

THE MAGAZINE FOR THE SALESIAN FAMILY

# DON BOSCO TODAY

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DON BOSCO

GOOD NEWS - GOOD BOOKS



# Editorial

## A Good Book *by Don Bosco*

*A good book can enter homes where no priest may ever go.  
Those in doubt will take it as a gift, or possibly a souvenir.  
There's no embarrassment in giving it, no obligation for anyone to read.  
When it's read, it calmly teaches truth. If ignored, there's no harm done,  
except possibly a lingering regret, which may, one day, spark a desire to  
know the truth which the book is always there to teach.  
At times the book may gather dust, lying on a table, or in a bookcase, for  
the moment just forgotten.  
Come a time, however, of loneliness, of sadness, of just sheer boredom,  
of anxiety about the future, of need for some escape, then this  
half-forgotten book casts off its dust, becomes a faithful friend,  
opens up some new horizons, perhaps, as in St Augustine's case, may  
even lead to conversion.  
A good book is polite with those afraid of it, for it speaks to them without a  
hint of any suspicion. With other people it becomes a friend indeed,  
ready to talk things over, to accompany them, anywhere at any time.  
In a family the recipient may never read it,  
but a son or daughter, or perhaps a friend,  
or a neighbour, might welcome it.  
In a village it may pass from hand to hand,  
befriend a hundred villagers or more.  
In a city, God alone knows the good a book produces.  
Borrowed from a library, bought in a bookshop, found at the side of a  
hospital bed, it becomes a welcome friend.*

I begin this editorial with these words written by Don Bosco, 120 years ago. Most people know that Don Bosco was a saint who devoted his life to the care of young people. However, he also devoted his life to the written word, to good books. He was a prolific publisher, an outstanding writer and a tireless printer.

Five years ago it was the example of Don Bosco which inspired us, in Don Bosco Publications, to promote our Salesian spirituality through good books. Providentially, at the same time, the Salesians in Germany invited Salesian publishers from Northern Europe to pool their resources, and work as a team in the production of books for young people. We went to the first meeting empty-handed, we were publishers who had published no books.

Five years later and thanks to the help from the Salesians in Germany and the encouragement of our Salesian Family, we have managed to produce over 20 titles. Some books such as *Rosie goes to Church* and *Trust the Road* have amazed us by their popularity. Other titles have sold slowly but consistently, answering, it seems, the needs of a niche market. Our loyal band of generous writers have helped us to realise the truth of Don Bosco's words, and we feel proud to have followed in his footsteps in a mission so dear to his heart.



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# Contents

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**PHOTOS**  
 ANS Rome

Philomena's Journey



4

Mongolia



6

Challenging Youth



8

World News

12

Don Bosco's Mother



14

Fr Patrick Kenna SDB



16

Fr James Conway SDB



18

Order Form

19

Booklist

20

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# Philomena's Journey

## World Youth Day 2005 Cologne



Where do I start with World Youth Day? I chose to go to Cologne because I wanted to meet other young Catholics. Initially I was apprehensive and unsure about what the whole event would entail. The very first meeting I attended at Salford Cathedral was rather overwhelming because I was the only person from my parish, but I was made to feel very much part of the group.

Once I had met a few people I had nothing to be concerned about as they were all very friendly and approachable. The first person I met before the meetings began was Theresa Davies, whom I have to thank because she encouraged me to go on this trip. Theresa is a credit to the Diocese, in her role as Youth Coordinator. She dedicated so much of her time and effort into making this trip a wonderful and enjoyable experience for all concerned. Another lady, whom I was introduced to, was Lorraine Leonard who gave continual support and encouragement throughout the trip. There was one other special lady called Sister Ethna whom I had never met until the day we travelled to Germany and I personally felt she enriched my faith with her sense of spirituality.

I have been a practising Catholic for 22 years and unfortunately numbers attending Mass have dropped, leaving very few young people in the church, and

the majority of the congregation being of the older generation. I felt that mixing with other young Catholics was a powerful way to enrich and strengthen my faith. It made me appreciate life a whole lot more, whilst showing gratitude for being part of the whole experience.

The trip began in Ahrweiler where we stayed with our allocated host families. Families from the parish of St Lawrence looked after us for one week. Alison who was studying at Salford University requested that I was her roommate whilst in Cologne. I was rather touched by this because she had only met me on a few occasions, yet she described me as a character full of charisma.

