

Opus Christi  Salvatoris Mundi

Missionary Servants of the Poor

2023/02

On Mission with God in the Andes Newsletter

GIOVANNI SALERNO, MSP

“the donkey of the Good God”

www.msptm.com



Dear Friends,

Laudetur Iesus Christus!

At 10:57 am on Saturday, February 4, 2023, Father Giovanni Salerno ended his earthly pilgrimage after 85 years of life, 61 of priesthood, 55 of missionary labor, and some 40 years as the founder of the Movement of the Missionary Servants of the Poor.

The days following his death were filled with a stream of people who wanted to say goodbye to him. The most moving were the many former boys and girls who had lived with us and ex-students who came to visit him, showing him their licenses as doctors, engineers, teachers, etc. and thanking him for doing so much to help them succeed in life.



The human pain the heart experiences by the loss of a Father, a founder and, for many, a great friend and confidant, cannot for anything obscure the joy of the blessing of his person, the example of his missionary path, the strength of the passion with which he lived his vocation.



He wanted to assume the role of “servant” for himself and for his spiritual sons and daughters; a servant in the biblical sense, that is, an authentic lover of God of whose love springs a special intimacy that brings authentic knowledge and releases the desire of fully realizing the will of the beloved.

We can apply to him the title that he himself wanted which was the compass that characterizes the way of living the Gospel of the Missionary Servants of the Poor, servant of God, servant of the Church, and servant of the Poor.

Service to God, nourished by constant prayer, simple in form and intense in substance. An intensity of prayer that is the intrinsic element of each missionary to fulfill the mandate of being “active contemplatives” and not merely activists for the poor. Examples of this life of prayer are Eucharist adoration which is part of the life of every Missionary Servant of the Poor, and the oratories with the Blessed Sacrament to which anyone may enter who knocks on our doors.

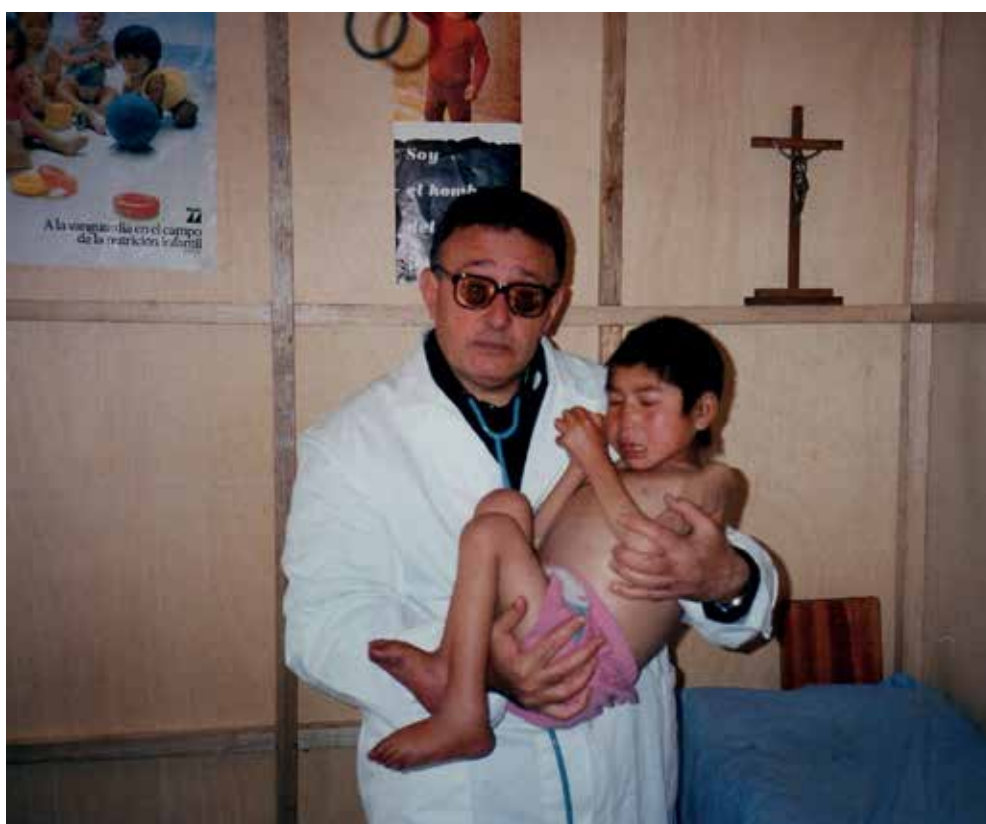


Service to the Church, fruit of a great love for her, suffering and rejoicing with her. Fr. Giovanni nourished a deep love for the Augustinian order that took him to its heart and made him want to be buried in the Augustinian habit. He had a paternal love for the Missionary Servants of the Poor for whom he felt himself to be a true “father.” He had a never-ending love for young vocations and a love for the contemplative life with which he knew how to infect his children and the poor that the Lord entrusted to him. He had a uniquely tender love for Mary, the Mother of the Church and Mother of the Poor.

A son of the Church, he was able to assume and fully realize in the mission environment the *aggiornamento* envisioned by the Second Vatican Council, rooted strongly in tradition with special sensitivity to well-celebrated liturgy.

Service to the Poor characterized his whole life. He taught everyone to be filled with God so as to be able to see the poor with the eyes of God and so see in them children of God, and thus know how to help them with humility and avoid the pride of mere philanthropy which had done so much damage in the heart of the Church.

Father Giovanni was fully and simply a man of God. And through him, God did great things, with all his weak humanity, with all his explosive Sicilian character, and with the ardor of an Augustinian seeker of God Whom we found especially in service to the poorest



At his death, he left us an inheritance of works that speak for themselves and, above all, the great message that life is fully authentic and a source of joy only when it becomes "bread broken for others."

We want this newsletter to be the basis of a publication, to be completed later, that will make known the life of a man of God of our time who captivated many by his holiness, who pushed a great many of us onto a road to conversion and who saved countless numbers of the poor.

Fr. Walter Corsini, msp
Vicar General
Missionary Servants of the Poor

PREFACE



Dear Friends,

I have received with great joy your decision to gather memories and testimonies of the life of Father Giovanni Salerno.

I was able to meet him when I was the parish priest at Porto Stefano in Grosseto Province, Italy. Thanks to a marvelous missionary group I tried to open the parish to the world so as to be able to fully breathe the mystery of the Catholic Church that embraces rich and poor to heal them through the Love of Jesus.

The meeting with Father Giovanni Salerno affected me a lot. We meet people daily but these encounters rarely leave any trace in our soul. Many people are like dark glass that don't let the Light of Jesus shine through. Meeting with Father Giovanni Salerno overwhelmed me in the same way that meeting Saint John Paul II and Saint Teresa of Calcutta did.

I was impressed by a deep harmony I noticed between the feelings of Mother Teresa and those of Father Giovanni. Mother Teresa told me several times, *"I'm not a social worker. I am a believer and I seek to transmit the Love of Jesus to everyone I meet."* Father Giovanni told me the same thing. *"I am a servant of the poor to bring Jesus among the poorest because only Jesus heals poverty in all its manifestations and all its depth."*

I remember I asked him, *"Then, must I come with you?"*

Father Giovanni answered, *"You stay where you are. In the wealthy countries there is a worse poverty than in the Third World. Spiritual poverty is spreading in developed countries, the lack of values, the poverty of insatiable selfishness which never satisfies."* Mother Teresa said the same thing, *"Calcutta may be found everywhere. In poor countries you may find persons physically malnourished but with beautiful souls. In rich countries you find persons well cared for in body but with devastated and incredibly ugly souls. Here there is so much need for Jesus and the true love that only He can teach and give."*

We have such a need for people like Father Giovanni Salerno, like Mother Teresa, like John Paul II. At the end of World Youth Day 2002 in Toronto, John Paul II said, *"Don't be like snails that leave behind only a trail with a bit of slime. A little rain is enough to wash it away. Dear young people, make of your life a work of art of love. Give it, spend it to do good and leave traces of yourself behind and you will be happy."*

This is the teaching that Father Giovanni has left us, a teaching very relevant for today.

