



THE MAGAZINE FOR THE SALESIAN FAMILY

DON BOSCO TODAY

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YOUNG PEOPLE TODAY



Editorial

Dear Friends

On October 1st this year, the Rector Major of the Salesians, Fr Pascual Chávez spoke to the 21 Salesians, 8 Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and 18 lay people who were departing as missionaries to various parts of the world. He said,

This, my dear missionaries, is the wonderful task you are being given: to collaborate in making the world more human through the power of the Gospel, capable of converting peoples' minds and hearts and changing society. Nowadays all evangelisation takes place in the setting of a culture that is secular, multimedia, post-ideological, and highly subjective.

Speaking about a new Youth Ministry, Fr Chávez also said, *Today young people are mission territory.*

This edition of *Don Bosco Today* reflects that reality – young people changing society by their generosity and young people being changed by other young people. Our first article is about generous sixth-formers who decided to spend time in Tanzania; a decision involving over a year's work of preparation to raise the money to make the trip possible. However, they were richly rewarded and their understanding of the needs of other young people has changed their lives. I hope that by reading this magazine you will be encouraged by the goodness and generosity of young people.

Reports from Sri Lanka and Colombia remind us that so many young people today are suffering the ravages of war, and we are proud to tell of the support offered by the Salesian Family.

The article on *Chaplaincy* makes us aware of the importance of nourishing the spiritual qualities of young people, encouraging the whole community towards a sense of justice and peace. The project offering a different kind of Christmas present is an opportunity to support the missionary work of young people in the mission territory of our own country.

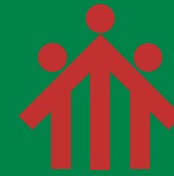
I have included an article on *Prayer* by Kathleen Pearce, the author of many of our children's books, because I have become more than ever aware of the great love we show one another when we wrap them in our prayers.



Anthony Bailey SDB
Editor

Email: a.bailey@salesians.org.uk

Finally – a word of sincere gratitude to all who support our Salesian work by their generous donations. We do try to acknowledge by letter every donation but I am conscious that many people keep our works going by standing orders and we need to thank them too for their continued support.



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Today you watch - tomorrow you teach

On the 21st of July thirteen of us travelled to Africa with ideas of making a difference, and enjoying ourselves a little on the way, I don't think any of us realised just how much impact the Tanzanian people and culture would change us.

We met at Manchester Airport, happy, excited and even a little apprehensive – but perhaps that was just the idea of the 31 hour journey from Manchester to our final destination of Moshi. On the seven-hour bus journey from Nairobi to Moshi we saw the first of many challenging and shocking sights. Driving through small towns and plains of barren land on heavily pot-holed roads was difficult. The most rural of areas appeared to be the most poverty-stricken and it was very difficult to witness it. It felt unreal, as if the windows we were looking through were TV screens, displaying a plea for donations to aid these poor people. However the most difficult and uncomfortable aspect of the journey was not the bumpy roads on a bus with questionable suspension, but the Kenya-Tanzania border. We all had to leave the safety of our bus and step out to have our passports and visas checked. As soon as we had left the bus we were mobbed by Massai women trying to sell us bracelets, necklaces and African tribal masks. We would become accustomed to this by the end of the trip, we even enjoyed haggling and talking with the street sellers, but on this first encounter we felt intimidated and scared not really knowing what to do and feeling guilty when saying, *No*.

When we finally arrived at what was to be our home for the next three weeks, we were welcomed by Fr Brian Jerstice, an English Salesian who has spent many years in Africa. We were introduced to the many local people who were helping to put the finishing touches to our house. We were expecting a shack with no

electricity, but found a house with electricity, hot water, furniture and food. It was amazing, especially when compared to the house next door, which was a shack, with no windows or doors, no electricity and one tap. The family who lived there could be seen cooking their food on an open fire in front of the house. It was a very sad but heart-warming, as these are possibly the poorest people any of us had ever met, but also some of the happiest. It made us feel so grateful for what we have, and now we're back we are more conscious of what we use and how much we waste.

Jordanna, Laura, Sean P, James and Jackie worked in the Moshi Airport Primary School. They had the earliest starts of all of us, having to be present for parade at 7:30am each morning. By British standards, this is early, but not in Tanzania. Each morning we were wakened at 4am by the call to prayer from the local mosque and the sounds of life and people leaving for work. Moshi Airport School had both boarding and day students, who were often local children from the areas surrounding Soweto. We all thought that we would be teaching assistants, helping in the school wherever we were needed. It soon became clear that we would be teaching in both the Primary and the Secondary schools. *Today you watch, tomorrow you teach* was very much the motto.

Working in the primary school was very rewarding. The children were enthusiastic and willing to learn, were always well behaved and respectful towards us. We were teaching English, using many different methods, but singing songs and nursery rhymes often made it easier and the children loved it. One of the best aspects of the primary school was the close contact with the children. At break and lunchtimes, the children mauled us; they were fascinated by our hair, and they had never seen freckles. It was a strange sensation to have at least ten children stroking you and playing with your hair as if you were a Barbie doll. We had taken a lot of sports equipment with us, and to see the joy on the children's faces when we played catch with a simple tennis ball was worth travelling miles to see!