We stayed with Udo and Vera as our host family, and the hospitality they showed us was remarkable. We could not, have asked for a nicer couple. They gave us warm beds, woke us up in the morning, provided us with German breakfasts to give us a taste of their culture, as well as showing us a great evening when we came home from a long day of activities. Our trips included travelling to Trier, which is Germany's oldest city, with a majestic cathedral and one of the first churches to be built in the country. Whilst staying in Ahrweiler, the community gave us all the opportunity to be involved in a choice of activities including:

- Cleaning War Graves.
- Art and creative activities with local disadvantaged people.
- Carrying the Cross up a steep mountain through the vineyards which was intended to be a permanent memorial for the people of Ahrweiler.
- Dancing to a memorial song by a German singer, which was choreographed by the Ahrweilen people.

The Salford group also attended various Catecheses around the cities of Cologne and Bonn, where we celebrated our faith with other English-speaking nations. The local community provided various events including a musical picnic along the River Rhine and we also attended a religious musical called Rachel. We joined together with 60,000 other young people in Cologne's football stadium, where we celebrated the opening Mass of the World Youth Day.

The next part of our journey involved staying with another host family in the Diocese of Trier in preparation for another eventful week. We took part in more Masses, and social events. We watched the Pope arrive by boat, with thousands of people waiting in anticipation. The trip then culminated in the Vigil Mass in St Mary's Field. This was an extraordinarily moving and spiritual experience, with over a million young people of all nationalities gathered together to celebrate Mass with Pope Benedict XVI.

In society today it is a continual struggle for young people to express their faith. In Cologne there was time allocated for reflection, where many young people were given the opportunity to share how they felt about social, religious and emotional issues. This enabled every member of the group to open up and air any worries or concerns they had, regardless of whether they were small or big. Each member of the group formed closer relationships through reflection time, enabling us to all work together. There were often times that were busy and stressful with the sheer number of people around, but our faith kept us all strong. Our feet ached and we were tired, but as pilgrims we learnt to keep our spirits high and help one another to get through the tough times. I personally experienced some fantastic memories and made friends with priests, nuns and other young people. This trip has made me stronger in faith and I will cherish all the memories forever.

**Philomena Meagher**  
**Past Pupil of Thornleigh Salesian College, Bolton.**

# Mongolia

## *Salesians in the Land of the Nomads*

From ancient times, Mongols referred to their motherland as Blue Mongolia, because of the eternal blue dome hanging over the endless steppes. Located in the heart of Central Asia, sandwiched between the two superpowers, China and Russia, it has a population of only 2.7 million people, living sparsely over a territory of 1.5 million sq km, or equal to half the size of Europe. Presently, children and young people under 35 make up 70 per cent of the population and the average age is 21. Out of the 2.7 million, about half live in cities and towns, while the remaining 47 per cent still live a nomadic lifestyle.

In 1991, the government of Mongolia was faced with so many complex problems that it asked the Catholic Church to help, recognizing its commitment to young people and the poor. This meant working in a nation that for 70 years had not heard of the Gospel, and in a place where no local church communities or structures existed. Among the various congregations that offered to serve the people of Mongolia were the Salesians, who arrived in 2001.

This mission was entrusted to the Vietnam Salesians, a vibrant province of the congregation, which now has 205 professed Salesians and 35 novices. The capital city of Mongolia is Ulaanbaatar, or Red Hero, the centre of politics, business and finance, culture and science. Here the Salesians have opened a house for more than 70 street children. Father Simon Lee Ho Yeal, a Salesian from Korea has been working on this project for three years. He explains, *After Mongolia was freed from communist rule, many families were destroyed and their children took to the streets, with no home, food or school. So we gather these children together and live with them.*

The Salesians have opened the following works:

### **Don Bosco Industrial Skills Centre**

A professional technical-academic training school for 16-23 year-old Mongolian students, longing and eager to learn and prepare themselves for life.

### **Don Bosco Youth Centre, Darkhan**

A study centre, youth centre and hostel for migrant 11-16 year-old boys and girls who wish to better their life. Many of them are found living on or below the streets, near the hot water pipes, coursing through a city where temperatures drop to 20 degrees below freezing.

### **Religion**

Woven through the nomadic culture is a rich Tibetan-Buddhist tradition, which has incorporated some elements of Mongolia's ancient Shamanist practices. Although many Buddhist monasteries were destroyed and religious expression was severely curtailed during the Stalinist purges of the 1930s, Mongolia's spirituality persisted and a resurgence of Buddhism began in 1990, when Mongolia became a democracy. Priceless artefacts, which were hidden for safekeeping, are now being returned to monasteries by nomadic families. Under this newly-found freedom of belief, other religions flocked in. Another popular religion is Islam, practised by a 60,000 strong Kazakh minority in the Bayan Ulgii province.

