



# World Bulletin

Winter 2020

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

## Finding Harmony Through Music

It may seem odd to consider the violin as a powerful weapon. But in the capital city of San Salvador, El Salvador – where brutal gang warfare renders the country one of the most dangerous places on earth outside of a combat zone – close to 1,000 at-risk youth are battling the violence, crime and poverty of their community through a common passion for music.

The Don Bosco Youth Symphony Orchestra and Chorus convenes young people between the ages of 8 and 20 who live in areas controlled by two prominent rival gangs. With the guidance of Father José Maria Moratalla Escuerdos (affectionately called “Father Pepe”), who conceived the idea – and the talent of orchestral director Bryan Crea – these youth foster human harmony through musical harmony.



“It makes no difference where they come from,” says Fr. Pepe. “There is no rivalry, no antagonism between them. During their practice, and especially when they perform, their unity and solidarity are fantastic.”

All participants in the program hail from schools located in neighborhoods with high homicide rates. During the orchestra’s season, they live together at the Don Bosco Industrial Polygon, a technical

school where older youth, especially, have opportunities to learn practical job skills for future employment. Today, more than ever, these skills are vital – with 12 percent of El Salvador’s youth ages 15-24 unemployed, and 41 percent underemployed.

Looking ahead, Fr. Pepe hopes to expand the program to include academies in dance, theater, fine arts and other areas of music. In further building the common bonds of artistic appreciation – and expanding opportunities for youth to develop employment skills – he envisions a brighter future both for El Salvador’s youth, and the country itself.

Mr. Crea agrees. “I think projects like this can influence the reality of the country. A more educated person, one who can think, who can feel the spirit of art, will not be drawn to violence.”

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## This Month’s Child

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Name: Mawufemor  
Age: 14 Years Old  
Home: Ashaiman,  
Ghana

Young Mawufemor easily could have become another nameless, faceless statistic. Fortunately, thanks to the Don Bosco Child Protection Center in southern Ghana, she has regained her self-esteem and hope for a better life.

In partnership with Ghana’s Ministry for Social Welfare, this Salesian-run program rescues and rehabilitates orphaned, abandoned, and at-risk youth in and around Lake Volta – a region notorious for child exploitation and trafficking. Currently, an estimated 21,000 boys and girls like

Mawufemor are trapped in exhausting hard labor jobs as fish-mongers and domestic slaves when instead they should be in school.

After finding her way to the Salesian center – where all her daily needs are met and where she participates in professional counseling to overcome the traumas of her experience – Mawufemor expresses excitement for what’s next ... starting with an education.

“I can safely say that I want to learn as much as possible!” she says. “I am happy and I believe in the future.”

## This Month’s Call For Prayer

*A new year – and a new decade – are upon us. We reflect back on the lives we’ve touched and look ahead to those who still need our care and compassion. Please pray that we can continue to ease suffering and provide hope to those in need.*



# Monthly Missions Report...

## In Brazil...

In the remotest regions of Mato Grosso, the rains are a both a blessing and a curse: providing welcome and critical relief from the long, hot, dry season – but also sickening the population, whose members rely on river water for drinking, cooking, and bathing, in the process.

Recently, Salesian missionaries serving in Campinópolis joined forces with indigenous health educators and providers to help alleviate some of the issues caused by contaminated water. With help from generous donors, deacon José Alves from San Domenico Savio Parish was able to donate clay water filters that will benefit 100 residents of Cuerpo de Cristo village.

The gesture may seem small, but its impacts are immeasurable. “I want to thank the Salesians,” says health volunteer Deusmira Moreira. “It is a great honor for me to be able to save lives of children, pregnant women and the elderly.”



## In Cameroon...



Since 1992, and in partnership with Mary Help of Christians Parish, missionaries at Don Bosco Mimboman have been helping marginalized youth overcome the challenges of poverty through education. Because many residents participate in the area’s well developed – but notoriously exploitative – informal economy, missionaries focus on programs that train students for in-demand professions such as audiovisual editing.

Presently, 20 students in this course are learning the most advanced skills, on the latest technology platforms, in this discipline.

When they graduate in nine months, they will do so with a state-issued Diploma of Professional Qualification and the support of Don Bosco Mimboman’s job placement office, which fosters and maintains internship opportunities with private companies in need of skilled labor.

## In Democratic Republic of Congo...

What do Nyassa, Bwinja, Helene, and Didienne have in common?

Thanks to the Village Savings and Credit Association (“AVEC,” after its French name), each of these women now have the seed money needed to launch an income-generating enterprise to better support their families.



A program of the Don Bosco Center of Bukavu, AVEC is an investment and micro-lending foundation for local women, most of whom are young mothers. After contributing a modest amount to the collective fund for several consecutive weeks, members – nearly 500 strong – become eligible to apply for grants to finance small business startups.

These four women join 96 additional recipients who all presented the best ideas, and who live in the most challenging circumstances. As the grant opportunities grow, so will the entire community’s hope for brighter collective futures!

## Missionary of the Month: Brother Alex Abelgas

For 40 years, Brother Alex Abelgas faithfully served his home country of the Philippines. After a recent visit to Pakistan inspired his missionary spirit, he now calls Don Bosco Lahore “home.”

Alex is the only Salesian brother present in Pakistan, and he struggles with the Urdu language. Where others might be daunted, however, he embraces his mission. Accompanied by his trusty accor-

dion, he communicates kindness and patience with a cheerful tune and a warm smile. His presence especially resonates with difficult students, which is just one of many reasons Bro. Alex’s colleagues describe him as “the best practical trainee ever” to serve at Don Bosco Lahore.

Will his example inspire future sons of Don Bosco to the vocation? Salesians across the country



hope so. For his part, Bro. Alex is focused on much humbler goals – like finding ten small accordions so he can start a school band.

## Thank You!

Dear Friends,

As I write my first World Bulletin reflection as your new director, I wish to express my humble gratitude for the opportunity I’ve been given to lead this remarkable organization.

Reading through the stories in this issue, it’s impossible not to feel uplifted by the many good things your support and prayers make possible. In places where poverty and despair could easily

test our missionaries’ resolve, your generosity offers the encouragement they need to envision and implement programs and services that truly change lives.

Salesians around the world provide hope through education, job training, economic opportunity, and other unique initiatives specifically tailored to community needs.

These stories we share in this issue represent the legacy you have



built – and the legacy I vow to steward, and strengthen, with your continued help. Onward!

With sincere gratitude,

*Fr. Gus Baek*

Fr. Gus Baek, S.D.B.



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