Ann-Marie, Sean W, Helen, Nick and Fr Martin worked in Bendel Memorial Secondary School. In contrast to Moshi Airport School, Bendel had only boarding students, many of whom came from Dar Es Salaam. The students were not allowed to leave the site of the school at all, unless they were ill. The school is still under construction, so the students are living on a building site! The dining hall was finished whilst we were there and so the pupils no longer had to take their meals in the classrooms.

Those of us at the Secondary school taught Chemistry, Biology, Maths, Physics and English to class sizes of 35-40 pupils who ranged in age from 12-17. A challenging feat for anyone! It was a difficult and scary prospect having to talk clearly to a class but after the first lesson we became more comfortable and began to enjoy it. The pupils at Bendel were similar in many ways to Thornleigh, our school in Bolton. If strangers were to come to teach us, the majority of pupils would be slow to go up and talk to them, which is exactly what we found when we went to Bendel. Once we had broken down the barriers, and starting talking to them, there was no stopping them. Every child we spoke to asked us the same questions – *What's it like in England? What's your school like?* They were as fascinated by our culture and us as we were by them and their culture.

Diarmuid and Megan worked in St Joseph's Hospital. We expected to find a small, poorly funded clinic with only one room and squeezed to the brim with beds. We were astounded to discover a small hospital, with a 30-bed capacity, a 5-doctor clinic and a fully functioning theatre! St. Joseph's is run by the Sisters of Our Lady of Kilimanjaro. Some of the nuns are formidable especially Sister Leocardia, who was our mentor whilst we were volunteering at the hospital. One of our daily tasks was to make the patients' beds. It was amazing how welcoming and friendly the patients were. When we entered a ward all the patients would greet us, at least with just a smile, as often this was all they could do as they were suffering, most commonly from malaria. We came with very little clinical experience, (Diarmuid is a first year medical student and Megan is a prospective medical student) but Sister Leocardia had clear ideas, showing a similar principle as the schools, *Today you watch, tomorrow you do, then the next day you teach another*. It was very scary! We were taught how to inject patients through their IV – the first time Diarmuid did this procedure he made his patient vomit (a side effect of the medication apparently). It was the scariest thing

to do, but by the end of the placement we were getting the hang of it, and so sorry to leave. As a final day *treat*, we were given the opportunity to observe a full surgery to correct a young man's severe acid reflux (severe heartburn). We had to dress in scrubs and couldn't touch anything to ensure a sterile environment – it was fascinating, but not for the faint hearted. The best thing about working in the clinic wasn't the medical side of things but the personal contact with the patients. We were able to talk to the patients, some of whom could speak a little English, and they taught us some Swahili so that we could talk to the other patients. From tiny babies to the elderly everyone was happy we were there, and we were always greeted with *Jambo, Karibu* meaning *Hello, you are welcome* in Swahili.

It wasn't just in the hospital where we experienced this friendliness. Everywhere we went in Moshi, everyone greeted us with warmth. When we walked along the roads to school, everyone we passed would greet us. It was fantastic. When we walked back to the house from our placements and turned the corner, the local children would run towards us to say *Hello* and walk with us holding hands or be carried on our shoulders. It was heart-warming. It was these street children who had the most effect upon us. They had very few clothes and no shoes, but they were the happiest people we had ever met. The joy on their faces when we'd go out with a football and play for even ten minutes was incredible. It's made us all much more grateful for everything that we have and want for a little less.

We would just like to express our thanks to all who contributed towards this trip, both through donations and moral support. Thanks to this generosity, we were able to donate £1750 to the Moshi Airport School and the same amount to the Bendel Memorial School, and £1000 to St Joseph's Hospital and £1000 to a street project in Nairobi.

Megan Russell



The Story of Chaplaincy

The story of chaplaincy begins at the gate to the city of Amiens in the year 337. A young soldier in the Roman army was walking into the city during a bitterly cold winter. The crowds were hurrying past a half-naked beggar who was close to death. Martin, unpaid and having only his military uniform, stopped and looked at the man who looked back at him expectantly with hand outstretched. After a slight hesitation, Martin took out his sword and then removed his cloak and sliced it through the middle giving half to the man and using the other half to cover himself again.

Some bystanders laughed at him and the ridiculous way he looked, wearing only half a cloak, but other bystanders felt ashamed that this poor soldier had helped from his poverty and made a difference whilst they, with money in their pockets, had ignored the beggar completely, and they walked away challenged by Martin's actions.



Picture of Saint Martin from the book *101 Saints and Special People*. (Don Bosco Publications)

Later that night Martin dreamed he saw a vision of Christ himself wearing the half cloak and saying to others, *Look at the cloak that Martin gave me today*. The dream so affected Martin that he tried to leave the army, and in 339 he was released into civilian life. From there he went on to work for the poor and increase awareness of the presence of God in ordinary people. He created a number of communities and became a church leader; dying at Tours in 397.

