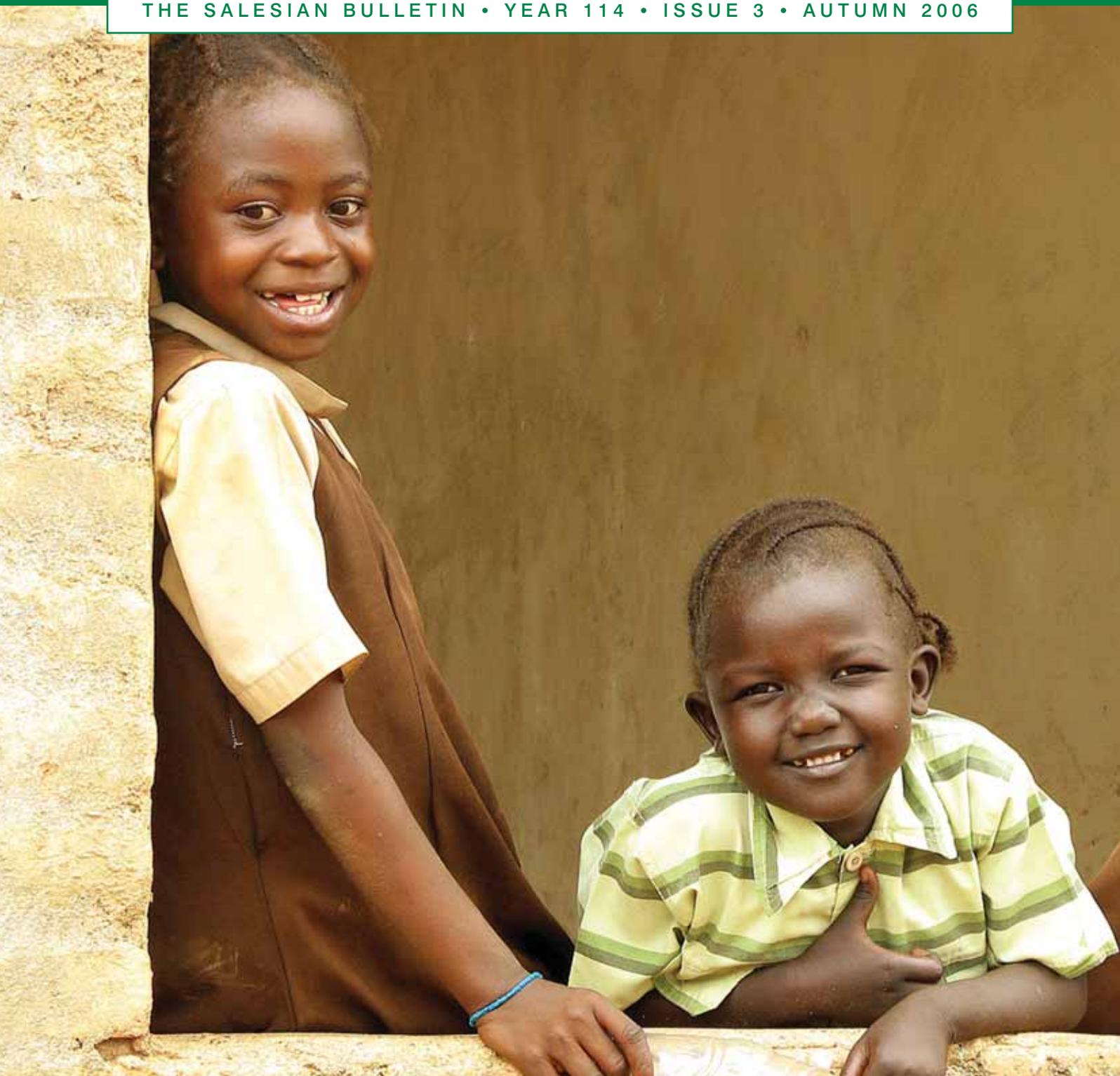


THE MAGAZINE FOR THE SALESIAN FAMILY

DON BOSCO TODAY

THE SALESIAN BULLETIN • YEAR 114 • ISSUE 3 • AUTUMN 2006





Editorial

May we pray for you?

On 25th November 1856 Mamma Margaret, the mother of Don Bosco died. It is impossible to understand Don Bosco's work without recognising the contribution made by his mother. She not only taught him so much about Christian living, but she literally sacrificed the last years of her life, working with him and becoming the mother of so many poor and abandoned children. The 25th November this year will be a day of special celebration in all the houses of our Salesian family, when we remember the hard work and support given to Don Bosco by his mother.

In our Christian tradition, November is a time of remembering. We take the opportunity to remember those who have died, those whose lives made such a difference to our lives. There has been a custom of people sending us a list of their dear ones for our community to remember them during the month of November. I usually place these lists in a special petition box by the altar of our community chapel in St Joseph's, where our community of retired Salesians live. After a fruitful life in school parish or mission work, they now enjoy a very special mission of prayer.

The work of the Salesians has always been supported by so many generous people who, like Mamma Margaret have devoted themselves to Don Bosco's work. I would like to take this opportunity in this issue to thank one such person, Joan Rankin, who in January retires from her work as manager of Don Bosco Publications. For twenty years she has worked tirelessly to make Don Bosco Publications the kind of work of which Don Bosco himself would have been proud. I know that she has become the friend and helper of so many readers of this magazine. Working with Fr John Houlihan, Brother Michael Grix and myself, she has been an example of Salesian dedication to us all.

The articles in this edition of Don Bosco Today are about generous people who are continuing the work of Don Bosco, helping those in most need and spreading the Christian message.



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Salesian Response to Child Prostitution

In the 1980s the Sri Lankan Government promoted tourism strongly. In 1988 a Salesian priest, Fr Pinto, based in Negombo, on the seaboard, a little north of Colombo and quite near the airport, noticed a change in many of the young people he met. He became aware that many were going with foreigners and tourists, and some were being taken by force. By then the child prostitution trade had become very organised in the area, not without the assistance of some of the hoteliers. The first thing the Salesians did, in fact, was to enlist the help of the members of their own Youth Club. They were the ones least affected; they were prepared to tackle the problem by appealing to companions of the same age-group. The boys were already aware of the issue; they knew more about it than the Salesians did. At a meeting held in the technical school no fewer than 200 people were present. The exploiters were ruining the youngsters of Sri Lanka; the Salesians and the young people in their youth club could not stand by and ignore it.

They began by organising a poster campaign to alert and warn parents, then a march with 600 young people. Some hoteliers complained to the Government and the Tourist Board. They accused the Salesians of insurgency, and the matter was reported to the police. After making enquiries, the police, resisting the pressure from the hoteliers, stood by the priests. A task force for preventing child abuse was set up, involving religious, police and responsible hoteliers. Many beach boys and other young people were arrested in the crackdown that followed.

