

THE MAGAZINE FOR THE SALESIAN FAMILY

DON BOSCO TODAY

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SALESIANS
OF DON BOSCO



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Editorial

The year 2009 is of special significance to us since it marks the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Salesians in 1859. This anniversary encourages us to reflect Don Bosco's ways, to return to Don Bosco with the eyes of today aware of the needs of today and with an understanding of the young people of today. We need to reflect both on what Don Bosco said and what he did. In 1854 Don Bosco said, quoting from chapter eleven of John's Gospel:

To gather together into one, the scattered children of God. These words of the Gospel tell us that our divine Saviour came down from heaven to earth to gather together all the children of God scattered over all the world. It seems to me that such words could be applied literally to the young people of our own times. **The young constitute the most fragile yet most valuable component of human society, for we base our hopes for the future on them.** These young people have a real need of some kind person who will care for them, work with them, and guide them.

This takes us to the heart of Don Bosco. The article by Fr Merriman, *Volunteering to go to Prison*, is a reminder that today there is still the *real need of some kind person*.

In the last issue of Don Bosco Today, we featured the World Youth Day, an impressive manifestation of the faith of young people today. In his message to young people the Rector Major, Fr Chávez, challenges them to reflect more deeply on their Christian vocation. Although this is a message for young people, in reality it is a challenge addressed to us, making it clear to us what we should expect from young people today. A reminder that we should never underestimate their generosity. That generosity is clearly shown in the lives of many young people, who volunteer to work with Salesian communities in distant parts of the world, as exemplified in the article by Sarah Cruickshank.

The new book on Prayer by Fr Michael Cunningham reminds us that we, like Don Bosco, need to be Contemplatives **in Action**.

Tony Bailey SDB

Last October, a copy of the Don Bosco Calendar was sent directly to all our readers. The printer had made a mistake in the month of September for which he apologises:

Unfortunately, during the preparation of the artwork for the 2009 calendar, an alteration was made which resulted in 5th September being obliterated. This operation was carried out after the editor of Don Bosco Publications had read the proofs and the error was entirely Printoff's. I would like to personally apologise for any inconvenience arising from this human error.

Brian Hough
Managing Director
Printoff Graphic Arts Limited

The calendar was reprinted at no cost to us and amended copies can be obtained free by ringing **01204 308811** or emailing **joyce@salesians.org.uk**

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Message Of The Rector Major To The Young 2009

My Dear Young People



Last summer I took part in the World Youth Day in Australia. It was great to see so many young people coming from all parts of the world, despite the distance and the expense. My thoughts immediately went back to the great adventure that began with Jesus of Nazareth. Fascinated by Jesus, the apostles followed him, listened to him and often didn't understand him. They had doubts about him until the end, and they betrayed him. Finally, however, they all associated themselves with Peter's passionate profession of faith: *Lord to whom shall we go? You alone have the words of eternal life.* They had been caught up in his total selfless love. A love which was more real than all their weakness, than their every betrayal. So that tiny seed germinated, and became a great people who cover the face of the earth: the Church.

Meeting those thousands of enthusiastic young people in Australia reminded me of a small group of young men who on the cold evening of 18th December 1859 had met together in Don Bosco's room to make the most important decision of their lives: to stay with Don Bosco, giving themselves totally to the Lord. And so in a simple and humble way, 150 years ago, a seed was sown. From that tiny seed there grew the Salesians, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the Salesians-Cooperators.

A story that has reached even us because that seed has become a great tree: the Salesian Family.

To you too, young people of the beginning of this third millennium, Jesus entrusts the mission which two thousand years ago he gave to his disciples: *I am sending you to proclaim my gospel to the ends of the earth.* Go with that love and that apostolic and educative passion which led Don Bosco always to give preference to the young, the poor, the people not yet evangelised.

I want to give you some suggestions to reflect on in the generosity of your hearts. I invite you to *walk together towards a shared goal*, with a deep spirit of communion, with a mature ability to plan together. Our common mission, our shared goal is the world of youth. For this reason, dear friends, we need to be *part of the youth scene*. Jesus is sending you, together with the whole Salesian Movement, to the world of today's young people, with its anxieties and hopes, with its moments of joy but also its suffering. I am thinking of the world of school, of university, of work; I am thinking about the places for free time and entertainment; I am thinking, in particular, about the desperate places of youth deprivation. It's a question of being actively present in all these places fostering a better quality of life, better and deeper communication

and sharing to overcome so much individualism and so much loneliness in which many young people are living, bearing witness to the positive values that give meaning and flavour to life, and above all, making the person of Jesus Christ, the source of life and of joy, present among the young.