### **Nomads**

Relatively unchanged for centuries, Mongolia has one of the last remaining horse-based nomadic cultures in the world. Nomadic families are traditionally known for



*The Salesian Fr Simon Lee during an inter-religious discussion with a Buddhist monk.*



the warm hospitality, offered to passing travellers in the form of food, shelter, and friendship. Hearty welcomes, warm smiles, and generosity are invariably offered by nomads in their traditional *gers*, which are felt tents. These nomads continue to live traditional lifestyles, tending more than 28 million livestock. Animal husbandry remains a backbone of the national economy, providing 20 per cent of the world's cashmere production. The nomads' life has changed very little over the centuries. Mongolia remains the last refuge of pastoral nomads, preserving and continuing the traditional cultural heritage of the many nomadic nations that once flourished on the present day territory of Mongolia.

Here are some comments on the work that the Salesians have begun in Mongolia:

### **Fr Carlo Maria Savio Villegas SDB**

The Salesians of Don Bosco came here in 2001. They began work with the young people of Mongolia, to fulfil the Church's desire to be of service, especially to those most in need. The local Church, here in Mongolia, has asked us to educate youth, particularly those who have difficulty going to secondary schools, obtaining a diploma, or going to university. These are the young people in Mongolian society who are most on the margins.

### **A Mother of a student at Don Bosco Industrial Skills Centre**

We moved into the city to give our four children some future because there is no hope living in the country. In the country we relied on the animals for our livelihood, but we lost all our livestock because of the drought. My husband has a cerebral disease. My husband has a cerebral disease. Even though my husband has cerebral problems, he tries to work, repairing TVs and radios, in the hope of feeding our family. He cannot do heavy work, as he is too weak. My son and I are looking for work, but sometimes we do not even have money for the bus fare. I do not want our children to give up studying because we are poor. Our children need education if they are to have a future.



### **Students**

My name is Borkhuu. I am a student in first year car mechanics. I was not able to finish my secondary schooling but I joined this school. I have studied many new things that I could not have studied in secondary school. I want to thank those people who helped me study here. Thank you for giving me a hand and for having listened to us students.

My name is Helen and I live in Ulaan Baatar, in Mongolia. I am one of the first girl students in Don Bosco. I wanted to become a dressmaker and my dream came true when I enrolled in this school. My life before this was very hard. I had to work in the market because I had to help my mother and feed my smaller brothers. But this school has given me the opportunity to study and acquire skills I can use for life. The teachers and priests in this school really do their best to teach us many things. I am now studying for university where I hope to continue my studies. One day, I too want to help young people like Don Bosco did.

### **Courtesy of the Australian Salesian Bulletin**

We have a limited number of DVDs about the Salesian work in Mongolia, available for schools while stocks last.

# Challenging Youth

## *Understanding Youth Spirituality*



It was the first time I'd ever met any Salesians. A priest and a brother had collected me, and three others young lads, from the railway station in Manchester and were driving us to the junior seminary at Shrigley. As we approached the college the priest told us, *If you climb over that wall you'll be on our property*. For him it was a natural thing to say, but for me it was quite startling. I'd never heard a priest speak of climbing walls, that was something normally associated with a good telling-off. On our arrival we were taken into the dining room and given something to eat. Pasted on the arch above the stage at the end of the room there were cartoons of Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck. Nobody referred to these, but from them I got a clear impression about this place. Here you could have fun, even be a bit childish. What I was assimilating in these two experiences was Salesian Youth Spirituality.

Don Bosco's Oratory was a place where you could have fun, be a normal adolescent, and you had the

security of knowing it was right. For Don Bosco, feeling at home was an essential requirement for youngsters' spiritual growth. It involved being comfortable with the people around you. This idea brings us to an important facet of spirituality; it is relational. St. Francis de Sales taught people not to try to find God in isolation, but through their relationships with family members, colleagues, the folk

they meet in the street. It was the same for St John Bosco. He encouraged the young Dominic Savio to see the playground as the place where he could meet his companions at such a level, that they could all become more aware of God's love.

It seems to me that most young people today are relational. When asked what they expect to get out of a retreat here at Savio House, they reply almost unanimously, *To make new friends and get to know people better*. They also want to enjoy their experience here, and this, too, means they are well suited to our Salesian way. But being predisposed and well suited is only the beginning. As educators, youth leaders and pastors, we need to lead them on to a new level.

