



Don Bosco

Insights

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Our Mission

We Salesians of Don Bosco, Province of St. Philip the Apostle, are part of an international community of consecrated religious, both brothers and priests, founded by Saint John Bosco.

Our mission is to be in the Church signs and bearers of the love of God for young people, especially those who are poor (C2).



Photo by Chioma Okoye, Communications Director, Mary Help of Christians Center, Tampa, FL

A Short Message

My dear readers,

This magazine is our attempt to launch back into print media. The heart of this very first issue of *Don Bosco Insights* is the “spotlight” we want to shine on ‘a’ ministry and on ‘a’ person. There is so much good that is being done and so many young people being served.

In a decade when print was repeatedly declared dead, we believe that there are people out there like us, people who still revel in thick paper and sweet-smelling ink, not to mention thoughtful long-form journalism and stunning, fantastical stories of ministries that take more than a couple of hours and a smartphone camera to crank out.

Of course, for all our love of print, we’re also a bunch of young people with a serious scrolling habit yet deep into our Catholic faith. We are young people discerning what God is calling us to do. We are young seminarians and Salesian priests, brothers and sisters who work quietly leading souls to heaven. We are young people who minister with very little fanfare.

So welcome to our first issue of *Don Bosco Insights*: our very first free bi-annual magazine. We think we’ve finally created something tangible that combines the beauty, coherence and perspective of a magazine to showcase what goes on behind the scenes.



Photos by Chiama Okoye, Communications Director and CVM, Mary Help of Christians Center, Tampa, FL

What can you expect? Eight sections of enlightening, entertaining, outspoken goodness. There are interviews with Br. Rafael Vargas who is a runner, dancer, and an acrobat who uses his gifts in ministry, and with Br. Paul Hotovy who gave up a lucrative career to join the seminary. We put a spotlight on work being done in our Salesian presence in Etobicoke, Ontario, and the life journey of Br. Travis Gunther, who is passionate about youth ministry. You will also read the journey of Ben Monteverde, a young man who decided to serve the less fortunate for a year. Besides being informational, you will also find some material on these pages that are formational.

We consider it our mission to uncover in print form what is normally done behind the scenes, stuff that you simply won't find in any magazine or newspaper.

Here's to an amazing magazine. Enjoy the read!

God bless you.

In Mary Help of Christians,

I remain,

Fr. Franco Pinto, SDB
Vice-Provincial and Province Delegate for Ministry

Vocation Insight



Courtesy of Br. Rafael Vargas, SDB

Br. Rafael Vargas, SDB

BY JULIA ST. CLAIR, PROVINCE COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

When Br. Rafael “Rafi” Vargas, SDB, was offered the opportunity to attend Don Bosco Prep in Ramsey, NJ, on a full scholarship, he did not realize that his “yes!” to this decision would be the beginning of his Salesian life.

“I was introduced to the life of St. John Bosco after reading his biography as part of one of my first assignments as a high school student,” Br. Rafi recalled. “Through my experience being a student at a Salesian school, I began to fall in love and identify with the Salesian spirit and charism.”

During the homily of the first school Mass during his junior year, Br. Rafi realized that the religious life was something clear to discern. “We were reminded that, to be men of God, we were meant to courageously live out the vocation God has for each of us, whether it be as married, single, or consecrated/ordained,” he explained.

As he transitioned from secular to religious life during his time in formation, Br. Rafi was deeply moved when he spent a “Come and See” weekend with the Salesian community in Orange, NJ.

“I experienced such joy and inner peace,” he exclaimed. “[The experience] broke down any assumptions and fears that I had at that time.”

During his time in formation, Br. Rafi served in several places. One of those was CRESCO in Guatemala, where he spent two years.

“It’s something that truly enriched me in many ways,” he remarked of his time with CRESCO. “Living with Salesians from so many diverse backgrounds, both culturally and from unique Salesian experiences, taught me so much. It gave me new perspectives of viewing how to serve youth, as well living in fraternal community as Salesian consecrated religious.”

Both during his time in Guatemala and on the U.S.-Mexico border in Tijuana and Juarez, Br. Rafi worked closely with young people who were most at risk. That experience deeply impacted him.

“Although it is difficult to choose a favorite experience as a Salesian so far, what immediately comes to mind is all of the experiences as a Salesian where I served very closely with young people most at risk,” he remembered. “I was present with youths who were separated from their families, along with young people who were in juvenile detention centers, shelters, struggling with physical or mental health, etc.”



Courtesy of CRESCO

Today, Br. Rafi is the associate director of vocation ministry in the province vocation office. He has high hopes for the office, especially regarding vocational accompaniment. ***“Within the next five years, my hope is that, as a province, we can continue to grow in the number of vocations to the Salesian life,”*** he began. ***“However, more specifically, I really hope we can all share a common vision towards vocational accompaniment. I hope we can continue to provide more opportunities to gather, accompany, form, and entrust youths and young adults. This will allow us to grow not only in vocations to the SDBs, but also to our whole Salesian Family. As a result, this will enliven the Salesian charism in our communities and beyond.”***

The realization of Br. Rafi’s hope would have a ripple effect across the entire Salesian Family. ***“I love our Salesian Family as a whole,”*** he beamed. ***“[My love for them] stemmed from my first love, which is the opportunity to accompany young people. It’s a gift to live in community and have confreres I can call my brothers. I am grateful for them and the rest of the Salesian Family, including the Salesian sisters and everyone who works side-by-side with us in our mission.”***