Angelo Card. Comastri

Vicar General Emeritus of his Holiness

for Vatican City

Biography of Father Giovanni Salerno, msp

The First Years

1938

Father Giovanni Salerno was born in Gela in the Sicilian province of Caltanissetta, Italy on January 30, 1938. His parents were Nicolás Salerno and Angela Legname. His father had married a second time after he was widowed so Father Giovanni had three step siblings from his father's first marriage to Rosaria Salerno (Gaetana, Angel, and Salvador) and three siblings from his father's second marriage (Vincenzo, Francisco, and Vicenza).



1940

+ June 10, 1940. Giovanni was little more than a year old when Italy entered the Second World War allied with Hitler's Germany.



1943

+On the night of July 9-10, 1943 the invasion of Sicily began in Gela by the allied forces of the United States and Britain.

By the middle of August, the Allies controlled Sicily ending with a victory over the enemy forces of Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany.

"I have some terrible memories of the Second World War. Though I was very young, I remember that it was hell, especially when the docks at the port of Gela were blown up." ¹

+At only five years old, Giovanni has a strange dream that many years later on September 30, 2000, in Ajofrín, Spain, he will comment on.



God has given me dreams that later come true. For example, I dreamed about Holy Mary Mother of the Poor, just like we have her now, when I was only five years old, when my vocation had not been formed yet and even less thought of. Many dreams I've had have come true. God has warned me of future events through dreams

1946/47

+At 7 or 8 years old he makes his First Communion in the church of the Capuchin friars in Gela.

I was only seven or eight years old but it is engraved in my memory and heart. Even today I have the vivid memory of the (then) parish priest, Father Antonino Di Fede and of the catechist Sister Anamaría of the Sisters of Saint Ann, who helped so much to make that day radiant.

I remember that the priest told us, "On the day of your First Communion, ask Jesus whatever you want and he will give it to you." That day I asked for three things: to be a priest, to be a doctor, and to be a missionary. And the Lord heard me. Put all of your apostolic efforts into preparing children for First Communion. On that day depends their future." ²

¹ Salerno, Giovanni. *On Mission with God in the Andes*. 2nd ed., Madrid, EDIBESA, 2015, p. 23

² Op. cit., p. 25

Religious Life Attracts Him

1948

+At the age of 10, Giovanni intends to become a Franciscan Capuchin priest, but at 11 he becomes excited about the Augustinians.

I remember that my father, because I always had delicate health, always cared for me with special love and never sent me to work in the fields like my other siblings who were younger.

He always told me, "When you grow up, you will have to be a doctor!" And he said it in such a firm, clear tone that for me it appeared to be a sure thing. I, however, preferred to be a priest and was inclined to follow my vocation for which, in my free time, instead of going to play soccer, I preferred to learn the catechism or went to Catholic Action meetings or to visit the Capuchin priests at the Shrine of Our Lady of Grace in my native village. This Virgin attracted me and I intended to become a Capuchin priest.

But the Father Guardian of the monastery to which my father had requested admission to the Seraphic Seminary, after I passed the entrance exams to the Middle School, advised my father that it was preferable that I finish the Middle School first and only later enter the seminary. And so it was. This caused me great confusion. I felt discouraged, because I realized that this was no longer for me.

During that school year, my godmother, Concettina Presti, who was a close friend of my parents, frequently visited my mother and told her of the Augustinian priests of Gela, especially of Father Vincenzo Presti, who had just arrived and was dedicated to promoting vocations to the Augustinian seminary in Palermo. I heard the talk about the Augustinians and became excited. They lived far from our house and one day I decided to walk to their convent and church to see them, at least from the outside if it wasn't possible to enter. (Salerno, Giovanni. Fr. Giovanni Salerno, missionary priest and doctor. Cuzco, October 20, 1990)

1949

+October 1949. Eleven-year-old Giovanni begins secondary school at the Augustinian Minor Seminary in Palermo.

I remember back then my first meeting with Father Vincenzo Presti and the new Prior, Fr. Filippo Pizzero, in the convent of San Agustín in Gela. I remember their warm welcome and the deep impression that both left on me since beginning to serve as an acolyte at their church.

I also remember how, a few days after that first meeting, Fr. Faustino Giunta, Provincial of the Order, arrived in Gela and told my father that the cost of the seminary tuition was three thousand lira per month. Faced with that unexpected amount, my father became very thoughtful and then looked at me and said calmly, "I will work in the fields one more hour a day for you and so will be able to pay the seminary tuition."

For this reason, every day in Palermo at four in the afternoon (the time my father returned from work in the fields), I felt great sadness when I thought of my father working an extra hour so that I could continue my studies there in the Seminary. (Salerno, Giovanni. Fr. Giovanni Salerno, missionary priest and doctor. Cuzco, October 20, 1990)

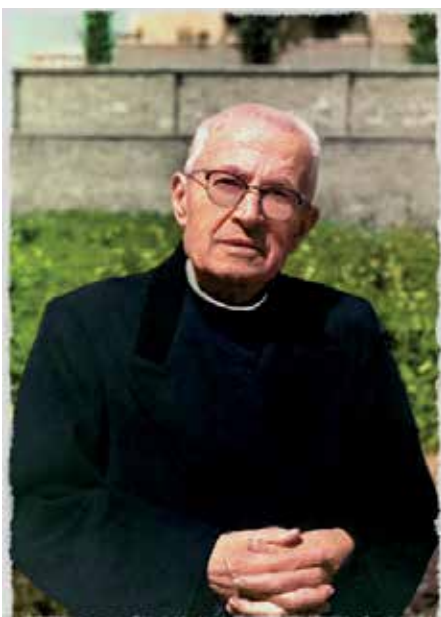
One afternoon, when all the family was around the table, the conversation turned to me and the Augustinians and it was decided to go the monastery of San Agustín to request my admission to the Major Seminary in Palermo.

I was happy! I felt that the Lord was calling me to be a priest and not a doctor. But there was also great pain in my heart not being able to carry out my father's wish for me to become a doctor.

When the day arrived to leave for Palermo, my mother dressed me up in "zouave" pants, the style for young people back then, and my father accompanied me there, a train trip that took all day. It was October or November 1949. (Salerno, Giovanni. Fr. Giovanni Salerno, missionary priest and doctor. Cuzco, October 20, 1990)

1950

+At twelve years old, he meets Blessed Giacomo Alberione, founder of the Paulists.



