dr Borrelli [*note*: Fr Borel]; You’ll be director at the Little Hospital of St Philomena; and you will also work at the Refuge. Meanwhile God will show you what you have to do for the young (MO Ch. 30).

DON BOSCO AND THE MARCHIONESS BAROLO'S WORKS

After three years at the Pastoral Institute, Don Bosco was taken on by Marchioness Barolo as a chaplain for her *Ospedaletto* or Little Hospital

of St Philomena's which was just beginning, and as a helper for Fr John Borel with his spiritual assistance to her several works.

Don Bosco already knew Borel: he met him first at the Seminary during a triduum for the opening of the school year, then at the *Convitto* he got a chance to know him better. Fr John Borel (1801–1873) was completely dedicated as a priest to his pastoral activities, tireless and completely unconcerned for his own interests. He had been a court chaplain and had got to know much of Piedmont's nobility. He had given this up so he could be full-time with young people, especially the most needy: he was the spiritual director for the public schools of St Francis da Paola first, then chaplain at the Refuge and then involved in several other educational institutions and also the prisons.

Like Cafasso he was a teacher of spiritual life for Don Bosco, a guide and excellent support to him in practical ministry and in setting up the Oratory on a stable and more organised basis:

From the first moment that I met Dr Borrelli, I always judged him to be a holy priest, a model worthy of admiration and imitation. Every time I was able to be with him, he always gave me lessons in priestly zeal, always good advice, encouraging me in doing good. During my three years at the *Convitto*, he often invited me to help at the sacred ceremonies, hear confessions, or preach for him. Thus I already knew and was somewhat familiar with my field of work.

We often had long discussions about procedures to be followed in order to help each other in visiting the prisons, fulfilling the duties entrusted to us, and at the same time helping the youngsters whose moral condition and neglect made increasing demands on priests (MO Ch. 30).

We need to note that from then on, for the four years to follow, it would be Fr Borel who would take responsibility for the Oratory when dealing with religious and civic authorities. Requests for help, rental and purchase contracts always bore his signature but not always Don Bosco's.

Fr Cafasso, who knew Don Bosco well and was convinced of his calling to do something special and new, saw it essential to put him with Fr Borel and be part of Marchioness Barolo's work: it was a real pastoral "workshop" offering real assistance and offered unique possibilities to the apostle of the young. He asked Borel to present Don Bosco to the Marchioness. She accepted him as spiritual director at the Little Hospital that was still under construction, and immediately took him on, with Borel's advice, in order not to miss out on such a good offer (cf. BM II, 177).

Palazzo Barolo

(via delle Orfane, no. 7)

It was here in autumn 1844 that Don Bosco, accompanied by Fr Borel, met Marchioness Giulia di Barolo.

The building, with its splendid Baroque facade, was begun toward 1635, and completed in 1692, by Gian Francesco Baroncelli then decorated in 1743 under the direction of Benedetto Alfieri (1700–1767).

The poor priest from the Becchi entered the elegant atrium of the palazzo on other occasions too and climbed the grand staircase to the sumptuous first floor area where the Marchioness had her study and reception rooms.

It was here that Don Bosco began his friendship with Silvio Pellico. From 1834 having got ten years of his prison term at Spielberg, he had become librarian and personal secretary of the Marchioness. The well-known patriot and writer wrote the words of some hymns for the Oratory boys, of which *Angioletto del mio Dio* (My God's Little Angel) is the best known. He died in this palazzo on 31 January 1854.

Giulia Vittorina Colbert di Maulévrier, the widow Barolo (1785–1864), was born in Vandea and was a descendent of the great Colbert, a minister for Louis XIV. In 1807 she married Marquis Tancredi Falletti di Barolo,

whom she got to know in Paris at Napoleon I's court . They were a very rich couple, more than the Savoy and very prominent figures amongst Turin's nobility. Their parlour was frequented by the most important people of the time: nobles, politicians (Cavour amongst them), diplomats, high officials and artists.

They were very religious (and both have had their Cause of Beatification introduced), but not having children they decided to put their wealth to the advantage of social and charitable works. With this in mind they founded an institution, the *Opera Pia Barolo*, which still exists today and is located in this palazzo.

The Marchioness found Turin in sorry state. Poverty was on the increase; there were no hospitals for the sick, places for the elderly, kindergartens or schools for those who could not pay.

Since 1832, she and her husband had set up a free school and the possibility of offering food for the poor: they served 250 bowls of soup a day; on Sundays they added a plate of meat and legumes and on Mondays, the Marchioness herself served twelve poor people at table. Then in winter people were given a supply of wood for the week. This noble woman personally took care of the sick, providing medicines, looking after them as a nurse and visiting the worst cases at home.

When her husband died in 1838, she spent most of her time founding and maintaining institutions on behalf of poor girls – sick, orphaned, imprisoned or caught up in prostitution. Her interest in these categories of people began in 1819 when she made a visit to the city prisons. It left her very much disturbed. From that day on she took direct interest in the prisons, spending long hours in the cells, teaching them hygiene, sewing, embroidery, catechism. because of her interest in Turin she had a female prison built, saw that an overall prison reform was set in place and introduced chaplains into the prisons.

A broad range of initiatives grew out of this, new social and charitable ones that Turin had never witnessed.

In 1821 she called the Sisters of St Joseph from Chambery to educate girls, thus setting up the first ordinary girls schools in Turin.

The same year at Valdocco she built the *Refuge*, a centre that took in 250 wayward girls and offered them a proper place for education, finding work, religious formation and the possibility of rehabilitation and fitting into society in an honourable way.

In 1825, with the agreement of King Charles Felix, she invited the *Dames of the Sacred Heart* to Turin for the education of upper class girls.

In 1832, to encourage girls at the *Refuge* who wanted to consecrate themselves to God through religious profession and pursue Christian perfection through prayer, penance and work, she founded the *Monastery of St Mary Magdalene* next to the *Refuge*, whence the name *Magdalene Sisters*. She also built a place there for under-age girls (under 12), and they were taught by the *Magdalenes*. They girls were known commonly as the *Maddalenine*.

Also in 1832 she set up the basics of new order of Sisters: the *St Anne Sisters* for middle class girls (corner of *via Consolata, corso Regina Margherita*). Next to the St Anne Sisters she built a house for thirty orphans, the *Giuliette* who were given 500 francs when they completed their education.

She was also interested in girls who might opt for the contemplative life: she contributed to building the monastery of *Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament* and promised them a regular annual sum. Turin is the city of the Blessed Sacrament, and she founded the *Association of Perpetual Adoration*.

For girls at the *Refuge* who stood out for their piety, but did not feel called to religious life, she founded the *Tertiaries of St Mary Magdalene* (1844). By their example they were to encourage others at the *Refuge* to be good and they also engaged in various charitable works.

In 1845 she built the *Little Hospital of St Philomena*, with 160 places for crippled and sick girls aged 3-12, run by the Sisters of St Joseph and helped by the *Tertiaries of St Mary Magdalene*.

Another of the Marchioness's intelligent insights was the institution of the *Families of Mary, St Joseph and St Anne*, which anticipated the "family house" idea. Each of the families was led by a *Mother*, given a place to live and each month tasked with looking after a group of girls who wanted to learn a profession (generally seamstresses, or something to do with fashion). The girls would come to the workshops in the morning and work alongside upright tradeswomen. The *Mother of the Family* had the role of coaching the *Daughters* in catechism, reading, writing, accounting and household tasks. They would all go to Sunday Mass together and even daily if they could. When the girls turned 21, had learned a trade and had enough money, the *Daughters* were then free to get married.

She took an interest in the pastoral and social situation of one of the poorest suburbs around, Borgo Vanchiglia, and planned then supported the *parish of St Julia's*. The work began in 1862 but did not finish until 1875 after her death. The remains of the Barolo couple are kept in this church.

Finally, amongst other social initiatives, we should recall the special schools which she opened at her own expense, for Catholic girls who came from the Waldensian valleys and the *Collegio Barolo* for poor boys, set up in the old Barolo castle (Cuneo).

The *Opera Pia Barolo* has continued to administer these institutions, many of them still supported today.

Don Bosco's oratory at the Refuge

(via Cottolengo, no. 26)

When Don Bosco was presented by Fr Borel to Marchioness Barolo, she immediately recognised the gifts this young priest had. To encourage him to accept the role as spiritual director at the Little Hospital, she not only left him free to deal with all the boys who would seek him out for

catechism, but she agreed he could gather his weekend Oratory in the new building not yet finished (the Little Hospital of St Philomena).

On the days immediately preceding 20 October 1844, Don Bosco shifted abode to the Refuge. The room he had is over the vestibule of the first entrance to the Refuge, next to Fr Borel's and Fr Sebastian Pacchiotti's (1806–1884), the other chaplains of the Barolo work, and they would also help him with the oratory.

“For the time being you can bring the boys who are coming to St Francis of Assisi to the room set aside for you. When we move to the building provided for the priests beside the little hospital, we can scout around for a better place” (MO Ch. 30), Fr Borel told him. Thus on Sunday 20 October, the Oratory transferred to the Refuge. Don Bosco describes this in his Memoirs, also describing the problems on the Sundays that followed:

A little after noon a mob of youngsters of all ages and conditions descended on Valdocco looking for the new Oratory.

“Where's the Oratory? Where's Don Bosco?” they shouted to all and sundry. No one knew what they were talking about. No one in that neighbourhood had heard of either Don Bosco or the Oratory. The questioners, believing that they were being teased, raised their voices more insistently. The locals, believing that they were being insulted, shouted indignant threats. Matters were getting serious when Dr Borrelli and I heard the commotion and came out of the house. At sight of us, the noise died down and calm was restored. The boys crowded round us asking where the Oratory was.

We had to tell them that the real Oratory was not ready yet, but meantime they could come to my room. It was quite big and would serve us well enough. In fact things went quite well that Sunday. But on the following Sunday, so many pupils from the locality came in addition to the old ones that I no longer knew where to gather them. My room, the corridor, the stairs were all thronged with children. On the Feast of All Saints Dr Borrelli and I prepared to hear confessions but everybody wanted to go. What could we do? There were more than two hundred children but only two confessors. One boy was trying to light the fire; another decided to put it out. The one brought wood, the other water. Buckets, tongs, shovel, jug, basin, chairs, shoes,

books – everything was turned topsy-turvy while they were trying to tidy things up! “We can’t go on like this,” said the dear Doctor. “We really must find a more suitable place.” Yet we spent six feast days in that restricted space, which was the room above the main entrance hall of the Refuge (MO Ch. 32).

But this was the scene for all of November: of a morning the boys attended Mass at St Francis of Assisi and in the afternoon they came to Don Bosco’s room for catechism, confession and whatever else was possible to do.

But they needed more room if they were to continue their activities. Archbishop Fransonì, when he was asked about it, asked if perhaps the boys couldn’t go to their parishes. “Most of them are foreigners,” replied Don Bosco and Fr Borel. “They are only in Turin part of the year. They don’t even know what parish they belong to. Many of them are badly off, speaking dialects hard to understand, so that they understand little and are little understood by others. Some are already grown up and don’t like associating in classes with little boys.” “That means,” continued the archbishop, “they need a place of their own, adapted to their own needs” (MO Ch 32). He approved of encouraged and continued to bless the initiative, saying he was ready to help. And we know that he kept this promise.

Marchioness Barolo, understanding the urgency, allowed him two large rooms at the Little Hospital being built next to the Refuge, and these temporarily became the chapel.

Don Bosco's oratory at St Philomena's

(via Cottolengo, no. 24)

The part the Marchioness gave them was found in the section of the Little Hospital already completed, on the third floor, where she was intending to keep a small community of priests who were providing spiritual help for the various works. This building is halfway along

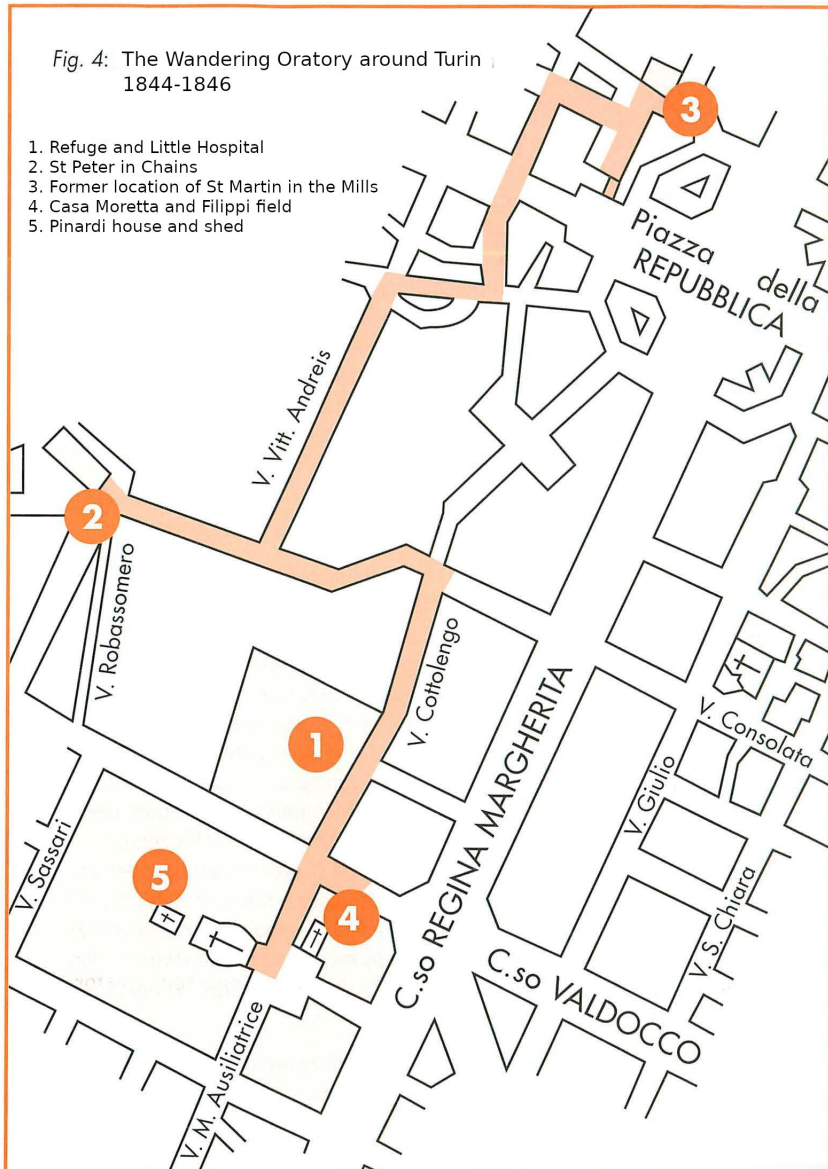
the lane running from the entrance off *via Cottolengo* no. 22 to the Magdalene monastery. A small entrance, now bricked over but still visible served as an independent access to the staircase going up to the third floor.

That was the site Divine Providence chose for the first Oratory church. We began to call it after St Francis de Sales for two reasons: 1. because Marchioness Barolo had in mind to found a congregation of priests under his patronage, and with this intention she had a painting of this saint done, which can still be seen at the entrance to this area, and 2. because we had put our own ministry, which called for great calm and meekness, under the protection of this saint in the hope that he might obtain for us from God the grace of being able to imitate him in his extraordinary meekness and in winning souls. We had a further reason for placing ourselves under the protection of this saint: that from heaven he might help us to imitate him in combating errors against religion, especially Protestantism, which was beginning to gain ground in our provinces, and more especially in the city of Turin (MO Ch. 32).

The *little chapel* was blessed on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, 8 December 1844. It was a bitterly cold day and there was plenty of snow, Don Bosco recalls, “many youngsters went to Confession and Communion. I finished that sacred liturgy with a few tears, tears of joy, because in a certain way I saw that the work of the Oratory was now established, with the object of entertaining the more abandoned and endangered youths after they had fulfilled their religious duties in church” (MO Ch. 32).

At the Little Hospital, still being completed, the Sunday Oratory got off to a good start in winter then in spring. They followed the same arrangements as before at the *Convitto*, with some improvements: Confessions and Communion early morning; then Mass with a brief explanation of the Gospel adapted to the boy’s understanding and language; in the afternoon catechism, hymns, brief instruction, Litany of Our Lady and Benediction. The rest of the time they played in the little alleyway below. Don Bosco and Fr Borel worked together in this, helped by Fr Pacchiotti.

Tours to the various places



This went on for seven months. Towards the end of May 1845 Marchioness Barolo, “though she cast a kindly eye on every charitable work”, began to urge them to find other arrangements, since she was about to open the Little Hospital (cf. MO Ch. 33). The opening took place on 10 August and probably then Barolo’s chaplains were to transfer to the rooms readied for them on the 3rd floor, where the temporary oratory chapel was.

Today the Little Hospital is a clinic and rest home for elderly women. In the chapel on the first floor we can still find the chalice Don Bosco used for daily Mass and the kneeler he used for his thanksgiving.

The third floor area that was the chapel of St Francis de Sales and where Don Bosco lived has now been turned into rooms for the Sisters at the Little Hospital.

THE WANDERING ORATORY

(25 May 1845–12 April 1846)

Fr Borel and Don Bosco decided to continue the Sunday activities. So with the Marchioness urging them on they set about looking for, another area nearby, possibly a chapel, where they could move the Sunday Oratory to. “It is true that the area we had been using had no internal communication with what was to be the chapel, the school, or the recreation center [*note*: in the Little Hospital]. Even the shutters were fixed in place and turned upwards. None the less we had to obey,” (MO Ch. 33). The number of boys coming had increased by many. They were mainly street kids, or at least ones at risk, and the Marchioness did not think it a good idea for them to keep coming to the Refuge where the wayward girls were, or to the Little Hospital or the Magdalene convent.

St Peter in Chains

(via san Pietro in Vincoli)

Not far from the Refuge we find the small cemetery of St Peter in Chains, built in 1777 by Count Francesco Dellala di Beinasco (1731–1803). It is a square building, with wide porticoes on three sides internally and a chapel on the fourth; opposite the entrance, then as today, there was a courtyard. This was right on the edge of the city and for reasons of hygiene, already since 1829 they had ceased to hold burials there; until 1860–1870 it was still used for certain family burials in the underground section. The cemetery belonged to the city council who paid a priest to look after the chapel and the few families who lived around there.

It seemed a good spot for the Oratory to gather: the chapel was good for religious functions and catechism; the courtyard was big enough for games. After an understanding with the city authorities and with the approval of the chaplain Fr Tesio, on Sunday 25 May 1845, Don Bosco and Fr Borel brought the Oratory boys along.

...It was an easy matter for us, especially since we had the backing of the archbishop, to get permission to hold our meetings in the church and courtyard of the Cemetery of Christ Crucified, popularly known as *St Peter in Chains*...

The long portico, the spacious yard, and the church for our sacred functions all so aroused the youngsters' enthusiasm that they were overcome with joy.

But in that place we came up against a formidable and unexpected arrival. This was not the ghost of one of the great numbers of the dead who slept peacefully in the nearby tombs. This was a living person, the chaplain's housekeeper. No sooner had she heard the pupils singing and talking, and, let us admit, their shouting too, than she rushed out of the house. In a furious rage, with her bonnet askew and her arms akimbo, she launched into tongue lashing the crowd of merrymakers. Joining in her assault upon us were a small girl, a dog, a cat, all the hens, so that it seemed that a European war was about to break out. I

tried to approach her to calm her down, pointing out to her that the kids meant no harm, that they were just playing innocently. Then she turned and gave it to me.

At that point I decided to end the recreation. I gave a short catechism lesson, and after we recited the rosary in church, we broke up hoping to come back the next Sunday to a better reception. Quite the contrary! When the chaplain came home that evening the good housekeeper went to work on him, denounced Don Bosco and his sons as revolutionaries and desecrators of holy places. All of them rascals of the worst kind, she said. She prevailed upon the good priest to write a letter to the civil authorities.

He wrote while the servant dictated, but with so much venom that a warrant was issued immediately for the arrest of any of us who should return there. Sad to say, that was the last letter written by Fr Tesio, the chaplain. He wrote it on Monday, and within a few hours he suffered a stroke from which he died very soon afterwards. Two days later a similar fate befell the housekeeper (MO Ch. 34).

Because he wrongly interpreted a document found in the archives, Fr Lemoyne adds to this version the information that already during the preceding Lent some catechism classes had been held at the cemetery.

Research has enabled us to clarify what really happened: there were meetings of catechists at St Peter in Chains, but not from the Oratory. They were from the *Congregation of Catechists of St Pelagius*; and they took place in May, not during Lent. But the *City Council*, on 23 May, also forbade those meetings for reasons that are not clear. On the 25th, when Don Bosco went to the cemetery with his boys, this prohibition had not yet been published. But the following Sunday the decree was affixed to the entrance and the police were asked to enforce it. Don Bosco, not knowing about this, thought it was because of his boys and after the incident the previous Sunday.

Fr Tesio obviously was not around to clarify things, having died on Wednesday 28th, as we see from the documents. We know that the chaplain's housekeeper, Margherita Sussolino, stayed a few days to pick up her things – and his; then there is no further information about her.

Immediately following the chaplain's death, as the documents tell us, Fr Borel, Fr Pacchiotti and Don Bosco made a joint request to take over the vacant chaplaincy. But the request was not accepted and it was given to someone else (18 June). At the end of the month the three sent in a written request to at least have permission to gather the boys on Sunday at St Peter in Chains. This too was rejected (3 July).

Then because of the urgency of finding a place for the Oratory, between 4 and 9 July they came back with a new request: to use, for some hours at least, the chapel at *Mulini Dora* (The Dora Mills). This time (10 July) the request was accepted (cf. F. Motto, *L'“oratorio” di Don Bosco presso il cimitero di S. Pietro in Vincoli in Torino. Una documentata ricostruzione del noto episodio*, in RSS 5 [1986] 199–220).

Until then the Sunday gatherings kept taking place at the Little Hospital and some churches outside the city: Sassi, Madonna del Pilone, Madonna di Campagna, Monte dei Cappuccini and Superga.

St Martin's chapel at the Molassi

(where we find piazza Albera today)

When they received permission to make use of the *Mulini Dora*, on Sunday 13 July 1845 the Oratory moved there.

The *Mulini Dora* or *Molassi*, are not to be found there today. It was a group of buildings where they ground wheat, but also pressed olives but also prepared hemp. There were also communal ovens for bread making. The mill wheels were driven by a wide canal, (the *Canale dei Mulini*) which drew on the Dora some kilometres away. Other small industries also used this water. These industries had sprung up around Valdocco and Borgo Dora.

The St Martin's chapel was used by workers at the Mills, all the local workers and their families. The Council let Borel and Don Bosco use the church only from 12 to 3 p.m. for catechism classes; it forbade the boys

to “go near the Mill precincts” or disturb religious ceremonies celebrated “for Mill personnel”.

The move and the memorable speech given by Fr Borel have been given us in all their detail:

Imagine us then, on a July Sunday in 1845, making our way laden with benches, kneelers, candlesticks, some chairs, crucifixes, and pictures large and small. Everyone carried some object suited to his strength. We must have looked like emigrants on the move; with din, laughter—and regret we marched out to establish our headquarters in the place just indicated. Fr Borrelli gave an appropriate talk before we set out and another when we arrived at our new church.

That worthy minister of the sanctuary, in that common-folk style of his that could be said to be more unique than rare, spoke these thoughts: “My dear boys, cabbages never form a big, beautiful head unless they are transplanted. The same is true of our Oratory. So far it has been moved from one place to another many times, but in the different places where it has stopped it has always grown bigger, with no little advantage to the boys involved...”

“How long will we stay here? We don’t know. We hope we’ll be here a long time; but however long our stay, we believe that like transplanted cabbages, our Oratory will grow in the number of boys who love virtue, will increase their desire for music, singing, evening classes, and even day courses...” An immense crowd of youngsters attended that solemn ceremony, and a *Te Deum* of thanksgiving was sung with the greatest emotion.

We carried out our religious devotions as we had at the Refuge, though we could not celebrate Mass or give benediction in the evening. This meant that the boys could not receive communion, which is the fundamental element to our institution. Even our recreations were often disturbed, broken up because the lads were forced to play in the street and in the little square in front of the church where a constant stream of people on foot, carts, horses, and carriages passed by. Since we had nothing better, we thanked heaven for what we had been given and hoped for some better spot (MO Ch. 33).

Don Bosco and his boys came here every Sunday until the end of December 1845, but only for the afternoon catechism classes. For Mass

and Confessions they had to move around various churches in the city and beyond.

This is when the first meeting between Don Bosco and Michael Rua took place. He was just eight years old. It happened in September, at the portico that now links *piazza della Repubblica* with *piazza Albera*.

Following protests from workers at the Mills who couldn't put up with the "jumping, singing and occasional squabbling" of the boys, the *Council*, sitting on 18 November 1845, said they would have to leave the premises by 1st January 1846.

Casa Moretta

(piazza Maria Ausiliatrice, no. 15/A)

Where the auxiliary church is today

With two months still left, Fr Borel and Don Bosco immediately began looking for a new place. St Martin's church at the Molassi was not good enough for their catechism classes; they were also thinking of beginning evening and Sunday classes for young working boys: so they needed better premises and ones that could be heated.

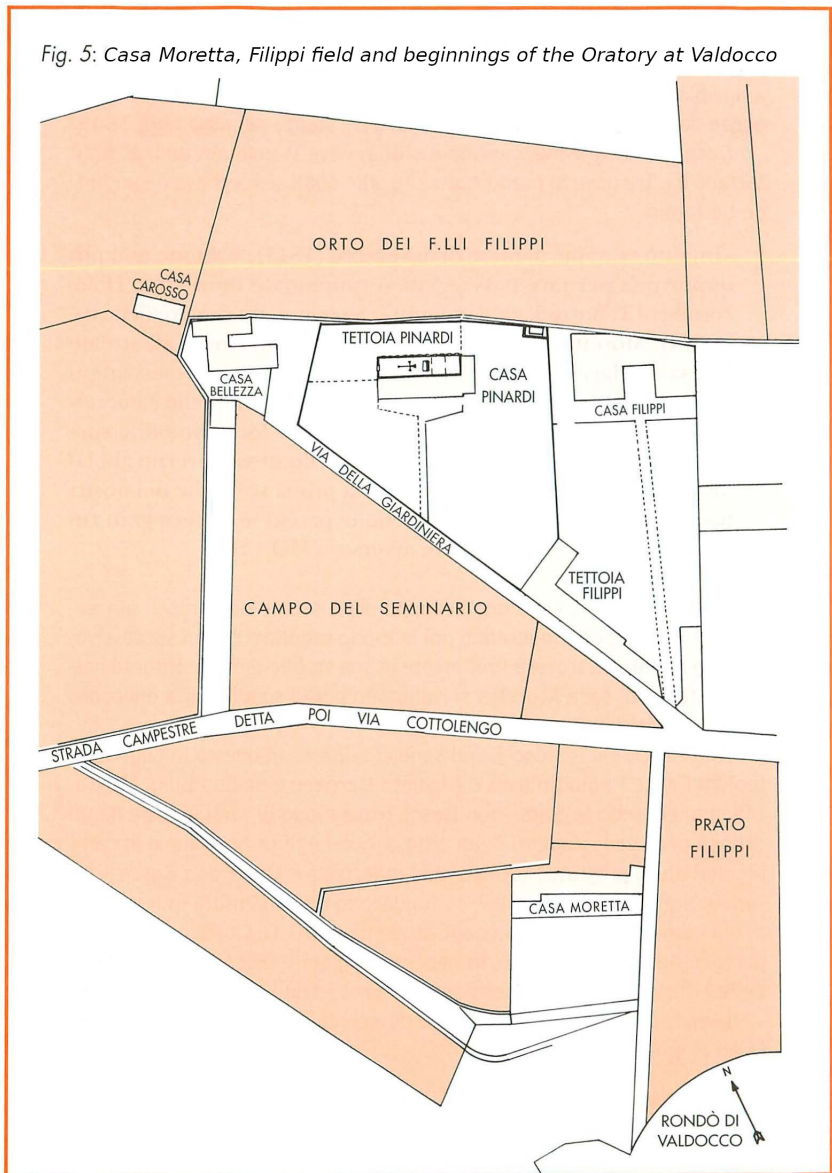
In Valdocco (just about where we find the parish church, in *piazza Maria Ausiliatrice* no. 15/A) Fr Giovanni Battista Antonio Moretta (+ 1847) had a two storey building part of which he was renting out. He happily met the two priests' needs by renting out three rooms in November 1845.

Casa Moretta had a cellar and a stable, nine rooms on the ground floor and another nine above, reached by a long balcony.

In the meantime, we had moved into November (1845), not a very practical season for outings or walks to places outside the city. In agreement with Fr Borrelli we rented three rooms in the house belonging to Fr Moretta, which is the one near, almost in front of, the Church of Mary Help [of Christians] today... We spent four months

Don Bosco Lived Here

Fig. 5: Casa Moretta, Filippi field and beginnings of the Oratory at Valdocco



there, confined in that restricted space, yet happy at least to be able to collect our pupils in those rooms and give them instructions and especially an opportunity to go to confession. That same winter we began evening classes. It was the first time that this kind of school was spoken of in our area. Consequently it was much discussed: some favoured it; others were against it (MO Ch. 35).

The *evening classes* are a development of the Sunday school which had already started at the Refuge; they would continue throughout the following year, when the Oratory would finally find a stable home. Meanwhile the three rooms at casa Moretta were packed with around 200 pupils.

Don Bosco and Fr Borel were helped in this by Frs Felice Paolo Chiaves and Giacinto Carpano and also Fr Luigi Musso. But since the classes were expanding, Don Bosco sought help from a group of young students whom he tutored in exchange for their help: “These young teachers of mine, at first numbering eight or ten, continued to increase” (MO Ch. 42). He also had recourse to some willing adults, tradesmen or small businessman around town, whom we can consider to be his first “cooperators”.

The approach he took for the Sunday schools and then developed for the evening classes meant

...just one subject at a time. For example, one or two Sundays were devoted to going over and over the alphabet and the structure of syllables. Then we started right off on the small catechism and, syllable by syllable, pupils were taught to read one or two of the first catechism questions. That served as a lesson for the week. The following Sunday that work was reviewed and a few more questions and answers were added. In this way in about eight weeks I could succeed in getting some to read and study on their own a whole page of catechism (MO Ch. 42).

The *results were positive*: “The night courses brought two good results. They inspired the youngsters to come to learn to read, which they realised was very important. At the same time, these classes gave

us an excellent opportunity to instruct them in religion, which was the object of our concern.” (MO Ch. 42).

But these consoling developments or the Oratory were accompanied by a number of accusations and misunderstanding: “Some called Don Bosco a revolutionary, others called him a madman, or even a heretic. This was their reasoning: “This Oratory alienates youngsters from their parishes... . Don Bosco should send the children to their own parishes and stop gathering them in other places.” (MO Ch. 35). This last accusation was taken up with two parish priests from the city: they noted how the Oratory boys were “seasonal” and not part of any parish structure; the parish priests then understood and encouraged Don Bosco to continue. But other rumours and misunderstandings continued.

They stayed about four months in the three rooms at *casa Moretta*, until at the end of February, when Fr Moretta was forced to send the Oratory away because of protests from other people in the building.

Some years later (9 March 1848), following Fr Moretta’s death, Don Bosco bought the place as well as the surrounding land, with a view to using it for the Oratory and his *boarding house*. He had to give this idea up due to the poor condition of the building so he resold it (spring 1849). In 1875, however he bought the *casa Moretta* and land back again, and set up *the first girls’ oratory* there, giving it to the Daughters of Mary help of Christians.

Filippi field

(corner of via Cigna and via Maria Ausiliatrice)

Probably in February 1846 Don Bosco and Fr Borel rented a nearby field belonging to the Filippi brothers, to gather the growing number of boys but also to avoid further eviction from public land or because they were disturbing private dwellers.

The field was to the east of *casa Moretta*, had a hedge around it and an old shed where they could keep items used for games (cf. fig.8 [page 226](#)).

Thanks to spring weather it was well-grassed and good for games and gymnastics but they could also use it for music, singing, prayer, confessions and preaching.

Doing the best we could, we held catechism classes, sang hymns, sang vespers. Then Dr Borrelli or I would stand on a hillock or on a chair and give a short sermon to the youths, who came up close to hear it.

For confessions, this is how we managed: I would be in the field early on feast day mornings, where many would already be waiting for me. I would sit on a hillock hearing one's confession while others were preparing or making their thanksgiving. Afterwards many went back to their games. At a fixed time of the morning, all the boys assembled in answer to a bugle call. A second blast on the bugle brought them to silence, giving me a chance to speak and tell them where we were going for Mass and holy communion.

Sometimes, as I said, we went to Our Lady of the Fields, to the Church of Our Lady of Consolation, to Stupinigi, or to the places mentioned earlier (MO Ch. 36).

These noisy assemblies, however, began to worry Marquis Michael Cavour, *Vicar of the City*, who was afraid of revolution and disorder. He called Don Bosco to find out exactly what was happening and how these Sunday gatherings were being held. Not satisfied he spoke to the archbishop about them and for a while he had the Oratory gatherings under the eye of the civic guards. This continued for a number of months.

Making the situation worse was an eviction order from the Filippi brother because, they said, they boys "with their continuous trampling in our field have killed the grass down to the very roots. We are prepared to forgo the rent owing if you are out of the field in two weeks" (MO Ch. 37).

Faced with all these problems some of Don Bosco's friends and helpers tried to dissuade him and get him to "abandon this useless enterprise"; some, seeing him worried and always surrounded by boys, began to suspect his mental balance. Even Fr Borel had his moment of doubt and suggested temporarily reducing the activities to a simple catechism class for about twenty of the smallest ones (cf. MO Ch. 37).

This is probably the time when two priest friends of Don Bosco's, worried about his state of mind, tried in vain to get him into care (cf. MO Ch. 38).

It was in these desperate circumstances that on one of the last Sundays they were at the Filippi field, perhaps 8 March 1846, an unexpected and decisive glimmer of hope shone through:

On that evening as I ran my eyes over the crowd of children playing, I thought of the rich harvest awaiting my priestly ministry. With no one to help me my energy gone, my health undermined, with no idea where I could gather my boys in the future, I was very disturbed.

I withdrew to one side, and as I walked alone I began to cry, perhaps for the first time. As I walked I looked up to heaven and cried out, "My God, why don't you show me where you want me to gather these children? Oh, let me know! Oh, show me what I must do!"

When I had finished saying this, a man called Pancrazio Soave came up. He stammered as he asked me, "Is it true that you're looking for a site for a laboratory?"

"Not a laboratory, but an oratory."

"I don't know the difference between an oratory and a laboratory, but there's a site available. Come and have a look at it. Mr Joseph Pinardi, the owner, [*note: change this to Francis*] is an honest man. Come and you'll get a real bargain" (MO Ch. 39).

The dates given for this in the *Memoirs of the Oratory* and from independent texts, leave us in some doubt. On the basis of recently discovered documents we can indicate the following sequence of events:

- Filippi field rented in February 1846
- The Filippi brothers terminate this agreement at the beginning of March, giving him a fortnight
- Comes across Pancrazio Soave on Sunday 8 March
- Rental contract for a shed signed by Fr Borel and Francesco Pinardi in the days immediately following (dated however as 1st April 1846)
- Between the drawing up of the contract and Sunday 12 April work was done to the shed to make it suitable to use as a chapel
- Meanwhile they continued to use the Filippi field, probably until Sunday 5 April
- 12 April, Easter Sunday, the Oratory moves officially to the Pinardi chapel.

We have a recently found letter which confirms that sequence of events, written to the *Vicar of the City* on 13 March 1846, where Don Bosco writes amongst other things:

During winter we carried out part of this (note.: catechism classes) in our house and part in various rooms we had rented. Finally this week we are in negotiations with a Mr Pinardi whom we have paid two hundred and eighty francs for a large room that could be the Oratory, plus two other rooms on the adjacent site. This place seems convenient both because it is very close to the Refuge and because it is some way distant from any church, but near to some homes; it just needs you to say that it is okay in terms of civil society and other external arrangements.

(G. Bosco, *Epistolario* . Introduction critical text and notes by F. Motto, vol. 1: [1835–1863], Roma, LAS 1991, pp. 66–67).

THE ORATORY AT CASA PINARDI

(from 12 April onwards 1846)

When Don Bosco, accompanied by Pancrazio Soave and Francesco Pinardi visited the shed for the first time that was attached to the north side of the Pinardi house, he was almost speechless and ready to reject the idea: “I can’t use it... it’s too low.” But Pinardi insisted he could adjust the place and lower the floor by about a metre and a half to make it suitable. Then Don Bosco agreed. They agreed on a rental of 320 lire a year for the use of the shed and the strip of land in front and to the side (cf. MO Ch. 39).

The adjustments were made between March and the first 10 days of April so that it could be ready for Easter (12 April 1846). The shed, now a chapel, was now the Oratory for the boys. It was blessed by Fr Borel the following day.

It is worth noting that over this period Don Bosco continued to live with Fr Borel at the Barolo place and continued his chaplaincy work there.

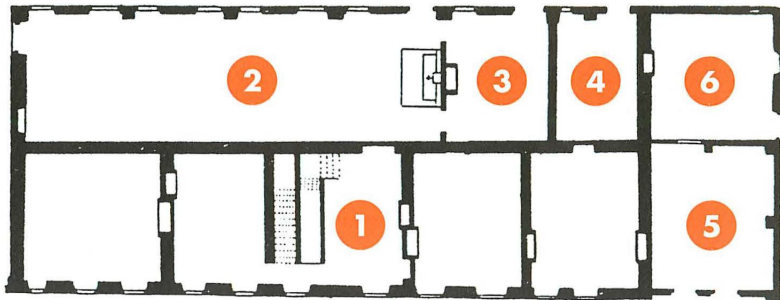
Pinardi chapel

The shed rented to the Oratory was of recent construction. In fact on 14 July 1845, when Francesco Pinardi had arranged with the three brothers Giovanni, Antonio and Carlo Filippi to buy the house and land (for 14,000 lire), the shed wasn’t there. He built it the following November either for storage purposes or to use it as a craft shop.

Six months later when Borel, in Don Bosco’s name, signed the rental contract, it was probably not in use by anyone.

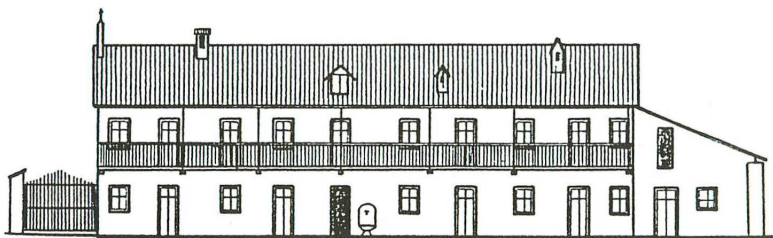
Tours to the various places

Fig. 6: Plan of chapel and Pinardi house



1. kitchen and refectory 2. shed-chapel 3. sacristy 4. back room 5. stable, hayloft 6. wood store

Fig. 7: Perspective drawing of Pinardi house



The surrounds

After Pinardi had made his adjustments, the shed was divided into three areas: the chapel properly so-called, a long and narrow room (about 15 metres long); two other rooms, one for the sacristy and the other as a little choir area and storage (cf. fig. 5 [page 202](#)).

