

# Relic of St. John Bosco a teachable moment

By Beth Donze  
Clarion Herald

A relic on loan from St. John Bosco's final resting place in Italy is coming to the Archdiocese of New Orleans as part of a worldwide tour leading up to the Salesian congregation founder's 200th birthday.

On Sept. 20 and 21, the relic – the tissue and bones of St. John Bosco's right hand and arm – will be presented for public veneration at three West Bank locations. (see box on page 23 for a complete schedule of veneration times and locations).

"When the (Salesian) rector major was deciding which

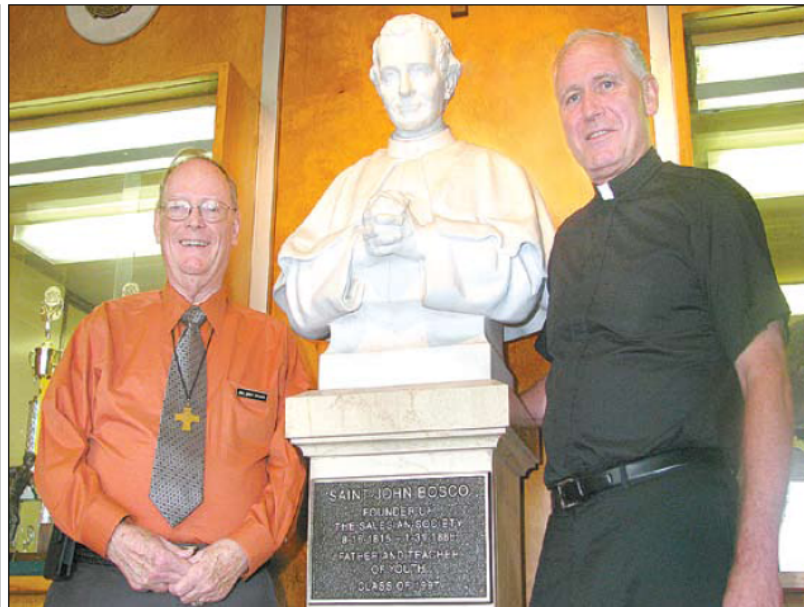


Photo by Beth Donze | CLARION HERALD

A relic of St. John Bosco, founder of the Salesians, will come to the archdiocese Sept. 20-21. Salesian Brother Jerry Meegan, left, and Salesian Father James McKenna, president of Archbishop Shaw High School, are making plans.

first-class relic to include in the tour, he decided on Don Bosco's blessing arm, because one of the last things he did before he died on Jan. 31, 1888, was to bless all the Salesian work throughout the world," said Father James

McKenna, director-president of Salesian-operated Archbishop Shaw High.

For the bicentennial tour, called "Don Bosco Among Us," the remains were placed in a lead box and then interred into a painted, life-size

fiberglass effigy of St. John Bosco.

The fiberglass figure, which reclines in funeral style, is an exact duplicate of the wax effigy that holds the entirety of the saint's mortal remains

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## RELIC

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in Turin's Basilica of Our Lady Help of Christians. The figure accurately depicts its subject's priestly garb, height of 5'4," and face, which was based on St. John Bosco's death mask.

The stunning reliquary will be enclosed in a clear, casket-style case.

"The purpose of showing the body is so that others can see that 'Yes! As a common person, I can become a saint, too!'" said Salesian Brother Jerry Meegan, coordinator of youth ministry at Archbishop Shaw. "The veneration of the saint doesn't mean that we venerate the fiberglass figurine of St. John Bosco; we venerate the life and the cause that the saint generated, and use that as a model for (our own) life," Brother Meegan said.

### Worked in Italy's slums

Born in 1815 in rural Castelnuovo, Italy, St. John Bosco established the Salesian order of priests, brothers and sisters to continue his lifetime mission to serve the poor and abandoned youth of Italy's overcrowded cities during the Industrial Revolution. As a young priest, Don Bosco gathered up Turin's street children to offer them recreational activities, religious

instruction and religious services, ultimately opening up a center to provide the neglected youth with clothing, shelter and vocational training, both as productive tradesmen and as fellow priests. He named the fledgling group the Salesians, in honor of St. Francis de Sales, and went on to co-found a Salesian order of religious sisters – the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians – to minister to destitute girls. The priest was canonized in 1934 and is the patron of young people.