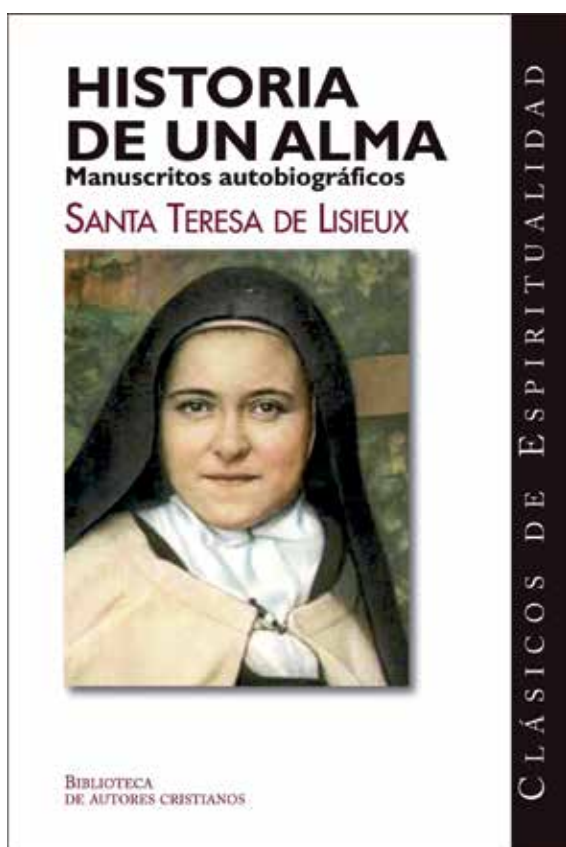
I met Blessed Giacomo Alberione (1884-1971) when I was twelve. He arrived in Palermo on a coal train. At that time, it was truly penitential traveling by train instead of by plane or car. Father Faustino Yunda, Augustinian Provincial of Sicily, gave him lodging and began to help him. I remember also that two Paulist brothers went to Gela, my town, visiting families and distributing Biblical pamphlets. My mother fed and housed them. (Salerno 3293)

+At twelve years old, he consecrates himself to the Virgin Mary at the Shrine of Tindari in Sicily

I remember I was about twelve years old when I consecrated myself to the Virgin Mary at a little shrine overlooking the sea on a typical promontory of my native Sicily. It was a wonderful day that I will never forget! Now, in that place, there stands a great Marian sanctuary which forms the faith of the pilgrims who come there. The bishop has had these beautiful words hung in large characters on a wall of the sanctuary: "For you, everything is little, O Mother!" Really, everything we do for our Mother Mary is always little, too little!³



++He reads for the first time the book Story of a Soul by Saint Therese of the Child Jesus when he is twelve years old. He receives it as a raffle prize.



When I was twelve years old, I won a prize playing Bingo that would mark my life, the book Story of a Soul by Saint Therese of the Child Jesus. In the appendix of the book, I read the story of the miracle of Gallipoli, a great miracle that greatly impressed me. The Saint of the "Little Way" was able to multiply, more than once, the money in the cash box of the Carmelite monastery in that city in southern Italy and so helping the Discalced Carmelite Sisters who suffered cold and hunger. Many years later, I experienced something similar in our Movement in such a way that, when I speak of it, I found nothing better to call it but "the new miracle of Gallipoli" ⁴

³Ob. cit., p. 26.

⁴Ibid

1951

+He is clothed in the Augustinian habit in the church of San Agustín in Palermo at the age of thirteen.

1952

+July 1952. The teenage Giovanni is baffled by the premonition about his father.

I remember the last time I was in Gela for my annual vacation in July 1952 when my father was still alive. He said to me, "Remember this: If you don't study medicine after you become a priest, you will regret it." I was taken aback and wondered how such a thing could happen. Wasn't it perhaps a fixation of my father's? However, the tone of voice was different from what my father normally used. But I didn't want to think that it was a true prophecy. (Salerno, Giovanni. Fr. Giovanni Salerno, missionary priest and doctor. Cuzco, October 20, 1990)



+July-August 1952. Prophetic dream of the death of his father.

Back in 1952, on vacation far from home, I dreamed that my father was dying. I told the dream to my superiors but they didn't believe me. But a little while later, a telegram arrived which astonished them. They didn't tell me that my father had died so as not to cause me too much stress. They told me rather that he was gravely ill, but I understood that he had died. I travelled to my city by train which, back then, took several hours to travel only 30 miles. When the pallbearers lifted the coffin bearing the remains of my father and crossed the threshold of the house to begin the funeral procession, I felt a new spirit within me, a new strength that took total possession of me, of my whole being. Through this strength I changed character and became stronger and more determined; before then I had been a very timid boy.⁵

At Palermo his vocation matures

+On the train from Gela to Palermo

In 1952 he accompanied his brother Enzo who was traveling to Palermo to enter the seminary of the Servants of the Poor, founded by Blessed Giacomo Cusmano.

Many years later he would write: *I still remember that long trip from Gela to the capital of the region on a slow coal train puffing and throwing sparks like a great metal monster.*

⁵Op. cit., p. 28-29.



It was late when we arrived in Palermo. We walked to the house of "Food for the Poor" which is still on Corso Calatafimi Street and there, over the door, I saw the words "Who serves the poor lends to God" (Prv 19:17) which struck me like lightning.⁶

1955

+From October 1954 - July 1957 he studied Philosophy at the school in Viterbo.

There, three ophthalmologists agreed on a diagnosis of an illness that would leave him blind within a few years.

But I believed firmly in my vocation and with tears in my eyes asked the Lord to help me. I wrote to the monastery in Cascia. Right away the Abbess answered me and wrote that a young Sister had offered herself as a victim for the health of my eyes. After a few days Father Ettore Salimbeni came to Viterbo. I didn't know him but when he found out about my case, he convinced my superior to let him take me to Rome where there was a celebrated ophthalmologist, Dr. Mazzantini. He saved my eyesight and took his leave of me saying, "You must return to your studies!" The result was that I was ordained a priest a year before my classmates. I will never forget Dr. Mazzantini!⁷

Priest of the Order of Saint Augustine

1961

+December 23, 1961. Father Giovanni is ordained a priest.

I remember perfectly when I was ordained a priest on December 23, 1961. It was the custom of the time for the bishop to tie the recently consecrated hands of the new priests with a white handkerchief. Immediately afterwards, the mother of each priest approached her own son to untie his hands and give them her maternal kiss.

⁶Op. cit., p. 27.

⁷Op. cit., p. 29-30.

On kissing my hands, my mother said, "May these hands save many children!" I was surprised hearing these words because the Augustinian order of our Sicilian province didn't educate orphaned or abandoned children.

After that the Provincial Superior, Father Agustín Lavalle, approached me and said, "May these hands carry the Gospel to the most distant!" Two authentic prophecies of what would be my future life!⁸



1962

+1962. Always wishing to serve the poor of the Third World, Fr. Giovanni asked his superiors for permission to study missionary medicine and to be able to help the poor in the Belgian Congo where he desired to exercise his ministry. After obtaining permission, he studied at the University of Florencia doing his practicum at the Meyer Pediatric Clinic in Florencia and the Civil Hospital in Caltanissetta.

The mission in Apurimac

1966

July 1966. In July 1966, the Superior General sent Father Ettore Salimbeni and Father Lorenzo Micheli, who was later named Bishop Prelate of Chuquibambilla, to do a prior reconnaissance of the mission. He then summoned the volunteers in Rome and told us that Apurímac was a very poor mission and that many religious Orders and Congregations had rejected it because they lived there in the stone age. Of all the Augustinians in Italy, who were then about 500 religious, there were only eight of us who volunteered for the founding of the mission of the Prelature of Chuquibambilla. (Salerno, Fr. Giovanni. "Letter to the priests and seminarians of the Movement." Cuzco, December 27, 2006)

⁸Op. cit., p. 32.

1968

+ Before leaving for Peru, Fr. Giovanni had an extraordinary revelation from a holy woman from the parish of Canicattí.

Certainly the prayers of Angela, the "Perpetua" of our parish in Canicattí, in the province of Agrigento where I worked as a newly ordained priest, helped me. She had given all of her savings to the founding of the mission in the Andes, but she didn't stop there. In front of the tabernacle, she had understood or intuited that the best thing she could do was to offer herself as a victim. And she said "yes" to the Lord.

And one day, leaving adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, she confided her secret to me: "I have given you everything, but it is better that I die before you go. This is how I prepare the ground for you. You do not know the language and you are not prepared for the mission. That's why I'm going to prepare the way for you." Indeed, she died three days later in that same hospital where I had done my practicum as a missionary doctor.⁹

+August 1968. Trip to Peru.



