

# Vocation Novena

To pray for Salesian Vocations as we prepare for Vocations  
Sunday 2023



## Is Don Bosco calling you?

'Vocation' is God's call guiding us to the path in life that will fulfil his plan for us. It touches our deepest purpose in life and can bring us the contentment of knowing and feeling we are 'in the right place'. It is a call each of us needs to listen for, whatever stage of life we are in. Please pray this week for all who are discerning their vocation, and for Salesians of Don Bosco in formation.



22 April 2023

‘A good vocation is simply a firm and constant will to serve God in the way and in the places to which he has called us.’ (St Francis of Sales)

In today’s first reading, we see the Apostles dealing with a real crisis in the early Church: the Greek-speaking Christians felt that their poor were being overlooked in the distribution of charity. They decided to elect seven Deacons whose primary task was service to others, regardless of background, culture, or nationality. Deacons remind us of that need to serve, just as Jesus served. Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus were chosen for this specific ministry—they remain as patron saints to all those wonderful deacons that serve the Church to this day. In our Salesian family today, let us pray for those permanent deacons who minister so effectively in our Salesian parishes and schools:

- **Deacon Michael Kennedy** in Battersea
- **Deacon Michael Bennett** in Bootle
- **Deacon Paul Evans** in Farnborough
- **Deacon Paul Page-Tickell** in Farnborough

Perhaps some of you sharing this novena for vocations might feel a calling to this specific ministry. Pray about it and have a word with your own parish priest - you could be the difference your parish needs. Deaconate is also a stage on the journey to priesthood: in our own Salesian family, **Deacon Ste Llyod SDB** is serving in Battersea. Pray for him too as he prepares for his priestly ordination in July.

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23 April 2023

‘A person knows when they has found their vocation when they stop thinking about how to live and begin to live.’ (Thomas Merton)

Our Gospel today is a very Salesian gospel: Don Bosco wanted his Salesians to bring the gospel to young people. Don Bosco saw the need to accompany young people in their journey of faith, sharing their music, media styles, and, above all, be willing to listen to their questions, especially the most difficult. Jesus today walks with his friends to Emmaus—they are so caught up in their grief and loss, they fail to recognise the ‘stranger’ walking beside them. Jesus listens to their questions and explains why the Messiah had to suffer. Like many of us, these two decided to cherry pick those parts of Jesus’ life and teaching that were convenient for them. They only discovered who He was when they invited Him to share table fellowship: in that intimate meeting, ‘they knew him in the breaking of bread!’ As Salesians of Don Bosco, we are called to meet young people where they are—not where would want them to be. The invitation to Salesian life is to be one who is not afraid to walk with young people, and to listen to their deep questions.

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## 24 April 2023-FEAST OF ST GEORGE

‘God calls you to make definitive choices, and He has a plan for each of you: to discover that plan and to respond to your vocation is to move toward personal fulfilment.’ (Pope Francis)

For this year only we celebrate the English national saint, George on this day.



Today we keep the National feast of England, St George. I always think that it is a shame that it is not kept with the solemnity and festivity that we associate with, for example, St Patrick's day as it is celebrated in Ireland and across the world. Unlike Ireland, the feast of the English nation is not a Bank Holiday; thus, we need to pick through the ordinary to find out why this day should be so special. Sadly, not much is known about George, but it is clear that he was a martyr, born in Turkey of a Christian family, became a soldier of the Roman

Empire, and was beheaded in Lydda in the early fourth century under the persecutions of Diocletian. He seems to have been martyred for protesting against Rome's persecution of Christians, allegedly giving up his military post to do so. As an outsider with a foreign religion, George was discriminated against by Roman authorities, who were becoming wary of Christianity's growing power. He was eventually arrested, imprisoned, and tortured, but refused to make a sacrifice in honour of the pagan gods or renounce his religion and faced punishment by death. This death impacted the Church greatly as the cult of George grew in importance over the centuries.