The entrance was on the west end, going down two steps, meaning that “in winter and when it was raining we were flooded out. In summer the heat and the bad odours suffocated us. (MO Ch. 55). The room was lit by seven small windows opening out onto the courtyard, but there was no connection between it and the house it was attached to. Next to the altar was a door leading to the sacristy.

The beams holding up the sloping roof were covered by a wooden ceiling; this meant there was no more than two metres height left in the building. So at the small *pulpit* located halfway down the chapel against the north wall, there was just enough room for Fr Borel and Don Bosco who were both smallish. When, on 29 June 1847, Archbishop Fransoni came to the chapel the first time to administer Confirmation, he had to remove his mitre or it would have bumped into the ceiling (cf. MO Ch. 45).

Don Bosco gradually furnished the chapel with statues and pictures expressing the spirituality and devotions that became traditional at the Oratory.

The wooden altar was the one they had used at the Little Hospital and was at the eastern end. A picture of *St Francis de Sales*, brought from the Refuge, hung on it. The Oratory and the chapel continued to be dedicated to him.

In a niche in the wall on the right as one entered there was a small statue of *St Aloysius Gonzaga*. To encourage devotion to this model of youthful holiness amongst his boys, Don Bosco introduced the practice of the *six Sundays* and a novena in his honour, getting these prayers printed in a small booklet. On 21 May 1847 he founded the *St*

Aloysius Sodality (the regulations were approved in April by Archbishop Franson), and the best boys were invited to join. From autumn 1847 almost until the end of 1848, every first Sunday of the month there was a small procession around the Oratory, where they carried the saint's statue.

For Feasts and processions for Our Lady, they had a statue of Our Lady of Consolation, bought on 2 September 1847 for 27 lire and placed in a niche almost in front of the small pulpit. Today this little statue is the only item that remains of the original chapel.

On the walls were the 14 pictures of the *Stations of the Cross*, bought for 12 lire and blessed on 1st April 1847, Holy Thursday. That was when they held the Stations of the Cross, for the first time in a version Don Bosco had adapted for the boys and published in *The Companion of Youth*, the little prayer book he had published a few months earlier.

From the days when they met on Sundays at St Francis of Assisi, *hymn singing* had taken on a special role in the Oratory. So Don Bosco, as soon as the opportunity presented itself, bought a small organ to help them with their singing; he paid 35 lire for it on 5 November 1847.

A few other small items completed the furnishings: 24 small pews and two kneelers, red curtains for the windows, some vases and a lamp near the altar (cf. ODB 67-75).

To mark it out as a chapel and also to be used for the timetable at the Oratory, he built a rudimentary bell tower and placed a bell there weighing 22 kg. which Fr Ignazio Vola gave him in November 1846 (ODB 96).

The two small rooms behind the chapel had a window each, a door which opened onto the courtyard and a chimney with a wooden hood. Later Don Bosco took over one of these and made it part of the chapel since it was already too small, shifting the sacristy to the second room.

The Pinardi shed was used as a chapel for six years, that is until 20 June 1852, the date of the opening of the St Francis de Sales church.

Then it became a study hall and recreation area and also a dormitory until 1856, when it was pulled down along with the Pinardi house.

Events

The Oratory had finally become stable, poor as it was: the number of boys, attracted by the solemn functions, music and games, kept on increasing; a few priest helpers who had pulled out a few months before, came back to help Don Bosco.

Life at the Oratory took on a more regular rhythm around the chapel that soon became the heart of the Oratory:

This is how we arranged our functions. The church was opened early in the morning on Sundays, and we heard confessions until it was time for Mass, which was scheduled for eight o'clock. Often, because there were so many for confession, Mass had to be put off till nine or even later. One of the priests, when they were present, assisted, and the prayers were recited in alternating choirs. Those who were prepared went to holy communion during Mass. When Mass was over and the vestments put away, I stood up on a low rostrum to explain the gospel. Then this was changed in order to begin a regular presentation of Bible history. These narratives were presented in simple and popular language, vividly portraying the customs of the times, the places, the [ancient] geographical names with their [modern] counterparts. This pleased very much the youngest, the adults, and even the priests who were present. After the instruction, there were classes till noon.

At one o'clock in the afternoon recreation began, with bocce, stilts, rifles, wooden swords, and our first gymnastics equipment. At two-thirty we started catechism. On the whole, ignorance abounded. Many times I began to sing the Ave Maria, but not one of the approximately four hundred youngsters present could continue if I stopped.

After catechism was over, since we were not yet able to sing vespers, we said the rosary. Later we began to sing *Ave Maris Stella*, then the *Magnificat*, then the *Dixit* [note: Psalm 109], then other psalms; and finally an antiphon. In the space of a year, we had become capable of singing the whole vespers of our Lady.

These practices were followed by a short sermon, usually a story in which some virtue or vice was personified. It all concluded with the singing of the litanies and with benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

When we came out of church, there was a period of free time for each to do as he pleased. Some continued their catechism class, some practised their singing, some worked at their reading. Most of them, however, jumped about, ran, and enjoyed themselves in various games and pastimes...

As night fell, we all returned to church when the bell rang, here we said a few prayers or recited the rosary and the *Angelus*, and everything ended with the singing of the *Praised be forever* etc.

As they left the church, I went in their midst and accompanied them while they sang and shouted. As they left the church, I went in their midst and accompanied them while they sang and shouted. When we reached the Rondò, we would sing a verse from some hymn. Then I would invite them back for the following Sunday, and with a loud chorus of “good nights” all round, each went his way (MO Ch. 40).

What was happening around this chapel drew attention from various sides. Many people visited the oratory in these early days. Marchioness Barolo was following things sympathetically but with increasing concern for Don Bosco and his activities. She was amongst the first to go there in summer 1846: seeing the poverty and the inconvenience of it all she once again tried to convince him to give all his time to the Refuge and the Little Hospital. She was worried about his health.

In 1848–1849, when Don Bosco once again felt abandoned by most of his helpers (this time for political reasons), he was visited by two priests who were unknown to him, one of whom was the famous Antonio Rosmini. It was interesting how this meeting took place:

At the beginning of the catechism period, I was totally occupied with arranging my classes when two clergymen arrived. They were coming with a humble, respectful bearing to commend me and seek information about the origin and system of the Oratory. As my only answer, I said, “Would you be good enough to help me?” One I asked, “Would you come to the apse and take the big boys?” To the taller

one I said, "I entrust to you this class, which is the wildest." Realising that they were excellent catechists, I asked one of them to give a short sermon to our boys, and the other to give benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Both accepted graciously.

The shorter priest was Father Antonio Rosmini, founder of the Institute of Charity. The other was Canon Archpriest De Gaudenzi, the present bishop of Vigevano. From that time, both of them were always kindly disposed towards our house; in fact they were benefactors (MO Ch. 53).

But there was no lack of visits of a less courteous nature: Marquis Cavour was still sending along his guards.

Every Sunday he sent some agents or policemen to spend the whole day with us, watching all that was said or done in church or outside it.

"Well," Marquis Cavour said to one of these guards, "what did you see and hear in the midst of that rabble?"

"Lord Marquis, we saw a huge crowd of boys enjoying themselves in a thousand ways. In church we heard some hair-raising sermons. They said so many things about hell and devils that it made me want to go to confession."

"And what about politics?"

"Politics weren't even mentioned. Those boys wouldn't understand anything about politics." (MO Ch. 41).

Fr Lemoyne tells us that "the Marquis' order... brought great spiritual benefit to all the guards. They ... had never heard such a sermon and had not been to confession for years, and would come to him right after and, fearful and repentant, ask him to hear their confession" (MB 2, 347).

Very soon what was going on at the Pinaridi chapel produced positive results. Don Bosco was able to pick out some of his boys in view of eventually sharing the apostolate with them. With this in mind, in 1848, the *retreats* began:

I adopted every means to pursue also my own particular objective, which was to observe, get to know, and chose some individuals who had a suitable inclination to the common life, and to take them with me into my house.

With this same purpose, in that year (1848) I put it to a test with a little spiritual retreat (MO Ch. 48).

The Lord blessed the Oratory work through some miraculous signs which Fr Lemoyne tells us about, like the multiplication of hosts during one of Our Lady's Feast Days in 1848 (cf. BM III, 311-312) or the chestnuts in November 1849 at the door of the Pinardi chapel (cf. BM III, 404-406).

The chapel today

The Pinardi house and chapel were pulled down in 1856 to build a more sturdy and roomy building. Where the old chapel was he put a dining room for himself and the first Salesians. A number of friends and benefactors sat at his poor table, including Giuseppe Sarto and Achille Ratti who became respectively Pius X and Pius XI (cf. ODB 80). The Major Superiors of the Congregation used this dining room until 1927. That year Fr Philip Rinaldi, third successor of Don Bosco's, wanted it returned to being a chapel in memory of the first chapel for the Oratory.

The chapel, opened on 31 January 1928, has been called *the Pinardi chapel until today, even if not quite correctly*.

On the wall behind the altar is a painting by Paolo Giovanni Crida of the Resurrection, recalling Easter 1846, the day Don Bosco opened the original Pinardi chapel. It is an image of the model of youthful holiness offered at Valdocco: a life free from sin and regenerated by the grace of the Risen Lord, full of joy and light.

The altar, designed by Valotti, is supported by four onyx columns. The mosaic beneath is the sacrificial Lamb redeeming mankind by his blood. He is the Vine with the branches being the Apostles, pictured

there by the symbols of their martyrdom. Jesus words, the mandate to go out and preach to all people, recalls the origin and scope of the oratory: “*Euntes docete omnes gentes, praedicate evangelium universo mundo*” (Go and preach to all people, preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth). The tabernacle, in beaten and then enamelled copper, following the school of Blessed Angelico from Milan, has symbols of fish and the words *Emmanuel adorabilis*, alluding to the Eucharistic presence of the “God with us.”

On the ceiling above the altar, dominated by the Eucharistic emblem, we read: “*Haec dies quam fecit Dominus: exultemus et laetemur in ea*” (This is the day the Lord made: let us exalt and rejoice in him), recalling the joy of the Resurrection and Easter 1846. The symbols of grapes and wheat also in beaten iron on the balustrade – images of “the food for eternal life” joining human work with the Eucharistic sacrifice – recall the spirituality of daily work and Don Bosco’s encouragement for daily Communion.

On the arch above the altar we can read the *Victimae paschali*, with reminders of the seven sacraments below the arch. The sacrament of Penance which Don Bosco considered to be a key element of spiritual life, is at the centre where we read *Claves Regni Caelorum* (keys to the kingdom of heaven).

The second arch in the centre of the chapel, has the Easter antiphon *Regina Caeli*, symbolising Mary as a model of virtue. There are symbols of Mary’s virginity: her burning love, intimacy with God and custody of heart; sin could not enter, and she was available for the call. Her virginity was fruitful. The lily amongst thorns in the centre of the ceiling recalls the importance Don Bosco gave to chastity, a virtue under siege but not impossible with Mary’s help.

Near the altar on the right is the statue of the Consolata a copy of the original which was there in 1847 and now kept in the museum in Don Bosco’s rooms: it is the only reminder of the original chapel. In 1856, when the Pinardi house was pulled down, Fr Francesco Giacomelli, one

of his fellow seminarians, was given the statue by Don Bosco as a gift. He had it with him at the Little Hospital where he was chaplain; then in 1882 he took it to Avigliana, where he was born. It stayed there for 46 years until in 1929 it was given back to the Salesians.

On the ceiling there are monograms of Christ and Mary surrounded by wild roses and passion fruit flowers, recalling the fruitfulness of suffering accepted in love.

A band of small crosses beginning from the altar goes around the entire church: these are our daily crosses united with Jesus' cross, for our personal purification and to transform our setting in a Christian way.

On the back wall where there would have been the entrance to the original chapel there is a plaque summing up the period of the wandering oratory. Another on the wall on the left recalls the hospitality Don Bosco showed Achille Ratti, the future Pope Pius XI, who had the good fortune of beatifying him in 1929 then canonising him in 1934. A third plaque finally, commemorates Don Bosco who "prayed and celebrated here - dispensing the divine mysteries to his boys - and then for some thirty years - within these walls - shared with his sons - the bread given by Providence - while he let them taste - his kindly fatherliness".

Recent developments

In keeping the project planned for the Salesian places at the Mother House, after the opening of the *Casa Don Bosco Museum*, the Pinardi chapel was converted to a place of perpetual adoration.

It is open from 8:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. for anyone looking for a quiet and silent place to pray. This new stage in its long history began on 24 October 2020.

Where the sacristy and choir used be, there are now some tools and other items recalling the first workshops at the Oratory.

Don Bosco at the Pinardi house

On 5 June 1846 Don Bosco rented three rooms in a row from Pancrazio Soave on the upper floor of the Pinardi house, on the east side. The contract established a rent of 5 lire a month for each room, from 1st July 1846 to 1st January 1849. Don Bosco came to this decision when he decided finally to separate completely from the Barolo work. The two roles were in fact incompatible, now that the Oratory had become more developed and more demanding than just a Sunday gathering.

Events during spring-summer 1846

With the opening of the chapel Don Bosco gave most of his energies to consolidating the Oratory but without neglecting his work at the Little Hospital and the many pastoral activities he was invited to take on in various places. His health was suffering and Marchioness Barolo, really worried about him, intervened. She met Don Bosco and invited him to moderate his frenetic activity. She wrote a long letter to Fr Borel (18 May 1846) to explain her thinking: she did not want the Oratory to close but she feared for Don Bosco's life. She wrote, amongst other things:

A few weeks after it was set up with your help, V. Rev. Fr, both the Superior at the Refuge and I saw that he was exhausted. You will recall how often I have asked him to take care of himself and give himself time to sleep etc. etc. He took no notice; he said that priests have to work, etc.

Don Bosco's health got worse up till the time I left for Rome; meanwhile he was working, but ill, spitting blood. It was then that I received a letter from you, Father where you told me that Don Bosco was no longer able to do everything he had to. I immediately replied that I was ready to continue Don Bosco's stipend if he would agree to do nothing else, and I am ready to keep my word. You, father, know that hearing confessions, encouraging hundreds of boys is not "doing nothing"; I believe it is harming Don Bosco, and I think he needs to go away from Turin so he can give his lungs a rest...

You are so kind, father and I probably deserve your poor opinion of me by letting me know clearly that I want to block this Sunday teaching for the boys and whatever else he is doing for them during the week. I believe the work in itself is very good and worthy of those who have undertaken it; but I also believe that Don Bosco's health absolutely does not allow him to continue, and on the other hand I believe that gathering these boys who used wait for their Director at the door to the Refuge, and are now waiting for him at the door to the Little Hospital, is not convenient...

To sum up, [1.] I approve of and praise this work of teaching the boys, but given the people in my own work, I think these gatherings outside my doors are risky. 2. And since in conscience I believe that Don Bosco's chest needs complete rest, I will not continue the small stipend I am giving him except on condition that he go some distance away from Turin so that he won't be tempted to harm his health. I have so much time for him and I am worried about him.

I know, Rev. Father, that we do not agree on these things. If it was not my conscience speaking I would as usual submit to your judgement.

(From: Archivio Salesiano Centrale – Roma, *Fondo Don Bosco*, microf. 541.B5–8).

Towards *the end of May*, the Marchioness, seeing that her earlier efforts were useless, confronted Don Bosco with a choice: if he wanted his stipend he had to reduce the rhythm of work, in her view excessive, at the Oratory. The young priest who was by now certain of his mission, replied: "I've thought it over already, M Lady Marchioness. My life is consecrated to the good of young peopl. I thank you for the offers you're making me, but I can't turn back from the path which Divine Providence has traced out for me" (MO Ch. 38). They fixed the date for the termination of his role as Director at the Little Hospital for end of August 1846.

Meanwhile, as the Marchioness had foreseen, Don Bosco's health reached a worrying state:

My many commitments in the prisons, the Cottolengo Hospital, the Refuge, the Oratory, and the schools meant I had to work at night to compile the booklets that I absolutely needed. On account of that,

my already frail health deteriorated to such a degree that the doctors advised me to stop all my activities. Doctor Borrelli, who loved me dearly, for my own good sent me to spend some time with the parish priest of Sassi. I rested during the week and went back to work at the Oratory on Sunday. But that was not enough. The youngsters came in crowds to see me; the boys from the village came too. So I was busier than in Turin, while I was causing a great deal of inconvenience to my little friends (MO Ch. 43).

On day at the beginning of July, a crowd of boys came to Sassi (around 400 of them!) all De La Salle Brothers' pupils, to go to confession because they had finished their retreat. Don Bosco, with other priests from the place, tackled this ministry, but the effort was the last straw for him:

Back home again, I was exhausted and took to my bed. I had bronchitis, combined with coughing and violent inflammation. A week later, I was judged to be at death's door. I had received Holy Viaticum and the Anointing of the sick. I think that just then I was ready to die. I was sorry to abandon my youngsters, but I was happy that before I departed I had given a solid foundation to the Oratory (MO Ch. 43).

The boys at the Oratory, finding out that Don Bosco was at the end of his tether, and moved by the great love they had for their friend, got into little groups and prayed:

Without prompting they prayed, fasted, went to Masses, and received holy communions. In turns they prayed all night and day for me before the image of Our Lady of Consolation. In the morning they lit special candles for me, and until the late evening large numbers were always praying and imploring the august Mother of God to preserve their poor Don Bosco.

Some made vows to recite the whole rosary for a month, others for a year, some for their whole lives. There were some who promised to fast on bread and water for months, years, and even their whole lives. I know that some bricklayer apprentices fasted on bread and water for entire weeks, without lessening from morning to evening their heavy work. In fact, when they had any bit of free time they rushed to spend it before the Most Blessed Sacrament.

God heard their prayers! It was a Saturday evening, and it was believed that it would be the last night of my life. So said the doctors who came to see me, and so was I convinced myself. I had no strength left because of a continuous loss of blood. Late in the night I grew drowsy and slept. When I woke I was out of danger (MO Ch. 43).

To recover his strength he was advised to spend at least three months in the Becchi, and that's what he did. Before leaving, at the beginning of August, he rented a fourth room at the Pinardi house on the upper floor from Pietro Clapié, who was working for Soave (cf. BM II, 388). Fr Borel looked after repairs and cleaning so that Don Bosco could move in there.

Meanwhile the Sunday Oratory and classes continued under Fr Borel's direction, helped by Frs Vola and Cârpano, and Fr Trivero and Pacchiotti.

Moving into the Pinardi house

On 3 November 1846, after his convalescence at the Becchi, Don Bosco moved into the four rooms at the Pinardi house. His mother Margaret came with him. She had decided to follow her son who no longer had work or income, and support him in his apostolic work. Her presence at Valdocco, also for reasons of prudence given the kind of people who lived in the area, was a decisive one once her son decided to begin to take in orphans.

These four rooms were poor and the situation was precarious. Rental costs for the chapel and the rooms was now 600 lire a year; then there were normal living costs, Sunday activities, snacks and helping the poorest Oratory boys. They entrusted it all to Providence and help came from many places. From a notebook of Fr Borel's we know that Fr Cafasso paid the rent and that financial contributions came from priests and all kinds of people. Marchioness Barolo too continued to help, but anonymously through Fr Cafasso.

These financial difficulties did not scare Don Bosco off and he kept broadening his activities. With this in mind on 1st December 1846 he rented the entire house and surrounding land. Pancrazio Soave was still using the ground floor for his work until 1st March 1847. When the contract with Soave ran out, Fr Borel took out a new one directly with the owner, Mr Pinardi, from 1st April 1849 to 31 March 1852. Pinardi agreed on a rent of just 1150 lire to support the work which had begun in his house. Nevertheless on 19 February 1851, a year before this contract ran out, Francesco Pinardi sold it all for 28,500 lire “to Frs G. Bosco, Fr Giov. Borel, Fr Roberto Murialdo, Giuseppe Cafasso, the grounds and buildings also held with the Filippi brothers to the east and south, the Giardiniera road to the north, and Mrs Bellezza to the west” (ODB 99).

How the house was

The front looks towards the south, and windows and doors were only on this side. The living area was a ground floor and an upper floor but very low, and it took up the area near the portico where St Francis de Sales church is now. It was about 20 metres long and 6 wide. The height of the entire building was no more than seven metres.

About halfway along near the staircase, was a narrow entrance near which, outside, on the eastern part, was a stone basin and pump with plenty of fresh water. The house had about a dozen rooms. On the ground floor, behind the pump, there was a small door to an oblong room with just one window, and this later became a dining room for Don Bosco and his first helpers.

There was a wooden set of steps built by Pinardi which Don Bosco then rebuilt in stone, going upstairs, and there from the landing you entered on the left into a room above the dining room; there was a balcony running the length of the building, and off this the doors to the four rooms, each of which had a window. There were another four rooms like this below. There was a skylight or dormer providing light from the roof, and a small cellar in the middle of the building. Behind this was the lean-to which we know as the chapel more or less the same length and width as the house.

Next to the Pinardi house, where the entrance to the second courtyard is now, was a low-slung shed that went almost the length of the entire building.

Made up of two equal parts, the southern end with door and window, had once been a stable but was now turned into a room; the northern end was used for stacking wood. Above was room for hay...

In the rental contract that Don Bosco renewed in April 1849 to March 1852, reference was made to a shed that connected the house with a fence on the north. It was the first and only extension (if we could call it that) of the Oratory prior to the building of the St Francis de Sales church, and was done so they could have a covered area to play under.

In summer 1849 Don Bosco renovated the building on the eastern side of the house, making the woodshed, stable and new shed into one large room which he could use for academies and theatre, especially in winter when the open-air stage could not be used in the little yard next to the chapel (ODB 100–102).

Surrounding land

The land around Pinardi house was 3697 square metres and was covered in grass and some trees. The northern strip (cf. fig. 7, no. 1 [page 209](#)), behind the chapel, was about 70 metres in length but only 8 wide. It was the Oratory's first playground.

To the west where the entrance to the chapel was, where the church of St Francis de Sales is now, there was an irregular field (cf. fig. 7, no. 2 [page 209](#)) about 31 by 20 metres which Don Bosco used for recreation, setting it up with a see-saw and some gym equipment.

The eastern side of the land, between the stable and the Filippi property (cf. fig. 7, no. 3 [page 209](#)), was kept for some rabbits.

Finally, in front of Pinardi house (cf. fig. 7, no. 4 [page 209](#)), much of the land was a garden (cf. ODB 102-104). This was known as *Mamma Margaret's garden*: a providential resource for the good woman who took good care of it. It would be got rid of alter to give more space to the boys for their games. At the height of their games they would often

trample on the garden. We recall the “devastation” caused by the boys when Brosio the *Sharpshooter*, was organising battles at the height of the popular and patriotic movement in 1848 and 1849 (cf. BM III, 310).

Don Bosco's room in the Pinardi house

We do not know which of the four rented upstairs rooms Don Bosco had in November 1846. But we know for sure that after that time, to get away from the mysterious nocturnal rumblings in the ceiling, he moved to the first room on the eastern end, and remained there till the new building was built (1853). The night disturbances continued even under the new arrangements, until Don Bosco put a statue of Our Lady there. This area also served as a study and reception area. On the outside architrave of the door he had written *Praised be Jesus Christ*.

This was the room where he had the famous *pergola of roses dream*. Don Bosco glimpsed his mission and his helpers working for the young in the long term. It was only apparently easy but in fact difficult (the thorns hidden under the roses along the way). But guided by Mary and urged on by pastoral charity (the roses), Don Bosco and those with the courage to follow him completed the mission entrusted to them (cf. BM III, 19–24).

Mamma Margaret occupied the room next to her son.

Organisation and development of the Oratory at the Pinardi house

The fact that he now had a stable place for the Oratory, allowed Don Bosco to reflect on the experience thus far and establish the platform for organising, keeping discipline, forming people and running the work:

When we got firmly settled at Valdocco, I gave my full attention to promoting the things that could work to preserve our unity of spirit, discipline, and administration. In the first place, I drew up a set of regulations in which I simply set down what was being done at the

Oratory, and the standard way in which things ought to be done... This little Rule brought this notable advantage: everybody knew what was expected of him, and since I used to let each one be responsible for his own charge, each took care to know and to perform his appointed duties (MO Ch. 45).

At the beginning of 1847 Don Bosco began drawing up the *Regulations for the Oratory*, which he worked on and improved over a number of years and finally published in 1877 (OE 29, 31-94). He documented this: he got hold of earlier Oratory regulations like those of St Philip Neri and St Charles Borromeo and some other contemporary cases. In particular he studied the *Rule for the Oratory of St Aloysius opened in Milan in 1842* and the *Rule for the children of the Oratory under the patronage of the Holy Family*. But the way these oratories were set up did not satisfy him: for the kind of boys he had he needed something new. So he eliminated outdated items and anything that smacked of coercion where religion was concerned, for example the Confession and Communion tickets, going to Communion by row, Confession by class groups and giving out breakfast only when someone had received Communion.

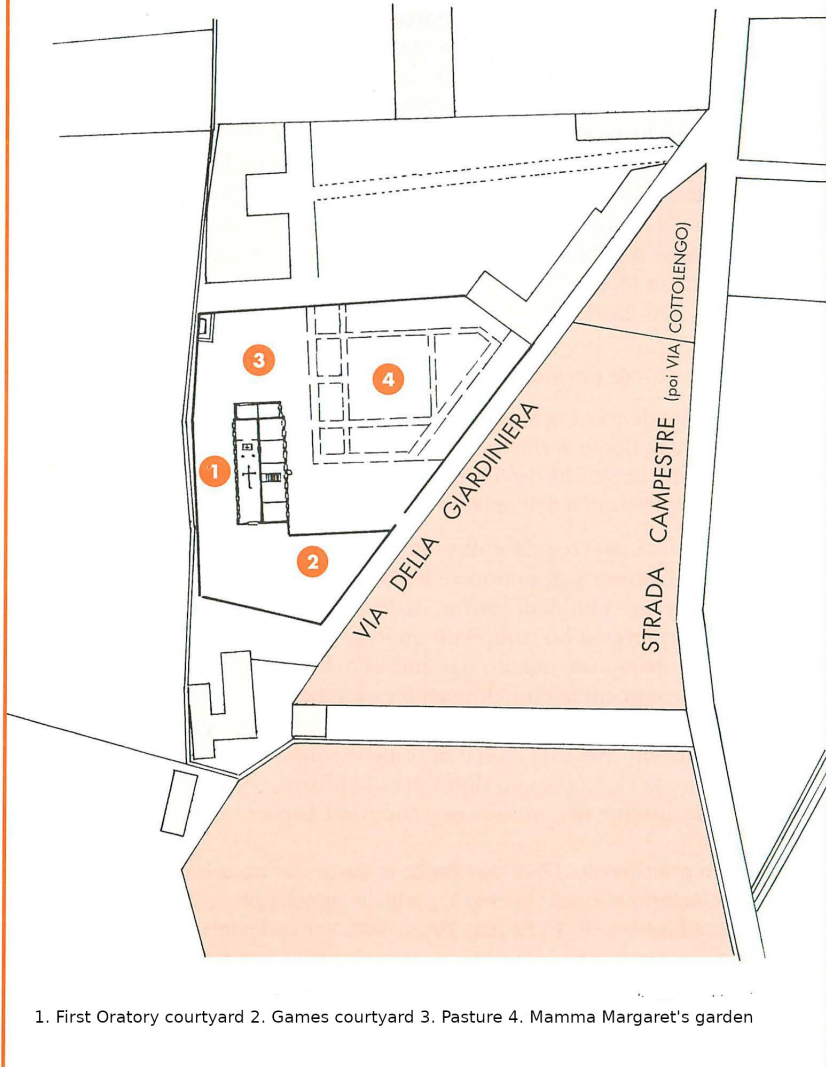
The document is in three parts. In the *first part* he presents the purpose of the Oratory and the role played by various ones who helped the Director. The *second part* is about religious practices the boys should fulfil and their behaviour in church and outside. The *third part*, drawn up later, talks about the day and evening schools and a range of general advice.

A special regulation drawn up at this time, regarded one group of boys in particular. These were the Rules for the St Aloysius Sodality, mentioned earlier, approved by Archbishop Frasoni on 12 April 1847 and later included in the general regulations for the Oratory (you can read them in BM III, 148-150).

Don Bosco took especial care to organise the *prayer life* for which he wrote a new and easy-to-use manual for his boys: *The Companion of*

Don Bosco Lived Here

Fig. 8: Pinardi house and surrounding land (1847-1851)



Youth (Paravia 1847), which reached 122 editions in his lifetime and was published in Salesian works until 1961.

Amongst the important items in 1847, the *Exercise for a happy death* deserves special mention because it was a common feature for the boys in Salesian houses until recent times. It was usually held on the first Sunday of the month and meant going to Confession and Communion as if they were the last occasion of your life and a community prayer asking for the grace of not dying a sudden and unprepared death. So this Sunday would stand out from the others, there was a special breakfast after Mass (cf. MB 3, 14-15).

Feast days too gave a certain rhythm to the Oratory and its religious aspect (novena in preparation, Confession and Communion well made, good resolutions). special recreation always went with them: games in the afternoon, lighting, balloons, fireworks, music and theatre, special guests, raffles. It was all meant to highlight how God's grace leads to full happiness. As well as the usual monthly celebrations there were particular ones: St Francis de Sales, St Aloysius Gonzaga, the Guardian Angel Our Lady (Annunciation, Assumption, Birthday, Rosary, Immaculate Conception).

As well as prayers in common the boys were also given a range of prayerful activities they could choose freely to encourage their growth in spiritual life. For example there was the Visit to the Blessed Sacrament, *a decade of the Rosary, prayers of consecration*, other prayers. Don Bosco suggested to the best boys that they make a retreat: the first time (1847) this was preached by the young Fr Federico Albert (1820-1876), future parish priest of Lanzo Torinese, and today beatified.

The *Sunday* and the *evening school* experiment continued and was growing. Don Bosco added in arithmetic, drawing, oratory, singing and music.

The approach he took was a novelty. There were many authorities, pedagogues and people interested in education for the ordinary folk who came to see and noted how effective he was. Don Bosco, for his

part, did his best to make these schools known, convinced of their importance for young working boys. So already in the early months of 1847 he was offering displays of the results gained by his pupils, inviting famous pedagogues and school people from around town: Fr Ferrante Aporti (1791–1858), Carlo Boncompagni (1804–1880), Prof. Gian Antonio Rayneri (1809–1867), Dr Pietro Baricco (1819–1877), Fratel Michele, superior of the De La Salle Brothers, and others. It was a great success and the following year (1848) both the Council and the *Royal Work for education of the Poor* opened evening schools which followed the Valdocco method. A Council Commission, seeing the results and success, gave an annual 300 lire subsidy to the Oratory, which continued until 1878 (cf. BM III, 21–21).

Don Bosco also prepared a number of texts which did well: *Church History for use in the schools* (1845), *The Metric decimal System made Simple... for use by tradesmen and country dwellers* (1846), *Bible History for use in the schools* (1847) and later, *The History of Italy told to young people* (1855).

Another successful initiative along these lines was his *singing classes*. After beginning by teaching a few hymns, Don Bosco soon went on to teaching them how to read music, and developed some teaching aids: “Since it was the first time (1845) that public music lessons were offered, the first time that music was taught in class to many pupils at the same time, there was a huge crowd. The renowned musicians Louis Rossi, Joseph Blanchi, Cerutti, and Canon Louis Nasi came and attended my classes [as observers] eagerly every evening.... They came to see how the new method was applied, the same method which is practised today in our houses” (MO Ch. 46).

For these Sunday and evening classes Don Bosco also got help from *young students*, as indicated earlier. He opened the oratory *on Thursday afternoons* for them and made himself available to tutor them, offering them some time for recreation and formation. The number of students coming to the Pinardi house that day kept growing and in fact became a new category of oratory boy. Many were catechists or worked in other

supporting roles. Towards evening Don Bosco would gather these first “leaders” and work with them to prepare the catechism classes and Sunday activities (cf. BM III, 1719-120).

New guests at the Pinardi house

The social situation in Turin was so dramatic that many of the young seasonal workers and orphans had nowhere to stay even at night time. Stables at inns, any old shed or workplace building, under eaves, were all places these lads sought for a place to sleep at night. It is easy to imagine the consequences for hygiene and morality.

While he was looking at how to respond to this emergency situation, Don Bosco had set up some straw mattresses in the hayloft and bought some sheets and blankets. But his guests did not repay his kindness well: “some of them repeatedly made off with the sheets, others with the blankets, and in the end even the straw itself was stolen and sold” (MO Ch. 46).

He had to think of a better solution. This time, as for the case of Bartholomew Garelli, it was an apparently marginal event which started an initiative that would become a stable one and one that would characterise Salesian work:

Now it happened that late one rainy evening in May [1847] a lad of fifteen showed up soaked to the skin. He asked for bread and shelter. My mother took him into the kitchen and put him near the fire. While he warmed himself and dried his clothes, she fed him a bowl of soup and some bread. As he ate, I asked him whether he had gone to school, whether he had family, and what kind of work he did. “I’m a poor orphan,” he answered me. “I’ve come from the Sesia valley to look for work. I had three francs with me, but I spent them all before I could earn anything. Now I have nothing left and no one to turn to.”

“Have you been admitted to first communion?”

“I haven’t been admitted yet.”

“And confirmation?”

“I haven’t received it yet.”

“Have you been to confession?”

“I’ve gone a few times.”

“Now where do you want to go?”

“I don’t know. For charity’s sake, let me stay in some corner of your house tonight.”

At this point he broke down and cried. My mother cried with him. I was moved.

“If I could be sure you weren’t a thief, I would try to put you up. But other boys stole some of the blankets, and you might take the rest of them.”

“Oh no, Sir. You needn’t worry about that. I’m poor, but I’ve never stolen anything.”

“If you wish,” replied my mother, “I will put him up for tonight, and tomorrow God will provide.”

“Where?” I asked.

“Here in the kitchen.”

“You’re risking even your pots.”

“I’ll see that it doesn’t happen.”

“Go ahead, then.”

The good woman, helped by the little orphan, went out and collected some bricks. With these she built four little pillars in the kitchen. On them she laid some boards and and threw a straw mattress on top, thereby making the first bed in the Oratory. My good mother gave the boy a little talk on the necessity of work, of trustworthiness, and of religion. Finally she invited him to say his prayers. “I don’t know any,” he answered. “You can say them with us,” she told him. And so he did.

That all might be secure, the kitchen was locked, and opened only in the morning.

This was the first youngster at our hospice... It was 1847 (MO Ch. 46).

The same year another boy was taken in: the two stayed at the Pinardi house until it was time for seasonal work back in the

countryside. From the end of the year, when Don Bosco was able to use all the house and land, the number of young guests grew gradually. But Don Bosco also took in some paying boarders: the son of Cav. Pescarmona from Castelnuovo, a student with Prof. Bonzanino, and two of his priest friends, Fr Carlo Palazzolo (the former sacristan whom Don Bosco helped as a student in Chieri) and Fr Pietro Ponte. During the week the two priests carried out their pastoral duties and on Sundays helped him at the Oratory, but they only lasted a year with the rigorous life at Pinardi house (cf. BM III, 175–176).

When the seminary was closed and taken over by the military (1848) he also took in some clerics. Thus the three main categories at Valdocco were taking shape: working boys, mostly without parents, students and clerics.

Amongst the early group of boys he took in were Felice Reviglio and Carlo Gastini (cf. BM III, 243–244).

Seeing the value of this initiative Don Bosco decided to develop the room he had for this purpose. So began the *Hospice* or *Home attached to the Oratory*.

Pastoral strategy

The number of boys coming to the Oratory at Pinardi continued to grow, partly because of its spontaneous attraction and partly through Don Bosco's efforts. His main concern was to look for poor and neglected boys to get them off the street and prevent greater problems. He used a variety of techniques for this, all based however on personal contact and friendship which wins over hearts. Sometimes he would walk past the work places at lunch time, mix with the apprentices and talk to them, showing he was interested in their problems; at other times when he met a group of teenagers playing cards or drafts, he would sit with them; he had fruits and sweets for the youngest urchins; he would

go into cafe's barber shops, talk to their employers and the apprentices, inviting the latter to come to the Oratory.

The best place for this was *piazza Emanuele Filiberto* (today *piazza della Repubblica*) already known then as *Porta Palazzo*. It was the market square so there were crowds of kids there every day, teenagers and older, all very poor: they sold things, matches or newspapers, shone shoes, or they were chimney sweeps, stable hands, porters... and so many other poor boys who lived from day to day. They were almost all part of the *Cocche* or gangs in Borgo Vanchiglia, real little hoodlums in fact. Until 1856 every morning Don Bosco would cross this *piazza* and find whatever pretext to catch up with many of them. Little by little he got to know them by name and brought them to the Oratory.

The area around the Pinardi house

The Pinardi property lies beyond and slightly below the *Rondò della forca* which then slopes on down towards the Dora. There were fields, gardens, occasional little cottages at least until the early Seventies, fanning out east, west and north around it. Here on these outskirts, with plenty of room, canals and irrigation channels, and where the first factories had sprung up in earlier decades, there were still chickens and cows belonging to farms on the other side of the river.

The small block of land where the Pinardi house was bordered on the south by *via della Giardiniera*, which separated it from a large area belonging to the seminary; and the Bellezza property to the west; north and east was the Filippi property.

Via della Giardiniera and Casa Bellezza

Access to the Pinardi place was off *via della Giardiniera*, a lane that ran diagonally across to what was then called *via Cottolengo* but today *via Maria Ausiliatrice*, and connected with the *casa Bellezza*.

This place, belonging to Mrs Teresa Caterina was to the west of the Oratory, about 20 metres from the door of the Pinardi chapel, where the mechanics and electromechanics workshops are today. The house ran a dive called *La Giardiniera*, and at evenings and weekends especially some of the less recommended categories of humanity would gather there: cursing, squabbling and fights would disturb Oratory activities.

Don Bosco did what he could to stop all that and keep the moral danger it represented away from his boys. For a whole year his efforts were to no avail; they did not want to sell the house, and the inn did not want to miss out on its earnings. Only in January 1854 did Don Bosco succeed in getting the place from its owner but it cost him a packet (MO 205–206).

Later he was able to get the entire property, clean it and put new and more trustworthy residents in it.

Mrs Teresa Caterina Novo owned the building, and while she was a friend and benefactor of the Oratory, she constantly declined the invitation to sell the house. When she died (1883) her children decided to sell the house and land to Don Bosco, since he really needed the land to expand his Oratory; the contract was drawn up on 8 March 1884. An exorbitant price was being asked (more than 100 thousand lire!), and this was paid by Count Colle di Tolone.

The building was only pulled down in 1922 (cf. ODB 234–236).

Filippi brothers property

The land on the north and east of Pinardi's property belonged to three brothers: Giovanni, Antonio and Carlo Filippi. To the east, almost in a straight line with the Pinardi house, was a 35 metre long two-storey building in a U-shape used as a silk factory. Opposite, along *via della Giardiniera*, on the corner with the Pinardi land, was a large shed. A certain contractor, Mr Visca had rented it from the Filippi brothers and was keeping horses and carriages there for the Council. Of an evening,

as well as the carriage drivers all kinds of poor people would seek refuge – drunks among them (cf. MB 3, 79).