It being impossible for various reasons to journey to the Belgian Congo, and the Augustinian priests being required to found the Prelature of Chuquibambilla in the province of Grau in the Andean region of Apurímac in southern Peru, Father Salerno volunteered and, in August of 1968, departed with a group of Augustinians for the foundation of that Prelature in the Andean mountains.

+August 22, 1968. Fr. Giovanni Salerno arrives in Peru to join the recently created Prelature of Chuquibambilla

I had hardly arrived in Peru in 1968 when I met dear Dr. Federico Bombieri, founder and director of the Carlo Erba of Peru. He welcomed me like a father and I will never forget this man who was truly a father to me. When he found out that I was headed to the High Cordillera to open dispensaries and treat all kinds of illnesses, he opened his heart to me and also his clinic.

He said, "I'm glad to meet a priest that dedicates himself to the sick. I so wanted my brother, who is a priest, to do this and thus help him; but he is sick and suffers a lot. He cannot dedicate himself to the sick much less go to mission territory." And then, over the years, he often said to me, "I'm happy to help you. Cheer up! I will never abandon you!"

⁹Op. cit., p. 40-41

I had gone to him to ask for some medicines. They had given me references to him in Italy. He said, "Don't worry. Tell me where you are staying and I will send you the medicines."

The next day while I was eating lunch as a guest of the Spanish province of Augustinians in Lima, the Superior called me, visibly alarmed, and said, "A truck full of medicines has arrived, all for you!"¹⁰

+Arriving in missionary territory and seeing the sad situation of the sick who had no health care, Father Salerno began to establish dispensaries in the principal villages of the region: one in Antabamba (12,000 feet above sea level) and then in Cotabambas (over 11,000 feet above sea level), again in Tambobamba (10,663 feet above sea level), in Coyllurqui (10,384 feet above sea level), in Progreso (12,674 feet above sea level), and in Aquira (12,044 feet above sea level).



1968/1969

And what will I say about my experience with the children of the Andes mountains?

In my youth, especially before I felt the call to the missions, I had no attachment to children. Their noisy behavior, their crying, their restlessness, everything annoyed me. However, when I arrived at the mission in the heights of the Cordillera, I had to assist as a missionary doctor at the delivery of a poor mother who gave birth in her small hut, lying on the ground, barely on llama skins, without water (much less hot water), without any change of clothes.

This poor mother died giving birth from a hemorrhage but the baby survived. And I, while I held the naked, helpless newborn in my hands who was crying from cold and hunger, felt my heart fill with indignation and rebellion. I shouted, "O Jesus, where are You? Why don't you do something for this little child?"

I remember it was a rainy night and that in the hut water was falling drop by drop through the straw roof mixing with the cold wind through the open doorway. And it was there that I felt something like a soft voice say, soothing all my rebellion, "Didn't I make you to help this child, for you to do something for him?"

From that moment I felt the need to be very close to the poor, especially poor children, orphaned, abandoned, and sick children. And I never tire of thanking Jesus for this privilege!

I think that the same voice that calmed my indignation and conquered my rebellion calls each and every one of us to open our hearts to the many suffering children. "Didn't I make you to help this child, so that you do something for him?"

¹⁰ Op. cit., p. 50-51.

The Idea of the Missionary Servants of the Poor begins to appear in his heart

1970

+ January 1970. The Headquarters of the National Program for the Control of Tuberculosis and Leprosy designated Father Giovanni Salerno as Collaborator of the Ministry of Health during the government of General EP Juan Velasco Alvarado, when Major General FAP Rolando Caro Constantini was Minister of Health (December 31, 1969 – August 28, 1975). So, Fr. Giovanni was able to expand his charitable work beyond Antabamba, to the Provinces of Grau, Abancay, Andahuaylillas, Aymaraes, and Cotabambas in the Department of Apurímac.

But Father Giovanni realized that the poor population of the Andean Cordillera of Peru needed not only doctors and missionary priests, but also people of good will to help them get out of the worst abandonment in which they found themselves. Thus, at the beginning of the 1980s, he founded an ecclesial movement that invited young men and women, married couples, priests, and lay people to unite for the cause of the poorest.



Seeing that in the Apurímac region there were not enough structures to support the work and the many young people coming to help as volunteers, Fr. Giovanni asked permission from his Superiors to move to the city of Cuzco where there were hospitals and more possibilities of help. There he laid the foundations of this ecclesial movement he named The Servants of the Poor of the Third World.

1975

+February 2, 1975. Fr. Giovanni travels on horseback from Cotabambas to Tambobamba soaked by the rain.

The Holy Year 1975! It was a great year for me! Perhaps the best year of my life because that was when I understood so many things that before, in Italy, even being already a priest, I hadn't understood yet.

I became gravely ill because of a long trip on horseback from Cotabambas to Tambobamba. It was February 2, 1975. I had found out that a young Italian layman, Giuseppe Pratesi, was sick and alone in Tambobamba.

Very worried, I undertook the journey with a Brother thinking that I could arrive by travelling all day on horseback. However, halfway there, a violent wind began to blow, like a hurricane, bringing rain. We didn't know what to do: to return home or continue the journey.



We decided to continue because we were halfway there. But we finally could go no further. We were extremely tired and our shoes and clothes were completely soaked with freezing water. And I didn't know how to keep my glasses dry so I could see where to go.

We decided to stop. I dismounted and said to the Brother, "Take the lantern and go on alone because I can't go any further." I was left alone. I fixed it so that the horse shielded me from the wind and warmed me with his breath preventing the freezing night from putting me out of action.

I thought I was on a level plain, perhaps on a gentle hillside, but when the Brother returned and illuminated the place with his lantern, I discovered that I was on the edge of a precipice almost 10,000 feet above the river that ran silently at the bottom of a

canyon. The horse had been like an angel sent from Heaven. I called him Eldorado.

Unfortunately, he wasn't with me long as someone stole him from me¹¹

The special call becomes stronger and clearer

1981

When there were many more abandoned and sick children than the San José Home where I was leaving them could care for, I began to deliver these children to families I knew. I gave them food to take care of the children but, unfortunately, these families did not give it to the children and ate everything themselves and the children starved. Upon the news of the death of these children, the family judge of Cuzco, Dr. Rosario Gonzales de Flores, called me and she threatened that she would put me in jail for handing over these children without the judge's knowledge. She told me that it was urgent to find a home so that these children could be sheltered, otherwise I would be sent to jail. The truth is that I had already considered this, but I did not have the permission of my superiors in Rome to work in Cuzco. I did not dare tell the judge this.

I was afraid for the future of the Saint Teresa of Jesus Home.

I foresaw that I would encounter many difficulties, and I think that in 1981, on the eve of the feast of Saint Teresa of Jesus, while I was traveling in the Land Rover to Antabamba (I think the driver was Alipio), I had an interior vision of the Child Jesus dressed as King, and He said to me, "Receive me in these children, and I will be a King for you, and I will not let you lack anything for the good of these children."

And truly, the Lord Jesus, since the foundation of the Orphanage and the Movement of the Servants of the Poor of the Third World, has been a King for me and for the entire Movement.

¹¹ Op. cit., p. 64-65

How Can I Help the Poor?



- Offering your sacrifices and prayers, together with your faithfulness to the Gospel and the Pope, so that each Missionary Servant of the Poor may be the living presence of Jesus among the poor.
- Echoing the cry of the poor by distributing to your friends and family this newsletter and all of our material (which you may request for free) as well as by organizing meetings at which one of missionaries may teach people about our mission.
- Sending us Mass intentions
- By feeding one of the students of our school for a year = £350
- By paying for the annual educational expenses for one of our children = £850
- By remembering the Missionary Servants of the Poor in your will.

