Dear Salesian Sisters and Brothers,

This afternoon I travel from the Provincial House to Watsonville to celebrate the last novena Mass in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The Mass will be celebrated at our parish of Mary Help of Christians. This is the eve of the beautiful feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Tomorrow I will spend the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe with the St. Francis Salesian Community and return to the Provincial House on Thursday, the 13th.

All the feasts of Mary are significant and beautiful. For us Salesians, of course, Mary, under the title of Mary Help of Christians, holds a special place in our hearts and tradition, but perhaps because of my own Latino background, this feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe is also a very special day and it has become more so in recent years. My time in the parish of St. Dominic Savio in Bellflower opened my eyes to the devotion and honor given to Our Lady of Guadalupe by so many, and I was moved by the humility and simplicity by which people of all cultures were drawn to her image and felt comforted by her motherly and caring presence.

In the story of the apparition of our Lady of Guadalupe to Juan Diego in 1531, we see the unfolding of a simple but moving relationship between an Aztec Indian and the “Morenita,” on the hill of Tepeyac near Mexico City. The Morenita means the dark one in Spanish. The words of the lady brought comfort to Juan Diego, the Aztec Indian, as much as they have brought comfort to so many throughout the ages, especially, those of poorer classes. At one point during the different apparitions, when Juan Diego was frustrated by the lack of understanding on the part of the Bishop, Mary intercepted him on his way to care for his sick uncle and says to him, “Am I not here, who am your Mother? Are you not under my protection: Am I not your health?...What else do you wish?” Mary instructed Juan Diego to collect some roses for the Bishop and place them in his tilma or cloak. Although roses were not in bloom at that time in that place in December, Juan Diego found some and collected them as instructed. He then presented them to the Bishop not only surprising him with flowers which were not common in that area at that time of year, but also with an image left on Juan Diego’s cloak which has become a symbol of Mary miraculous presence in our lives. Our Lady of Guadalupe is not just patroness of the Mexican people but she is the patroness of all of the Americas. Devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe is not just a Mexican devotion but a universal one, especially, among the Latinos.

On reflecting on the beautiful readings of this Advent Season and, especially, today’s reading from the Prophet Isaiah, Chapter 40: “Comfort, Give Comfort to my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and proclaim to her that her service is at an end, her guilt is expiated; Indeed, she has received from the hand of the Lord double for all her sins,” I hear God speaking to his people through the voice of Mary at Tepeyac. God’s tenderness and care for the wayward, as found in today’s readings, seems to be articulated again and again through the presence of Mary in our lives but in a special way in the tradition of Our Lady of Guadalupe. There is a special tenderness and care expressed through this particular apparition which is not commonly found in other Marian apparitions. Perhaps, that is why
millions of people are drawn to this image of the “Morenita,” and has made Tepeyac one of the most visited sacred sites.

For us Salesians, our Marian Devotion is based and rooted in Don Bosco’s own filial devotion. From the Dream of nine to the end of his life, Don Bosco saw Mary as a caring Mother and gentle teacher. Don Bosco believed that everything he accomplished was done because of and through Mary. Our Salesian Constitution 8 says, “We believe that Mary is present among us and continues her “mission as Mother of the Church and Help of Christians.” And, we all remember the famous story of Don Bosco in Nizza among the Salesian Sisters, insisting that he saw Mary there among them. He did not only believe in her presence but was convinced she (Mary) was there. He could see Mary walking among them. Our devotion to Mary is not one that is cold, aloof and theoretical but earthy in the sense of sensing and feeling her presence among us and being convinced that she continues to guide and teach us. Similar to the devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe as expressed by so many, especially, those of Latino decent, who trust in Mary intercession, help and care, we Salesians also live out a similar expression of trust, faith and acknowledgment that she is here among us and guides our Congregation even today. Let us pray to Our Lady of Guadalupe, that our devotion too will be simple, intimate and trusting. May we feel and sense her Motherly care and tenderness. Let us entrust our young people to her care and help them (the young) come to a better and deeper understanding of who she really is for us Christians and Salesians.