The seminary field

Opposite Pinar di house beyond *via della Giardiniera*, where the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians is now, was a large field cultivated by the seminary. In Salesian tradition it is often referred to as the field of dreams, because Our Lady pointed it out in a dream to Don Bosco as the place where her church would stand and as the place where Solutor, Adventor and Octavius were martyred.

On 20 June 1850 Don Bosco bought this too as he was looking for more and more room for his boys. A few years later, when finances were very low, he resold it to Fr Antonio Rosmini (10 April 1854). Rosmini wanted to build a place there for his Congregation, including helping Don Bosco in his Oratory ministry. The plan never came to fruition, so Don Bosco, who was already thinking of building the church to Mary Help of Christians, bought it back again on 11 February 1863.

DON BOSCO'S OTHER ORATORIES

The situation in Turin in the 1840s with a massive influx of people and especially young people, brought many pastoral and religious problems with it. Fr Cocchi's and Don Bosco's efforts had shown themselves to be effective, and gained the support of people interested in the social and religious welfare of the population. The earlier fears of parish priests having been overcome, the need was seen for other oratories to be set up on the fringes of this rapidly expanding population.

Don Bosco had hundreds of boys from all over the city at the Pinar di house and saw the need to decrease the congestion at Valdocco so he could be more pastorally effective.

St Aloysius Oratory

(*corso Vittorio Emanuele II, no. 13*)

One Sunday in August 1847, seeing the huge number of boys coming to Valdocco, Don Bosco put the idea to Fr Borel of opening a second Oratory. A good number of boys were coming from *piazza Castello*, *piazza san Carlo*, *Borgo Nuovo* and *san Salvario*, and had to come a considerable distance: it seemed to be a good idea to choose one of those areas for the new project.

The Archbishop approved when asked and suggested the southern outskirts of the city. The Parish priest at *Santa Maria degli Angeli* parish was also enthusiastic about it.

So one day Don Bosco and Fr Borel went looking around Porta Nuova, along the so-called *viale del Re*, today *corso Vittorio Emanuele II*, in the direction of the Po. It was outside city limits, open, and used by lots of young people looking for places to play. They found a little house with a shed and courtyard belonging to a certain Mrs Vaglianti who was ready to rent it out for 450 lire a year. The building and courtyard were where the church of St John the Evangelist stands today.

To secure that house we had to engage in a very fierce battle with the inhabitants. It was occupied by a group of washerwomen who believed that abandoning their ancient abode would cause the end of the world. But we used a gentle approach and offered some compensation, and so a deal was struck before the belligerents reached a state of war (MO Ch. 47).

The Oratory was opened on 8 December 1847 and called St Aloysius. Fr Giacinto Cârpano (1821–1894) looked after it, he used the same regulations as for Valdocco. He was helped by cousins Roberto (1815–1883) and Saint Leonardo Murialdo (1828–1900). Cârpano, who ran the Oratory for some years, was succeeded by Fr Pietro Ponte (1821–1892), young chaplain for Marchioness Barolo and then Fr

Paolo Francesco Rossi (1828–1856), a zealous man whom the boys loved, but who died at only 28 years of age from cancer.

The Oratory remained without a priest as director for some time; Don Bosco gave the task to a young lawyer Gaetano Bellingeri who gave all his free time to the work for a whole year (1856–1857). A number of clergy helped out but none of them was able to take on responsibility for the Oratory, given the amount of time and money that would have been involved. After several attempts and long reflection Don Bosco offered the role to young Fr Leonardo Murialdo who had been teaching catechetics at the Guardian Angel Oratory and also Valdocco since he had finished at the seminary. The choice turned out to be an excellent one since Murialdo, working beside Don Bosco, had absorbed his method and spirit. He took over St Aloysius in 1857 and Don Bosco helped him with his early catechists and assistants and his best clerics: Michael Rua, Celestin Durando, Joseph Lazzero, Francis Cerutti, Francis Dalmazzo, John Cagliero, Angelo Savio and other great Salesians. Many good lay people were involved running the Oratory, such as lawyer Gaetano Bellingeri, already mentioned, Count Francis Viancino, Marquis Scarampi di Pruney, Count Pensa, lawyer Ernest Murialdo, Leonard's brother, Prof. Mosca and Engineer John Baptist Ferrante.

The Porta Nuova Oratory, like the one at Valdocco, was very poor. The chapel was poor, the other buildings very narrow and not very strong. Fr Murialdo put in a considerable sum of money from his own pocket: he had a marble tabernacle built and the altar steps; he paid for the feast day prizes and raffles bought clothing for the poorest boys. Like Don Bosco, he set up a night school for singing and followed the *Solfa* approach of Master Luigi Rossi (1823–1903). Later on this school was taken up by Master Elzeario Scala. He also started a band but soon had to give it away because of disciplinary problems. He put up a small building which could be divided into two with a wooden divider (which could be removed to make it a theatre) so he could have two primary classes for about a hundred poor boys who were rejected by other schools.

The Oratory soon found itself having to confront Waldensian propaganda given that the new Statute (Charles Albert) of 1848 had given them full freedom to promote themselves. They were not far from St Aloysius, where they had a headquarters, and a little later built a church, hospital and other social works.

Murialdo ran the Oratory until 1865 when to satisfy his felt need for further pastoral and spiritual qualification he went to the Sulpician seminary in Paris. The Oratory then came under the direction, for a long period, of zealous Fr Teodoro Scolari di Maggiate (1837–1893). After this the Oratory was run exclusively by Salesians.

Today, as we have already indicated, the church of St John the Evangelist stands where the former Oratory was, built by Don Bosco between 1878 and 1882, and designed by Edoardo Arborio Mella (1808–1884).

St Aloysius Oratory today is in a building entered from *via Ormea* no. 4.

The Guardian Angel Oratory

(was on the corner of via santa Giulia and via Tarino)

Fr John Cocchi founded the first Oratory in Turin in 1840 (1813–1895), for abandoned boys who loitered in the streets and squares around the church of the Annunciation, where he was parish priest. It was in the *Moschino* area on the left bank of the Po, near what is now *piazza Vittorio Veneto*. “More like a collection of wild animal haunts than human habitation. It sheltered the worst kind of people, was a nest of feared gangs, especially young criminals. It was a dangerous place during the day and inaccessible by night, even for the police who rarely went there and only if fully armed. The main street was called, interestingly enough, *Contrà dle Pùles* [note: flea street]” (from: A. Viriglio, *Torino e i torinesi. Minuzie e memorie*, Torino, A. Viglongo e C. Ed. 1980³, p. 149).

In 1841 Fr Cocchi shifted the Oratory closer to the centre of *Vanchiglia* under a shed in a garden belonging to casa Bronzino, where he built a little chapel and theatre. But he called it the *Guardian Angel*, after a society of young priests in Turin who were interested in looking after abandoned children.

The idea of the Oratory was to keep children busy before and after catechism classes. But very soon a good number of young workers and day workers came along. Amongst the games and activities, Fr Cocchi included gymnastics which was a novelty especially for the ordinary people.

Given the patriotic fervour of the first war of independence, a group of youths from the Vanchiglia Oratory decided to enlist in the army as volunteers. Fr Cocchi was also keen on the national ideal and not wanting to abandon them, followed them as they marched on Novara (March 1849). They were not accepted and they had to sneak back home.

But it caused a sensation and Archbishop Fransoni decided to close the Oratory temporarily. After pressure from Cafasso, Borel and Don Bosco who were concerned about the lot of youngsters from that area, the Archbishop allowed it to open the following October entrusting it to Don Bosco. With Fr Borel's help, they rented buildings out and asked Fr Càrpano to ruin it, then Fr John Vola. But they found the place and the boys too challenging and soon left it. In October 1851, still under Don Bosco, Fr Robert Murialdo, helped by his cousin Leonard took it up until 1856.

The Guardian Angel Oratory stayed there until 1871. That year Don Bosco gave it to St Julia's parish. They moved it to a more suitable place near the recently built church (1866).

When Fr Cocchi left the Guardian angel Oratory in 1849, he took up other social and pastoral initiatives. Amongst these was a work for very poor youngsters who had nowhere to live or survive. He had already taken some in at the theatre in his Oratory, then kept some in rooms

at Moncalvo, Vanchiglia and called them *Artigianelli*, since they were all young apprentices and workers. To support this work he founded a charitable association made up of clergy and laity. The statutes of the association, dated 11 March 1850, were signed in a room at the parish of the Annunciation by Fr Cocchi and Frs Giacinto Tasca, Roberto Murialdo and Antonio Bosio. The institute moved several times until 1863 when it found its own building in *corso Palestro* and still existing today.

Fr Cocchi did not direct this for long; at the end of 1852 he was already involved founding a farming commune near Cavoretto. The *Artigianelli* was given to Tasca and Fr Pietro Berizzi, who gradually established the work by setting up internal workshops which eventually became trade schools. In 1866 Saint Leonard Murialdo took over the work “temporarily” but in fact ran it for 34 years. This was where he founded the *Giuseppini*.

CHURCHES USED DURING THE WANDERING ORATORY STAGE

From summer 1845 to spring 1846 Don Bosco, with no place suitable or large enough for his Oratory’s religious functions, brought the boys to different churches around the city and surrounds. This would generally be in the morning, for Mass and Confessions, while the afternoons were spent at a temporary facility (the Little Hospital, Molassi, Moretta house, Filippi field). At other times when the weather was better Don Bosco would organise a full day walk and offer the boys a substantial snack.

We recall here some of the better known churches in Salesian tradition that Don Bosco used.

The Consolata

This is the Marian Sanctuary closest to the heart of Turin's people and was frequently visited by Don Bosco and his boys in the early days of the Oratory.

It goes back as far as the 4th century and is bound up with the discovery of an early image of Our Lady. Today's building is actually three connected churches: oval-shaped St Andrew's, the Sanctuary properly so-called which is hexagonal in shape, and the underground (or at least lower) chapel of Our Lady of Graces. The Baroque structure we see was built in 1679 and designed by Guarino Guarini, replacing an earlier Roman building from the 10th–11th century. We can still see its magnificent bell tower.

The cupola, built in 1703, was given its frescoes by G.B. Crosato in 1740. The current marble and plaster lining is the work of C. Ceppi in 1904.

St Joseph Cafasso's remains are preserved in St Andrew's chapel on the right, brought from the general cemetery by his nephew Can. Joseph Allamano, who had been rector of the Sanctuary. Nearby there is a staircase leading down the crypt or chapel of Our Lady of Graces which may have been the primitive church going back to the 4th century.

From St Andrew's church there is a fine set of steps and beaten iron gate, gift from Marquis Tancredi Falletti di Barolo, leading into the Sanctuary of the Consolata. On the central altar, work of Filippo Juvarra (1729), is an image of the Virgin and Child. Tradition identifies this as to do with the earliest icon from the 4th century but in fact it is painted on wood and comes from the 15th century, a copy of one to be found in Santa Maria del Popolo in Rome (14th century).

There is a *piazza* to the side of the building with a Corinthian column topped by a statue of Our Lady: the City of Turin erected this in thanksgiving for being freed from the cholera epidemic in 1835.

Don Bosco prayed in this church even as a seminarian whenever he visited Turin. There is a monastery to one side, which used to belong to the Cistercians prior to the French Revolution, but in Don Bosco times the *Oblates of the Virgin Mary*, founded by Fr Pio Brunone Lanteri, lived there. One of his school companions and friends entered this group – Joseph Burzio. After the law of suppression, (1855), the monastery went to the diocese and from 1882 became the Pastoral Institute (*Convitto*) under the new arrangements given it by Canon Joseph Allamano.

Don Bosco celebrated his second Mass here (Monday following the Feast of the Trinity, 7 June 1841), “to thank the great Virgin Mary for the innumerable graces she had obtained for me from her divine Son Jesus” (MO Ch. 25).

During his serious illness in July 1846, that brought him near to death’s door, the Oratory boys thronged here to the Consolata and it was their prayers and tears that gained the unexpected grace of recovery:

During his time at the *Convitto* and for a good many years afterwards, health and other duties permitting, Don Bosco often made himself available for Confession at the church.

In the early years of the Oratory the boys choir at Valdocco was often invited to sing at the various functions at the Consolata. Especially on 20 June, Feast of the Consolata, the Oratory boys would always be part of the procession.

Don Bosco often knelt before the feet of Our Lady of Consolation in some of the most difficult situations in his life. We recall one sorrowful occasion on 25 November 1856, when Mamma Margaret died at 3:00 a.m. Joseph Buzzetti went with him to the Consolata. Broken-hearted, he celebrated Mass in the lower chapel then knelt tearfully in front of the image of Our Lady: “My sons and I are without a mother! Please be our mother from now on!” (BM V, 374).

Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi, Archbishop of Turin, on the evening of 24 March 1883 came to the Consolata: “Let us go and find our dear

mother and put ourselves under her mantle. It is consoling to live and die and Mary's mantle." The witness to these words was Tommaso Chiuso, his secretary. The archbishop died suddenly on the following morning, 25 March, Easter Sunday.

The Superga Basilica

The Basilica known as the Superga was a fascinating goal and especially appropriate for an all-day walk. It stands above the city on a hill (669 metres) about ten kilometres from the centre of Turin. This majestic Basilica dedicated to Mary's nativity, was built between 1717 and 1731 and designed by Filippo Juvarra, to fulfil a vow made by Vittorio Amedeo II during the French and Spanish siege of Turin (1706).

It is a circular building which anticipates certain neo-classic features, and is flanked by two elegant Baroque bell towers which are amongst the best-known such in Piedmont. The cupola is very large and is more than 65 metres high.

There are three staircases leading up to a spacious porticoed area supported by eight huge pillars, at the entrance to the building.

Inside we see: St Maurice, first chapel on the right, by Sebastiano Ricci from Belluno (1659-1734); in the second, the Nativity of Mary, by Agostino Cornacchini from Pescia (1685-1740); in the third, Blessed Margaret of Savoy, by Claudio F. Beaumont from Turin (1694-1766).

Standing over the main altar is a marble high relief by Bernardino Cametti from Gattinara (1682-1736) showing *the Virgin, Blessed Amedeo of Savoy and the Battle of Turin* in 1706.

A door on the left of the sanctuary leads into the chapel of Our Lady of Graces, or *the chapel of the vow*, of similar dimensions to a small church that existed there in 1715. Kept there is the statue of Our Lady before which Vittorio Amedeo II made his vow to build the Basilica.

Back in the church, on the third chapel on the left we see a painting by Beaumont of St Charles; then the Annunciation, a high relief by Cametti; and in the third, St Aloysius of France by S. Ricci.

The very large building behind the church was built by Juvarra for the Congregation of Regulars whom Vittorio Amedeo II (1730) had chosen to form the upper clergy. From 1835 to 1855 *an Ecclesiastical Academy was based here*, supported by Charles Albert. It followed up scientific research and further cultural qualification for the best students who had theology degrees from the University of Turin. The Academy's huge library has now been moved to the Royal Library in Turin. Paintings of the Popes, from St Peter to John Paul II, are found in a hall on the ground floor.

Stairs lead down to an underground area built in 1777 to hold the Savoy Family tombs. Kings from Vittorio Amedeo II to Carlo Alberto are buried there.

Today the Servites look after the church and building behind.

At the back of it all, still on the hill, there is a stone recalling the tragic plane crash on 4 May 1949 when 31 people died, amongst whom the entire Turin football team.

The first *walk to the Superga*, which Don Bosco organised with boys from the Oratory, is written up in considerable detail:

Soon after 9:00 we set out for Superga. Some carried baskets of bread, some cheese, salami, fruit, or other provisions for the day. They kept quiet till we were outside the populated parts of the city, but from then on they began yelling, singing, and shouting, though they kept ranks.

On reaching the foot of the hill, where the path climbs to the basilica, I found a lovely little pony, already saddled up, which Fr Anselmetti, Anselmetti, pastor of the church, had put at my disposal. There was also a note from Dr Borrelli who had gone on ahead: It read: "Come along with our dear boys, and don't worry. The soup, the dinner, and the wine are ready." I mounted the horse and read the letter aloud. They all crowded round the horse, and after hearing the message,

broke into applause and cheers, shouting and singing... . Amid that uproar the music struck up, provided by a tambourine, a bugle, and a guitar. It was absolute discord, but it served as a backing for the noisy voices of the boys. The result was wonderfully harmonious.

Worn out with all the laughing, joking, singing, and I would say, the yelling, we reached our destination. The perspiring youngsters gathered in the courtyard of the shrine and were soon given food enough to satisfy their voracious appetites. When they had a while to rest, I called them all round me and told them all the details of the wonderful history of the basilica, with its royal tombs in the crypt, and the Ecclesiastical Academy which Charles Albert had established there and the bishops of the Kingdom of Sardinia supported.

Dr William Audisio, the president, generously provided the soup and main course for all the guests. The parish priest donated the wine and the fruit. We took a couple of hours for a tour of the area and later assembled in the church, where many people had already taken their places. At 3:00 p.m. I gave a short discourse from the pulpit, after which some of the best choir boys sang a *Tantum ergo*. Their clear voices and the novelty of it won everyone's admiration. At six we sent up some balloons to signal our departure. With renewed and lively thanks to our benefactors we struck out again for Turin, singing, laughing, running, and sometimes praying on our way. When we got to the city, the boys dropped out of our procession a few at a time at points along the route closest to their homes and returned to their families. When I got back to the Refuge, I still had with me 7 or 8 of the strongest lads, who had carried the equipment used during the day (MO Ch. 36).

Monte dei Cappuccini

On a tree-covered rise jutting out from a hill towards the Po, called *Monte dei Cappuccini*, there is a beautiful church dedicated to *Our Lady of the Mount*, built in 1683 by Ascanio Vittozzi from Orvieto (1539–1615). The building, in the form of a Greek cross, is surmounted by a cupola above an octagonal base, was opened for worship in 1611. Of note are the four altars inside by Benedetto Alfieri in 1746, with wooden statues by Stefano Maria Clemente (1719–1794) representing

four Capuchin Saints. St Francis with Madonna and Child on the right altar is a copy of a canvas by G.B. Crespi known as Cerano (1575–1632), exhibited in the Savoy Gallery; the St Maurice on the alter on the left is by Moncalvo.

The Capuchin monastery is next to the church, and was built by Vittozzi but has been largely rebuilt over a number of occasions. One part of the monastery holds the *Museo Nazionale della Montagna* (National Museum of the Mountain).

From the balcony in front of the church you get a splendid panorama of the city. Because of its strategic position and height, fortifications were built there at the end of the 13th century, and these are connected with some of the most important battles in Turin's history.

Because it was so close to the city and such a beautiful spot, Don Bosco often brought the boys here, and the Capuchins were always welcoming.

One of these outings, while the Oratory was at the Filippi field (March 1846), is described for us by a boy from that time:

We had finished only one game when everybody suddenly quieted down at the sound of a trumpet. Leaving whatever they were doing, they all crowded around the priest whom I later came to know as Don Bosco: "Dear boys," he said in a loud voice, "it's time for Mass. This morning we're going to the Monte dei Cappuccini. After Mass we'll have breakfast. Those who haven't had time for confession can go some other Sunday. As you know, confessions are heard every Sunday."

When he had finished speaking, the trumpet sounded another blast and everyone started walking in an orderly manner. One of the older boys began the rosary and all joined in. We walked for nearly two miles. I didn't dare to join the boys, but out of curiosity I followed them at a short distance and responded to the prayers with the others. As we began to climb the slope leading to the monastery, we recited the litany of Our Lady. I thoroughly enjoyed the climb; the trees, the

dirt road, and the clumps of woods covering the hillside echoed to our singing and made the walk very enchanting.

During Mass, a number of boys received Communion. After a brief sermon and thanksgiving, we all went into the courtyard of the monastery for breakfast, but since I felt I had no right to eat with them, I held back, waiting to join them on the way home (BM II, 302–303).

Madonna del Pilone

The church, dedicated to the *Annunciation*, was built in the 17th century on the place where there was an ancient column or pillar with a representation of the Annunciation on it (1587), now incorporated into the main altar. It became a parish church in 1807 for people in the surrounding suburb.

At the time of the early Oratory one would have need to cross the river on a boat to get there. This occasional outing became quite spectacular when led by Don Bosco, as happened in 1843 when the Oratory was still gathering at the *Convitto*:

One day Don Bosco took the boys to *Madonna del Pilone* (Our Lady of Anchorage). There they boarded three large boats and when they were in midstream on the Po River, they intoned a sacred hymn. People on the river bank stood still, listening; then, captivated by the melody, they followed the course of the boats, walking along the shore road. As some trumpet players happened to be among them, they took up the easy rhythm and improvised an accompaniment to the boys' singing, with magic effect. All the people came out of their houses, so that by the time the boys, about a thousand persons were there to welcome the young choristers (MB 2, 106).

Madonna di Campagna

(via Massaia, no. 98)

This church, too, is dedicated to *the Annunciation*. It goes back to the 14th century. It was destroyed during the aerial bombardment in the Second World War and rebuilt in the 1950s. The tomb of Marshall Ferdinando de Marsin is kept inside. He was captain of the French army during the siege of Turin 1706.

The Capuchins looked after the church in the 19th century. They had occupied the nearby monastery since 1567.

Don Bosco often brought the Oratory boys here, and at his time it was surrounded by green fields and linked to the road to Lanzo by a majestic lane flanked by three rows of centennial elms.

In March 1846 when the Filippi brothers reneged on the contract for their field, Don Bosco took his boys to *Madonna di Campagna*, about two kilometres from Valdocco, to ask the Mother of God the grace of finding a stable location for the Oratory. It was probably Sunday morning, 8 March. As in similar circumstances they said the rosary on the way and sang hymns.

When they entered the tree-lined lane leading from the main road to the monastery, they were all amazed to hear the church bells loudly pealing. I say “they were all amazed” because, although they had been there several times before, their arrival had never been greeted by the festive sound of bells. This was so unusual that word got around that the bells had begun ringing of their own accord. Be this as it may, one thing is certain: Father Fulgenzio, the superior of the monastery, who was then father confessor to King Charles Albert, assured them that neither he nor any other member of the community had ordered the bells to be rung, and that, notwithstanding his efforts, he was not able to find out who had rung them.

The boys went into the church for Mass... Don Bosco gave them an appropriate little talk. He compared them to birds whose nest has been knocked to the ground, and urged them to ask Our Lady to prepare for them a better and more permanent home. So they prayed

Don Bosco Lived Here

to Her with all their hearts, confident that She would grant their request. After breakfast, they returned to town for their last afternoon gathering in their meadow (MB 2, 327–328).

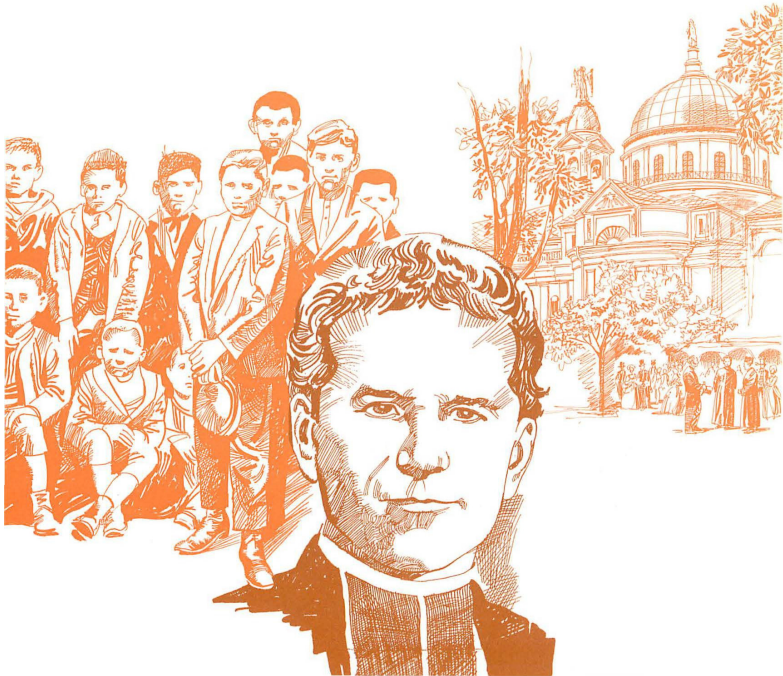
It was that day in the late afternoon that Pancrazio Soave approached Don Bosco to suggest renting the Pinardi shed.

Part Four

DON BOSCO DEVELOPS THE ORATORY

(1850–1888)

Mature years



Some details and their significance

MATURE CHOICES

This part of our guide covers the last 38 years of Don Bosco's life: the most fruitful period. These are mature years, full of events, initiatives and results.

The young priest who was known in Turin for his activities on behalf of poor and abandoned boys and for his effective and personal educational approach involving “religion, reason and loving kindness”, gradually becomes someone who catches the attention of an ever-expanding circle of people. The educational interests he led, the objectives he sought to achieve, the religious and civil values he offered took on universal dimensions thanks to a basic attitude of a religious nature combined with intelligence and socio-cultural sensitivity.

His focus on and complete availability for God's will and the inspirations of the Spirit, aware of the pastoral mission he had received, also gave him *flexibility* and an ability to *discern* historical events. Thus he succeeds in joining effective religious and formative activity with a successful pedagogical formula and clear, well-chosen practical choices.

The Oratory as it was at the beginning developed in *forms and activities that were more and more spelt out* and responded to the expectations and needs of the young. They were also new in social responses. To religious activity and catechesis he added evening and weekend literacy classes; he had a hostel for abandoned boys set up on a family model; he drew up contracts for trade preparation firstly, then developed his own workshops internally; he had a boarding house for high school students aimed at helping children from ordinary families who were clever enough but had no hope of attending public schools,

etc. It all came from faith, civic sense, imagination and real affection for young people.

He summed up the aim of all his efforts in a well-chosen formula: *forming good and upright Christians, useful citizens*. This urgent goal of preventing and shoring up against irreparable evil allows him to go beyond the conservative mindset he had grown up in, one that would have had him locked into and paralysed by rigid and inflexible models. Instead Don Bosco drew his practical inspiration from a model of society and the human being which was replete with Christian values and solid civil virtues while at the same time open to historical development: it was a harmonious arrangement of old and new or, as he himself said, “the old man renewed according to the needs of the times.”

While attentive to the real needs of the young (affection, friendship, cheerfulness, being active, community, mixing with others in groups, getting involved, strong ideals, cultural and professional development...), he wasted no opportunity to follow up social and political events. His many initiatives show us this:

- The laws of suppression of orders and religious bodies (1855) pointed him towards a *more malleable model of a religious congregation or society*.
- *School reform legislation* (1848 and 1859) encouraged him to seek solutions which would respond to his plans for education and which would also fit in with the more liberal idea of society.
- The development and gradual articulation of cooperative activity in its various forms offered him pointers for conceiving a *broad movement of Cooperators* who would serve the Church and civil society.
- The spread of *interest in the missions* on the one hand and the massive flow of *migration* towards the New World on the other, inspired a missionary project involving evangelisation, civilisation, educational activity alongside classic missionary and socio-religious

activity for Italian migrants, similar to what was happening in Valdocco.

- A growing thirst for culture amongst ordinary people, the desire to read and be informed, the spread of anti-Catholic thinking, encouraged him to dream up *very agile and economic ways of communicating and spreading Christian values* and ways of thinking; his books spread these ideas with the help of a wide network of fellow-sympathisers and had notable success for their simple language, style (narrative, examples), and for their popular sentiment.
- Lack of understanding and serious tensions between state authorities and the Church hierarchy meant that many sees were without a bishop, and this had consequences for the people. He was prudently conservative but concerned mostly for pastoral care, so became a mediator, convinced as he was for the need for *reconciliation* based on a renewed concept of *Church-State relationships*.
- The urgent need to find funds to build his works and the Sacred Heart Basilica obliged him to make *many trips around Italy, to France and Spain*, and this was an opportunity for pastoral ministry, preaching, invitation to conversion and doing good and serving the poor; he made this an opportunity to bring Catholics together and encouraged them to action and unity; it became an effective way of passing on his educational approach, his anxiety to save and safeguard young people; for his characteristic devotion to Our Lady which united both a way to perfection and historical and social activity of the highest order.

Fatigue and suffering, faith and unconditional self-giving, availability, service of the Church and the Pope meant that in the final years of his life he became an imposing figure at the highest levels: he was a point of reference for Catholics of his time but continued to be a priest for the young; he was seen as a prophet for new times, a 19th century marvel, but his message remained very simple:

Some details and their significance

- Give yourself completely to God from your youth.
- Work tirelessly and in every way to do good and avoid evil.
- Be charitable and treat your neighbour with loving kindness.
- The sacraments of Eucharist and Penance are the secret to holiness.
- Venerate the Virgin Mary as a model and help for Christian living.
- Love and serve the Church and the Pope.
- “If we do good, things will go well in this life and the next.”
- “A piece of paradise fixes everything!”

EMERGING PEDAGOGICAL AND SPIRITUAL VALUES

There are many values that can be highlighted over these 38 years. We limit ourselves to a few in reference to those areas he visited, especially ones that interest young people and those who serve them in educational and pastoral activity.

Naturally, and also for Valdocco, many of the values suggested earlier in this book remain valid. We can go back to these in reference to things like the family spirit Don Bosco created at Valdocco between educators and boys, or their professional and cultural preparation, and their journey of Christian life and spiritual development. Don Bosco put before his boys the values that had been important for him as a young man and which were the basis of his personality as a human being and Christian.

The church of St Francis de Sales reminds us that:

- Young people have a “native” feeling for absolute values, want robust spiritual invitations and know how to respond fully if they are helped, encouraged and followed up.
- A young person’s prayer must not be limited to form or emotions or odd moments here and there: it has to animate life, inspire and support choices, be part of one’s whole day.
- Grace, sacramental relationship with Christ, work marvels in young hearts and can lead them to the heights of contemplation.

- The sacrament of Penance is an essential tool along the Christian journey; it is medicine, prevention, strength, evaluation, and a way of facing up to issues.
- Concrete models of Christian living which are close to a youthful mindset and the situation they are in, are powerful and effective channels for values.
- Christian truths, liturgy and sacraments, devotion to Mary, the Bible... need to be presented and experienced in their totality, but in ways that young people can follow: youth ministry is not a minor or piecemeal pastoral activity despite it using youthful language and forms.

The *home attached to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales*, with its community life, activities and rhythms, teach us that:

- The young person has a compelling need for understanding, friendship, being loved in his (or her) own right, for confidence but also needs successful adult models, spiritual fatherliness (not paternalism!).
- A positive, calm youthful community filled with values and actively involved, is one of the most effective means of formation;
- the best apostles of the young are young people themselves.
- To educate like Don Bosco did there is a need for a well-knit group enlivened by charity, generosity and self-denial, inspired by religious motivation, an optimistic outlook on mankind and history (which is the history of salvation!).
- Today's young person is tomorrow's adult: every choice, every activity, including play, contributes to our formation; the educator has to be far-sighted, respectful, intuitive, qualified; his or hers is an historic mission.
- Youth ministry and educational activity will be impaired and ineffective unless they focus on vocation and professional formation.
- A plan is essential, one which is shared and carried out by an educative community where activities, choices, times, duties, lighter

Some details and their significance

moments. catechesis, formation, prayer, culture are coordinated and given purpose...

- *Prevention* is building up positive values and attitudes before keeping evil in check.
- Formation of thinking and beliefs filtered through the *critical use of reason* is not manipulation nor does it produce fanatics. It produces free, malleable and balanced people.
- The educator's task includes discovering and encouraging talents and offering opportunities for their expression and development.
- Cultural and professional preparation cannot be delegated uncritically: it is not just a question of technical skills being passed on but of forming ways of thinking, a worldview, values.

Historical, geographical and biographical notes

SOCIAL AND PASTORAL ACTIVITY IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 19TH CENTURY

After the fall of neo-Guelphianism after 1848–1849, the gap between liberal classes who were in government and the Catholic world, widened. The latter did not approve of the anti-Roman national unification model and took refuge behind conservative positions. Given legislation affecting the Church, suppression of religious congregations, school reform, tensions were on the increase, aggravated by waves of anticlericalism on the one hand and rigid intransigence on the other. It came to the point of complete breakdown in dialogue when the papal states were occupied and Rome was taken (1870). One of the saddest and most obvious consequences was that when their Ordinaries died, many sees remained vacant. The financial situation for local Churches worsened given the new fiscal burdens imposed due to the expropriation of ecclesiastical goods. There was a strong vocational crisis that was only overcome in the 1880s.

Any efforts at reconciliation by the more open exponents of either party were in vain.

In 1861 Fr Giacomo Margotti launched the motto in *L'Armonia*, a Turin newspaper: “neither elected, nor electors”, inviting Catholics to pull back from any participation in political life as a protest against liberal positions. In 1868 the Sacred Penitentiary made a theory of this position in the principle of *non expedit*, taken up and confirmed in 1874 by Pope Pius IX. With regard to the more or less intransigent position of the *non expedit*, Catholics held different positions until the Holy Office,

in 1886, interpreted it officially as forbidding Catholics from any direct kind of involvement in political life.

But in fact, from the 1850s Catholics, having withdrawn from any compromise with power, devoted their efforts more carefully to the religious, educational field, and to welfare and then more general social activity later on. Clergy and laity set in motion a range of activities, from popular missions, renewing the older confraternities, setting up new religious associations, to founding schools and colleges (understood more as boarding schools), kindergartens, rest homes, hospitals, rural banks, worker and mutual aid societies. So the warp and woof of initiatives and understandings was taking shape that would come together in the *Opera dei Congressi* (1874–1904) and a Catholic mass movement with strong social connotations.

Hierarchy and clergy focused their attention and efforts on more properly religious and pastoral aspects of Church life. We also saw a general recovery in the Catholic world in Europe and Italy that led, for example, to renewal in the study of theology (neo-Thomism), bible and liturgy (biblical and liturgical movement), catechesis (birth of various catechetical movements), missionary involvement, etc.

We also saw a renewal of spiritual life and a heightened interest in the supernatural and the miraculous in Catholic settings in the last decade of the century, helped along by extraordinary apparitions (the best-known being Lourdes and La Salette) and by the attractive power of charismatic figures like Don Bosco himself.

One sector that underwent enormous development was consecrated life. The crisis of the great religious orders on the one hand, and on the other the impelling need for pastoral workers, people to work in education and welfare, led to the flourishing of small and moderately large congregations of women especially, but also men. These were mostly locally based ones that responded effectively to local needs.

All these choices meant a welding of Catholic hierarchy to popular settings, clergy to laity and were prelude to a model of Church that would become more explicit in the century to follow.

Don Bosco's activity, along with others in the area of "Christian charity" urged on by the serious needs of young and ordinary people, opened the way to the Christian socialism of the end of the century. Don Bosco was fundamentally a pragmatic individual who sought to tackle the situation by getting around obstacles and moving in places of agreed manoeuvrability. He adapted to the laws and arrangements of liberal society which had allowed free competition, pluralism, and a secular understanding of the State.

Thus his works had a certain energy and adaptability about them and the beneficiaries of his work, "poor and abandoned and at-risk youth", were developing into more complex categories: from seasonal workers in the 1840s and 50s, to the children of working-class families in the suburbs, to young students from the middle class in the new Italian State who would be the future clergy, to emigrants to the Americas, and he also included the "savages" of Tierra del Fuego submerged in the darkness of paganism.

Don Bosco, starting from his Valdocco experience, shows up as the true saint: faithful to God, but also a special witness for his times, able to give rise to real responses to the expectations of the future.

TIMELINE – BUILDINGS (1851–1888)

Dates	Acquiring and building
1851–1852	Church of St Francis de Sales
1852–1853	Don Bosco’s house and the first part of the new wing (the <i>Camerette</i>)
1856	Pulling down and rebuilding the Pinardi house Two wings for day school primary classes on the <i>via Giardiniera</i> and the small reception office
1859	A large area with 3 rooms for senior classes in the courtyard to the north
1859–1860	A larger reception area
1860	Bought the house and Filippi land New sacristy for the Church of St Francis de Sales
1861	Extension and other adjustments to the <i>casa Filippi</i> First extension of the <i>Camerette</i> wing
1862	Portico and terrazzo in front of the <i>Camerette</i> Two-storey building along the <i>via Giardiniera</i> for the printing press, dormitories and new entrance-reception area
1863-1864	Three-storey building for use as classrooms adjacent to the east wall (<i>casa Audisio</i>)
1863	Reacquires the “field of the dreams” sold to the Rosminians
1863–1868	Church of Mary Help of Christians
1870	Buys back the large garden area to the north, from Modesto Rua. It has once been part of the Filippi property
1873	Buys then demolishes the <i>casa Coriasco</i>
1874–1875	Builds what is today’s reception area
1876–1877	Further extension of the <i>Camerette</i> wing

Dates	Acquiring and building
1880	Buys the <i>casa Nelva</i> and grounds for the festive oratory
1881	Extends the garden area to the north
1881–1883	Builds a new location for the printing press
1883–1884	Builds new mechanics workshop
1884	Buys the <i>casa Bellezza</i> and land

(Cf. F. Giraudi, *L'Oratorio di don Bosco. Inizio e progressivo sviluppo edilizio della Casa Madre dei Salesiani in Torino*, Torino, SEI 1935²).