His cloak, or half-a-cloak, became a precious object in military and royal circles. It became a spiritual symbol for the whole community. The cloak was used when taking oaths and was carried into battle and came to symbolise all that was best in humanity, a symbol of the spiritual dignity of each person and a powerful reminder of the need to seek God in ordinary things. The cloak was called a *capella* (a cape). It was kept in a tent or in a building that came to be called a *capela* or *chapel*. The person assigned to look after this sacred relic was called the *capellano* or *chaplain*. The chaplain would control access to the sacred symbol and organise prayers and ceremonies for the community to celebrate the spirituality it signified. These were the first people to be called chaplains. They began firstly in the army, then in royal courts, later in hospitals and more recently in education.

The story highlights some key features of chaplaincy:

1. It was inspired by a layperson's act of listening and serving the needy.
2. It is based around the God-given dignity of each person in the community.
3. It is a form of service that challenges others to think about their own lives.
4. It involves safeguarding and celebrating the spiritual treasures of a community.
5. It is a ministry rooted in prayer and reflection on Jesus and the Gospels.

St Martin of Tours' symbolic act casts a long shadow across Church history reaching the second Vatican Council and our own multi-cultural world here in England and Wales. It touches all forms of chaplaincy in health, military and educational settings and points to the unique combination of religion, reflection and service focussed on a specific group's needs at a particular time and place.

These five dimensions represent an insight into chaplaincy that is rooted in the tradition and experience of the Catholic community. Before moving on to more recognisable and current descriptions of the role it is helpful to explore the more intuitive approach that this story teaches us.

1. Listening and Serving

Martin shared the same experience as other people on the road into Amiens that winter. He acted differently because he heard the cry of the poor man and took the time to stop. He engaged with a personal need and responded as best he could from his own resources. The story reminds us that chaplains have to stop and listen. That means listening to pupils and staff left out in the cold, *wasting time* with people on corridors and in staff rooms and recognising needs even when unspoken. The story reminds us that chaplains need to put their personal gifts at the service of the most needy.

2. Recognising an individual's dignity

The story tells us that the beggar at the gate was Christ himself and that whatever we do for the least of our brothers and sisters we do for Jesus. This rather pious observation takes the ordinary pastoral care for people into an almost mystical encounter with God especially in the struggling members of a school community. The chaplain's role is to keep reminding the school community that the trouble-maker, the time-watching teacher and the truant are all children of God. How we treat them will be the litmus test of whether we are living the Gospel as a school community.

3. A form of service that challenges others

Martin took action in public in a way that divided opinion. From one act he gained both ridicule and respect and he made others think. This conscious action in public is a major strategy in chaplaincy in

school. To influence a large community it is not enough to appear only in church or prayer settings. A chaplain has to design actions that animate the whole community towards justice and peace. Those actions may be suitable for certain groups but their impact should be school-wide. A chaplain who is always passive and waits for others to come to them is missing this prophetic dimension to the role.

4. A task of safeguarding and celebrating spiritual treasures

The chaplain's task was originally to guard and celebrate the sacred symbols of the court, the army or the community. In school chaplaincy, the role is exactly the same. Ensuring that the gospels, the sacraments and the traditions of the Christian community are respected, revered and absorbed into practice, is part of this ministry. At one level this means ensuring that prayer, liturgy and sacraments are well prepared, symbols of faith are displayed and given due honour. It also means building bridges between those of different faith and no faith so that these treasures can be embraced as far as possible by the whole community of the school.

5. A role rooted in prayer and reflection on Jesus and the Gospel

Martin walked through the gate at Amiens and heard God speak in a beggar. He could not have heard if he had not been listening and immersed in the presence of God himself. The chaplain, in order to fulfil the role must also be prayer-centred and have part of their life and timetable focussed on stillness and scripture. There is a spiritual asceticism about the chaplain's role that will always elude job descriptions. It will be the chaplain's task to live a prayerful and disciplined spiritual life. The effects of that inner work will emerge in holiness and wisdom certainly but also in a prophetic zeal that may at times disturb the assumptions of others in the school community.

David O'Malley SDB

David is presently writing a book on Chaplaincy to be published by Don Bosco Publications

Chaplaincy Website

www.salesians.org.uk/chap/

The Power of Prayer

On 15th December 2006 my husband and I celebrated 50 years since the day we first met. At lunchtime we visited an Italian restaurant and toasted each other with a glass of wine. We reflected on the past 50 years and looked forward to the future and spending Christmas day in London with our son Matthew, Louise his wife and our new grandson.

That evening my other son, Antony, who now lives in New Zealand phoned with the devastating news that his nineteen-month-old daughter Maddie had been diagnosed with cancer. We were heartbroken, our little granddaughter we had never seen, was seriously ill and our son and his family were thousands of miles away. There was nothing we could do, we felt so helpless. We spent a sleepless night talking, crying and praying.

