

# Special Report: The Lasallian Mission in Eritrea

Located in the East African region, on the shores of the Red Sea, Eritrea is one of the countries that make up the 'Horn of Africa', with a population of around 5.8 million.

Since 1991, Eritrea has been recognised as an independent nation with a diverse range of religious beliefs.

## **The Beginnings of La Salle in Eritrea**

"The presence of the Brothers in Eritrea is since 1938", says Br Ghebreyesus Habte. At that time, two Brothers were sent to Addis Ababa, in Ethiopia, and four to Asmara, the capital of Eritrea. Later, in 1939, two more Brothers joined the group in Addis Ababa.



"The Brothers in Addis Ababa stayed until the end of the Second World War and they were expelled with all the Italian missionaries", continues Br. Ghebreyesus, recalling a particular anecdote: as the four Brothers were being taken to Berbera, in Somalia, as prisoners, a captain who was a Brother's student saw them and recognised them by their habit. He then said to them: "Oh, I was your student in London, so what do you want that I can do for you?". So, they asked him to send them to Asmara, where they joined the community that had already been established there.

## **Non-formal education**



“In the country at present, we are 16 Brothers and 6 Brothers outside the country”, says Br. Ghebreyesus, stressing that “since 2019 we do not have schools”, as “they have been nationalised”. Consequently, “we have moved from formal teaching to non-formal education and have opened a community in the Barentu Diocese, where many villages are

far from the city”. There, the Brothers run several study centres for students from poor neighbourhoods, who attend in the mornings and afternoons, at times that do not clash with their school timetables.

Each centre “is a place where they can study”, and the Brothers help them, after school, to explore different areas of knowledge such as maths, English and science, amongst others. “So this is a project we are trying to promote in different parts of the diocese and also where there are religious communities,” adds Br. Ghebreyesus.

### **Commitment to the Church**

Working alongside other religious congregations, and contributing to their formation, is also part of the Lasallian mission in Eritrea. “Another apostolate we are currently involved in is the Institute of Religious Studies, an outreach programme in Asmara, run in collaboration with the University of Nairobi and the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA).



Students obtain their qualifications there, and various congregations send their students: Sisters, Fathers and Brothers. We give a course of 4 years in Education and 4 years in Counselling Psychology,” explains Br Ghebreyesus, who is part of the teaching staff.

In this way, the Brothers in Eritrea are committed to the qualified formation of missionaries and young religious. Furthermore, “also we do an intensive course for formators from different congregations, helping them how to accompany and offer spiritual direction”. This is a two-week intensive course in which five of the

Brothers in Eritrea collaborate, either by teaching or facilitating training workshops.

### **Creativity and openness**



Taking stock of the Lasallian Mission in Eritrea today, Brother Ghebreyesus is aware that “we have to be creative and open enough to do whatever meaningful work, even if it is very small... but it makes a difference”. In his case, he enjoys sports, so if he cannot teach, he is happy to join the children on the street to referee a football match or play with them. “There

are a lot of things we can do, and we are also catechists in our Institute. So we are also talking about this in order to give a meaning to our society”.

“I believe that what we do is very Lasallian, because at the beginning of the Institute, the Founder went to the peripheries, as we say today. So, I think it is really meaningful and very Lasallian if we understand our mission in this way, because to be a Brother is a vocation. So, even if there is no school, this is how I want to give my life”, concludes Br. Ghebreyesus.

**Watch, below, the interview that Brother Ghebreyesus Habte gave to *LaSalleOrg Interviews*.**