Salesian priests and brothers now constitute the second largest group of men in the church, after the Jesuits; and the Salesian Sisters are the church's largest group of missionary sisters, their combined ministries serving people in 120 countries.

"That's a vast movement," Brother Meegan said. "We want to show (local pilgrims) that this is the person who started all this as a gift of God to the church."

### Three types of relics

Holy relics – or objects of religious veneration – fall into three categories: First-class relics are items that are directly related to Christ's life, such as the manger or cross, or the physical remains of a saint, such as fragments of bone. Second-class relics

are items that were worn or used by a saint, such as clothing, furniture, book or religious objects. Third-class relics are objects that have been touched to a first- or second-class relic.

### Relics alluded to in Scripture

The use of relics – as reminders to the faithful to ask for saintly intercession in their quests for healing and holiness – is mentioned several times in the Old and New Testaments.

The earliest reference, in 2 Kings, relates how a dead man came back to life after coming into contact with the bones of Elisha, while in the New Testament, a woman with a hemorrhage seeks healing by touching the hem of Jesus' garment. In the Acts of the Apostles, pieces of cloth that had touched the skin of St. Paul cured the sick when they were applied to the ill.

### Not 'magic'

While some Catholics wrongly believe the relics themselves hold "magical" powers, miracles have been attributed to the intercession of saints including St. John Bosco, and inspire individuals to live the same faith-filled life in imitation of the saintly role models.

"He was just doing everyday, ordinary work in an extraordinary way," Father

## Public veneration to take place at three West Bank locations

Local pilgrims will have the following opportunities to venerate the relic of St. John Bosco during its world tour stop in the Archdiocese of New Orleans:

### ▶ Monday, Sept. 20

St. Rosalie Church, 600 Second Ave., Harvey: A 7 a.m. Mass will herald the relic's arrival to the Archdiocese of New Orleans; it will remain in church for public veneration until 9 p.m.

### ▶ Tuesday, Sept. 21

The John A. Alario Event Center, 2000 Segnette Blvd., Westwego: Relic available for public veneration from 9 to 10 a.m., followed by a 10 a.m. Mass and youth rally until noon; Archbishop

Gregory Aymond will be the Mass' main celebrant and homilist.

St. John Bosco Church, 2114 Oakmere Drive, Harvey: Relic available for public veneration from 5 to 10 p.m. A prayer service will conclude the veneration.

After leaving New Orleans, the relic will travel to three cities in Florida, Washington, D.C., New York, Toronto, Montreal and Surrey, B.C., before embarking on a tour of 17 countries in East Asia.

For more information on the relic tour, visit [www.DonBoscoAmongUs.org](http://www.DonBoscoAmongUs.org) or [www.DonBoscoAmongUs.blogspot.com](http://www.DonBoscoAmongUs.blogspot.com).

McKenna said, noting that Archbishop Shaw students learn about their founder's "purpose-driven life for the young people of Turin" through a month-long unit in their religion curriculum, and model their founder's commitment to service by becoming youth ministers and peer ministers, taking part in week-long service retreats, and even becoming Salesian priests and brothers.

"(The relic tour will enable them) to be physically with a holy priest who gave up his life for young people,

and who convinced other young people to follow Christ, whether it was in consecrated life, or as a lay advocate for young people," Father McKenna said.

"They know this won't be 'a magic trick,' or some immediate miraculous occurrence," added Brother Meegan, "but it may bring somebody to a slow conversion of heart; it may open up a door of grace; or it may be the inspiration for someone to say, 'Maybe I can follow in his footsteps.'"

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## ABP. AYMOND

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things have changed in the

ette as the Mass readings are being proclaimed during Mass. Do you see a need for people to follow along with the text of the

I don't become chair until November of this year, but I do receive copies of comments that come into the office. Very frankly, there have