The Salesians were asked to start up some rehabilitation activity; an entirely new work for them. When the police brought boys to the Salesians they talked to them to try to convince them to come to a

rehabilitation course. Without their willing co-operation there could be no hope of change. In reality, the first course was not a great success; they were all young men of 16 years of age and upwards, and too hardened for real recovery. With two exceptions they returned to their former ways - not at Negombo where they no longer felt safe, but further south in the country. The next attempt was more successful; the percentage of those persevering was very high, with failure in only two or three cases. In this second course all the boys were much younger. Initially the Salesians had difficulty working with these younger boys because they had not worked in primary schools. They needed the support of others to continue the work. At the end of the courses the boys were helped to find employment.

The success rate is normally high, 90% of the boys who have taken part in the courses now have no great problems. It is always a bit of a gamble to speak of recovery. The main difficulty at the beginning is to convince boys to accept the invitation to take part in the rehabilitation course. Because they have never been in a boarding situation, they are afraid they will be unhappy and lose their freedom. They are usually boys who do not go to school, who find occasional employment with the fishermen, who are *available* on the beach, and so become easy prey for the paedophiles. When invited to the rehabilitation course, they sometimes recoil from the responsibility involved. They can't even concentrate on games. They do play, but not in the happy and carefree manner typical of the young. They appear tense and preoccupied about something, never entirely at peace. They need a very flexible timetable until they are fully integrated into the system, until they feel they want to learn a trade.

There are some particularly sad situations which need immediate attention. What the boys have learned from paedophiles they sometimes try to practise with their companions, or to organise sex groups themselves. It is something that spreads like a virus. In these cases the Salesians try to involve helpers who are professionally trained.



A former detention camp was used as a rehab centre. The young people were taught music and perform street shows to raise awareness of the issue in the local communities. At the beginning some parents were angry, because their children could earn 30,000 rupees a month, and couldn't get pregnant! The paedophile ringleader was a Swiss man, who was backed by some of the political leaders. There was a poster campaign against the Salesians and those seeking to protect the youngsters. They even went so far as to suggest that the bishop should tell the priests to back off so as not to interfere with tourism! The country had now been alerted. Interpol too got involved and sought to have this man arrested, and eventually the local police acted. He immediately filed a court case against Fr Pinto, suing for 150 million rupees damages for loss of earnings! A similar lawsuit was instigated against another priest who led the movement with Fr Pinto. Fr Pinto was taken to court three times charged with defamation, accompanied by up to 25,000 supporters. This case was finally dropped. The Swiss man threatened to kill him, and there were other death threats by phone. The man was finally extradited to Switzerland, tried and jailed.

After a while a new rehabilitation centre was set up, and rehabilitation and preventive work has developed. Fr Pinto received a national award for protecting the rights of children, and was the first Catholic priest to be appointed a member of a presidential commission. He has been invited to speak in the USA and in Sweden. Fr Pinto is now provincial of the Sri Lankan Salesian province.

Our own work is based on Catholic principles. It is not just a case of preservation, but rather of education, of principles, of human and spiritual mental health, of respect for oneself and others. This is not a Sri Lankan problem, it is a global problem. In whatever part of the world we live we must insist on values in education. Not every desire for pleasure is to be satisfied at all costs. That unfortunately, is the mentality behind a whole series of financial machinations, which leads to the ruination and destruction of so many young people.

Sally's Reflections

I was thrilled to be invited to join Maureen, the mother of Sean Devereux¹ and Father Joe Brown on their trip to Liberia. I was horrified to see that it was on the list of places not to travel to. Much soul searching ensued. Was I being unfair to my children and family making this trip? Was I going for purely selfish reasons? Eventually thanks to the assurances of the Salesians and the support of my family I decided to go ahead with the visit. What a great decision!

Nothing could have prepared me for my first impressions. Where were the airport terminals, the duty free, formal customs and immigration departments, the monorail to the terminal? I simply stepped off the plane and onto the tarmac to be met by Fr Joe Brown. We walked to a dilapidated building which served as an arrivals terminal, queued up in front of an old wooden desk and had our passports stamped.

The trip to Monrovia took about an hour, through war-ravaged countryside, innumerable military checkpoints but no harassment or difficulty. We passed through shanty towns with exotic names such as *Smell No Taste*, apparently named when the Americans were building the airport, the Liberians could smell the food, but not taste it. On arrival, I was made very welcome by the Salesians. Needless to say there was no air conditioning, or hot water and only intermittent electricity, but it didn't take long to adapt and cope.

The very next day the action-packed visit started with celebrations for Don Bosco's Day. We joined a four-mile march through the streets with the Don Bosco Youth Band. This started off with about 50 people and grew and grew. It took a couple of hours to get to Matadi walking through the main street in Monrovia, dodging craters in the road and massive holes with missing drain covers. When we finally arrived we were treated to an extremely talented and varied entertainment programme. There were several guest

speakers including Senator Blamo Nelson who had known Sean Devereux; they all spoke of the spirit of Sean, which was very moving.

On Sunday we headed out to the parish of Caldwell so I could see a true Liberian Catholic church. Whilst waiting for the service to begin we taught the children to play *Duck Duck Goose* – we had six children to start with but ended up with about twenty. The children were so bright and responsive and language and culture were no barriers. This was the first time I had attended a Catholic Mass and I was struck by how similar the liturgy was to that of my Anglican Church, I felt very at home.

Later in the day we went for a tour of the Mercy Ship, Anastasis. The Mercy Ships are an amazing organisation, I had thought they were just involved in performing surgeries and providing medical care but they are very active in the communities onshore, in the countries they visit, providing much needed educational resources as well as helping with local building, repair and agricultural projects. To find out more about their wonderful work have a look at www.mercyships.org.

On Monday we attended a presentation of funds for the extension of the Sean Devereux library at Stella Maris Polytechnic (formerly Don Bosco Polytechnic). We toured the facilities and met staff and students. The facilities at the Polytechnic have been greatly enhanced by the donation of a generator which was presented by



the Salesian Past Pupils Association. The library is run by the chief librarian, a charming lady called Kebbeh who was a former child refugee. We next visited The Sean Devereux Memorial School in Brewerville established by Amadu Sarnor, a friend of Sean's who established it soon after Sean's death. The school has been built, destroyed and rebuilt several times during the course of the 14 years of civil war in Liberia, but Amadu doesn't give up.

