

THE MAGAZINE FOR THE SALESIAN FAMILY

# DON BOSCO TODAY

Vocation and Inculturation



DON BOSCO

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## Editorial »

On behalf of the children of Haiti, I would like to thank the readers who contributed so generously to our Salesian Haiti Appeal. The appeal realised over £15,000. There were over 250 donations ranging from £2 to £1435.

I was particularly impressed by a number of schools who organised fund-raising activities for the children of Haiti. It is too soon to give details of the Salesian work in Haiti; we hope to be able to do so in the next edition.

The concept of **inculturation** is not so easy to understand, but Brother Matthew's article on page six helps us to appreciate the idea. **Inculturation** is about change, the way we must change because our world is changing rapidly. Brother Matthew charts the journey from Poland to England, from Polish Catholicism to English Catholicism, from Polish children to English children. His experience provides a template for every missionary, the process of change – we must understand the people God has called us to work with and must change our mentality accordingly if we are to bring the good news, the gospel, to them. Tonino Passarello, in his article, explains how a teacher must learn before he can teach; must understand the needs and lives of young people before he can help them to pray.

The article *A Brave Mum* challenges us to change our attitude to those young mums who are brave enough to follow the vocation of motherhood despite the prejudice of society. Finally Fr O'Malley's article in praise of headteachers focuses on the unique responsibility of our school leaders to understand the needs of young people, parents and teachers and to steer our schools through the troubled waters of conflicting expectations.

**Tony Bailey SDB**  
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This edition of *Don Bosco Today* is different. It is more reflective than usual. We are reflecting on the twin themes of **vocation** and **inculturation**. We are all familiar with the idea of vocation; how different people respond to God's call. So we have presented in this issue an account of various Christian vocations. We begin with the vocation of the Christian mother; lovingly accepting the gift of a child even in the most difficult circumstances. Matthew, a Polish Salesian Brother, recounts his experience in an English secondary school. Tonino, explores the challenge of helping young people to pray. Marco encourages young people to consider a religious vocation in today's world. Fr O'Malley is full of praise for those brave men and women who respond to the challenge of the Christian headship.

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# A Brave Mum

» ***I am the 18 year-old mother of Jacob, a beautiful baby boy.***

I was 16 years old and unmarried when I became pregnant. From the moment I realised I was pregnant, I was determined to have my baby. For me it was not a difficult decision to make, but it was very difficult to get other people to support my decision. »

Let's begin with my parents. How could I tell my Dad? I had always been very close to my Dad I was sure he would understand. But how could I tell him? I decided to write him a letter. As soon as he read it he phoned my Mum at work. She pretended that she had known previously. Both my parents could not accept it and wanted me to have an abortion straight away. My mother even drove me to the clinic for an abortion. After three or four months my Mum came to terms with the situation and accompanied me to the hospital when I had stomach cramps and when I went for scans. I was quite surprised by my Dad's reaction; after all his parents had been church-going Catholics. Fortunately, once my parents came to terms with my pregnancy they were very supportive. Now they love their grandson to pieces and couldn't live without Jacob. Other girls now come to me for advice, their most frequent question is, *How do I tell my parents that I'm pregnant?*

Many of my friends were supportive throughout my pregnancy. At school, the school chaplain was very supportive and one of the senior members of staff was brilliant, she seemed to understand me and helped me throughout my pregnancy. But so many people did not know how to treat me, I was tired of them telling me, *I told you so*. The truth is that everywhere I looked there were stories of the ever-growing number of teenage parents and how they were destined to achieve nothing and most annoying were all the *adults* trying to come up with a solution to a *problem* which they did not seem to fully understand. I discovered that there are always plenty of opinions flying around about young women getting pregnant and having children – and they are seldom positive. It was so frustrating.

I feel that I have learned much about myself, I'm certainly not as lazy and selfish as I was before. The experience of being a mother has developed me as a person in that I can handle responsibility better and I feel I now have a more mature attitude to life than so many of my peers.

According to the British media, the positives of being a teenage mum don't matter – for fear of encouraging it. Although I would never tell someone that it is right or a good idea, I strongly believe that we should not sacrifice the wellbeing of the 17,800 young mothers in England for the theories our government have of prevention; which, up until now, have not succeeded. What amazed me most when my news first surfaced was that it wasn't my peers who treated me differently or scrutinised me for my decision, it was the adults around me. People began treating me differently, conversations became awkward and some people even spoke to me as though I was still in junior school. People, for some reason, believed that talking to me like I'm a child was the right way to act. Teenage mothers, including myself, who suffer from Postnatal Depression, are persecuted by the media telling us that we have ruined our lives.

