

Summer/Fall 2021

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Page.

Supporting Sri Lanka's War Widows
During the Pandemic 2

New Campaign to Prevent Child Abuse . 5

Notes From the Field:

A personal account by Salesian
Lay Missioner Ann Steffen 9

Don Bosco Tech: Preparing Today's
Underserved Youth for Tomorrow . . . 3

Salesian Snapshots 18

"I am the Bread of Life..."
Simple food for displaced families 22

Driven by Empathy: An Olympic
Gold Medalist Reflects on Her
Salesian Education 26

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It is filled with even
more stories and
photos of all the
good works YOU
help make possible.



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Letter from the Editor



Dear Friend and Partner in Mission!

This coming January will mark the 75th anniversary of Salesian Missions – a significant milestone in our long and fruitful partnership with generous friends like you.

Ever since Father James O’Loughlen first established this Mission Office in 1947, with a charter to tell the stories of our global works and rally support for our efforts, we have achieved success after remarkable success: not for ourselves, but for the poorest, most disenfranchised, and most vulnerable children and families living in more than 130 countries around the world.

Those successes are truly countless. At the same time, they are individually significant and transformative. In the nearly two years that I have served as director here, I have heard about – and we have told you about – kids and adults whose names I will always remember. Because of caring friends like you, these very real people are building much brighter futures thanks to the education, training, social support, and other assistance they needed and received from our devoted missionaries.

This issue of SALESIAN is a testament to what we can continue to accomplish together. In fact, as I write this letter, it strikes me that we are the torch-bearers keeping Fr. O’Loughlen’s flame alive. I hope you will continue to join me in igniting that passion among even more good people like you who will carry it forward into the next decades ... and beyond.

With sincere gratitude,

Fr. Gus Baek, S.D.B.

P.S. Throughout these pages, you’ll discover many examples of how your generosity and love make a significant difference – and our partnership doesn’t stop there. Please visit salesianmissions.org to read more success stories and find additional ways to get involved.

Thank you for making our mission... your mission.



Please know that throughout the year, Masses will be offered for you and our other partners in mission at the Basilica of Jesus the Adolescent in Bethlehem and here at our Salesian Missions Chapel.

Supporting Sri Lanka's War Widows During the Pandemic



Ever since the COVID-19 pandemic first reached Sri Lanka, Salesian missionaries have been mobilizing to assist those who are most vulnerable to its impacts.

In a country that already has suffered prolonged civil war, two devastating tsunamis in 13 years, and a deadly dengue crisis, their task isn't easy. While poverty rates have been falling in the years since the conflict ended in 2009, many Sri Lankans remain excluded from the kinds of opportunities that can lead to sustainable employment and increased income. And more than 90,000 of them are women from the country's eastern and northern provinces who lost their husbands in the war.



“Gender disparities have traditionally meant that workforce participation among women in these provinces is low,” explains Father Gus Baek, director of Salesian Missions. “When the conflict robbed families of their primary earners, women turned to the informal economy – think unskilled laborers, household workers, trash pickers, and street vendors – to help put food on the table. And that economy all but disappeared during pandemic-related shutdowns.”

That’s when Don Bosco Sri Lanka stepped in.

First established in 1956, this country-wide network today comprises a broad complement of Salesian-run educational, vocational training, youth-empowerment, social support, and other projects in 17 different locations. And, as always is the case in times of crisis, our missionaries were able to quickly react to community needs – simply because they live and work among the people they serve every day.

To date, missionaries have delivered essential items – including rice, flour, sugar, tea, soy meat, chili, nutritional supplements, bath soaps, washing powder and shampoo – to more than 300 of Sri Lanka’s war widows and their families. And missionaries from every Salesian institution in the country have been providing food aid, hygiene kits, and health education and prevention information to other vulnerable communities.

The Don Bosco Development Center in Dungalpitiya keeps a registry of those who are most in need, and helps coordinate aid distribution within local communities where the government has imposed strict lockdowns.

“The pandemic has been particularly challenging for families who were



This young, widowed mother gratefully accepts help from the Salesians.



