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29/1/2009 - RMG - The 150th anniversary of the founding of the Salesian Congregation shortly to be opened



(ANS – Rome) - The members of the “Society of Saint Francis of Sales”, known as the Salesians, are preparing to begin the celebrations for the 150th anniversary of their foundation.

Officially started on 18 December 1859 in Turin by the priest Fr John Bosco, the Salesian Congregation today is present in 129 countries with 16.092 Salesians (10.669 priests, 2.025 brothers, 2.765 clerical students, 515 novices, 118 bishops of whom 5 are cardinals).

The anniversary recalls the meeting held on 18 December 1859 in Don Bosco’s room at the Oratory of Saint Francis of Sales in Valdocco, Turin, where 18 young men, as recorded in the historical minutes, 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 towards their own sanctification.”

The Rector Major of the Salesians, Fr Pascual Chávez Villanueva, in his letter regarding the 150th anniversary addressed to all the Salesians in the world called 2009 “a year of grace” which ought to help the Sons of Don Bosco to remember their origins and the goal towards which they are called.

A large number of events are planned in the 93 Provinces. The year of celebration will officially begin on **31 January**, the liturgical feast of Don Bosco. On that occasion the Rector Major, Fr Chávez, will preside at Mass in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians at Valdocco in Turin. During the Mass, which will be broadcast live on Telepace at 18.10 (GMT+1), in streaming www.missionidonbosco.tv, the IX successor of Don Bosco will give his traditional **message to the young people** of the Salesian Youth Movement around the world. On the same day the publication is expected of the “**Project for Europe**” of the Salesian Congregation, which, in response to the new challenges which the Old Continent is presenting to religious life, to the education and formation of the young, is engaged in re-launching its presence in Europe.

This “year of grace” will be marked by other special dates and events:

- 25 May: celebration of the feast of Mary Help of Christians;
- 24 June, the name-day of Don Bosco, Feast of the Rector Major;
- 16 August, Don Bosco’s birthday.
- 18 December: all the Salesians in the world will be invited to renew their religious profession.

An outstanding event will be the pilgrimage of the casket containing relics of Don Bosco which will visit the various countries where the Salesians are present. The long journey will begin in July this year beginning in Chile and will come to an end in 2015, the year in which the bicentenary of the birth of Don Bosco occurs.

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