Here is another suggestion: *make the voice of the young heard*, in particular that of the many who don't have a voice and no one listens to; make their needs and their expectations known, defend their rights and support them in their demands. You ought to be the voice of the young speaking to society and also to the Church: with a spirit of creativity promote initiatives that make their plight known, their problems, hardships, their expectations and hopes. The many good things too that are already taking place in the world of youth need to be made known, the many positive initiatives for which often no space is found in the media; in this way foster a positive view of the world of the young among adults, infecting them with your enthusiasm and drive. For you, young people, civilian, social and missionary *voluntary service* constitutes a possible vocation of significance. Be ready and willing to opt for demanding and generous forms of service even to the extent of accepting the gift of God who calls you to a *vocation of special consecration*.

Strengthen your own Salesian Youth Movement promoting contacts and knowledge about each other between the various groups in the same Salesian centre or in the same local area, encouraging the sharing of ideas and resources, collaboration in joint projects in the service of the great causes of life and of solidarity. Collaborate with institutions and organisations in civil society, especially those which are working among the young and in the field of youth in need. Make the Salesian presence, as a Movement, visible in the Church and in society by taking part in joint projects, offering your resources and capabilities in support of initiatives on behalf of the young.

Following paths of *spiritual growth and development and of pastoral formation* we will be able to carry out our shared mission which is the Christian education and guidance in life of the young person.

Here is the question put by the Pope to the young people at the last World Youth Day in Sydney; he said:

Dear young people let me now ask you a question. What will *you* leave to the next generation? Are you building your lives on firm foundations, building something that will endure? What legacy will you leave to young people yet to come? What difference will you make?

Let us walk together with hope: *You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses to the ends of the earth.* (Acts 1:8). My dear young people, these words of Jesus are addressed to each one of you. Never ever forget it! The Risen Jesus opens up for each one of you these wide horizons, to the ends of the earth. But these begin here and now in your own countries, in your own cities where Providence has placed you. We are part of a great Family born in the heart of Don Bosco and increased with the gift of Mary Mazzarello and of all the Saints who have given it life, in a special way the young saints, such as Dominic Savio and Laura Vicuña. Today the Lord is calling us to continue this beautiful adventure for the benefit and the salvation of the young.

Mary, who was the Mother and Teacher of Don Bosco, cannot leave us alone on this journey. She is for us too the Mother and Teacher who opens our hearts to Christ and to the young, so that at the service of the poorest young people we can build a movement of salvation and the fullness of life.

Fr Pascual Chávez

Turin, on the feast of Saint John Bosco, 31st January 2009



Slumdog Millionaire

Without doubt one of the greatest hits of 2009 is the new film by Danny Boyle, *Slumdog Millionaire*. It tells a very basic tale of rags to riches, with love conquering all, set in the Dharavi slum of modern Mumbai. It is a film made in the centre of the so-called *Bollywood* cinema industry and speaks volumes for this production as it crosses over the cultural divides and makes us realise that we do live in a global village. It has the universal appeal of the victory of good over evil. Many honours, including BAFTA and Oscar nominations, have been bestowed upon both cast and crew.

The young hero, Jamal Malik is a contestant on an Indian TV version of the universally popular game show, *Who wants to be a Millionaire?* For those few who have never seen the programme, the format is very simple: answer a series of questions and win a million pounds - you can even ring a friend for help or ask the opinion of the audience. In the movie, Jamal is accused of cheating as he moves closer to that top prize and he is arrested. He is able to show, through a series of flashbacks to his childhood in the slums, that his knowledge is not book or school-based, but his learning comes through the harsh realities of having to survive in a cruel world.

These scenes of life in the slums are perhaps the most moving of the film; Danny Boyle has often commented on how real poverty can be seen nightly on the television news, but to really experience it you must smell it and taste it. Indeed it is to the producer's credit that they did not choose to film it on a vast soundstage in leafy Surrey, but they worked exclusively in Mumbai, using a cast of local children with no formal acting training. These are the real stars of the film; they speak and act with complete honesty that perhaps reflects their own situation. Indeed the screen writer, Simon Beaufoy wanted this reality to be obvious throughout the film, *I wanted to get (across) the sense of this huge amount of fun, laughter, chat, and sense of community that is in these slums. What you pick up on is this mass of energy.* Energy is evident in the film from that opening chase through Dharavi to the final explosive Bollywood-style dance routine, with Jamal finally winning over the only love of his life, Latika.