A lot of people thought I was throwing my life away, ruining my chances of anything. This seems to be the way our nation judges teenage parents. Many people underestimate a young person's ability to adjust to new situations, work through something which potentially could hold them back. This is no easy task when people are publicly saying how you have ruined your life.

Teenage pregnancy is not the way to go. It's hard work, time consuming and has changed my life in so many ways that I've lost count. I have to get up at daft o'clock in the morning, I have to make food which makes me feel sick and 9 times out of 10 I will have a baby with me. But the way I see it is I get to wake up to a beautiful baby boy, who always has a smile on his face, whether it's 7 o'clock or 4 o'clock. I get to cook for someone who (for at least 5 years) won't tell me I can't cook and I spend everyday with someone who will always love me, unconditionally; although I would never tell someone that teenage pregnancy is a good thing.

I was so pleased when Jacob was baptised and I am now studying A levels and I hope to go to university to study nursing. My ambition in life is to become a midwife.

**Rebecca**







Brother Matt is a young Salesian Brother from Poland who is completing a year's experience working as a teaching-assistant in a Salesian school in England. »

*A car, a mobile, money and a girlfriend – that makes you a man nowadays.* That's the way some lads think. So many of those they consider heroes behave like children. They seem to lack responsibility, they indulge in foolish and dangerous behaviour, they use people; for them what they have is more important than who they are. So it was inevitable that at first the young people regarded me as an alien rather than a normal person. I tried to show them, to teach them that being a man means to love and be ready to protect what you love, to give your life for it. It means not to fear even when everything and everyone is against you. *Do not be afraid.* They were the gospel words that sustained me during my stay in England. Being a man means to work hard, to be the head, be in charge – first of all in charge of your own life. Not to give the steering wheel to mass-media, mates, alcohol, drugs or your X-Box. That's what I was trying to show them. Maybe one year is not enough but I hope they've seen that I'm happy, in charge of my life, even if I don't have my own car, money or a girlfriend. For me, being a man means to be a good Salesian – a father, brother and friend.

Although Polish and English teenagers are different – because of language, education, culture and family background, there is something that everyone understands – a smile. I am convinced that's the key to their hearts. The only difference is that sometimes it takes longer to open doors. That was, for me, a lesson in patience. In my country when a Salesian or priest smiles youngsters come and want to chat, ask different questions, they're interested in him, in his story, in his vocation. It's so obvious, but not here. I was someone from a different world, an adult, a staff member and they must have thought I was a spy. It took me a long time to break through. Eventually I used the simple Don Bosco method – like what young people like. When I've seen them with headphones for example, I've asked about their favourite bands, types of music. And I've shared my tastes in music with them. Similarly with sport, art, and books. It was difficult for me because I'm the type of person who does everything quickly – I think fast, I talk



fast, I walk fast, I eat fast, I make friends easily. In England I had to slow down. I've also become more tolerant of the behaviour of young people, they are slightly more aggressive and hyperactive than in my country. Perhaps it is because of their family situation – some lack both parents, some boys miss the father figure in their lives. After quite a few failures at the beginning I decided I wouldn't give up, I'll try again and again... and it was worth the fight. Despite being so different from them, I think the youngsters began to appreciate me. I didn't see it at the beginning, but soon I recognised *signs* of their appreciation. I treasure those moments when, jogging after school and passing the school bus, the pupils would wave and shout *Hello, Brother Matt.* I'll never forget those moments, and hi-fives on the corridor.

When I heard I was going to England I imagined myself a fighter, a warrior, a crusader. I wanted to take my cassock, bible and crucifix (and maybe a sword) to evangelise. But when I stepped out of the plane I realised that it just wouldn't work. You can't tell an Eskimo the parable about the good shepherd because he has got no idea what sheep are like. So I had to change my way of thinking, I had to become more modest about my religious life, hide the shepherd's crook. They live in a different culture; have a different way of praising God, of talking about him. So I had to change my behaviour, my way of thinking. I soon realised that, in a different culture learning the language is just the beginning. Inculturation means discovering all the good and valuable things that British people and their culture produced during 2000

years. I can't just step in like an unexpected guest in other people's houses and tell them what kind of books they should read, what kind of music to listen to, and how to prepare a meal. I'm the guest; I must respect the host.