George is not purely an English national and religious symbol, but an international and even multicultural one. He is an important and celebrated saint in many other countries, regions, and cities all over the world, including Bulgaria, Ethiopia, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Palestine, Portugal, Russia, and Spain. This is something that the nation would do well to remember, as sometimes English nationalists use this day to promote the vilest forms of extreme nationalism. While pride in one's nation is so important and necessary, when it becomes hijacked by political parties for their own ends, then we need to worry deeply. The reality is that the England of 2023 is not the England of 1923; we must remember that England has always been a nation that welcomed different cultures and nationalities down through history.

George is seen as one who stood up for what was right and just. In our search for finding a true path in life, we would do well to follow his determination and strength. In the icon above, he is seen as slaying the mythical dragon—the dragon represents all those forces that try to destroy us or keep us down. What are the 'dragons' that you need to slay in your lives or in society today? How do we rid society of selfishness, bitterness, and hatred? Sadly, we do not always get the political leadership that we deserve, so we need to work from the grassroots. As a community, we are called to work for the common good; evil has got to be faced head on, as Pope Francis reminds us, **'the life of Jesus was a struggle. He came to overcome evil, to defeat the Prince of this world, to defeat the Devil'** (11/04/2014). It is useful to remember that the Pope's baptismal name is George—St John XXIII always maintained that the greatest day of his life was not his election as Pope but his baptism day. In making that difference we can build up the nation in ways that are beyond GNP or the size of an army. England is not an independent nation anymore; those of us who live here are part of the United Kingdom; while the UK might have left the European Union, we are members of the Commonwealth, NATO, the United

Nations, and numerous other international institutions. As we discovered with COVID-19 and the international work on vaccines, we can only defeat a global pandemic with a global solution. As the Holy Father reminds us, **'We can never repay evil with evil. We must overcome evil with good, offenses with forgiveness.... this is how we live in peace'** (08/02/2017).

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**Inspire many people to offer their lives to you, so that your love may be made visible in them. Raise up many good and worthy shepherds to serve you as Brothers, Sisters, and Priests in the Salesian Family of the British Province. Give them the strength and grace they need to respond generously to your call to give their lives in the service of others. We ask this prayer through your Son Jesus Christ, who is Lord for ever and ever. AMEN**

25 April 2023-Feast of St Mark

Where your talents and the needs of the world cross; there lies your vocation  
(Aristotle)

Today we remember one of the four gospel writers, Mark. Scholars tell us that his version of the gospel is the earliest. The gospel starts with the Baptism of Jesus, by John, in the Jordan—for him, no Christmas story of angels and mangers. Mark is focused: he wants to trace the ministry of Jesus from that baptism through teaching, miracles, joy, and pain, with the scene of the empty tomb at the end. Today's gospel takes us to Jesus' great commission, **'Go out to the whole world and proclaim the Good News to all creation.'** Do you think that you could be a bearer of Good News? There are plenty of examples of those who bring bad news—our media is full of it. As a Salesian of Don Bosco, you would be called to bring the gospel message to young people in a particular way. As a Salesian of Don Bosco, you could make a real difference in the lives of young people who are sometimes unsure and unwilling to commit. St Mark dedicated his life to proclaiming the loving message of Jesus in good times and in bad. Pope Francis reminds us that Salesian life will not always be easy, **"The Gospel is always proclaimed on the road, never sitting down...go out where Jesus is not known, or where Jesus is persecuted, or where Jesus is disfigured, to proclaim the true Gospel...To go out in order to proclaim. And the preacher risks his life in this going out. He is not safe; there are no life insurance policies for preachers. And if a preacher seeks a life insurance policy, they are not a true preacher of the Gospel: so, first of all: Go, go out."** (25/04/2017) Do you think that Salesian life is for you, or someone you know? Why not try?