Last night I was able to attend a Board of Directors meeting and Christmas dinner organized by the Salesian Boys and Girls Club of San Francisco. Due to my schedule I had not been able to attend their meetings or gatherings. I have participated in some of their Galas and fundraisers. I was very impressed with the organization and enthusiasm of the Board. There must be over 50 members on the Board. And, the number of functioning committees was quite impressive. I wish to thank Mr. Frank Lavin for his leadership these last two years as Board Chair. But, I am also very grateful to all the Board members who work so hard to promote the Salesian Spirit at the club and reach as many young people as possible. I could sense their loyalty to Don Bosco and those who founded the Club many years ago. The Club is in a very healthy place financially and new programs are constantly being considered in order to be of better service to the young. I was impressed by the dedication of the staff, especially, under the leadership of Mr Randy Di Martini, Executive Director. A big THANK YOU to all those at the San Francisco Salesian Boys and Girls Club. Afterwards, we were treated to a delicious dinner in the parish hall.

After a very brief stay at the Provincial House (we have our Christmas Staff luncheon on Friday), I will head down to Los Angeles for our December Provincial Council meetings on the 16th, 17th and 18th at De Sales Hall, Bellflower. I will spend the rest of that week in Los Angeles attending several less formal meetings before heading back to San Francisco on the 22nd for our Christmas celebrations at the Provincial House and our gathering in Richmond for our Northern California Christmas dinner and celebration on Christmas Day.

May this Advent Season continue to be a blessed and fruitful one. Be assured of my prayers and please pray for my ministry and those of the Province. May Mary continue to guide us to Christ, the source of all light and peace. And, may we always sense her presence in our communities, our homes and our lives.

With warm regards and gratitude,

Fr. Ted

INTOUCH · DECEMBER 11TH, 2018
On November 28th the three Executive Directors of our Salesian Clubs in California met for the first time in history.

The meeting took place at the Salesian Club in Richmond. For two hours out three Executive Directors met with the objective to find the way to support each other and to support the children of the communities being served.

Some of the topics discussed were: the creation of a marketing plan as Salesian Clubs, the creation of a ongoing formation program for employees that work in each of the clubs, and the creation of an endowment account to support the mission of the Clubs.

The next meeting will take place in San Francisco and the group will meet with the club operations leaders to share best operational practices. With this information the group would like to create a Salesian Clubs brochure.

We are excited to keep moving for our children, specially the most in need.
USA West in the East!
National Conference on Catholic Youth Ministry

By Fr. Mel Trinidad, SDB
Province Delegate for Youth Ministry

The National Conference on Catholic Youth Ministry (NCCYM) took place in Tampa, Florida, December 5-8. The Salesian Family sponsored a booth to promote Salesian presence in the Youth Ministry environment at the national level, as well as offer resources and generate connections and network opportunities. The booth was a collaboration of the SDB’s East and West, and the FMA’s East and West. There were close to 1800 registered participants in the conference from all over the United States and beyond. This year the conference targeted the adult Catholic Youth Ministers and next year, as it happens every other year, the conference will focus on Catholic young people.

Unlock Your Holiness Today was this year’s theme for the conference.

Left to right: Fr. John Roche, SDB (Coordinator for Vocations), Ms. Gina Robles (Youth Ministry Associate), Fr. Mel Trinidad, SDB (Delegate for Youth Ministry)

Fr. Abraham Feliciano, SDB (Delegate for Youth Ministry - SUE) interacting with participants

Gui Lopes (SYM USA East) and Gina assisting a participant with a purchase.

Sr. Ann Cassidy, FMA (SUO) assisting participants during rush hour.

Fr. John Roche, SDB and Miss. Amy Marinaro (Office Support Manager - SUE) working our Saints Quiz.
A few weeks ago, the Holy See press office released a statement announcing that Pope Francis has shifted the date of the annual World Day of Migrants and Refugees from January to the last Sunday in September. In 2019, this will be September 29. Ordinarily, such an announcement would go unnoticed and have little consequence in our daily lives. What’s the difference for us whether this day is celebrated in January or September? I draw your attention to the announcement, not so much because of the date, but because of the purpose of the celebration: an opportunity for the Church to reflect on the circumstances confronting migrants, including immigrants, refugees, children, and victims and survivors of human trafficking. Considering that so many migrants and refugees are young people, we need to pay attention.