During the days that followed we felt very low, unable to concentrate and very tearful. We wanted news from New Zealand but were afraid to phone. When our children were small we could care for them and comfort them, try to take away their pain but now our son was 12000 miles away and suffering, we could not put our arms around him. Our immediate thought was to go to him, but my health prevented me from making such a long journey and we thought our presence might add to their worries. We prayed for guidance, we wanted to do the right thing.

As news of Maddie's condition spread, we received so many promises of prayers, not only family and friends but schools, parishes and prayer groups. Prayers were



also offered in many parts of the world including Bethlehem on Christmas Day, an Evangelical preacher on New Zealand Television and a man on Death Row in America.

Gradually our feelings of helplessness and sorrow passed. Prayer had given us a sense of strength and comfort and an inner calm. By the end of February, Maddie had completed her chemotherapy treatment and had the tumour and one of her kidneys removed. The prognosis was good. We still desperately wanted to go to New Zealand, to be with them. After many weeks of prayer, and with assurances from my GP, we finally we made the journey. Seeing Maddie for the first time, albeit in a hospital bed, was wonderful, and we spent several very happy weeks in March with my son and his wife, with Maddie and her four-year-old sister Beth. Just before we left New Zealand, we learned that Maddie now had a secondary cancer and would need more aggressive chemotherapy.

During the months that followed, we continued to pray and my thoughts turned to the power of prayer, and the change I had gone through. I thought about the panic and helplessness I had felt on first hearing the news. I had made the journey to New Zealand but I had also made a journey within myself. I now had an inner calm and my son and his wife seemed to have a new strength, a new confidence in the future of their little family. Perhaps this is what prayer does. For reasons we do not understand, it does not cure all ills, it does not make pain go away, but envelops us in God's love, we can feel His arms around us, caring for us, supporting us. This gives us lucid moments in times of turmoil, comfort in our distress and sometimes acceptance of circumstances beyond our control.

My family always teases me about what they refer to as *Mum's Prayer List* and how it seems to get longer and longer. There is always someone who needs prayers. Now when someone asks for my prayers I think more carefully about the person and reflect on their particular needs. My experience of the past months, when we have felt such support from the knowledge that so many people have been praying for our family, has given me a new understanding of the power of prayer. I now believe our prayers help not only the individual but also those who love them.

Maddie is making good progress. She is now two years old and on 4th July test results showed there was now no trace of the cancer. We thank God for answering our prayers and will be forever grateful to those who prayed for our little granddaughter.

Kathleen Pearce

The Bear Facts

Hello Children



We all know how an elephant gets down from a tree don't we? It sits on a leaf and waits till Autumn! Well here we are again at my favourite time of the year. It's not too hot, it's not too cold, it's just right (where did I hear that

before?). It looks beautiful in our forest as the leaves change colour from green to gold to brown.

Two things I like to do in Autumn are collect conkers (there are thousands of them in our forest and Rio is our conker champion) and go to a bonfire: there's lots and lots of wood around here and we have a great time!



In this Autumn and Winter Magazine I want to tell you the story of the fun run that I, and my friends did to raise money for charity. It was a good job we were running because it was a bit nippy outside but we really enjoyed ourselves even though I hurt my foot again.



I think it's time I told you a bit more about myself and my friends. I'm 7 years old like Rio. Molly is 8 and Suzi is 6. I've got a lot of hobbies like doing magic tricks, playing football and swimming. My Mum and Dad come from Italy which is why I have an Italian name Bosco. They come from a city called Turin which has a famous football team called Juventus, the team I support. I bet you can guess which team Rio supports because he always wears a red shirt and some white shorts. Molly likes Newcastle because they wear black and white so she says they look like her!

Bosco Bear





Friday:

“Hi,” said Rio Rabbit.

“Hi,” said Suzi Squirrel.

“Are you ready for the fun run tomorrow?” asked Rio.

“Not really,” said Suzi. “How far do we have to run?”

Only 2 kilometres,” said Rio. “Twice around the forest.”

Suzi sat down for a rest.

Bosco Bear and his friends had planned a fun run to raise money for lots of charities like the Salesian Missions.

Saturday:

Lots and lots of animals were at the start line. Bosco was jogging on the spot warming up and doing stretches. Rio had bought some new trainers to look cool. Molly was telling Suzi she’d be alright.

Peter Kay’s song “I would walk 500 miles” was playing on a karaoke machine. There was face-painting, a bouncy castle, a roundabout and everyone was excited and a bit nervous. All the runners had to wear fancy dress. Bosco was in a chicken suit; Suzi was a ballet dancer, Rio a spaceman and Molly a footballer. There goes a Meat Pie talking to a Banana!

Fun Run

The crowd went quiet: everyone got ready;

5.....4.....3.....2.....1 They’re off!