The imperative for many of today's young people is to *have a laugh*. This is the criterion by which experience is often judged to be desirable or otherwise. It was certainly the case that Don Bosco's Oratory rang to the



sound of laughter. But the joy that is basic to our spirituality must go far deeper than that. Dominic Savio showed he'd understood that well when he told Camillo Gavio, a new boy at the Oratory, *Here we make holiness consist in being happy*. Don Bosco knew that real happiness could only be attained when one had a clear conscience and was a friend of God, and this was genuine holiness. *Real happiness*, we could just as easily say *our spirituality*, then involves the whole person and it was the whole person that Don Bosco aimed to form. He made sure that in his Oratory the young people felt they belonged, they could develop their God-given talents, they could have fun and they could find meaning in their lives. These four elements of his spirituality embrace the whole of a young person's needs.

One could argue that young people have a further need, to be challenged. When a cholera epidemic raged in Turin, Don Bosco challenged his pupils to volunteer to nurse the sick. A number of them risked infection and rose to the challenge. Sean Devereux demonstrated outstanding heroism in combating corruption in West Africa, while dedicating himself to the needs of young people. Some of you who are reading this article will have seen for yourselves how teenagers respond when involved in an HCPT pilgrimage to Lourdes. This isn't simply altruism. It is the point to which our relational spirituality leads us. Love of God and love of neighbour go hand in hand. My own contact with teenagers in Lourdes has convinced me of the innate goodness in ordinary young people. In many ways the media would have us believe otherwise. Don Bosco made young people feel they were special. He instilled in them confidence and a self-belief. They pressurised themselves, in rising to challenges, to make a difference among their peers and the wider society.

Even before she met Don Bosco, Mary of Mornese was making a difference among the girls of her village. Enthused by Salesian spirituality, she later co-founded a religious congregation through which that urge to make a positive difference has been carried worldwide. Over twenty recognised branches of the Salesian Family are doing the same. Perhaps today, more than ever before, young people come to faith through service of others.

When Don Bosco celebrated Mass in the new Pinaridi shed on Easter Sunday, church bells could be heard ringing everywhere in the city. Don Bosco saw the enthusiasm of his young congregation and the poverty of their surroundings and said, *We have only a small bell, but it's Easter Sunday for us, too!* How this must have resonated with those youngsters, who were marginalized, not only from society, but also from their parishes. It brought together their grasp of the meaning of their lives, their sense of belonging and their need to celebrate.

As members of the Salesian Family, we are fairly good at organising liturgies that capture the interest and enthusiasm of our young people, thereby leading them to know and love the God who gives meaning to their lives. We are excellent, let's not be too modest about it, at organising activities that appeal to their imagination and sense of fun. Sometimes we challenge them. Let's give thanks, that through our approach, countless youngsters feel at home in our Salesian Family.



**Bernard Parkes SDB**

Savio House Retreat Centre



**Mo**





DON BOSCO

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# World News

## **Azerbaijan** **First Salesian church in Baku** **11th September 2005.**

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The foundation stone of a Catholic church was laid in the city of Baku. Presiding at the ceremony was Cardinal Crescenzo Sepe, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples. Among those present were the Nuncio Apostolic Mgr Claudio Gugerotti from Georgia, representatives of the Government of Azerbaijan, the Orthodox Church, the Jewish community and the Muslim community as well as a large number of the faithful. Two Salesians from Slovakia had arrived in Baku five years ago. The community today consists of 5 priests, 2 brothers and 3 volunteers in what is the sole Catholic presence in Baku. The construction of the church should be completed within a year. This Salesian church will be the first Catholic church in the city of Baku.

## **Israel** **New Academic Year at Ratisbonne** **Jerusalem: 22nd September 2005.**

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The new academic year in the Ratisbonne studentate of theology in Jerusalem has just begun. On 17th September Fr Giovanni Laconi, Vice Provincial of the Middle East Province officially installed Fr Francis Preston as Rector of the community. The following day the community met together to prepare the programme for the year. On 21st September, the feast of St Matthew the Apostle, a Mass was said to open the academic year and entrust it to the Holy Spirit. The staff members of the community are Salesians from Great Britain, Italy, Malta, Poland, Spain, the Dominican Republic, India and the Philippines. There are 28 young Salesian students. They come from Africa (Congo, Tanzania and Ethiopia), from Central America (Dominican Republic and Haiti), from Asia (India, Sri Lanka and Vietnam) and

from Europe (Poland). During the past year, the studentate, which was transferred from Cremisan to Ratisbonne in 2004, has been making preparations to fulfil its role as an international centre of theological studies. From this academic year, lectures will be given in English and Ratisbonne will be able to provide Salesians, from any part of the world, with the opportunity to study and reflect in the Holy Land.