The caravans of migrants at the border between Mexico and USA highlight the need for World Day of Migrants and Refugees. The humanitarian crisis of those seeking asylum has become politicized, leaving the poor to suffer. Moving beyond our party allegiances, as Salesians we are concerned for the well-being of the young, especially the poorest and most at risk. Our Salesian mission brings the issue of migration and refugee status close to home for us, since it is probably among the immigrants that we will find the poorest youths. Recognizing the complexity of the issue of immigration, our religious communities and Salesian presences can respond according to our charism, like Don Bosco when he created a home that welcomes, a school that prepares for life, a place where friends gather, and a parish that evangelizes. I invite our communities to examine how they are responding to the needs of immigrant youths in their areas. Is there something more that can be done?

Please take the time to read the letter from Fr. Ernesto Hernandez, SDB, and the MSM Team (Msión Salesiana Migrante). With Fr. Shiju Thottupurathu, he studied the phenomenon of migration for two years, with a special concern for the movement of young people in our Interamerica Region*. You can find some of the results of their studies at www.boscomsm.com. Fr. Ernesto makes some concrete proposals that can help us deepen our reflection on how we respond to immigrants. His proposals might spark some new insights or lead to new actions in our educational-pastoral plan (the local SEPP). The letter includes a link to an article in the NY Times on the humanitarian crisis in Tijuana and how the city is struggling to respond. There is also a link to a presentation by Salesians at the International Migration and Peace Forum last year.

As Fr. Ernesto mentions, and as so many of our Salesian presences already are doing, a first response could be to offer help with basic human needs—food, clothing, shelter. Our response need not be limited to this, however. Some Salesian presences might be able to offer education on the rights of immigrants, or visit detention centers, or organize a mission trip to experience first-hand the situation of migrants. We should not forget about the important work of advocacy, reaching out to our elected officials to see that human rights and Gospel values guide public policies. We can
include specific intercessions in our prayer. Resources for the 2018 World Day of Migrants and Refugees are available at the USCCB website, National Migration Week page. At the same time, we can mark our calendars for World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2019.

I would like to highlight one of Fr. Ernesto’s proposals: the importance of networking. We won’t solve the immigration issues in our region, but working together with others, we can have a greater impact. I recommend that you partner with the local diocese or Catholic Charities in their efforts to serve our immigrant brothers and sisters. Members of other religious orders have joined their voice and efforts to form Sisters and Brothers of Immigrants, www.sistersandbrothersofimmigrants.com. In the Archdiocese of Chicago, priests have formed Priests for Justice for Immigrants, www.catholicsandmigrants.org

Remembering how the Holy Family migrated to a foreign land to escape persecution, and how Jesus gave us the supreme law of love, we take advantage of the simple announcement of the change of dates for World Day of Migrants and Refugees to renew our commitment to serve the young, especially the poorest and most at risk.
Healthy Cooking
Healthy Christmas Salads
By Sheila Kun RN, BA, BSN, MS, FCCP
Salesian Cooperator

What did I learn from our family Thanksgiving potluck gathering each year? All of our siblings and their kids are great cooks. Food is always in abundance. There is no rivalry on who has the best recipe or dish for this year. However, you can tell by the tupperwares that each family brings in, that there is plenty of food left over for the next day. As a matter of fact, one of the nieces has a “The day after Thanksgiving party” that she hosts. The regulation is that the participants bring leftovers from their Thanksgiving feast. What a great idea! The turkey, ham, roast beef, chicken, sausages were the dishes that usually needed to be distributed among all families. However, the vegetable dishes usually were gone by the time the party was over. This prompted me to think of sharing some salad and vegetable recipes for you during the Christmas holiday season. We cannot stuff ourselves with all the meat items; it is good to have a balance and choice should you want to watch your waist line. Here is one good recipe I discovered from the Nutrition Action Healthletter July/August 2017 edition. The healthy cook is Kate Sherwood. She shared the following Super Supper Salads that make dinner easy and healthy. Just like she said: “just whisk, chop, simmer or saute a bit, toss, and eat.” And it is on the table in half an hour, max.

**Sesame Tofu & Greens Salad**

1 bunch kale, ribs removed
1/2 lb. baby spinach
1 14 oz. package extra-firm tofu, drained and blotted dry
2 Tbs. sesame seeds
2 tsp. peanut oil
1 bunch scallions, sliced
1.5 Tbs. tahini
1.5 Tbs. reduced-sodium soy sauce
1 Tbs. lemon juice
1 tsp. toasted sesame oil
1 clove garlic, finely minced
1 tsp. honey

1. Stir the kale into a large pot of boiling water. Cook until just tender, 1-2 minutes. Stir in the spinach and remove from the heat. Drain and run under cold water to cool. Squeeze well, then chop.