So I never said a word about things that I thought were wrong; because they weren't wrong – they were different. Even if sometimes I was boiling inside and wanted to shout out. I just stopped and thought: *Why? Why say it's wrong? Don't judge! How do I know that Poles are doing these things correctly? Who am I to judge?* If something works here but not in Poland let it be, just leave it as it is. The best way is to observe; don't criticise. Learn because maybe you'll need to do the same. *Does it work?* It worked for me. After weeks of inner rebellion I fell in love with this country, its people, its food, and even the weather!

In school, the staff are wonderful. They spend so much time in the school. I really admire their commitment and the passion they show in their teaching. That's the impression I'll take, in my heart, back to Poland and tell people about it. The school staff were a great example to me, a 26 years-old foreigner, with no experience of professional teaching. Thanks to them I've learned so much and I've achieved so much. Being a teaching assistant in their lessons was a pleasure and huge life-lesson for me. They didn't have to say a word. I just watched them; it was like a good film. Now I need to share my experience with others and invite them to play that role. They deserve an Oscar. What surprised me was that, after a few months of working with them, some of the teachers occasionally did things the way I was doing them with the youngsters – ways that worked. I like to think they appreciated the Salesian way.

How do English Catholic young people differ from Polish young people? They have their English Catholicism the same as Polish young people have their Polish Catholicism. There is no point in trying to make judgments, no need to compare or to assess the differences. This diversity is an area where the whole richness of the Church takes place: a space that cannot be measured or defined. But when you enter that space with an open mind you will never be the same again. You become a new Catholic – a richer Catholic. That certainly has been my experience. That's why I encourage others to join Project Europe' – for that enriching experience. They will discover that they receive more than they give.



I have certainly changed since I came to England. Some people have commented on the improvement in my English, and have even remarked that I'm more British now, whatever that means. I'm sure that is not just about Health and Safety issues or tea breaks. It seems to me that I just understand people more than I did before. I'm curious to see what my family and friends are going to say when I return home. I can certainly feel the difference. I just know I've changed; even when I can't name it I can feel it.

There are still many areas of disagreement; that's inevitable and that's healthy. I didn't come to England to change into Brother Matthew. I'm still Mateusz. Most of our differences are caused by our lingual, cultural and historical differences. But an appreciation of this makes us more valuable as people, more effective as Salesians. I've learned something from you but I hope that you've learned something from me. This is Project Europe, not Project England or Project Poland. We can only hope that every country which takes a part in Project Europe will reap the benefits.

As I said in the beginning, *Why?* was the most important question. Sometimes the question is more important than the answer. A good philosopher is the one who asks the most important and basic questions.



Matthew Koziolk SDB

During my stay in England I've asked myself many times *Why?* Often I have not found an answer. But I hope that my Salesian presence among young people will encourage them to ask some questions: Who am I? Why do I live? What's my life purpose? Does God exist? Could I be a Priest, a Brother or a Sister? I hope that they will ask these questions and that they may find some answers, I pray for that. That's what I can leave them – my prayers.

<sup>1</sup> In 2008, the Salesians launched *Project Europe*, with the aim of leading the continent back to its Christian roots, seeking a new form of evangelisation, in order to respond to the spiritual and moral needs of the many young people, who seem to wander aimlessly with no one to guide them and nowhere to go.

# The Bear Facts



Hello Children,

Many children in the past had difficult lives.

Many parents sent their young children to work to earn money. Children only six or seven years-old were sent down coal mines which were dark, dangerous and

frightening places for them. My grandad had nine brothers and sisters and they all lived together. They were so poor that they only had one pair of clogs (shoes) and one scarf between them, so they took turns going out in order to wear them.

Do you own a pet? If you do I am sure you are kind to it. Brown Bears, like me, get treated well because people can be frightened of us. I'm very gentle really but if I growl it sounds fierce. Rabbits are supposed to be nervous animals but Rio isn't; he chases Rottweiler's. Squirrels, like Suzi, are often shy but Molly Magpie is pretty confident.

My new story is set during our summer holiday in Greece. Greece reminds me of the Olympic Games and ancient buildings; an unusual alphabet and sticky cakes; tiny blue and white houses and goats with bells round their necks and a donkey, called Davros, who became a friend of ours.



## WORLD CUP PREDICTIONS

All of us here at Forest School have looked into our crystal ball and made our World Cup predictions.



