



HANDBOOKS

8a

**PRESENCE AND MISSION
OF THE SCALABRINIANS
IN NORTH AMERICA**



Cover picture: Migrants crossing the border (credits Leonir Chiarello)

TRAINING HANDBOOKS FOR THE LAITY - 8a

PRESENCE AND MISSION
OF THE SCALABRINIANS
IN NORTH AMERICA

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METHODOLOGY

1. **Initial moment of meditation** (prayer or song)
2. **Structure of the Handbook 8a:**
 - The beginnings
 - Between the two world wars
 - Opening of the first missions in Canada
 - The turning point in the 1960s
 - Developments in the pastoral care and formation
 - Places and services
 - Looking at the future
3. **How to use this handbook**

The reflection on the proposed material can be done in one or more sessions, especially if you would like to focus more on one country or another. Testimonies given by Scalabrinian missionaries who carried out their ministry in a specific area can be used.
4. **The final sharing can revolve around the following questions:**
 - What aspects of the Scalabrinian presence in North America and Central America seem more relevant to you?
 - What was lacking in the Scalabrinian presence in this region?
 - What are possible developments for the mission in North America and Central America?
 - How can lay people be involved in this ministry?
5. **To learn more**

For the selection of movies on migration in North and Central America, see the list in the general guide
6. **Evaluation**

Fill out the short questionnaire that is distributed
7. **Conclusion** with a prayer or a song

A few months after the foundation of the Scalabrinian congregation (November 28, 1887), in the summer of 1888 the first Missionaries of St. Charles Borromeo arrived in New York: they were Frs. Felice Morelli and Vincenzo Astorri, accompanied by Bro. Angelo Armani. As Blessed John Baptist Scalabrini had recommended to them, through their missionary work they should heal the sick, build churches, open schools, hospitals and orphanages, overcome problems and obstacles, sustain struggles and dangers, never forgetting to announce to the Italians they met the Word of God and to provide for them those services they needed¹.

In 4 years (1891), the Scalabrinians had already established 11 missions in North America, thanks to the zeal and hard work of Fr. Francesco Zaboglio, considered the co-founder of the American missions. The first chapel was inaugurated on August 5 1888, in New York and was dedicated to the Resurrection, followed by the St. Joachim Chapel, inaugurated on Christmas Eve 1888, which later became a national church for the Italians. By 1906, the parishes had already become 19 and were divided into two provinces: the eastern one called the St. Charles Borromeo province (with its headquarter in New York) and the western one (whose headquarter was in Chicago) named after St. John the Baptist.

In addition to the first missions, hospitals, schools and orphanages were also established, where various religious female institutes, such as the Daughters of St. Anne and the Apostles of the Sacred Heart, provided services and assistance. The latter, led by St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, after their arrival in New York in March 1889, took care of the scholastic and religious education of children and the sick in hospitals.

To support the work of the Scalabrinian missionaries (priests and brothers) and the nuns who arrived in the missions right after, Blessed Scalabrini set up a lay organization for the assistance of Italian migrants², with the aim of protecting them from any abuse in the ports of departure and arrival, giving them advice and helping them in case of difficulty or illness, and accompanying them during their travels. In 1902 there were already 19 committees, and especially the ones of Genoa³ and New

¹ Cf. Zizzamia, 24-25.

² The Association of Patronage for Italian Emigration was inaugurated in 1889 and its first president was the Marquis Giovanni Volpe-Landi, a close collaborator of Mons. Scalabrini, who had modeled this Association according to the structure and the functions of the San Raffaele Society, founded by Peter Paul Cahensly in 1871 and present now in Austria, Belgium, Spain and New York.