Our trip to Tappita on Wednesday was a day I will never forget. This was due not only to the fact that Sean had spent so much time there and loved the people deeply, but also to the *divine intervention* which enabled us to get a lift in a helicopter! We could not believe our luck when, having started joking with Father Joe about getting a helicopter, we ended up getting in touch with Jerome Yap at the UN who turned out to be a Salesian past-pupil, from the Philippines, who had heard about Sean in New York! On our arrival we were overwhelmed by the welcome we received. The whole community must have been there to welcome us, lining the sides of the road and singing at the top of their voices. A programme had been organised for us in the church, which was packed. There were songs, dances and a little drama as well as countless speeches. It was an incredibly emotional time as past pupils and teachers spoke of their recollections of Sean and all that he had done there.

Thursday was a quieter day. It started off with various friends arriving to visit Fr Joe, he has a massive fan club in Liberia. We visited the AIDS hospital, run by the Sisters of Mercy. We met all the patients in varying stages of AIDS and then visited the children of these patients who are also HIV positive. It was heartbreaking as well as joyful, they are so desperate for cuddles and interaction and yet so responsive. We also drove out to Pipeline Road, a fairly long trip out of town through the Red Light district, so called because it has a single red light at an intersection. We drove through the market area which was a mass of people and wheelbarrows selling everything from dried fish to DVDs. We visited the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart who take care of handicapped children. This project has been scaled back due to the withdrawal of funds from USAID. There were about 16 children there ranging from 12 months to 15 years although the majority were under five. A high percentage were polio victims but several were war victims one of whom was Nelson, a young boy whose home had been destroyed by a rocket grenade and who had lost a leg; he had dreadful scars but a beautiful smile.

War victims seem to have lost the sympathy vote; after all it's self-inflicted isn't it? Sadly that is not the case, many participants in civil wars are there because they have no choice, they are enslaved by drugs and bribery and the *promise* of a better life by whichever warlord they are fighting for. It would be so easy to turn off the TV when these stories are reported, to assume that somebody else will be taking action so we don't need to, but this visit demonstrated to me that this is exactly what we shouldn't do. The suffering caused during a war is horrific but its aftermath is equally tragic and devastating. It is a well known fact that prevention is better than cure and one of the ways this can be achieved is by lobbying Governments to stop the arms trade. Lack of controls on the arms trade is fuelling conflict, poverty and human rights abuses worldwide.



Six Days in Lebanon

20th July

During this week of conflict between Israel and the Hezbollah, the two Salesian houses in Lebanon both north of Beirut, continued their activities until, for security reasons, they were suspended. Being in the hills the centre has attracted many of the displaced people, mainly Muslims. The Lebanese army who asked to be able to billet a detachment of soldiers in the Salesian house understood our refusal. In the meantime the two Polish Salesians in the community are busy helping the hundreds of refugees, their own countrymen, who are trying to reach Syria and Turkey and from there return home. Every day the humanitarian emergency gets worse. Electricity is rationed and the supermarkets are being rapidly emptied. Even during the worst times of the civil war Lebanon didn't suffer as it is now. The civil infrastructure of the country still only being rebuilt, with about 40 million dollars of debt, is reduced to ashes. The military blockade of the country is total.

21st July

The Salesian house at El Houssoun, has opened its doors to the refugees: more than 200 at present. There are lots of children and women, some elderly and two men with heart condition. Many of these people are under shock from the fear they experienced. The bombardment is reaching further afield to places that previously were thought to be out of range. In the next few hours we are expecting a new wave of refugees and it will become more difficult to find a place for them. We are ready to set up a camp site with more than 200 tents since we have the space on the land around our house with a nearby pine-wood. There are also 170 being housed in the village. The situation is chaotic. The State of Lebanon is trying to get itself organised but so far it has proved ill-prepared and incapable of managing such a disastrous situation. Thanks to the presence on the spot of Salesians and of our volunteers we are succeeding in providing a quick response to the humanitarian emergency. There is no doubt that the presence in our Salesian houses of Muslims and Christians underlines our neutral approach in the face of elementary basic human needs. Throughout the



Middle Eastern Region we have always been a vital force for inter-religious and inter-ethnic dialogue.

24th July

While the Secretary of State of the USA is concluding her diplomatic tour and getting ready to take part in a meeting in Rome, the Salesian house in Al Fidar continues to be a sign of hope and peace. After having declined the invitation from the Embassies to leave the country for reasons of safety, the Salesians have put themselves at the service of the people to relieve their needs. At a meeting in the evening with those responsible for the oratory, after saying the rosary for peace, the Rector invited the young people to organise some sort of entertainment for the youngsters and adults who were staying in the main refugee centres in the district. Fr Kazimierz, accompanied by some leaders visited the main refugee camps. During the visit they collected information especially about the number of children and youngsters there. There were repeated appeals for help with first aid, in particular drinking water and milk for the newborn babies. During a second visit they distributed dozens of bottles of water from the Salesian house. During the eleventh day of the war, bombardment of the Christian area between Beirut and the North intensified. Television transmitting stations were systematically destroyed. An unexplained black material is covering the beaches in the Al Fidar area.

