



# World Bulletin

Winter 2021

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

## New Hope for Exploited Youth

They are known as “wheelbarrow boys” – the hundreds of children, some as young as seven years old, who work as unskilled laborers hauling all sorts of heavy materials around the streets of Accra, Ghana. Their families are so desperately poor, with so many mouths to feed, that their parents have surrendered them to child traffickers ... often unwittingly. Other kids, valued for their small size, end up toiling in nearby gold and diamond mines.

Across the country, thousands of girls and boys are missing out on their education right now because they’re forced to work. In the Lake Volta region alone, where relatives often sell young family members into the fishing industry in order to pay off debt, nearly 21,000 youth are out of school. This contributes to an unbreakable cycle of poverty in which nearly 45 percent of Ghana’s population lives on less than \$1 a day.



Sadly, this situation isn’t limited to Ghana.

In fact, according to the International Labor Organization, as many as 152 million girls and boys around the world are engaged in child labor. And, during the past year, the global pandemic has forced millions more toward the same fate.

“These girls and boys stand little chance of breaking the cycle of exploitation and despair that plagues generations of children,” says Father Gus Baek, director of

Salesian Missions. “This is why preventing child labor – both the result and cause of poverty – is key to our global mission.”

From India’s brickfields to the streets of Medellín (see story, below), from the mines of the Democratic Republic of Congo to the markets of Kandi, Benin – and in hundreds of other places – our missionaries are there: with the holistic programs kids need to reclaim their childhoods and dignity. Rescued youth are given nutritious meals, safe shelter, and psychosocial support – as well as traditional education and vocational training opportunities that prepare them for future employment.

“These are small, yet meaningful steps toward much brighter futures,” Fr. Gus says. “Thanks to Salesian-run programs, former child laborers can fulfill their potential as educated, independent adults who can positively contribute to society.”

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## This Month’s Child

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Name: Juan David  
Age: 19 Years Old  
Home: Colombia

Juan David was just six years old when he became the sole provider for his family. His father had died, and his ailing mother had two younger children to care for.

And so this vulnerable little boy took to the streets of Medellín, Colombia, begging strangers for money in order to buy food. When that wasn’t enough, he worked as a “recycler.” A fancy name for children who scavenge the city’s landfills for items to sell.

Juan David should have

been playing with his little siblings. Instead, he traded a care-free childhood for one in which drugs, violence, and fear lurked around every corner. When he finally disappeared, his friends assumed he was dead.

Happily, thanks to Salesian missionaries at Don Bosco City, Juan David is very much alive! Rescued by a Salesian missionary nearly 14 years ago, he now attends university and aspires to help children like him overcome adversity and build brighter futures.

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## This Month’s Call For Prayer

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*While we have reason to be hopeful that vaccines and treatments will alleviate the devastation caused by the global pandemic, we must continue to remember, and pray for, the millions of impoverished children and families whose suffering will continue.*



# Monthly Missions Report...

## In the Czech Republic...



Schoolchildren at the Salesian Youth Center in Ceské Budejovice are getting up close and personal with bees, thanks to the Center's new "Salesian Honey Project."

This unique and innovative project teaches girls and boys what it's like to be beekeepers. They wear protective suits, observe the inner workings of the hives, and learn how honey is produced. Judging by their "bright, sparkling eyes above the beehives," the project has already captivated the children's attention and fueled their enthusiasm for learning.

The Center now has a source of sustainable income, too. Thanks to the work of professional beekeepers, missionaries recently produced, packaged, and marketed the inaugural line of "Salesian Honey" products. As their customer base grows, so too, will the opportunity for even more children to benefit from the Center's programs.

## In India...

Every year, more than 400 vulnerable girls and young women are trafficked from the tea gardens of Darjeeling, India. Dazzled by the promises of education, higher pay, and brighter futures elsewhere – opportunities that simply don't exist for them – they make easy prey for unscrupulous adults seeking to lure them away from home and family.

Determined to end this practice, missionaries at Salesian College Sonada have launched a new scholarship program specifically for girls. It's funded, in part, by the social justice-minded owner of a successful global tea brand.

Established in 1933, Salesian College Sonada currently educates 1,400 underserved students, 95 percent of whom come from the rural hills. The new scholarship initiative promises to empower female students through training opportunities that lead to viable jobs in agriculture, technology, tourism and travel, and more.



## In Brazil...

For more than 50 years, struggling families in Corumbá, Brazil have been relying on the Salesians to make their Christmas season brighter.



As an annual tradition administered by Cidade Don Bosco, the "Bell of Charity" project is one of the largest humanitarian aid programs in the region. Families receive basic food baskets as well as clothes and toys donated by the community. Typically, about 150 baskets are handed out in the month of December.

This past year, however, the Salesians quickly realized that the pandemic would intensify the demand for their services. So, they began the Bell of Charity program in April. During the next nine months, they assembled and distributed more than 1,000 baskets – providing essential items for the wellbeing of impoverished families while also delivering holiday cheer when they needed it most.

## Missionary of the Month: Alexandre Akilimali

Growing up in Goma, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Alexandre Akilimali "never could have imagined there was such a place as Ecuador!" he says. Now, he serves among some of the country's most impoverished youth and families in the indigenous Shuar people of Yaupi.

Don Bosco first called him here through the example of Father Fermin Kikoli, who directed ITIG

Don Bosco where Alexandre attended school. Inspired, he entered the novitiate and immediately volunteered for missionary work once he qualified.

As he goes about his days in the jungle, Alexandre takes the advice he received during missionary training to heart: "Don't go to give something new; first go and learn from others." And the Shuar children are happy to



teach: building bridges of friendship across language and cultural barriers.

While full acclimation will require much patience, Alexandre looks forward to serving the people of Ecuador as a Salesian priest and missionary.

## Endless Possibilities...

Dear Friends,

Around the world, our mission is grounded in pragmatic education. By teaching youth hands-on skills, we engage their curiosity, inspire their learning, and equip them for future work.

For exploited and underserved children especially, these educational opportunities can be transformative – like our innovative beekeeping initiative featured in this issue.

Not incidentally, Saint Francis de Sales, for whom our order is named, admired bees – viewing their own "hands-on" work to collect pollen as mutually beneficial to the flowers and the colony.

That's exactly what we envision to be the result of a Salesian education. Just as individual honeybees make collective positive contributions to their communities, students



who graduate from our programs can do the same. And the possibilities, as they say, are endless!

With sincere gratitude,

*Fr. Gus Baek*  
Fr. Gus Baek, S.D.B.



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