I was lucky enough to watch the film with a fellow Salesian, Fr Gerry Broidy, who spent some time with the Salesian Breads project in Southern India. The film rang true with many of his recollections of working with the youngsters on the project, it gives a true portrayal of how millions of people have to live in our world on a daily basis. Boyle does not seek to sanitize it or dress it up: he tells it as it is, while pointing to the fact that India is fast becoming a new force to be reckoned with.

Danny Boyle is a Lancastrian by birth and attended Thornleigh Salesian College in Bolton. Any remote thoughts of becoming a Salesian or entering the priesthood were soon dismissed by the gentle Fr James Conway. As Danny later related, *I don't know if he was trying to save me or the priesthood.* Like Danny, I was lucky enough to be a pupil of the most wonderfully charismatic teacher of English Literature, Mr Frank Unsworth. To the sixth formers of Thornleigh he was a hero: as he not only taught us literature, but was also our drama coach and took us to the theatre, especially to Stratford where we could see Shakespeare. While some of us moved on to industry or commerce or even became Salesians of Don Bosco, Danny followed that vision given to each of us by Mr Unsworth and went on to study drama at Bangor, the rest, as they say, is history.

Vision and encouragement is something we all need in life; Don Bosco saw that this was crucial in his system of education. We need the challenge of the next question and we should not be content with second best. *Slumdog Millionaire* offers each of us a chance to reflect on where we are going in life.

Gerry O'Shaughnessy SDB

SLUMDOGS OF DON BOSCO

What are the Salesians doing for the children of the slums of India?

When I searched the internet I discovered a new site entitled www.slumdogs.org

This site answered the question. Under the heading **Salesians in India** we read

SALESIAN WORK FOR THE YOUNG AT RISK

A formidable network of services, as astounding for its variety and reach as for its impact!

- 354 Street Presences
- 100 Shelter Homes
- 117 Children's Homes
- 233 Street Education Centres
- 63 Vocational Training Centres
- 29 Advocacy Units
- 35 Missing Child Search Units
- 26 24-Hour Childline Centres
- and a host of other projects across **72 cities and towns throughout India** – undeniably the most vigorous expression of Salesian India's concern for the 'Young at Risk', the most neglected and vulnerable section of the country's youth.



The expression *Young at Risk* (YaR) embraces children and young people whose safety, growth and development are put at risk through indifference and neglect on the part of parents as well as society. Generally, the term refers to runaway children, school dropouts, rag-pickers, street children, child workers, young drug addicts, orphans; those abandoned, abused or exploited; refugee-children, victims of war, violence and calamities.

Inspired by Don Bosco, in the past thirty years or so the Salesians in India have clearly established themselves as the pioneers in bringing new hope for children in difficult situations. Interestingly, their move to the streets in the 1970s was triggered off by the helplessness of a City Corporation.

In 1974, the Mayor of Cochin was confronted with a problem. He had on his hand 110 young delinquents – an unruly pack, indeed, of rough and tough pickpockets, shoplifters, rag-pickers, and runaways. The police had rounded them up from the city's railway stations, bus stands, market places and streets. The Mayor was convinced that keeping them confined in a *settlement* under police surveillance was not the best solution, but he couldn't see any alternative till, of course, he heard of the Salesians. He approached Fr. Varghese Menacherry, the Director of Don Bosco Youth Centre at Vaduthala. *Would the Don Bosco people be able to do something for these delinquent children? They are troublesome kids, but we need to do something for them,* he pleaded. Fr. Varghese nodded in agreement and added, *Definitely. They need to be taken care of; they need to be guided and taught some skills to help them earn a living.* The Corporation authorities promised to provide the place to keep them and also to meet all the expenses of looking after them, if only Don Bosco would accept them.

Fr. Varghese contacted Fr. Thomas Panakezham, the Provincial of Madras, who gave the project full support and encouragement. And so, on the 31st May 1974, the Salesians received the first batch of 110 youngsters from the Municipal Corporation of Cochin in an old warehouse of the Corporation in Palluruthy, which they christened *Sneha Bhavan* (House of Love).

Thus began a new chapter in the history of Salesian Youth Ministry in India – a conscious movement towards street children, those roofless and rootless young people one finds everywhere, especially in the cities, eking out an existence by picking up things from around railway stations, bus stands and market places.

Soon *Sneha Bhavan's* ripple effect began to be felt across Salesian India, especially among the younger generation. More and more Salesians began to show a new interest in working for these young people.