TIMELINE–EVENTS (1850–1888)

Dates	Events
1850	Don Bosco founds the workers or mutual aid society
1852	Archbishop Fransoni appoints Don Bosco as Director of the Oratories
1853	Begins publication of the <i>Lecture Cattoliche</i> (Catholic Readings) Internal workshops for shoemakers and tailors
1854	First nucleus of the <i>Salesian Society</i> : called “Salesians” Book-binding workshop Dominic Savio comes to Valdocco
1855	First internal class (3rd form secondary) given to cleric Francesca
1856	Carpentry workshop Another two internal classes (1st and 2nd secondary) Sets up the <i>Immaculate Conception Sodality</i>
1857	Sets up the <i>Blessed Sacrament Sodality</i> and a <i>St Vincent de Paul Youth Conference</i>

Dates	Events
1858	Don Bosco makes his first trip to Rome and presents Pius IX with his plans for a religious society and the first draft of the Constitutions Founds the <i>Altar Boys</i> group
1859	Secondary school complete (5 classes) Sets up the <i>St Joseph's Sodality</i> The <i>Salesian Society</i> becomes official
1860	First lay members (= coadjutors) in the Salesian Society
1861	Founds the Printing Press
1862	Metalwork workshop
1863	First place outside Turin, at Mirabello Monferrato (AL), directed by M. Rua
1864	Founds the College at Lanzo Torinese (TO) <i>Decretum laudis</i> for the Salesian Society First meeting with Mary Domenica Mazzarello
1865	The <i>Library of Latin Authors</i>
1867	Second trip to Rome
1868	Consecration of the Church of Mary Help of Christians
1869	Pontifical approval of the Salesian Society Opening of school at Cherasco (CN) Begins work on the <i>Library of Italian Youth</i> Third trip to Rome
1870	Founds the school and boarding section at Alassio (SV) Fourth trip to Rome Transfers the school at Mirabello to Borgo S. Martino (AL)

Dates	Events
1871	Finds the trade school at Marassi (GE) which moves to Sampierdarena the following year Foundation of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians Two trips to Rome (in June and September) Arch. Gastaldi becomes archbishop of Turin Opening of the house at Varazze (SV)
1872	Accepts the college at Valsalice in Turin
1873	First tensions with Gastaldi Seventh and eighth trip to Rome
1874	Final approval of the Constitutions of the Salesian Society First General Chapter of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, where Mazzarello is elected Superior General
1875	Ninth trip to Rome First missionary expedition to Argentina
1876	Tenth and eleventh trip to Rome Pontifical approval of the Salesian Cooperators Contacts in France regarding possible foundations
1877	Three trips to Rome Opening of the <i>Patronage de St Pierre</i> in Nice (France) First General Chapter of the Salesian Society Finds the <i>Salesian Bulletin</i>
1878	Death of Pius IX and election of Leo XIII, while Don Bosco is in Rome for his fourteenth visit First audience with Leo XIII Blessing of the foundation stone of the church of St John the Evangelist in Turin
1879	Fifteenth trip to Rome Opening of the novitiate at San Benigno Canavese (TO)

Dates	Events
1880	Sixteenth trip to Rome Don Bosco agrees to complete the building of the Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Rome
1881	First foundation in Spain: Utrera (Seville) Seventeenth trip to Rome Death of Mary Mazzarello
1882	Trip to France and again to Rome Consecration of the church of St John the Evangelist
1883	Cardinal Alimonda becomes Archbishop of Turin Fr Achille Ratti, future Pius XI, visits the Oratory Fr Cagliero made Vicar Apostolic of Patagonia
1884	Important trip to France, despite worsening health Nineteenth trip to a Rome The Letter from Rome on the state of the Oratory Don Bosco's schools take part in the National Industrial Exhibition in Turin, where they have their own pavilion Episcopal consecration of Cagliero
1885	Despite his health, Don Bosco make a new journey to France Fr Rua appointed as his Vicar, with right of succession
1886	Journey to Spain
1887	Final trip to Rome for the consecration of the Sacred Heart Basilica Don Bosco celebrates his last Mass on 11 December
1888	31 January: Don Bosco's death

SUGGESTIONS FOR VISITS AND TOURS

Your visit to Valdocco can be tailored to the needs of your groups.

Accessibility

Casa Don Bosco Museum is an accessibility-friendly venue, certified as such by *Turismabile*, Region of Piedmont. The elevator is accessible from the courtyard behind the large bronze statue of Don Bosco, beneath the portico in front of the ticket office.

Reservations

Valdocco has a number of larger rooms available which you can reserve for your group by emailing <accoglienza@valdocco.it>.

Guided visits of Casa Don Bosco Museum can be requested at <info@museocasadonbosco.it>.

If you prefer to visit on your own, we recommend beginning at *Pinardi chapel* (page 215), then proceeding to the *church of St Francis de Sales* (page 266), Casa Don Bosco Museum including the *Camerette* (Don Bosco's rooms) (page 293) and the *Basilica of Mary Help of Christians* (page 323).

The newest point of interest in Valdocco is *Casa Don Bosco Museum*, the historic centre of the Salesian citadel of Valdocco, a radical restoration of the original structures built by Don Bosco, including his *Camerette*. Particularly noteworthy is the rediscovery of the rooms in the basement, the oldest in Valdocco. The entire first and second floors have been transformed, including the rooms where Don Bosco lived and died. Visitors can easily spend up to two hours enjoying these sacred Salesian spaces.

Good spots for reflection, prayer or Mass: Pinardi chapel – church of St Francis de Sales – the *Camerette* chapel in Casa Don Bosco Museum – Basilica. Use of these worship spaces is possible in agreement with the Rector of the Basilica. You can make reservations at Rector of the Basilica. You can make reservations at <segreteria@basilicamariaausiliatrice.it>.

Tours of the various places

This guidebook presents the buildings of the *Salesian citadel* in Valdocco in chronological order:

1. The *historical centre* made up of buildings constructed by Don Bosco between 1851 and 1856 (which he subsequently expanded or renovated): the church of St Francis de Sales and the adjacent building (1853, 1856) including the *Camerette* wing
2. *Church of Mary Help of Christians* (built between 1863 and 1868, with extensions carried out after Don Bosco's death from 1935–1938);
3. *Other buildings built by Don Bosco and still existing*: reception area (1874–1875) the printing press (1881–1883);
4. *Places Don Bosco built but which were then rebuilt*: former Filippi house (adapted and extended in 1861, then completely rebuilt in 1952), former Audisio house (built between 1863 and 1864, then pulled down and rebuilt in 1954);
5. *Places built after Don Bosco's death*: the house of the *Superior Chapter* of the Congregation; the trade school complex; middle school and theatre in the second large courtyard; kitchen, laundry room, refectory (1927); the (new) oratory;
6. *Buildings facing piazza Maria Ausiliatrice*.

To this list we can add the *church of St John the Evangelist* near Porta Nuova train station, and *Valsalice* on the other side of the River Po.

THE HISTORICAL CENTRE

(built between 1851 and 1856)

The consolidation and evolution of activities at the early Oratory, along with the exponential increase in the numbers of boys attending on weekdays and on weekends, convinced Don Bosco of the absolute necessity of moving to a second stage of development: building new areas he had only dreamt of till then. His faith in divine Providence and his bold entrepreneurial spirit prompted him to undertake courageous projects, especially in the light of his meagre financial resources. He relied entirely on lotteries and private and public donations as his main source of income.

The most pressing need was to build a bigger and more dignified *church* to replace the shabby Pinardi Chapel; then, he needed to extend the *home attached to the Oratory* by building a large hospice for his many young apprentices and students, mostly orphaned and completely abandoned boys.

Church of St Francis de Sales (1851–1852)

In order to lengthen the Pinardi chapel, Don Bosco relocated its original sacristy, attached to the chapel, to a tiny room inside the Pinardi house. But even after this modest expansion the place remained uncomfortable. Don Bosco offers this description: The Pinardi chapel was inadequate

on account of its capacity and its lack of height. To enter one had to go down two steps; as a result in winter and when it rained we were flooded out. In summer the heat and the bad odours suffocated us. Few feast days passed without some pupil fainting and being carried out limp. So it was necessary to start a building more proportionate to the number of youngsters, better ventilated, and more healthy (MO Ch. 55).

The plans for the new church, facing onto *via della Giardiniera* (which cut diagonally across what is today's main courtyard), were

drawn by Federico Blachier and the construction was entrusted to Federico Bocca, a faithful benefactor of the Oratory since 1847. The *City Building Council* approved the project on 24 June 1851, even though work had in fact already begun a month earlier, namely, demolishing the wall that separated the two courtyards (one in front and one on the west side of the Pinardi house) on which the church was built) as well as the excavation for the foundations.

On 20 July 1851, with the excavations completed, the *corner stone* was laid. It was a grand ceremony. Representing Archbishop Fransoni (exiled in Lyon) the blessing was given by Canon Ottavio Moreno, the royal almoner; the corner stone was laid by Giuseppe Cotta, a banker and generous benefactor of Don Bosco and many other charitable works in the city. In the presence of 600 oratory boys and many distinguished guests, the enthusiastic Fr Barrera improvised a splendid address where he likened the corner stone of the future church to a mustard seed and added: “it symbolizes [...] that these Oratories, founded on Christian faith and charity, will be unshakeable rocks against which the enemies of the Church and the spirits of darkness will hurl themselves in vain” (BM IV, 193).

Work advanced quickly. By August the walls were already several metres high. To finance his project Don Bosco sold small plots of land, which he had bought from the seminary in 1850, to Giovanni Battista Coriasco and Giovanni Emanuel, but the 4,000 lire he gained were barely enough to pay for part of the excavations. So he printed public circulars and petitions, thanks to which he collected 35 thousand lire from small and large donors; a further 1,000 came from King Victor Emanuel and Bishop Losana of Biella; the *Royal Apostolic Treasury* gave him 10,000 lire which could be drawn on for completed work. But even this was not enough. So in December 1851 Don Bosco organised a grand lottery – the first of many – from which he unexpectedly earned 26,000 lire, which he wanted to share with the neighbouring hospital, Cottolengo’s Little House of Divine Providence.

The financial need that urged Don Bosco to seek funds from public bodies and private benefactors from every walk of life served as great publicity and awareness raising for his work. Respect for him grew.

The St Francis de Sales church was quickly completed and on 20 June 1852, when Turin was celebrating the Feast of the Consolata, the parish priest of Borgo Dora, Fr Agostino Gattino, solemnly blessed *this new building*. The morning ceremony flowed into the afternoon. It attracted throngs of youngsters, ordinary folks and important social personalities and benefactors (cf. BM IV, 298–304).

As it was for construction costs, so too for the furnishings. Many benefactors came forth, for whom Don Bosco was most grateful:

The church was built but needed all kinds of furnishings. Civic charity did not let us down. Comm. Joseph Dupré undertook to decorate a chapel dedicated to St Aloysius, and buy a marble altar which still adorns the church. Another benefactor undertook to fit out the choir loft, where a small organ was set up for the day boys. Mr Michael Scannagatti bought a complete set of candlesticks; Marquis Fassati undertook to supply Our Lady's altar and provided a set of bronze candlesticks, and later the statue of Our Lady. Fr Caffasso paid all the expenses incurred for the pulpit. The high altar was provided by Doctor Francis Vallauri and completed by his son, Fr Peter (MO Ch. 56).

The *bell tower* of St Francis de Sales church was completed between December 1852 and February 1853. On 22 May 1853, next to the little bell tower of the first church, a larger one was built as a gift from Count Carlo Cays (1813–1882), a friend of Don Bosco, one of the most active Catholics in Turin. When his wife died in 1876, Cays entered the Salesian Society and became a priest. In 1929, in honour of Don Bosco's beatification, both bells were completely recast to restore their pitch.

Visiting the Church of St Francis de Sales

The Church of St Francis de Sales offers key insights on the essential elements of the spirituality Don Bosco lived with his boys:

- In the small choir behind the altar Don Bosco heard confessions for three hours a day, offering a kind of essential but substantial *spiritual direction*.
- The *Eucharist* celebrated on the altar, received at the communion rail and adored here was the driving force of the Oratory.
- The *Virgin Mary* was loved and venerated here as a mother, a helper, and a model of Christian perfection.
- *St Francis de Sales, St Aloysius Gonzaga and St Joseph* were also shining examples of virtue to be emulated.
- Throughout the year, many *feasts* and personal and community practices of piety found in *The Companion of Youth* were celebrated here.
- *Singing* was an integral component of shared prayer, always prepared attentively and adapted to the boys.
- The *daily example* of Don Bosco, Mamma Margaret, the first Salesians and so many exceptional boys reinforced the spiritual journey of this growing community.

All of this nurtured the interior life of the Oratory community members.

The Interior Decoration of 1959

The church, in the shape of a Latin cross, is 28 m. long and 11 m. wide. Don Bosco wanted it to be functional and dignified, but essential in its decoration.

Today's interior was a subsequent embellishment project. Fr Fedele Giraudi, Economer General of the Congregation, undertook a major Valdocco rebuilding project which included an upgraded interior design for the Church of St Francis de Sales: the old floor was replaced; the walls were lined with marble; the paintings were restored.

Entrance to the church is usually through the side door on the east side near the portico, connecting the church to the main courtyard.

Upon entering the Church, on the east wall is a painting of Fr Michael Rua's first Mass (Crida 1960) which was celebrated on the altar of this church on 30 July 1860. Don Bosco is assisting him and John Cagliero and John Baptist Francesia are the two assisting deacons. Cagliero and Francesia would celebrate their first Mass at this same altar on 15 June 1862.

Above the entrance we see Count and Countess Federico and Carlotta Callori from Vignale (Crida, 1960), amongst the first and most generous benefactors and friends of Don Bosco.

Our Lady's altar was donated by Marquis and Marchioness Dominic and Maria Fassati and has remained more or less unchanged, even though the two plaster pillars and the wooden altar rail have been replaced with marble ones. The statue of Mary Immaculate we see today is not original. The original statue – Our Lady of the Rosary, with the Child Jesus, which had come from the Consolata – was a gift from Marquis Fassati. Alas, during the 1959 renovations, this statue was lost.

The two paintings on the side walls of the Marian chapel are by Càffaro Rore. They depict events from Dominic Savio's life which occurred in this Church. On the right, Dominic's vision of Pius IX with torch in hand in reference to the conversion of England; on the left, Dominic with some friends reading the rules of the *Immaculate Conception Sodality* which he founded. This second sodality at the Oratory was founded on 8 June 1856 in front of the Marian altar, where Dominic would often pray alone or with his friends. The Sodality's members promised to carry out their duties, try to be holy and to be apostles amongst their peers (cf. DS 75-83).

Two years prior to this, on 8 December 1854, when Pius IX had proclaimed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, Dominic consecrated himself to Our Lady at this side altar:

On the evening of that day, 8 December, when the church functions were over, and after consulting his confessor, Dominic went before Our Lady's altar, renewed the promises he had made at his First

Communion, then said the following repeatedly: Mary, I give you my heart; may it always be yours. Jesus and Mary always be my friends; but please may I die rather than have the misfortune to commit even a single sin (DS Ch. 8).

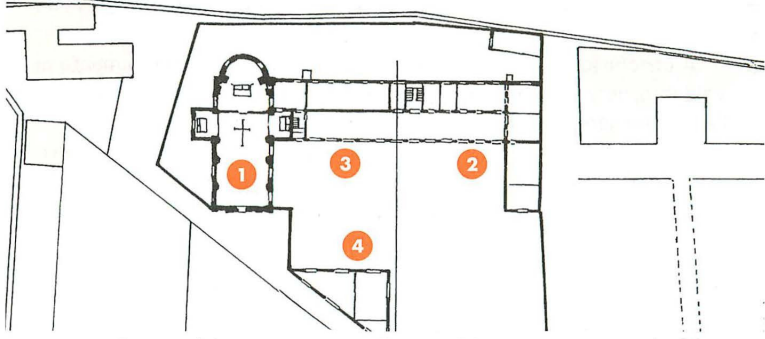
On the pillar between Our Lady's chapel and the sanctuary is Don Bosco's original pulpit, a gift from Fr Cafasso. From this pulpit Don Bosco preached his daily sermon to the boys, including the one that convinced Dominic to make a new spiritual commitment:

Savio had been living at the Oratory for six months when there was a sermon given on how easy it was to become a saint. The preacher develop three ideas in particular that made a great impression on Dominic, and they were: it is God's will that we all become saints; it is very easy to succeed; there is a great reward ready in heaven for whoever becomes a saint. For Dominic that sermon was a spark that kindled God's love in his heart. He said nothing for some days, but was less cheerful than usual and this was noted by his companions and also by myself. Thinking it might be because he had some new health problem I asked him if he was feeling ill. "On the contrary," he answered, "I feel rather good." "What are you telling me?" "I am saying that I feel the desire and need to become a saint; I didn't think it was so easy to become a saint but now I have understand that we can do so and also remain cheerful, I absolutely want and need to become a saint. So tell me what I have to do to begin."

I praised his resolve, but encouraged him not to be concerned, because the Lord's voice is not heard among such feelings of disquiet; I told him that first of all I wanted to see a constant and balanced cheerfulness, and advising him to persevere with his duties of study and piety I recommend that he never fail to take part in recreation with his companions (DS Ch. 10).

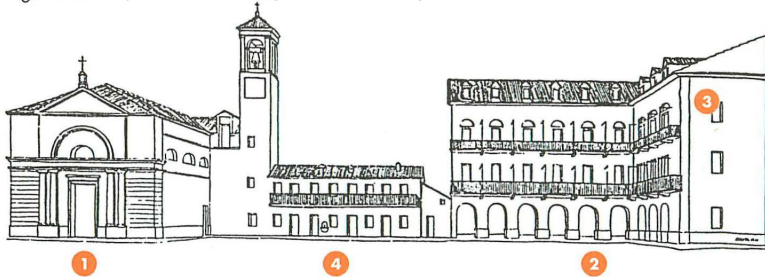
Don Bosco Lived Here

Fig. 9: Plan of new buildings 1851-1856



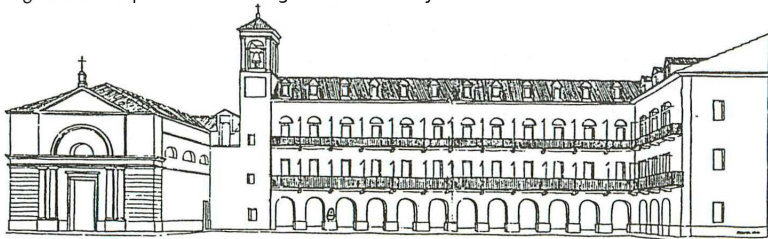
1. Church of St Francis de Sales
2. Don Bosco's house
3. Former Pinardi house (1856)
4. Primary classrooms and reception (1856)

Fig. 10: Perspective drawing of the Oratory (1853)



1. Church of St Francis de Sales (1852)
2. Don Bosco's house (1853)
3. Don Bosco's room from 1851-1861
4. Pinardi house

Fig. 11: Perspective drawing of the Oratory 1856-1861



The *high altar*, a gift of the Vallauri family, with its tabernacle and candle ledges (originally there were three ledges; today there are two) is original. The base of the altar was modified by Fr Giraudi to accommodate Fr Michael Rua's casket on the occasion of his beatification.

This *tabernacle* was blessed by Don Bosco on 7 April 1852. It was the focal point of the church and the spirituality at the Oratory. Don Bosco often told his boys that the pillars of the spiritual life are the sacraments of the Eucharist and Penance, well and frequently celebrated. These were the two means he used to transform so many poor boys on their journey of faith. Living the sacraments helped them to become spiritual giants.

At the *communion rail*, Mamma Margaret, Dominic Savio, and the first generation of boys and Salesians received Communion. The marble rail was added during the 1956 renovations; it replaced the original wooden rail which is now on display in the Casa Don Bosco Museum, on the second floor Gallery entitled Salesian Holiness in Valdocco.

On the wall to the right of the altar we see Dominic's famous ecstasy after Communion (Càffaro Rore), which occurred in the small choir behind the main altar. It was his favourite place to offer his prayer of thanksgiving. Don Bosco leaves us this account in his biography of the young saint:

It often happened that going to church, especially on the days Dominic Savio went to Communion, or when the Blessed Sacrament was exposed, he would be beyond himself, spend far too long there unless called on to do his various duties. It happened one day that he was not there for breakfast, school, or lunch and no one knew where he was; he was not in study nor in bed. When the Director was told, he guessed what it might really be, that he would be in church, since this had happened other times. He went to the church, went to the choir and saw him there like a rock. He had one foot on the other, one hand balanced on the edge of the lectern, the other placed on his breast with his face turned to the altar. His lips were not moving. I called him but he did not answer. I struck him lightly then he turned and said: "Oh, is Mass already over?" "Look," the Director said showing him the watch,

“It’s two o’clock.” He humbly asked forgiveness for breaking the rules of the house, and the director sent him off to lunch, telling him: “If someone asks you where you are coming from tell them you were doing something for me” (DS Ch. 19).

Sacristy

From 1846 to 1851, the Oratory sacristy was inside the Pinardi Chapel. In 1851 Don Bosco relocated it to a room inside the Pinardi House. In 1860, a new sacristy was added to the Church of St Francis de Sales, to the left side of the altar. This sacristy was built by businessman Charles Buzzetti. He and his brother Joseph, a Salesian Brother, were among the first boys welcomed by Don Bosco in 1841 after the meeting with Bartholomew Garelli.

Above the sacristy door we see *St Joseph Cafasso at prayer* (Favaro, 1960).

The *St Aloysius Gonzaga chapel* is the most original part of the church; only the balustrade has been replaced. The altar, donated by banker Joseph Dupré, the tabernacle, the niche and statue of St Aloysius are all original.

The simple plaster statue, likely purchased by Don Bosco when they were was still praying in the Pinardi chapel, was carried in procession on St Aloysius’ feast day to impress upon the hearts of the boys of this model of gospel charity and youthful chastity. These were fundamental values of the Oratory’s youth spirituality.

On the side walls of the St Aloysius chapel are two canvases by Favaro: on the right (1961) we see Dominic Savio, Michael Magone and Francis Besucco, three exemplars of Salesian youth spirituality whose biographies Don Bosco wrote; on the left (1959) is Pancrazio Soave accompanying Don Bosco to the Pinardi house on Palm Sunday, 5 April 1846.

On the *west wall towards the centre* of the church, we find two large paintings by Dalle Ceste (1960). The painting on the left depicts

St Francis de Sales preaching to the people in his efforts to reconvert Catholics who had passed to Calvinism back to the Church. On the right, the dream of 1844 (*The Field of Dreams*; cf. BM II, 318), in which Mary reveals to Don Bosco his future Oratory: the church of St Francis de Sales (visible in the background), and with her foot, indicating the place where the Basilica would one day rise, on the spot where three Roman soldiers, Ottavio, Solutore, and Avventore, converts to Christianity, had been martyred.

The *large area at the back of the church* was for the choir begun by Don Bosco himself and developed by John Cagliero (1838–1926), one of the first Salesians, an accomplished musician and future Cardinal. This area was eventually enhanced with a small organ, later replaced by better instruments; the organ in the loft today is by Tamburini, Crema (1959).

From 1852 to 1856, Mamma Margaret was often in this church. Tradition holds that she prayed her rosary sitting in the last pew on the left.

Once the Church of St Francis de Sales was built Don Bosco could lead more dignified liturgical and religious functions. Every day and especially on feast days, he sought devotion, precision, decorum and solemnity at worship. Cleric Joseph Bongiovanni (1836–1868) founded the *Blessed Sacrament Sodality* in 1857, “aimed at promoting the frequent and regular reception of the sacraments and the worship of the Holy Eucharist” (BM V, 499). The following year he organised the boys with more leadership potential into a group of *Altar Servers*:

Besides promoting the decorum of God’s house, its primary purpose was to foster priestly vocations, especially among the more devout students of the upper grades. After adequate training, the Knights of the Altar were allowed to serve Sunday Mass in cassock and surplice and to assist in a body inside the sanctuary at the sacred services on the principal feasts of the year. They were also trained to be torchbearers, acolytes, thurifers, cross-bearers, and masters of ceremonies at solemn high Mass, Vespers, Benediction of the Blessed

Sacrament, processions, Holy Week services, and funerals (BM V, 517).

Many original artefacts which originally embellished this church can be admired throughout Casa Don Bosco Museum:

- a **statue of St Joseph** that once stood on the left side of the presbytery (opposite the pulpit), is now in the Large Dining Room in the basement of the Museum, beneath this church. Don Bosco chose St Joseph as the second patron of the oratory, especially to inspire the boys who were learning to be artisans. Among them was cleric John Bonetti (1838–1891). In 1859 he founded the *St Joseph's Sodality* with the purpose of “promoting the glory of God and the practice of Christian virtues” (MB VI, 654).
- an **oval painting of Saint Francis de Sales, most likely a gift from the Marchioness Barolo**, which originally hung in the apse behind the altar (visible in the painting of Rua's first mass); today it is displayed in the Gallery of Paintings on the first floor of the Museum.
- a statue of **St Francis de Sales** that replaced the oval painting in this church is now in the Museum chapel, on the second floor near the *camerette*.
- the original **wooden communion rail** from the high altar, where Mamma Margaret, Dominic Savio, and the first generation of boys and Salesians received Communion, is now on the second floor of the Museum, in the Gallery of Salesian Holiness Lived in Valdocco.
- The **original door to the tabernacle** where Dominic had his ecstasy is on display in the same Gallery.

Leaving the Church: the plaque of the multiplication of the loaves

As you leave the Church from the east entrance, turn right and notice the small plaque on the outside wall beside the doorway. This plaque recalls the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves of bread.

For breakfast, it was customary for Don Bosco to offer a bread roll to his resident students as they came out of the church after daily Mass. One morning in November 1860 the baker, Mr Magra, had not brought any bread because Don Bosco had not paid him for some time. Don Bosco had what little bread remained brought to him in a basket. There were about twenty rolls. He personally began to give them out while Francis Dalmazzo, a fifteen-year-old boy at the Oratory, looked on. He offers this testimony:

the boys kept filing past [don Bosco] to get their piece of bread from him and kiss his hand as he smiled and said a kind word to each of them. Each lad – some four hundred – received a bun. When the distribution was over I again peered into the basket. To my great astonishment I saw as many buns in it as there had been before, though no other bread and no other basket had been brought up (MB VI, 455).

The 1853 building (Don Bosco's house)

Facing the long portico, the original “Don Bosco House” (1853), is the part of today’s structure to the right of the two passage ways.

When the Church of St Francis de Sales was completed, Don Bosco, steeped in debt, decided to proceed immediately with the second stage of his plan: the construction of a building large enough for the Oratory’s ever developing activities, including a hospice to house the abandoned boys he met or who had been recommended to him. By early 1852, there were over thirty young *boarders* living in the small, crammed Pinardi rooms. They would take their paltry meal and eat in the courtyard or anywhere they could around the house. Don Bosco needed larger dormitories, a study hall, a dining room.

A thirteen year old John Cagliero came to the Valdocco Oratory in 1851, after the death of his father. He describes the poverty of the early Oratory and the welcoming, family spirit he experienced with Don Bosco and Mamma Margaret:

I shall always fondly remember the moment I arrived at the Oratory on the evening of November 2 [1851]. Don Bosco introduced me to his mother, saying, “Mamma, here is a small boy from Castelnuovo. He wants to become really good and go to school.”

Mamma Margaret replied, “You’re always bringing in boys when you know very well that we have no more room.”

“Oh, you’ll find a little corner for him,” replied Don Bosco, smiling. “In your own room, perhaps,” she replied.

“That won’t be necessary,” continued Don Bosco. “He’s so small he can sleep in the grissini basket. We could hoist it to a beam just like a birdcage.” Laughing at the remark, Mamma Margaret left the room to find a place for me. That night another boy and I slept at the foot of Don Bosco’s bed.

The next morning I saw how poor this dwelling was. Don Bosco’s room was quite small with a low ceiling, and our dormitories on the main floor were narrow and paved with cobblestones. Straw mattresses, sheets, and blankets were the only furnishings. The kitchen was miserably equipped. For china and silverware we had only a few tin bowls and spoons. Forks, knives, and napkins made their appearance only many years later when some benefactor provided them for us. Our dining room was a shed; Don Bosco’s was in a little room near the well. It also doubled as a classroom and recreation hall. All this helped to keep us in the poor and humble station into which we had been born.

Don Bosco’s example was an education in itself. He actually enjoyed waiting on us, tidying up our dormitory, mending and cleaning our clothes, and performing other services for our benefit. He shared our life and made us feel that this was not just a boarding school but truly a family cared for by a tender, loving father whose only concern was our spiritual and material well-being (BM IV, 202–203).

On 26 April 1852 Valdocco was shaken by a deadly explosion in the nearby royal ammunitions factory in Borgo Dora. The powerful blast damaged the fragile Pinardi house. This made the construction of a new, safer home all the more pressing.

Construction

In the summer of 1852 excavations began for the new Don Bosco House, stretching east of the Pinardi house to the wall that separated it from the Filippi property (today's coffee shop in the corner of the courtyard), along which was a wing that would extend southward, parallel to the Church of St Francis de Sales. This extension became affectionately known as "Don Bosco's camerette" because his personal rooms were in this wing. By November, the second floor walls were already completed.

Then, calamity struck. On 20 November one of the upper walls of the new *camerette* structure facing the courtyard collapsed, seriously injuring three workers (cf. BM IV, 352). Don Bosco was shaken but not deterred. Work resumed quickly because it was urgent to complete the dormitories for the working boys who came to the Oratory for night school.

A dozen or so days after the collapse the walls were rebuilt and Don Bosco was eager to complete the roof. But calamity struck yet again. On the night of 1 December 1852, towards 11:00 p.m. this new building collapsed:

Only the roof now remained to be completed. Girders and lintels were in place and tiles were neatly piled near at hand when all work was halted by a violent rainstorm that lasted several days and nights. The downpour lashed the girders and lintels and softened and washed away the fresh and perhaps poor-quality mortar; as a result the walls remained standing like naked piles of bricks and stones (BM IV, 353).

Providentially, Don Bosco and the boys were all asleep and no one was injured. The following day, all eyes were on a huge solitary beam on one side of the house where Don Bosco's room and the boys' dormitory were, still miraculously in place. The collapse was a financial disaster, but Don Bosco forged ahead.

While waiting for work to resume in the spring, Don Bosco upgraded and transformed the Pinardi chapel into a dormitory, and held

weekday morning classes in the church of St Francis de Sales, which remained a worship space for weekday morning and evening prayers and for religious functions on Sundays. After lunch and in the late afternoon it became a huge study hall. There were classes in the choir, around the altar, in the two side chapels, at the back and in the nave of the church. One can imagine the noise, but everyone easily adapted (cf. BM IV, 360).

When the good weather arrived, construction resumed. So did Don Bosco's fundraising efforts. By October 1853 the house was ready, including the first half of the *covered portico*, so necessary as a gathering space in bad weather. By the end of October classes were being held under the portico, as well as in the new dormitories and basement refectory, while the original Pinardi chapel was transformed into a study hall. More boys could now be welcomed to the Oratory; their number grew to 65 and by the end of summer 1854 they numbered 76.

The *camerette* wing, built parallel to the church of St Francis de Sales in the basement of the new building, was expanded over time: what we see today is double its original length and width.

The ***ground floor*** of the *camerette* wing was a storage area for wood used in the carpentry shop.

On the ***first floor*** there was a dormitory for the trade school boys, which was later converted into a study hall. After that, it became the shipping office for the *Salesian Bulletin* (until 1988). Today, this room hosts the Casa Don Bosco Museum's exhibit entitled *Architectural Development of Valdocco*, tracing the evolution of the Oratory buildings from the time of don Bosco's arrival in 1846 to the elaborate complex it is today.

On the ***second floor*** of the *camerette* wing were three rooms.

The first room, located at the juncture of this wing with the main building, was assigned to two or three boys who were to be at Don Bosco's beck and call; the second room served a double function as library and secretary's office—at that time the cleric Rua fulfilled this duty. (BM IV, 458)

Later it would become the office of Fr Joachim Berto, Don Bosco's secretary; then, from 1865 to 1888, it became the room of the Prefect General (Don Bosco's vicar): first, Fr Rua (until 1888) then Fr Dominic Belmonte (1888 - 1901) and finally Fr Philip Rinaldi (1901-1914).

The third room was *Don Bosco's first bedroom* (1853–1861).

Furniture was simple and essential:

The furniture, which was never replaced or refurbished, consisted of a small iron bed, odds and ends donated by benefactors, several very plain chairs, a small bare desk without drawers, an old dilapidated sofa, a wobbly shelf. A simple kneeler for hearing confessions, a crucifix, and a few holy pictures. For a long time [1853 to 1861] this one room served as bedroom, reception room, and office (BM IV, 458).

On 15 May 1861, Don Bosco's bedroom was struck by lightning which wreaked havoc in the attic dormitory and did serious damage to the building. Everyone was scared, but no one was hurt.

When this wing was completed a few months later, Don Bosco chose 8 December as the day to place a statue of Our Lady at the centre of the roof as a "lightning rod" to protect the Oratory from future misfortune. To this day, the statue of Mary, Help of Christians on the 1876 façade of the *camerette* conveys Don Bosco's trust in Mary's motherly protection.

New activities

With a new, larger building at his disposal, Don Bosco launched new pastoral activities. From the earliest days of the Oratory he had wanted to give the working boys a suitable place for their professional formation and human development. He looked for upright employers, went to visit the boys at work during the work week and in November 1851 began to draw up agreements for their apprenticeship. These soon became signed and legally binding contracts. Despite his vigilance and care, however, the boys would still face serious challenges. So he decided

to build workshops in Valdocco, with the intention of developing his own trade school.

By the end of 1853 he had set up his first two workshops: *shoemaking* and *tailoring*. The first, run by Domenico Goffi, was in a small corridor in the Pinardi house near the bell tower; the second, led by Papino the tailor, was in the old kitchen.

Always practical, he drew up a set of *Regulations for Trade teachers*, laying down their duties and professional and educational responsibilities towards the apprentices (cf. BM IV, 459ff plus Appendix 21). Within a year, this early draft became a more complete and systematic set of *Regulations for the Workshops* (1862) (cf. BM VII, 72). The first workshops had the aim of guaranteeing a good professional education for young apprentices while removing them from the risk of anticlerical, obscene or scandalous conversations that were common in the shops outside of the Oratory.

At the same time, Don Bosco had to manage the basic needs of a house full of boys who needed shoes, clothing, food and school supplies. And he was constantly needing to build new buildings. Luckily, the labour done by the boys for outside clients provided a small income for the Valdocco household.

Fr Antonio Rosmini, a friend of Don Bosco, came up with a brilliant suggestion: Don Bosco needs to set up a printing press! Don Bosco was already publishing the *Letture Cattoliche* (Catholic Readings) and appreciated this suggestion. But he had to find room and the considerable capital for such an undertaking (he would manage to do so only in 1861). In the meantime, he contented himself with a *book-binding workshop* begun in 1854. He put this in the second room on the ground floor of the new building, next to the staircase, (today, the reception area of Casa Don Bosco Museum), with a small commercial bookshop next to it. Don Bosco himself became the bookbinding teacher; his first pupil was called Bedino (cf. MB 5, 22ff).

When this building was finished, Don Bosco set new goals. He wanted to demolish the Pinaridi house and replace it with a new, bigger structure attached to the church. But between the end of 1853 and the beginning of 1854, Piedmont suffered a financial crisis and the cost of food and building materials skyrocketed. He shelved this project for a while since the more urgent need was to find money to feed his boys. He would eventually demolish the Pinaridi house and start construction on the new building in 1856.

The 1856 building (former Pinaridi house)

The original Pinaridi house once occupied the space at the west end of the portico; the first five arches starting from the Pinaridi Chapel entrance indicate its length. In 1856 Don Bosco demolished the Pinaridi house to start his new building.

The *water fountain* attached to the second column is the only original external piece of the house that remains. In the early years, water had to be pumped from the well (the opening of which is visible on the ground to the right of the fountain). Public utilities only reached Valdocco after September 1863 (cf. BM VII, 441).

At the beginning of 1856, Don Bosco tried to negotiate a loan with the Ministry for the Interior but was refused because of the ongoing financial crisis. Unphased, Don Bosco got on with the new building just the same!

He therefore sent for a man named Juvenal Delponte, who was an architect and contractor of sorts, and asked him whether he had enough funds to meet initial expenses.

“No,” the contractor replied, “I don’t.”

“Neither do I,” Don Bosco said.

“Then what are we going to do?”

“Let’s begin all the same,” Don Bosco said decisively. “By the time we have to pay the men, the Lord will send us something.”

This phrase became routine with Don Bosco whenever he started new construction. He would tell the contractors: “I need this new building. I have no money, but let’s start anyway, and quickly!” The estimate for the wing ran to forty thousand lire. Several times John Villa heard Don Bosco say: “Don Bosco is poor, but with God’s help we can do anything” (BM V, 296).

Trusting in divine Providence, Don Bosco sent out letters and appeals to friends, benefactors and public bodies. Work began in March. After the Pinaridi house was demolished, new foundations were laid. Within five months even the roof of the new Pinaridi building was completed!

Yet again, however, there was an incident that caused a fright and drove up the construction cost. Windows, doors and glass had already been installed when on 22 August around 10:00 a.m., while a worker was taking down scaffolding from the top floor, a beam fell through the ceiling. The ceiling collapsed, and so did the ones below. Only the surrounding walls were left standing.

Don Bosco’s faith in God and enthusiasm for his mission allowed him to overcome any discouragement. He immediately pushed the project to completion. By the beginning of October 1856 the new Pinaridi House was finished.

Finally, the two buildings (Don Bosco’s House, 1853 and the Pinaridi Building, 1856) were connected to form one continuous structure, typical of Turinese architecture.

It was just as Don Bosco had wanted it to be – extremely simply, with no space wasted for wide staircases or corridors. The passageways were so narrow that only one person at a time could walk through them... Don Bosco himself determined the use to which the rooms were to be put (BM V, 355).

Every available space was utilised. The *gabled roof* allowed for small bedrooms in the attic. The long *balconies* meant the rooms on both the first and second floors [second and third floors in the usage of some other

cultures], could be accessed without the need for any inside corridors. For Don Bosco, space was too precious to be wasted on hallways and staircases! There was only *one internal staircase* at the west entrance of the Don Bosco House (visible today through the Museum's first glass door to the right of the passage way). This staircase went down to the basement and up only to the first floor balcony. To access the upstairs rooms, one had to climb the stairs to the first floor, exit onto the balcony and walk outside to the entrance of each room. The second floor balcony was accessed via a small ladder from the first floor balcony.

Don Bosco House as it was originally arranged (cf. BM V, 355-356)

In the *basement* there was a kitchen and two dining rooms; this was the only kitchen and dining area in Valdocco, underground, for seventy years, until 1927!

On the *ground floor*, the current Pinaridi Chapel had been divided into two sections. The part closest to the Church of St Francis de Sales (from the west wall to the Chapel's second window) was the sacristy. The rest was used for prayers and the *Good Night* with the boys on winter evenings; later, this section became the dining room for Don Bosco and his first helpers.

On the right of the staircase in the 1853 building (Don Bosco's house) there were three adjacent workshops for *shoemaking*, *bookbinding* and *carpentry*. Next to the carpentry shop there was a wide area below the library and Don Bosco's room for storing wood.

On the *first floor* (starting from St Francis de Sales church) there were: two rows of rooms used for the *tailoring workshop*; *classrooms*, the *office* of the prefect, Fr Alasonatti, the *reception area* for visitors and day students, a large *study hall* and right beneath Don Bosco's room a *dormitory* for the working boys.

On the *second floor*, in a room under Our Lady's chapel, was the *choir room*, directed by John Cagliero. At the front of the house

(from the left) the *music room*, *dispensary*, *infirmary*, the bedrooms of *Mamma Margaret and her helpers* and the community *laundry room*. On the north side there were *more dormitories*.

In the *attic*, the windowed gables, provided light and fresh air to the dormitories on the north side, and to a row of small cells for teachers and older clerics (Cagliero among them) on the south side.

Along the entire length of the *long portico* Don Bosco commissioned Peter Enria to paint a series of *biblical passages* in Latin with Italian translation. The phrases placed beneath the arches were essentially a catechesis on the sacrament of Penance; the ones posted on the pillars quoted the ten commandments. This was an early example of the Salesian “educative environment”.

The marble plaques we see today are reproductions and only partially reproduce the original texts (cf. BM V, 356–357 and F. Perrenchio, :*L'utilizzazione della Bibbia da parte di don Bosco nell'educazione dei giovani alla fede*, in “*Bollettino di collegamento dell'Associazione Biblica salesiana*”, n. 10 [1993] 159–165).

The Good-Night Pulpit

With the recent renovations for Casa Don Bosco Museum, a delightful new addition appeared under the portico: a *bronze* replica of *Don Bosco's good-night pulpit* from which the pastor-educator delivered his famous talks to the boys after evening prayer. The original wooden pulpit is preserved in the *camerette* Chapel on the second floor of Casa Don Bosco Museum.