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26 April 2023

**'Your vocation in life is where your greatest joy meets the world's greatest need.'**  
**(Frederick Buechner)**

In our Gospel today, Jesus reminds his followers that he is 'the bread of life'. As true followers we need not fear hunger or thirst—we share in the gift of eternal life. In our Church today, we need people to consider how they can help to spread the gospel message in an authentic and true way. We need priests who will bring the Word of God alive and relevant, especially to young people. We need priests who will be prepared to break bread of the Eucharist, and share the life of God, especially with young people. Today let us pray that some may come forward to consider a vocation, a life as a Salesian of Don Bosco. Perhaps God is calling you, or someone close to you to be a Salesian Sister, Brother, or Priest. Perhaps you could make a real difference today.

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27 April 2023

‘In a world so torn apart by rivalry, anger, and hatred, we have the privileged vocation to be living signs of a love that can bridge all divisions and heal all wounds.’ (Henri Nouwen)

Our Gospel today continues with the ‘Bread of Life’ theme—who is going to be your next parish priest? Who is going to be the one to lead your parish family in the next twenty years? Is it fair to expect priests to come to our nation from abroad? Are we asking the right questions? Do we have real hope for our future? As Pope Francis constantly reminds us, our common Christian vocation has to be hope-filled, because we are an Easter people. The Eucharist is the sacrament of unity that brings the community together. In the synodical process that is so dear to the heart of the Holy Father, we will re-discover our community commitment. By our baptismal promises, that we renew every Easter, we are commissioned to bring that peace and love of God to those places where we live. Today, you could bring Jesus to places that the official Church cannot reach. Today, like Mary of Magdala and the Emmaus Disciples, you can preach the gospel not just by what you say, but, more importantly, by what you do.

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28 April 2023

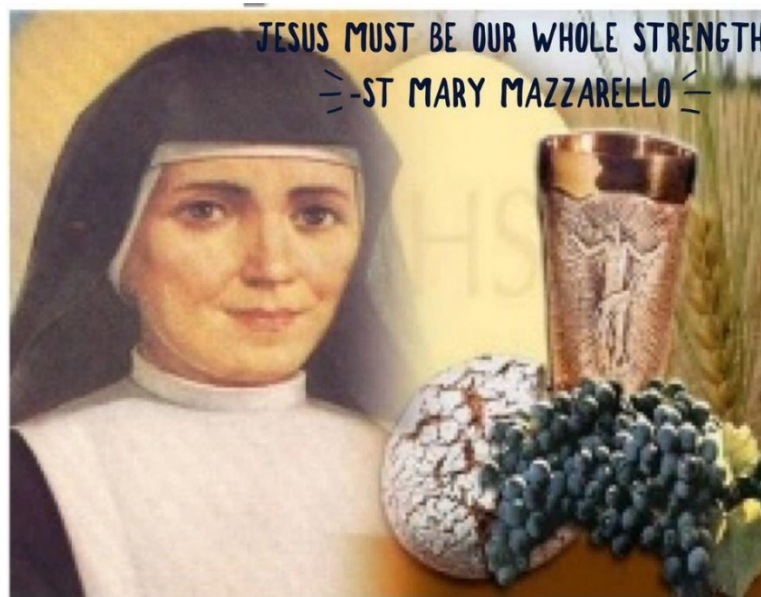
‘You will know your vocation by the joy that it brings you. You will know. You will know when it’s right.’ (Dorothy Day)

Very often we might dismiss the thought of becoming a Salesian, as we think that we are not worthy—we are not good enough, or holy enough. Today’s reading from Acts should give us pause for thought, as it shows how God does work in the most mysterious of ways! Saul of Tarsus was a committed Jew and hated the Christian Church: he witnessed the stoning of our first martyr, the Deacon Stephen. He was on his way to Damascus to arrest Christians, when he had his most dramatic conversion experience. Such is the unconditional love of God for everyone, that, even a sworn enemy of Jesus like Saul, could experience salvation. Saul was baptised and took the name Paul, becoming a great preacher of the gospel. He founded Christian communities across the Roman Empire and kept in touch with them through his Letters—teachings that we still use to this day. Jesus welcomes everyone into the Christian family. He welcomes those praying this novena; he welcomes those who feel that they are not good enough to be a Salesian of Don Bosco. You are!