*Faith is so important to these families who have so little.
The local church is an integral part of the community.*

already living in poverty,” says Fr. Baek, noting that in several areas of the country, seven out of ten people do not have electricity at home, and nearly half of the population lacks access to safe drinking water. “That’s why Salesian organi-

zations in Sri Lanka and around the globe have been working since the start of the pandemic to ensure that vulnerable people are taken care of and have the food and basic supplies they need to survive.” ♥

Learn more! Visit www.SalesianMissions.org/sri-lanka

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and be sure to invite your friends and loved ones.***



NEW CAMPAIGN TO PREVENT CHILD ABUSE



***I*n the Dominican Republic, where nearly two-thirds of children under the age of 14 experience physical, psychological, or verbal abuse at home, Salesian missionaries are leading the charge toward positive change – starting with an advocacy initiative developed by the Boys and Girls Don Bosco Network in Santo Domingo.**

The new “Protect Childhood” campaign aims to raise public awareness of child abuse and mistreatment through educational workshops, forums, and other activities designed to spread the message that everyone is responsible for keeping kids safe.

“Family violence occurs around the country and the Salesians are doing all they can to end it,” explains Father Gus Baek, director of Salesian



“The Salesians provide for the whole person so youth can develop in a productive and healthy environment,” reports Fr. Gus Baek.

Missions. “The kind of despair bred by generational poverty, combined with cultural norms around how to discipline children, robs far too many kids of the healthy childhoods they deserve.”

Although the country’s economy has steadily been improving, more than half of children under the age of 18 live in poverty in the Dominican Republic. These children and their families struggle to adequately feed and shelter them-

selves, and the daily stresses of barely getting by can easily lead to patterns of abuse that can be difficult to break.

That’s why, for the past 35 years, missionaries and staff at Boys and Girls Don Bosco Network have worked to promote children’s rights and protect Santo Domingo’s most vulnerable children. To date, more than 60,000 youth and 25,000 families have found the resources and support



they need to put violence behind them and build better futures. “Protect Childhood” is the latest, logical extension of these efforts – and prominent organizations have taken note.

Salesian and UNICEF representatives participated in the campaign’s inaugural forum, titled “The current reality of childhood in the Antillean country: challenges and tasks to guarantee the rights of children and adolescents.” With support from the National Council for Adolescence and Childhood of the Dominican Republic, “Protect Childhood” offers another forum on the issue.

Finally, industry experts led sessions addressing issues such as “Child labor as a form of child abuse;” “Good treatment;” and “Prevention of child abuse in care centers for vulnerable children, adolescents and young people.”

“Salesian missionaries in the Dominican Republic provide more



than traditional education and aim to provide for the whole person so youth can develop in a productive and healthy environment,” says Fr. Gus. “This campaign represents a small step toward protecting children’s rights, but it’s a significant one. The more people we can educate about the issue, the better chance we have of addressing it for good.”

“Protect Childhood” joins a variety of other Salesian-led initiatives to ensure that youth have their basic needs met and have the opportunity to learn skills that enhance their lives, bring them joy, and encourage their passion for learning. ♥

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- Membership in the Don Bosco Legacy Society

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON PLANNED GIVING:

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- Fill-in and return the form below.

* These calculations are estimates of gift benefits; your actual benefits may vary.

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SUM/FALL 2021
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Notes From the Field...

A Salesian Lay Missioner Experience

Lay Missioner: Ann Steffen

Mission Assignment: Bolivia

In Sickness and in Health



Hello everyone! In case you were wondering, the title has nothing to do with marriage. I just thought that this phrase from wedding vows fits today's topic. So now that we have clarified that... here's my story.

When I committed to doing mission work in Bolivia, one of my students wanted to know if I was afraid of getting sick while on mission. I told them I wasn't because I knew God was in control and I probably would have access to doctors to some degree.



Ann with a few of her precious girls.

Side note: this conversation actually took place before Covid came to the United States.

Interestingly enough, the fear of getting sick or dying has never been one that I have dealt with as I prepared for mission work or now as I am in the middle of it. Yes, I might be exposed to illnesses that I might not in the United States, and yes, the medical system here is not quite the same, but I am a healthy young adult, so I don't need to worry too much. I also know that the Salesians will take care of any medical costs that may arise, including the cost of being taken to a hospital that can help, which is a blessing. I have also never feared Covid as I prepared for mission work. All the statistics were saying that healthy young people rarely developed complications.