In a small niche in the wall at the west end of the portico by the Pinaridi Chapel entrance is a *statue of Our Lady* (not original). When the weather was good, the boys gathered in front of the statue for evening prayers. During the month of May and on feasts of Our Lady the boys would decorate the statue. On a small picture hung nearby there they would attach slips of paper on which they had written their

fioretti (small acts of sacrifice they promised to make) and the brief prayer suggested for each day.

The students' section

After the completion of the new Pinardi building, Don Bosco concentrated on the formative needs of his resident students. Already in 1851 he had drawn up some disciplinary rules, and in light of the experience acquired over the years, he went on to elaborate a proper set of *Regulations for the Home attached to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales*, which he completed in 1854.

During the 1851–1852 school year there were more than twelve *boarding students in Valdocco*. Don Bosco and Fr Pietro Merla (1815–1855) had been their teachers but as enrolment increased Don Bosco began sending his boys into the city for private lessons offered by Prof. Giuseppe Bonzanino (lower secondary) and Fr Matteo Picco (Humanities and Rhetoric). Both were excellent teachers who willingly welcomed Don Bosco's poor boys at no cost. The Oratory boys were exemplary students and the two teachers added them to their regular classes with other pupils who came from distinguished and even noble families.

On 22 October 1854 Dominic Savio joined the Oratory, becoming one of around eighty boarding students. Half of these were trade school students and the other half were academic students. That year, Dominic attended classes in the city, with Prof. Bonzanino.

In the 1855–1856 school year, Don Bosco opened his first *internal secondary school*, entrusting the third level, which included Dominic Savio, to cleric John Baptist Francesia, who was all of seventeen years old. These classes were held in the old Pinardi Chapel. The first and second levels and Humanities and Rhetoric students continued going into the city for classes with Prof. Bonzanino and Picco (cf. BM V, 232).

The following year (1856–1857), since the number of resident students had reached 85 (70 of them trade students), Prof. Francesco

Blanch was called to the Oratory. He taught first and second levels together (cf. BM V, 362). That year, just a few months before his death, Dominic Savio studied Humanities at Fr Picco's school.

In 1857–1858, with 121 academic students and 78 trade school boys, the Oratory ran three classes: first level secondary (Cleric John Baptist Francesia), second level (Cleric John Turchi), third level (Fr Joseph Ramello).

On 7 November 1857 the Turin Catholic paper *L'Armonia* published Don Bosco's *conditions for accepting students* at the Oratory:

1. Boys must be at least twelve and not over eighteen.
2. They must be orphaned of both father and mother and have no relatives able to care for them.
3. They must be completely destitute and homeless. If a boy fulfills the first two conditions but still has some goods of his own, he must bring them along for his own use, since it would be unfair in this case. to live off the charity of others.
4. A boy must be in good health and not physically deformed.
5. Priority will be given to totally destitute and homeless boys who already frequent the festive oratories of St Aloysius, of the Guardian Angel, or of St Francis de Sales, because this hospice has been opened especially for them (BM V, 496).

Finally, when the 1859–1860 school year began, Don Bosco launched a program he had been planning for some time – having an entire secondary school at the Oratory, and using his own boys as young teachers: cleric Celestine Durando (1st class, with 96 pupils!), cleric Secondo Pettiva (2nd class), cleric John Turchi (3rd class), cleric John Baptist Francesia (4th and 5th classes). From here on the academic student section took on greater importance, and had higher enrolment than the trade schools. Don Bosco's aim was to continue helping the poorest boys while offering the more academically inclined the possibility of pursuing higher studies with the hope of nurturing upright citizens and vocations to the priesthood.

From statistics that Don Bosco sent to the Superintendent of studies for the year 1861–1862, we know that there were 318 boarders and 14 day students: 96 in first class, 68 in second, 87 in third, 38 in fourth and 39 in fifth.

Other buildings (between 1856–1859)

While setting up and furnishing the new buildings, Don Bosco decided to tackle other areas so he could open a completely *free primary school* for boys in the area who could not attend city schools or who had been denied admission to them. Thus between October and November 1856, against the wall along the *via della Giardiniera*, Don Bosco built a triangular one floor building with two classrooms (this no longer exists): a larger one for primary classes during the day and a smaller one for evening classes with a small reception area (cf. fig. 9, no. 4 [page 272](#)).

The primary *day classes* began in early 1857, taught by Master James Rossi from Foglizzo who was also a good singer and trombone player (cf. BM V, 365). In 1861 these classes were moved to the Filippi house (today's coffee shop). In the two rooms on *via della Giardiniera* Don Bosco set up the first *printing press*, run by Master Andrew Giardino. Later, from 1862 to 1869, this space became the metalwork shop.

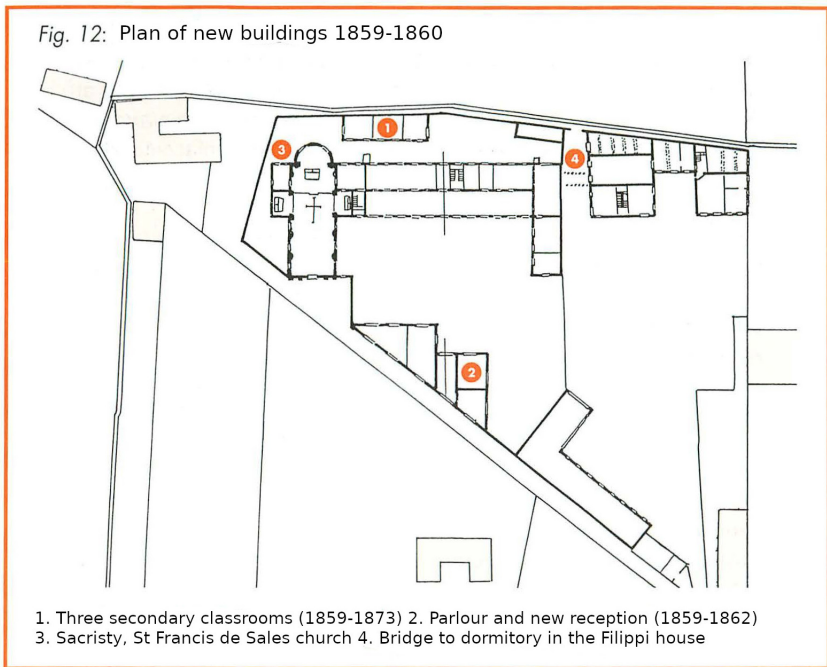
Next to this newest building, on the right of the entrance, between 1859 and 1860, Don Bosco built, with financial assistance from Fr Cafasso, a more dignified *reception area* with a room for the doorkeeper, parlour for the boys' relatives and a covered entrance (cf. ODB 131). But after he had bought and fixed up the Filippi house, in 1863 a new reception areas was built in the southern corner of the property bought from the Filippi brothers. The old reception area was transformed into two workshops for *shoemaking* and *tailoring* (cf. BM VII, 330).

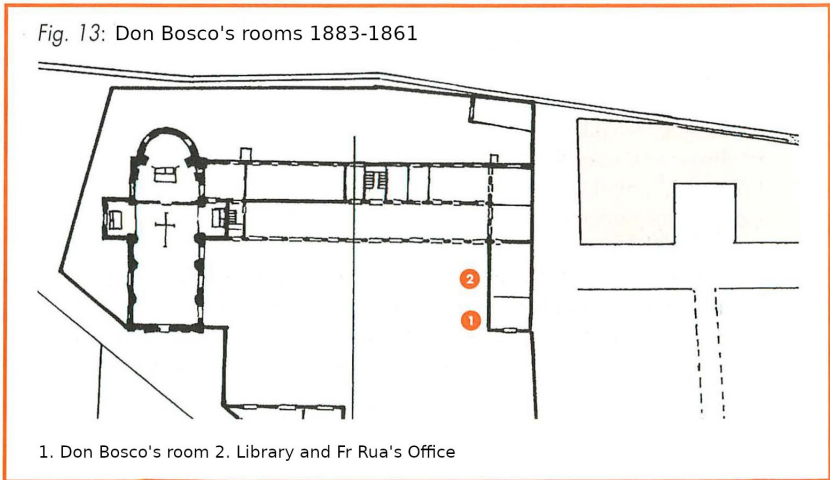
In order to have all his secondary classes at Valdocco with in-house teachers, Don Bosco had to build yet more classrooms. In summer 1859 he asked businessman Giovenale Delponte to build *three large rooms*

against the boundary wall of the courtyard behind the main building. At the same time, he pulled down the shed to the right of this new structure which had been used as a washing area and built a new laundry room with an abutting woodshed (cf. BM VI, 143). These two buildings were demolished in 1873.

Further extensions to the *camerette* (1861, 1862, 1876)

On 16 July 1860 Don Bosco completed the first major extensions to the Oratory in terms of land and workshops, by buying the Filippi property for 65 thousand lire.





1861 extension

The following year, having relocated the tenants of the Filippi house, Don Bosco modified the Filippi house to serve the needs of the Oratory. Amongst other things he planned to link the Filippi house to the Don Bosco House (1853) thereby doubling the width of the wing where his room was. Thus, the *camerette* wing underwent these changes:

- on the *ground floor* the **portico** (behind the large bronze Don Bosco statue) was added. For decades (from the 1880s onwards) students gathered here for night prayers;
- on the *first floor* was a student dormitory (today, the Gallery of the Architectural Evolution of Valdocco)
- on the *second floor* was a library (the new Museum chapel) and, adjacent to it, to the south, Don Bosco's new bedroom.
- the *attic* became another dormitory.

Don Bosco's new room, with windows on the east and south walls, would be his personal space for 26 years, until mid-December 1887. It

was connected with the first room he had lived in since 1853, which is often referred to now as the “antechamber” (cf. fig. 14, no. 3 [page 294](#)). Having moved to his new room, the antechamber became a waiting room for visitors who came in ever greater number seeking counsel from the Saint.

During the 1870’s Don Bosco’s health began to deteriorate and he could not always go down to the Basilica to celebrate mass. So he placed an “altar concealed in a wooden wardrobe” in the antechamber, so that whenever he could not go down to the church, he could celebrate Mass there (cf. BM XVIII, 9). This “wardrobe-altar” is on display in the Chapel near the *camerette* on the second floor of Casa Don Bosco Museum.

1862 extension

Under the *camerette*, at the front of the house, there was a storage shed. Don Bosco converted the shed into a large portico, 14 metres long (the length of the house), 6.75 m. wide by 4 m. high (cf. fig. 15, no. 5 [page 294](#)). The area between the pillars was enclosed and windowed to create a large room where he temporarily relocated the printing press. Some months later, the printing press was moved yet again to a new facility that had been specifically built for that purpose along *via della Giardiniera*, and the enclosed portico became the *foundry* for making lead typesetting characters (cf. MB VII, 116. These construction details are omitted in the English BM).

Above the portico was a lovely **open air terrazzo** with brick columns bounded in steel. Don Bosco added some large gardening pots in which he planted **muscatel vines** from his hometown of Castelnuovo. The vines climbed up the front of the house as far as the windows to Don Bosco’s room, produced shade, and much fun at harvest time.

1876 extension

After the Church of Mary Help of Christians was consecrated (1868) and the reception building fronting *via Cottolengo* was completed (1874-1875), Don Bosco began his final expansion of the *the camerette wing*. Above the 1862 portico he added two storeys plus an attic. Since then, the façade of the house has remained unchanged. On the tympanum of the new façade he placed the statue of Our Lady which he first placed on the roof as a “lightning rod” on 8 December 1861. She has been there ever since.

This extension added three smaller areas to the *camerette*.

The first area was an *enclosed balcony* on the second floor, facing south. (cf. fig. 16, no. 7 [page 294](#)). Enclosed with floor-to-ceiling glass doors, the gallery provided Don Bosco a bright and sheltered place to walk when the pain in his legs made it impossible for him to leave his room (cf. MB 7, 375). The boys would come here so he could still accompany them through the sacrament of Reconciliation.

The *second area*, which connected to the waiting room (the antechamber) became Don Bosco’s *private chapel*.

The *third area*, to the south of Don Bosco’s bedroom, was his secretary’s bedroom. It is in this room that Don Bosco died (cf. fig. 16, no. 6 [page 294](#)).

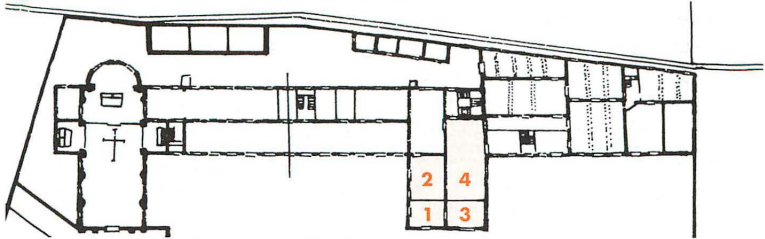
More will be said about each of these venerable spaces as we proceed through Casa Don Bosco Museum where the legacy of Don Bosco’s life and spirit and mission is kept alive.

The 1929 Camerette Staircase

When Don Bosco was beatified in 1929, the *camerette staircase* (across from the main entrance to the Museum) was built to accommodate the many pilgrims who flocked to Valdocco to venerate the Saint in the rooms where he lived from 1853 to December 1887 and where he passed away on 31 January 1888.

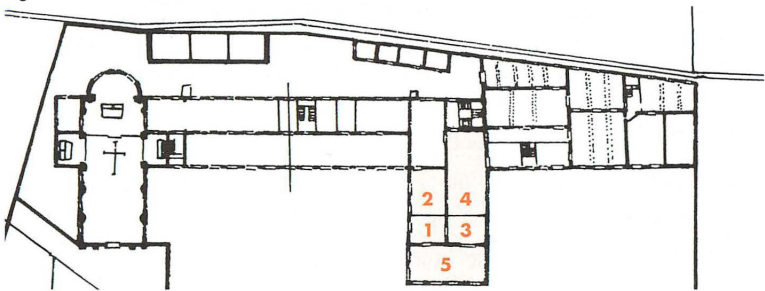
Don Bosco Lived Here

Fig. 14: Don Bosco's rooms 1861



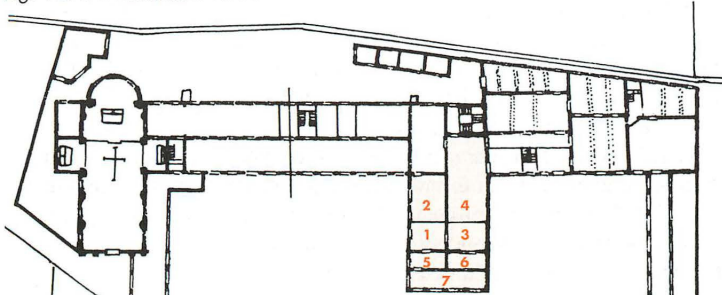
1. Antechamber
2. Don Bosco's secretary's office
3. Don Bosco's room and office 1861-1887
4. New library

Fig. 15: Portico and terrazzo in front of rooms 1862-1876



1. Antechamber
2. Don Bosco's secretary's office, later the Vicar's room
3. Don Bosco's room and office
4. Library
5. Portico and terrazzo

Fig. 16: Rooms from 1876



1. Antechamber
2. Vicar's room and office
3. Don Bosco's room and office
4. Library
5. Private chapel
6. Room where Don Bosco died
7. Gallery

**Don Bosco's House today:
CASA DON BOSCO MUSEUM
including THE CAMERETTE**

The 27th Salesian General Chapter (2014) asked the Rector Major to revitalise the “Salesian places” in and around Turin to render them a more eloquent expression of the history, spirituality and mission they carry. This mandate inspired a courageous rethinking of Valdocco, creatively faithful to its origins. With much effort, sacrifice, teamwork and justified satisfaction, the new *Casa Don Bosco Museum* was inaugurated by Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, 10th successor of Don Bosco, on 4 October 2020.

Casa Don Bosco Museum covers 4,000 square metres over four floor, encompassing all of the original Don Bosco House (1853) including the *camerette*, and the Pinardi Building (1856). Indeed, the *camerette* remain the charismatic heart of the Don Bosco's Valdocco and the historical nucleus of the Museum, but the same *camerette* are better appreciated today as an integral part of the wider reality to which they belonged.

Our tour begins on the **ground floor** of Casa Don Bosco. Then we'll explore the **basement** where Valdocco's oldest rooms are found and where Salesian family spirit was lived and shared. On the **first floor** [second floor in the usage of some other cultures] we'll consider the evolution of Don Bosco's Salesian spirituality and youth ministry. On the **second floor**, beginning with the *camerette*, we'll reflect on Don Bosco the man: where he lived, where he founded the Congregation, where he wrote, where he slept, and where he passed from time into eternity. Our visit then focuses on **Don Bosco the saint**, and **Don Bosco the founder** of a vast international **Salesian Family** and school of holiness. We'll meet exemplars of Salesian holiness who lived in Valdocco and beyond, the spiritual progeny of a holy founder. Finally, we'll see how the Oratory which began in Valdocco has spread to 134

countries thanks to the intrepid **missionary dedication** of Don Bosco's many sons and daughters: religious, priests and lay people.

The Ground Floor

The ticket office and reception area of Casa Don Bosco Museum were originally the Oratory's book binding shop. The large room behind the reception area was added by Fr Michael Rua. Today it is a venue for temporary art exhibitions.

Champions of the Educative and Pastoral Community

In the reception area we are greeted by four Salesian heroes who lived in Valdocco and shaped the Oratory from the beginning: **Mamma Margaret** (marble medallion by Gaetano Cellino) and **Fr John Borel** (bronze medallions by Gaetano Cellini), **Cardinal John Cagliero** (bronze bust, Arturo Tomagnini) and **Fr Michael Rua** (bronze bust, Ennio Ferrari). They invite us to appreciate the educative-pastoral community as a charismatic and not just a functional approach to building and living the Oratory experience in our various and varied works and presences today.

The Basement

The basement was closed and essentially forgotten after the "new" kitchens and dining rooms were built on Via Sassari (at the back of the second courtyard) in 1927. Today, the basement is one of Casa Don Bosco's most endearing features. It extends the entire length of the portico, from the Church of St Francis de Sales to the *camerette*.

Proceeding through the Museum reception area we literally walk in the footsteps of Don Bosco and the first Salesians, arriving at the original (1853) staircase to the basement. Where preferable, the elevator under the portico guarantees easy access for everyone.

The Basement's five main rooms

Built in five phases, the basement was where everyday family life at the Oratory was lived. These rooms are presented in chronological order:

1. *The Boys' First Dining Room (1853)*

Until 1853, the Valdocco residents ate meals where they could... anywhere in the Pinardi house or out in the fields and courtyard around it. In 1853, Don Bosco builds the first refectory for the boys.

The refectory's **stone wall** keeps alive the practical creativity displayed by Don Bosco in the construction phase of his house. To avoid buying bricks with money he did not have, he invited the boys, during their recreation, to bring the biggest rocks they could carry from the nearby Dora and Stura Rivers. In this way, he not only saved money but he also made the boys protagonists in building the very house in which they and so many others would live.

The lithograph of the **Last Supper** dates back to the 1850's and was discovered in the basement. We can easily imagine Dominic Savio, the count Carlo Cays as a novice and all the first Salesians gazing upon it during meals.

2. *The Oratory Kitchen (1856)*

The "first" kitchen, used by Mamma Margaret, was in the Pinardi house. After Don Bosco purchased and demolished the Pinardi House in 1856, he created this basement kitchen, equipped with a pantry, a well, and one oven. For 70 years, this was the Oratory's only kitchen, producing meals for hundreds of residents.

Because of their voracious appetites, Don Bosco had a clear, simple rule: the boys were not allowed in the kitchen. But they were expected to share in "family chores" by serving the meals. To facilitate this, a small **service area** beside the kitchen is where the boys would pick up the platters which they took to the dining rooms.

3. *The Large Dining Room (1858)*

As more boys joined the Oratory, Don Bosco built a second, **larger dining hall** (1858) beneath the Church of St Francis de Sales (1852). This was the main Oratory dining hall until 1866. This space also served as the *first Salesian theatre*, where John Cagliero's music was interpreted for the first time.

As part of Casa Don Bosco Museum, this dining hall is now home to four permanent exhibitions:

- ***Marian iconography***, including treasures collected by Fr. Paul Albera beginning in 1914 and after him by Fr Piero Ceresa. A vast part of the collection was acquired by Giuseppe and Ottavio Gallo, siblings and salesian priests of happy memory. Their acquisitions include an alabaster statue of Mary Immaculate, icons, paintings and frescoes, one of which dates back to Benedictine school of the fourteenth century.
- ***Gifts to the Museum*** (*originally received as gifts to the Basilica*), such as an ivory crucifix, Pope Pius VII's tobacco box, and a copper, Langobard cover to a book of the gospels from the eight century.
- ***Popular piety and devotion*** linked to the Basilica such as *ex voto* offerings and procession banners for the feast of Mary Help of Christians.
- ***Liturgy***, including the chalice used by Don Bosco for the consecration Mass of the "Church" of Mary Help of Christians (it was elevated to a minor basilica on June 28, 1911), a monstrance gifted to Don Bosco by the alumni of the Valdocco Oratory (1875), the Guglielminetti chalice (1930) and sacred vessels received from St John Paul II (1988).

4. *Don Bosco's Wine Cellar (1861)*

Added to the east end of basement during the 1860-61 renovation, the cantina is beneath Don Bosco's *camerette*. Here, Don Bosco made and

stored wine, and kept his wine-making equipment. Today, it houses a collection of Marian statues and images, honouring Mary's role in the foundation of the Oratory and Don Bosco's youth spirituality.

5. The Crypto-portico (1868)

This was the last section added by Don Bosco to the basement. It connected the main hallway to the newly built bread oven beneath the Basilica. It was blessed by Don Bosco in November, 1868. Each day, some 3000 loaves of bread were baked here, to the delight of the boys and Salesians alike. The passage remains, but the oven is gone.

The First floor

The first floor of Casa Don Bosco has 10 exhibition spaces. Beginning at the top of the *camerette* staircase and turning right, the exhibits are as follows:

1. Valdocco's architectural development

Five models display the evolution of Salesian Valdocco. The first is a stand alone of the Pinardi house and chapel (1846). The second places the Pinardi house in an empty field flanked by its only neighbours, *Casa Bellezza* and *Casa Filippi* (1846). The third shows the architectural developments up to 1861, including the church of St Francis de Sales and new Don Bosco House. The fourth shows the progress made by 1868, including the Basilica, the annexed Filippi house and the printing press along the *via della Giardiniera*. Finally, we see Valdocco as it is today, including the oratory, professional schools and highschool.

2. Urban development of Valdocco around the Oratory

Photos, maps and an interactive screen draw visitors into the urban growth of Valdocco as a neighbourhood around the expanding Salesian citadel.

3. The Gallery of Paintings

Art figured significantly in Don Bosco's educative project in Valdocco. Pieces commissioned by him or his successors were intentionally designed for catechetical or devotional purposes. The jewel in the crown of this collection is Enrico Reffo's 1896 painting of St Francis de Sales at prayer, commissioned for the Basilica (in what has subsequently become the Dominic Savio chapel) by Michael Rua. A second painting of the Savoyard bishop is the "oval frame" which originally hung behind the altar of St Francis de Sales Church, most likely a gift of the Marchioness Barolo.

In the adjacent room is a collection of original paintings of Don Bosco, including Giuseppe Rollini's *Don Bosco in prayer* (1880).

4. Youth Ministry Room

Three dreams of Don Bosco are the focus of this space: The **dream at nine years of age** (1824), the **Field of dreams** (1844) and the **Missionary Dream** (Barcelona, 1886). Interpreted by the Spanish artist **Javier Carabaño** (2020), the paintings convey the Good Shepherd and Mary the Shepherdess as the guiding force to Don Bosco's entire youth project, focused on needy youth, using reason, religion and kindness, and extending from Becchi, to Valdocco, to as far away as Valparaiso, Calcutta and Beijing.

The paintings are supported by three foundational Salesian documents: Don Bosco's first three handwritten notebooks that become the **Memoirs of the Oratory** (1873-1875); a first edition (1847) copy of the *Companion of Youth*; and a copy of the *Letter from Rome* (1884).

Finally, facing the dreams, is a **portrait of Francesco Besucco**, commissioned by Don Bosco. Besucco represents the countless thousands who have thrived in Salesian youth projects the world over.

5. The Cafasso, Borel, Barberis and Lemoyne Room

This room honours Don Bosco's lifelong friends and principal collaborators.

St Joseph Cafasso (1811–1860) was Don Bosco's spiritual guide at the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* for three years, his weekly confessor for 22 years, and generous benefactor throughout his life. On display is a monstrance he gave Don Bosco, underlying their deep eucharistic spirituality.

Fr John Borel (1801–1873) was one of Don Bosco's beloved seminary professors and personal mentor. Although Borel was chaplain to the royal house of Savoy, he was instrumental in the Oratory's early days, happy to play "second fiddle" to more charismatic personalities like the Marchioness Barolo and Don Bosco. He gave up his role as royal chaplain to dedicate himself fully to the Oratory and other social outreach projects. On February 1851, he "co-signs" with Don Bosco and personally pays for the purchase of the Pinardi chapel. When Don Bosco falls sick and has to return to Becchi (summer 1846), it was Borel who managed the fledgling Oratory.

On display is one of Borel's handwritten homilies. He was a gifted preacher to Turin's nobility and paupers alike, adjusting his style and language to suit his audience.

Fr Julio Barberis (1847–1927) was renowned for his simplicity of heart and spirit of obedience. He fully assimilated Don Bosco's spirit and passed it on to new generations, serving as director of novices for forty years. He delighted in saying he was a "formator of saints", most notably, Venerable Andrea Beltrami and Blessed August Czartoryski. A prolific writer, many of his books are on display.

Fr John Baptist Lemoyne (1839–1916) was a masterful spiritual director and preacher. Endowed with a brilliant intellect, he published many works, from the historical to the dramatic genre, for which he was respected both within the Congregation and in secular circles. Don

Bosco appointed him secretary of the Superior Council and editor of the Salesian Bulletin, thus giving him the opportunity to follow closely the last years of the activity of Father, of whom he was the principal and most authoritative biographer. He began the publication of the Biographical Memoirs of Don Bosco, an extensive documentation in nineteen volumes. He gathered many of Don Bosco's thoughts and writings into thematically organised texts. Many of his writings are on display.

Completing this exhibition of Don Bosco's early collaborators is the first **table** used by the General Council (originally for the Pinardi house library), and a **glass-doored bookcase** which belonged to Fr Michael Rua. When Rua became Don Bosco's first successor, he moved this cabinet into Don Bosco's bedroom which he now occupied. Today it holds items used by Don Bosco such as **candlesticks, cups, glasses, cutlery and books**.

Other items of interest are: **nails** taken from beams in the old Pinardi house and a **wooden skull** (common in nineteenth century spirituality), used in the early days of the Oratory as part of the monthly *Exercise for a Happy Death*. According to one tradition, the **hazelnuts** date back to 3 January 1886 when Don Bosco distributed them to more than a hundred boys, taking them out of a small bag (cf. BM XVIII, 2-3), just one example of the many "multiplication" miracles he worked on behalf of poor young people.

Rooms 6,7,8: The Albera, Cagliero and Rua Rooms

In these three rooms, the Museum recalls Don Bosco's first two successors, *Frs Michael Rua and Paul Albera*, as well as Cardinal John Cagliero, leader of the first Salesian missionary expedition to Patagonia, first Salesian bishop and cardinal.

Of note are the **coloured walls** in these rooms; they are the only coloured walls in the Museum, to convey that Rua, Albera and Cagliera

each add their own “colour” the “pencil sketch” of the Congregation entrusted to them by Don Bosco.

These rooms display portraits and personal possessions of these great Salesian leaders, and furniture used by them. In the Cagliero room we see the only stained glass window, installed in the basilica in 1939, to survive a 1942 bombardment.

9. Don Bosco, Publisher

This exhibition presents Don Bosco’s intense publishing activity. As an educator and pastor, Don Bosco dedicated himself to the “apostolate of the good press”, publishing or editing some 300 books and smaller works on various topics of religion, education, and history. He started the *Letture cattoliche* [Catholic Readings], a monthly series written in a popular style for young people and ordinary Catholics. He set up printing presses and publishing houses. His aim was to reach out to an ever greater number of people so he could extend the effectiveness of his pastoral activity. On display are some of his books, a set of brass typesetting letters and stamps used for embellishing book covers, a list of all of his publications organized thematically, and the desk used by his secretary and archivist, Fr. Gioachino Berto.

10. The Library

This area is reserved for research and is accessible with special permission. In addition to the collection of books on Salesianity, of note are the finely worked book cases from the offices of the SEI [Società Editrice Internazionale], the Salesian Congregation’s publishing house from 1908–2018.

The Second floor with the *camerette*

The second floor is dedicated to Don Bosco the man, the saint, and the patriarch of an international spiritual family. The narrative unfolds across ten rooms. We begin in the *camerette*.

The *camerette*

The *camerette* – five rooms – are the spiritual heart of Valdocco and the historical centre of Casa Don Bosco Museum. In these rooms Don Bosco lived from 1853 until he passed into eternity on 31 January 1888.

1. Don Bosco's first bedroom

We enter the *camerette* through Don Bosco's first bedroom, which he occupied for eight years (1853-1861). It also served as his office and reception room.

Da mihi animas, caetera tolle

Preserved in the glass enclosure in the corner of this room is a small section of the **original terra cotta tile floor**. Suspended above it is a reproduction of the **Da mihi animas, caetera tolle** sign which hung above the east wall bedroom window (now the doorway to Don Bosco's second bedroom) which caught the attention of Dominic Savio upon his arrival at the Oratory on 22 October 1854. Don Bosco leaves this account of the event:

... having come to the Oratory, came to my room to put himself, as he said, entirely into his superiors' hands. His glance immediately fell on the poster above where in large letters were written the words St Francis de Sales used say: *da mihi animas, caetera tolle*. He read them carefully; I wanted him to understand what they meant so I invited him, in fact helped him translate the meaning: *Oh Lord, give me souls, and take away everything else*. He thought for a moment and then added: I understand: here we do not do business in money but in

souls: I understand; I hope my soul will also be part of this business (DS Ch. 8).

Da mihi animas, caetera tolle summarises the deep spirituality behind the Salesian mission: ardent charity, absolute availability to the Lord, radical asceticism in thought, affect and action.

Charismatic and juridical foundation of the Congregation

This first bedroom is also the “womb” of the Salesian Congregation, to which the two prized documents in the central display case attest.

The *first document*, one page from a tiny notebook handwritten by a sixteen year old Michael Rua, records the minutes of Don Bosco’s first invitation to a group of four boys from 16 to 18 years of age, gathered in this room in view of establishing the Salesian Congregation:

On the evening of 26 January 1854 we gathered in Don Bosco’s room. Present were Don Bosco, Rocchietti, Artiglia, Cagliari and Rua; Don Bosco suggested that with the help of the Lord and St Francis de Sales we should engage in an exercise of practical charity toward neighbour. This would be in view of making a promise of it, and later, if possible and convenient, a vow to the Lord. From that evening those who committed or would in the future commit themselves to this exercise were called Salesians.

The mutual pledge taken by Don Bosco and these four young collaborators to exercise practical charity towards their neighbour effectively summarises the entire Salesian mission and spirituality. It unites in a single movement of charity the pastoral drive of the Founder with the zeal of his disciples.

In this room, on 25 March 1855, Michael Rua made his first profession of vows to Don Bosco, thus becoming the first Salesian. He would soon be followed by Fr Alasonatti and cleric John B. Francesia.

The *second document* is the minutes of the juridical foundation of the Salesian Society which took place on the evening of 18 December 1859. The participants are named: Don Bosco, Fr Alasonatti, deacon

Angelo Savio, subdeacon Michael Rua, clerics Cagliari, Francesia, Provera, Ghivarello, Loggero, Bonetti, Anfossi, Marcellino, Cerruti, Durando, Pettiva, Rovetto, Bongiovanni and layman Louis Chiapale were “all united in one and the same spirit with the sole purpose of preserving and promoting the spirit of true charity needed for the work of the oratories on behalf of neglected young people at risk. For in these disastrous times of ours such young people are liable to being corrupted and plunged into godlessness and irreligion.” They decided “to form a society or congregation with the aim of promoting the glory of God and the salvation of souls, especially of those most in need of instruction and education, while providing the members with mutual help toward their own sanctification.”

Fr Lemoyne describes the events that preceded this meeting:

On December 8, the Oratory solemnly celebrated the feast of the Immaculate Conception. That evening Don Bosco announced at the “Good Night” that the next day he would hold a special conference in his room after the boys had retired to bed. Those concerned — priests, clerics, and laymen who shared Don Bosco’s work at the Oratory and enjoyed his intimacy understood that they were invited to attend and sensed that this meeting was to be an important one. Accordingly, they met the following night, Friday, December 9, 1859.

The meeting opened with the usual invocation to the Holy Spirit and a prayer to Mary Most Holy for enlightenment and assistance. Then Don Bosco, after summing up what he had said in previous conferences, proceeded to describe the nature and loftiness of a religious congregation, the everlasting honor accruing to a person entirely consecrated to God, the ease with which he could save his soul, the inestimable store of merits he could gain through obedience, and the imperishable glory and the twofold crown awaiting him in paradise. Then, visibly moved, he declared that the time had come to start that congregation which he had long been planning and for which he had been mainly working...

He concluded by saying that the moment had come for all who had heard his conferences to state whether or not they wished to join this pious Society which would be named — or would continue to be named — after St Francis de Sales. Those who did not want

to belong to it should make it clear by no longer attending the conferences. He was giving them all a week's time to reflect and meditate on this important decision with God. ... The cleric [John] Cagliero, undecided, paced up and down the portico for a long time, various thoughts crossing his mind. Finally, turning to a companion, he exclaimed: "I am determined and always have been — never to leave Don Bosco. Monk or not, it's all the same to me!" Later he wrote a note to Don Bosco declaring that he deferred completely to his advice and decision.

Don Bosco, meeting him afterward, smilingly said to him, "Come. This is your life!"

The conference to express their belonging to the Pious Society was held on 18 December 1859. Only two did not present themselves." (BM VI, 180–181).

Don Bosco's first personal chapel

In the 1870s, when Don Bosco's health began to fail seriously, this room also served as **his personal chapel**. He added an "altar concealed in a chest that looked like a closet" so that whenever he could not go down to the church, Don Bosco celebrated Mass here (cf. BM XVIII, 9). This wardrobe-altar is on display in the new Museum chapel on the same floor (cf. [page 317](#)).

2. Don Bosco's second bedroom 1861–December 1887

Having completed the 1861 expansion, Don Bosco moved into this new bedroom which he occupied for nearly 27 years, until mid-December 1887.

This room was the forge of intense pastoral creativity, the headquarters of organisation, animation and government of Don Bosco's religious congregations, the Salesian Cooperators and an educational and apostolic movement of ever-widening reach. The secret of Don Bosco's tireless evangelical work, effective communication, fruitful initiatives of charity flows from his burning interior life.

The humble **desk** is where Don Bosco wrote thousands of letters to Popes, people of influence, Salesians, boys and benefactors. It is where he wrote most of his works for young people and ordinary folks; where he collected and organised his educational and pastoral experiences and inspirations into spiritual and pedagogical writings; where he wrote the Constitutions of the Salesian Congregation, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and the Association of Salesian Cooperators; where he planned the first missionary expeditions to South America.

On the desk are objects used by Don Bosco, like his inkwell and pen. He maintained that his desk work was as apostolic and just as important as his work in church, in the playground and in the streets of Turin. He was successful in his pastoral and educational activity because he knew how to think, study, plan, communicate ideas, sensitise and involve ever-expanding circles of people.

On 19 December 1887, Don Bosco sat at his desk for the last time and laboriously wrote a few sentences on holy pictures he wanted to send to benefactors:

“Perform good deeds as soon as possible, for there might not be time and thus you would be cheated... Blessed are those who give themselves entirely to God in the days of their youth... He who delays giving himself to God is in great danger of losing his soul... He who sows good deeds will reap a great harvest... If we do good, we will find good in this world and in the next... At the end of our life, we shall reap the fruit of our good deeds... ”In paradise one enjoys all blessings and for ever” (cf. BM XVIII, 408–409).

The modest **shelves** above the desk were always crammed with correspondence waiting for a reply, drafts of regulations to refine, manuscripts to be published, books from which he drew inspiration.

The **bed** is the one in which Don Bosco dreamt so many of his dreams. It is also the bed in which he died, although not in this room (which will be explained below). Above his bed, images of St Francis de Sales and St Joseph, his crucifix, and a framed message which reads, “Only one thing is necessary: to save one’s soul”.

On the **night table** is the **acetylene lamp** by which he worked late into the night, his **water bottle**, **rosary**, and **relics** of St Francis de Sales and St Jane Francis de Chantal.

Other original furnishings on display are the **kneeler** on which Don Bosco prayed morning and evening prayers, and his large **breviary** resting upon it. He drew strength and guidance for his very active life from his constant union with God, nourished regularly through moments of intimacy with the Lord.

There are so many **chairs** in his bedroom because this room was also Don Bosco's only **office** where he received the many visitors from every social class who came to seek his counsel. Lawyer Carlo Bianchetti recalls:

Don Bosco's room breathed forth heavenly peace. I cannot tell whether, like flowers, we opened ourselves to the dew of consolation or whether we shut tightly upon the heavenly breath which flooded our souls. Don Bosco sat at a plain desk which had drawers and small pigeonholes. Letters and papers were bundled in heaps before him, increasing with each new mail delivery. But Don Bosco was not concerned with that; he pushed the piles aside...

He carried on with each caller as if he had no one else to listen to that morning. Like St Francis de Sales he held that haste makes waste. Never the first to end a conversation, he would not even hint at shortening it. Rather, if a visitor feared he had been indiscreet and wanted to leave, Don Bosco would graciously beg him to stay a bit longer...

His conversation was most delightful, generously interspersed with timely, humorous anecdotes and incidents. To make them more effective he would say they were his personal experiences or that he had heard them from Father [Joseph] Cafasso or Father [Louis] s or Father [John] Borel or Guala someone else. His pleasantries made an incisive, vivid impression and were always appropriate. So gracious was his manner that no one could reproach him for being less than gentlemanly and discreet... There was in Don Bosco a respectful, good-natured, warm-hearted approach which in no way impaired his skill—metaphorically—in pulling a tooth or catching a big fish” (BM VII, 14–15).

The **couch** was a concession to an elderly Don Bosco who could no longer sit in a chair due to the severe pain in his swollen legs. Michael Rua recounts that he often saw Don Bosco in total darkness at night, praying his rosary on that couch, straining beneath the pain of frequent migraines.

From the many writings which Don Bosco produced in this room, we offer this exceptional passages from his *Spiritual Testament*, written between September 1884 and May 1886:

My dear and beloved sons in J. C.

Before leaving this world for eternity, I wish to fulfil a duty towards you and so satisfy an ardent desire of my heart. First of all, I thank you with the most ardent affection of my soul for the obedience you have given me and for all you have done to sustain and propagate our Congregation.

I leave you here on earth, but only for a short time. I hope the infinite mercy of God will enable us all to meet one day in Heaven. There I await you.

