



# World Bulletin

Winter 2018

Prepared Exclusively for Special Friends of Salesian Missions  
A Written Testimony Of How You Bring God-Saving Grace To A Troubled World

## Giving Young Women a Reason to Live

It's an existence almost impossible to imagine: waking up each morning, wondering whether you'll still be alive when the sun sets. This is life for many who live in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Since 1998, the country has been plagued by an intense, brutal conflict that has already claimed the lives of more than five million people: as many as 1,000 casualties *per day*, according to the World Health Organization. Nearly half of the war's victims are among the young. Those who escape the violence face collateral humanitarian crises that further threaten their futures and potential.

Sadly, for too many girls like 17-year-old Gentille, survival often seems a fate worse than death.

Two years ago, during a deadly massacre, soldiers abducted Gentille as their slave. "I was forced to be the wife of one of those men," she explains in deliberately chosen words to



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temper the savagery she endured. When she finally managed to escape, she joined thousands of other young women in a club to which none of them wished to belong. They were all victims of vicious gender-based assault, psychologically traumatized and often pregnant, who have been ostracized from society with nowhere to turn.

"I wanted to kill myself," Gentille recalls. Thankfully – at just the right time – she discovered help, and renewed hope, at Maison Marguerite.

Here, Salesian missionaries offer a safe haven for girls and women in the war-torn district of Kivu. One of the few such facilities in the area, Maison Marguerite includes an overnight shelter, a school, and a community space. Currently, 22 girls, ages 12-17, live at the shelter, while 60 others visit during the day – pursuing professional training in tailoring, hairdressing, and the culinary arts.

In addition to food and medical assistance for themselves and their babies, the girls can access psychological counseling, life-skills training, self-esteem coaching, parenting classes, and much more. Ultimately – as Gentille herself is about to do – they leave with the skills they need to build stable, productive futures. Gentille plans to open a small tailoring shop in Goma.

"I am nervous," she admits, "But so grateful to the Salesians, who are helping me and my baby start a new life."

Learn more at: [www.salesianmissions.org/congo](http://www.salesianmissions.org/congo)

## This Month's Child



Name: Eramma  
Age: 14  
Home: Deodurga, India

She may only be 14, but Eramma commands respect: a living example for other girls and young women in her small rural village, where gender-based inequality and violence regularly trample the rights, and spirits, of her peers.

As president of her school's Child Rights Club – a project of the Salesian-run, statewide Child Rights Education and Action Movement (CREAM) – Eramma regularly advocates on behalf of exploited children, and works to secure their ability to attend school. And, thanks to the confidence and leadership

skills she has developed under CREAM's guidance, she is firm in her convictions, even when that means confronting powerful adults.

Recently, Eramma rescued a 9-year old girl who had been forced into domestic servitude by a prominent government employee. That girl is now in school. Eramma also collaborates with administrators and police on issues such as bullying, inadequate school infrastructure, child malnourishment and more. No wonder, walking the halls in her school uniform, she is called the "Angel in Blue!"

Learn more at: [www.salesianmissions.org/cream](http://www.salesianmissions.org/cream)

## This Month's Call For Prayer

*So many impoverished children -- particularly girls -- fall victim to abuse, exploitation and slavery. Please pray that these precious and vulnerable young lives are freed from their pain and suffering ... and given the chance to experience a brighter future.*



# Monthly Missions Report...

## In Benin...

They are called “*vidomegon*” – young girls sold into slavery by their desperately impoverished families. By day, they toil in private homes and public markets; at night, they endure physical exploitation and violence, psychological abuse and despair.

Since 2001, Salesian missionaries in Cotonou have been working to address this issue. At Barra Vidomegon, a shelter sited amid the busy Dantokpa market, girls discover a safe haven, meals, recreational activities and more. When they are ready, they may attend the nearby *Maison de L'Esperance* (House of Hope), where they can train in the culinary arts.

Soon, a new dormitory at House of Hope will permanently house as many as 70 former *vidomegon* where – in addition to vocational training – they will receive the psychological support they need to fully overcome their traumas and re-enter society as independent adults. *Learn more at: [www.salesianmissions.org/benin](http://www.salesianmissions.org/benin)*



## In Bulgaria...



Salesian missionaries have launched a new outreach program for the nearly 30,000 Romani children and families living in the southern city of Stara Zagora.

A traditionally nomadic tribe, the Roma people regularly suffer prejudice, social exclusion, and long-term unemployment. As a result, many plummet into inescapable poverty that further fuels their persecution and lack of opportunity.

Through a variety of parish-based activities and programs, the Salesians work to gain the Romas' trust. Every day, children participate in games, music, shared meals and even etiquette lessons at the Salesian youth center. As a result, parents have also begun to visit: they attend Mass, ask advice, or simply sit with the religious.

Ultimately, missionaries hope to convince parents to send their children to the Salesian school – the most effective way to overcome systemic oppression and improve their future prospects. *Learn more at: [www.salesianmissions.org/bulgaria](http://www.salesianmissions.org/bulgaria)*

## In South Korea...

Beginning in 2018, Salesian missionaries in the Jeju diocese will offer an alternative for children in conflict with the law: a residential program, and rehabilitative services, at the St. Isidore Farm Boys' Home.

Such an alternative is crucial in a country struggling with increased juvenile crime. Family court judges – challenged by inadequate social service referral options – face little choice but to sentence these children to compulsory community service, or time in jail. Neither option proves effective: their respective failures measured in the wasted human potential of far too many young lives.



Soon, judges can refer such children to St. Isidore Farm, where they can continue their education, learn a valuable job skill and be filled with the inspiring spirit of Don Bosco.

## Missionary of the Month: Fr. Thomas Uzhunnalil

Father Thomas Uzhunnalil, the Salesian priest kidnapped in 2016 during a deadly attack on the Missionaries of Charity in Aden, Yemen, has earned the Mother Theresa Memorial Award for Social Justice.

It is presented annually by the Harmony Foundation, a Mumbai-based organization dedicated to spreading peace, dialog and community support regardless of religion, caste, gender or ethnicity. The 2017 award recognizes “com-

passion across borders,” specifically within the context of the worldwide refugee crisis. At the time of his abduction, the Indian-born Fr. Tom had been serving in Yemen for four years, having vowed to remain despite the region's escalating civil strife.

The award cites Fr. Tom's “bravery and resilience in the face of adversity; his dedication and commitment to a place of great danger; and his inspiring example of compassionate humanity.”



Released without harm this past September, Fr. Tom joins a distinguished cohort of past recipients, including the Dalai Lama, Malala Yousafzai, and Doctors Without Borders.

## Resilience in Times of Misfortune

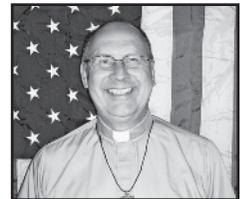
Dear Friend,

In his letter celebrating the bicentenary of Saint John “Don” Bosco's birth, Rector Major Ángel Fernández Artime recalled the values young John learned from his family. It's a long list; but in reviewing it myself recently, one in particular jumped out: *resilience in times of misfortune*.

You see, this legacy of resilience remains at the very core of our

Salesian charism. In all that we do, we endeavor to model it, and teach it, to the youth and families under our care.

Your kindness, compassion and generosity are critical in our efforts in this regard. You help us to empower and assist young women, child laborers, juvenile offenders, and marginalized communities overcome past adversities, and redefine their futures with hope and purpose.



I am deeply grateful for your support and wish you and your family health, prosperity and happiness in this new year.

May God Bless You!

*Fr. Mark Hyde, SDB*

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