## **The Philippines** **Project for vocational training for** **marginalised youngsters** **Cebu: 21st September 2005.**

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12 Salesian Centres involved with marginalised youngsters have got together to form an organisation to raise the necessary funds for the running of support projects for those in need. The funds are being provided by Katholische Zentralstelle für Entwicklungshilfe, a European NGO. The project, run by the 12 Salesian Centres, is being managed centrally by the Project Implementation Unit (PIU), based in Don Bosco Technology Centre in Cebu. At present the PIU is providing quality control for the products of eight technology centres in the islands of Visayas and Mindanao. So far the project is meeting with success in preparing for the labour market and in the development of small business enterprises. The vocational training centres are attended by over 3000 youngsters and the drop-out rate has gone down from 20% to 16% during the past year. Almost 8% of those, who received diplomas, are former students of the Don Bosco Rehabilitation Centre. It is estimated that those now qualified in the vocational centres in Cebu have contributed to an increase of 115% in family income. The Salesians have asked those providing the funding to continue their efforts and their support so that the projects can be maintained and this has met with approval from their European partners.

## India

### ***Health is wealth: a medical camp in Pomon*** **10th August 2005.**

Don Bosco High School, Naigaon, on the outskirts of Mumbai, organized a medical camp in Pomon Village. The camp was conducted in collaboration with the local Public Health Centre (PHC). It was held in the Residential School at the village of Karkhanpada. The residents of Karkhanpada are isolated and neglected by the Government, very often leading to severe malnutrition among children and even death. People from adjacent hamlets also benefited from the Medical Camp. The headman of the village was present throughout the programme. The inauguration of the programme was conducted by the children at Karkhanpada. Young people assisted in distributing leaflets and informing people about the medical camp in the surrounding hamlets, they also helped in registration of patients and preparing medical cards during the camp. Two doctors attended the patients. Two nurses also were present to assist the doctors in their work. Medicines were supplied by the PHC, as well as by Fr Bonnie Borges, the Principal of Don Bosco High School, Naigaon. The positive response was seen when 138 people attended the camp even though it was a rainy day and people were busy with the cultivation of their fields.

## Tunisia

### ***Volunteers among the children of Tunisia*** **Menzel Bourguiba**

For some years now, French and Belgian young people go to Tunisia in the month of July, to work as volunteers, with Tunisian leaders, for the local children. Thanks to a team made up from the FMA community of Menzel Bourguiba, it was possible to organise a project for 300 children, with about fifty volunteer leaders from France, Belgium and Tunisia. All of the leaders followed a course in Salesian education and spirituality. The French and Belgians were encouraged to understand the Tunisian people, their culture and religion, to be open to an intercultural encounter, to share in the life of the community, to participate in moments of Christian reflection, of prayer and celebration. The openness of the Tunisian young people was remarkable. They asked questions about the meaning of life and wanted to meet with another culture. This experience shows how young people from different countries, cultures and religions can understand each other and work together in games and reflection and give of themselves to younger children, sharing life in Salesian simplicity.



# Don Bosco's Mother

## Mamma Margaret



Margaret was born in Capriglio, a small village some 30 kilometres southwest of Turin, Italy in 1788. She was the sixth child of the family, she never learned to read or write. Though illiterate she was by no means ignorant.

Margaret married Francis Bosco, whose wife Margaret Cagliero had recently died. Francis was left with his three-year-old son Anthony. On 8th April 1813 Margaret gave birth to her first son, Joseph, and two years later on the 16th August 1815, she was blessed with a second son, John - the future Don Bosco.

Francis Bosco died when John was only 21 months old. Margaret, now 29, was left with a family and a farm to look after. She eventually had to give up the farm to look after her three sons and their grandmother, this meant moving to a humble shack. Margaret was offered the chance of a very comfortable marriage, but the

condition was that her children would have to be cared for by a tutor. She declined, *God gave me a husband and has taken him from me. On his deathbed he entrusted three children to me and I would be a heartless mother if I abandoned them at the very time when they had most need of me.*

Margaret's constant refrain was, *God watches over us always.* Don Bosco recounts how his mother prepared him for his First Communion. Later Don Bosco said, *I am sure that on that great day God really took possession of my soul.*

She taught her children to respect their elders and to give willing help to those in need. She often said, *Do everything for love and to please the Lord.* In later years Don Bosco used to say that education was a matter of the heart. This had indeed been his happy experience with his mother Margaret.