When asked what advice he’d give a young person discerning a call to serve as a Salesian religious, Br. Rafi offered three key points of wisdom. ***“First, visit [the Salesians] and experience living in a community. Second, have a trusted spiritual guide or someone to accompany you through your vocational discernment,”*** he detailed. ***“Finally, keep praying for guidance, discernment, and—most importantly—the courage to say “yes!” to God’s will. Although we will never know the full picture, we can confidently trust in God, who knows and leads us.”***



Courtesy of Province Vocation Office

Br. Paul Hotovy, SDB

BY JULIA ST. CLAIR

Paul Hotovy grew up with a great-uncle who was a priest in the Diocese of Lincoln, NE. “As a child, I thought, ‘Oh, maybe I’ll be a priest,’” he shared. He didn’t think about it much in high school or college and went on to become a teacher. Then everything changed when Paul was sent to teach at a Catholic high school in Florida as part of a teaching program through the University of Notre Dame.

“They were strong in faith and had good role models,” Paul remembered of his former students and peers. “When I was around twenty-four to twenty-five years old, I began to take my faith more seriously. As I went to Mass and read the Bible, the question of my vocation arose. I tried to put God first, and I found an inkling that God was calling me to be a priest or join a religious order.”



Br. Paul plays basketball with DBCR students. | Courtesy of Br. Paul Hotovy, SDB

During and after his realization, Paul attended Mass at his local parish St. Leo the Great in Omaha, NE on weekends, where his brother was the sacristan. In 2016, Paul met a visiting priest who helped at Masses for the summer —Fr. Dominic Tran, SDB. “I didn’t know about the Salesians or Don Bosco,” Paul began. “Yet I had a general desire to explore the priesthood and religious life.”

After Mass, Paul went to the sacristy to help his brother and spoke with Fr. Dominic. They exchanged numbers and met up a few times to discuss religious life. Fr. Dominic gave Paul the *Memoirs of the Oratory* during one of their get-togethers. This helped Paul, who enjoyed teaching, relate to Don Bosco as he read about his life.



Br. Paul with DBCR students at a Salesian Leadership Retreat | Courtesy of Br. Paul Hotowy, SOB

A year later, Fr. Dominic invited Paul to work for a month during the summer at the Chicago community's summer camp. The following year, in August 2018, Paul joined the Salesians of Don Bosco as a candidate. After he served as a pre-novice and novice, Paul made his first profession as a Salesian of Don Bosco in August 2021. During the summer of 2024, he made a three-year renewal of religious profession and also worked with children at Camp Echo Bay in New Rochelle, NY.

"When you do anything publicly, there's a certain intentionality you gotta have, and there's certain graces built into vows and renewals," Br. Paul elaborated. "You're not in the spotlight, but you kind of are. There's a lot of graces as you're recommitting yourself to this life I'm supposed to follow Christ and Don Bosco as a sign and bearer to the young."

Br. Paul loves his Salesian life, especially living in community and all the wonderful opportunities he has to connect with the young. "The biggest blessings of being a Salesian are getting to live with certain confreres who are very exemplary, living the faith, and helping others," Br. Paul beamed. "Also getting different opportunities to connect with young people. I've been blessed to have spent this summer at Camp Echo Bay and teach Faith Time. Each place I've served has a different interaction with young people. This includes getting to both meet and listen to different groups of young people." During his work with the youth thus far, Br. Paul sees what they need the most from the Church—relationships with others, especially God. "As Salesians, our focus is to build our relationships with and among young people," he explained. "Bishop Barron says that 'evangelization is one hungry man telling you where to find food.' There's a lot of anxiety and loneliness in the world, and people have an innate desire for something more, which is God. I tell people where to go to find food, and it's Jesus."

Br. Paul is in his second year of teaching at Don Bosco Cristo Rey High School. Before then and after the novitiate, he spent two years at Don Bosco Prep in Ramsey, NJ. He still enjoys teaching and would like to let young people grow spiritually as they explore their relationship with God, both inside and outside of the classroom.



“

As Salesians, our focus is to build our relationships with and among young people.

”

Courtesy of Br. Paul Hotovy, SDB

“I teach geometry [at Don Bosco Cristo Rey High School],” he offered as an example. “God creates order, and geometry is order. A goal of mine this year is to do more connections like that in class. It’s exciting and challenging being on your feet and creating lesson plans. Sometimes there are ways to tap into the desire to talk about deeper things, like God. We can feed the desire, which can be daunting.”

As Br. Paul continues his formation journey, he hopes to follow God and imitate Don Bosco today while remaining present, grounded, and focused. “God willing I become a Salesian priest, I will be a better priest if I try to follow God and imitate Don Bosco today,” he detailed. “I try to ground myself in ‘now’ and continue to grow by being a responsible teacher and growing the students in front of me and my prayer life. I hope to become a responsible priest who cares about others and has a faith life.”

Br. Paul is excited to continue growing his faith as a cleric and Salesian teacher who wants to help others. He advises young people to discuss their faith with a community or at least one person who provides understanding and support. “At first, I only had my brother,” Br. Paul remarked.

He also encourages those exploring their vocation to develop a rhythm of prayer. “For example, you’re going to sit down and read the Bible for ten minutes every day,” he offered. “That’s a rhythm of prayer, no matter your vocation.”