<b>Bosco</b>	<b>Winner</b> – England	<b>Runner-Up</b> - Italy	
<b>Rio</b>	<b>Winner</b> – Spain	<b>Runner-Up</b> – Brazil	<b>England:</b> Quarter-Final
<b>Molly</b>	<b>Winner</b> – New Zealand	<b>Runner-Up</b> – Holland	<b>England:</b> Semi-final
<b>Suzi</b>	<b>Winner</b> – Ivory Coast	<b>Runner-Up</b> – Argentina	<b>England:</b> Quarter-final

**We'll see!**

Bosco Bear





# DONKEY RIDES

## GREECE

*Mamma Mia!* exclaimed Bosco Bear.

Molly, Rio, Suzi and Bosco were enjoying their summer holiday on the Greek island of Rhodes. They had just finished a moussaka, in a restaurant, and Molly and Suzi had gone outside for a dance, wearing traditional Greek dresses.

*Tomorrow, announced Bosco, we're going to the Acropolis at Lindos.*

*What's that?* asked Rio.

*It's a 2000 year old monument, explained his friend. You get a fantastic view from the top.*

## DONKEYS

Next day the friends caught a bus to Lindos Market.

*Right, said Bosco, We need some donkeys.*

*Why?* asked a puzzled Suzi.

*Because they carry you up that very steep, zigzagging path to the Acropolis, he explained.*

All the friends looked up and up, and saw a path full of donkeys. *You could say we're going to have Donkey Rhodes,* suggested Rio. *I think it would be much better if you didn't,* answered Molly.

*Those poor animals must be very, very strong, she said. Look how big some of the people are that they're carrying.*

Rio chose a donkey called Davros. *Giddy up,* he said, shaking the reins. He seemed to think he was in the Grand National.

*Don't be cruel, said Bosco. I've changed my mind. I'm going to walk up.*

*So am I,* agreed Molly.

Rio looked thoughtful.

## THE ACROPOLIS

*Sizzling sausages! It's so hot, my skin feels like its burning,* said Bosco.

The friends were at the top of the Acropolis. It was midday: the sun was blazing down.

*I think I'm going to faint,* cried Suzi as she wobbled.

*I've been thinking, about Davros*

*our donkey, announced Rio ... He can't be happy here, so let's take him home with us.*

*Don't be silly, laughed Suzi, shaking her head. We can't do that.*

*Yes we could, insisted Rio. We could pay his owner; get him on the bus to the airport, and put him in a special animal box on the plane.*

*There was a pause.....*

*Bosco smiled, Rio.....that's a brainwave, Let's do it!*

## FARMER FRED'S FARM

In Darkwood Forest, near Bosco's home, stood Farmer Fred's Children's Farm and Playground. There was a tractor ride, a pets' corner, a bouncy castle, and....donkey rides.

*Hello,* said Davros smiling.

*Hello,* replied Tommy, one of Farmer Fred's donkeys. *You've got an unusual name.*

*Yes. I'm from Greece, explained Davros. Bosco Bear and his friends brought me here. I've learnt to speak English; everyone's very kind to me; it's not too hot and I only give rides to children. I could stay here for donkeys' years.*





# KINDNESS IS, AS KINDNESS DOES

*Kindness is as kindness does* is an old saying. It means that being kind is something you DO, not something you say. You can be kind without saying anything. The word *kindness* comes from an old English word *kin* which means family. So if you are kind to someone (or something) you treat them as you would treat your family.

Most children, I'm very glad to say, are very kind towards other children and, are often, extremely helpful to children with poor health or special needs. Bullying is the opposite of kindness. Don't ever make other children unhappy. I read about a man who admits he was a bully at school: now, he has two children of his own and hates the idea of them being bullied.

Many people are kind to animals. Many people think that animals are sometimes mistreated. They think putting animals in zoos and circuses is wrong: using donkeys to give rides; killing animals for food; even swatting a wasp are all wrong. What do you think?

## Summer Competition: ANIMAL RIGHTS.

Write what you think about the way people should treat animals. Should all animals be treated the same?

We'll publish the best replies in the next issue of Don Bosco Today.