Margaret saw in John a very special character; she noticed the extraordinary qualities he manifested. *Perhaps he will become a priest?* He was quick-witted, sensitive, intelligent, active and daring, open to his companions, who were drawn to him as a born leader, and always frank and trusting in his relations with his mother. John later confided in her that he wanted to be a priest, who would work for young people.

John was able to attend the public school of Chieri. At last the way was open for him; but one great obstacle remained - poverty. His board and lodging, together with his studies cost more than he was able to pay. Providence was there to help him and also the generosity of all the neighbours, and of course his frugal style of life enabled him to get by. John spent ten years at Chieri, four at the public school and six at the major seminary.

The year 1834 was time of crisis for John. He had to make a final decision about his future. How could he presume to be a financial burden to his mother with



further years of study? He also thought that there would be many dangers in what would be for him the added comforts of the life of a parish priest. He decided to enter the Franciscans, and discussed the matter with the parish priest at Castelnuovo. His mentor did not agree with his decision and counselled Margaret to talk him out of it. *You should think of your own future, too: if John becomes a parish priest you too will be able to live at the parish centre.* Margaret went to Chieri and spoke with John, *I have nothing to say regarding your vocation, except that you should do what God inspires you to do. Do not be concerned on my behalf. You owe me nothing. Never forget that. I was born in poor circumstances, have lived in poverty all my life; and I am happy to die poor; and I say this seriously to you, if you ever become wealthy, I shall never set foot on your doorstep.* Don Bosco, even in his seventies, still had a vivid remembrance of Margaret's decisive and emotional tone as she uttered these words.

Before John Bosco was ordained priest, his mother told him. *You have taken the priestly habit and I am as happy as any mother could be. Never forget that it is not the habit that matters, but the effort to progress in virtue. If you ever come to have doubts about your vocation, be sure you never dishonour that priestly garb. I would rather have a poor peasant as a son than a priest who neglected his sacred calling.* She added a thought that was probably much closer to his heart, *When you came into the world I consecrated you to the Blessed Virgin Mary. When you began your studies, I taught this devotion to you. Now I want you to belong totally to her.* Don Bosco, seeing his mother so greatly moved said, *Mother, I thank you for everything you have done for me. Your advice will not be forgotten. I shall treasure it always as long as I live.* John was ordained a priest in Turin on Saturday 5th June 1841.

John lost no time in settling into his work for the young of the streets and the prisons. He worked so hard that in July 1846 he became seriously ill and lay exhausted by his apostolic labours, with his very life in danger. He went back to his mother's home in Becchi for a lengthy convalescence. He was desperate to return to Turin, there were so many youngsters waiting for him. However, there was a delicate problem to be solved: he was a young priest of thirty years of age, and had recently moved to the Pindari dwelling in Valdocco. Unfortunately, this was in an area of ill repute. John was advised to take his mother back with him to Valdocco. John hesitated to ask her to give up her peaceful life in the country and to move into a noisy city at fifty-eight years of age. Finally, one evening he put before her his dilemma. She understood the urgency of the problem and her immediate answer was, *If you think such a course is pleasing to the Lord, I am ready to come with you immediately.* On 3rd November 1846, mother and son left the hill they loved and went on foot to Turin.

She had brought her humble wedding trousseau, which she had always lovingly preserved, a few cheap jewels, and some linen articles. These she used to make clothing for the poor boys, or sold them to buy immediate necessities. Margaret sacrificed everything. She gave herself entirely to her son and took an active part in the very foundation of the Salesian apostolate. These ten years proved to be the most definitive period of Don Bosco's life. Margaret assumed a new name that remained with her always. She became Mamma Margaret.

Don Bosco often asked her advice, and many of his decisions during these years had the benefit of her wise judgement. When he had to go to the city or be absent for some

days, he did so with the comfortable feeling that Mamma Margaret would be present with the boys and would see that all went well. At times even the reception of important visitors was left to her.

Margaret's concern for her son greatly increased. Those who opposed his work with children swore to take his life. He no longer dared leave home at night without at least two of his bigger lads; and many a time the famous dog Grigio came to his rescue, even lying across the doorstep on one occasion to prevent him from going out at night. *If you won't listen to me, Margaret said to her son, at least take notice of the dog; do not go out!*

For ten years Mamma Margaret was the mother of Don Bosco's boys, with all that word implies, of patience, toil and tenderness. In the first place she had to get used to the shouting and rough and tumble of the oratory, and it lasted all day and well into the late hours of evening classes. Then came the first street orphans to be looked after. She had to prepare their meals, tend the little vegetable garden, feed the poultry and rabbits, do the laundry, cook, mend and iron - often well into the night while the boys slept, for many of them had only one set of clothes. She had to care for them when they were ill; and with infinite patience put up with their noisiness and their carelessness.