School Insight

Don Bosco Prep (Ramsey, NJ, USA)



*Don Bosco Prep students Waylon Harper '27, Nick Becker '25, and Dylan Wrona '27 in the media room.
Photo by Julia St. Clair*

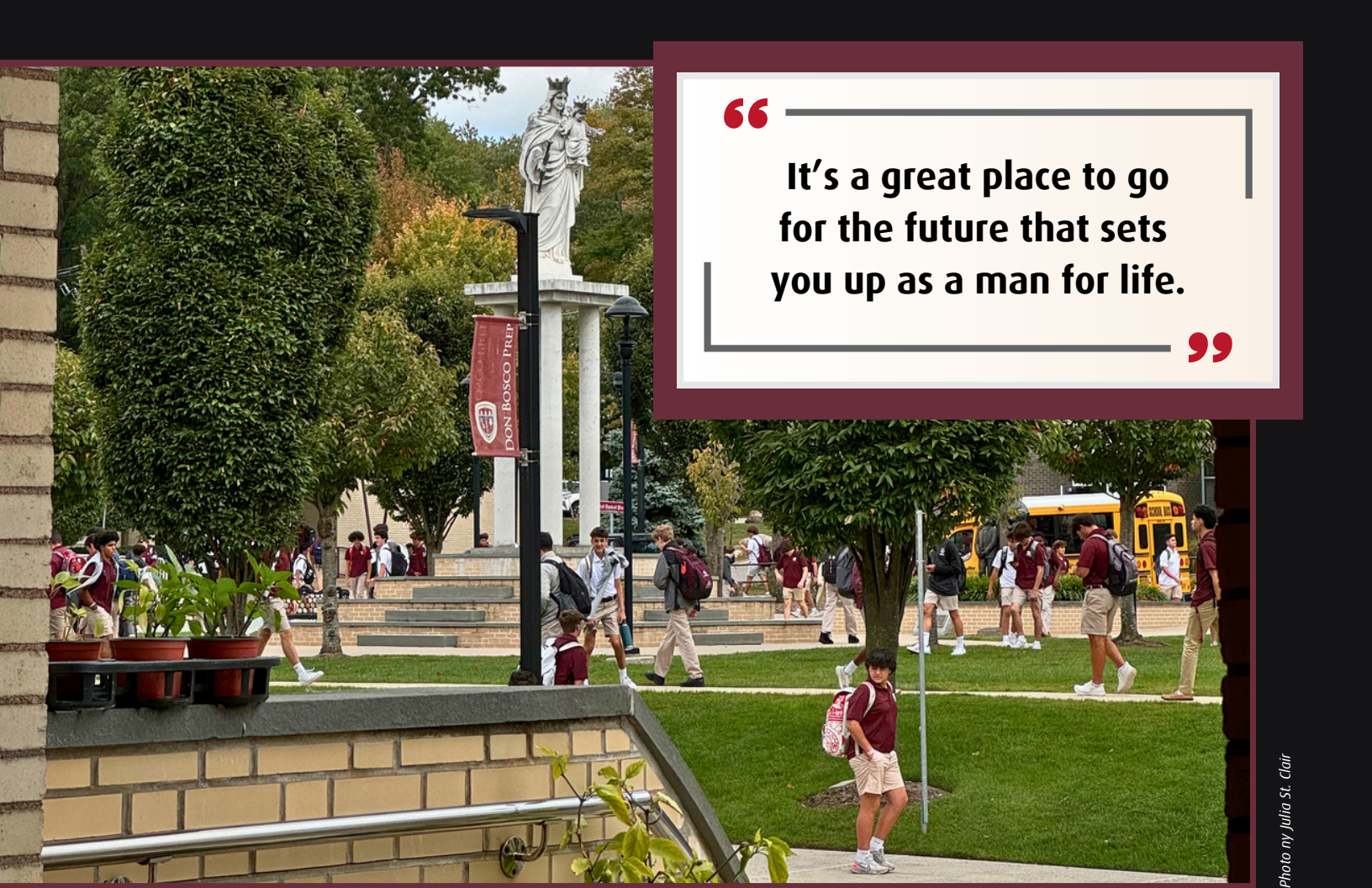
BY JULIA ST. CLAIR

Just under an hour away from New York City lies a school that's existed since before St. John Bosco was canonized. The oldest all-boys Catholic school in Bergen County, NJ, it opened with St. John's Hall in 1915, which served as the original building. Forty years later, it expanded with Immaculata Hall in 1953. Sixteen years later, the school debuted another building—DeSales Hall. Then, the school opened its most recent building, Savio Hall, in 2017—exactly 102 years after it first opened. This school is Don Bosco Prep, affectionately known as “DBP” and “Bosco” among its students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends—the Bosco family.

It's impossible not to feel the presence of DBP's namesake on campus, which is warm, cozy, and reminiscent of a college. “There's something so healthy about walking this beautiful campus class-to-class,” Savio Scholar Dylan Field '27 remarked. Mass and confession are offered daily, and Bosco offers outdoor Masses and adoration.

One of Bosco's many unique blessings is what they do before each football game. “Everyone meets at the grotto before the start of the game, gets riled up, then goes on their knees to pray,” Waylon Harper '27 shared. “You can hear everyone at the grotto saying, ‘St. John Bosco, pray for us!’ from up in the [football] field.”