Do not grieve over my death. This is a debt we must all pay; but afterwards, every fatigue sustained for the love of our Master, the good Jesus, will be greatly rewarded. Instead of weeping, make firm and efficacious resolutions to remain staunch in your vocation until death.

Watch, so that neither the love of the world, nor the affection of parents, nor the desire of a more agreeable life induce you to make the great mistake of profaning the sacred vows, and so transgress the religious profession by which you are consecrated to God. Let none take back that which we have given to God.

If you have loved me in the past, continue to love me in the future by the exact observance of our Constitutions.

Your first Rector is dead. But our true Superior, Jesus Christ, will never die. He will always be our Master, our guide, our model. But remember that he, in his own time, will also be our judge and the one who rewards our faithfulness in His service.

Your Rector is dead. But there will be another elected, who will have care of you and of your eternal salvation. Listen to him, love him, obey him, pray for him as you have done for me.

Adieu, dear children, adieu. I wait for you in Heaven. There we shall speak of God, of Mary, the Mother and support of our Congregation; there we shall bless eternally this our Congregation, the observance of whose rules will have powerfully and efficaciously contributed to our salvation.

Sit nomen Domini benedictum ex hoc nunc et usque in saeculum. In te Domine speravi, non confundar in aeternum" (RSS 4 [1985] 98–100).

The bedroom of his first and second successors until 1914

After Don Bosco's death, this room became the office and bedroom for his first two successors: Blessed Michael Rua (1888–1910) and Fr Paul Albera (1910-1921).

Blessed Michael Rua, accustomed to an ascetic lifestyle, spent most nights sleeping on the uncomfortable couch. Only in his final illness, in obedience to his doctor, did he accept replacing it with a bed.

Fr Paul Albera occupied this room until 1914, the year in which he built a new wing for the Superior Council, at which point he moved out of this room and the *camerette* became a sacred space dedicated to the veneration of the eventual saint, the historical heart of Casa don Bosco Museum.

3. Don Bosco's private chapel (1886)

The third room, added in 1876, became the chapel where Don Bosco celebrated Mass in his final years. The chapel recalls the centrality of the Eucharist in Don Bosco's spiritual life, in his role as pastor and educator, in his relationship with Christ the Redeemer, priest and victim who offers himself for the salvation of the world.

Etched into the south wall and ceiling are the contours of Don Bosco's altar, a gift to him from Turin's Cardinal Alimonda in 1886, to replace the poor "wardrobe altar" previously used by Don Bosco. The

Alimonda altar is now on display in the new Chapel facing the modern altar (cf. [page 317](#)).

The Eucharist, celebrated “*digne, attente ac devote*” (worthily, attentively and devoutly), as Fr Cafasso used to say, remains one of the central pillars of Salesian spirituality, the sacrament of unfettered self-giving to God who wishes to take possession of the human heart in an exclusive and sanctifying relationship. For good reason, Don Bosco strictly linked the Eucharist to chastity (the “beautiful virtue”) and devotion to Mary. The Eucharist remains the source of the charity which imbues the entire Salesian approach to education and ministry and distinguishes it as an invitation to ongoing personal formation.

This room’s central display is the **black armchair** used by Don Bosco in his old age when he was vesting for Mass in this chapel. After his death, he was dressed in his priestly vestments (cf picture on west wall) and placed in this chair so the Salesians, Oratory boys and endless friends and benefactors could pay their respects. From this chair he worked his first miracle from heaven: reconnecting the severed finger to the hand of nineteen year old Luigi Orioni.

4. The gallery

The gallery (1865) is the fourth room of the *camerette*. It was originally an open terrace above the printing press. Don Bosco enjoyed walking in the open air, contemplating the Basilica and gazing upon his beloved boys at recreation in the courtyard below.

In 1876, the gallery was enclosed to allow Don Bosco in his final years to take short walks protected from the elements. The two kneelers at the end of the gallery were the only furnishings. They allowed Don Bosco, when he could no longer leave his room, to hear the boys’ confessions until the very end.

Moscato vines

From the gallery windows one sees that Don Bosco never forgot his agricultural roots in Asti's wine country. In 1852 he had a variety of muscatel vines from Castelnuovo planted beneath his rooms. These vines climb up the façade of the house from the courtyard below, reminding us of Don Bosco's playful and joyful spirit. He asked for these vines to be planted partly for the shade they provided but mostly for the pleasure they gave at harvest time. He would personally pick the grapes and give them to his dearest benefactors.

The *Biographical Memoirs* offer this account:

...some stout vines in the playground had climbed up the walls to shade the spacious windows on the balcony. One Saturday evening while the saint was in his room hearing the confessions of the pupils of the upper classes [note: probably autumn 1884], a pupil of the fourth high school grade, named Paul Falla, noticed a bunch of grapes that was hiding amid the leafy branches as he was on his knees waiting for his turn. He therefore picked it from the twig and calmly began to munch on the grapes. Absorbed in what he was doing, he forgot everything else and noticed it when the penitent between him and the confessor had gotten up and left. After giving the absolution to the boy on the other side of him, Don Bosco turned to young Falla to hear his confession. With the bunch of grapes in his hand, the boy flushed and stammered an excuse. Don Bosco told him gently: "Do not get upset, finish eating your grapes and then you can make your confession." So saying, he turned to the other side and continued with the confessions (BM XVII, 143).

Letter from Rome (1884)

In his Letter from Rome (1884) Don Bosco recounts a dream in which he was standing at the window of his bedroom balcony in Valdocco... this balcony... from which he sees the sad state of affairs in his beloved oratory below. He exhorts his Salesians to restore the joyful spirit of Valdocco by returning to the young, by living the "sacrament of Salesian presence" among them, as he taught them to do. Today, from this

gallery, Don Bosco invites us to examine how fervently we are living the sacrament of Salesian presence in our work of accompaniment and evangelisation.

5. The room where Don Bosco died

This final room of the *camerette* is where Don Bosco passed from time into eternity.

The room, added in 1876, was the office of Don Bosco's secretary. In December 1887, a bedridden Don Bosco was transferred here because the room was wide enough for a **second bed** to be placed parallel to his own, enabling him to be moved regularly from one bed to the next to avoid painful bed sores.

It was furnished with second-hand donations from benefactors. The **small desk** is where Don Bosco, until 19 December, wrote inspirational messages to benefactors on the back of Mary Help of Christians prayer cards. The **chair with wheels** made it easier to move him around. The three-stepped **wooden ladder** helped him climb into bed.

Marking the spot where Don Bosco died is a precious **display of relics of his life and mission**: his rabat (clerical collar); overcoat; fur hat used on so many trips; and his worn out beretta, a symbol of his priestly identity; his two walking sticks; a change purse; a personal note book (1852); a worn out pair of cotton gloves; and a black scarf most likely the handiwork of Mamma Margaret.

Above these relics, **natural light** flows in from a round window: the Eternal Light who sent Don Bosco to bring hope and joy to the darkness of Valdocco has called him home... but his legacy remains with us.

Hung on the wall is a small **bell** tied to a chord that was attached to Don Bosco's bed... Towards the end of his life, he could do nothing for himself and was completely dependent on the assistance of others for every basic need.

Finally, beneath the bell, the words spoken by a dying Don Bosco to the hundreds of boys gathered in his room and on the second floor, crying and praying for the beloved father: **“I’ll be waiting for you all in paradise.”**

This sober but powerful display invites visitors to reflect on the elderly Don Bosco’s physical and moral efforts, the fruitfulness of his suffering and physical inactivity. But we are also reminded of the serious recommendations in his spiritual testament, the encouragement and warnings of a Founder by now far from the happy, noisy gatherings of boys, and from the spectacular feats of the young acrobat. His gaze now keenly extends to concern for the situation of young people in the world, the future of the Congregation, the risks and temptations of worldliness and “comfort” which risk corroding the ideals and spiritual and apostolic fervour of his sons.

In his final days Don Bosco could no longer get out of bed. He died on the morning of 31 January 1888, at 4:30 a.m. His final agony has been recorded as follows:

On the night of the 30th Don Bosco turned his head slightly towards Enria, who was then constantly in attendance as night male nurse, and said, “Say... but... but... goodbye!” Then very, very softly, he began to recite the Act of Contrition. Now and then he exclaimed, “*Miserere nostri, Domine*”. [“Have mercy, O Lord.”] In the dead of night, he would raise his arms heavenward now and again, clasp his hands and repeat, “Your holy will be done!” Later, as his whole right side became slowly paralyzed, he let his right arm lie motionless on the bed. But he did not stop raising his left arm, nor repeating, now and then, “Your holy will be done!” After that he spoke no more; but the whole day on the 30th and the following night, he continued to lift his left hand in the same way, probably intending to signify his renewed offer of his life to God. ...

The doctors said that Don Bosco would not live beyond the evening or before sunrise. The news spread in a flash all over the Oratory, causing great anguish. The confreres begged that they might look on him once more, so Father Michael Rua permitted them all to go in and kiss his hand. They gathered in small, silent groups in the chapel and

then filed past his deathbed, one by one. He lay there on his humble bed, his head slightly raised, but inclined somewhat toward his right shoulder, propped up on three pillows. His face was not drawn, but calm; his eyes half-closed; his right hand spread out on the quilt. On his chest there was the crucifix, and he was clasping another one in his left hand. At the foot of the bed there was his purple stole, the symbol of his priesthood. ...

At twelve forty-five when, for a brief instant, only his secretary and Joseph Buzzetti were standing near his bed, Don Bosco opened his eyes wide, he stared twice, at length, at Father Charles Viglietti, he lifted his left hand which was free, and rested it on his head. As Buzzetti saw that gesture, he burst into tears, exclaiming, "That is his last farewell." Then he relapsed into his previous immobility. The secretary continued repeating ejaculatory prayers. Then Bishop Cagliero and Bishop Leto took turns in continuing these prayers. Father Francis Dalmazzo gave him the blessing for the dying, saying the accompanying prayers.

Around four o'clock in the afternoon, Count Radicati, a great benefactor of the Oratory, went to see him. An old schoolmate of Don Bosco at Chieri, Father Eugene Francesco, remained in a corner of the room weeping for an hour. At six o'clock Father Francis Giacomelli appeared, put on his stole, and said some ritual prayers. Since it was late that night and Don Bosco did not seem about to die immediately, several of the superiors went to bed, though Father Rua and others did not move. The dying man lay motionless, breathing heavily. He remained like this the whole night long...

He entered into his death agony at one-forty five in the morning on January 31st. When Father Rua saw that he was failing rapidly, he put on his stole and resumed the prayers for the dying, which he had already begun to say some two hours earlier. The other superiors were hastily summoned. Some thirty people between priests, clerics and laymen filled the room and knelt praying.

When Bishop Cagliero entered the room, Father Rua passed the stole to him, and moved over to Don Bosco's right hand side: he bent down to whisper into the beloved Father's ear, and with a voice choked by grief said, "Don Bosco, we, your sons, are here." "We beg you to forgive us for all that we have caused you to suffer and to give us your blessing once again as a token of your forgiveness and your paternal benevolence. I will guide your hand and pronounce the blessing formula." All bowed their heads. Doing violence to his own

heart, Father Rua lifted his paralyzed hand, pronounced the blessing formula over the Salesians present and absent, and especially over those who were the farthest away.

At three o'clock a telegram came with the apostolic blessing sent by Cardinal Rampolla. Bishop Cagliero had already read the final prayers, "*Proficiscere*" [move on!]. At four-thirty the bells of Mary Help of Christians rang out for the Angelus, which everyone recited softly. Father Bonetti whispered his *Viva Maria* once again into Don Bosco's ear as he had done the day before. The death rattle, which was heard for about an hour and a half, stopped. His breath suddenly became free, calm, but it was a matter of only a few seconds. Then he stopped breathing. "Don Bosco is dying!" Father Dominic Belmonte exclaimed. The people, who in their weariness had been sitting down, leapt to their feet and got closer to his bed. He breathed then three times, with short intervals. Don Bosco truly was dying. Staring at him, Bishop Cagliero said, "Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, I give you my heart and my soul. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, assist me in my last agony. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, may my soul breathe forth in peace with you."

Standing in a circle around him, Father Rua and the others lived out their own painful anguish together with their Father. Don Bosco was dead! (BM XVIII, 455-458).

6. The New Chapel

What was once the Oratory student library is the new Casa Don Bosco Chapel.

The **historical altar** at the back of the chapel was a gift to Don Bosco from Turin's Cardinal Alimonda in 1886, an "upgrade" from the poor "wardrobe altar" previously used by Don Bosco (see description on **p. 318**). Cardinal Alimonda blessed this altar on 29 January 1886; Don Bosco celebrated his last Mass on this altar, in his private chapel, on 11 December 1887. After that, from his bed, he "attended" the Mass celebrated by one of his Salesians and Communion was brought to him. The **painting of Mary Help of Christians** (Rollini) above the altar as well as the statue of the **Sacred Heart** are Don Bosco's.

The statue of **St Francis de Sales** behind the new altar once adorned the Church that bears his name in Valdocco.

Behind the worship space are three precious relics of Don Bosco's life and mission:

The humble **wardrobe-altar** is where Don Bosco celebrated Mass when he was too weak to go to the Basilica. From 1872–1886, it was in Don Bosco's first bedroom, then it was transferred to the sacristy of the Church of Mary Help of Christians; in 1887 it was taken to the convent of the Salesian Sisters in Moncrivello, where Sr. Eulalia, Don Bosco's niece, was superior. It remained there until 1930 when it was brought back to Valdocco (cf. ODB 145).

Humble as it is, this wardrobe-altar is nonetheless **the altar of Don Bosco's ecstasy** because in December 1878, Don Bosco was caught up in a mystic rapture while celebrating Mass upon it. This was witnessed by Fr Evasio Garrone, who at the time was an altar boy serving Don Bosco's mass. He recounts that along with a companion named Franchini he was serving Don Bosco's Mass in the little chapel next to his room:

At the elevation of the Host he noticed that Don Bosco was in ecstasy, his face suffused with a heavenly expression which seemed to flood the whole chapel with light. By degrees Don Bosco's feet left the altar platform, so that he remained suspended in air for some ten minutes. The two altar boys could not reach up to his chasuble. In utter bewilderment Garrone dashed out to call Father Berto but could not find him. On coming back he saw that Don Bosco was just descending, so that his feet once more touched the floor, but a heavenly aura still seemed to hover about the altar (BM XIII, 701-702).

Also displayed are Don Bosco's original wooden **Good-Night Pulpit**, and his **confessional** from the Church of St Francis de Sales where he would hear the boys' confessions for three hours at a time.

7. Don Bosco the Saint

This room was originally a large dormitory for the boys, in which such notables as Dominic Savio, Micky Magone and Francesco Besucco slept. Today it celebrates Don Bosco's beatification (June 2, 1929) and canonisation (April 1, 1934, Easter Sunday).

Dominating the room is the **gilded wood and glass casket** used to translocate Don Bosco's remains from his first tomb in Valsalice to the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Valdocco. It held Don Bosco's human remains in the Basilica, in the chapel now dedicated to St Mary Mazzarello, until his definitive altar was completed in 1939, originally the altar of St Peter. The casket was made at the professional school of San Benigno Canavese and designed by Salesian Brother Giulio Valotti.

On the wall by the windows are two paintings. The smaller one is the official **painting for the beatification** (Angelo Enrie, 1828) in which, for the first time, Don Bosco is depicted with a halo, surrounded by a choir of angels. The larger one was painted for his **canonisation** (1934).

The gold-embroidered silk **liturgical vestments** were a labour of love from the Salesian Sisters produced for Don Bosco's beatification mass. They were created under the leadership of Sr. Luisa Vaschetti, third Superior General of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians (1924-1943).

The gold embroidered silk **frontal** which reads "SANCTE JOANNES ORA PRO NOBIS" adorned the temporary altar in the Basilica where Don Bosco's remains were enshrined until 1939.

Above it is the **altar cloth** gifted to the Basilica by Elena, Queen of Italy, on the occasion of her visit on 13 April 1935. The acronym "FERT", embroidered into it, was the motto of the House of Savoy. The cloth was draped over the frontal.

At the bottom of the showcase is a simple **ceramic pitcher**, testimony to the miracle of Don Bosco's bilocation in Saint-Rambert

d'Albon in October 1878. It was a gift from the Clément family to the Marian museum in 1959.

Playing on the wall mounted monitor is **video of the procession** through the streets of Turin with the ceremonial urn bearing St John Bosco's remains on Sunday 8 April 1934, one week after his canonisation in Rome on Easter Sunday.

8. Salesian Holiness in Valdocco

Valdocco was not only a prolific trade school; it was also a school of holiness. Fourteen people who lived at the Valdocco Oratory are now saints, blessed, venerables or martyrs.

Twelve of them are honoured in this room (St John Bosco and Blessed Michael Rua are recognized elsewhere): St Dominic Savio, Blessed Louis Variara, Venerable Andrea Beltrami, Blessed Joseph Allamano, Venerable Margaret Occhiena Bosco, St Louis Orione, St Leonard Murialdo, Blessed Philip Rinaldi, St Louis Guanella, Blessed Augustus Czartoryski, Protomartyrs Louis Versiglia and Callistus Caravario.

The room also contains precious items from the early days of the Church of St Francis de Sales: the first **wooden communion rail** where Mamma Margaret, Dominic Savio and others received Holy Communion, and the original tabernacle door in front of which Dominic Savio had his eucharistic ecstasy (1856).

At the centre of this room is a fabric enclosure, reconstructing the location and perimeter of **Mamma Margaret's tiny bedroom** (1853 – 1856). Inside is the upper part of a cabinet in which she kept her sewing kit for mending the boys' clothing. Displayed upon it are the holy medal she gave to John Bosco on his first communion and the crocheting hook of Maria Giovanna Rua (Michael Rua's mother).

A crystal-like display at the far end of this room honours exemplars of Salesian holiness from Italy and around the world: St Mary Domenica

Mazzarello, the five Polish martyrs of Poznam, St Artemides Zatti, Blessed Alessandrina Da Costa, Blessed Alberto Marvelli, Blessed Ceferino Namuncura, Blessed Joseph Calasanz and his 31 Spanish Companions, Blessed Enrique Saiz Aparicio and his 62 Companions.

9. The Salesian Family

The large room north of the “Salesian Holiness in Valdocco” exhibition is dedicated to the thirty-two branches of the worldwide Salesian Family. We contemplate here Don Bosco’s rich spiritual progeny.

A colourful, stylised tree on the east wall represents the various branches of the Salesian Family that grow from the trunk, the Salesian Congregation, founded by Don Bosco. On the perpendicular wall, each branch is identified by its name, as well as the year, place and language of its founding.

The exhibits create a tapestry of “first fruits” of Salesian holiness from the branches of the Salesian Family tree: women and men, lay and religious, priests and bishops, able bodied and physically challenged, locals and missionaries. A detailed listing of all the items on display exceeds the scope of this book, but this summary listing of Salesian family saints honoured here already suggests the wealth of spiritual inspiration available to visitors.

Blessed Eusebia Palomino Yenes	FMA, Italy
Blessed Bronislaus Markiewicz	Diocesan Priest, Poland; Founder, <i>Congregation of St, Michael the Archangel</i>
Blessed Blanco Marquez	Salesian Cooperator, Spain
Blessed Stefan Sándor	SDB brother, Hungary
Servant of God Titus Zeman	SDB priest, Slovakia
Blessed Maddalena Morano	FMA, Italy
Blessed Maria Romero Meneses	FMA, Italy
Blessed Maria Troncatti	FMA, Italy

Don Bosco Lived Here

Venerable Vincent Cimatti	SDB priest, Italy. Missionary in Japan
Venerable Dorotea De Chopitea	Salesian Cooperator, Spain
Venerable Simaan Srugi	SDB brother, Palestine
Venerable Luigi Olivares	Diocesan priest. Becomes SDB. Bishop, Italy
Venerable Attilio Giordani	Salesian Cooperator, Italy
Servant of God Stephen Ferrando	SDB Bishop, Italy. Missionary in India
Servant of God Francis Convertini	SDB priest, Italy. Missionary in India
Venerable Ignaz Stuchly	SDB priest, Poland
Servant of God Andrea Majcen	SDB priest, Slovenia. Missionary China, Vietnam
Servant of God Rosetta Marchese	FMA, Italy
Venerable Laura Meozzi	FMA, Italy. Missionary, Poland
Venerable Teresa Valsè Pantellini	FMA, Italy
Fr. Rodolfo Lunkenbein Simao Bororo	SDB priest, Germany. Missionary in Brazil
Simao Bororo	Layman in Brazil
Servant of God Luigi Bolla	SDB priest, Italy. Missionary in Ecuador, Peru
Servant of God Giuseppe Cognata	SDB Bishop, Italy, Founder, <i>Salesian Oblate Sisters of the Sacred Heart</i>
Servant of God Silvio Galli	SDB priest, Italy
Servant of God Antonino Baglieri	Volunteer with Don Bosco, Italy

The exhibition of Salesian Family saints is a proverbial “work in progress”.

10. Salesian Mission Activity

The final room is dedicated to Salesian Missionary Activity. Don Bosco’s missionary dreams, nurtured by his reading the Annals of Propagation of the Faith, matured into a concrete plan. Today, the Salesian Congregation is the largest missionary presence in the world.

On display in the Missionary exhibition are:

- Bishop Louis Versiglia's alb
- Don Bosco's globe which once rested his desk, reminding us of his tireless zeal to evangelise the world.
- the original photo of the first Salesian missionary expedition to Patagonia in 1875, headed by Fr John Cagliero.
- the register of names of every Salesian missionary who has left from the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians to the far flung corners of the earth, ever since 1875.
- a brief description of the expansion of the Salesian mission around the world.
- the Salesian missionary cross, marked by the image of the Good Shepherd and the Holy Spirit, the Salesian motto *da mihi animas caetera tolle*, and Jesus' exhortation (Mt 28:19) to go to all peoples, baptising in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

THE BASILICA OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS

The idea of building a majestic church in Mary's honour, able to hold the large youthful population at Valdocco more comfortably, came to Don Bosco one evening in December 1862, as Fr Paul Albera tells us:

One Saturday night in December, possibly the 6th, Don Bosco finished hearing confessions around eleven and went to the dining room for his long overdue supper. He looked very pensive. Only Albera was with him. "There were a lot of confessions tonight," he suddenly remarked, "but truthfully I hardly know what I said or did, because all the time I had something on my mind which totally absorbed me. I kept thinking: Our church is too small. We have to pack in our boys like sardines. We must build a larger, more imposing one under the title of Mary, Help of Christians. I don't have a penny, nor do I know where to find the money, but that's not important. If God so wills, it will be done. I'll try. If I fail, I am willing to take the blame. I won't mind if people say: *This man began to build and was not able to finish.*" (BM VII, 196–197).

But already in 1844, at the very beginning when he was gathering his boys and had neither a place nor a clear formula for his Oratory, in a prophetic dream complementing the one he had when he was nine, he was accompanied by a *Lady* through the various stages of development of his work, to “a field sown with maize, potatoes, cabbages, beetroot, lettuce and many other vegetables”:

“Look again,” she said to me. I looked again and saw a wondrously big church. An orchestra and music, both instrumental and vocal, were inviting me to sing Mass. Inside the church hung a white banner on which was written in huge letters: *Hic domus mea, inde gloria mea*” (MO Ch. 31).

The dream was repeated the following year with one extra detail: the church would be in the “place where the glorious martyrs of Turin, Adventor and Octavius suffered martyrdom” (MB 2, 233). Don Bosco only understood the dreams later, seeing the development of his work, a tangible sign of divine assistance and Mary’s active maternal presence. It was not so much the desire to do something at all costs about his dream, but the real needs of his boys and the people, along with his devotion to the Virgin, that would press him to build “a larger church”.

Historical origins of the title Help of Christians

The title *Help of Christians*, already found in the 16th century in the Loretto Litany (Litany of Our Lady), and was also venerated in Turin where there was a Confraternity by that name at the church of St Francis da Paola. It gained prominence from Pius VII in 1815. He had just returned from imprisonment by Napoleon and wanted to thank Mary the Help of the Church and of Christians, instituting the Feast day on 24 May.

In 1862 there was a further event that rapidly spread devotion to the Help of Christians: in March of that year Our Lady had spoken from a picture in a ruined church in Fratta near Spoleto – it was to a

five-year-old child. Mary began to grant favours and particular graces. News spread like wildfire and great enthusiasm ensued. Within a few days pilgrims were pouring in. Archbishop John Baptist Arnaldi of Spoleto, impressed by the numbers who kept coming and the piety that had been aroused, decreed that the sacred image could be given the title of *Auxilium Christianorum* and became an enthusiastic promoter of what had happened and of the cult of the Help of Christians.

The Spoleto events took place at a time of high tension between State and Church; the temporal power of the Pope seemed to have reached its nadir, much of the Papal States were already under the control of the new Kingdom of Italy and the Roman Pontiff himself became a target of criticism and contempt by liberals and anticlericals. Spoleto had been Pius IX's diocese as a bishop and the apparitions encouraged Italian Catholics: the Lord had not abandoned his Church and through his Blessed Mother was working portents and wonders.

The Help of Christians, as Archbishop Arnaldi put it, was “the bright star that shines in dark times, protectress of the Catholic Church, comforter of the Roman Pontiff who is scorned and opposed in every way by the enemies of the faith; she is the strong warrior, the terror of hell, salvation of the faithful, refuge of the afflicted, hopeful reminder of triumph for the Church and its August Head.” Mary was crushing the serpent's head and marking God's victory over the enemies of good.

In Catholic newspapers and homilies the name *Ausiliatrice* and the Spoleto events resounded throughout Italy, arousing fervour and enthusiasm amongst Catholics, but likewise criticism and ridicule amongst their adversaries. In Turin *L'Armonia* gave considerable prominence to the events up until May 1862, publishing Archbishop Arnaldi's report, and it aroused considerable interest.

Don Bosco's inspiring motives

Don Bosco had already used the title *Auxilium Christianorum* in his Month of May (1858) publication to indicate Mary's effective activity

as a protector, during life but especially at death (where “she will be a fearful captain and in the guise of an orderly army will restrain the attacks of the infernal enemy”). On 24 May 1862, in his “Good Night”, he “very joyfully told us of some miraculous events connected with a painting of Mary near Spoleto” (BM VII, 105).

The plan to dedicate the new church to Mary Help of Christians came about then in a context of hope and expectation, where Marian spirituality was drawing a notable impulse from Spoleto in an ecclesial, social and eschatological sense. Don Bosco, for his part, was fully aware of the climate and occasion.

Behind his desire to name the longed-for church after the Help of Christians, there was firstly an *ecclesiological motivation* accentuated by the bitter recognition of the “sadness of the times.” So much is evident from many things Don Bosco said: the dream of the “two columns”, which he told his boys on 30 May 1862 (cf. BM VII, 107–109), the introduction to a book in 1868 entitled *The Marvels of the Mother of God invoked under the title of Mary Help of Christians*:

The universally heartfelt need today to call on Mary is not something particular but general; it is not that there are more lukewarm people to inspire, sinners to convert, innocents to preserve. Things like this are useful everywhere, and for anyone. It is the Catholic Church itself that is under attack. It is attacked in its functions, its sacred institutions, its Head, its teaching, its discipline; it is attacked as the Catholic Church, as the centre of truth, as the teacher of all the faithful.

It is to win the special protection of Heaven that it turns to Mary our common Mother as special Helper of the King, the Catholic people, Catholics throughout the world.”

(G. Bosco, *Maraviglie della Madre di Dio invocata sotto il titolo di Maria Ausiliatrice*, Torino, Tip. dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales 1868, pp. 6–7).

But it was not historical contingencies alone that determined Don Bosco’s choice. He felt that this title was the best one for *expressing his gratitude* to the Virgin for the many “helps” received, and also to

invoke her protection over the newly emerging Congregation. Cardinal John Cagliero tells us:

In 1862, Don Bosco told me that he was thinking of building a magnificent church worthy of the Blessed Virgin. “Up to now,” he said, “we have celebrated the feast of the Immaculate Conception with pomp and solemnity. Indeed, it was on this day that our work of the festive oratory began. But the Madonna wishes us to honor Her under the title of Mary, Help of Christians. The times are so bad that we sadly need Her help to preserve and safeguard our faith. But there is another reason. Can you guess it?”

“I believe,” I replied, “that this church will be the mother church of our Congregation, the source of all our undertakings for youth.”

“Right!” he exclaimed. “The Blessed Virgin is our foundress. She will also be our support.” (BM VII, 197).

For Don Bosco, then, the title of Help [of Christians] found immediate resonance. *Personal experience and reflection* had led him to devotion to Mary and a mariology with positive and historical underpinning. Mary was not just the Mother of God to be venerated and loved, someone who aroused tender affection and spiritual enthusiasm: she had been directly involved in the history of salvation at a personal, ecclesial and social level; hers was an historical and eschatological mission; it was she who had guided Don Bosco from his childhood and sustained him through so many difficulties; development of the Oratory was due to her; it was she who was guiding the first steps of the emerging Salesian Congregation.

For Don Bosco there was also a strong *pastoral and pedagogical emphasis*: Mary is a help as we journey through life in overcoming the assaults of sin, being freed from every kind of evil (spiritual, moral and physical) and especially for doing good.

Within the Oratory’s walls, amongst all the people who came to Valdocco, and amongst Don Bosco’s benefactors, devotion to the Help of Christians took on a more intimate significance, one less determined by political and social factors. He pointed out to his boys how she can

arouse greater religious fervour and commitment to life and spiritual growth. He presented Mary to his Salesians as inspiration, strength, and model for the educational mission and their journey to holiness, while he demonstrated the powerful and miraculous activity and protection of the Mother of God to the faithful, in order to encourage them to conversion and a life inspired by Christianity.

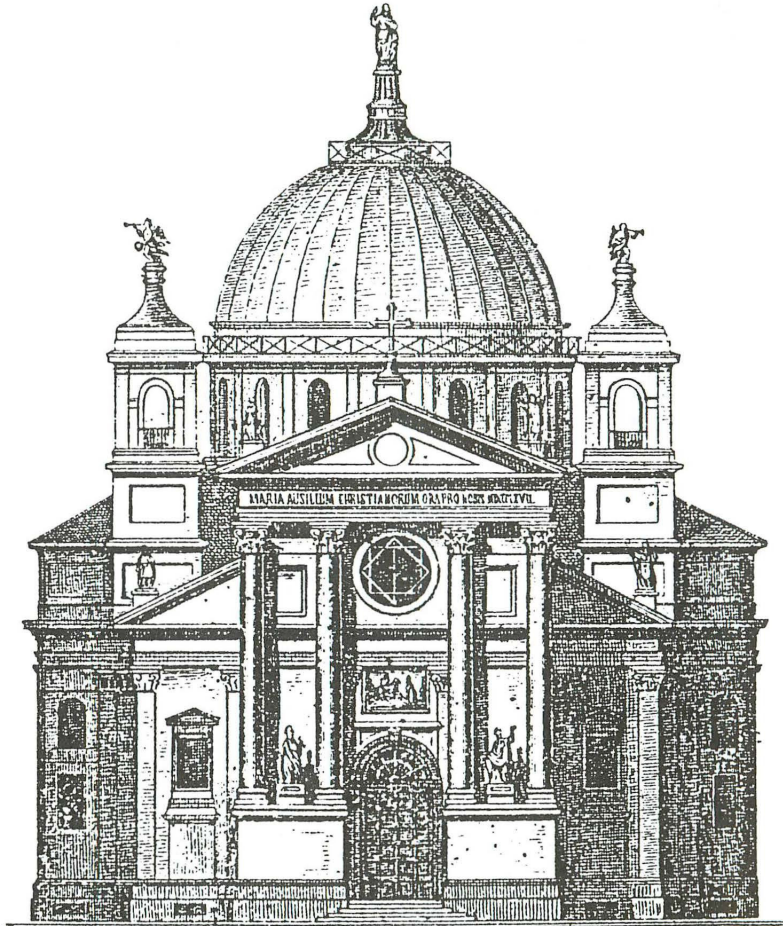
The project and works

Don Bosco had no financial basis for this work, but convinced that “The Madonna Herself wants the church. She will provide the means” (BM VII, 223), at the beginning of 1863 he negotiated with the Rosminians to buy back the seminary field that he had sold to Rosmini in April 1854. Dealings concluded on 11 February. He relied on the charity of his benefactors and the support of the authorities, sending out a large number of circulars providing his reason for the construction of the new church – for pastoral purposes only: to give more space to the young people within and outside the Oratory and provide the new suburb springing up around Valdocco with a church, since the area now had “a population of over twenty thousand with neither church nor chapel, no public school, where, with the exception of ours, services could be held, or religious education imparted” (MB VII, 379 – this detail is not included in BM, hence the MB reference).

The project

Don Bosco firstly gave the project to a commission of architects, then seeing that each one wanted his own design and that discussion was going on for months without any agreement, he gave everything to Engineer Antonio Spezia, the one who had estimated the costs of the Pinardi house when he had bought it. Spezia drew up a plan in the form of a Latin cross covering some 1200 square metres:

Fig. 17



Lit. Giordana • Salussolia Torino

(G. BOSCO, *Rimembranza di una solennità in onore di Maria Ausiliatrice*, Torino, Tip. dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales 1868).

Two low belfries flanked a jutting facade. The main entrance was through an atrium supporting the choir loft. A majestic dome with sixteen large windows capped the nearly two hundred and thirty-foot-high structure [note.: it turned out to be 45 metres]. The main altar, behind which ran a narrow passageway, was flanked on both sides by a sacristy opening on a spacious, imposing sanctuary. Each arm of the cross ended in a large altar; two other altars were located in small chapels midway in the lower stem of the cross.

Don Bosco was delighted with the design. “Without my telling the architect my particular wishes,” he remarked, “he designed a chapel in the exact spot which the Blessed Virgin had pointed out to me.” This particular altar, in fact, was dedicated to the holy martyrs of Turin [Adventor, Octavius, and Solor] (MB 7, 276–277).

The plan, after a few problems were resolved concerning the naming of the church *as that of Mary Help of Christians*, was approved by the City Building Commission.

Building works

Construction was given to Carlo Buzzetti, one of the first Oratory boys. To buy the land and put a wooden fence around it, it had cost 4,000 lire in May 1863. Excavations took place in summer and autumn. An enormous amount of earth had to be carried away given that there was a large underground area under the church, as well as the deep foundations. Thus, in 1863 only part of the work could be completed. It began again in March 1864. They became aware that the ground was alluvial, so “deeper excavations had to be made and piles sunk along the perimeter of the church. Though the additional expense was considerable, work went on steadily.” (BM VII, 393).

In winter they bought 200 thousand *miriagrams* of rock [note: 100 miriagrams = tonne, more or less], transported to Turin by rail for free, thanks to the Director General of Railways, Bartholomew Bona. On 5 April, Don Bosco sent out another request for public charity and had

it put in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale* on 12 April 1864 and other Catholic papers.

The church's plans had to be submitted to the then Canon Lorenzo Gastaldi, future archbishop, who approved them and suggested some functional alterations which were mostly accepted. When the plans were complete, Don Bosco sent out other circulars to the faithful asking them to subscribe, and these went out through northern and central Italy. There was no lack of response; by talking about the new church construction, Don Bosco was also spreading devotion to the Help of Christians and this meant multiplication of favours and graces received through Mary's intercession. This confirmed Don Bosco in his belief that if the Blessed Virgin wanted this church, she had already worked out how finances were going to be found.

By the end of April excavations were complete and Buzzetti invited Don Bosco to lay the foundation stone. At the end of the function he turned to the builder and said:

"I want to advance you something on this big job," he said. "It may not be much but it's all I have." Then he took out a small purse and emptied it into Buzzetti's hands. The latter—like the rest of the bystanders—was expecting a generous handful of gold coins. Imagine their bewilderment on seeing just eight miserable *soldi*. "Don't worry," Don Bosco smilingly added. "The Madonna Herself will provide the funds. I am only Her instrument, Her treasurer." Then, turning to the bystanders, he concluded, "You will see!" (MB 7, 393).

The Italian State was going through a serious economic crisis, and only a Saint or someone terribly reckless could have tackled a risk like that. The excavations and foundations alone cost more than 35 thousand lire and to bring the project to its conclusion Don Bosco had to find around a million, having only predicted about 200 thousand lire.

The state of Italian finances got even worse from autumn 1864. The country generally was feeling the pinch and Don Bosco's benefactors too. When the capital was moved to Florence (1865) the number of

benefactors diminished. The already serious situation became tragic for Don Bosco: he had to tackle serious food shortage for his more than seven hundred boys now at Valdocco, and every fortnight he had to find a salary for Buzzetti's workers and bricklayers as well as money for building materials, the prices for which were going through the roof. But Don Bosco considered he could not delay construction so he redoubled his efforts, his trips, as well as the humiliations, and of course his prayers.

On 27 April 1865 there was a solemn celebration of the laying of the cornerstone: blessed by Bishop Odone, Bishop of Susa who replaced Bishop Nazari of Calabiana, Bishop of Casale who was ill. The stone was placed by Duke Amedeo d'Aosta son of Victor Emanuel II, and there was also the Mayor, Prefect and other important personages from Turin. Don Bosco publicised the fact with a commemorative pamphlet and launched a grand lottery.

The financial situation was no better in 1865 and 1866, and Don Bosco had to extend his efforts to find new funds. In December 1865 he went to Florence, where he was a guest of Countess Ugucioni, and in spring of 1866 he sent Cavaliere Federico Oreglia di Santo Stefano to Rome. He was a Salesian Brother. His task was to encourage charitable giving by stressing devotion to Our Lady and the miracles wrought under the title of Help of Christians, more than the needs of Valdocco and philanthropic motives.

In July 1866 they were working on the cupola, but only slowly due to lack of money. On Sunday 23 September the cupola was completed with a ceremony laying the final brick, which was done by Don Bosco and Marquis Emanuele Fassati.

The church had not been finished by December as had been hoped. Don Bosco decided to go to Florence and Rome again (December 1866–January 1867), looking for further help.

His time in Florence and Rome also allowed him to offer help in reconciling the Italian State with the Holy See, and he was appreciated by both sides for his balance and moderation.

During these journeys Don Bosco, who presented himself always as a priest concerned especially with the salvation of the people he met, gave renewed impetus to Christian life and conversion. It was during this time that his fame as a miracle-worker began to increase.

Between proceeds from the lotteries and continual smaller amounts from friends and benefactors old and new he survived through 1867, but building stopped during a very cold winter when food costs skyrocketed. On 21 May 1867, the new Archbishop of Turin, Alessandro Riccardi di Netro blessed the statue of Our Lady on the cupola. It stood 4 metres high, and was made by sculptor Filippo Boggio.

In spring 1868 donations began flowing again and work inside the church could continue. By May that year, while final touches were being added, pilgrims began to come spontaneously to the new church from the rural parishes of Monferrato and Langhe.

Consecration of the church

On 21 May 1868 Bishop Balma blessed the five bells and finally, on 9 June, at a solemn function, Archbishop Riccardi consecrated the new church and the altars. The consecration began at 5:30 a.m. and finished at 10:30, after which the archbishop celebrated the first Mass in the new church. In the evening, for Vespers the antiphon *Sancta Maria, succurre miseris*, composed by Cagliero, was sung. It had a marvellous effect: there were three large choirs in different places, as Don Bosco wrote in a commemorative article called *Recollections of a Solemnity in honour of Mary Help of Christians*:

One on the sanctuary of about 150 tenors and basses representing the Church militant; the other in the cupola of about 200 sopranos and contraltos representing the angels or the Church triumphant; the

third choir was made up of other 100 tenors and bases and was in the orchestra and symbolised the Church suffering.