For those who wish to send us donations or a bank transfer
(monthly, bi-monthly, quarterly, annual)

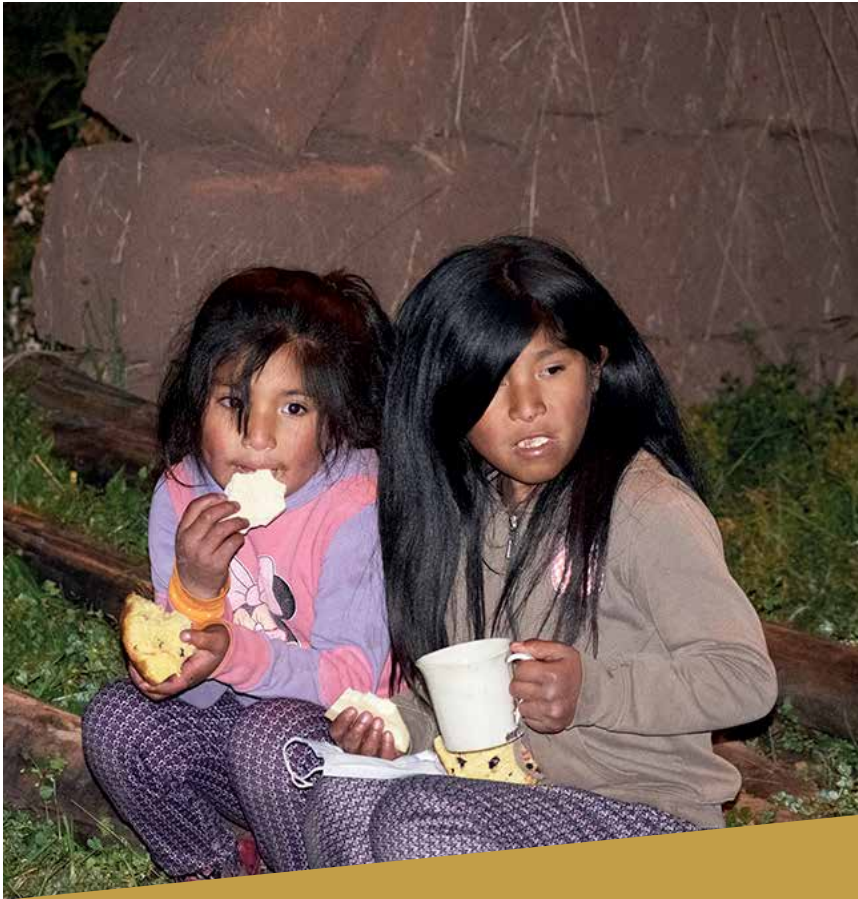
Our bank details in the UK: Bank name: Co-operative Bank

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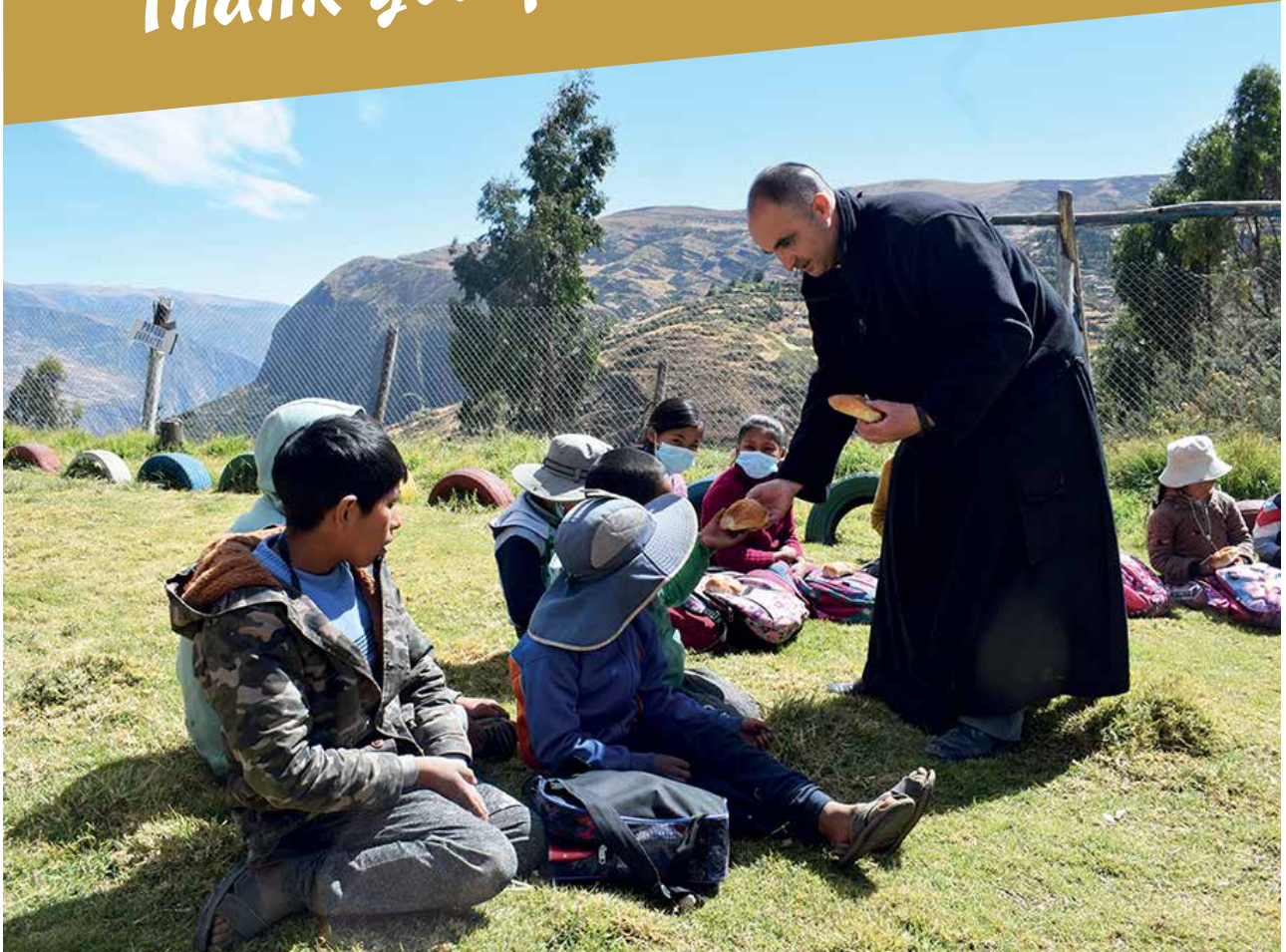
(Registered UK Charity number: 1134707)

**With your help, one more child
will be fed in our centres in Cuzco, Peru.**



*Thanks to
your help, one
more child
can be fed in
our houses of
Cusco, Perú*

Thank you for all that you do



Christ has fulfilled all my desires as a King would, because He is the Lord, and a great Lord. I think that all my successors and all my spiritual sons have to see in our children the very face of Jesus and trust in His divine Providence. They should never submit requests and projects to governments or organizations in order to receive money, because for my successors and my spiritual sons, He will always be King and Lord.



The vision of the Child Jesus dressed as a king is represented in this statue at the Saint Teresa of Jesus Home in Santa Maria de Larapa in Cuzco.

1982

+May 2, 1982. Inauguration in Cuzco of the Saint Teresa of Jesus Nest-Home or "the nestlings," also familiarly called the "Dovecote."

"Prophecy, in one way or another, has always been present in my life. I will never forget, for example, May 8, 1982, when the Saint Teresa of Jesus Nest-Home was inaugurated in Cuzco, on Tambo de Montero Street. For the occasion, the Prefect of the city wanted to participate in the ceremony, together with other authorities. This gave me a chill, to such an extent that I felt the duty to tell him, 'Mr. Prefect, we have opened this House-Nest without any authorization. If you want, you can close it.'