³ Scalabrini established the Genoa committee in 1889, and in 1891 it became part of the St. Raphael Society. In 1893 Fr. Zaboglio took over the Genoese association and in 1894 was replaced by Fr Pietro Maldotti, who took care of the migrants arriving at the port of Genoa, finding them accommodation in hotels and giving food and clothing to those in need. Fr. Maldotti's ministry continued until 1901. By then the Scalabrini's suggestions

York⁴ stood out. The precious service of the St. Raphael Society continued until 1923; afterwards the assistance to Italian migrants on ships and in ports was entrusted to the Vatican Prelate for Emigration and to the American Auxiliary for Italian Immigration under the jurisdiction of the Archdiocese of New York.

An important event for the Scalabrinian missions was the visit of Blessed Scalabrini to the United States in 1901, that lasted 100 days. During this time he gave more than 300 homilies and speeches for various occasions, administered thousands of first communions and confirmations, ordained 4 priests in the Church of Pompeii in New York, blessed the construction of churches in Providence (Rhode Island), Utica (New York) and St. Louis (Missouri), as well as a children's orphanage founded by Fr. Morelli in Newark (New Jersey). His welcome was extraordinary everywhere, and Scalabrini himself marveled at the honors and great respect paid to him by his missionaries⁵ and the people of the missions he visited. Returning from his visit, in November of the same year he went to Pope Leo XIII to give him an account of his journey and to offer suggestions and recommendations to the Vatican Secretariat of State, Propaganda Fide and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Italian government.

BETWEEN THE TWO WORLD WARS

Bishop Scalabrini's almost sudden death (June 1, 1905) produced a great instability in the new institute, due to the lack of a final Rule and internal structure. The Founder's wish was to form a religious congregation, with specific statutes (1895), introducing religious vows and the novitiate for seminarians in formation. However, the need of missionaries to work in the US parishes forced Scalabrini to continue recruiting diocesan priests who ministered for a few years in the Scalabrinian missions and were bound only by a five-year oath. The delay of the approval of the new rules by Propaganda Fide and the idea that Italian emigration to the Americas was a temporary phenomenon increased the already

to protect Italian migrants before departure, during the crossing and upon arrival at their destination, were incorporated into an Italian law to curb the abuses perpetrated against emigrants.

⁴ The New York office of the St. Raphael Society was established in 1891, under the direction of Fr. Pietro Bandini. The purpose of the association was to protect Italian immigrants from traffickers and to help them find work, offer religious services and provide accommodation especially for the poor and unaccompanied children. The committee was very active until 1896. Afterwards, both the US and Italian governments had introduced laws to regulate the flow of migrants and agencies to help new arrivals in the port of entry.

⁵ Scalabrini was truly impressed by his missionaries and their apostolic work. For the Italians, missionaries were the apostles, doctors, peasants, artisans and advisers; this was the secret of their success and great influence over them.

difficult and complicated development of the institute. Therefore, after Scalabrini's death and with the election of Fr. Domenico Vicentini as superior general, there was a change in the configuration of the institute, made up mostly of missionaries with a temporary oath, who lived alone and were not bound to the congregation by religious vows. In 1908, the congregation thus became a Pious Society, which a priest adhered to by a simple oath of perseverance.

Even under the direction of Fr. Pacifico Chenuil, second superior general (1919), the priests' recruitment was intense, in order to continue the missionary work in the Americas, and this procedure was followed for several years, until the reintroduction of religious vows in 1934⁶, the year in which the Society became again a religious congregation, under the jurisdiction of the Consistorial Congregation. In addition, the missionary scope of the institute was widened including now the pastoral care of the descendants of Italian migrants.

The period between the two wars witnessed a sharp reduction of the Italian migration, due to changes within the country of origin and destination. In the United States, very restrictive immigration laws were adopted in 1921 and 1924, which mainly affected the countries of Eastern and Southern Europe, in particular Italy. At the same time, the Fascist regime in Italy discouraged emigration, considered a weakness for the regime that was unable to provide employment opportunities to its citizens.