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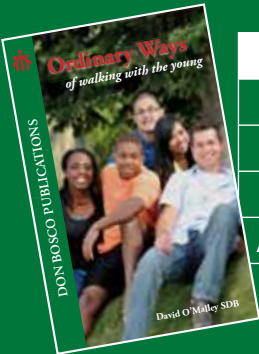


# Ordinary Ways

## for the New School Year

Hidden in the ordinary patterns of each day  
is a network of life-giving relationships  
between young people and the adults that care for them.  
When a parent puts down the paper to talk to their son or daughter  
new things become possible.  
When a teacher, after disciplining a difficult pupil,  
enquires more gently about their home situation,  
they have moved into a sacred space where lives can be changed.  
Ordinary relationships, simple objects of life  
can become pathways to personal growth and windows of insight.  
Parents, teachers and youth workers are on a road that can lead to wisdom.  
We need to see beyond the immediate and the ordinary,  
to deeper patterns of mystery and presence.  
Our own adolescence re-emerges, to be dealt with again on the road to maturity.  
The adult sometimes becomes the pupil.  
Young people sometimes speak the words we need to hear about our own life journey,  
usually when we don't want to hear them.

*Ordinary Ways* is the simplest guide to a Christian way  
of walking with the young



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Prayer, in its traditional sense, is not so evident in the lives of young people, but my research into the habits of children, in terms of positive thinking and willingness to pray, may surprise some people. »



As a department leader I insist that every period of teaching starts with a prayer. About three years ago I began to question why I insisted upon this. Is it acceptable to say prayers just for the sake of it? When a teacher says a *Hail Mary* at the start of every lesson, what impact does it have on the spirituality of our students? Very little I suspect. Prayer at the start of a lesson should be a positive experience for our learners, should be linked to lesson themes and objectives and could encourage students to pray more in their lives. Prayer needs to be a positive experience for both the teacher and the student. When we asked students and RE staff about their praying habits, most said that they couldn't recall the prayers that were said at the start of lessons and that they had been said simply because it had become a matter of routine.

I began by asking students about times when they have prayed. The results were varied, it was clear that some element of prayer did exist in their lives. Responses were mainly; *I pray when I go to church*, or, *I pray when someone is sick or when bad things happen*. When asked if prayers continued when they had received what they had prayed for, students were a little evasive. On the whole, children said that they simply did not pray. I decided to think about prayer from the perspective of a 14-year-old student and began to think about the picture that I have of their lives. I could never imagine the level of stress that these students have in their daily lives. Many live in broken homes, some having no male role model or father figure.

## Praying with Young People



Some are expected to fulfil adult roles and behave in adult ways at a young age. Unfortunately, some have been brought up in deprived areas with experiences of social problems. Some students, from affluent areas, have lived in homes with parents who have very intense careers and the typical idea of the nuclear family is certainly one that most of our students would not be able to comprehend. Some are brought up as Catholics, but are not taken to church or supported in their faith by their parents. Their parents were brought up in a similar way. Children's lives are more varied today, as are their experiences and the consistency of these experiences.

Having thought about their lives in more depth I went back to a selection of children and asked them about times when they are quiet, times when they reflected and probed for information about times in their lives when they obviously do pray, but they don't understand this as being actual prayer. Their responses have led me to believe that it is not the children who have abandoned prayer rather it is adults who have misinterpreted their needs. Typical responses were:

- *When I am stressed I will go to a field behind my estate where I will sit and look out upon all the people who I know. It helps me to relax and to think.*
- *At night, before I close my eyes, I go through all the things I have done during the day and think about all the things I need to do tomorrow.*
- *I get stressed when revising for exams, so a friend has taught me some breathing exercises that help me to focus on my revision and break it down into manageable chunks.*
- *When I need to think things through I go to the gym and get into **the zone**. When I have finished I feel a lot more positive.*

Are the children here not describing elements of reflection, peace, ways of prioritising their emotions and energy, relaxation techniques, focus and requests for *time out* in their hectic lives? A typical prayer does not have the desired affect and maybe children have found their own way to focus and to direct their thoughts to a higher power. Because of this we decided to try out a few things in the RE department. Firstly, our daily worship is now linked to major events that have happened or the topic content of our lessons. Prayers are sometimes *tactile*, opportunities to use actions. We have really been helped by the production of *Swatch and Pray* by

Fr David O'Malley. This series of prayers and reflections is accompanied by linked actions and elements of focus that allow the students to visualise their prayers and thoughts and make it real to them in their lives. Usually a member of staff will select a passage that may link into a lesson or form period. Students have their favourite prayer and many request to have a certain reflection read out. It has certainly enhanced our collective prayer experiences and has been adopted as a whole school approach to prayer.