He got up and said, 'How can I close this Nest-Home dedicated to Saint Teresa of Jesus here in Cuzco an orphanage that assures us that Jesus has stepped into this poor neighborhood where there is so much misery? On the contrary, this House will multiply because other missionaries and priests will arrive to console and educate all the poor and abandoned children of this neighborhood.' Then he added, 'Come to my office tomorrow and I will give you the authorization.' Then, to his secretary and bodyguard he said, 'Tomorrow, when Father comes, don't make him wait. Let him in immediately.' And, in fact, the next day when I went to the prefecture, I found the authorization already signed and the Prefect delivered it to me himself.

To tell the truth, when I thought about the words of the Prefect of Cuzco, I got very excited because before then I had never thought about including priests in the Movement. I had seen that the formation of many holy priests was urgent, but I didn't know what to do nor how to do it. Should I simply present to my superiors a project for the formation of other priests with a totally special charism to serve the poor? The answer would come shortly after, from the facts themselves guided by Divine Providence."¹²

¹² Op. cit., p. 80

+In 1982, in Alba de Tormes, Salamanca, Spain, Fr. Giovanni has the joy of holding in his hands the reliquary containing the heart of Saint Teresa of Jesus.

“It was a great joy. The heart of Teresa flooded me with an indescribable heavenly perfume.”

+The day after visiting Alba de Tormes, Fr. Giovanni finds himself in Coimbra, Portugal visiting the Discalzed Carmelite Monastery where he meets Sr. Lucia dos Santos, one of the three little shepherds of Fatima.



“For a long time, I had been discussing with the Carmelites of Coimbra the plan for the foundation of the Movement of the Servants of the Poor. Sister Lucía dos Santos, the cousin of Saints Francisco and Jacinta Marto, and like them, seer of the Virgin of Fatima, encouraged me to travel to make the charism of this foundation known and assured me that the Virgin Mary would help me with everything. She also promised me – and she made her sisters promise the same – to help me and to always follow me spiritually for the realization of this project”.

+“The next day, in Fatima, I had the joy of meeting Mother Teresa of Calcutta.”

“I asked her for help with the little orphanage that I had just founded in May on Tambo de Montero Street in Cuzco. She listened to the plan for the Movement of evangelizing the people of the Andes, educating the orphaned and abandoned children in schools and workshops; as I asked her for help, I was thinking that my ideas were like the ones she had had for her foundation.

But she told me that she would not send any of her sisters because our two charisms were completely different. But she told me, ‘Go ahead, and God will help you.’ Then we prayed the Holy Rosary together in the chapel of the apparitions.”

God sent the first collaborators to him

1983

+April 17, 1983. Fr. Giovanni meets José Luis (Pepe Lucho) Barazorda and his wife Carola, who take charge of the little orphanage.



Thus, almost unintentionally, Father Giovanni began an ecclesial Movement that invites young men and women, married couples, priests, and lay people to unite for the cause of the poorest of the Third World.

With the help of the many young people and married couples who quickly came to help the poor of the Andes, Father Giovanni Salerno was able to found orphanages and soup kitchens for orphaned, abandoned, and sick children. By the many young priests and seminarians who have emerged from among the volunteers, and by the women and married couples who have consecrated themselves to God and the poor for a lifetime, the Lord has blessed this Movement.

Faced with the sad and dramatic situation of hunger, disease and injustice that Fr. Giovanni encountered in the Apurímac mission, the Holy Spirit made the voices of the recent Pontiffs and the voice of the Second Vatican Council which, scrutinizing the 'signs of the times,' denounced the scandal of hunger, illiteracy, the new forms of slavery, and the deep ideological and racial divisions that plague man today (cf. Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes, On the Church in today's world*, n° 4, December 7, 1965). These voices resounded in his priestly heart.

The encyclical *Populorum progressio* on the need to promote the development of peoples (March 26, 1967) in particular resonated with him. In that encyclical, Pope Paul VI calls upon all of humanity to "*build a world where every man, without exception of race, religion or nationality, can live a fully human life...A world where freedom is not an empty word and where poor Lazarus can sit at the same table as the rich*" (no. 47).

During the long years of waiting, this supplication of the Church matured in Father Giovanni Salerno as a divine invitation to a specific ecclesial mission, that would be the Servants of the Poor of the Third World, called to carry out the wishes of the Holy Father among the poorest through humble and silent evangelization. They would strive to achieve for the poor a condition and quality of life in keeping with their dignity as human persons and children of our Father in Heaven (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, 1988, no. 5).



1984

Meeting of Fr. Giovanni Salerno with the Archbishop of Toledo and Primate of Spain, Cardinal Carmelo González Martín.

It was very significant that a person like the Cardinal Archbishop of Toledo, with so much ecclesial and pastoral experience, first as a bishop and later as an archbishop over many of the most important Spanish dioceses, quickly intuited and appreciated the charism of the nascent Movement started by Fr. Giovanni Salerno, and supported him to great effect.

Don Marcelo González immediately opened to me his heart and the doors of the seminary in his diocese and advised me to take our seminarians to his seminary, so our seminarians continued their studies there.

In early 1990, a family from Ajofrín provided us with a house that had no heating or amenities, and they began to live in Ajofrín, where a man had also donated a 14-hectare piece of land for us to build the house for our Movement, so I was happy. And while our seminarians studied, the charism of our Movement became known in Madrid and was supported in every way.

I didn't have any priests to appoint as formators for our Ajofrín seminarians. I spoke with the cardinal and told him that I was alone. He called the then Auxiliary Bishop of Toledo, Don Rafael Palmero, and begged him to take charge of our seminarians. Bishop Palmero spoke to our seminarians once a week.



1986

+November 4, 1986. Fr Giovanni is received in a private audience by Saint Pope John Paul II.

I will never forget November 4, 1986, the day I was received at the Vatican by Pope John Paul II. The day before, Father Stanislaus, the Pope's Secretary, telephoned me, telling me that at 6:30 in the morning he would wait for me at the foot of the Bronze Gate. Punctual, he and a group of others were there waiting for me.

I was the first to enter the Pope's private chapel. There was still half an hour to go before his Holy Mass, and thus I was able to be alone with him for a long time. How beautiful it was for me to be able to pray next to the Pope, side by side with him! When informed that I was a missionary, he wanted me to proclaim the Gospel, even though some bishops and other important people were present.



*After Holy Mass, he received me in private. I had the impression that he already knew something of the Movement. Even more, I think he knew everything about it because it was he who first spoke to me about the Movement of the Servants of the Poor of the Third World. Praising me, he said, "It is really **Opus Christi Salvatoris Mundi!**"*

*It was from that day that we began to call our Movement of the Servants of the Poor of the Third World with the name of **Opus Christi Salvatoris Mundi** (Work of Christ, Savior of the World). Savior of all men, of everyone. This would be the official name of our Movement and remains so always because it came from the lips of the Holy Father himself.¹³*

1987

+March 20, 1987. The authorization for Father Giovanni by his confreres of Apurímac to found the Movement is endorsed in Palermo-Rocca on March 20, 1987 by the Provincial Superior, Father Giuseppe Turco, OSA.

1989

+December 3, 1989. The first stone of the future House of Priestly Formation of the Movement is laid in Ajofrin, Toledo, Spain.

¹² Op. cit., p. 106



"It was back on December 3, 1989, when the first stone of our Seminary was laid in an open field on the outskirts of the town of Ajofrín, near Toledo. A man from Ajofrín had given us 14 hectares of land on which we could begin the construction of the seminary. While I thanked him from the bottom of my heart for his very generous gesture, he told me, 'It's the most beautiful thing I've ever done in my life! You shouldn't thank me!'