25th July

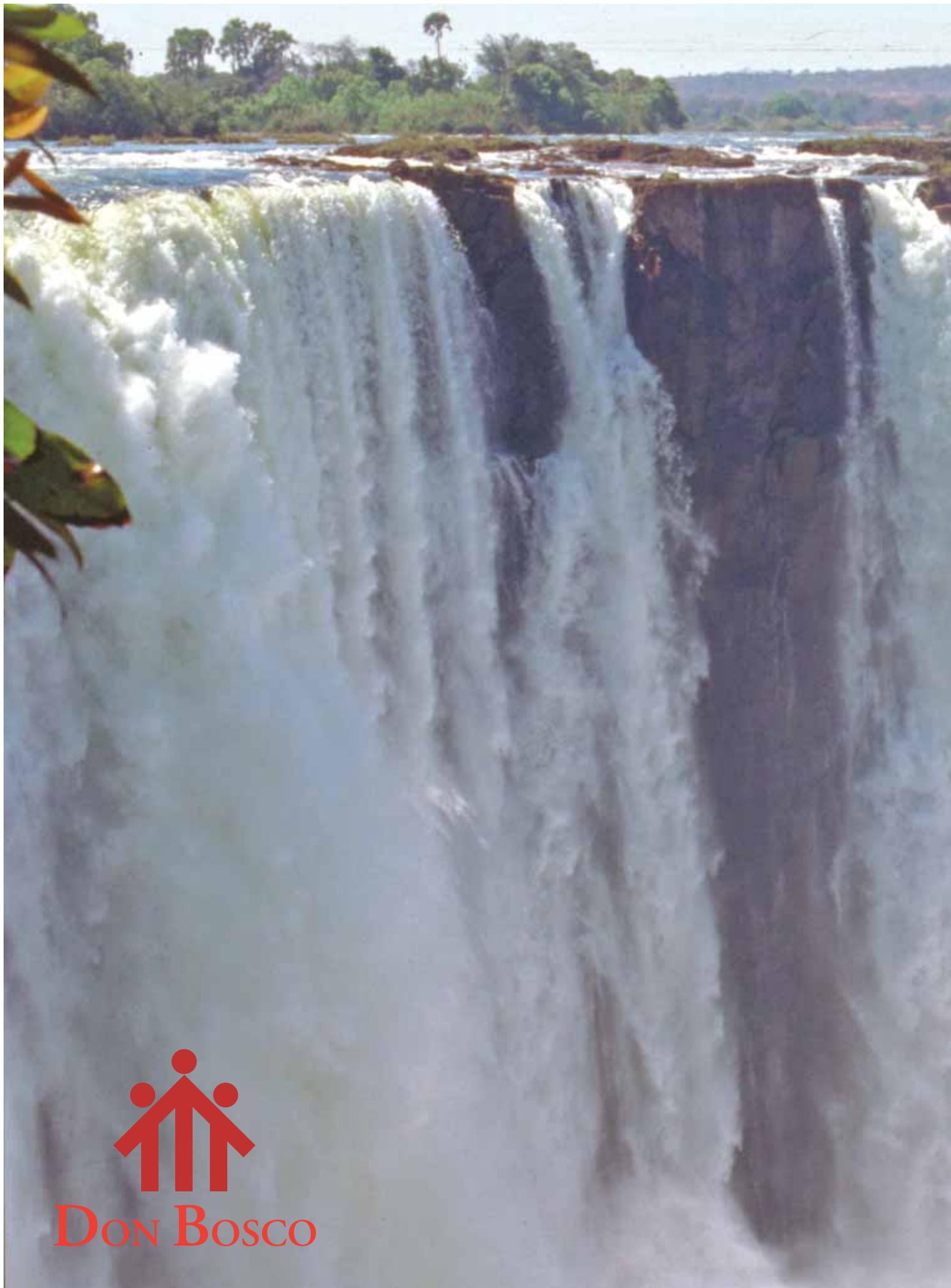
The Rector of the Salesian house in Al Fidar, and Fr Vittorio met the person in charge of centres welcoming the displaced people to assess the situation. There was a positive response to the idea of the youth leaders from the Al Fidar Oratory providing entertainment for the young refugees. The children were cheered up and experienced some peace and calm which also had a positive effect on the adults. On the basis of this experience it was agreed to hold a second evening. Youth leaders went to school where dozens of children were waiting for them. While the little ones became more and more enthusiastically involved in group games, miming songs and dancing, the older ones and the adults stayed on one side. In spite of the lack of electricity everything went well. At the end of the evening there were gifts, specifically for the newly-born babies.

31st July

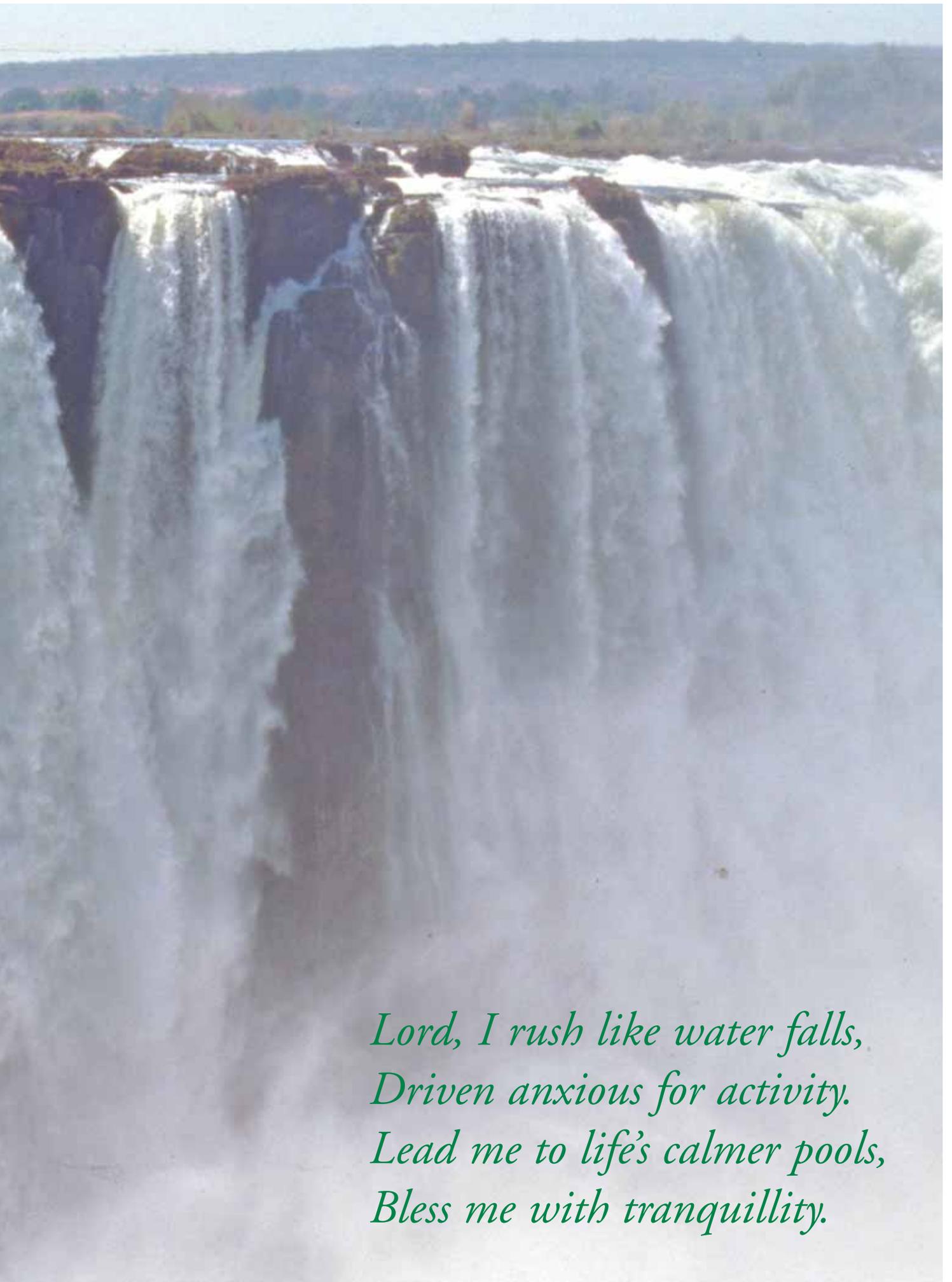
The killings at Qana, where 60 civilians including 37 children died, seem to have focused attention on the tragedy taking place. The Salesian houses continue to be centres of hope and support for the refugees *There are now almost a million displaced and fleeing people trying to escape the bombing.* Every day the situation in the Salesian centres is getting more complicated as is the work of the many local volunteers who are working non-stop to ensure the refugees get the first aid they need and to keep the children occupied. The Salesians are helping to care for the refugees now gathered together in four public schools to which others will soon be added. After having held a meeting with those responsible among the Shiite refugees the Salesians' work team from Al Fidar VIS have found out that there are at present in the region of Jbeil over 30,000 refugees of whom 50% are children and youngsters, and the number rises every day. There are 14 centres which have received some of them; the rest are scattered all over the place, staying with families, in sports centres, small hotels, and very many of them in tents among the trees. The Salesian team is especially following up this last group since they are the ones in most need of assistance. In the last few days the department of the Italian Embassy dealing with the crisis has approached the Salesians in Al Fidar to set up an emergency heliport in the playground for possible evacuations. Families in the village are providing accommodation for over 250 displaced people, while in the 15 neighbouring villages there is a great network of support. In the Salesian House there is an atmosphere both of death and of hope: one of the two pregnant women in the centre has just given birth to a baby girl. At the same time there are problems trying to recover the bodies from the southern part of the country on account of the destruction of the roads and bridges.