The crisis came when, one evening in 1850, she poured out her woes to her son, *John, I cannot take any more of this existence. Every day these boys manage to plague me with some new vexation. Please let me get away from here. I want return to Becchi and end my life there in peace.* John heard her out with sadness. He looked at her and then raised his eyes to the crucifix hanging on the wall. Margaret followed his gaze and the tears rolled down her wrinkled cheeks, *You are right, of course.* From that moment on, no further complaint was ever heard from her. Her sacrifice meant so much for the development of the Salesian apostolate.

Since all the orphans called her *Mamma*, it was clear that they considered her not merely as a cook and a laundress, but rather they regarded her as their mother, putting their total confidence in her as orphans who had found safety and love and readily returned that love. Margaret was always available for them, at any time of the day. They loved to chat with her; she was able to

correct them, advise and console them. In this way she helped them to develop their characters and strengthen their faith.

When in 1854 cholera broke out in Turin, everyone at the oratory was miraculously untouched despite the fact that the hygiene conditions of the day left much to be desired. In her effort to help and comfort the sick and the dying, Mamma Margaret gave all her linen to the afflicted. When the scourge of cholera had run its course there was an unexpected influx of fifty very young orphans. Margaret was the natural one to whom they were entrusted; and at sixty-six years of age she found herself more than ever a mother. Bereavement and poverty always claimed her heart. From her first arrival at Turin she wore the same patched and faded clothes. On two occasions Don Bosco gave her money to buy herself a new dress. But the old one remained, a little more worn, a little more patched. The money had been spent on things the boys needed.

Returning from Becchi in mid-November 1856, Margaret felt unwell and had to be confined to bed with a rasping cough. The doctor diagnosed pneumonia and gave no hope of recovery. Her son Joseph hastened from Becchi; and Margaret spoke her last words to her sons. To John her words were, *There will be others who will take my place here; but Our Blessed Lady will always be the one in charge. Do not seek splendour or display, but only the glory of God. Poverty, genuine poverty, must remain the basis of all your work. God knows how much I have loved you; but in heaven I shall love you even more. I have done all I could. If at times I seemed to be abrupt, it was for your good. Tell the boys that I have worked for them with a mother's commitment. Ask them to pray for me.* John broke down, overcome with grief.

Margaret died at three o'clock in the morning. Joseph hastened to call John, and the two brothers embraced each other, overcome with sorrow. The great number of boys in the funeral procession to the parish church gave the appearance of a triumphal parade; but it was a pauper's funeral, and Margaret was buried in a common grave without ever having a tombstone carrying her name. Twenty years before she had said to John, *I want to die poor.* She left nothing that belonged to her, absolutely nothing - except her immense love.

# We Remember

## Fr Patrick Kenna SDB 1955 - 2005



Pat knew all about community living, he grew up in a loving family; the son of Joseph and Shelia Kenna and he had an older brother, Michael. The family was joined by Kevin, Margaret and Mary. Pat thought the world of his family and was especially proud of his nephews and nieces. The care and concern that Pat brought to so many people was the care and concern that he received as a child, he accepted this as the norm.

As he grew up, Pat became aware of the community that was the Church, a community that was part and parcel of Joe and Shelia's lives, a community they shared with their own children and grandchildren. It was a community that included the Sisters at Farnborough Hill, the Monks at Farnborough Abbey and, of course, the Salesian Family of Farnborough. Through the example of his family, and the Salesian family, Pat was to embark on a community journey that was to take him across the country and globe, in a quest to make Gospel values and the teaching of Jesus more accessible and realistic. Pat didn't just talk about the Good News, he actually walked the walk!

He enjoyed Salesian life in many communities, Shrigley, Farnborough, Dublin, Ushaw, Bootle, Blaisdon, Battersea, Liberia, California, Don Bosco Youth Centre, Bootle, India and finally Chertsey.

As his friend and former Rector, Sean Murray said, *Pat was able to pack into 49 short years more than most people get into 70!* Pat had vitality and zest for life, his community of friends meant the world to him. He had a genuine concern, interest and care for young people. His work in schools, and in the youth service, saw him going that extra mile, to give young people the courage

and strength to move forward in life. In his own unique way, Pat acted as an advocate and, more importantly, a real friend of the young.