The North American missions were concentrated in some specific areas. In the east, they were especially in the state of New York (7 parishes), Connecticut (2 parishes), Rhode Island (5 parishes) and Massachusetts (5 parishes). In the province of St. John the Baptist they were mainly in Chicago (9 parishes), as well as Milwaukee, Cincinnati, Kansas City (MO). The only parish in Canada was in Winnipeg (Manitoba).

The reconfiguration of the institute in 1934 brought about the expansion of the vocation recruitment, and various seminaries were opened in Italy and Brazil. A recruitment program was also launched in the United States. In 1937, the Sacred Heart Seminary was opened in Chicago, which in 1940 already hosted students from the two North American provinces. Four years later the novitiate was inaugurated, which was moved to Staten Island (New York) in 1948.

FIRST CANADIAN MISSIONS

With the gradual consolidation of the institute and the flourishing of vocations in Italy and abroad, the Scalabrinian congregation regained its autonomy and elected its own superior general in the person of Fr. Fran-

⁶ In February 1934, Pope Pius XI reintroduced religious vows restoring the institute initial configuration.

cesco Prevedello (1951). This also promoted the establishment of new missions to respond to the needs of many Italians now moving abroad. In fact, after the Second World War, emigration from Italy resumed intensively towards Argentina and later on to Venezuela and Australia.

Emigration to the United States was still very limited. But thanks to the initiative of Fr. Cesare Donanzan, the American Committee on Italian Migration (ACIM) was instituted in 1952, with the aim of organizing the Italian community and carrying out advocacy and lobbying initiatives to change the current immigration law.

Canada was starting to open up to immigration from Europe. Around the 1950s, 300,000 Italians arrived in Canada and the Scalabrinian missionaries replied to the invitation of the Canadian bishops by creating new missions in various dioceses. New parishes were assumed in the provinces of Ontario (Toronto and Hamilton) and Quebec (Montreal) for the St. Charles Province, while in the St. John the Baptist Province parishes were established in the cities of Windsor, Sarnia, Edmonton, Thunder Bay and Vancouver. They were mostly new churches or missions founded by the Scalabrinians, or in some cases pre-existing parishes later on entrusted by the local bishop to the Scalabrinian congregation because of the massive presence of Italians in certain areas. In several cases, parishes were territorial with special care for the Italians, while in other dioceses the old structure of national or personal parishes was kept⁷.

THE TURNING POINT IN THE 1960s

In the early 1960s, radical changes took place in the immigration policy of different countries. Specifically Canada and the United States abandoned their restrictive and discriminatory policy by accepting immigrants from all countries. In the United States, the 1965 migration law eliminated the quota system in existence since 1924 by adopting a policy based on giving the same immigration possibilities to everyone, setting up an annual quota and a maximum number of immigrants from each country. The new policy also promoted family reunification, including immigrants' brothers and sisters as suggested by ACIM, and for about 10 years over 20,000 Italians arrived in the United States each year. ACIM also offered initiatives to legally and socially support new migrants.

Because of this new law, discrimination against Asian migrants ended and in a short time the migratory trend towards the United States changed radically. Traditional European immigration was drastically

⁷ The four parishes in the Archdiocese of Toronto were all territorial, with the specific care of the Italians and Portuguese in the area. Instead, the parishes in the diocese of Hamilton and those in the archdiocese of Montreal were all personal parishes or mission for the Italians.

reduced, also because the European economic development no longer forced people to migrate. Soon, immigration from Latin America, especially Mexico, and from Asia made up 90 percent of the total number of new comers into the United States.

With the changes in the migration phenomenon, the Scalabrinian congregation aimed at expanding its charism, no longer limited to Italian immigrants but extended to all migrants, and codified it in the new Rules of Life.

The pastoral care of new migrants, especially Spanish-speaking ones, was progressively put in place. Many of these immigrants, coming from Mexico and Puerto Rico, settled near the Scalabrinian parishes and were very often left to themselves. Thanks to the South American origin of some Scalabrinians and through the learning of Spanish and Portuguese by others, the missionaries welcomed new immigrants, to whom they offered services in their specific language.