(G. Bosco, *Rimembranza di una solennità in onore di Maria Ausiliatrice*, Torino, Tip. dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales 1868, p. 27).

The three choirs were conducted at the same time by Cagliero using an electrical device.

Festivities and religious functions went on for eight days and different prelates presided. Thousands of pilgrims took part. During the octave the people's great faith obtained many graces and some notable healings through Mary's intercession, all of which contributed to spreading the church's fame as well as Don Bosco's.

What did Don Bosco's church look like?

There were five altars:

- The high altar with the large picture of the Help of Christians by Tommaso Lorenzone (1824-1902).
- St Peter's altar, on the right, with a painting by Filippo Carcano (1840-1914) of Milan; today this altar is below in the crypt and Don Bosco's altar has taken its place.
- St Joseph's altar, on the left, with a painting by Lorenzone (the only one remaining intact today).
- St Anne's altar, in the chapel on the right of the central nave: this was the most beautiful one and had plenty of marble; it had been made in Rome by sculptor Luigi Medici, and had a painting by Giovanni Battista Fino (1820-1898): it is now found in the women's section to the right of the main altar, and the altar itself is dedicated to Saint Mary Mazzarello.
- The altar of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, in the chapel on the left, with a painting by Giovanni Bonetti from Turin (today to be found in Caserta in the Sanctuary of the Sacred Heart of Mary;

the altar was later dedicated by Fr Rua to St Francis de Sales; today it is St Dominic Savio's altar).

Don Bosco describes the church thus in his commemorative pamphlet:

If the reader observes this church from the outside, he sees a modern style facade proportionately wide and high. The main door is a masterpiece by Ottone Torinese, designed by Cav. Spezia.

Two bell towers which will soon be surmounted by an angel two metres high in beaten copper, the exquisite work of the Brogi brothers from Milan, stand in front of the cupola. Above one of them is a concerto of five bells in E Flat with which we can play music for singing and also military marches...

The cupola plated with copper and covered with white lead, stands above the bell towers; this will prevent oxidation, and protect it from strong winds, heat, cold and other inclement weather according to season. Above the cupola is a majestic statue of gilded beaten copper standing about four metres high and the work of Cav. Boggio. It is a gift from a good lady from Turin. The Blessed Virgin is in the act of blessing her devotees who are saying: *Nos cum prole pia benedicat Virgo Maria.*

If you enter the church by the main door you see two marble columns supporting the orchestra and supported by two pedestals worked in such a way that they also served as holy water fountains. We should not forget the orchestra which is the gift and work of master carpenter Giuseppe Gabotti from Locarno and who lives in Turin.

It has two floors, an orchestra and contra-orchestra with echo or double flooring. It can hold around three hundred musicians.

The flooring is Venetian style. The sanctuaries for each altar are likewise mosaics. The one at the main altar needs no carpet. It is worthy of all the most beautiful solemnities. The balustrades and altars are of marble, and made by Cav. Gussone from Turin except the first on the right as you enter. This was made in Rome by Luigi Medici and paid for by a nobleman from Bologna. The marble here is better than for all the other altars.

If you pause at the centre of the church and turn your gaze to the right of the main altar, you see the pulpit in front of you. It is one of

the most splendid items in the church. It is a gift from a noblewoman of Turin who wants to remain unnamed but wants everyone to know that it is an offering made for a grace received, so we find it written in gold letters: To Mary help of Christians for a grace received.

The design and its execution were found worthy of praise. But what makes it especially commendable is that it stands out from the wall, thanks to which the preacher can be seen from any part of the church. It is also worth noting with regard to the preachers, that the shape of the church echoes the voice, so words need to be pronounced distinctly to avoid confusion when speaking.

The two cross-vaults have a door each so that the faithful can easily enter and leave. The cornices of the church and cupola are equipped with iron railing to protect whoever needs to work up there, and also to hold singers and others during major solemnities as we have done during the octave which we are about to talk about.

(G. Bosco, *Rimembranza di una solennità in onore di Maria Ausiliatrice*, Torino, Tip. dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales 1868, pp. 14–17).

Restoration and extensions

First extensions (Don Bosco 1869–1870)

As soon as Don Bosco had paid his remaining debts he began building a choir behind the main altar and two side sacristies extending those flanking the sanctuary. It had been suggested by Canon Gastaldi when work began, to avoid people passing from one sacristy to the other via the sanctuary (cf. BM VII, 394).

This made more room for singers and boys from the festive Oratory. They could use the sacristy on the left that opened directly onto the sanctuary.

Second extensions (Fr Rua 1889–1891)

Between 1889 and 1891, Blessed Michael Rua, first successor of Don Bosco, undertook improvements and restoration of the sanctuary. He made a vow to this effect on the evening of Don Bosco's death, when he was seeking permission to bury him either in this church or at least at Valsalice, as in fact happened.

Working on the restoration and decoration of the church of Mary Help of Christians were artist Giuseppe Rollini from Intra, a past pupil of Don Bosco's, Prof. Carlo Conte from Vercelli for the decorations which are most valuable, engineer and architect Crescentino Carelli from Fubine, especially for the main altar where he enclosed the painting of Mary Help of Christians in a magnificent marble frame.

The gables on the facade were raised somewhat and the top of the bell towers modified (ODB 283).

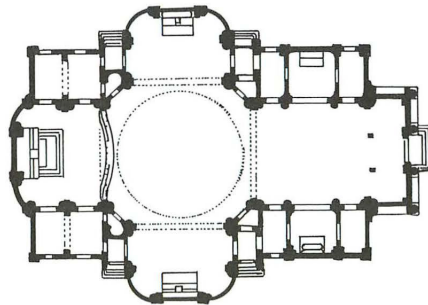
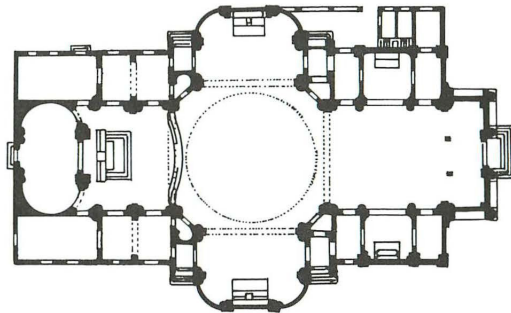
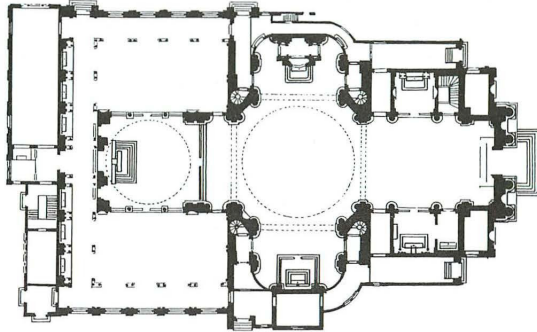
Third extensions (Fr Ricaldone 1935–1938)

Over time the church of Mary Help of Christians gained importance and stature worldwide, while the church at Spoleto remained a local sanctuary, and in July 1911 St Pius X conferred on it the title of *Minor Basilica*.

The church, also by now a parish church, could no longer hold the seven hundred boys, local people and the regular flow of pilgrims, especially on feast days. Fr Philip Rinaldi then decided to increase the area without affecting Don Bosco's work and asked architect Mario Ceradini, president of the Fine Arts Academy in Turin, to study possibilities. He planned an extension obtained by transforming the Latin cross into a Greek cross and building four large chapels in the corners formed by the intersecting naves. Fr Rinaldi's death (5 December 1931) saw the project suspended, and it was taken up by Fr Peter Ricaldone.

Don Bosco Lived Here

Fig. 18: Successive developments of the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians



1. Basilica the year it opened (1868) 2. Choir and 2 sacristies added 1869-1870 3. Extensions - two chapels beside main altar, large sacristy (1935-1938)

The design by architect Mario Ceradini required pulling down buildings adjacent to the Basilica, and would have meant colossal expenditure. They then decided to ask the Economist General, Fr Fedele Giraudi, and Salesian architect, Giulio Valotti, to study the question.

The plan approved in 1934, the year of Don Bosco's canonisation, and implemented from 1935–1938, involved the following:

- lengthening of the sanctuary over which a second cupola was built, and consequent relocation of the main altar and the painting of Mary Help of Christians.
- construction of two large chapels either side of the sanctuary, with balconies above.
- a long gallery with six altars behind the main altar, connecting with the two side chapels.
- construction of a spacious sacristy behind and towards the former Pinardi house
- a walkway with two doors behind the facade.

Today, the dimensions of the church are: 70 metres long; 36 to 40 metres wide; height including the top of the statue on the cupola, 45 metres.

The work also included almost complete redoing of decorations, altars and abundant addition of marble, sculptures and furniture.

The restorations were opened on 9 June 1938.

Visiting the Basilica

(cf. fig. 19 [page 341](#))

Facade

Architect Spezia drew his inspiration for the facade from St George the Great Church in Venice, designed by Palladio.

Looking at the church from the entrance to the *piazza* off *corso Regina Margherita*, the gilded statues stand out: Our Lady on the cupola (4 metres high, by Boggio) the angels on the two lower bell towers: the Archangel Gabriel (on the right) offers a crown to Mary, the Archangel Michael (on the left) holding a flag with *Lepanto* written on it, recalling the victory over the Turks (1571).

On the gables above the facade are the statues of the three martyrs Solorio, Adventor and Octavius, martyred at this spot according to tradition and Don Bosco's dream.

The two statues above the clocks are St Massimo, a Church Father and first bishop of Turin, and St Francis de Sales.

In the niches above are statues of St Aloysius Gonzaga and St Joseph.

Higher still, in the triangular part of the gable, is the coat of arms of the Salesian Society, held by two angels, and underneath are the words *Maria Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro nobis*.

In the niche under the rose window is a marble group of figures representing Jesus the Teacher welcoming and blessing the children.

Between the side columns are two bas-reliefs representing St Pius V proclaiming the victory at Lepanto (on the left), and Pius VII crowning Mary in the Sanctuary at Savona (on the right). Under the bas-reliefs are two angels holding a placard with the two dates: 1571 and 1814.

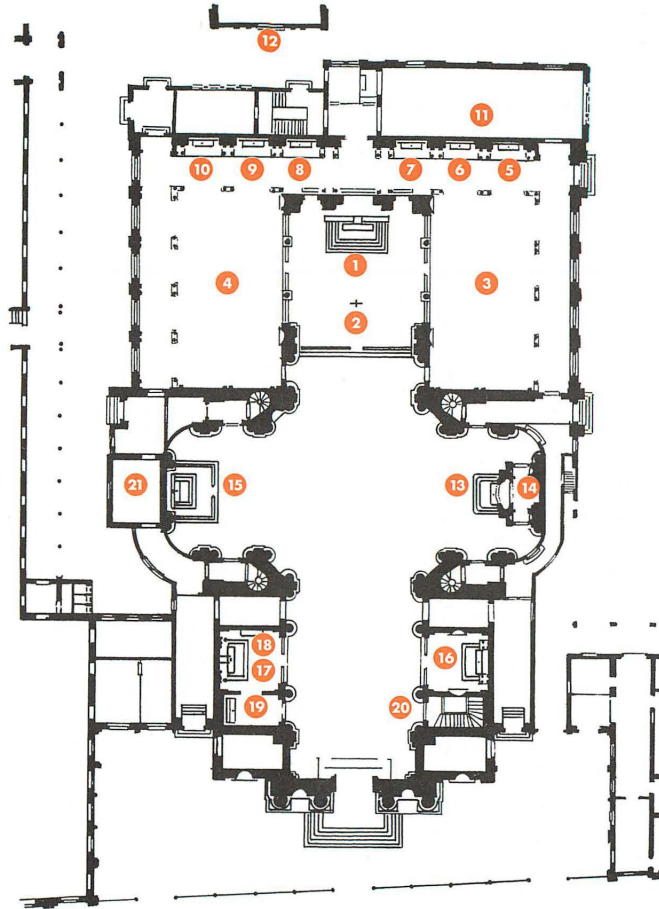
Two scenes from the Gospel are engraved into the base of the columns: the raising up of the son of the widow of Naim and the healing of the deaf-mute.

Inner facade

Entering from the centre door and taking a few steps inside, if you look back you can admire the multicoloured rose window up above representing Mary's monogram with symbols of her Queenship (Our

Tours of the various places

Fig. 19: Plan of Basilica of Mary Help of Christians Today



1. Main altar 2. Location of main altar previously 3. Crucifix chapel 4. St Pius V chapel
- 5-10 altars: Cottolengo, Crucifix, Cafasso, Holy Martyrs, Pius V and Guardian Angel 11. Sacristy
12. St Francis de Sales altar 13. Don Bosco's altar 14. Small chapel near casket
15. St Joseph's altar 16. M. Mazzarello's altar 17. Dominic Savio's altar
18. Savio funereal monument 19. Sacred Heart chapel 20. Entrance to relics chapel 21. Baptistery

Lady Help, Queen of Peace, Morning Star) above the sun shining over the waters of Lepanto.

The grand orchestra which Don Bosco built is no longer there today: it was removed to provide light for the central nave. The place for the organ and singers is now on the left of the main altar above the large side chapel.

On the entrance door there is a Latin epigraph recalling the two dreams which are pictured either side, work of Mario Barberis. The one on the left is the *dream of the two columns* (May 1862: the Church is a ship, piloted by the Pope and in the hostile stormy world it is saved by anchoring itself to the columns of the Eucharist and the Help of Christians; cf. MB 7, 107ff); the one on the right is the *dream of the raft* (January 1866): it represents the saving mission of the Salesian Society amongst the young.

The band running the length of the church, between the heads of the pillars and the cornice above which is the roof, has the Marian antiphon written in large letters: “*Sancta Maria succurre miseris – iuva pusillanimes – refove flebiles – ora pro populo – interveni pro clero – intercede pro devoto femineo sexu – sentiant omnes peccatores tuum iuvamen – quicumque tuum sanctum implorant auxilium*” (Holy Mary, succour the poor, help the fearful, restore the weak, pray for the people, intervene on behalf of the clergy, intercede for women, show your support for all sinners and all who implore your holy assistance).

Chapel of St Mary Domenica Mazzarello (cf. fig. 19 no. 16 page 341)

On the right, near the main entrance, a door leads to the stairs that goes down to the Chapel of the Relics (cf. [page 354](#)). It was through this door, until 1937, that the choir went up to the orchestra. In the niche above is a statue of Saint Cecilia, patroness of music.

Then comes the chapel, with a bronze casket under the altar with the remains of *Saint Mary Domenica Mazzarello (1837-1881)*

co-foundress and first Mother General of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Her body was brought from Nizza Monferrato to the Basilica in 1938, the year of her beatification, and placed in the Chapel of the Relics; it was placed under the altar the following year.

Mother Mazzarello was canonised on 24 June 1951.

The altar is the work of Valotti, while the painting of the Saint is by Crida. The two items on the wall are also by Crida: the one on the left, Mother Mazzarello's election as Superior (15 June 1874); the one on the right, when Pius IX gave her and the first missionaries an audience (9 November 1877).

We recall that Mary Mazzarello is the cornerstone for the living building that Don Bosco wanted to raise up to Mary Help of Christians after consecrating this church to her. On 5 August 1872 at Mornese, for Mary Mazzarello and companions' first profession, Don Bosco spoke these words:

Among the smallest plants but one of the ones with the best perfume, is the nard often spoken of in Holy Scripture. In the Office of the Blessed Virgin it says: *Nardus mea dedit odorem suavitatis*, my nard gives out a sweet perfume! But do you know what needs to be done for nard to give out its perfume? It needs to be well-crushed. So do not be sorry if you have to suffer. Whoever suffers for Jesus Christ will reign with him in eternity.

You now belong to a Religious Family that belongs completely to Our Lady; you are few, you have little and you do not have human approval. But do not worry. Things will soon change...

Yes, I can assure you the Institute will have a great future if you remain simple, poor, humble.

So observe all the duties of your new circumstances as religious, and supported by our tender mother Mary Help of Christians you will pass undamaged through the shoals of life and will do great good for your souls and those of your neighbour.

Your glory will be your beautiful title of Daughters of the Help of Christians, and often consider that your Institute should be the living

monument of Don Bosco's gratitude to the Great Mother of God, invoked under the title of help of Christians."

(From: G. Capetti [ed.], *Cronistoria*, vol. I: *La preparazione e la fondazione*, Roma, FMA 1974, pp. 305-306).

The statues of the angels in the side niches are the work of sculptor Giacomo Mussner from Ortisei.

This chapel was originally dedicated to St Anne. In 1890 Fr Rua replaced the original painting with one of the holy martyrs Solor, Adventor and Octavius, since this was the spot on which they were martyred according to Don Bosco's vision. After this chapel, from the door that leads into the passageway on the right, is a statue of St Agnes, one of the patronesses of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

St John Bosco chapel (cf. fig. 19 nos. 13 and 14 page 341)

In the right transept, where the chapel of St Peter used be, is the altar dedicated to St John Bosco, work of architect Mario Ceradini (1938).

Above, under the painting by Crida, is the bronze and glass *casket* containing the Saint's remains, designed by Prof. Giulio Casanova of the Albertin Academy, and framed by the marble architecture of the altar. Don Bosco's *body*, dressed in vestments donated by Pope Benedict XV, was transferred here from Valsalice in 1929. The face and hands are wax masks by Cellini and painted by Carlo Cussetti.

The altar has marble of various colours, onyx, malachite and oriental jewels. The tabernacle, decorated with lapis lazuli, has a silver chiselled door with a small dome of ancient onyx over it, and bronze decoration.

Architect Mario Ceradini (1864–1940) separated the altar from the wall at the back and gained a small and richly decorated area of which allows pilgrims to approach the casket. Two statues at the side of the altar, the work of sculptor Nori from Verona, represent *Faith* holding up the chalice and host and *Charity*, with the burning heart.

In the side niches are two saints for young people who inspired Don Bosco's pedagogy: on the right *St John Baptist de La Salle* (1651–1719), founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (work of Cellini, 1942); on the left *St Philip Neri* (1515–1595) founder of the Congregation of the Priests of the Oratory.

Two stained glass windows on the side of the altar illustrate scenes from the Saint's life: on the right his meeting with Bartholomew Garelli in the sacristy of St Francis of Assisi (8 December 1841); on the left Don Bosco's and Mamma Margaret's arrival at Pinaridi house (3 November 1846).

Proceeding towards the main altar, we find the *pulpit* in walnut, designed by Spezia, from which Don Bosco preached on many an occasion especially on feast days. There are many testimonies preserved of his heartfelt sermons. Here for example is a passage from one he gave on the occasion of the first missionary expedition in 1875:

I only say that even though in this moment my soul is saddened at the thought of your departure, my heart is greatly consoled in seeing our Congregation strengthened; in realizing how we, in our insignificance, are yet able at this moment to contribute our little pebble to the mighty edifice of the Church. Yes, go forth bravely, but remember that there is but one Church that is spread over Europe, America, and the whole world and welcomes men of all nations who seek refuge at her maternal bosom...

Wherever you will be, beloved sons, always remember that you are Catholic priests, that you are Salesians...

The Sacraments and the Gospel preached by our Savior, by His Apostles and by St. Peter's successors down to the present day, those Sacraments and that same religion jealously love, profess and exclusively preach wherever you will be, whether among savages or civilized people...

As Salesians, no matter in what remote part of the world you may be, never forget that here in Italy you have a father who loves you in the Lord and a Congregation that thinks of you in every circumstance, provides for your needs and will always welcome you as brothers. Go, then. You will have to face all kinds of trials, hardships, and dangers.

Do not be afraid; God is with you; He will give you such grace that you will be able to say with St. Paul: By myself I can do nothing, but with Divine help, I am all powerful. *Omnia possum in eo qui me confortat...*

Farewell! Perhaps some of us shall not meet again on this earth. For a while we shall be physically separated, but one day we shall be reunited forever (BM XI, 361–362).

Major cupola

At the centre of the building is the grand cupola built by Don Bosco but decorated by his successor Fr Rua (1890–1891). The huge fresco is the work of Giuseppe Rollini (1842–1904) past pupil of Don Bosco's. Rollini's sketch of this is found today in the museum attached to the *Camerette*.

In the upper part we see the triumph and glory of the Help of Christians in heaven: Our Lady is seated on the throne and is holding her Child upright on her knees; above her the majestic figure of the Father and the dove symbolising the Spirit; angels and archangels fly around and the throng of blessed ones; near Mary's throne is St Joseph and, a little off to the right, Sts Francis de Sales, Charles Borromeo, Aloysius Gonzaga, Philip Neri and others. In the lower part of the cupola is Don Bosco amidst his sons: on the right, Bishop Cagliero with a group of Patagonians, the Salesians and Salesian Sisters missionaries teaching catechism; on Don Bosco's left the Salesians and their work with students and trade school boys.

Further to the left are the religious orders of Trinitarians and Mercedarians.

In the part of the cupola in front of Mary's throne a group of angels is holding a tapestry representing the battle of Lepanto (7 October 1571), next to which on the right are Pius V and the captains of the Christian armies; on the left the Pole, John Sobieski, who liberated Vienna from the Turkish siege (1683). The final group completing the

decoration and closing the circle is Pius VII with the Bull instituting the Feast of Mary Help of Christians (1815).

In the four rib vaults of the cupola Rollini has painted the Doctors of the Church, St Ambrose and St Augustine (Latin Church), St Athanasius and St John Chrysostom (Oriental Church).

High altar (cf. fig. 19 no. 1 page 341)

The old high altar built by Don Bosco was where the balustrade is today.

On the pillars holding up the arch that divides the nave from the sanctuary, in the two niches above the side entrances, are statues of St Anne (on the right) and St Joachim (on the left), Mary's parents, who are looking towards the huge painting of Mary Help of Christians. The statues are the work of sculptor Nori.

The wide sanctuary, result of the extensions in 1935–1938, extend beyond the limits of the former apse, also covering the area formerly occupied the choir, built by Don Bosco between 1869 and 1870.

The high altar, work of Salesian architect Giulio Valotti (1938), is like a huge frame for the grand painting by Lorenzone. The architectural lines are faintly reminiscent of the Renaissance, covered in decoration and coloured marble.

On the two pillars flanking the painting are twelve niches, six per side and two by two, holding statues of saints well known for their devotion to Our Lady.

On the right hand pillar, from the bottom up, Saints: Cyril of Alexandria and Stephen of Hungary (first level); John Bosco and Bernard of Chiaravalle (second level); Mary Domenica Mazzarello and Bernadette Soubirous (third level).

On the left pillar, in the same order, Saints: John Damascene and Dominic Guzman (bottom); Ephrem and Bonaventure (middle); Rose of Lima and Catherine of Siena (top). In the triangle is a mosaic by Reffo

that was part of the old main altar, of the eternal Father (1891). In the triangles on the iconic arch are two angels in mosaic, by the same artist.

The frieze in between the main triangle of the tympanum and the painting, on two gilded bronze plaques, is the greeting *Ave Maria*.

A range of boxes with fourteen round heads of angels in Carrara marble, work of Luisoni, frames the altar.

The tabernacle is framed by pilasters with small stones and white stalks of lapis lazuli. In the small tympanum there is a bas-relief of Jesus offering bread. Standing out from it is an artistic crucifix in gilded bronze with two symbolic deer. All this serves as the base of a throne for the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament surrounded by two angels holding a crown.

The picture of Mary Help of Christians

Don Bosco commissioned this work in 1865 asking artist Tommaso Lorenzone to do it. He wanted a grand scene: The Virgin above amongst the choirs of angels; around her the Apostles and Martyrs, the prophets, virgins and confessors; at Mary's feet the symbols of her victories and the people in the world, in an attitude of prayer and supplication (cf. BM VIII, 2ff). But given the artist's comment that he could hardly achieve such a grand project as that, Don Bosco was content with a summary of it, but just as grandiose; in fact the painting measures 7 by 4 metres.

One of the upper large halls in Palazzo Madama was rented out for the work to be done and it took the artist three years.

Our Lady stands out above, on the clouds, in regal pose, sceptre in her right hand and the child in her left. One her head, surrounded by a bright crown of twelve stars, is a dove, symbol of the Spirit, and above that the eye of the Father from which extend rays that illumine the scene.

Next to the Virgin, a little lower down, under the clouds and angels, stand some Apostles with the instruments of their martyrdom. At Our

Lady's feet are the Apostles Peter and Paul and the four Evangelists with their traditional symbols. On the left, near St Peter holding the keys, is John the Evangelist with the chalice from the Last Supper and the eagle which symbolises his sublime Gospel; next to him is Mark seated on a lion. To the right, behind St Paul, is the white figure of St Matthew with an angel and St Luke with an ox. Below, between Peter and Paul is the Basilica and the Oratory buildings; on the horizon the Superga on the hill, with the Church of Our Lady.

Don Bosco's love for Our Lady and the Eucharist was contagious. His sons, the Salesians and the boys, made it an important part of their spiritual life even achieving the heights of contemplation. It was not only the case for Dominic Savio, but for many others as Don Bosco pointed out:

One day I entered the main door of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. It was nearly dusk. When I got to the middle of the church I looked up at the painting and noticed that [something like] a dark drape covered the Madonna. I instantly wondered, Why on earth would the sacristan cover Our Lady's picture? I stepped closer to the sanctuary and saw that the drape was moving. Shortly afterward, it slowly dropped until it touched the floor, genuflected to the Blessed Sacrament, made the sign of the cross and walked out of the church through the sacristy. What I thought was a drape was rather one of my sons who, in an ecstasy of love, had been raised the better to see the picture of the Virgin Mary and lovingly contemplate Her and kiss Her immaculate feet. On another occasion I walked into the church from the sacristy and saw a boy kneeling, high in the air, on a level with the tabernacle door facing the apse, 5 as he was adoring the Blessed Sacrament, his head bowed, resting against the tabernacle door in a tender ecstasy of love like a seraphim. I called him by name. He aroused himself and came down, abashed, begging me not to tell anyone (BM XIV, 380).

The minor cupola

The sanctuary is lit by a second cupola, built between 1935 and 1938, with sixteen coloured windows with figures of angels, painted by Prof.

Mario Barberis from Rome. The angelic figures carry symbols of Marian titles: *Star of the Sea – Mother of God – Ever Virgin – Gate of Heaven – Full of grace – Blessed among women – Queen of heaven – Queen of angels – Queen of the world – Excellent Virgin – Mystic Rose – Help of Christians – Source of our joy – Holy Mary – Protectress against our enemies – Help at the moment of our death.* At the centre of the cupola, around the symbolic dove, are written the words *Hic domus mea, inde gloria mea.*

In the four rib-vaults are angels in bas-relief, work of Vignali, with symbols of four items from the Loreto Litany: *Tower of David – Tower of ivory – Ark of gold – Ark of the covenant.*

The two side chapels off the sanctuary (cf. fig. 19 nos. 3 and 4 page 341)

These were built for the boys and pilgrims to use during solemnities.

The one on the right is dedicated to the Crucifix, and the one on the left to St Pius V. Columns in green marble separate them from the wide corridor running around the side and linking them from behind the main altar.

The decoration of the chapels is the work of Carlo Cussetti.

Balconies above the side chapels

Above the Crucifix chapel (right) is a large area that can hold the faithful when numbers are huge. It is lit by a beautiful window representing Mary Assumed into Heaven.

In front, over the St Pius V chapel is the organ and choir loft which can hold more than 200 people. The organ was built by G. Tamburini of Crema (1941), and has 68 sound registers and 23 mechanical ones, 65 combinations and 20 pedals. It has 5,100 pipes.

This reminds us of the rich liturgical music tradition at Valdocco and its various masters: Cagliero, Dogliani, Scarzanella, Pagella, Lasagna, Lamberto and others.

The white Carrara marble pillars that support the central arches of the two areas each have, in front, three cherubs in high relief by Nori, as if they are singers and musicians.

Gallery behind the main altar

Six altars are arranged along the gallery behind the main altar. From right to left they are: Joseph Benedict Cottolengo, with painting by Dalle Ceste (1938); the Crucifix, with wooden figure by Giacomo Mussner from Ortisei; St Joseph Cafasso, painting by Dalle Ceste (1938); Turin's Martyrs, with a precious painting by Reffo (1896; Fr Rua replaced St Anne with this in what is now Mary Mazzarello's altar); St Pius V, with canvas by Barberis (1938); Guardian Angel, with canvas by Giambattista Galizzi from Bergamo.

The sacristy (cf. fig. 19, no. 11 page 341)

Behind the gallery which is behind the main altar. It has six paintings by Crida (1938), with scenes from Don Bosco's life: Don Bosco defended by *Grigio* (on the door on the courtyard side that goes into the Basilica); meeting Bartholomew Garelli; Don Bosco amongst the boys at the Oratory; arriving at Valdocco with Mamma Margaret (and below an excellent view of the Pinardi house); Don Bosco hearing confessions; the young Bosco at the Becchi teaching catechism in the hay shed.

Statue of Mary Help of Christians

Returning from the St Pius V to the central nave, in front of the pulpit is a niche where you can see the statue of Mary Help of Christians carried in procession every 24 May.

It is interesting to note that on 27 April 1865, the corner stone of the church was placed tight at this spot. This explains why Don Bosco wanted the niche for the Help of Christians here, since she is the real cornerstone of all his work.

St Joseph's altar (cf. fig. 19, no. 15 page 341)

In the transept on the left, opposite Don Bosco's altar, is the only one that has remained just as Don Bosco wanted it.

The great painting by Lorenzone was put here six years after the opening of the Basilica, on 26 April 1874, Feast of St Joseph's Patronage. As Don Bosco wanted it, St Joseph is standing, the Child in his arms, while he is taking roses from him and letting them fall on the Church of Mary Help of Christians; Our Lady is nearby in a devout pose. An angel carries a lily symbol of chastity; another two the invitation "*Ite ad Joseph*", that is "Go to Joseph." On the tympanum is the biblical verse "*Constituit eum dominum domus suae*" (He made him master of his house), recalling that Don Bosco chose him as one of the principal patrons of the Oratory.

In the niches on the side walls are two statues by Nori: King David on the right and the *Prophet Isaiah* on the left.

St Dominic Savio's altar (cf. fig. 19, nos. 17 and 18 page 341)

From St Joseph's altar, going toward the back of the Basilica, before St Dominic Savio's altar, on the door leading into the passage on the left, we see a statue of *St Francis Xavier*, apostle of the missions, work of sculptor Gaetano Cellini.

Where we find St Dominic Savio's altar today was dedicated by Don Bosco to the *Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary*. In the work Fr Rua had done (1889–1891), the chapel was dedicated to St Francis de Sales and

the altar remodelled as we see it today. The central painting, by Reffo (1893), representing the Saint of Savoy is now stored elsewhere.

In 1954, year of Dominic Savio's canonisation, the chapel which since 1914 had kept his remains, was dedicated to Don Bosco's young pupil. A modest painting by Crida, put there that year and showing Dominic kneeling before Our Lady, was replaced by the precious work of Mario Càffaro Rore (1984).

Today Dominic Savio's remains are kept in a gilded casket beneath the altar. They were earlier kept in a small burial casket to the right of the altar.

The chapel vault, representing the triumph of the Eucharist and the struggle between the Archangel Michael and Lucifer, was painted by Rollini in 1874. The two side frescos are also by him (1894) and show the life of St Francis de Sales: on the right the Saint, still a priest, preaching to the Calvinists; on the left he is now a bishop and is in a print shop reading a draft ready for publishing. The reference is to his activity as a writer is evident. he is patron saint of journalists. One item of curiosity: the printer with the long beard next to the Saint is a portrait of Carlo Gastini. He went to the Oratory until 1848, learned bookbinding there and always remained a close friend of Don Bosco's. He was one of the founders of the Past Pupils, and because he was a poet and singer, was considered to be Don Bosco's *minstrel*. He was at the Oratory until he died in 1902.

Sacred Heart chapel (cf. fig. 19, no. 19 page 341)

At the back of the Basilica on the left, close to St Dominic Savio's chapel. Fr Rua wanted this when he transformed the nearby chapel of the Sacred Hearts into the St Francis de Sales chapel (1894).

The centre triptych, showing the Sacred Heart of Jesus and two adoring angels, is the work of Carlo Morgari (1888–1970), who also did the walls and vault.

On the right we note the statue of *St Anthony of Padua* held up by two elegant bronze columns.

In the niche above the chapel entrance, towards the central nave, is Vignali's statue of *Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque*, the Visitandine Sister to whom we owe the devotion to the Sacred Heart.

Beneath the Basilica

In the spacious area below the Basilica Don Bosco had a number of items used for the Oratory, like the oven for their daily bread.

In the 1935–1938 extensions two chapels were added: one for the relics and one for St Peter, this latter under the sacristy. In the remaining areas was the *Salesian Centre for historical documentation and Marian devotion* with its museum and library (from 1978 until 2017). It had its origins in the idea of Fr Maggiorino Borgatello, who wanted to organize a “Museum to the cult of Mary Help of Christians in the world”. This first modest museum was opened in 1918. But, with the works of the enlargement of the Basilica (1934–1938), the material was dispersed.

In 1978, Fr Pietro Ceresa transported his rich collection of Marian documentation from the Salesian Institute in Bologna and placed it in the basement beneath the Basilica.

Following the festivities of the Bicentenary of Don Bosco's birth, this lower area of the Basilica was recovered and a large multipurpose room created. As a result, the large Marian collection was moved to storage elsewhere. A part of it can now be found in the new *Casa Don Bosco* Museum.

Chapel of the relics

Access is from the Basilica, down the stairs on the right near the entrance.

It was opened in 1934 to hold the notable collection of relics donated by Commendatore Michele Bert from Turin.

It is a single nave in a Latin cross form, with ribbed vaults and reminds one of the catacombs.

At the bottom of the stairs you see the *altar of the Apparition* that recalls Don Bosco's vision in 1845 when the Virgin pointed out the place of martyrdom of the three Roman soldiers, Solutor, Adventor and Octavius. A metal cross on the floor, on the left, and a painting by Dalle Ceste mark the precise place the Virgin pointed to.

Don Bosco tells it this way:

I seemed to be in a vast meadow with a huge crowd of boys... They were all abandoned boys, devoid of moral principles. I was about to turn away when I saw a Lady beside me. ...

“In this place,” She added, “where the glorious martyrs of Turin, Adventor and Octavius, suffered martyrdom, on these clods soaked and sanctified by their blood, I wish that God be honored in a very special manner.” So saying, She put out Her foot and pointed to the exact spot where the martyrs had fallen. I wanted to leave a marker there so as to find the place again when I returned, but I could not see a single stick or stone. Nevertheless, I kept the place clearly in mind (BM II, 232–233).

On the left of the painting is the burial casket of Blessed Michael Rua, first successor of Don Bosco (1837–1910).

Continuing, we then see the altar of the holy widows, and opposite, the altar of the virgins and martyrs; the altar of the holy bishops and confessors (near which is buried the Venerable Fr Philip Rinaldi, third successor of Don Bosco) and opposite is the altar of the holy martyrs; then comes the altar of the founders of religious orders and congregations and then the holy doctors of the Church; finally there is the main altar, with a relic of wood from the true cross.

The decorations on the altar are by Prof. Mario Barberis.

Along the walls in reliquaries, and under the altars are hundreds of relics.

The Salesian pantheon

Fr Pascual Chávez, as Rector Major, decided that the mortal remains of the Rectors Major should rest in this Basilica in Turin. Therefore, after appropriate studies, it was considered that the “Salesian pantheon” should be in the area of the chapel of the relics because it is a special place, evocative of Salesian holiness. It is a sacred place that reminds us of the beginnings of Don Bosco’s Oratory, the Filippi field, the visions through which Our Lady pointed to Don Bosco’s apostolic mission to him. There are numerous relics in the chapel of Saints and Blesseds that recall the whole history of the Church with its many testimonies of holiness.

Seeing the Rectors Major who have followed him over time and through history, brings us back to the origins of the Salesian charism and shows us how, over time and generations, there is a common thread of fidelity and creativity. The alternation of faces, names and dates is also a strong encouragement to recall a history that is almost two centuries old. It is a sign of affection, gratitude and awareness for the work done by the deceased Rectors Major. Our prayer of suffrage, before these tombs, becomes a commitment to cultivate the sense of belonging and unity to the charismatic heritage that they have witnessed in their ministry as Successors of Don Bosco.

Our founder, St John Bosco, has been in Valdocco since 1929, the year he was beatified. Then, in 1938, he was transferred to the altar he occupies in the transept of the basilica, a privilege he has because he is a Saint. In the chapel of relics, each in his own altar, we find Michael Rua (the first successor of Don Bosco) and Philip Rinaldi (the third), because of their status as Blessed.

All this was blessed by Fr Ángel Fernández Artime on 21 May 2017. The mortal remains of the Rectors Major arrived over the months that followed. There is room for future occupants of this space.

St Peter's chapel

St Peter's chapel is under the sacristy. Access is gained from stairs behind the church. It has St Peter's altar offered by Roman benefactors. It used to be in the basilica where today we find Don Bosco's altar and remains. Don Bosco wanted it to be a sign of his devotion to St Peter's successor.

The chapel is a worthy place for the valuable painting Don Bosco commissioned Filippo Carcano to paint – Christ handing the keys to Peter.

Bell tower museum

After the celebrations of the Bicentenary of Don Bosco, work continued on the restoration of some of the rooms of the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians. For example, access to the bell tower.

Anyone capable of climbing the stairs can visit the bell tower accompanied by a guide.

This tour allows the visitor to discover hidden treasures in the service rooms of the church built by Don Bosco in 1868. Thus, for example, you can visit some of the rooms that were used for storage or where some of the first Salesians lived, and those who were in charge of the operation and maintenance of the Basilica (usually Brothers).

The museum presents some significant objects from the Basilica's sacristy, a testimony to the passage of history and the wonder of the art over these more than one hundred and fifty years. Particularly significant is the photographic presentation of the two domes of the Basilica.

At the heart of the tour is the original clock purchased by Don Bosco, with the offerings of the people of the neighbourhood, and

the collection of original dials, related to the historical clocks that overlooked the courtyards and square of the first Oratory.

OTHER BUILDINGS BY DON BOSCO

In the entire building complex at Valdocco, of those going back to Don Bosco, other than what has been presented so far, only two remain either side of the Basilica: the reception area (on the right) and the printing works (on the left), planned by Engineer Spezia to finish off his work on the church.

The Reception (1874–1875)

When Don Bosco was able to make use of the entire Pinardi house, he immediately set about restoring, or building where it did not exist the boundary fence for the Oratory. And he had a strong wooden door on the *via della Giardiniera*. When religious functions and catechism classes began, the door was closed to avoid intrusion and disturbances.

In October 1853 Don Bosco opened the first workshops in the Pinardi house and entrusted to master shoemaker Domenico Goffi also the task of *doorkeeper*. Three years later, when the Hostel was taking shape and he was drawing up regulations, Don Bosco chose a doorkeeper and he had his own spot near the entrance to the day primary schools (1856; cf. further on, no. 3.1.3).