“Don’t go too fast at the start,” shouted one of Bosco’s friends Kate Cat; “then it’ll be purrfect!” “Don’t worry, I won’t,” gasped Suzi. Bosco and Rio were running together. Down the hill; along by the River Snake, through Darkwood Forest past Lake Glass and round again.

Suddenly Bosco stopped; “Blethering Blisters,” he yelled. “My foot’s hurting again.” Poor old Bosco. It was supposed to be a fun run but it wasn’t much fun and Bosco couldn’t run very well.

The other runners were sprinting now. There was 100 metres to go to the finish. Who would win? Rio was ahead by a metre.... Hannah Hare was finishing like a train....Hannah.... Rio..... here comes Graham Greyhound..... And then there was a sudden gust of wind and Molly Magpie whizzed past everyone and WON! WOOOO! Well done Molly!

As well as a great race and loads of fun, a lot of money was raised for charity and even Bosco smiled as he put a plaster on his sore foot.



Charity

Charity is where people help other people. Sometimes it's to help people who are very ill: there is a hospice near our forest for very poorly people. TV programmes like Children in Need help raise money. Concerts are held to get money for starving people in Africa: people who don't have anywhere to live need help as well.



A fun run is a good idea because the people who take part in the run are given money by their friends for doing the run and then they give the money to charities. They also have FUN doing it.

But you can show charity to people all the time. Have you ever thought you'd like to help someone else? Someone falls at school and you help them get up; that is charity. Someone is carrying something heavy and you help them: someone is upset and crying and you talk to them and give them a hug. Jesus said, **"THE MOST IMPORTANT THING OF ALL IS TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER"**.

So everyone can give charity to other people. It doesn't matter how old you are and it always feels really good to do it. And do you know that if you help other people, they will help you?

Words in Words

How many words of 3 or more letters can you find in the word BOSCOBEAR?
e.g. scare and car

We think 30 would be good and 40 would be very good. The most we could find was 48. Can you beat that? There will be a book prize for the word champion!

Send your entries on the form below to: Don Bosco Publications, Thornleigh House, Sharples Park, Bolton. BL1 6PQ Or email michael@salesians.org.uk

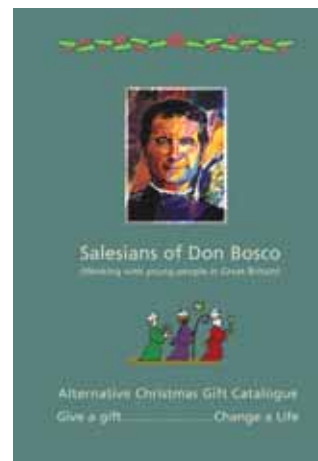
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A new kind of Christmas gift – Invest in the Young



In recent years, many of us have increasingly become concerned about the behaviour of some of our young people. Many neighbourhoods experience what is reported in the press as anti-social behaviour. Don Bosco believed that young people are precious though vulnerable members of society and that no young person can be excluded from our hope and our concern.

However, as citizens we may be, at times, saddened by the number of young people who demonstrate their frustrations and hopelessness through destructive and often threatening behaviour. However those who work with youth know that a real cause for celebration is the thousands of responsible, caring young people in our society who rarely reach the front pages of the press.

We are very aware of the need to continue and where possible expand on our work with young people. For this, we need your help. We are committed to providing opportunities through our Salesian network for young people to develop respect for themselves, others and their communities in caring, Christian environments. The Salesian network consists of over a thousand adults working face to face with young people in all parts of the UK from Glasgow to Cornwall. We have a residential centre and a growing number of youth groups, service groups and youth clubs as well as a network of youth chaplaincies. Six secondary schools are linked to this network. There are 11 parish communities committed to Salesian youth work and a growing number of volunteers who dedicate themselves year by year to the service of youth. All of them work to build a sense of community and spirituality in the young.

Not everyone has a vocation to work with young people. They can often appear difficult, sometimes almost impossible to communicate with - but everyone can play a part through supporting our work with prayers and financially. For many years you may have given generously to support our missions abroad. We now also urgently require your help to support and develop our work with young people in Great Britain.

This year, for the first time, our volunteers have produced an alternative Christmas gift catalogue. You will receive a copy of the catalogue through the post. The pages of this catalogue describe some of the youth work we are involved with that require your support to continue and expand. This Christmas, instead of buying material gifts, we ask you instead to consider sponsoring one of the activities listed in our catalogue in the name of a friend or family member. Sponsorship opportunities range from £5 donations towards youth club equipment or materials for sacramental programmes to larger contributions towards training youth workers or contributing to the salaries of our school chaplains. In return, for each act of sponsorship you make we will give you a Christmas card describing the sponsorship gift and the impact it will make. We are sure your friends or relatives will appreciate this different kind of Christmas gift and feel that they are helping young people in a practical way. You will receive the cards in time to distribute them to your family and friends for Christmas.

As this project is being run by volunteers, we ask that you send in your orders by the 8th December in order for us to send out your gift cards promptly.

Please pray for the success of our project.