4th August 2006

The Israeli air force bombed four bridges on the road which connects Beirut to the north of Lebanon, cutting the principal trunk road, not to mention the only means of communication. The explosions were so violent that they shook the windows of the Salesian house at El Houssoun, several kilometres away: the refugee children started crying with fear. The situation has been made dramatically more difficult, especially for those who travel to work in the capital every day. Many have lost their work, their only source of income. The vice of war is squeezing ever more tightly. In spite of these conditions the Salesians are continuing their relief work with the refugees housed in the institute and among the families. The leaders, male and female, from the Youth Centre, are lavishing their attention on the children of the neighbourhood. The mothers, including the Muslims, are delighted and are discovering with wonder, the beauty of the Oratory of Don Bosco. *Often we find Muslim children and mothers in front of the little grotto of Our Lady, which is in our wood, absorbed in prayer,* recounts Fr Armando Borolaso. In this way, the Virgin Help of Christians, patroness of our house of El Sousoun, has become also the Help of Everyone.



DON BOSCO



*Lord, I rush like water falls,
Driven anxious for activity.
Lead me to life's calmer pools,
Bless me with tranquillity.*

Claudia's Experience

I've been here in Burundi for almost a year, and from a personal and professional point of view my experience is becoming the most important I have ever had. In the past I have been in other countries such as Uganda, Kosovo and Albania but humanly speaking that experience cannot be compared with this in which I find myself with the most vulnerable and destitute people.

According to United Nations' statistics Burundi is the second poorest country in the world. I feel that I am living on the very fringes of society. Life expectation is about 46 years and the literacy rate is about 40%. It is a former Belgian colony which, for about five hundred years has been the scene of inter-racial conflict between the Hutu (the majority) and the Tutsi (the minority but with economic and military power).

The *Cité des Jeunes Don Bosco* is in Buterere, one of the outlying districts of the capital Bujumbura, a place of evacuees, refugees and the unemployed. It is said that about 26,000 people are living in crumbling huts made of mud and sticks, without any social infrastructure or services that would enable them to have water, light and drainage systems.

Here there are many street children, children abandoned and left to themselves, with very similar negative experiences: little or no schooling, from totally broken homes, the father figure often violent on account of widespread alcoholism, the mother often widowed or left with many children, who cannot manage to look after her family. Often these conditions result in the children being abandoned and so there are many children who head from the villages in the interior or from the outskirts of the capital, for Bujumbura, most of them becoming street children.

Up to now the children's project of the *Cité des Jeunes Don Bosco*, is concentrating mainly on rescuing the street children, the most vulnerable group of Burundese society. We go out looking for them, at night, arranging with the social workers from the Centre to identify the



key places where they are getting ready to spend the night on some cardboard they managed to pick up at the central market. Often we find them trying to camouflage themselves among the rubbish, sometimes hiding behind hedges, sometime on the roofs of the houses so as not to be caught by the police, who try to chase them off and if they catch them beat them and put them in prison. When we find them our first contact is often while the children are under the influence of drugs. Some are only six, some even younger, and they are already regular users of marijuana. Some sniff glue, melting the plastic and so pass another night feeling nothing, neither hunger nor the cold, not thinking of anything, in a deep sleep and, so they say, dreaming a lot.

When we meet them for the first time it is rather tentative: at the beginning they are very withdrawn, but then they relax a little, and when they realise that we are only there to help them, without ulterior motives, they begin to open up. Then the next few times they come looking for us, run up to us, they are waiting for us, and start telling us about themselves: how they come to be on the streets, the sometimes blood curdling stories about their families, tales of violence, of abandonment, of exploitation. Often you can see it in their faces, a look that suggests they have become resigned to this life, since they can find no way out, but only exploitation, child abuse, prostitution and drugs.

On the streets there are gangs who all try to recruit a number of very small children, and often it is these who are victims of the worst violence, in exchange for *protection*. They are made to beg in the markets, along the main roads, in front of restaurants, or else they have to work and give at least half of what they make to the leader of the gang. When we meet up with them on the street, often the gang bosses are not pleased because they know that we are trying to get them off the streets, and away from crime and so they will lose their valuable work force, but then we try to work on the bosses, trying to get them to look at their own lives, to see things differently. In the end they often agree to help us to try to give these youngsters a better future.

In recent months the recovery programme of the *Cité des Jeunes Don Bosco* for street children has been concentrating on children most at risk, those between six and fourteen, coming from different parts of the country with very different stories but all now sharing the sad experience of living on the streets.

At present those enjoying the benefits of our centre are 47 in number, children who are orphans on account of the war, or of sickness. This is sometimes a simple case of malaria that wasn't treated, through lack of medicines, and resulted in the death of their parents. Some are children left to their fate with no one to care for them. Some finish up on the streets so young that it difficult for them to give up certain habits.

The first weeks they spend at the centre are decisive for the success of what we are trying to do: they are constantly tempted to return to the streets. Sometimes they go away for a night or two, but then come back knocking on our door. And we welcome them with open arms. Their return also makes the others think, but we are ready to take them back with all their experience of the streets, of the traumas and the violence. Each of them carries within them a world we cannot even imagine, but fortunately they are strong and have great determination.