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29 April 2023—Feast of Catherine of Sienna



Today we remember a wonderful saint of our Church: Catherine was a Dominican. Even though she led a hidden life of prayer, she was not afraid to ask awkward questions, especially to those in power. She prayed with Pope Gregory XI to bring about a reform of the clergy: she saw that they need to be true men of God, offering their lives in true service of neighbour. In our Salesian family we have a wonderful woman, Mary Mazzarello—she offers us a deep spirit of contemplation and an effective care for young people.

Born in 1837, Mary Mazzarello grew up in a hard-working, God-fearing peasant family in northern Italy. She was a normal teenager of her times: intelligent, enterprising, hard-working, fun-loving, and always in the height of local fashion. As she grew into young adulthood, she began to sense that God was calling her to belong totally to Himself and she responded by consecrating herself completely to Him. She did not understand immediately what this meant or how it would unfold. It was a response of unconditional love. Mary was often impulsive but in the matter of discovering a direction for her life she sought advice from those who knew her well and whose judgement she trusted. Her father was a great source of homespun wisdom and the leader of the apostolic group she had joined, and was a woman of spiritual insight and intelligence. She confided, above all, in Fr. Pestarino who had guided her for several years and who knew her inside out. Slowly she came to distinguish the way ahead in the events of everyday life.

She weighed up her inclinations and physical strength, took stock of situations around her and considered what she might do to share Christ's passion for the world. An event that had a particular bearing on her life and future mission came in the form of illness. When assisting some sick members of her family during the epidemic of typhoid fever that struck her village in 1860, Mary contracted the disease. After several months hovering between life and death she recovered but no longer had the strength to work in the fields and vineyards as she had formerly done. What was she to do? At twenty-three she had her life before her but lacked skills beyond those acquired in helping her father on the farm. Together with her closest friend, Petronilla, she set about learning dressmaking from the village tailor so as not to be a burden to her family and with the declared aim of setting up sewing classes for the village girls. Once their training was finished, the pair did indeed begin their work for the good of the girls, teaching them a life skill and encouraging them to live their Christian life joyfully.

Hers was not initially a choice for religious life, but one of a life consecrated to God by vow, while living and working in her village environment. Associations of young women sharing the same desires and aims as Mary were appearing in several parts of northern Italy at this time and Mary became part of one of them, receiving support from others to live the life she had chosen.

But God had further plans for her. She met Don Bosco, and they perceived in each other a shared passion for the good of the young. Here was a woman who experienced his apostolic ideals for the young and who was the perfect choice to become the founding member his new religious congregation of the Salesian Sisters. Mary did not hesitate but once again said her wondering but joyful 'YES' to God--wherever that would lead her.

Are you interested in discovering more about the life of the Salesian Sisters—the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians? Why not contact their Vocations Promoter, Sr Pat Devine FMA. Sr Pat is a friendly and lively Sister who would be delighted to hear from you. Contact Sr Pat on:

[patdevine13@gmail.com](mailto:patdevine13@gmail.com)

Why not try?