In 1977-79, Fr Joe Fernandez did the first-ever scientific study on street children in India, as part of his Master's in Social Work at the Madras School of Social Work in Chennai. As his study was nearing completion, Door Darshan, the national TV channel, (then in its black-and-white infancy years) telecast an interview with Fr Joe, highlighting some of the important findings of his study. Several photographs, showing the life of children on the streets were also shown on the TV during the interview. Soon UNICEF got interested in these photographs and bought them for their campaigns during the 1979 International Year of the Child.

Without doubt, Fr Joe's study of the *paper-pickers* of Madras did create a new awareness of the phenomenon of street children. In fact, beginning from 1980, the Salesian students of theology at Kristu Jyoti College, Bangalore, started venturing out into the streets of the city, contacting the rag-pickers, under the banner of *Project Outreach*. In course of time, through the young priests who passed out of Kristu Jyoti, this initiative found echoes in all the provinces of India.



The Bear Facts

Hello Children



Do you like children's stories? The competition, in this magazine, is for you to write your own story. Have you ever tried curling up on a settee to read a book? Lots of children like a story at bedtime. Some like fantasy books like *Harry Potter*: Others like a ghost story: everybody likes a story that makes them laugh. Do you like a happy ending? Do you like to imagine that you are one of the characters in a story? Which is your favourite book? Write the Title in the space above your own story and we'll see which is the most popular one of all.

Most children, today, spend plenty of time on their computers and watching TV but there are still many boys and girls who enjoy *getting into* a really good book. Reading is extremely good for you as you learn lots of new words; you improve your spelling; you will write better yourself and you'll even start to speak better; and all of these things will happen without you even knowing it! So.....READ ON!

Autumn 2008 Boscoword Competition - Solution



- | | |
|---|--|
| ACROSS | DOWN |
| 4. A dark colour (5) | 1. Famous battle in 1066 (8) |
| 5. A type of tree (3) | 2. Alright (2) |
| 6. City in Italy where Don Bosco was born (5) | 3. A mobile (5) |
| 7. The abominable snowman (4) | 4. Name of the Pope (8) |
| 9. Founder of Salesians (3-5) | 5. Nigeria and Ghana are in this Continent (6) |
| 11. Choirs do this (4) | 6. How many are there in twins (3) |
| 12. A long time (3) | 8. Very heavy weight (3) |
| 13. If you don't, you could drown! (4) | 10. Shrek was one of these (4) |
| 16. Summer Fair (4) | 14. Perhaps (2) |
| | 15. I (2) |

Winners

Tom, Finchie and Beth Whitehead from London
Geraldine Ainsworth from Stockport
Olivia Nicholaou from Laleham

Prize

They have all received a copy of 'John Bosco: friend of children and young people'

Bosco Bear



The Pirates Of The Buried Demon



GRIZZLY BEAR

Bosco, Molly, Rio, Suzi and Graham were on Parrot Island, in the middle of the River Snake.

My Grandad told me that one time a long time ago, my Great-Great-Great-Great-Grandad Grizzly was a pirate, said Bosco. Grizzly had a ship called

the Gorilla; he flew the skull and crossbones, and when he returned from a voyage he sailed up the River Snake to hide his gold and silver on this island.

Wow, gasped Suzi. *Where is the Treasure?*

Well, said Bosco. *The legend says that you should look for an Appange tree.*

A what, said Molly?

A tree where the fruit is half-apple and half- orange, explained Bosco.

Then look for the pink and black, 4-legged, bird-eating spiders.

Follow the spiders and they will take you to the treasure!

THE SEARCH

Bosco's friends liked playing at Pirates.

A-aaaa-rgh and shiver mi timbers, said Rio. Graham; away and see what ye can find.

Belay, said Molly. Come on mi hearties and follow me.

Suzi sat down and dreamed that some diamonds would go very nicely with her new dress. Suddenly Graham came sprinting back.

You look like a hot dog, joked Rio!

Graham wasn't amused. *You'll be a very hot dog, you pesky varmint, when you walk the plank, replied Graham. Come on. I've found an apple tree and some spiders, he said.*

Did the spiders have 4 legs? asked Suzi?

I don't know, said Graham, just shake your shovels and follow me!

They came to a clearing and on the sandy floor was a rusty old spade.



A-aaaa-rgh. I said a-aaaaaaa-rgh, said Rio. He was very excited. Start digging.

THE TREASURE

CLUNK !

I've found something, said Rio. We'll be rich....we'll be millionaires!

was a very ancient, oak box. They yanked it up.... opened the creaking lid And inside was....a wooden leg!

Where's the treasure, asked Graham?