In 1964, the Scalabrinians were also asked to assist the crew of Italian origin and passengers of two Home Lines cruise ships, operating between New York and the Caribbean. In 1968, this ministry included the assistance to sailors docking in the New York port, and for this purpose the Sailor's House was opened in Manhattan. The initiative to assist seafarers eventually was extended to other ports in the US and Canada (Thunder Bay and Sarnia).

For the Italians present in large cities in North America, the missionaries founded Cultural Centers⁸, especially in Chicago (1970), Los Angeles (1972) and Washington (1981), to offer social services and activities. The idea was to provide for Italians and their descendants an opportunity to meet and maintain their culture and traditions.

One of the major contributions made by the Scalabrinians to Church and society was the foundation of the Centers of Studies⁹, following the example of Scalabrini who studied emigration, and then wrote, gave lectures, and sparked interest and debate. CSER was the first Study Center, located in Rome (1963). The following year, the Center for Migration Studies of New York, based in Staten Island, was launched and directed by Fr. Silvano Tomasi, and then for many years by Fr Lidio Tomasi. In 1966 began the publication of the *International Migration Review* (IMR), which is considered one of the best scientific journals on immigration, and later on the annual "In Defense of the Alien" conference kicked off,

⁸ These Centers are referred to as "Casa Italia".

⁹ N. 29 of the Rules of Life reads, "To study and deepen the migratory phenomenon and related problems, the Congregation establishes Study Centers for migration and for migratory pastoral care. They carry out documentation and research, analysis and reflection, under the sociological and theological-pastoral aspects. Their nature and purpose are specified in specific statutes."

with the aim of raising public awareness on migration issues in the political world.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN PASTORAL WORK AND IN FORMATION HOUSES

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the two North American Provinces began restructuring their missions and established new positions in some US states and in other South American countries.

In the St. John the Baptist Province, especially in Chicago, the traditional Italian-American parishes opened their doors to the Spanish and Portuguese speaking new comers (many of them undocumented), as well as to Vietnamese refugees and other Asian groups¹⁰. In the same way, the St. Charles Borromeo Province established new missions, especially in Florida, to provide assistance to Mexican and Puerto Rican migrants, but also to the many Haitians who had arrived in those counties by sea¹¹.

To respond to the new migrations, programs of vocation recruitment and formation were launched in the countries of origin of the migrants. In 1980 it started in Mexico, and then in Colombia and Haiti. The new vocation programs led to a diversification of the ethnic origin of the missionaries and a better ability to respond to the needs of the new immigrants.

The big increase of immigrants, including undocumented ones, from Mexico or other ethnic groups crossing Mexico to get to the United States brought the attention of the American government to the irregular immigration issue. The 1986 amnesty regularized over three million irregular immigrants, but also tighter restriction measures were adopted to control the border with Mexico, producing thousands of pushbacks at the border. To meet the needs of migrants about to emigrate or rejected at the border, Fr. Florenzo M. Rigoni opened up the first migrant house in Tijuana¹². The model was then replicated by the congregation and the local Church in many other places

In the countries of arrival, in addition to parishes becoming over time sheer multicultural missions (both for the different origin of the religious operating in the community and for the services offered to mi-

¹⁰ One time completely Italian, in the 1970s the churches of Our Lady of Sorrows, St. Callistus and Mount Carmel in Chicago devoted themselves to the numerous Mexicans and Latinos in the area, while in Kansas City the Holy Rosary Church took care of the Vietnamese refugees (boat people) who had just arrived.

¹¹ In the 1980s, the Scalabrinians arrived in Immokalee (Florida) to serve Mexican and Haitian migrants. In 1987, they were also entrusted with the mission of Our Lady of Peace for Hispanic migrants and Our Lady of Perpetual Help for Haitians.