Support and help one another. Give each other encouragement. (St Mary Mazzarello)

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30 April 2023—Vocations Sunday

To be saints is not a privilege for a few, but a vocation for everyone. (Pope Francis)

Today we reach the summit of our vocation novena: today is Vocations Sunday. It is the day given by our Church to reflect and pray for vocations to the priesthood and religious life. We pray for our friends who are Jesuits, Franciscan, Dominicans, Presentations, Sisters of the Cross and Passion, and Carmelites to name just a few—we pray for the diocesan clergy, and their needs. We pray that each one of us can see what God is calling us to—and how we can respond. In our Gospel today we see that Jesus is the true shepherd of the Christian family. Jesus only wants what is good for us. He tells us clearly, **‘I have come so that they might have life and have it to the full’** Jesus wants to share the fullness of his with us: it is a life that is dedicated to the care and well-being of others. In a special way, as members of the Salesian family, Don Bosco saw the need for his followers to be good shepherds too. Following the gentle inspiration and patronage of St Francis of Sales, they were to care for young people, especially those who were difficult, and those who were poor. Don Bosco began in his work in the slums of Turin nearly two hundred years ago: he wanted his priests and Brothers to be true friends of young people, wanting what was best for them. Today, you will find us in schools of all kinds; in youth clubs; in homes for homeless or abandoned children; working with street children; supporting volunteers; working as missionaries; as chaplains in schools, colleges, and universities; and in parish work.

Vocation means to be called to some activity that touches the deepest purpose of your life. It is a call to a relationship of self-giving that also gives meaning and direction to your journey in life. For Salesians of Don Bosco, the sense of being called is experienced through a concern for the needs of young people. The roots of that concern are often buried in the experience of family, friends, and school. Since God calls us through experience, finding God's will for us (a vocation) means looking at our experience of life and listening for the deeper themes and energy that move us towards a Gospel way of living. Could this be something that inspires you? Could you see yourself living in a community of like-minded men who want the very best for the young people that they work with? Could you share that life of prayer, centred on the Eucharist, and that gives to others? Could you see yourself as being like the ‘Good Shepherd’ of today’s gospel? Do you want to make a difference?

**Please feel free to contact the Salesian Vocations Promoter, Fr Gerry O'Shaughnessy SDB:**

[gerry.oshaughnessy@salesians.org.uk](mailto:gerry.oshaughnessy@salesians.org.uk)

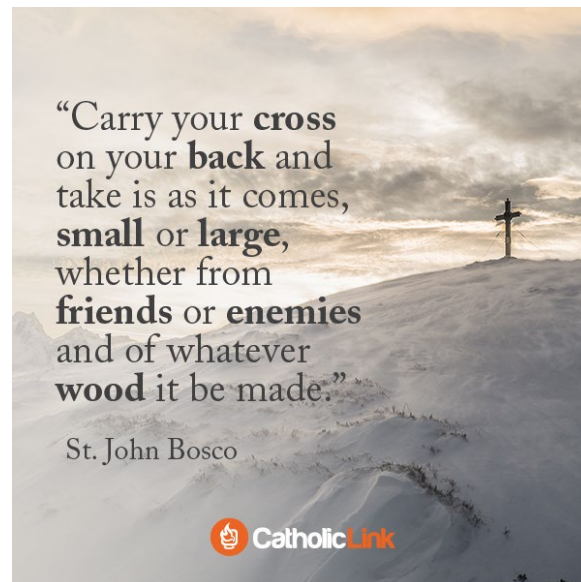
The Salesian way is a life of joy and sharing. Please contact us, in person, or visit our website:

[www.salesians.org.uk](http://www.salesians.org.uk)

Here you will have a good flavour of what we are doing across Britain, and in the global community today. God could be calling you, or someone you know—please do not ignore that call.

Share Fr Gregory SDB's vocation story:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BvKM12-em-k>



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Salesian Cross of the Good Shepherd

**Saint John Bosco**

**Friend of the young,**

**Teacher in the ways of God,**

**Your dedication to empowering the needy inspires us still.**

**Help me to work for a better world,**

**where the young are given the chance to flourish,**

**where the poor's dream for justice can come true,**

**and where God's compassion is shown to be real.**

**Intercede for me as I bring my needs to you,**

**and to our heavenly Mother, the Help of Christians.**

**Saint John Bosco, pray for us.**