For further details co write to
Salesian Sponsorship Appeal, Salesian Provincial Office, Thornleigh, Sharples Park, Bolton BL1 6PQ

Sri Lanka – Offering Hope to Child Soldiers

The number of child soldiers recruited by *The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)* the rebel group of the Tamil Tigers in the north of Sri Lanka continues to grow, according to reports by the Asianews Agency.

The use of child soldiers is a plague that has afflicted Sri Lanka for years, in the course of a civil war that has dragged on for over twenty years and seen government forces opposed by Tamil rebel separatists. The tragic nature of the situation can also be seen from the falling number of children at school. Many children don't go to school to avoid leaving their homes and falling into the hands of the rebel army.

According to the United Nations Children's Agency (UNICEF) data, since the signing of the cease-fire in 2002, more than 5000 children have been drawn into the ranks of the Tiger soldiers, but the actual number could be far higher given that it is difficult to reach remote zones where many camps are based. The average age of these young recruits is sixteen; about 40% are girls.

On the 19th June 2007, UNICEF, welcomed the release of 135 child soldiers by the Tamil Tigers, but said it was concerned that many more still remained with the rebels. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam said that it had discharged the group of boys and girls under 17 years of age over the past six months, and pledged to rid its ranks of all children under 18, by the end of the year. The Liberation Tigers said it hoped the work done by its Child Protection Authority will convince people of their determination to bring the minimum age of recruitment up to international standards by the end of 2007. Gordon Weiss, the UNICEF spokesman, declared,

“We welcome the LTTE commitment to release the children but we also note they still have many more children in their ranks. Till all the underage children

are released, the LTTE will not be in accordance with international standards.”

The Salesian missions in Sri Lanka date from the late 80s, when a rehabilitation centre was opened in Colombo. At first, it catered for child victims of paedophilia and children at risk who were taken off the streets. In recent years, at the request of the government, the Salesians have begun looking after child soldiers. Various centres were opened for this purpose throughout the country and the young people, completely rehabilitated now number a score or so. These are adolescents over sixteen years of age now, but recruited as soldiers when they were as young as ten. The youngsters cared for in the Salesian centres learn a trade, to enable them to take their rightful place, and live a *normal* life.

However, it is very hard work. Many youngsters fail to finish the recovery programme and are forced to return to the army in order to protect their families who would otherwise be victims of reprisals by the rebels. The only way for them to escape from this situation is to move to another part of the country, which in itself is often very difficult.

The Salesians not only welcome the children who suffer as soldiers, but open their doors to the many families caught up in the conflict. Recently more than 4500 civilians were forced to flee the Musali division in Mannaar district when the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) moved into that area. Ninety-nine families were allowed to take refuge in the Don Bosco Technical College. The auto shop at the Don Bosco Technical centre is



state of the art. The tools are new and the staff dedicated. The diagnostic testing equipment is as good as you will find anywhere in the world. The Salesians are keen to give troubled young men a second chance at life. One boy, now eighteen years old, had fought for the Tamil Tigers from the age of sixteen. He says he fears for his family,

“My mother and the rest of my family are experiencing difficulties following my capture. I am studying auto mechanics and living here now, because if I return to my house I'll face a lot of trouble from the Tigers.”

The young man says he feels fortunate he is alive and healthy. Sitting next to him is another young man also eighteen and too scared to give his name, who is not so fortunate. He began fighting for the Tamil Tigers at the age of thirteen. Wounded badly in the shoulder when he was captured at the age of sixteen, he cannot learn auto mechanics; instead he studies printing and says he feels bitter that he had to fight when other children could go to school.

“When I see schoolchildren I feel sad, If I had been able to study like that I could have a good position in life.”

The boy soldiers, at Don Bosco Technical Centre, say they joined the Tamil Tigers voluntarily after older boys who had joined the guerrilla organisation staged presentations and films that glorified life as a Tiger fighter. It was a decision they say they soon regretted when faced with the realities of life as a child soldier. Forced marches, frequent beatings for minor infringements of camp discipline and terrifying combat against heavily armed government troops replaced school and family life.

Fr Felix, who is the director of the Don Bosco Technical Centre, says when the Tamil Tiger boys first arrived at Don Bosco they were difficult to handle,

“When they first came they were really wild and really arrogant. They were not willing to accept anything we said. But slowly we won their hearts, and now they are just like other boys, they are really receptive. In times to come I feel they might even be better than the other boys - we treat all of our boys equally but we do give these fellows some special treatment because they deserve and need our special attention.”

Fr Felix says months of patient work with the former Tamil Tiger soldiers are now beginning to show results. He says the boys are learning new skills and have adapted well to their new surroundings. Still, he says, there are bad days.

“They feel very sad sometimes because they see the parents of other children the brothers and sisters of other children when they come to visit and eat together then they feel sad because they have nobody, all they have are us. I do not think their wounds can be completely healed, those scars will remain forever. But we try our level best, as Salesians of Don Bosco, to be kind and loving to these boys.”