Bosco offers its students an array of educational and extracurricular opportunities. These include, but are not limited to, advanced placement (AP) classes in pre-calculus, calculus, statistics, U.S. history, and government; the renowned LEO program (in which students get to set up their business plans and present them ala *Shark Tank*); robotics competitions and a state of the art robotics lab); a media room; and its prestigious sports teams and theater program.



“

**It's a great place to go
for the future that sets
you up as a man for life.**

”

Photo by Julia St. Clair

“[Bosco’s] baseball team won two out of three championships since I’ve been here,” Nick Becker ’25 commented. “My dad used to coach baseball and football, so [DBP] was always the place for me to come [for high school].”

Current Don Bosco Prep students journey to school from seven different states. Some like Nick have always known of Bosco, while others are led there. For example, Savio Scholar Avinash Sabnani ’27, who lives an hour away from campus, came from a public school background. “I love the bond here,” Avinash beamed. “Everything is connected, and the school does its best to create an inclusive environment for everyone. It’s a great place to go for the future that sets you up as a man for life.”

Setting up men for life is a passion for the faculty and administration at Bosco. “How you form a person’s character makes a difference,” Director of Learning Needs Tom DeLucci commented. “It’s the purpose of what Don Bosco hoped to achieve in his time—to steer kids in the right direction and make a difference.”

Part of making a difference is presenting students with opportunities for their success—and the ability to make them happen. “My favorite thing about this school is you can come here and do whatever you want,” Savio Scholar Jack Schreiber ’26 beamed. While he was in eighth grade, Jack came to Bosco on a whim for a tour and met with academic officers and upperclassmen. “If they don’t have a club, you can start it,” he continued. “By having freedom, we form connections with each other. I tell freshmen to ‘throw everything at the wall and see what sticks.’”

Jack's advice encompasses a unique quality of Bosco. "We've increased the number of opportunities we offer," Assistant Principal of Student Affairs Chris Moore remarked. "Our robotics program is incredibly strong, and our theater program is much stronger. There are athletes in both the play and the audience!"

Moreover, the students know and appreciate everything they have at Don Bosco Prep. "[The faculty and administration] encourage us to have fun and be closer to one another," Jack added. "There's an emphasis on respect and being a good man. It doesn't matter what you're doing or who you are—the brotherhood comes together."

The "brotherhood" is a term that has always been associated with Don Bosco Prep. Yet it rings true and echoes across the Bosco family, regardless of whether it's during or after hours.



Bosco students in the drama club (top left), the robotics program (top right), and praying at the grotto prior to a football game. Courtesy of Mrs. Nicole Shatouhy P'19, P'21, Enrollment Management Associate, Head FTC Ironmen Robotics Mentor, Don Bosco Prep



Top photo by Julia St. Clair:
Physical Education Teacher Tank Daniels,
Social Studies Teacher Megan Harris,
and Business Teacher Kevin Corcoran

Bottom photo courtesy of Karla Giron:
Assistant Principal for Academics Karla Giron
with her husband and son in Bosco gear



“Here, people start as friends and become family,” Physical Education Teacher Tank Daniels explained. “When my dad died, I just came to Bosco. I don’t know why since no one was here. I went to the gym, and Fr. Abe [Feliciano, SDB, Ramsey Director] was working out. He was there with me, and we prayed.”

Tank, a former football player who won a Super Bowl ring during his run with the New York Giants, counts Fr. Abe and the entire school for being there for him and his family. “I feel indebted to this place for being there for me when I needed them,” he reflected. “I love it here.”

For the future, Don Bosco Prep would like to continue doing what it does best—forming good men with a plethora of opportunities at their feet.

“I want [Bosco] to continue to be a place that welcomes everyone, has students explore their talents, and offers them a variety [of opportunities],” Business Teacher and Don Bosco alumnus Kevin Corcoran ’86 conveyed. “It makes me feel good and like we’re doing a good job.”

Kevin is also the father of two sons, who, like their dad, are Don Bosco alumni. They graduated from the classes of 2018 and 2022, respectively. Tank, also a father to two sons (who he had baptized at Bosco), hopes to follow in his colleague’s footsteps in being a Bosco parent.

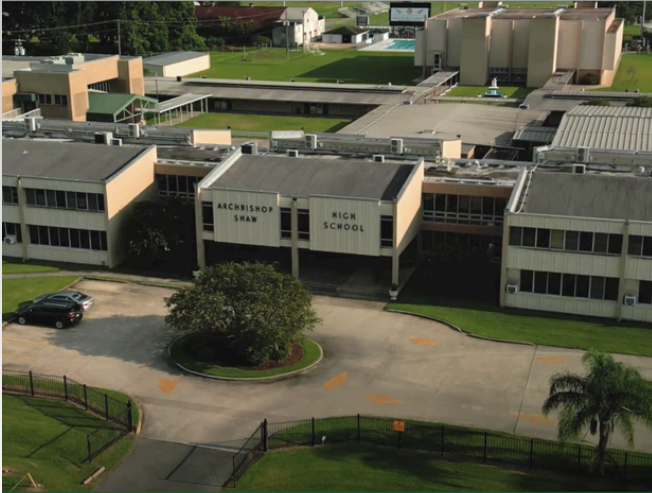
“My son and his little buddies go, ‘We wanna go to Bosco!’” Tank beamed.

Assistant Principal for Academics Karla Giron is also a soon-to-be Bosco parent, as her son will come to DBP next year. Her husband also recently joined the faculty/staff.