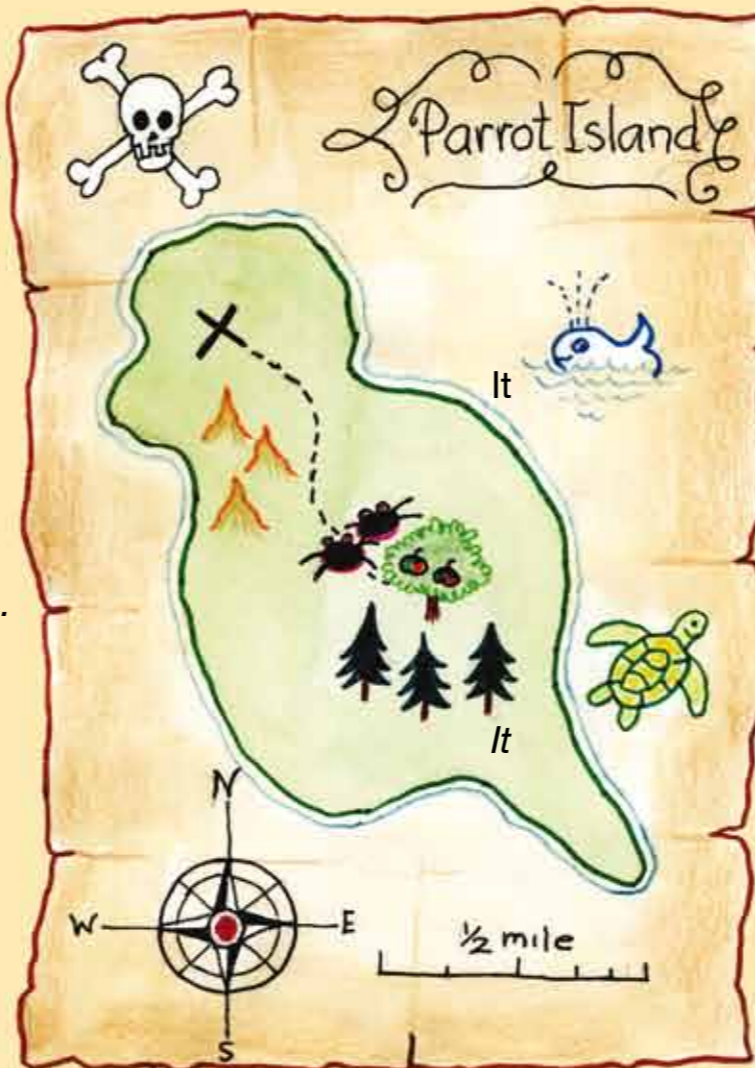
Whose is this leg, wondered Suzi?

Is it Grizzly's? said Rio.

BOSCO

might be, said Bosco. My Grandad told me that Grizzly had a wooden leg and the pirates often used to have fun and try and trick him. They called it 'pulling his leg'.

You've not been pulling OUR legs, Bosco, have you, asked Molly, looking straight at him? Rio Suzi and Graham all turned to look at Bosco as well.



WOULD I DO THAT? asked Bosco.



Volunteering To Go To Prison!



Fifteen years ago a very determined lady began something entirely new in the British prison service. She organised volunteers to come into a Young Offenders Institute to teach Basic Skills reading, writing, and numeracy. The volunteers work, one to one, with inmates who asked for help.

That Office organising Volunteer Supported Education (VSE) is still the only one of its kind in the UK. Recently we had a function, celebrating what has been achieved over 15 years and asking distinguished and influential guests, why have other prisons both for young and old offenders, not introduced similar schemes. They could play an important role in breaking the cycle of re-offending.

On our *Exhibition Evening* five of our most recent students went up with their tutors and read out to an audience of about 100 people what had been their experience with VSE. My own student, Danny, gave the longest presentation and he has agreed to let me publish the text he himself had written.

What seemed quite amazing was the courage of these lads. Despite their limited educational and

social backgrounds, they had to stand and speak before an audience of 100 people, including a recent Chief Inspector of Prisons, prison governors, and visitors from a number of other prison establishments. Here's what Danny had to tell them.

When I heard there was going to be a VSE get-together I felt obliged to attend and share my views as I had been a student learning under my tutor Joe for some time now. I come to hear of what VSE has to offer whilst working in the officers' mess and meeting Joe. When Joe explained that he could give me one-zone help with my mathematics among other subjects I told him I was interested right away as I have never been the great at mathematics and as you can appreciate being in prison and not doing any form of education makes you forget any of what you have previously learned in school for instance as you are not putting your brain to work.