¹² The first migrant shelter, with about 100 beds, however was inaugurated in 1978 in Cucuta (Colombia) at the border between Colombia and Venezuela, to assist Colombian migrants trying to enter Venezuela. In Tijuana (Mexico) the first welcoming house was built in 1986, with a capacity of about 200 people.

grants in various languages), centers of attention to migrants were established, where many lay Scalabrinians were involved. In the St. Charles Borromeo Province, the support for the most vulnerable migrants was provided through legal assistance, ESL programs and vocational training, humanitarian assistance (food, clothing, job and accommodation information) and other types of services that, together with the liturgical celebrations in church, helped to respond to the migrants' immediate needs. Many of these centers were located especially in New England (Boston-Providence) and New York; but gradually they spread to other areas and towns of the Province (Atlanta in Georgia, Delray in Florida, Valencia in Venezuela).

The St. John the Baptist Province expanded its mission to Central America, especially Guatemala and El Salvador, both with centers of attention to the migrant and pastoral activities on behalf of the new comers.

In 2007, SIMN (Scalabrini International Migration Network) was established to follow up on a suggestion of the 1998 Chapter. After the initial work in Brussels and Geneva, its headquarter was moved to New York. Its commitment to advocacy and fundraising keeps on growing, by proving the importance and necessity for the care of migrants and refugees, and by acting as an intermediary or bridge between the departing and arriving communities. A few Scalabrinian parishes, in North and South America, participate in the SIMN activities, through fundraising activities to help and promote an integral formation of migrants in the countries of origin as well as in transit areas. In addition to government subsidies or from charitable foundations, the most active committee is SIMN - Canada based in Toronto that has already organized six fundraisers whose proceeds have been donated to various Scalabrinian missions around the world, to financially support projects or programs in various migrant shelters. Because of the vastness of the migration phenomenon, cooperation with different agents and organizations is necessary, both locally than internationally¹³.

PLACES AND SERVICES

Pastoral Places

The St. John the Baptist Province carries out its mission in 16 parishes, 6 migrant centers (Tijuana, Nuevo Laredo, Guadalajara, Tecun Umán, Ciudad de Guatemala, San Salvador), one professional training center

¹³ In addition to the collaboration with the Scalabrinian laity and volunteers, other groups are involved in this specific ministry, like other religious orders, local churches, foundations and private and governmental organizations, by supporting some specific projects.

for deportees and asylum seekers (CDMX). In Guatemala, a Scalabrinian missionary is responsible for the Episcopal Conference commission for human mobility, while in two dioceses the missionaries run the human mobility office, and in two others the office for Hispanic ministry. In the Province there is also the Centro Scalabriniano de Pastoral Migratoria, 3 seminaries and a nursing home.

The St. Charles Borromeo Province carries out its apostolate in 20 parishes, 12 missions, four seminaries, one study center, and various migrant centers. In Haiti, a Scalabrinian coordinates the migrant office of the Haitian Episcopal Conference, while two other missionaries oversee the migrant office of Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic) and Manta (diocese of Portoviejo, in Ecuador).

Only five of these parishes and missions provide mono-lingual services (mostly where the formation houses are located, such as in Colombia and Haiti). The others instead offer services in multiple languages. Serving migrants in these countries requires adaptability and willingness to learn the different languages of the migrants. Most of the parishes in North America can be found in cities where the Scalabrinians have been working for many decades. However, the new arrivals and the migration trends brought about the closure of old positions and the opening of new ones, especially in Florida and Georgia.

While in the last 30 years the St. John the Baptist Province opened up various houses for migrants, involved in the problems at the borders and with refugees present in those areas, the St. Charles Province only in recent years inaugurated welcoming centers, especially at the border between Colombia and Venezuela¹⁴, Colombia and Ecuador, Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Nevertheless, many centers of attention to migrants within the Province offer various services to the newly arrived migrants¹⁵.

Lay apostolate in the Provinces

Several missions within the two Provinces already have very committed lay people, who are involved especially in providing services to migrants and refugees in welcoming houses and centers of attention to migrants. Some of them are full-time or part-time volunteers, others are hired and receive a salary.