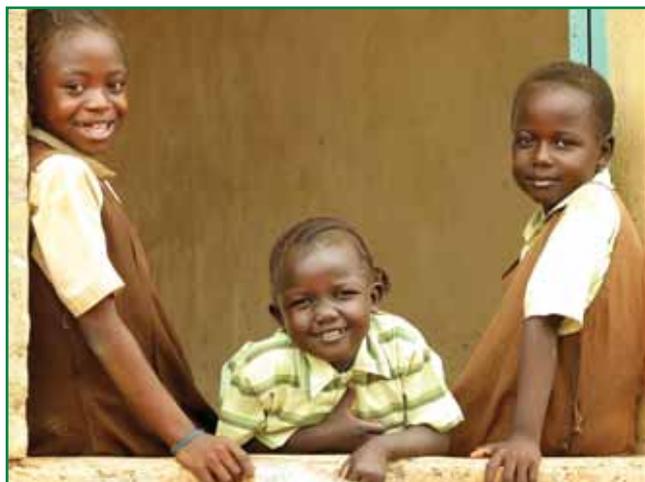
We have a psychologist who helps, dealing with the most traumatised children, many of whom have a distorted view of sexuality having seen so many things: from paedophilia to prostitution, traumas due to being abandoned and having lost their parents.

In recent months 24 of them have been placed with families, and a mini project has been set up to provide financial support for the family members and so gradually, after careful preparation, family placements have begun. On the other hand seven of them have been in touch with their own families and are beginning the process of going back to them.

In addition to working with street children, at the *Cité des Jeunes Don Bosco*, we also have our Vocational Training Centre which has a school with various courses which year after year involves more and more students. At present we have about 400 students attending the training courses, and eating their lunch in our refectory, which with students and children caters for over 450 people. In addition there are the activities of the Salesian oratory, which in general attracts about 200 children and youngsters each day, whereas at the weekends and during the summer holidays there are 800 or 1000 children involved in the games and recreational activities.

All of them go to the Buterere primary school, which is just in front of the Centre, and seven of them are among those at the top of the class. From being street children, neglected and scarcely surviving, to being first in class! You should see the smiles on their faces when they return to the Centre, home as they call it, with the good marks in their exercise books. It is a marvellous transformation for these children.

Don't forget Sudan!



People across the world observed September 17th as the Global Day for Darfur, in order to focus international attention on what has been described as the worst humanitarian crisis of the 21st century. The conflict in Darfur, which began in February 2003, has already claimed the lives of 200,000 people and displaced more than 2 million. With the Khartoum government refusing to allow UN troops to take over the peace-keeping operations in Darfur, there seems to be no speedy solution in sight to this man-made catastrophe. Sudan's history has unfortunately been plagued by wars. It has just emerged from a 21-year civil war between the North and the South, which killed some two million people in South Sudan and displaced another four million. This long and bloody war has reduced South Sudan to one of the poorest regions in the world with 90% of the people living below the poverty line. The peace agreement between the North and the South has now made possible the launching of developmental programmes in South Sudan.

The Don Bosco Network, the consortium of European Salesian NGOs, has been quick to respond to this opportunity and has decided to focus its attention on the development of Sudan. The Don Bosco Network (DBN), an association of European Non-Governmental Organisations running projects in 82 countries all over the world, has been actively working in Sudan through its primary partner, the Salesians, for the past 15 years. The Salesians came to Sudan in 1979 and since then have set up institutions in Khartoum, El Obeid, Wau and Tonj. These institutions include Vocational Training Centres, formal schools and primary schools in the

villages. It is a well-recognised fact that all these institutions offer a service that is relevant as well as of a high quality.

VIS¹, the Italian Salesian NGO, was chosen as the lead agency within the DBN to coordinate its activities in Sudan. Accordingly, VIS established an office in Khartoum in July 2006, and is now in the process of launching a major operation especially in South Sudan. Education will be the primary focus of this operation. After a careful reflection on the poverty assessment of Sudan and keeping in mind its own competence, the DBN has decided that the principal strategy it will adopt for its intervention in Sudan is **Education**. The DBN does not define education in the narrow sense of a formal school education, but education understood as imparting Literacy Skills, Livelihood Skills and Life Skills. Education enables every person to be the protagonist of his own development and thereby contribute to the overall development of the nation. Similarly, education paves the way for the creation of a climate of peace and the socio-economic conditions that promote the dignity of every individual person. South Sudan has the lowest school enrolment ratio in the world! Similarly projects that offer job-oriented vocational training to youngsters from Darfur and to displaced persons living in Khartoum form part of the programme.

Commitment to Evangelisation

In recent years, as a result of the political situation in this country the Salesian mission has experienced mixed fortunes but it has relaunched its commitment to evangelisation with renewed enthusiasm. The two communities of the Salesians and of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Tonj, working in an area spread over a territory containing 120 villages, are involved in an intense activity of evangelisation which in recent years, as a result of the war, the famine and the floods, has often been greatly hampered. Fr James Pulickal, in charge of the Salesian community is one of the greatly loved pioneers, a missionary who has put heart and soul into helping the people and in evangelisation. During the war he spent 18 months as a prisoner of the guerrillas. The clinic with a Salesian doctor working there treats over 150 sick people every day as they travel long distances on foot. There are about fifty patients suffering from tuberculosis and about 200 from Hansen's disease. There are 850 pupils

in the school. In recent years seven other school centres have been opened linked to the main school in Tonj, reaching out to 65 of the 120 villages. In each one there are about 100-120 pupils.

Six of these schools are now planning to open four more. In the absence of trained teachers the missionaries have prepared some young catechists to do the teaching. They meet together every Thursday for a training session and at the weekends they go out to various villages to help with games, education and Christian formation. The schools are also used as mission stations for catechesis and Sunday Mass. When the rainy season prevents them reaching the villages, the teacher-catechists devote their time to the youngsters in Tonj. At present there are 190 preparing for the sacrament of Confirmation and about 100 for Baptism.



The Difficult Situation of Young Women

The Salesian Sisters are concerned about the situation of women in Tonj. The community is made up of four Sisters who are responsible for a boarding school, a kindergarten and primary school, parish works, a dispensary, and promotional activities. Because of the civil wars, those who remained in the villages, especially the women, have had no access to education. Some cultural traditions like polygamy are still practised in the villages. For the family or the clan, the girl is a means of wealth because she receives the dowry from the boy who wants to marry her. Often the men are cattle owners. Those who have more women and cows are considered richer.