“If you want to bring your family to your workplace, you know there is something special happening there,” Karla observed. “I can see this as an administrator, a wife, and a mother.”



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Spotlight



St. Benedict Parish Etobicoke, ON

BY JULIA ST. CLAIR - PHOTO BY JULIA ST. CLAIR

One hundred years ago, the Salesians began their first presence in Canada at St. Agnes Parish, Toronto. Although they withdrew from the parish ten years later in 1934, Salesians have remained a key presence in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), especially at St. Benedict Parish, where the Salesians have been for forty-one years.

Located in Etobicoke, St. Benedict Parish was originally a diocesan parish until the Salesians took over in the 1980s. Yet the Salesian mission was firmly rooted in its parishioners, some of whom still work for the church, long before the Salesians took over.



Fr. Branden Gordon, SDB, (left) leads the monthly young men's discernment group. Here, they read a chapter from the book Radical Discipleship: Consecrated Life and the Call to Holiness, and reflect on some vocational questions. Photo by Sammy Jr Paraguas

This is where I serve the people of God that God puts in my path," Lay Pastoral Assistant Antoinette Pace shared. Born and raised in the parish, Antoinette and her siblings were all baptized in the font that remains in the church to this day. Additionally, her brother Fr. Mike Pace, SDB, was ordained at St. Benedict Parish and served as its pastor from 2007 to 2016.

Originally a teacher, Antoinette experienced a call from the classroom to the parish. "I'm living out my vocation," she continued. "When you follow God's will, it's sheer joy."

In her role as a Lay Pastoral Assistant, Antoinette prepares people to receive the sacraments (communion and confirmation, as well as baptism for Order of Christian Initiation of Adults [OCIA], formerly RCIA), administers with the parish and St. Benedict Elementary School, plans Faith and Family (a program for the year and catechism for public school children), and welcomes refugees as part of a resettlement program that the parish has done since 2010.

"Every sponsorship that the parish takes on with our Office for Refugees, Archdiocese of Toronto (ORAT) is a one-year commitment of financial, moral, and practical orientation to Canadian living from [the refugees'] day of arrival," she explained. "It's great welcoming newcomers. These are our brothers and sisters. This is the Church—it's the work of the Church to do this kind of outreach to those most in need."

Antoinette's favorite thing about being at St. Benedict's is bringing God to the people and the people to God by accompanying them in their journeys and listening to them. "It's a privilege to accompany, welcome, and listen to people's voices and be edified by them and their transformation as they encounter God in His word," she beamed. "It also helps me grow in my faith and ask myself, 'Where is the opportunity to bring the Lord and listen to people's pain and joy and celebrate with them?'"

Many parishioners like Antoinette come back to and give back to the community. For example, Terri Labrecque, who got married at the church, volunteers with ministry at the parish, including being a marriage coordinator.

"My favorite thing about being in ministry is meeting, welcoming, and engaging with people," Terri exclaimed. "This is a good parish run by good priests. They're always available, and you don't have to work too hard or wait too long [to get a hold of them]."

The Etobicoke community currently has six Salesians—five priests and one brother. Its Director Fr. John Puntino is back after having previously served in that role from 2011-2017. "Now comes the sequel," Fr. John remarked.



*The youths of the St. Benedict Parish community gather for the first Oratory Night of the year.
Photos by Sammy Jr Paraguas*

Fr. John shared how the Salesian Family spirit is alive at St. Benedict Parish. “Every activity is geared towards a specific age group, and everyone has their own unique value,” he conveyed. “There is a sense of family spirit throughout the parish. I like to think that people feel at home here.”

St. Benedict Parish’s impact reaches throughout the entire community. There’s something for everyone—a youth ministry team, Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (one of the original ones in Canada), the Knights of Columbus, and a sewing club, just to name a few of the many opportunities the parish has to offer.



Photo by Julia St. Clair

“I’ve been in this parish for fifty years. My kids were born here,” Maria Galluzzi, who is a part of the sewing club, beamed. “When [the parish] started SummerDaze Camp my kids went. Then they became volunteers before they ran the program. Now my grandchildren have gone to SummerDaze and volunteered. This church is like my home.”

Additionally, Br. Kevin White, who came to St. Benedict Parish from Archbishop Shaw High School, sees the community’s Salesianity everywhere, especially in the young adult core team. “They feel comfortable and able to be themselves, and they know they can encounter Christ here,” Br. Kevin explained. “[The Salesianity in Etobicoke] hits the four pillars of the Oratory [Church, school, home, and playground]. The team then experiences and animates that.”

Another young Salesian at the parish is Fr. Branden Gordon, who grew up close to Etobicoke. One of Fr. Branden’s duties is to preside at homeroom Masses at Johnson and other elementary schools in the area. “The Church is the fishing boat,” he communicated. “When [the Salesians] go out to the schools, it’s like going fishing on the lake. It’s a way we can get children involved in the parish.”

Fr. Branden feels connected to the young people he encounters and can empathize with them, especially those who either aren’t or are just starting to practice and explore their faith. “I started practicing my faith in university,” he reflected. “I had interactions when religious seeds were planted, then the seeds spread out in my interactions. Maybe students will remember positive experiences and those will be the catalyst for change in their lives like they were in mine.”



Perhaps the young people in the GTA could have an encounter with the Salesians like Fr. Frank Kelly, who has been a member of the Etobicoke community for over thirty years.