All this is to say that the thing that some people may dread finally happened. Covid came to the Hogar (*Salesian Mary, Help of Christians Youth Home*). For about 3 weeks now, we have been shut in the Hogar as the virus has run its course. It started with a few of the older girls (who were attending in person classes) testing positive, which led to everyone being tested.



Usually at the Hogar, the girls would enjoy daily gatherings. Sadly, after Covid hit, social activities were strictly limited.



During the first week, I tested positive along with about half of the girls. The following week, those who were originally negative were tested again, at which point we found out that everyone except for 5 people had it. Needless to say, life has been interesting this past month.

I want to assure you that everyone in the Hogar will make a full recovery. My symptoms were mild. Almost like having a common cold: mild headaches easily fixed with medicine, a slight cough, and stuffy nose. Honestly the hardest part of my experience was spending a week alone in my room when I was feeling so well. I wasn't even allowed to see the girls who were sick.

Since the second week, it has been all hands on deck, especially since the Sisters who are in charge of the Hogar were hit the hardest. If I think about it, I know that my everyday work here is helpful, but these past two weeks, I know without a doubt that I have made a difference. I can't imagine what would have happened if there were no volunteers here during this critical time.

This time of sickness at the Hogar has made me realize that this is part of what I signed up for. Not only am I here to help when times are normal and happy, but also when things are more difficult. It's a calling to



Ann was so proud to be godmother to these little girls on the day of their Baptism.

be present in sickness and in health just like in marriage.

This experience as a Salesian Lay Volunteer has made me realize that I want to dedicate my life to helping others, and I love doing just that here at the Hogar. I love giving bedtime hugs to the younger children and holding their little hands as we go to do chores. I love having the older ones lean their heads on my shoulder as we watch a movie and laugh together when sharing jokes. I love helping the girls in the kitchen as they prepare and serve the daily meals. I love celebrating birthdays and comforting those who are sad or hurt or sick. And I am grateful that God has brought me here right now to give and to receive love from these precious children that He loves so much.



Love and prayers,

Ann

Learn more! Visit www.SalesianMissions.org/bolivia

The *Salesian Lay Missioners* is a faith-based volunteer program that offers a unique opportunity to serve the poor children of the world. We sponsor domestic and international placements and require a 1 or 2 year commitment.

If you would like more information about this life-changing program, please write to:

Salesian Lay Missioners

Attn: Adam Rudin

2 Lefevre Lane

New Rochelle NY 10801-5710

Or visit our website at:

www.SalesianLayMissioners.org

or email us at: *slm@salesianmissions.org*



Salesians in the U.S. and Canada

In 1897 the first Salesian missionaries (Priests & Brothers) settled in California. Salesian Sisters soon followed, arriving in New Jersey in 1908. Being a missionary in the U.S. at the time was difficult and challenging – but the good works progressed.

Today over 450 professed Salesian Priests, Brothers and Sisters are present in the United States and Canada. Salesian Provinces based in Haledon NJ, New Rochelle NY, San Antonio TX and San Francisco CA serve thousands of young and poor throughout both countries. Their ministries encompass day care centers, elementary and high schools, formation houses, religious education centers, parishes, summer camps, development offices and youth centers. Thankfully, the spirit and joy of Don Bosco is still alive today in the U.S. and Canada!

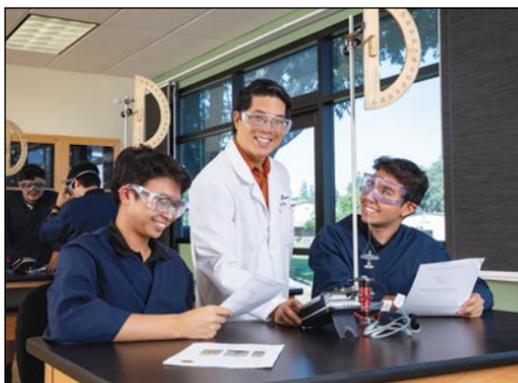
Don Bosco Tech: Preparing Today's Underserved Youth for Tomorrow...

When Alexis Mendoza first walked through the doors of Don Bosco Technical Institute (Bosco Tech) in Rosemead, California, he knew he was in the right place.

The son of a single mother living with disabilities, this Class of 2020 graduate grew up with a strong religious faith and an inherent understanding that “sometimes, people can use a little bit of help.” Bosco Tech’s commitment to prepare students for



Don Bosco Tech combines academics with mutual respect and kindness.