When I started to work with Joe I come to realise that my maths skills had decreased significantly and that maths is a subject you cannot learn overnight this gave me no self confidence. With each lesson I began to see improvements and with I become able to tackle harder questions and learn and put to use methods in order to do this. I soon sat a level one maths exam and passed which I am pleased about. We then aimed towards a level two with only a small number of practice lessons before the exam and as a result Joe tried to cram in a number of topics into one session which was difficult for me to take in. I was hesitant to take the exam to say the least as I didn't feel ready, though Joe was eager for me to try and said "You don't have nothing to lose by sitting it but you have gained something if you pass. If only we had a few more sessions beforehand, perhaps four or five I would have gone into the test feeling more upbeat nevertheless I took it

I enjoyed each lesson with Joe and before starting work we would talk about recent events and things such as what we had done since our last lesson with him usually telling me stories of his most recent long distance walking adventure and the latest book he was enjoying reading that tends to be written in either

French or Italian, seeing how excited he would be over such things amazed me and I come to realise there are a wide variety of things people like doing and that my likes were so confined in comparison. I wondered maybe I too could receive enjoyment from various activities and hobbies if only I would give them a go. I also liked laughing with Joe as he got a question wrong he would become flustered and annoyed with himself until he had found the correct answer and why he had made a mistake. This rarely happened though I would always remind him of it as it made a nice change to me being the one with the wrong answer.

I would strongly recommend VSE to anyone interested in furthering their education as you can learn new skills at your own pace in an environment where there are no distractions as it is just you working with your tutor. I personally believe VSE has helped me and I am confident that I can put my new skills to good use outside of prison when given the opportunity to do so.

I would like to thank Joe my VSE tutor for all the help, support and confidence he has given me and VSE as a whole for enabling him and others to pass on their knowledge to us who need it most. Thank you for listening.

A letter to Danny

At the celebration of the 15th birthday of VSE at Feltham on Tuesday April 8th 2008, Danny, you were brilliant!

I'm sure lots of visitors told you that, that same evening.

You were a great ambassador for VSE. VSE has helped you. It was good that you and the other lads were willing to help VSE – and many other prisoners elsewhere in the future. Prisons everywhere need to set up VSE systems, and the evidence of our Feltham students could help bring that about, though it may still take some time before we can see the results.

What you wrote, and read out to us all showed clearly that you have a gift with words. you conveyed to everyone that VSE is about much more than the teaching and learning of basic skills, very necessary though that is.

More important still than your words were what you brought to the evening, simply by being yourself. everyone in the audience knew how nerve-racking an experience you were having, standing up there to address them. Perhaps I'm prejudiced but there was something about what you shared with us that impressed deeply because you came across as so honest and genuine I didn't feel we were being conned.

Later, I was noticing how you and the other inmates were mingling with the visitors, after the formal part of the evening. Both you and the visitors seems at ease with one another, as young people might be in their own house, at a reception for friends of their parents.

The evening proved that you don't need to *take a drink* to show your best self. In your natural and plain self you deserve and win respect, because you have qualities others can admire. No need for smart clothes or flashing lots of money around.