“I was in the seventh grade at St. Patrick’s School in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn,” Fr. Kelly reminisced. “Sr. Rose Edwards took us on a pilgrimage to visit Don Bosco Seminary in Newton, NJ. I wasn’t supposed to go, and I sat behind Sister on the bus.” That was how Fr. Kelly was introduced to the Salesians. “If it wasn’t for Sr. Rose Edwards, I never would’ve gone there Don Bosco Seminary.”

Fr. Kelly has hope for the future of religious vocations, especially in and from Etobicoke and the GTA. “Fr. Mike [Pace] and Fr. Branden [Gordon] are two good vocations,” he offered. “There’s a lot more there that have too good potential.”

When asked if he has any advice for those discerning to be Salesian religious, Fr. Kelly remarked:

“If it’s of God and for you, welcome home.”

*(Top photo) Core team and Etobicoke Salesian Family Christmas Caroling
(Side photo) Eucharistic Adoration in the church during a Visitation
Photos by Sammy Jr Paraguas*



Brother Insight



Courtesy of Br. Travis Gunther, SDB

Br. Travis Gunther, SDB

BY JULIA ST. CLAIR

In Arkansas, Br. Travis Gunther, SDB, heard his vocation. “I felt a call to religious life coming when I was in the fourth grade,” Br. Travis recalled. “Then, when I was in the fifth grade, I went to a vocation day with my home diocese at Subiaco Monastery, where I noticed the monks looked like Jedis. Over the course of the day, I realized that these men were real and not just putting on a show. Their lives were dedicated to prayer, justice, community, hospitality, and peace.”

Years later, Br. Travis would meet the Salesians through an invitation of a friend from Arkansas. “He asked me if I could be a camp counselor in Florida,” Br. Travis explained. “That summer, we lived with the Salesians at St. Philip Benizi Parish in Belle Glade, FL, where we worked amongst the poorest of the poor.”

The experience greatly affected Br. Travis. “The men I saw on the playground with kids were the same men I had dinner with each night,” he beamed. “My takeaway from the summer was Salesian life is also real.”

In 2008, Br. Travis recognized God was nudging him to be a religious with the help of a spiritual director. He first discerned with the Benedictines over the summer. Then, he lived with the Salesians in Port Chester for a year at Holy Rosary Parish (now part of St. John Bosco Parish). He became a Salesian Brother in 2012 and made his perpetual profession in 2018.

During his pre-novitiate year, Br. Travis felt it “became clear” that he was called to serve God as a Salesian Brother.



Courtesy of Br. Travis Gunther, SDB

“I was blessed there was a group of us in initial formation trying to understand the dimensions of each Salesian vocation,” Br. Travis reflected on his time in formation. “And there was something about the Brothers I met—like Br. Bernie [Dubé], Br. Jerry [Meegan], Br. Mike Brinkman, Br. Sal [Sammarco], among many others—and their ability to be present amongst the young that was more than just an individual personality trait. Their lives showed the beauty of the Salesian Brother vocation I’m called to. In a particular way, each of these men were and are the example of Salesian accompaniment walking alongside the young, getting to know them, and encouraging them to know and respond to God’s call.”

Br. Travis also pondered on the beauty of the vocation of his brothers who are, have become, and are on the road to becoming Salesian priests.

“First and foremost, the Salesian priestly vocation is beautiful, and my vocation as a Salesian Brother is not possible without them. Inevitably, in the conversation about Salesian priests and Brothers, the question is, ‘What is the difference?’ This usually ends with a conversation about all the things a priest can do and a brother cannot sacramentally and leadership-wise. To be a Salesian Brother is simply to be a Salesian: responding to God’s call, living and working in community, in service of the young.”



Br. Travis Gunther, SDB, with students in the B.E.S.T. program at Don Bosco Prep.
Photos courtesy of Br. Travis Gunther, SDB



Br. Travis and B.E.S.T. students partake in some carpentry in Stony Point, NY.

Photos courtesy of Br. Travis Gunther, SDB



As he looked back on his formation journey, Br. Travis feels grateful for his twelve years as a Brother so far. He also appreciates the privilege of serving young people, living with great Salesians, and, up to this point, getting to know the Salesian Family in at least six countries.

Today, Br. Travis is the province delegate for formation. He lives at Don Bosco Prep in Ramsey, NJ, where he taught art during his practical training from January 2016 through June 2019.

“Currently, one of my greatest privileges is to accompany guys in formation, especially those outside the province, with their studies,” Br. Travis exclaimed. “I’m grateful to walk with them as we seek to know God’s will and follow him in the way of Don Bosco. It’s humbling to get to be a Salesian.”



Another privilege for Br. Travis is continuing to accompany some of his former students. “Sometimes it’s a simple text with a prayer requests and other times it’s a walk around the campus catching up on life and their dreams for the future,” he added.

Br. Travis also expressed his gratitude for his brother Salesians. “I’m grateful for their acceptance and patience with me, especially with my mistakes and learning curve,” he detailed. “It means a lot hearing ‘I’m glad you’re here’ from them.”

When asked what advice he’d give to men who are discerning calls to both religious and specifically Salesian life, Br. Travis offered three steps: be honest, ask questions, and try it out. “Our Salesian life isn’t made for textbooks—it’s made for living,” he outlined.



SALESIANS OF DON BOSCO

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Chicago, IL: October 18-20, 2024

Orange, NJ: November 15-17, 2024

Tampa, FL: January 31- February 2, 2025



Please pray for our Men in Initial Formation!