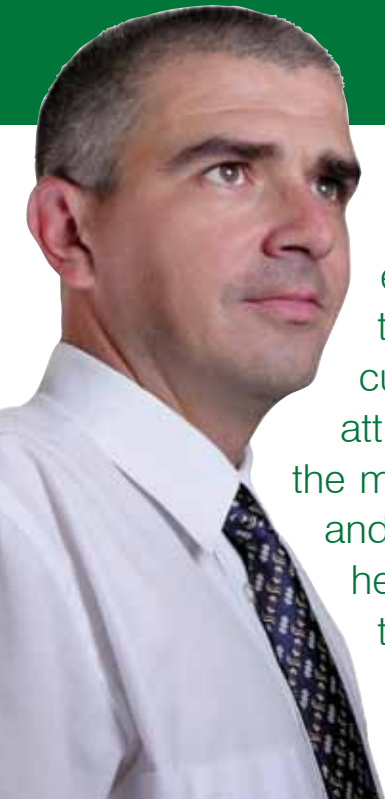
In addition, the RE department has listened to the feedback from students and has built into the curriculum key opportunities for children to pray. This is done via *guided journeys* and meditations which are held in the school chaplaincy room or the school chapel. The students are taken through breathing exercises before being given advice on how to focus and clear their minds so that they can fully become in tune with the reflections. They are then taken on a journey accompanied by music, incense and candles and are encouraged to think about the things that they need to prioritise in life. This is done in a subtle manner and relies on complete trust between the teacher and the student. The students love doing this. They are at peace throughout the session and show a maturity that helps to prove that prayer is still important to teenagers. They tell us that they rarely get time to be quiet and that stillness and peace usually comes only via sleep. The constant requests for meditation are now overwhelming and it is up to my team to ensure that students fully understand why we do this and get them to try and do it in their personal lives.

So it isn't difficult to get children to pray; they actually want to pray. The difficulty is making prayer relevant to their life experiences and shaping it in a form they can enjoy, feel safe participating in and gain peace. The proof is clear for observers in our school to see. Students are curious about prayer and they are obsessive about buying and carrying symbols of their religion. SDB badges and lapel crucifixes are worn by many; there are constant requests for more. Rosary beads are very popular and we have held classes to show students how to use them traditionally and in a more modern way. Prayer is obviously still an important part of the lives of our children; but it took us some time to understand their needs. The challenge is to find out how to help young people to make prayer meaningful and important.

**Tonino Passarello**



# In Praise of Headteachers



It is clear from the evidence we received that headship is currently not seen as attractive because of the many additional duties and pressures which headteachers now have to take on without receiving a great deal of extra money in return.<sup>1</sup> »

These words from the ninth report of the Select Committee on Education highlight the difficulty in appointing headteachers in Christian schools. The role involves the balancing of complex pressures in a constantly changing educational setting. It demands resilience and a range of skills that few people possess. Headteachers are, in my experience, courageous, committed and likely to be motivated much more by faith than by ambition. In common with many bishops, they stand at the meeting point between the Gospel and the local secular world; between religion and the practical atheism of our culture. They also bridge the gap between home and school, between the almost industrial mentality of some educational policy and the vocational self-sacrifice of staff. They hold together different generations of teachers by maintaining an ethos and tradition that reaches back to former pupils and out into the wider community. They are people that can be stretched at times beyond their limits.

Yet the figure of *headteacher* is often portrayed simply as a manager of target-based learning and someone who is only as good as the latest set of the school's exam results. This industrial model of their role as managing *inputs* (learning) and *outputs* (exam results) is a narrow and demeaning view of the spiritual leader of a Christian learning community. The headteacher is undoubtedly responsible for learning and results but the quality and durability of that learning will depend not just on what happens within the curriculum but also upon the relationships that sustain the school community. The

exam results will only catch part of the learning that happens in the classroom and school community. Much of the richness, bequeathed to pupils in a school, will only emerge in later life, in family living, parenting, commitment to citizenship and to the Church. The narrow culture of measurement and the repressive, almost medieval, practice of *blame and shame* leave our headteachers at risk of going over to the *dark side* and adopting narrow mechanical and superficial ways of working and thinking; or simply burning themselves out with the loneliness and responsibility involved in holding so many pressures in balance.