2. Cut the tofu 10 slabs. Pat the sesame seeds into the tofu. In a large non-stick pan, saute the tofu in the peanut oil until browned, 4-5 minutes. Sir in the scallions and remove from the heat.

3. Whisk together the remaining ingredients with 1 Tbs. of water. Toss with the greens. Top with the tofu and scallions.

This recipe is for 2 servings. Per serving (3 cups): calories 520/total fat 29 g sat fat 4 g/carbs 37 g/fiber 12 g/protein 35 g/sodium 600 mg.

Not a bad idea for a healthy start while we usher in the holiday season. I have a feeling that if you use this for a potluck dinner, there will be no leftovers.

**Your homework assignment from the Care Ministry this week:**

Think of your favorite salad and share the recipe with a friend.

The Care Ministry welcomes your feedback: kunlouis@gmail.com
REFLECTION

By Kevin Ruano, Franciscan Mission Service DC Service Corps

“Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.” - Luke 3:1-6

Isaiah, whose words the evangelist Luke repeats in this week’s Gospel, prophesized a beautifully uncanny world. According to the prophet’s vision, no valley would be too deep, no mountain or hill too high, no road too long or path too rough for God’s salvation to reach. When we understand this word, we recognize that the saving presence of God has no limitation. God’s revelation arrives everywhere and to all life wherever it may be. No one life stands below or above another in that radically horizontal and unfamiliar world. God disregards human hierarchies, borders, and definitions.

This season, we celebrate, meditate upon, and commit ourselves to our world’s greatest mystery—God incarnate and among us in Christ. Just like those along the Jordan who were invited by John the Baptist, we are invited to work for the world to which Christ, the salvation of God, arrived. The world in which we recognize God is with us and in each one of us. The world whose mystery we know capable to reveal itself anywhere and at any moment of the day. The world in which each person enters in community without prejudice or judgement but with mutual respect because we know every person to be equally chosen and beloved by God.

FOCUS: SIMPLE LIVING

When I reflect on what prevents us from treating each other as kin and caring for each other and our common home, indifference appears as our greatest challenge. Today our politicians run campaigns based on hatred, prejudice, and the blatant disrespect of other cultures.

Today so many of us deny scientific facts and disregard how our planet is suffering while we choose to continue to live numb and blind. Preoccupied primarily by our economic wellbeing, we tolerate injustice and accept apathy. Simple living this Advent must mean making space for God and others in our hearts by ridding our lives of the material goods which make us apathetic to and complicit in others’ suffering.

SERVICE SUGGESTION

Opening our hearts to the arrival of God begins with an honest reflection on what in our lives encourages our cultural indifference to the suffering of our planet and its most marginalized peoples. This Advent, think of the moral demands of our faith and analyze whether your life habits or practices adequately demonstrate your commitment to God, all God’s people, and all God’s creation. What will you do to reflect more of the light of Christ today?

PRAYER

Just and compassionate God, whose incarnate word reveals itself to the tender and humble hearted, we pray for healing from the hurtful divisions that human hierarchies, borders, and definitions impose.

Send your Spirit to renew a world divided and suffering. May bigotry shake in the path of Your love and prejudice fade in Your understanding presence.

You, good guardian, know each one of us to be Your chosen and beloved. Bless and protect us as we work for reconciliation, peace, and justice.

Week 2 of Advent | December 9th, 2018
DECEMBER
Salesian Missionary Intention
in the light of the Holy Father’s prayer intention

For the Salesian Family at the service of Social Communication

That the Salesians and the Salesian Family may have an evangelizing impulse and creativity in the Areopagus of Social Communication.

Today more than ever social networks, and Social Communication in general, are architects of culture. We pray that – with creativity, professionalism and intelligence – we may influence culture through the Gospel and our educative values.

This Christmas SHARE the GIFT of an AWESOME STORY

DON BOSCO
FRIEND OF THE YOUNG

V BOSCO
OF THE YOUNG

His Life Story in a Comic Book Available

Mary Help of Christians Center
6400 East Chelsea Street
Tampa, FL 33619
Phone: (813) 625-6181 Ext 22
Email: Jdegrassi@mhctampa.org
Available online at www.mhctampa.org
In every young person, a point of goodness is accessible, and it is the primary duty of the educator to discover that sensitive cord of the heart so as to draw out the best in the young person.

- Don Bosco