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THEOLOGY III



BR. KEVIN WHITE
PRACTICAL TRAINING



BR. PAUL HOTOVY
PRACTICAL TRAINING



BR. FRANCIS NGUYEN
PRACTICAL TRAINING



BR. MINH-TU NGUYEN
POST-NOVIATE



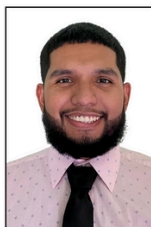
BR. PASCAL MUKUYE
POST-NOVIATE



BR. JOHN TAYLOR
POST-NOVIATE



NICHOLAS JANDERNOA
NOVIATE



CARLOS CERDA GUTIERREZ
NOVIATE



LORENZO D'ALESSANDRO
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Fr. Steve DeMaio
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vocations@salesians.org



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Courtesy of Ben Monteverde

Ben Monteverde

BY JULIA ST. CLAIR

Five years ago, Benigno “Ben” Monteverde was an engineer who found himself discerning God’s will about his vocation. “I had several co-workers from India who were at risk of being displaced from their jobs since they lacked programming skills,” he recalled. “Out of concern for my friends, I decided to teach them programming so they could adapt to their company’s change of pace and minimize the risks they faced.”

During this time, Ben realized he enjoyed teaching and sharing his skills with others. “I was happy to see my co-workers succeed and improve,” he detailed. “Then, I asked myself, ‘How can I do more of this?’” Together with his spiritual director, Ben realized that God was calling him to step outside of his comfort zone and become a missionary.



Courtesy of Ben Monteverde

“I followed a famous proverb: ‘Give a man a fish, you help him for a day. Teach a man how to fish, you help him for a lifetime,’” he explained. “Thus, I wanted to teach my skills to others so that they, too, could achieve what I did.”

Ben searched for missionary opportunities online, where he found the Salesian Lay Missioner (SLM) program. After collaborating with SLM Director Adam Rudin, Ben chose to be stationed in Timor Leste.

Upon his arrival, Ben noticed some cultural differences in his new home that he eventually adjusted to, especially with time. “At my site, it’s common for plans to change without warning or given notice,” Ben commented. “Being an American, I respect time and strive to be punctual and finish on schedule. Here, I’m unsurprised if my class gets canceled or delayed without notice. Due to this, I learned to prepare for ‘what ifs’ and respond quickly when they happen.”



“

It's a win-win situation. I enjoy my time teaching them, and they learn and enjoy the classes.

”



Courtesy of Ben Monteverde

“For instance,” Ben continued, “I designed my lesson plans to ‘overprepare for the unexpected.’ Moreover, when classes do get canceled or there’s a holiday, I see these as opportunities to create more lesson plans for the future or work on my backlog of projects.”

Ben’s favorite experience in Timor Leste has been teaching English to young Salesian aspirants daily. “Although I only have nine students, most of them are motivated. They’ve also expressed how they enjoy my teaching style, which incorporated a new English language development curriculum I helped create,” he elaborated. “It’s a win-win situation. I enjoy my time teaching them, and they learn and enjoy the classes.”

Upon his return to the U.S., Ben will continue his vocation journey. “I have discerned to move forward with the Salesians in the SUE Province,” he revealed. “I’m already in contact with the vocation director [Fr. Steve DeMaio, SDB] and expressed my intent to apply to join the congregation.”

Ben also plans to create another English curriculum like the one he started and implemented during his time as an SLM. “I am currently collaborating with my fellow SLM in Cambodia on this,” he exclaimed. “I hope this customized curriculum will standardize and formalize the English education of young people in a technical school. If this succeeds, it can have a long-lasting impact.”



Photo by Ben Monteverde

Additionally, he offers honest advice to anyone who is discerning a call to serve as an SLM. “This might sound tough, but I think it’s what allowed me to not experience ‘culture shock,’” he began. “First, prepare to face difficulties. Think like a cadet in a military boot camp, though it gets better over time. Second, be accustomed to inconveniences. Expect an uncomfortable bed, thin walls in your room, food you may not like, electricity to go out multiple times per month, and unreliable internet. It’s similar to what one might experience if they were to go on a long hike, like Mt. Fuji

Third, be mindful that your expectations may be different from what you actually experience. Fourth, learn to be content with what you have (except sin, of course). Fifth, please remember that you are a servant first and an adventurer second. This will allow you to get and, more importantly, give the best experience.

Sixth, never forget to pray every day, multiple times a day. Bonus points if you take advantage of a chapel with the Blessed Sacrament steps away from your bedroom and pray alone in silence.”

Ben’s seventh point is to trust in God’s plan and remember that He does have one. “It’s always better than ours, even though you might think otherwise,” he added. “Looking back, there was one specific point in my missionary journey where I sensed God’s hand in the situation, guiding me along the way. I did not like the idea, but it really did appear that He wanted me to move forward with it. With what I now know, I realized God was protecting me from further problems I would never have predicted then.”

Last, he’d like potential SLMs to know that it’s okay to make mistakes; they should not be afraid of them. “When you make mistakes or realize you could have done better, use the situation to your advantage,” Ben offered. “Use them as opportunities to identify and address weaknesses for the future. The positive mindset of embracing failure and taking the time to learn from it was key to helping me improve my classroom management.”