As members of a Christian community we need to recognise and value the amazing men and women who lead our schools. They lead a Church community within diocesan structures that are themselves under pressure. Few people in our Church appreciate all the pressures under which they labour but we need to be aware of some of the issues they manage each day. They need to:

- Continually improve results in order to avoid slipping down the written and unwritten league tables which might lead to bad publicity, falling roles, amalgamations and even closure.
- Respond clearly and quickly to educational initiatives that can come from outside the needs of the local community.
- Maintain an active and informed governing body in support of their role.
- Be skilled in selecting and recruiting suitable staff and then provide ongoing and relevant training for them, as well as dealing with grievances and terminating employment in a just and Gospel-based way.
- Respond to the needs of the local deanery for effective religious education that will bring older pupils back to practice.
- Manage issues of health and safety, relationship education, budgeting and policy management which are a regular and time-consuming focus for every head.
- Maintain and model the spirit of the school so that each pupil and member of staff has the experience, whatever their faith background, of a gospel-based community where spirit and activity are integrated in each person.

These are just some of the roles that I know keep many headteachers late at work and, at times, distant from

their own home. They take work home and live and breathe a role that, at times, calls for the constant support of their whole family. They see themselves as setting the tone for the whole school, modelling a work ethic for colleagues and absorbing responsibility for tasks that are often difficult to delegate. Many, with whom I have worked, know that they are doing a good job and yet they may be very close to the limits of their energy for long periods, as they balance the secular and spiritual demands of their role. What they sometimes lack is the recognition that bonds them supportively to the community in which they serve. The encouragement headteachers need will come only rarely from the inspectorate and more often from the local authority. The most important sustained support a headteacher needs must always come from within the school community; from parents, governors, pupils and staff.

Parents need to see beyond performance tables to the person of the headteacher as a spiritual leader in their community and not simply a service provider for the local authority. Perhaps parents, more than others, will recognise in the head a shared commitment and care for their children, especially in the confusion of adolescent lives. Governors need to find time to read between the lines of the minutes of meetings and support the head at times of celebration, as well as during times of trouble or change. Teachers need to take good news into the head's office and not just problems. All members of staff need to use the middle leaders in the school community to resolve problems before going to the headteacher. Pupils simply need to say *thank you* to the headteacher when they can, admit their mistakes honestly and enjoy the spirit of the school.

Saint John Bosco recognised the importance of leadership and offered the image of the Good Shepherd as a model for leaders of Church-based communities. It is a challenging model for the leader; to seek out the lost, establish safe places, and lay down one's own life at times for what really matters. Headteachers will often feel that responsibility to live the Good Shepherd model at the heart of the school community. However, the Good Shepherd model is for the whole school community not just the leader. We are all called to shepherd the spirit of love, truth, justice and compassion in the school community. Therefore the headteacher also needs to feel shepherded through a genuine concern for them as a person within a school community. The headteacher needs to hear affirmation as well as difficulties from staff. They need to experience some recognition for their role

and their informal presence in school and the work they do beyond the school site. In Christian terms, those in leadership are called to service and not to status. No community can buy that service as a product, it is always a gift nurtured by a compassionate community.

A school community thrives primarily on respect, understanding, affection and good humour. It is based on teamwork that has little to do with the solo heroics of fictional characters of films and novels: those who apparently single-handedly turn whole communities around. Real leaders emerge from teamwork and mutual support. Real leaders emerge in communities where responsibility for the community is shared by the whole community and not left to just one person. As a Christian community, we cannot allow the narrow and industrial models of leadership to overshadow the model of the Good Shepherd.

Don Bosco believed that praise, recognition and encouragement give strength to the inner spirit and help people to remain humble and strong in the service of others. May we find time in our conversations to recognise, praise and encourage those men and women who lead our schools. If they experience the warmth and understanding of their community, they can then find even more strength to face the daily challenge to build and shepherd, on our behalf, a new spiritual community in a secular age.

**David O'Malley SDB**



» Those in leadership are called to service and not to status.

<sup>1</sup> Select Committee on Education and Employment Ninth Report no 186





Born in East Molesey, Surrey, just across the bridge from Hampton Court Palace, I was raised a Catholic Christian by my mother and father and this is reflected in my education. First, I attended St Joseph's Preparatory School, Beauchamp Road East Molesey, run by the Sisters of the Christian Retreat. At the age of ten I went, literally next door, to St Thomas More R.C. Middle School for four years before going to the Jesuits at Wimbledon College. »



When I was eight years of age I became an altar server and the thought of becoming a priest probably started about that time, though it had strong competition from two other aspirations, such as being an astronaut or a milkman. It was during my time at Wimbledon College that thoughts about priesthood popped up again. Several factors were at play in my process of discernment. These were the arrival of a young charismatic chaplain; the opportunity of daily Mass before school and the work of the school CAFOD group. Even then, I was still considering work as a lawyer, translator or teacher.