Science students learning about the environment and green technology.

lives of distinguished service and social justice resonated with Alexis. So, too, did its unique, project-based college preparatory curriculum. For if Christ's example is Bosco Tech's beating heart, then its patron saint's belief that "education is a sacred means for the transformation of human beings" is the blood that courses through its veins.

"Like Don Bosco, we believe that 'school is life being lived,'" says communications officer Karen Krynen. "We apply his Preventive System of Education to accompany our students using reason – through fostering relationships of mutual respect; religion – through recognizing each one's dignity and responsibility to discern

God's call; and loving kindness – through emphasizing gentleness, patience, joy and optimism."

An aspiring physician, Alexis recognized that the school's intentional blend of altruism and academic rigor could equip him with the knowledge and skills he needed to rise above his circumstances and thrive in his future profession.

ADDRESSING AN UNMET NEED

Alexis hails from Bell Gardens – a predominantly Hispanic and Latino community located just outside of Los Angeles. Here, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, the median household income for a family of four is \$42,223. More than 28 percent of its 42,012 residents live in poverty, and fewer than 6 percent of adults hold a college degree.

This is why Don Bosco Tech exists. First established in 1955 to serve bright, talented young men from moderate- to low-income families, this mission endures today.

"Our experience shows that students from underserved communities desire a rigorous academic



program and are willing to work hard to achieve success,” says Ms. Krynen. And statistics bear this out: among the 72 percent of students who received financial aid last year, the average GPA was 3.5. Further, Bosco Tech boasts a 100 percent college acceptance rate.

“Our financial aid program exists to attract and retain students from underserved communities who are ambitious, intelligent, and eager to embrace the challenge of the demanding and unique educational experience found only at Bosco Tech,” Ms. Krynen adds. Currently, 400 such students – young men from all religious backgrounds – are building the foundation for successful, in-demand careers.

DRIVEN BY DEMAND

In 1954, together with the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and local business leaders, the Salesians laid out their plans for a new kind of high school – one that would specifically prepare students to meet the labor demands of an exploding aeronautics industry.



*Learning can be challenging and fun!
Here the robotics team works on their latest project.*

According to Bosco Tech president Memo Gutierrez, the goal was to “educate engineers and technicians possessing sound ethical standards and management potential to enter industry, or enroll in college upon graduation.”

In the decades since, Bosco Tech has evolved from a five-year institution comprising a traditional secondary education and an associate of science degree program, to a four-year, project-based applied science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) program. This evolution both remains true to Bosco Tech’s original mission, and reflects today’s specific needs in STEM-related sectors.

According to Ms. Krynen, the



Each student is offered a challenging path to higher education in his chosen field.

school's flagship program offers extensive integrated coursework in one of six fields, including: architecture and construction; biological, medical, and environmental technology; computer science and electrical engineering; integrated design and art; materials science and media. Students spend up to 25 percent of their daily class time immersed in their chosen field, including having access to industry-standard laboratory equipment typically not available in traditional high schools. They are also required to complete a core curriculum including religion, English, mathematics,

science, social studies, fine arts, foreign language, and healthy living.

Ms. Krynen reports that many students secure internships at leading area companies including SpaceX, The Boeing Company, and NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL), among others – and that some remain there through college and beyond. In fact, she says, “I’ve heard one JPL representative say that the organization hires more Bosco Tech alumni than from any other high school!”

A BRIGHT FUTURE

For his part, Alexis is taking the next important step toward his own dream career. Having distinguished himself as an exceptional student, athlete, leader, and young man of service at Bosco Tech, he is now enrolled at Cal State LA as a premedical student – where he honors the lessons first sewn by his mom and nurtured at Tech.

“Helping others makes the world a better place,” he says. “I always make sure to treat [people] with the utmost care and respect, the same way I think Jesus would have treated them.” ♥

*For more information on Bosco Tech, please visit **boscotech.edu***

Salesian Snapshots

... a scrapbook of stories
from around the Salesian world

INDIA: Salesians deliver food and medical supplies

Even the most remote and challenging areas don't stop the Salesians from helping the needy – and they are quick to use any transportation available. As the Covid-19 pandemic continues in India, the Salesians are multiplying their efforts to send aid. In recent days, the “Don Bosco Veedu” organization of Trivandrum was able to distribute 200 medical kits and 850 food packages to children and poor families in the remote Karimadom region.