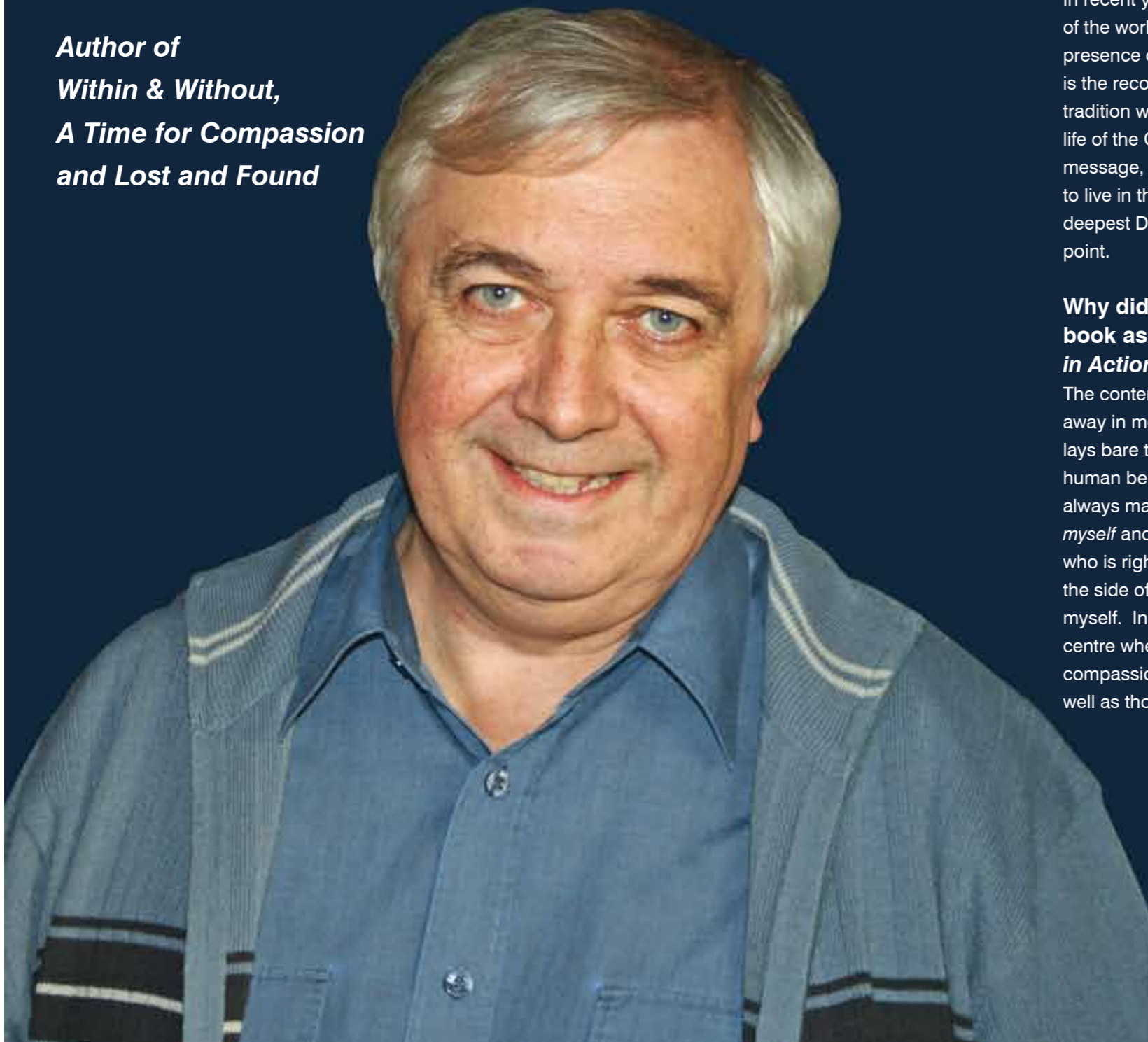
Over the coming months, and even in ten years time, we at VSE will always be delighted to hear from you, to learn of the ways in which you are succeeding in re-building your life. And of course I will always be happy to write back.

Joe Merriman (VSE Tutor)

Let Your Heart Pray

A New Book by Michael Cunningham SDB

Author of
Within & Without,
A Time for Compassion
and Lost and Found



**“It unlocks the heart of
the gospel message”**

Why did you write *Let Your Heart Pray*?

In recent years, I have given retreats in many parts of the world. For me, the most evident sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit, in our troubled times, is the recovery of the contemplative tradition. This tradition was taught for the first 1500 years of the life of the Church. It unlocks the heart of the gospel message, which is that we have all been created to live in the deepest union with God. It is in our deepest DNA. Anything outside that is to miss the point.

Why did you choose the subtitle for the book as *Spirituality for Contemplatives in Action*

The contemplative tradition is not to be hidden away in monasteries. It is for the life of the world. It lays bare the central spiritual problem facing every human being: what do I do with my ego? The ego always makes judgements and creates divisions: *myself* and *others*, *good* and *evil*, *black* and *white*, who is right and who is wrong. It places me on the side of the righteous, so I can feel good about myself. In contemplation we move to a deeper centre where everything can be accepted with compassion and forgiveness, my own failings as well as those of others.

Did your twenty years teaching in comprehensive schools help you when it came to writing your book?

I was fortunate in my teaching years to work with a number of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. I thought I could teach and change them. I learned that the key question was, *How was this experience changing me?* Salesian teaching has to be an exchange of gifts and challenges.

Which authors have helped you most?

My own founder, Don Bosco, set me on the way. In recent years Richard Rohr has been the one who put the pieces together for me. I have always been fascinated by the story and writings of Thomas Merton. I am still learning about the contemplative tradition from Thomas Keating and Cynthia Bourgeault, and mystics such as St Paul and that wonderful English woman, Julian of Norwich.

Do you get much feedback from your readers?

My retreat ministry seems to be growing in response to requests from people who have read my books.