I went to Cardiff University, and despite going through a very rough period in my faith life, I regained the strength of my faith and in my second year of university felt that I had reached a pivotal stage in my life, a moment of decision. I still felt drawn to priesthood and in particular to the foreign missions. Having contacted several missionary societies, I was particularly drawn to one.

After several years studying philosophy and theology, I went abroad to Pakistan for almost two years, where I was involved in both teaching and pastoral work, including house visitations, visits to parish outstations and free English language tuition. I needed to grasp a working knowledge of Urdu which is the national language of Pakistan. Though I found reading, writing and spelling difficult; I could just about make myself understood. At least I thought the parishioners understood, perhaps they were too polite to tell me otherwise.

Upon my return to the UK, I was asked what I enjoyed most about my time abroad. Upon reflection, I felt that it was the teaching that had been both very challenging but ultimately something that had been life-giving and had kept me sane. Teachers reading this now may, at times, wonder. It was then that a priest I knew suggested that I join the Salesians as he knew them well and his uncle had been a Salesian priest.

At first, this suggestion surprised me. Yet things started to make sense. My sister had been educated very well by the Salesians in their school in Chertsey and there was a strong link with my home parish of St Barnabas in Molesey. Not only did this parish fall within the catchment area of the Salesian School in Chertsey, but there were also two parishioners, Jean Casha and Ina Coles, who taught in the school and Jean encouraged me to make an initial contact with the Salesians at Chertsey.

After several chats with Fr Andrew Ebrahim, I was invited by the Rector at that time, Fr John Dickson, to become an *aspirant*; this involved living for several months in the Chertsey community, getting a taste for the apostolate whilst at the same time continuing my paid employment in Heathrow Airport. Then I was invited to make my pre-novitiate year in Thornleigh Salesian College Bolton, where I worked as a Learning Support Assistant.

From Bolton, I went to the novitiate in Farnborough, Hampshire, where three other novices and I learned about the history of St John Bosco and the early Salesians as well as about the distinctive Salesian charism. I was involved in the parish Masses, being in the choir and playing the flute and guitar. I was also part of a great team of catechists who prepared and led the Confirmation programme.

During my post-novitiate year, I went to St Mary's University College, Strawberry Hill to train to become a Religious Education teacher in a secondary school. Having gained my Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) I successfully completed my first year in Salesian School Chertsey as a Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT), completing my induction.

The two years in Chertsey flew by and then I moved to the Salesian community in Battersea about eighteen months ago. Last year, I went back to St Mary's

Strawberry Hill for a Masters in Pastoral Theology. To complement this study, I also went to Allen Hall, the diocesan seminary for Southwark, where I attended lectures in Pastoral Theology, Liturgy and Homiletics.

Last summer I was invited to apply for perpetual vows, which I took in early September. I was then ordained a deacon shortly afterwards. I have been exercising my ministry as a deacon in the Salesian parish, Sacred Heart Battersea, on a daily basis, by proclaiming the Gospel at weekday Masses and assisting the parish priest, Fr Christopher Heaps at the Eucharist. I have also preached at Sunday Masses and I have visited the residents of a care home, so that they may receive Holy Communion and a blessing on a regular basis. I have also been a First Holy Communion catechist and played an active role in the Battersea choir as a musician and singer. I hoped to be ordained priest in July.

Throughout my long journey, I have found support in likely and unlikely places, in likely and unlikely people. There have been times that have been difficult, but in the words of St Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians, we are never without a friend and I have been honoured to have met many good and fine people and made great friends along the way. I have met many people who were role models as Christians for me, and I hope that I have given as much as I have received from all the good people around me.

**If you think you know someone who might be called to live out their Christian life as a priest or religious, then it might be worth plucking up the courage and dropping a suggestion. I know a priest who first thought about being a priest only when someone broached the subject with him. If you have considered, or are reconsidering life as a priest or religious, then take the opportunity to find out more. Finally, in addition to the Salesians who have made me feel welcome, I would also like to thank my family, who have supported my decision and vocation.**

**Marco Villani SDB**





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