Salesians use all means possible to access and help those in the most remote areas.

Learn more! Visit www.SalesianMissions.org/india-emergency

EL SALVADOR: “Afternoons in the Family”

To alleviate the negative effects of confinement due to the pandemic, the Salesian organization *Fundación Salvador del Mundo* is implementing the “Afternoons in the Family” initiative. The goal is to promote – in a healthy and safe environment – a recreational space for children and



their families at the Salesian youth centers of San Miguel, Santa Ana and Soyapango, El Salvador. Activities involve interaction between families, learning and practicing various sports such as cycling, football, aerobics, painting workshops and enjoying family picnics.



During the pandemic, families enjoy getting together in a safe environment.

Learn more! Visit www.SalesianMissions.org/el-salvador

SOUTH SUDAN: Where every child learns the value of life in Don Bosco style

The “Don Bosco Child Care Center” of Kuajok, South Sudan, is a Salesian work in the fullest sense: home, school, church and playground, where every child who arrives there learns the value of life in the style of Don Bosco. Its programs, which take place in the afternoon from Monday to Saturday, are attended by 45 to 60 children from



Besides enjoying recreation, the children at the Center are offered food, housing and medical care.

various parts of the country. The Salesians and staff of the Center visit the families of the children to follow their progress and offer food donations. The Center also supplies medical care for the young people. As some of the children are orphans and have nowhere to go and others live far from school, funds are being collected to build simple shelters to accommodate them.

Learn more! Visit www.SalesianMissions.org/south-sudan

FIJI ISLANDS: A “Happy Spirit” for children

Following Don Bosco’s belief that children should be free to have fun while being supervised, every Thursday and Saturday most of the young people from the busy parish of St. John Bosco gather at the Salesian oratory in Suva, Fiji. Here they participate in various organized activities: sports, games, sharing and meetings. It is an opportunity for young people to make new friends, under the guidance of the whole Salesian community. Given the growing number of young people from the surrounding villages of Muanikoso and the Makoi area, it was decided to open a second oratory nearby. And since rugby is the most popular sport in Fiji, the Salesians make sure that everyone can try to play it – from the smallest boy and girl to teens. A happy spirit opens the door to learning and growth within the community and helps to bring families together. ♥



All children, regardless of gender or age, are encouraged to participate in the activities at the parish of St. John Bosco.

Learn more! Visit www.SalesianMissions.org/figi

What was once mud and tin...



Millions of people throughout Africa, Central and South America, India and Asia are celebrating Mass and worshiping God in the most primitive conditions. Salesian missionaries are in desperate need of funds to build simple and decent houses of worship.

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Read more about our Chapel Building Program by visiting us online at:

www.SalesianMissions.org/chapels



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- Enclosed is my gift of \$23,000.00 to build a Memorial Chapel in a remote and difficult area.
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“I am the Bread of Life...”

SIMPLE FOOD FOR DISPLACED FAMILIES



Since war first broke out in the Tigray region of northern Ethiopia in November 2020, fighting has ravaged the region.

The ongoing and bloody conflict has claimed thousands of lives, displaced more than two million people from their homes, and triggered a humanitarian crisis so vast that an estimated four million people – or two-thirds of Tigray’s population – desperately need emergency assistance. And where war happens, hunger inevitably follows. According to official reports, 350,000 people are facing it right now. It’s a “starvation calamity” greater than any other in the world.



*Salesian Priests, Sisters,
and locals join forces
to bake life-saving
bread for many
displaced families.*

Yet every day – with limited resources on hand – our Salesian missionaries have been nourishing the men, women, and children who show up at the gates of their missions begging for food in order to survive.

In Adwa, Adigrat, Mekellé, and Shire, they are baking and distributing between 2,200 and 2,600 loaves of bread for daily distribution. They are also providing clean water to the thousands of people who come searching for it each morning. And they are distributing food, hygiene supplies, and other basic necessities to internally displaced people living in five local camps.

“The war doesn’t discriminate between the rich and the poor,” says Father Gus Baek, director of Salesian Missions. “And our brothers and sisters in Don Bosco are



doing whatever they can for innocent civilians caught in the cross-fire with nowhere else to turn.”