What did you learn from your mistakes?

Well, I've made many, but it was Richard Rohr who taught me something that I wish I had learned earlier. We don't go to God by getting it right but by getting it wrong. Unless we have experienced the compassion and forgiveness of God we have not really met the Father of Jesus, who uses everything in our lives, even our sins and failures, and turns it into good. At the end of the day it is always about compassion, or loving kindness as Don Bosco called it. That has to be good news.

Learning through action

Sarah in Cebu



In our current financial crisis, it is perhaps easier to begin to relate to the situations of millions of people around the world, although whatever we imagine about their poverty will still be a long way from the truth. The crisis that we are currently finding ourselves in has been happening in the developing world for over a decade yet very little has been done to alleviate their suffering, the reality of which is beyond our comprehension.

I went to an island called Cebu, for four weeks to live and work in a church and youth centre there which is situated in the middle of a slum called Pasil. The

community is built on a rubbish dump, at the base of a power station, which is constantly generating clouds of pollution, in an area where no-one else wants to live, and this is why they are there. In my naivety, I thought that this would be the only slum community in the city so I was shocked to find similar areas throughout the city. The poor are living alongside the rich in such close proximity that you can literally walk out of the Cebuano version of the Ritz onto the road where corrugated iron shacks make up the houses of those living there. I went out there with an organisation called Bosco Volunteer Action (BOVA) whose mission statement is *Learning through action; serving the young and the poor alongside Salesian communities around the world.*

The Salesian community that I lived with in Pasil was amazingly inspirational. The dedication that they have to the youth out there was humbling and to be a part of their projects was incredible. It was by far the most challenging thing that I have ever done. To be a part of the *bigger picture*, to reach out to someone in need and to receive so much back in return, was a huge blessing beyond my understanding. My daily routine involved helping out in the kitchen in the morning and preparing food for the feeding programme. The programme is supposed to feed about 100 children but only about 60 to 70 kids actually turned up because the mothers could not be bothered to bring their children. This was quite challenging in itself, as we simply could not understand why you would miss the opportunity of free food, as this would be the only meal the children would have that day.

In the afternoons, I helped out in the office, putting together official documents for the centre to make the qualifications they offered to the vocational trainees, aged between 18 and 25. I also completed the profiles of the students for the sponsorship organisations. After that, I would go and help out in the nursery at the orphanage run by the Sisters of Mother Theresa. The orphanage was for sick and abandoned children and we would go along and play with the babies on the floor, keep them amused and help with the feeding. The orphanage cares for about 60 babies and children and was seriously understaffed. In the evening our duties required us to supervise the scholars, the children who are sponsored to go to school, in their tutorials for an hour every night. The rosary was then said and then we would play games like basketball and volleyball, table football and pool which were part of a new Games' Room that had recently opened.

Pasil is characterised by the amount of children there. At all times of the day and night they accompanied us, everywhere we went. As soon as I got out of the car, I was surrounded by kids, who wanted me to bless them by touching their forehead. Pasil is known as one of the roughest places in Cebu and the poverty there is indescribable.

Yet, despite this, they all had smiles on their faces; smiles that mask an immense depth of pain and suffering, but smiles that were genuine and easy. The people I met were living from day to day. They

were locked in the cycle of working to eat and eating to work. Their houses, built of corrugated iron and maybe some semi-concrete if you were lucky, were built in extremely close proximity to each other, making the *roads* between them narrow, dirty and smelly. Their bath consisted of a bucket. If you were lucky you would live near a well otherwise your water came from a giant plastic container that was filled by the rain water. It is usual to find whole families living in one room, with up to, and sometimes, more than ten or eleven people sleeping together. In fact I was quite embarrassed to describe my house in the UK, and how we all slept in separate rooms with more rooms just for eating or socialising!

All my fears of going to the Philippines were unfounded as I soon discovered that I was extremely welcome from the moment I arrived. But the heat, noise, smells, language, traffic and, most of all, the poverty and destitution everywhere completely overwhelms you. I have never felt so far removed from all that I know.

My time out there was spiritually, mentally, emotionally and physically tiring but I enjoyed every minute. I felt very humbled by living amongst such an amazing, inspirational group of people. My faith was challenged yet fulfilled in ways that didn't really make sense. The lives the people live just opened up to me the reality of what kind of world we share. Projects, such as the one I helped out in, give young people the amazing opportunity to change their lives; lives that they have not chosen to live and would probably have no other opportunity to escape. They are given a purpose, a future, a hope, but most importantly a chance to live as a child should live.

Sarah Cruickshank



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