The boys, who used to fight for the Tamil Tigers, say their biggest surprise upon coming to Don Bosco was being accepted by their Sinhalese peers. Sri Lanka is more and more a divided country, fewer and fewer Tamils and Sinhalese speak each other's language. Don Bosco teaches a lesson of reconciliation that the rest of Sri Lanka should follow.

Sister Carmen Elena Mejia FMA

Sister Carmen Elena is a member of the El Tarra community in Colombia and belongs to the province of Mary Help of Christians (CMA), Medellín. However, she works in Tibù, with the Salesian bishop, Camilo Castrellón in the youth and vocations ministry.

Four years ago my provincial asked me to go to Catatumbo Colombiano, a region rich in natural beauty but one where the people are very poor because they live in the midst of armed conflict. My main responsibility is for the vocational ministry throughout the diocese. I work in the bishop's house in Tibù, and because the area is very dangerous, I cannot be with my own community very often.

I travel around the diocese working with the young. We contact representatives from the last year of high school from all the schools in the diocese and work with them, doing student formation. Then we meet with the youth groups from all the parishes of the diocese, and spend time with those young people who are thinking of entering the seminary. Finally, we work with those who could become mentors of other young people.

There are many young people in the diocese, however the work is very difficult. One year we could have a group of 40-50 young people and the following year there might be only two of that group left. Some families move away because of the violence, taking their sons to other places to avoid them being recruited into the rebel groups. Others go to work in the coca plantations, gathering the coca leaves to support their poor families.

The young people are about 20 years of age. Many do not know how to read or write. They are young people without a future, without hope and they do not know where to go. The diocese has many projects for poor

people; the bishop gives priority to the young and the poor. In his diocese there is only one main purpose: *To walk with the people in the style of Jesus, the Good Shepherd.* The bishop is a Salesian. The people are very good and sensitive, they have suffered much; you can see the suffering on their faces.

My most difficult moment with the young people was when a little village asked me to hold a meeting with their youth group. The young people had come to Tibù so that they could get to know the city. I had prepared well for the meeting, but when I met them I became aware of the fact that they did not know how to read or write. At that point, I said to myself, *What do I do now?* I spent the whole night thinking about how to use the material I had prepared for them. I could not give them an outline; they could not read, they could not write. But I had to recognise the fact that God had given me the gift of being creative. We set to work with clay and paper. I asked them to make a map of their little villages. They were divided according to where they came from and each group had to construct a map showing the rivers, the houses, the roads, etc. Then with a few symbols, they had to illustrate the population. For example, they marked with triangles the number of families, with circles how many young people were studying, with squares how many children were working, all by symbols but no words. Each group then presented their findings to the others. The final experience was very beautiful. With these maps, they were able to share the situation of their villages and what they could do for the other young people of their village.

Sadly, not all the pastors in the parishes have been trained to minister to young people and therefore these are not always followed up with energy. For this reason, when John Paul II named Camilo Castrellón, a Salesian, to be bishop, he said to him: *I entrust the young people to you, so that you can work with them.* I cannot always go to the parishes because they are very far apart. The bishop is focussing much of his time on the formation of priests. During the summer and winter holidays, we always have 3-4 day meetings of formation for youth ministry.

The Sisters of the community at El Tarra work very much with the people. They mainly occupy themselves with catechesis and with the formation of catechists. They visit the villages and help the priests in sacramental preparation. Furthermore, they work with the children who live in the countryside in a campaign to help them to learn to read and write. They collaborate with the project called; *Let us transform ourselves*, designed for young people who have not been able to study. We are four very happy Sisters. When we get together, we have so much to talk about.

I am very happy. I do not think I have a missionary vocation, but what I am doing I do joyfully because the people are very poor and are in great need. What I value most is the opportunity to work with the bishop. He is a person with the greatest human qualities I have ever seen. He is 64 years old, a well-balanced man, always smiling and is at his desk only in the evening when he returns home. During the day, he is always with his people. The poor stand in long lines to speak with him, to tell him everything, to talk of their problems, to ask for help, advice, and he is always there for them. The conflict has lasted for more than 40 years. Some groups have laid down their arms, but other more violent groups are starting up. The people live in fear, and even the young people are afraid. It is difficult for them to speak; only after a long time will they begin to tell you something. They have lived in very violent times. Their parents have always told them to keep quiet, not to say anything because of the fear of being killed. For this reason, it is difficult to get to know them. The bishop is a member of the peace commission, in dialogue with the armed groups, and he is optimistic that the conflict will be resolved, but the journey is long.

29/9/2007 – Colombia



Fr Hugh Douglas SDB 1919 – 2007



Hughie was born in Bolton and attended Thornleigh Salesian College. He was professed as a Salesian in 1937 and ordained in 1947. He began his teaching as a Brother in Chertsey, then spent two years teaching in Burwash, Sussex. He managed to obtain a degree during his teaching years; Geography was his lasting love, he was a fellow of the Royal Society of Geographers.