In addition to food aid, missionaries have set up a shelter in Adwa, where more than 35,600 people are currently displaced. Brother Cesare Bullo has been assisting in this project from Addis Ababa.

Says one of our missionaries in the region, “We are grateful to God for all the graces, blessings, courage and strength that He is bestowing upon us to continue our journey in the challenging and difficult times we are facing in Adwa.”

Please join us in prayer, that peace may soon find the region, and that the human suffering ends. ♥

Learn more! Visit www.SalesianMissions.org/faith

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For yourself, a loved one ...or family and friends!

Our new and very popular publications – our “2022 Angel Datebook” and Christmas book, “Ave Maria” – are now available. Each book comes with a mailing envelope so you can send them to friends and loved ones.



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“Ave Maria” Qty _____

Name _____

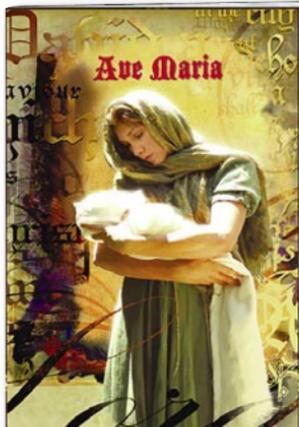
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Driven by Empathy: **An Olympic Gold Medalist Reflects on Her Salesian Education**



*T*rack and field athlete Kim Gevaert, a former student at Don Bosco School in Haacht, Belgium, won a gold medal in the 4x100 relay at the 2008 Beijing Olympics and was the 2006 European champion in both the 100- and 200-meter dashes. Recently, she returned to her alma mater to talk about how a Salesian education impacted her.

“Empathy and ‘believing in’ were strongly present in this Salesian school,” said Kim. “There was attention for



the complete development of each child. The school tried to bring out the talents of the students and you could do what you were interested in. I definitely felt that.”

She added, “I still remember how I was the weak link in the volleyball team at school – at least that’s how I felt. Eventually, I became one of the stronger runners on the national relay team, but I was very good at empathizing with people when they made a mistake or were not in the best of shape. I never pointed the finger, but understood how that person felt. Empathy and humility are things I have acquired here.”

“I also enjoyed the moments of reflection,” Kim explained. “In my sixth year, we went on a weekend silent retreat with the Sisters. We had to be quiet and go to Mass with them at four o’clock in the morning. Moments like that broaden your view. Those women chose such a life and I could

understand that. I chose to become a mother, and I think it’s important, as a parent, to counterbalance all the ups and downs that children go through. Through faith, we give them a sort of something to hold on to. In the end, they choose their own path. I raise my children Catholic, but with a broad view of the world. ‘Faith, what is it?’ and ‘What does it do to me?’ The broader view of faith and of the world is our starting point.”

Kim has also been dedicating time to underprivileged youth in Congo. She said, “My husband and I wanted to do something for the children in his native Congo. I know very well that we grew up in a family with lots of opportunities. As we get older, we realize more and more that we were lucky. For many children, this is not the case.” Her Salesian education blessed Kim with a compassionate view of the world and for those less fortunate than she. ♥

Count Your Blessings - Grant a Wish!

The Salesians work in over 130 countries. Just imagine, then, how many of our missionaries write to tell us of their hopes and dreams, trials and successes. Maybe, as you count your blessings, you could grant a wish. God bless you!

Fr. Gus



WISHES OF THE MONTH

- **Restore hope for distressed kids.** In the Dominican Republic and around the world, far too many children endure senseless verbal and physical abuse. Can you help us address the root causes of family violence, and remind kids what it feels like to be loved? (See p. 5).
- **Prepare the next generation of changemakers.** A Salesian education empowers young men and women with a compassionate view of the world – so they may carry the lessons of Don Bosco forward to benefit those in need. You can nurture that legacy. (See pp. 13 and 26).
- **Help children develop a “Happy Spirit.”** In the Fiji Islands and other places, our Salesian missionaries run programs that give children the opportunity to grow and flourish – and to find joy during their developing years. You can help bring happiness into their young lives. (See p. 20).
- **Help feed the hungry.** Where war happens, hunger inevitably follows. Your gift today supports our efforts to nourish innocent civilians in northern Ethiopia, and in countless other places ravaged by conflict around the world. (See p. 22).

GRANT A WISH REPLY FORM

SUM/FALL 2021
WL (RF)

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