The families take care of their daughters until they reach marriageable age, without however sending them to school but only to guarantee the dowry coming from their marriage. The girl has no choice in the marriage. One Sister wrote, *It is sad to see girls of 14 or 15 given as a wife to men of 60 or 70 years who already have many wives, because they have the possibility of giving a larger dowry to the family.*

Tradition demands that if the husband dies, the wife must continue to bear children to him by marrying the brother of the deceased. She must also assume the responsibility of raising them on her own without receiving help from others, not even from the brother-in-law who already has other wives. This is why the Sisters always have a large number of mothers and children who are malnourished and come to them for help or to survive. During certain times of the year, drought contributes to this situation and thus the infant mortality rate is very high.

During these years, the Sisters have encouraged the education of girls, offering them a place to live in the boarding school. This is not easy since they must distance the girls from their families for a while in order to educate them. The possibility of giving them hospitality in the boarding school gives the girls a chance to complete their studies and also to avoid matrimony at a very young age.

The girls are keen to study, to better their condition and eventually that of their family. The Sisters have started a life-skills formation programme, providing lessons in hygiene and various manual activities to help them get a job. In addition to this, they offer the girls the opportunity to learn the importance of cultivating local produce in order to ensure their own nutrition requirements and that of their children.

After 23 years of civil war, the Sisters are optimistic about the future. They hope to realise what was written in the peace pact signed recently by the warring parties. They are convinced that only through education, can there be the change of mentality, necessary for building a social environment that is favourable for peace and that gives the people the capacity to govern themselves.

Spiritual Leadership - Encouragement

Recognition

It seems such a simple thing to smile, to say someone's name or to offer a brief word of appreciation. Yet the impact of such brief acts of recognition can warm and sustain other adults on the team for the rest of the day. It is not simply a matter of recognising faces and saying names; it is also recognising the story behind each face and the particular challenges, triumphs and disasters that they may carry in their work with the young. The short moment of recognition, the nod on a corridor and the quiet thanks become shorthand connections to the inner spiritual life of colleagues. These moments are the visible expressions of a deeper recognition of a common vocation to work with the young and an appreciation of the kind of dedication and sacrifice that such work involves.

Recognition needs to be personal. It is best done quietly but often; rather than publicly and rarely. The challenge for the leader lies in knowing the team and seeing things from their perspective, noticing where they falter, how they cope with success and how they manage setbacks. When the leader is able to see the challenges, fears and hopes of colleagues then their smaller triumphs and disappointments are more easily recognised.

Recognition demands that the leader moves the centre of their thinking from themselves to others. This move towards selflessness is part of the leader's spiritual journey; a self-emptying that is seen as crucial to spiritual growth in every religious tradition. The ability to keep one's own concerns in perspective and allow others to develop and succeed is part of a maturity that spiritual leadership demands. It is part of the role of being a good shepherd; knowing the sheep and helping them to grow to fullness of life as individuals.

The Good Shepherd

The image of the good shepherd, for example, can make a lot of sense to a teacher who is aiming to get control of class groups early in their career. Using that image to describe the situation can help sustain the teacher spiritually and protect their vocation from

disappointment and frustration. The Christian story sees failure as part of a bigger picture, part of a journey and not a disaster or a dead end. In supporting colleagues the leader, acting spiritually, can draw on Gospel stories of talents, storms, feeding the hungry, crosses and empty tombs. These stories open up an inner landscape that can give meaning to the day to day struggles of all members of a Christian community. In the Christian tradition the Eucharist, with its emphasis on growth through brokenness and community, can offer meaning and a sense of belonging that goes beyond all words and into the mystery of a vocation to work with the young.

Celebrations

Getting together with colleagues to waste a little time together is a prophetic act on the part of leadership. It is a recognition that there is a wider perspective that makes sense of what we are doing. The remorseless pressure of targets, tests and evaluation can give the impression that the adults are entirely responsible for whatever is seen as success or failure in work for the young. Celebrations recognise a deeper mesh of meaning and quietly recognise the cost of being with young people. The celebration is not a reward for work well done but is instead the feeding of the spirit that holds people together in the service of the young. It is not an occasional option but a regular way that leadership can serve the teams they lead.

Don Bosco spoke about the need to go beyond the roles we carry and into a friendly presence with others. Celebrations bridge the roles that can sometimes divide and replace them with a lively spirit of confidence. Celebrations need no excuse because for Christians there is always a reason to celebrate. We believe in a God who can turn tragedy to new life and death into an eternal belonging. So every celebration is an act of faith in life whilst it is still imperfect, unfinished and even confusing. When in doubt, celebrate!

Births, Deaths and Marriages

Opportunities to care and to celebrate are provided by life events that will touch adult lives on a regular basis.

Leaders need to recognise the chance to focus on people rather than their roles through births, sickness, marriages bereavements and other life-changing moments. An invitation to prayer or a quiet word in the ear can lift the heart of that person and draw the community more closely around them for a while. The ability to celebrate new life and love among colleagues lightens the pressures of work and lifts the spirit. Anniversaries of joy and sadness, sensitively recalled by leaders can help weave the story of staff and the community into a more supportive embrace. In that atmosphere hearts can be opened and needs made known in a way that draws the whole community deeper into the mystery of life, death and resurrection.

Welcoming the Stranger

Most spiritual traditions place strong emphasis not on *stranger danger* but on welcoming the stranger. The story of two disciples walking to Emmaus after the death of Jesus is just one way that the theme is found in Christianity. The disciples welcomed a stranger and found they were walking with Jesus. In the process they found their hearts were on fire with new insight and energy for the future. In working with young adults, this tradition suggests a special care for new staff and volunteers. For the Christian, taking time to introduce new staff to others, to explain how things work, who to go to for help and making the first move in saying *Hello* become acts of loving kindness and not simply good professional practice.

In Christian communities new arrivals carry a fresh sense of God's presence into the teams they work with. They bring a new experience and background that upsets the pattern of existing relationships. They bring needs that draw new strengths from long established staff and they offer the precious gift of first impressions and insights that may have escaped the long term workers on the team. Welcoming the stranger is therefore an act of loving kindness for the new arrival but also a part of the enrichment of the adult team for the future. It is a way of drawing down a blessing on everyone, a way of caring for the carers.

Creating an Environment of Care

Don Bosco built a caring community for young people that involved creating a home, a school, a playground and a church in city centre Turin. That model has grown into a spirituality of care that identifies four ways of caring as a community for the needs of all, including the adults.

Belonging
Learning
Relaxing
Meaning

The experience of Don Bosco led him to believe that keeping this fourfold balance led to an environment in which everyone could grow, including the adults. It was a community of Gospel life, based on an optimistic humanism that set people free to be themselves in community. This fourfold pattern could become a checklist for care in a school or youth group.

