

MY PILGRIMAGE TO VALDOCCO

by Paddy O'Neill

It was a great privilege to be asked to attend The Extraordinary General World Assembly of the Salesian Family and Salesian Past Pupils in Turin this October. I was the Rep of the Salesian Family in Ireland for The Assembly which ran from 2nd October to the 6th October 2024 in Valdocco, Turin.

My first contact with the Salesian World was in 1970 on meeting a friend of my father, Fr Joe Whittle SDB from Dunlavin in Co. Wicklow. Fr Joe recommended to my Dad and Mom that I should go to Salesian College Pallaskenry as a boarder. My experience in Salesian College shaped me into the person I became, from the wonderful holistic experience and from the great Salesian priests and brothers in Pallaskenry from 1972 to 1977. As you may know, I am a very proud part of the Salesian Family and I can tell you that Don Bosco and the Salesian Congregation have made a tremendous impact on young people throughout the world. The figure of 34 million Salesian Past Pupils worldwide was mentioned at the recent World Assembly.

The day I arrived in Valdocco I received a warm welcome from Bryan Magro, World President, and some of the other organisers. It felt like I had met many of the delegates before but it was our common denominator of being member of the Salesian Family.

It was a very deja vu experience for me being at Valdocco. I've watched the Don Bosco movie many times and would have seen the visuals of what the oratory was like. When you attend a Salesian School for five years and hear all the stories about Don Bosco, you almost feel like you know the man personally.

On day two, there was a discussion around the theme of Synodality 'Journeying Together' as a Salesian Organisation of Past Pupils and the Salesian Family. The highlight for me personally was attending mass in the Basilica of Maria Ausiliatrice and seeing the exact replica of the mural painting of Mary Help of Christians behind the altar, identical to our church in Copsewood. I was asked to sing Fr Hugh O'Donnell's hymn to Don Bosco 'Here is a Man' as a communion reflection. I found that singing this song in the