¹⁴ The migrant center in Cucuta has already been functioning for the last 40 years and has always provided assistance to migrants crossing from Colombia to Venezuela. In the last 5 years the opposite phenomenon has taken place, by taking care of Venezuelan refugees who arrive in Colombia on a daily basis.

¹⁵ The first meeting of these centers was organized in the summer of 2018, with many Scalabrinian missionaries in attendance.

A few years ago the lay formation initiative was strong and wide spread; instead in recent years there has been a lack of specific formation for lay people in some places, even though some Scalabrinian missionaries have provided this training in the community or at area level.

The recent relocation of the congregation's SIMN main office in New York has fostered the creation of some lay committees, engaged specifically in fund-raising activities.

Pastoral services

The St. Charles Borromeo Province promotes care for migrants and refugees through the Center for Migration Studies in New York, with various publications and activities. The organization of conventions, seminars and the participation in other events held by the academic and political entities provide CMS with a special opportunity to implement its advocacy and lobbying programs for the protection of migrants and refugees, especially in the United States¹⁶.

Regarding Mass Media, both North American Provinces are in the process of setting up a communication office, for the coordination of various magazines and other publications, as well as a greater involvement in social media. Many current publications are in Spanish, Italian and English to promote the Scalabrinian charism and the specific activities on behalf of migrants and refugees¹⁷.

As far as radio programs, in addition to the daily programs "Radio Maria USA" and "Telemater" via internet, "Radio Scalabrini" has also been inaugurated a few months ago, aimed mainly at reaching out to the large Brazilian community in the Boston area and throughout the USA¹⁸.

LOOKING AT THE FUTURE..

Migration remains a relevant issue in North and Central America. Actually the causes producing the emigration phenomenon are still unresolved and increasing by the day. Specifically, political instability in Central America has promoted the creation of "caravans" of migrants trying to reach the United States, but often experiencing difficult conditions along their journey and rejection at the border. The current regime in Venezuela has also caused a massive exodus of migrants, who are

¹⁶ For further information regarding CMS activities and publications, see www.cmsny.org.

¹⁷ In Colombia, CEPAM publishes two magazines, *Acontecer Migratorio* and *Colombia Migrante*; are periodicals are published in Guatemala, *Sin fronteras*; in Mexico, *Migrantes* and *Jovenes sin fronteras*, in Venezuela, *Incontri*; and in the United States *Scalabrinians*.

¹⁸ *Radio Maria and Telemater* host programs in Italian and have their headquarters in New York, while *Radio Scalabrini* in Portuguese was inaugurated at the end of June 2020, in the Scalabrinian parish of St. Tarcisius in Framingham (Massachusetts).

relocating in Colombia or other Latin American countries. Therefore, the mission of the Scalabrinian congregation is more relevant than ever.

In general, the approach of the pastoral care to migrants through parishes becoming over time multi-ethnic communities of faith, a living expression of the Church's catholicity, needs to be strengthened. The networking of the parishes in the St. Charles Province should be taken into consideration. The new experience of the centers of attention to migrants, providing services of welcome and human promotion, must be continued, by paying attention to the transformations that migration is undergoing and to the new services that migrants need. The interpretation of the migratory phenomenon offered by CMS and other Scalabrinian magazines requires an attentive ear, able to grasp where our presence can be most necessary and effective. The charism we have received deserves to be shared, inviting young people to join us in a path of formation leading them to consecration to God and to the migrants.

The variety of ethnic origins of the missionaries allows us not only to live in community what we preach to others, but also to be able to diversify our missions. The Scalabrinian presence in North America has already been redesigned several times in more than 130 years of its history. Through the skills of new missionaries it will be possible to respond to new groups of migrants, to provide new services in the traditional structures and to live in an even deeper way the charism inherited from the Founder.

In a future filled with challenges and opportunities, there will always be many possibilities for a specific commitment of the laity.

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