Hughie was a priest who taught in schools for more years than most Salesians. A man who for 17 years cycled each morning before school over Battersea Bridge, to say Mass for the Spanish Sisters in Rowland Gardens, would come back to school and check his rainfall gauge before going to teach.

One of his pupils at Battersea in the 50s wrote, We grieve for him, but give deep thanks for the life of a true Christian gentleman, He was a popular and well-regarded Salesian, held in great affection by many.

Hugh's life is clearly divided into teaching, serving, and suffering. He taught for over 40 years, served the Thornleigh community as bursar for 17 years and suffered retirement for 5 years. Hughie was always justifiably most proud of his long years of teaching, real Salesian work for which the province is most appreciative.

I think his 17 years serving his community as bursar, were a tribute to him. The sad time for Hughie came when he had to accept retirement from being bursar. While many people look forward to retirement, he dreaded the thought of it. It is tempting to gloss over these last few years, but I feel we need to recognise them, for in a strange way for him they were very significant in his life. Hughie's life had been defined by activity, by his job. He now had to enter into a phase of passivity.

This last phase of waiting or suffering is no reflection on the quality of care he received both in St Joseph's and towards the end in the Willows Nursing Home. We all know how wonderfully well he was looked after. We easily recognise our role as *fellow workers with God*, perhaps this understanding of our role needs to be balanced by the perception of our role as *fellow sufferers with God*. Christ's passion set the pattern. I feel that Hughie's last lesson for us is to recognise this role in our lives.

The evening before the funeral Fr Carette made this observation, "I have the happiest of memories of bringing Hughie Holy Communion just a fortnight ago. As always, we would say, *How are you?* He would give that distinctive loud reply. *I'm fine! I'm absolutely fine!* Of course, he was not fine but he was courteous enough not to show his pain, not to inflict his pain on us."

So, when Hughie pushed open the half-closed door of eternity and said: *Dad, here I am, I'm home!* I am sure the Lord himself said, *Hughie, now you are fine! Absolutely fine! Come along now and enjoy that place I have prepared for you.*

Fr Tony Bailey SDB

Sister Clelia Ferrari FMA 1925 - 2007

Clelia was the youngest of six children, her parents were Italian and started a business in London. Her mother was pleased when the Salesian Sisters came into their parish. Clelia always spoke with great affection for the Sisters she had known as a child, and it was certainly through the influence of their example, that her own vocation became so clear to her.

Clelia was accepted as a novice in 1952, and was sent to make her novitiate in Italy. She spent a further two years in Turin as a student where she became proficient in Italian, and made good use of this skill throughout her life.

Returning in 1956, she trained as a secondary school teacher, specialising in commercial subjects. She taught in St Thomas' school in Chertsey for a number of years. In 1965 she was sent to Liverpool with a group of Salesian Sisters, to open a new secondary school for girls. She taught commercial and secretarial skills and became deputy head of the school.

It was in the early seventies that cancer made its first appearance in her life. She faced the possibility of her own death when she underwent that first operation, but she recovered well. With great strength of character, she refused to let death frighten her again. She continued her work in school until 1982. She spent one year working with the SDB community in their Pastoral Centre but she really missed community life with her own Sisters. She had a sabbatical year in Maynooth and then continued to teach in Chertsey two days each week, in spite of having been given *early retirement* on health grounds.

Clelia was appointed provincial secretary in 1985 and for the next eight years she put her planning and organising skills to good use. In 1993, she returned to the community in Rotherhithe. Here she found plenty to do and made use of her own skills wherever she could. She kept in touch with the past pupils from Liverpool, especially those from the earliest days of the school, she organised reunions and welcomed visits. She began a project that she called *Summer English* sending past pupils and other young women to teach English to groups of Italian students in summer camps run by the Sisters in Italy.

Her illness finally caught up with her, she knew she was soon to die, and was ready to go to God, however, with customary serenity and humour remarked that she was *in no great hurry*. She planned her own funeral down to the last details. She wanted organ music (not guitars!), she asked her parish priest to meet her close family for a meal, so that *they would not meet as strangers* at her funeral. She did the same for the Sister she asked to say a last few words about her at the funeral, even giving her some notes about her childhood memories that would be of comfort to her surviving brother and sister and their families.

Clelia was always a great talker and she continued to communicate to the end. In the days just before her death, she constantly expressed her gratitude for everything in her life. She knew she had been blessed in her family, and spoke about the love she experienced from early childhood. She was very proud of her Salesian vocation and was grateful for the blessings of belonging to the Salesian Family. She appreciated the love and care she received from her own community and from the staff in the hospital and also in the hospice where she died. We can easily imagine her telling God all about the goodness she experienced in her life.

Clelia was a colourful character and will be remembered with affection for her love of her vocation and the Congregation, for her immense courage in battling with the illness that pursued her for half of her life and for her sense of mission that continued almost to her last months. She specifically asked us to remember her alive and not dead and not to forget to pray for her. May she rest in peace.

Sister Kathleen Scullion FMA



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