As a historian, Pat had a great memory for facts, places and, most importantly, people. He could tell you who was on Week 3 of Blaisdon Camp 1985; he remembered birthdays and loved to record events for posterity on his ever-popular camera.

Pat saw it as his responsibility to promote Salesian hospitality. That meant welcoming the stranger, standing in solidarity with those who were persecuted and oppressed. It was this awareness that led him to work for a short time in Liberia and India. We were all enthralled and moved by his stories of the street children or the effects of the Tsunami. As someone said to me, *Fr Pat brought the reality of that disaster in to our school in a way that our children could comprehend and then do something about it.* There was something deeper here, however, Pat had a real desire to help people and make their lives better.

Pat would often remind us that he never took a holiday, he never really travelled! However, when we were students, he was the only one to carry his passport with him, so that he could go off at a moment's notice! Pat journeyed with so many people and always made sure that he kept in touch with his family and even wider circle of friends. So many of us have journeyed with him, privileged to have shared a car, minibus, train or plane with him. Like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, we have all shared a wonderful friendship together.

*Pat we do not need to text you or phone you; you are just a prayer and a memory away. Thank you for those memories: they will keep you alive for us today, and every day.*

**Gerry O'Shaughnessy SDB**



# We Remember

## Fr James Conway SDB 1921- 2005



Jim was born in Brewel, Co Kildare, in April 1921. Jim discovered his Salesian vocation as a result of the sterling promotion of Don Bosco and the Salesian life round Ireland, undertaken by the famous Fr Ciantar who tirelessly travelled the length and breadth of Ireland, showing the Don Bosco film, and enthusiastically promoting the new missionary college at Shrigley Park. Jim was a willing recruit, and it was from Shrigley that he went to the noviciate at Beckford, in August 1939. This was the largest noviciate in the Province's history, with 53 novices. Jim studied philosophy and theology, and taught at Shrigley and finally at Blaisdon where he was ordained in 1950, the Holy Year.

His first appointment was to Salesian College, Chertsey. Jim always said that he lost his heart to Chertsey. He promised himself never to get attached to any place ever again. He lamented his leaving and took ages to settle in his new home, at Thornleigh, Bolton.

Jim spent thirty-two years of his priestly ministry at Thornleigh. At times, it seemed, as if he had always been there. In his role as form teacher of 1 Beta, and later head of First Year, he became an institution that welcomed, supported, encouraged and educated generations of youngsters. Tutored by Jim, they grew up to read and appreciate poetry and the literature he loved. Jim delighted in the well-turned phrase, the poetic sparkle and the depth of feeling of poets and playwrights. He insisted on the highest standards of spelling, punctuation and expression. These were, for him, the delicacy of human sensitivity. His other great love was for nature, his extraordinary knowledge of birds; a hobby that gave Jim, and his pupils, endless joy.

Jim's vocation as a priest and particularly as a confessor was a fundamental aspect of his Christian life. He always welcomed his penitents warmly, always made them feel he appreciated and understood their difficulties and problems.

In his last five years at Bolton, Jim was asked to take on the unenviable task of being the Rector of Thornleigh, at a time of turbulence and change. He found this a difficult task, but his kindness was much appreciated by his community. After five years as Rector, Jim began a totally different stage of his life. After the stability of Bolton for 32 years, he suddenly took up 20 years of itinerant ministry. This ranged from Ushaw to Dublin, Glasgow to Battersea, helping with the student community. The highlight of these years was the time he spent as assistant priest in a tiny country parish in Byermoor, Co Durham. In this ex-mining village, Jim loved to spend some time each morning in the Primary School.

Jim's last sustained period of ministry, 1996 – 2003, took place in Chertsey, his first love. Here, once again, his gentle humour and identification with the poor came to the fore.

For Jim, the triumphant moment of his latter years was the wonderful celebration his family held at the church where he had said his first mass in 1950. His Jubilee Mass, accompanied by a piper, was a veritable triumph. He loved it and genuinely appreciated the time and trouble and all the love of his family that this celebration represented.

Jim suffered from progressive ill health over his last years. Finally he had a massive brain haemorrhage. I had the privilege of being by his bedside, when he breathed his last. May he rest in peace.

**John Dickson SDB**

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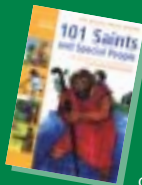
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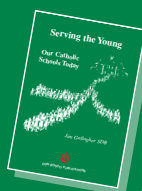
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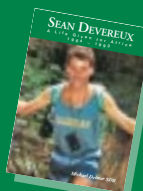
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