We had nothing apart from the land. However, Cardinal Marcelo González, then Archbishop of Toledo, had given me a very clear and decisive order: "Build the Movement's Seminary in Ajofrín, and at the same time build a beautiful and large Chapel, because one day your seminarians will have to explain the catechism there to the children who will come from the houses near the Seminary!" Those words proved to be prophetic!

When Bishop Rafael Palmero, Auxiliary Bishop of Toledo, laid the first stone, I felt a strong chill just thinking that our coffers were empty. But fortunately, we had a great trust in Divine Providence.

I remember there was a strong wind and it was very cold. Seeing myself in the middle of that wasteland, deserted, I said to myself, 'Does the Lord really want this Seminary? Well. If He has given us this piece of land, He will also send us the rest.' A few months later, from our center in Babylon, New York, in the United States, we were informed that some Chinese benefactors from Macao had sent a check for \$250 (so they told us at first), as the first donation of others that they would send successively. But, on a second phone call, we were told that the check was actually not for \$250, but \$250,000!

And it was for our Movement, in the hope that one day our missionaries would be able to go to China to evangelize that immense country. With that sum we covered half of the expenses for the construction of the seminary and the chapel. The other half was given to us by a married couple who, since the beginning of our Movement, have followed us in silence and love. This second gift allowed us to acquire the houses in Rome, in Sordio near Milan, in Poland, and also some in Peru"¹⁴

¹² Op. cit., p. 90-91

The branches of the Missionary Servants of the Poor grow providentially

1995

+April 1995. The contemplative fraternity of the Movement begins in Urubamba, Cuzco.

C with the celebration of Easter of 1995, the contemplative fraternity project came to life, of which I have spoken to you many times, always with the hope of being able to see its realization. In the town of Urubamba, 8,800 feet above sea level and 37 miles from the city of Cuzco, in the so-called Sacred Valley of the Incas, the construction of the small building was completed and the living of the contemplative life begun. Father Giovanni has often said, "These are young men who want to donate their lives in silence, offering themselves as incense in the brazier, offering themselves to God for the good of the poor." They live an austere regime of a fully contemplative life, working the land and praying for all the needs of the Church and the Movement.



1997

+March 17, 1997. Beginning of the school year for the new Francisco and Jacinto Marto School.

Thanks to your silent sacrifices, the fruit of your faith, trust, and Christian love with which you have followed the work of the Movement, we were able to open our free school for poor boys which we call Francisco and Jacinta Marto in honor of the visionaries of Fatima, on March 17. (Letter to Swiss friends, May 19, 1997. cf. Salerno 161)



+1997. The President of Peru, Alberto Fujimori, and the local Archbishop meet Fr. Giovanni Salerno while visiting the orphanage of the Movement in the city of Cuzco.

“One day in 1997 (if I remember correctly), while I was having lunch at our house on Avenida Grau in Cuzco, I was notified by phone that the President of the Republic, Alberto Fujimori, was visiting Cusco and wanted to visit our Saint Teresa de Jesus home. I thought immediately that it was a joke. Shortly after, President Fujimori along with his entourage knocked on the door, accompanied by the Archbishop of Cuzco, Msgr. Alcide Mendoza Castro, and various civil and military authorities.

The President congratulated me and praised me, telling me that he was willing to help me with a car or a washing machine or anything else the orphanage needed. Knowing that since he had become president of Peru he had passed laws allowing for the adoption of children by same-sex couples, I felt it my duty to tell him, in front of the authorities, ‘How can I accept gifts from you who have passed immoral laws for adoptions? The best gift you can give our children is to make morally sound laws that protect them for a better future.’”



2000

+ Cusco, December 2000, the then Archbishop of Cuzco, Mons. Alcides Castro Mendoza, approved the statutes of the nascent Public Association of the Faithful Opus Christi Salvatoris Mundi, the Missionary Servants of the Poor of Third World.



2003



+March 9, 2003. The inauguration of the new Saint Teresa of Jesus Nest-Home in Cuzco.

+May 22, 2003. The President of Italy confers on Fr. Giovanni Salerno the honor "Knight of Labor."

On May 22, 2003, Father Giovanni Salerno was awarded the decoration of "Cavaliere del Lavoro" (Knight of Labor) by the President of the Republic of Italy, for his meritorious work during his long years of missionary life. The Italian Embassy invited him to Lima to give him this distinction in an official and solemn manner, but Father Giovanni preferred to receive it at the headquarters of the Movement, in Cuzco, considering the work that is done there on the part of everyone and as a sign of gratitude to all the Missionary Servants of the Poor of the Third World who work in Peru and in the countries of the East, especially in Hungary.

Father. Giovanni, in a special ceremony, received from the hands of Dr. Rubatto, Italian Consul in Cuzco, the decoration of the "Cavaliere del Lavoro" (Knight of Labor) granted by the President of the Italian Republic, Dr Carlos Azeglio Ciampi.

2005

+March 17, 1997. Beginning of the school year for the new Francisco and Jacinto Marto School.

"On September 14, 2005, I blessed the dark colored veils for the professed sisters and the white veils for the novices and gave them to each sister to put on. The community remained in Adoration all day in the chapel thanking Jesus in the Eucharist."

2007

+August 22, 2007 the first stone was laid for the construction of the new local contemplative branch of the Missionary Servants of the Poor in Querowasi, Andahuaylillas, Cuzco.



+August 22, 2007 the first stone was laid for the construction of Nazareth Village for the Servants of the Poor Missionary Families in Andahuaylillas, Cuzco.



+August 25, 2007. Official inauguration of the City of Boys in Andahuaylillas, Cuzco.



2011

December 23, 2011. Fr. Giovanni, who was celebrating his 50th anniversary of ordination to the priesthood, is received in audience by Pope Benedict XVI.

The audience on this important occasion took place after the General Wednesday Audience. Father Álvaro Gómez, msp, who had just obtained his degree in Canon Law, accompanied Fr. Giovanni.



A new apostolate opens in Cuba

2012

October 1, 2012. The Bishop of Cienfuegos, Cuba visits the Superior of the House of Formation of the Movement in Ajofrín, Toledo, Spain.

"The history of the founding of our mission in Cuba began on October 1, 2012, the feast of Saint Teresa of the Child Jesus, when Msgr. Domingo Oropesa, Bishop of Cienfuegos, while in Spain, visited the Superior of our House of Formation in Ajofrín asking him for a foundation for his diocese in Cuba, with 400,000 inhabitants and only 6 priests, most of them over 70 years of age. Previously, all the members of the Movement had been praying for the Lord to enlighten us about making a foundation in needy lands" (Salerno 3803).

2013

+In January 2013, Fr. Giovanni traveled to Cuba with Fr. Álvaro Gómez, Vicar General, to see about a foundation of the Movement in the Diocese of Cienfuegos.

"Msgr. Oropesa had us visit a large part of the diocese and told us that he planned to assign our first missionaries to the small town of Pepito Tey which is surrounded by other larger towns with 10,000 and even 20,000 inhabitants, all of them abandoned from a religious point of view, without priests and without nuns." (Salerno, Giovanni. *My memories of Cuba.*)

"When we saw that sad reality, sad in every respect, we had no doubt that the foundation had to be carried out there."

+December 2013. Departure for Cuba of the first Missionary Servants of the Poor Priests.

In December of 2013, the first of our missionary priests left for Cuba: Fr. Urs Zaroni (Swiss) and Fr. José Szabó (Hungarian). The ceremony at their departure from Cuzco with the solemn delivery of the Crucifix was very moving for everyone.



