When war first erupted in Tigray, Ethiopia in November 2020, the world was deaf to the whine of its missiles. The brutal assaults, the senseless massacres, the heartbreaking isolation from outside assistance—all was lost amid the din of our ongoing pandemic. With so many COVID-related crises to cover, the press simply couldn’t hear the victims’ cries for help.

But our Salesian missionaries heard. More than that, they saw. Because they serve in four communities within the Tigray region, our dedicated priests and sisters witnessed, first-hand, the very human consequences of the violence. And that experience merely intensified their commitment to Ethiopia and its people—a commitment made more than 45 years ago, when missionaries first arrived in Mekelle.

It hasn’t always been easy. Even before the ongoing crisis in Tigray, the country has battled violence, famine, disease, and other daunting challenges. Yet, buoyed by the resilience and potential of the children and families they serve, our missionaries have persevered—and continue to fight for better futures with the most powerful weapon they have: education.

Today, in 14 different communities throughout the country, they wield it liberally on behalf of countless impoverished, vulnerable, and at-risk youth. Through traditional schools, vocational training, and wraparound social programs for students and their families, missionaries take aim at the root causes of poverty and despair.

In Tigray specifically, students at the Don Bosco Technical Institute in Adwa can train in manufacturing, construction, metalworking, tailoring, IT, and other in-demand trades. At the Don Bosco Catholic School of Shire, girls and boys can prepare for traditional secondary education. And at the Don Bosco Technical Institute in Mekelle, youth can learn mechanics, welding, and automotive skills. To date, thousands of students have graduated from these institutions. Amid the crisis, missionaries are working hard to guarantee poor youth their continued right to study—including financial assistance and support for remote learning initiatives.

While our missionaries understand there’s no magic bullet to eliminate Ethiopia’s systemic challenges overnight, their eyes remain fixed on the target: to create a more just, equitable society, built on the foundations of education. When that happens, there should be no need for war.

To learn more, go to: salesianmissions.org/ethiopia

This Month’s Child

“You wanted me here with you, right?”

It’s the first question that little Veronica asked when she arrived in her new dormitory at Hogar Maria Auxiliadora. Much to her great relief, the resounding answer was “yes!”

Veronica had brought nothing with her to “the Hogar”; she simply had nothing to bring. Nothing, that is, except an easy smile that belied her fear that she was unworthy of love. That’s when a Salesian Lay Missioner serving there decided to nickname Veronica, Querida, derived from the Spanish “to love.”

Veronica lives, plays, and attends school at the Hogar alongside 45 other orphaned, abandoned, or abused girls like her. Located in Cochabamba, Bolivia, this long-term residential home offers a safe, structured setting where girls can ultimately grow to become independent, confident young women.

Now in the second grade, and heartened by her new nickname, Veronica is well on her way to doing just that.

This Month’s Call For Prayer

With the holidays approaching, please pray that those who are suffering the most will receive the love and support they need to overcome the challenges they face—and the hope and faith that better days are ahead. Join us at our weekly Chapel Mass - Live Streaming NOW! Go to our website for details: SalesianMissions.org/mass

Advent Devotionals – Sign Up Now: www.SalesianMissions.org/Advent

Advent is a time for intentional prayer, reflection and joyful anticipation. Our special devotionals, emailed weekly beginning Sunday, November 28th, will remind you of the true meaning of Christmas—and will inspire and guide your own preparation for our Savior’s birth.
Each year at this time, I reflect on the things I’m most grateful for. I also remember those around the world who won’t experience the joy of Christmas. Families who lost their homes and livelihoods to disaster. Kids orphaned or abandoned through no fault of their own. Youth with few prospects who turned to the streets for solace. Their stories could be heartbreaking … yet so many of them write new chapters thanks to you!

That’s why, among the many blessings I count this year, you top the list—because your love and generosity help us restore joy amid so much misery.

From Bolivia to Ecuador, Ethiopia to Samoa, you can find examples of how we do that here. You might even “see” the joy reflected on people’s faces, just as our missionaries did in Lebanon.

Joy to the World

Dear Friends,

Each year at this time, I reflect on the things I’m most grateful for. I also remember those around the world who won’t experience the joy of Christmas. Families who lost their homes and livelihoods to disaster. Kids orphaned or abandoned through no fault of their own. Youth with few prospects who turn to the streets for solace. Their stories could be heartbreaking … yet so many of them write new chapters thanks to you!

That’s why, among the many blessings I count this year, you top the list—because your love and generosity help us restore joy amid so much misery.

From Bolivia to Ecuador, Ethiopia to Samoa, you can find examples of how we do that here. You might even “see” the joy reflected on people’s faces, just as our missionaries did in Lebanon.

Thank you for reminding me that the true meaning of Christmas lies not in what we receive, but in what we give.

With sincere gratitude,

Fr. Gus Baek, S.D.B.