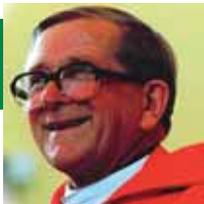
We do not learn or grow to be human on our own but only in community. Care for the adults not only sustains them for the task of dealing with the inconsistencies of youth, it is also a way of modelling positive adult roles for the future and an act of faith and of friendship for the young.

Fr David O'Malley SDB

(Extract from forthcoming book on Leadership in Education)

We Remember

Fr Sean O'Loughlin 1926 - 2006



Sean was born at Drombana just outside Limerick. He entered the recently opened Salesian College at Pallaskenry, Co Limerick just after the close of the Second World War, hoping to become a priest but with his lack of previous secondary education, especially Latin and his evident experience and expertise on the farm, he was accepted to become a Salesian Brother.

He made his noviciate in Burwash in 1948 and after his first profession, Sean moved to Shrigley to help on the farm in those post-war years. His extraordinary determination and hard work and his love of working with the boys made him a much loved character even then.

With the closure of the farm Sean experienced one of those radical changes of direction that somehow so often marked his life. The Provincial asked Sean to train as a chef so that he could serve the community at Shrigley in a new capacity. While working in the kitchen and studying in the evenings, Sean enjoyed feeding the students during the day and joining in the football matches on Wednesday afternoons and at the weekends.

His next posting was when he was asked to go and look after the sports fields and grounds at the Salesian School, Chertsey. His work on the sports fields at Chertsey consisted of a long term campaign to build in the drainage necessary to make the fields playable. Given the low-lying situation of the fields and the high water table, it was a task that would have daunted a less determined and hard working man. Sean never gave in. At Chertsey he was soon coaching the school football teams who played on his well maintained pitches.

It was in a similar role that he came to Farnborough but Fr Michael Blackburn, at Brother Michael Delmer's bidding, offered Sean the job of Senior sports master. Sean acquitted his new role with enthusiasm and the football teams thrived. Of course, despite his new job, he never gave up his care for the grounds and early or late he could be found tending the fields on his tractor.

Even after his first hip operation Sean found that he could manipulate himself onto the seat of his tractor even before he could walk again.

With the changes that came into the Church at the Second Vatican Council Sean's vocation to the priesthood began to re-emerge once again, with the encouragement of Fr Robert Coupe. He eventually came, as a student for the priesthood, to Ushaw College at the age of 62. For the next five years Sean worked at his theological studies with the determination that had drained the fields at Chertsey despite the water table. With the support and encouragement of the professors and students Sean became a much-loved feature of the Seminary and the Salesian community there.

In his beloved parish at Esh Winning he won the hearts of the sick and elderly he visited with such devotion. His gentle humility drew all sorts of people to him. After ordination he spent a year in the Glasgow parish of St Benedict before returning to Chertsey where he exercised a wonderful apostolate among the youngsters in the playground. His love for the sick and elderly and his frequent pilgrimages to Lourdes made a wonderful contribution to the enrichment of the Salesian community life and apostolate in those years. Sean's love for human beings and his capacity to relate to the young and old were a wonderful gift that he shared unhesitatingly as a Salesian and a priest. His life was rich in human relationships; with his wonderful family, his friends, past pupils and his community. His last two years were troubled by the onset of many major illnesses. He died on the 4th September 2006 in the arms of his niece Kathleen who has been a wonderful support to him over these last most difficult years.

Sean had a wonderful sense of fun and teasing. He had a deep love of his family, a great devotion to the Mass and our Blessed Lady, a concern for the young, the sick and the elderly and a sterling determination to make his superiors see the light his way. We shall miss Sean immensely. May the Good Lord reward him and may his garden in heaven be ever in bloom.

A little bit of heaven

Death was once part of life. Adults and children alike were not surprised by it. Today people have become unfamiliar with the simple and natural fact of death. They lack the ability to deal with this modern way of death. Today so many people die alone, without any ritual. As result our whole approach to death has radically changed.

Death forces a family to face a variety of choices. Some people try to deny death. Pascal, three centuries ago wrote: *Not having succeeded in conquering death men have decided not to think about it any more.* Death becomes a taboo subject. In this way death is denied its proper place in life and loses its meaning; death becomes an *accident*. Obviously this is an attempt doomed to failure from the start: films, TV drama, news programmes and electronic games are packed with death on a huge scale, and all within children's reach. The realisation of death occurs in stages and children gradually cope with the various elements until they come to understand that it is irreversible and universal. Then the questions start: *What happens afterwards? Does everything disappear? Is death a full stop to life or only a comma? Will we die too? Mum and Dad? Won't we see them any more? Will I have to die?* Death is always shrouded in suffering and the family is the place where mourning can be understood and experienced. We are familiar with a special sort of feeling called *consolation* which almost always manages to relieve the spiritual pain. Children too know about it: crying in the arms of mum or dad makes them feel better. Weeping together, sharing the pain can help us to bear even the most heart-rending loss. Love doesn't die, and in some way, support and sympathy fill the emptiness left by someone who has died.

Death doesn't take away for ever the people we love if we can remember them. A memory almost seems to be one way of keeping alive a person who has died. That's why we put flowers on the grave in the cemetery and we need to speak about them. For important people, monuments are built in their memory. With a memorial someone no longer alive continues to be present. In the hearts of those who were loved, the memory of the one

who has died can be very strong; it brings relief and eases the pain.

This world is not our permanent home: we are here for a while and then we pass on. Each day someone is born and someone dies; people come and people go. Only the Creator can give a satisfactory answer to such a fundamental question. He has done, since He gave an answer to the question of death that no one would ever have imagined. He has passed through death Himself and has put an end to it, opening the way to eternal life for everyone. In this way no one can ever say: *God doesn't know what it means to die.* From the Christian understanding of death one can draw the strength to live. Someone who believes in Jesus believes in this promise: When God loves someone He makes them live for ever. God doesn't destroy the life He has created, He changes it for the better! Life is not the result of blind and cruel fate but of responsibility, since we all have this appointment we mustn't miss. It's precisely when talking about death that faith makes a difference. Christians don't say: Life is beautiful but then unfortunately we die, but Life is beautiful and then finally we die. One of the essential tasks to teach young people is that they have the possibility each day of choosing between life and death. From this point of view the teaching role of the family assumes an altogether special character. We have only one life. It begins on this earth and continues in the house of God. The family of believers lives in an atmosphere of joy, of profound hope and feels the strong attraction of an exhilarating future. Don Bosco used to say in the midst of difficulties. *A little bit of heaven will make everything right!*

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