Monsignor Domingo Oropeza had prepared a small house for our priests to stay in, but only a few days later they were told that they could not continue to stay there. Then they began to live and sleep in the small church of Pepito Tey, where they stayed for at least a month and a half, with only a small toilet and no other comforts." (Salerno, Giovanni. *My memories of Cuba.*)

2015

+April 2, 2015 (Holy Thursday). Fr. Giovanni Salerno decides to resign as Superior General of the Missionary Servants of the Poor.



+June 25, 2015. Father Giovanni volunteers to go to Cuba.

"I felt full of energy. I celebrated two Masses every day during the week and three Masses on Sundays in three different towns, some 30 or 40 and even 60 km apart. On weekdays, I celebrated Mass at 8:00 pm in the town of Comunayagua. The two young seminarians helped me with catechism, while I heard confessions in every church I went to. We returned to Pepito Tey around 10:00 at night." (Salerno, Giovanni. *My memories of Cuba.*)



2017

+May 24, 2017. Fr. Giovanni leaves Cuba and returns to Lima.

"I had to leave Cuba suddenly because I no longer had physical strength and above all because my eyesight had deteriorated a lot. Now I see very little (only large and close objects) and I spend the day in our house in Lima, sitting in an armchair, where my only job is to pray all day. In this way now I pray even more for the whole world, above all for a greater number of missionary and contemplative vocations. I thank God that every day, with the help of a Brother, I can celebrate Holy Mass using the votive formula, which I know by heart. This is a great grace for me." (Salerno, Giovanni. *My memories of Cuba.*)



Father Giovanni ends his long earthly sojourn



Lima, February 4, 2023

At 10:57 on this morning, the wish of Father Giovanni Salerno for Holy Mary Mother of the Poor to come and take him to the Merciful Father is realized, on the first Saturday of the month.



In recent days, the general medical condition of Father Giovanni, already delicate due to his age and the various ailments he had been suffering for a long time, had become complicated due to an infection that had spread from his leg to his vital organs. On the afternoon of Friday, February 3, he slipped into a coma and on the morning of Saturday the 4th (first Saturday of the month), he had the delicacy to wait for the arrival of the Missionary Servants of the Poor Sisters to surrender his spirit.

The following day, February 5, he was taken to Cuzco to be waked and the funeral Mass was held in the middle of the week.

The many poor people and children that he has guided to Heaven received him now in the eternal dwellings and they intercede for his soul. From our heart full of human pain comes a single sigh: Thank God for the gift of life and the missionary priesthood of Father Giovanni, a gift for the poorest.

If a missionary flame burns within you, don't let it go out. You are called to feed it!

Our missionary communities of Priests and Brothers, Contemplatives, young laymen, Sisters, and married couples will help you on this journey.

*If you are a **young person wishing to explore a vocation** for at least a year, living in mission territory and sharing the community life of the Missionary Servants of the Poor and disposed to discern what mission God is calling you to in the Church...the poor await you.

*If you feel called to follow a path of consecration, transforming your whole life into service to the poorest as a **missionary brother or sister**...the poor await you.

*If you are a **married couple** who, with your children, have decided to open your family to the

poor as a "domestic missionary church"...the poor await you.

*If you are a layperson or religious who wants to make an official public commitment of personal conversion and of prayer to the Institute of the Missionary Servants of the Poor in a commitment ceremony as an **oblato**...contact us.

*If you would like to personally help in your diocese or form a Support Group of the Missionary Servants of the Poor with the aim of deepening and spreading our charism, fostering recollection, continuous conversion, spiritual freedom of each and every one of its members, and in this way go to others with enthusiasm and generosity, full of the love of God... contact us.

*If you want to **offer** your prayers and sufferings for the Missionary Servants of the Poor but without a binding commitment...contact us.

Youth seeking a vocation

Married Missionary

Missionary Brother

Oblate

Missionary Sister

Associate/Support Group

Offerer

Name

Street

City State

Postal Code Country

Telephone Occupation

Age Level of Education

Email

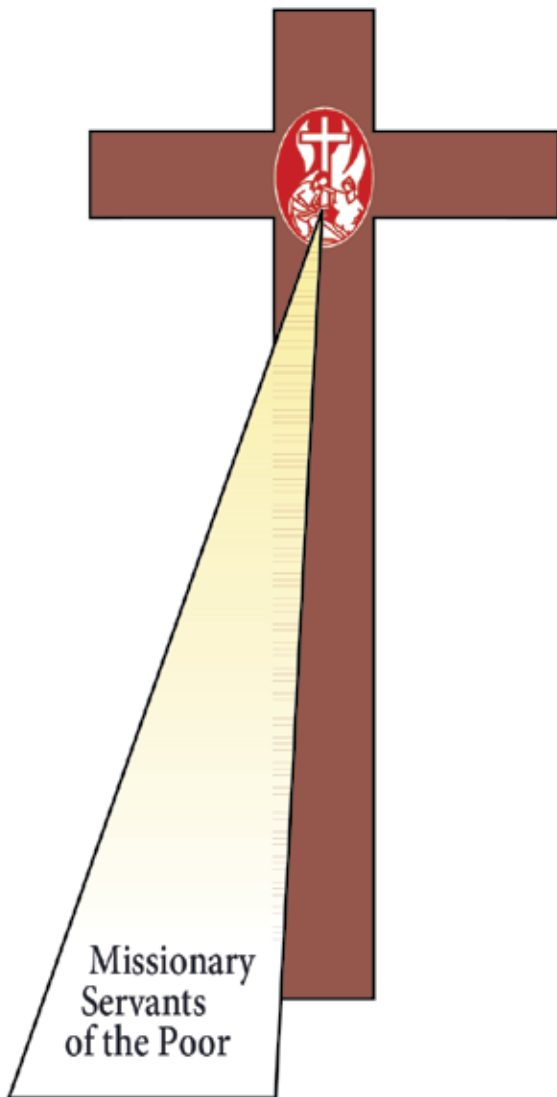
Seminarians, please mail
your request to:

House of Priestly Formation
Holy Mary Mother of the Poor
Carretera Mazarambroz S/N
45110 Ajofrín (Toledo)
Spain
casaformacionajofrin@gmail.com

All others, please send this form to the
following address:

Missionary and Servants of the Poor
10 Chicheley Gardens
Harrow HA3 6QH
United Kingdom
Tel: 0044 (0)7511136055
msptw.uk@gmail.com

OPUS CHRISTI SALVATORIS MUNDI



MISSIONARY SERVANTS OF THE POOR

What is meant by this, is different missionary realities (Priests and consecrated brothers, religious (male and female), missionary families, priests and brothers especially dedicated to the life of prayer and contemplation, associates, oblates, collaborators, support groups) who share the same charism and work under the same founder.

OPUS CHRISTI SALVATORIS MUNDI

Formed by those members of the Missionary Servants of the Poor, who are called to follow a more profound way of consecration, with the characteristics of community life and the profession of the Evangelical Counsels according to their condition. To be canonically recognized as two religious institutes: one for the male branch of the Priests and Brothers, and one for the female branch of the Sisters.

SUPPORT GROUPS OF THE MOVEMENT

They aim to deepen and spread our charism, working for the conversion of each and every one of our members, through the organisation of periodic gatherings. These members are considered ASSOCIATES.

OBLATES

The sick, old and imprisoned, who offer their sufferings for the Poor, and for those who have welcomed and endorsed the charism of the Missionary Servants of the Poor, in their lives.

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This Newsletter and all the material that we publish are completely free and always available to everyone thanks to the generosity of benefactors who believe in our charism and in this way collaborate in extending the Kingdom of God.

For this reason, do not hesitate to ask us to send you our publications so that other people can learn of the charism of the Missionary Servants of the Poor.