“The choice of a good doorkeeper is a treasure for a house of education”: Don Bosco was convinced of this and also wrote it in his *Little Treatise on the Preventive System* (cf. Ch. II, par. 5 in RSS 6 [1985] 248). He also entrusted this person with educational responsibilities, as can be seen in the first *Draft Regulations for the Home Attached to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales*, where he dedicates 12 articles to the doorkeeper. Here are several of them:

Tours of the various places

1. The doorkeeper's most important duty is to be always at his post and courteously receive all callers. Whenever he has to absent himself for his religious duties, meals, or other legitimate reasons, he should have a substitute appointed by the director.
2. He shall not admit anyone into the premises without informing his superiors. He shall direct business callers or those who need to discuss matters pertaining to the boys to the prefect. He shall refer to the director only those people who explicitly ask for him.
3. He shall not allow any boy to leave the premises without a pass unless he has been instructed otherwise by the superior. In that case he should keep the matter confidential and record the time of departure and return. ...
9. He shall maintain order and strive to prevent any misconduct in the playground or inside the house. He shall not permit shouting or any loud noise during sacred services, school hours, or study periods. ...
12. The doorkeeper shall endeavor to keep busy at all times either with his routine duties or with others that shall be entrusted to him. He shall always be courteous and affable in accepting and delivering messages.. Courteousness and affability should be his outstanding traits (BM IV, 548–549).

Between 1859 and 1860, with Fr Cafasso's help, Don Bosco built a larger reception area near the earlier one, with a room for the doorkeeper, a parlour for the boys' relatives and a covered entrance for vehicles. Two years later he shifted the reception further to the right (still on *via della Giardiniera*) on the corner with the new printing works and the wall that was the boundary with the Filippi property. The reception remained here till 1874.

When the Church of Mary Help of Christians was completed, in 1873 Don Bosco reacquired the land on the right of the Basilica from carpenter John B. Coriasco, whom he had sold it to in 1851; he had the house pulled down and the workshop that had been built there, and between 1874 and 1875 he erected the first two buildings planned by Spezia.

In this beautiful three-storey building he put the reception, some offices and two guest rooms. In the smaller building next to it (the next

to be completed) was the bookshop, *a storage/dispensary* and on the first floor the bookbinding.

Printing works (1881–1883)

This flanks the Basilica on the left, symmetrical to the building holding the reception. It was planned by Spezia at the beginning of the 1870s, but was built only after he was able to buy (1880) the Nelva house with its long strip of land to the west of the Sanctuary.

The Nelva house and part of the land alongside the church of St Francis de Sales were meant for the festive Oratory, and then in the remaining space he gradually built the printing works building (1881–1883) the mechanics workshop (1883–1884; this was pulled down in 1893 to build the first theatre at the Oratory).

In this building, the small oratory printing press could gradually develop and become one of the most modern and effective in its day. In 1884 Don Bosco bought a suitable pavilion 55 metres long by 20 wide, for the grand National Exhibition of Turin. The workshop heads and boys worked under the gaze of visitors who could follow the whole process of producing a book (they printed the *Fabiola* and the *Little Catechism*): making the paper, setting up the press, printing, binding and packaging the goods for sale.

The great Salesian tradition of graphics came out of this, thanks to Salesian Brothers who were formed here, and spread around the world contributing in important ways to technical and artistic development in this field. It was here that the *Salesian Bulletin* and thousands of publications of every kind made Don Bosco known, propagated the missionary and Marian spirit and served the Church especially in the area of catechesis and religious formation of young people.

FORMER BUILDINGS THAT HAVE BEEN REBUILT

Other building built or adapted by Don Bosco were gradually pulled down and rebuilt. We record two of them: Filippi and Audisio houses.

casa Filippi (Filippi house 1861, rebuilt in 1952)

The Filippi brothers, on the right of the Pinardi house and opposite the famous field which was the last one used by the Wandering Oratory, had land with a house and a large shed along *via della Giardiniera*. The house was in an inverted U-shape, had two floors, and was used for silk production. It was 35 metres long and about 8 wide.

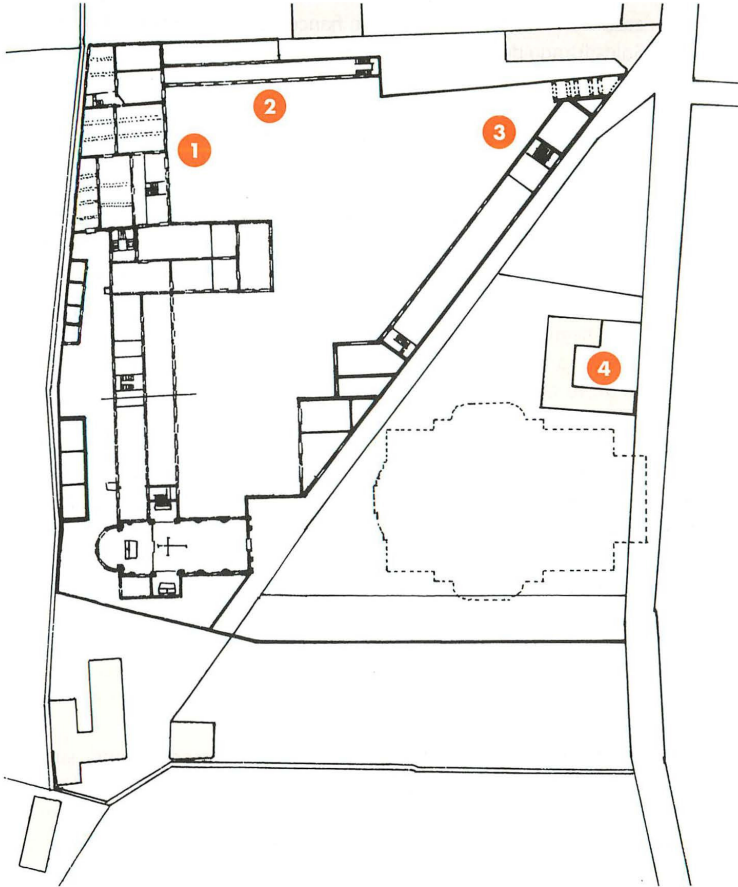
The shed was being rented by an undertaker, Visca, who kept carriages and horses there belonging to the Council. The coming and going of workers and the racket from the cart and carriage drivers, the stable boys and many vagabonds who found shelter under the shed disturbed the prayer, study and work rhythms at the Oratory.

Don Bosco, with the help of Comm. Giuseppe Cotta, bought the house and land on 16 July 1860, for 65 thousand lire. It took over a year however to get rid of all the residents who continued to use the shed and ground floor of the house.

Don Bosco only used the upper floor as a large bedroom. To gain access he built a wooden bridge that connected the building with the *Camerette* wing (cf. fig. 12, no. 4 page ??). There was about seven metres between the two buildings, like a strait, so the boys used call Filippi house *Sicily*.

In summer 1861, once the place was empty, the entire Filippi property was annexed to the Oratory and new building constructed to link the two areas: the small plot between the two wings of the Filippi house was incorporated into the one storey building. The *Camerette* wing was extended and joined to the Filippi house. A wide staircase was placed at the junction of the two buildings (cf. fig. 20, no. 1 [page 362](#)).

Fig. 20: Filippi and Audisio houses



1. Filippi house (1861-1957) 2. Audisio house (1864-1954) 3. Printing press and reception (built 1863). 4. G.B. Coriasco Carpentry workshop (1851-1874)

On the ground floor of the Filippi house thus enlarged he put a storage area and workshop for painters and milliners (cf. MB 7 116); on the first floor there were classrooms; on the second floor a large study for 500 pupils and during festive occasions this could be a theatre.

Fr Lemoyne, who was already a priest when he came to Valdocco in 1863, describes the study thus:

It was always looked upon as a sacred place. From the very first days of the Oratory it was a room of solemn, sacred silence. Even in winter, when Don Bosco allowed the boys to have breakfast in the study hall because of the severe cold, silence was always observed out of respect to the place. The youngsters doffed their caps and tiptoed in, we might say. Then they said a Hail Mary with the invocation “Seat of Wisdom,” which later was replaced by “Mary, Help of Christians, pray for us.” Occasionally Don Bosco himself would sit in the common study hall to give good example. Amazingly, no matter who walked in—even important people—no one would stir, look up, or show curiosity (BM VII, 337).

At the sight of the students at the Oratory in perfect silence immersed in their work, two English gentlemen, “one of them a Cabinet Minister of Queen Victoria”, were amazed when visiting the Oratory one day. To their question “How are such silence and self-restraint possible?” Don Bosco replied: “Frequent confession and Communion and devout, daily attendance at Mass.” “You are quite right. Quite true! Its either religion or the stick! I will tell this in London” (BM VII, 337).

Under the portico (it was known as the “portico of prayer”) you can see a statue of Our Lady that Don Bosco had put in the first sacristy in the Basilica.

casa Audisio (Audisio house 1864, rebuilt in 1954)

After the Casati law (1859) school reform and other norms, Don Bosco saw that he had to do something about the secondary classes – which

were still private – to bring them into line with the new rules and find qualified teachers.

In 1862 and 1863 the Oratory Secondary school ran great risk of being closed, but Don Bosco instead of being discouraged, improved and expanded it.

While his young teachers were doing their teacher training, he got F. Serra to plan a new three storey building for the school; it went up between summer 1863 and spring 1864. It included the Filippi house and went down towards the reception area. It was a long, narrow building, with a portico on the ground floor, classrooms on the two upper floors and bedrooms for the Salesians under the roof.

Later on the building was called Audisio house in homage to the good Salesian Brother who had an office there.

Audisio house was pulled down and rebuilt in 1954. Currently under this portico is a large hall for pilgrims.

CURRENT WORK AT VALDOCCO

For completeness sake here is a quick summary of Salesian work currently part of Valdocco.

Vocational Training Centre (CFP)

This is to the left of the Basilica as a continuation of the printing works and mechanics workshop Don Bosco had built.

Fr Rua, between 1892 and 1904, had new workshops built on the corner of what is now *via Maria Ausiliatrice* and *via Salerno*. These buildings held the mechanics, carpentry, bookbinding, tailoring workshops and classrooms and dormitories for the trade school boys. That way there was a strict division between academic and trade school boys and communities, which Don Bosco had begun and suggested.

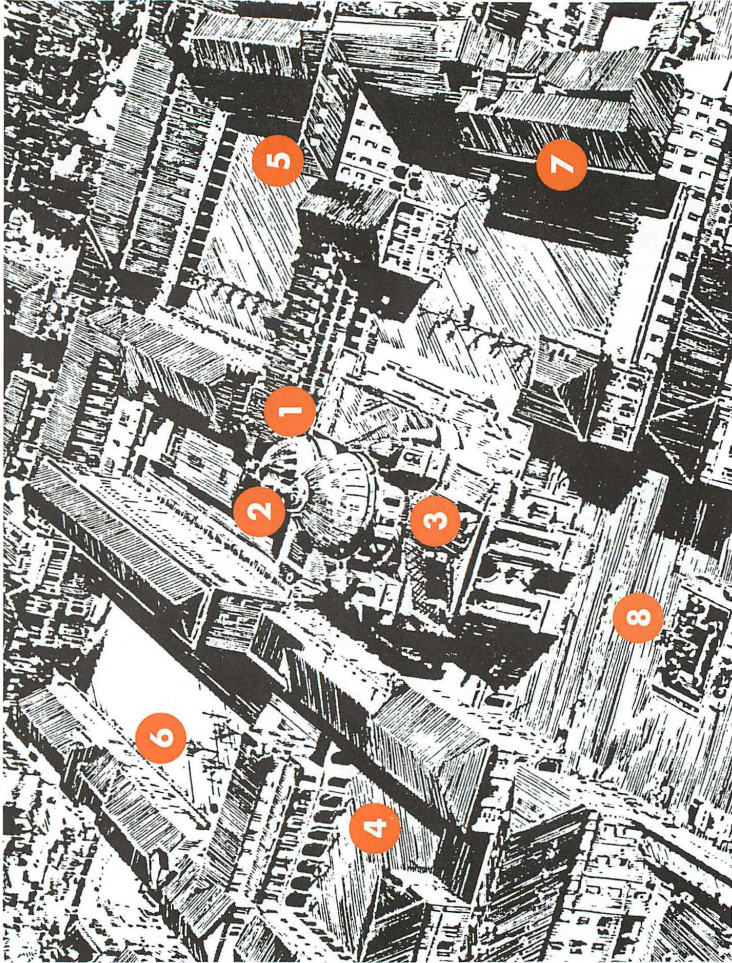
With the development of the vocational (technical) sector, between 1925 and 1927, Fr Rinaldi had a new and larger complex built behind the former Pinardi house, used as carpentry, tailoring and shoemaking workshops, with classrooms and infirmary on the upper floor.

After the Second World War the old building were restored and completed under Fr Fedele Giraudi who built a large building (1952–1955) for mechanics and electrotechnical work, classrooms for the vocational school and the School of Applied Photography (SAF).

Over the decades the technical and vocational sector evolved; it shifted from a craft phase to more technical and industrial one. The shoemaking, tailoring and carpentry workshops have gone.

Today, Valdocco's CNOS-FAP has adapted to society's new needs. There, students can be trained in the following specialisations: hotel management, catering, bar service, gardening and agriculture, food production, electricity, electromechanics, design, marketing and graphics.

Fig. 21: Valdocco today



1. Historical core
2. Church of St Francis de Sales
3. Basilica of MHC
4. CFP Vocational Training Centre
5. St Dominic Savio Middle School
6. Oratory
7. Marian Centre
8. Piazza Maria Ausiliatrice and FMA works, parish office and church.

The St Dominic Savio Middle School

There is nothing that remains of the old secondary school area that Don Bosco built. In the large garden that extended behind Don Bosco's house and the Filippi house the building complex we see today grew up around the second Valdocco courtyard.

Fr Rua, along the same direction as the extension to the Audisio house, put up a building (1908–1909) for classrooms and a new study that could hold 400 pupils. Some of the Saelsian Society General Chapters were held in this room.

Fr Paul Albera continued the construction by adding a hall that could be used as a covered recreation area and along *piazza Sassari* put up a second building with classrooms and dormitories. On the corner of *via Sassari* and *via Salerno* he also built a laundry and cloakroom (1920–1921), with a place for the Sisters who looked after it to stay.

Fr Philip Rinaldi completed this with a large kitchen and new dining rooms (1925–1927). During the Second World War a bombardment completely destroyed the building on *piazza Sassari*. Fr Giraudi rebuilt it in 1951 and built a large theatre, still in use, and dormitories.

Today the old “students section” at Valdocco continues its activities as the St Dominic Savio Middle School, but with a strong emphasis on vocational subjects.

The Daily and Festive Oratory

The Festive Oratory, out of which all of Don Bosco's work developed was, for a good number of years, part of the *Home attached*. While the Basilica was being built, both because of lack of available space and the large number of boarders, but also because of the changing socio-economic nature of the suburb, there was a considerable decrease in the number of boys coming to the Oratory from outside.

Don Bosco sought to remedy this by reserving the land beside and behind the Basilica for the Festive Oratory and using the sacristy on the west side of the Basilica as a chapel. The situation was precarious for a decade, until 1880, when the Nelva house and land was bought for the daily Oratory.

The Festive Oratory had a new springtime and decisive relaunching under Fr Rua, who reserved an area towards *via Salerno* for it (1899; land belonged to Carosso), built a theatre and in the Carosso house put classrooms for catechism and evening classes.

Under the leadership of Fr Joseph Pavia (1852–1915) the oratory grew and consolidated to the point where Fr Albera, having pulled down Carosso house, widened the courtyard and along *via Salerno*, as an extension to the theatre, had a large area built with classrooms on the upper floor. Finally, when Fr Peter Ricaldone was Rector Major, the poor buildings on *via Salerno* were pulled down and today's Oratory (1934–1935), designed by Valotti, was built.

From Don Bosco to today Valdocco, always with a youthful population, has ensured and continues to ensure an influx of young people to keep Don Bosco's first work alive and relevant.

Reception area

This area is used to house the community of the Salesian Marian Centre, which served the Basilica and other pastoral services, and used the premises located in the first large courtyard to the right of the Basilica:

The purpose of the Salesian Centre was to animate liturgies in the Basilica, spread devotion to the Help of Christians (especially through the *Maria Ausiliatrice* magazine and the Mary Help of Christians Association [ADMA]), receiving pilgrims and keeping an eye on memorabilia regarding Don Bosco.

Formerly, this area contained:

- The porter's lodge, built by Don Bosco, where there was a transport and travel office at the service of the missions
- In the lower building that extended the porter's lodge on *via Maria Ausiliatrice* there was the Elledici Bookstore (LDC), management offices and the Salesian Bulletin
- The House of the Superior Chapter (parallel to the Basilica, built by Fr Paul Albera from 1912 to 1914), the former residence of the major superiors of the Salesian Congregation, was used for pilgrims (first floor, with meeting rooms and self-service), to provide hospitality to Salesians and missionaries passing through, and for the offices of the various activities of the Marian Centre.

Today we find:

- *Missioni Don Bosco* with its Ethnographic Museum.
- The offices of the community that serves pilgrims. The entire lower area (built by Fr Albera) in front of the Basilica has been changed with the creation of meeting rooms dedicated to the Rectors Major.
- The rest of the building is used as rooms for the confreres from the communities at Valdocco and as a residence for elderly Salesians. It also has rooms to accommodate pilgrims on request.

The Salesian Circumscription of Piedmont and Valle d'Aosta

The first floor of the former Pinardi and Don Bosco houses was the headquarters of Salesian works in Piedmont and Valle d'Aosta: it held the Superior's office and his team, as well as the regional CNOS-FAP, the centre which coordinates schools, technical education, recreational and cultural activities of Salesian work throughout Italy.

With the creation of the *Casa Don Bosco* Museum, they have been moved to areas in the second courtyard behind the Pinardi chapel.

The *Missioni Don Bosco* Museum

This museum was established to celebrate the 150th Salesian Missionary Expedition. It aims to make the knowledge of the missionary world more accessible to pilgrims who come to Valdocco.

On display are tools, furniture, clothing and ornaments, the result of the creativity with which various groups of human beings have been able to adapt to their environment, transforming the resources available for the needs of daily life and for their cultural practices and rituals.

The museum is organised by geographical areas; but one can also choose tours by theme, available in the audio guides.

Far from being an exhaustive presentation about the spread of the Salesian missions across the world, this museum is a showcase of the most significant Salesian presences among indigenous peoples and to protect the different cultural traditions.

The tour begins with Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego, the destinations of the first Salesian missionary expedition in 1875. The exhibits are an important testimony of cultures and populations by now extinct. The items collected by Fr Maggiorino Borgatello in 1911 and Fr Alberto Maria De Agostini in 1932 can be considered unique pieces today.

It continues with the Shuar in Ecuador, with the particularly significant work of Fr Luis Bolla, whose cause for beatification and canonisation is in process. The material brought from the “Yanomami” of Venezuela, a precious work of Fr Luigi Cocco. The material from the populations of Rio Negro, with the Bororos, Xavantes and Carajás of Brazil.

It continues with the Nagas of northeastern India. One showcase is dedicated to China, another to Japan and another to Oceania. The tour ends with two showcases dedicated to the African continent.

The museum opens up to the contemporary world thanks to the documentation contained in the large display that testifies to the current

commitment of Salesian missionaries around the world on behalf of the most disadvantaged and needy populations.

The visitor can explore some of the Salesian presences across five continents through a monitor, also told through short videos and photographs.

The courtyard

When the pilgrim or visitor enters Valdocco, the first thing they see is the courtyard.

The courtyard or playground occupies a very important place in Salesian history. There was one from the outset next to the sacristy of the first Oratory at the Convitto, then at the Barolo “Refuge”. But then for Don Bosco, the Filippi field and many other places around the city’s outskirts, became an open playground where Don Bosco gathered his youngsters during the time of the Wandering Oratory.

This first courtyard is now squeezed between buildings. But we are fond of it because that is where it all began: a courtyard and a shed converted into a chapel.

The boys felt at ease with Don Bosco: “He was always the first in the games, the soul of the playground. I don’t know how he did it, but he was in every corner of the playground, among all the groups of young people. Personally and with his eyes he followed us all. We were rowdy, sometimes dirty, importunate, capricious. And he liked to be among the poorest. He had a motherly affection for the little ones.” So says Stefano Castagno, one of the boys who had a great time at the first Oratory.

We should stop in the current courtyard, take a walk around the outside of the buildings and recall:

Don Bosco Lived Here

- The water fountain: it is still there from the beginning; how many stories it must have heard; how many mouths it has refreshed.
- The staircase: it was the only one; it was the only way to get to the bedrooms and the kitchen; one day the famous Grigio that did not want to allow Don Bosco to leave planted himself there; hundreds of times the “parents” of our Salesian Family, including Mamma Margaret, have gone up and down it.
- The attics with their garrets: we can see Cagliero opening the window and washing his hands and face with the snow.
- The portico with its stand for the “Good Nights”, that brilliant educational intuition of Mamma Margaret and Don Bosco.
- The facade, the balconies, the vine, the Madonna lightning rod, the monument to Don Bosco and thousands upon thousands of pilgrims who have spent a small but important part of their lives enjoying the sacred “noise” of this Salesian courtyard.
- Mamma Margaret’s vegetable garden: full of beautiful vegetables and crushed by a horde of barbarians who wanted to play soldiers. On 7 March 2020, a statue of this woman who we can call the co-founder of the Salesian Family was placed here. Margaret is opening the door and welcoming the first of the thousands of people welcomed into this holy house. She seeks to be a sign of gratitude to the thousands of today’s parents of Salesians and those of all times (the statue is the work of Mauro Baldessari).
- The statue of Don Bosco and the thousands of pilgrims who have had their photo taken there.
- The plaques that recall the visits of recent Popes.
- The plaques that recall the many endearing stories of the Oratory.

Finally, we can recall the long list of the good people who are part of our lives and who walked or run around these playgrounds:

- *Young people* like Dominic Savio, Michael Magone, Francis Besucco, Camillo Gavio, Carlo Gastini...

- *Holy adults* like those we find in the *Casa Don Bosco* Museum, and many others: Joseph Cafasso, Mary Domenica Mazzarello, Vincent Cimatti, Titus Zeman, Maria Romero, Albert Marvelli, Bronislaw Markiewicz, Artemides Zatti, Francis Convertini...

There are statues of some of them in the external niches of the Basilica at courtyard level: Saints Louis Versiglia and Callistus Caravario; Blessed Michael Rua and Philip Rinaldi (work of Mauro Baldessari).

PIAZZA MARIA AUSILIATRICE

In 1868 and 1869 Don Bosco bought a number of blocks of land in front of the Sanctuary, completing the exercise by buying the Moretta (1875) and Audagnotto houses (1878). The first girls Oratory for the Daughters of Mary help of Christians was opened in the Moretta house (1876), directed by Sr Elisa Roncallo, while the Audagnotto house was assigned to hospitality.

From 1870 Don Bosco was considering a project of new constructions that would be a worthy completion to the church of Mary Help of Christians. Engineer Spezia was asked to study the project, which was approved by the City Council, but because of a number of difficulties he only built two buildings, one either side of the Basilica (reception and printing works).

The buildings around the *piazza* today were built between the end of the 19th century and 1935: on the left, as you leave the Basilica, is the parish and Youth Ministry Centre which coordinates the educational and pastoral activity of the Salesians in the region; there is the parish church built by Fr Rua for the former girls Oratory; and the buildings formerly belonging to the *Società Editrice Internazionale* (SEI). On the right hand side is the former General House of the FMA Sisters and their various works.

Monument to Don Bosco

This was erected on 10 September 1911, during the Past Pupils International Congress and in view of the first centenary of Don Bosco's birth.

Sculptor Gaetano Cellini from Bologna was chosen from amongst the 59 contestants for the task.

The outbreak of the First World War slowed the opening for the project, which took place with great solemnity only on 3 March 1920.

Built atop a base of porphyry stone is the bronze statue of Don Bosco with a group of boys around him. The veiled woman at the Saint's feet represents, Faith, and is offering a cross for veneration to a bent person symbolising humanity.

In the high-relief on the right is a mother sending her child to kiss Don Bosco's hand, symbolising a familiar style of education; on the left is a leper calling on the holy founder of the Salesian missions.

Either side is a group of figures representing Don Bosco's two great devotions: Eucharist and the Help of Christians. On the right a strong worker is tipping his hat to the Blessed Sacrament, before which a woman is praying and a mother is kissing her child. On the left is a proud native South American converted by the Salesian missionaries, and prostrate before the help of Christians to whom two virgins are offering flowers.

At the back of the monument are three bas-reliefs alluding to Salesian assistance for migrants, and their work in technical and agricultural schools.

OTHER WORKS DON BOSCO BEGAN IN TURIN

Two other institutions in Turin are direct testimony of Don Bosco's tireless work for the education of young people and his ever-widening

horizons: the church of St John the Evangelist and the building attached to it, familiarly known as *san Giovannino*, and Valsalice which from 1888 to 1929 had the good fortune to be looking after the tomb of the holy educator. So at the conclusion of this overview of places in Don Bosco's life and work, it would be good to mention both of these.

The Church and Institute of St John the Evangelist

(corso Vittorio Emanuele II, no. 13 - via Madama Cristina, no. 1)

Next to the St Aloysius Oratory, described in earlier pages, and as its natural development, Don Bosco wanted to build a church and hostel with a school for “poor and abandoned” boys to make his work of education more effective.

There were a number of reasons for the Saint to tackle this. In the San Salvario area the city had begun to expand, already foreseen in urban planning since 1847 and then accelerated when the nearby Porta Nuova railway station was built. It became a demographic centre especially for ordinary and very poor people. And already since 1853, since the Waldensians had been emancipated in 1848 they had begun building a church there, a hospital and a school, and this latter was also open to Catholics who found it difficult to go to other city schools. The Jewish synagogue was also built later in this area. Proselytism and Protestant activity were another reason for Don Bosco to develop his work here, which began in 1847.

The construction

Between 1870 and 1875, gradually buying up land, Don Bosco succeeded in extending the property of the St Aloysius Oratory until he had a 4,000 square metre area at his disposal. Another strip of land, 300 metres belonging to Enrico Morglia, a Protestant, he only obtained in 1876 after having recourse to the Council of State.

The design for the new complex was given to Count Edoardo Arborio Mella (1808–1884) of Vercelli whose inspiration was the Roman-Lombard style of the 11th and 12th centuries.

Work on the building began quickly in 1877. On 14 August the following year he had laid the corner stone and in December 1879 the external structure was already complete. Internal decorations were finished in three years and on 28 October 1882 the church was solemnly consecrated.

The building is like a basilica with three naves, the central one double the size of the side ones. The building is 60 metres by 22 and can hold 2500 people.

Dedicated to St John the Evangelist, Don Bosco wanted it to also be a monument to Pius IX for the kindness he had shown him. This brought him no end of difficulties in dealing with Archbishop Gastaldi, who was also building a church in memory of Pius IX, St Secondo's. Don Bosco completed his project just the same, and a large statue of the Pope at the entrance to the church still today recalls the strict bonds between the priest of Valdocco and Pius IX.

Visiting the church

The facade is set back from the nearby buildings which run along *corso Vittorio Emanuele II*. This creates a small courtyard enclosed by architectural elements that serve as links between the church and the buildings adjacent to it.

The bell tower reaches a height of 45 metres. It has three floors, topped by an octagonal pyramid, above which arises a globe, a star with twelve rays of gilded copper. The first two floors which are square have mullioned windows. The third floor, which is octagonal, has a lancet windows and eight stone columns six metres high. The bells are on top, inaugurated on 8 December 1881.

On the door at the entrance is written “*Ianua coeli*” (door of heaven), while the lunette above shows the Redeemer seated, with the words *Ego sum via, veritas et vita* (I am the Way the Truth and the Life).

Higher up above the mullioned window is a mosaic of the glory of St John.

Inside, on the right as you enter, is the large statue of Pius IX in Carrara marble, by Francesco Confalonieri of Milan (1830–1925). The Pope is in the act of imparting a blessing, and in his left hand he has the decree of approval of the Salesian Congregation.

An imposing organ of 3600 pipes, work of Cav. Giuseppe Bernasconi from Bergamo is in the orchestra. Don Bosco opened it in July 1882 with a series of concerts over four days which attracted as many as 50,000 people to the church all with their entry ticket. The instrument was restored for the church’s centenary, and locate behind the main altar.

Light comes through to the nave through ten high rectangular and six circular windows.

The central nave ends in a *semicircular apse*. The painting on the half-dome is of Jesus on the Cross pointing out the Apostle John to Mary as her son. The painting, along the lines of a Byzantine mosaic, is by Enrico Reffo. The portraits along the arches of the central nave are by the same artist. These are the seven bishops of Asia Minor described in the Apocalypse (by St John). In the broad circular windows under the cap over the apse we find: St John the Evangelist, St James, St Andrew, St Peter and St Paul. The work is by Pompeo Bertini from Milan.

The side naves extend around the apse and provide a majestic passageway.

The main altar, in oriental style, has a double table. The sanctuary was bounded by a balustrade made of (white) stone from Saltrio, of which only a part has been preserved. It had iron gates. The magnificent floor is of Pompeian style mosaic.

The side altars are dedicated to St Dominic Savio (painting by Càffaro Rore, 1974), St Joseph (Reffo, 1882) and St Francis de Sales (Bonelli), along the right hand nave; to Blessed Michael Rua, St John Bosco (Crida, 1934) and the Sacred Heart (Crida again), along the left hand nave.

The icon of Don Bosco with the Help of Christians which was hung at St Peters on the day of the canonisation (1 April 1934), has replaced an earlier painting of the Immaculate Conception. Also those of Dominic Savio and Fr Rua replaced ones of St Mary Magdalene and St Anthony the Abbot.

The Institute

As had happened at Valdocco, next to the new church Don Bosco immediately wanted to build “a hospice for poor and abandoned boys.”

Between the church and *via Madama Cristina*, he soon had a place that could hold 350 pupils built in the same architectural style as the church. It came into use in autumn 1884 and for the first ten years it was a place for adults who aspired to Salesian life. Blessed Philip Rinaldi was the Rector, future third successor of Don Bosco.

In 1894 the institute was converted into a boarding school with primary and secondary classes, recognised in 1905 as a State recognised secondary school. Today the building is a university hostel and an oratory (entrance off *via Ormea*) and a centre of pastoral activity for Filipino immigrants.

Over its long history the *Giovannino* has seen important Salesians come through such as the musicians Fr John Pagella (1872–1944) and Fr Virgil Bellone (1907–1981), historian Fr Albert Caviglia (1868–1943), Latin scholars Fr John Baptist Francesia (1838–1930) and Fr Sisto Colombo (1878–1938). Amongst its pupils we recall St Callistus Caravario, martyred in China (1903–1930).

Valsalice and Don Bosco's tomb

Origins

Between 1857 and 1861, the De La Salle Brothers in Turin had built a large place in the “Valle dei Salici”, on the slopes of Turin’s hills. It was a boarding place for noble students from their San Primitivo school. In 1863, following the laws on religious suppression, the brothers had to abandon the school and the Valsalice building was run by a society of priests from Turin who in October that year opened a school there called “Collegio Valsalice”, “for bringing up young upper class students in religion, sciences and preparing them for civil, military, and commercial careers” (cf. P. Baricco, *Torino descritta*, Torino, G.B. Paravia 1869, p. 705). There were primary, technical, junior secondary, senior school classes and a technical institute which was preparatory to entering the Military Academy. But due to a low student turnover and financial problems the school had run down so Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi had pressured Don Bosco to take it over.

The Salesians at Valsalice

Don Bosco and his first collaborators, given the archbishop’s insistence, but with considerable concern, accepted the college in March 1872 and rented the building for five years. The situation did not improve immediately under the Salesians. But Don Bosco, hoping this school would provide priestly vocations, decided to buy the building in 1879. The same year he set up an ornithological museum with the very complete collection of Canon Giambattista Giordano (1817–1871).

The house soon gained a prominent place amongst Salesian works. Because of its beautiful location amongst the greenery of the hills, just outside the city, Don Bosco chose it as a place for rest and recuperation for the elderly and sick confreres and also for the confreres’ retreats.

Some of the early *General Chapters* of the young Congregation were also held there.

In 1887, by his explicit wish, the work underwent a radical transformation: instead of a senior high school it became a formation house for clerics, and was called the *Seminary for the Foreign Missions*. Any number of first generation Salesians were formed here, and they brought the world their own particular stamp of culture and educational and pastoral approach. Amongst these we recall the martyrs Sts Louis Versilia (1873–1930) and Callistus Caravario (1903–1930), missionaries in China, Blessed Fr Louis Variara (1875–1923), apostle amongst the lepers in Colombia, Fr Augustus Czartoryski (1858–1893), Fr Andrew Beltrami (1870–1897), Fr Vincent Cimatti (1879–1965), founder of the Salesian work in Japan.

Don Bosco buried at Valsalice

In 1888 Valsalice was where Don Bosco's body was laid. According to one testimony he himself had foreseen this after a meeting of the *Superior Chapter*, at Valsalice on 13 September 1887:

It had been decided that the institute of Valsalice was now to be used for another purpose: the well-off boarders were going to be replaced by clerics studying philosophy. At the end of the council meeting, Father Barberis remained alone with him. The Novice Master asked him with all confidence, why, after he had always opposed such a change of purpose, had he now changed his mind. Don Bosco answered, "From now on, I will be here to safeguard this house." As he said this, he kept looking steadily toward the big staircase which led from the upper-level garden to the portico of the big lower playground. After a moment he added, "Get the draft plan ready." Since the school had not been entirely finished, Father Julius Barberis thought that he wanted to see the building completed. So he said, "Good, I'll draw it up. I'll submit it to you this winter." "Not this winter, but next spring," Don Bosco answered. "You will not submit the plan to me, but to the council." Meanwhile, he kept looking at the staircase. Only five months later did Father Barberis begin to

understand what the Saint had meant, when he saw him buried at Valsalice in the very center of those grand stairs. He finally understood everything when the design for the monument to be erected over Don Bosco's tomb was presented in the spring, although Father Barberis had not spoken a word about the September conversation to anyone (MB 18, 328).

When Don Bosco died, a worthy burial place became a matter of urgency. The Salesians did not yet have a proper place in the communal cemetery and since they did not have permission to bury the Founder at the church of Mary Help of Christians the body seemed destined for common burial. But at the suggestion of the civil authority (the President of the Council of Ministers, Francis Crispi), the idea was mooted of burial at Valsalice, outside the urban area therefore outside the jurisdiction of the city burial regulations. Following the solemn funeral on 2 February, the bier was brought to Valsalice on the 4th, and on the 6th was able to be placed in the hurriedly prepared tomb. Some months later a mausoleum-cum-chapel was built there, designed by Carlo Maurizio Vigna.

It was at the centre of the portico which divides the two courtyards on different levels, in front of the main college building. Making use of this arrangement of courtyards, the tomb and chapel had two floors.

A broad set of stairs from the portico in the lower courtyard led to a niche that held the tomb. A bas-relief shows Don Bosco in priestly vestments as he was when placed in the coffin. We read the epigraph as follows: “*Hic compositus est in pace Christi - Joannes Bosco Sacerdos - orphanorum pater - natus Castrinovi apud Astenses XVIII kal. sept. MDCCCXV - obiit Aug. Taurin. pridie kal. febr. - MDCCCLXXXVIII*” (Here, in the peace of Christ, lies Fr John Bosco, father to orphans, born at Castelnuovo near Asti on 16 August 1815. Died in Turin on 31 January 1888).

Either side of the tomb, two sets of stairs lead to the terrazzo at the front of the upper courtyard. Here we find a chapel along Gothic lines which is above the tomb. The fresco in the apse over the marble altar is

a Pietà on a gilded background; it is by Rollini. Ten years after his death Don Bosco's spiritual sons built a church nearby this complex to St Francis de Sales, patron of Catholic journalists and Salesians, built with donations by Cooperators and the Provinces of Europe and America. Planned by Salesian architect Fr Ernest Vespignani (1861–1925), it was dedicated to the cult of Cardinal Augustine Richelmy on 12 April 1901.

Further work was done on the tomb in 1907, when the Cause of beatification and canonisation was introduced. The idea was to add decoration to the crypt and chapel for this occasion. This is how we see it today.

On the pediment [*note*: a triangular part at the top of the front of a building that supports the roof] of the chapel, a by now tatty-looking fresco was replaced by a mosaic saying: “*Ave Crux, spes unica*” (Hail to the Cross, our only hope). The terrazzo on the upper courtyard was also redone and given a new balustrade. In the crypt, on gilded backgrounds, are geometric motifs fashioned with hot molten wax, interwoven with vines and other religious symbols in vivid colours. It was done on the basis of a design by Francesco Chiapasco.

Special care has been given to embellishing the portico where the staircase provides access to the tomb. This is the work of Engineer Stefano Molli (1858–1917). Vaults, arches and walls have been ornamented by fine etchings, the work of Prof. Francesco Barberis. The eight lunettes show buildings recalling important stage of Don Bosco's life: the cottage at the Becchi; the facade of the church of St Francis of Assisi, where on 8 December 1841 the work of the Oratory began; the Pinardi house, first stable location of Salesian work; the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, consecrated in 1868; the Mornese house recalling the foundation of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in 1872; St Philip Neri College at Lanzo Torinese, where Don Bosco first set up the Salesian Cooperators Association; the Viedma institute, founded on 24 May 1879, recalling the beginnings of the Salesian missions; and finally the *Camerette* at Valdocco where Don Bosco died on the morning of 31 January 1888.

A door and beaten iron gate were placed to indicate the stairs that lead down to the tomb and the rest of the portico. This whole complex has been an object of constant pilgrimage. Don Bosco's body lay here until the end of 1929, the year of his beatification. For the occasion, on 9 June the body was laid out as we see it today, and led in a solemn cortege to the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, to strains of *Giù dai colli*, music written for the occasion by Salesian Fr Michael Gregorio. The lyrics were by Fr Secondo Rastello.

Fr Rua and Fr Albera were also buried at Valsalice before their bodies were transferred to Turin.

Valsalice today

The Salesians still look after the place that was the Founder's resting place for forty years or more. The mausoleum, especially the ornamental part, and church were restored in 1986–1987. The house, which has been gradually extended (a third floor was added in 1898–1901; a new wing on the west in 1930–1931 and further added to in 1956), has again returned to its earliest function as a school, following the transfer of the Philosophy students to Foglizzo (1925–1926). So this place has played an important role in the city and local area, preparing thousands of students for university (in 1905 it was given State recognition for *Liceo Classico* and in 1952–1957 gained legal recognition also for the *Liceo Scientifico*, the two senior secondary – matriculation – branches in the Italian university preparation scheme of things). In line with this tradition, today it offers lower and upper secondary courses (“classic” and “scientific”, as indicated earlier) and the valuable *Don Bosco Museum of Natural History*, developed on the basis of the ornithological collection which Don Bosco acquired in 1879; The mineralogical and petrographic collection of about 5000 pieces, is one of the largest in Piedmont.