SERVE LIKE DON BOSCO

Be a **Salesian Lay Missioner (SLM)**. Jump into each day like Don Bosco. Pray with the Salesians, laugh with the children, and watch God provide for you in surprising ways. Pour yourself out to the kids. You'll be amazed at what you can do!

6 THINGS TO KNOW



Catholic

We uphold all teachings of the Catholic Church and Her support of the Pope.



Community

You live in community with Salesian priests, brothers, or sisters, along with other SLMs.



Welcoming

No "expertise" needed: bring a heart to serve.



Flexible

You choose how long you serve.



Global

You can serve internationally or in the U.S.



Affordable

We cover room and board, medical insurance, and travel.

“

Serve the Lord joyfully!

Luc. gio Bono



www.SalesianLayMissioners.org



BY JULIA ST. CLAIR - PHOTO BY FR. EDDIE CHINCHA, SDB
FR. EDDIE CHINCHA, SDB (CENTER), WITH YOUTH MINISTRY ALUMNI (LEFT TO RIGHT) KEVIN REYES, LUCAS GEMIO, SILVESTRE ALARCON, AND KEN KAMIYA

YM Insight

St. John Bosco Parish, Port Chester, NY

St. John Bosco Parish offers some great opportunities for youth ministry, which is led by its Coordinator of Youth Ministry (CYM) and Parochial Vicar Fr. Eduardo “Eddie” Chincha, SDB.

“I’ve been able to catch up with students I’ve met in practical training at Salesian High,” Fr. Eddie, who originally came from the Port Chester community when he began his formation journey, shared. “They’re now grown men. One called me ‘Br. Eddie’ when he saw me again because that’s how he remembered me.”

The Port Chester community is known for its large parish with three worship sites and the Don Bosco Community Center, along with its oratory and catechism programs. The Parish had 200 confirmation students last year and has about 160 for this year.

Seven years ago, the parishes that made up the Port Chester community merged into one: St. John Bosco Parish. Each parish had its own youth group, which brought some amazing youth ministry (YM) opportunities to St. John Bosco Parish. One that the parish offers is a young adult group that meets on Friday evenings in Spanish. “It’s been going on for over twenty years, and it has been a place where many young adults grew in their faith. A great example is one of our own, Fr. Miguel [Suarez, SDB], who used to attend,” Fr. Eddie commented. About thirty young people have come to each meeting so far this year.

Among the other regular event is the Friday night Oratory for middle school students and a special experience on Monday evenings. There is also an altar service team of about fifty servers who meet Saturday every other month.

The first Monday night of the month, high schoolers meet for about an hour of adoration. Confessions are available, and everyone enjoys a nice meal together before the evening's end. The first adoration of the year was held on Monday, September 30, with twenty-five high schoolers in attendance.

"It's very uplifting to see how a parish can accompany people for more years than a school can," Fr. Eddie detailed. "It also challenges the community to be intentional about keeping young people involved." This includes how YM opportunities often "compete" with other activities that young people are a part of. Fr. Eddie added: "If they drop other things to be at a church on a Monday night, it's because they're making an extra level of commitment."

The youth of St. John Bosco Parish also participate in midnight runs. This past November, they attended the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) in Long Beach, CA, for the first time in around a decade. "It was a really powerful experience to accompany our young people to NCYC and see their reaction to being part of huge and youthful faith community worshipping and learning together," Fr. Eddie conveyed.

In the future, Fr. Eddie hopes to reach out to as many young people as possible, especially after they finish their religious education. He also prays to empower those who are already involved to continue to be young leaders at St. John Bosco Parish.

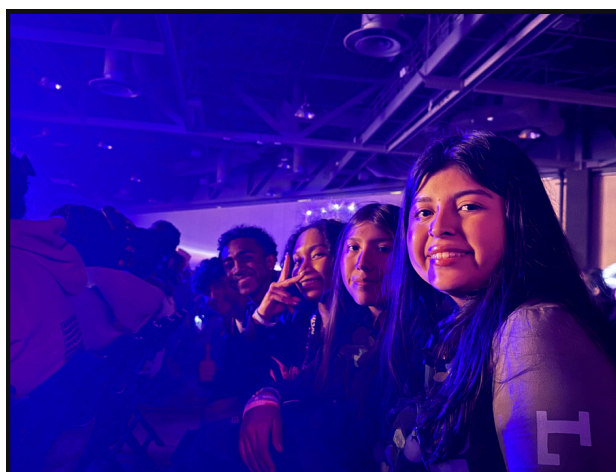
"I'd want to strengthen the heavy involvement of young adults who have grown up in the parish and lead a lot of activities already," Fr. Eddie explained.

Additionally, he would like to cultivate and grow vocations here in Port Chester. "I think God puts a lot of vocations out here," he continued. "I was blessed to have accompanied young adults discern a religious vocation in Tampa. I would like to help this community do for others what it did for me and make Port Chester a place where Salesian vocations grow."

Some Salesians who have come from Port Chester include Fr. Clem Cardillo (passed away in 2011), Fr. Miguel Suarez (now pastor of St. John Bosco-St. James Parish in the Chicago community), and Fr. Eddie. "Don Bosco said that one out of ten young people will have a religious vocation. Let's keep all our options open and not close ourselves to any possibility. It's time for us to start again," Fr. Eddie declared.



*Top photo: Young adult group on an excursion to Bear Mountain, NY.
Bottom photo: Port Chester youths at this year's NCYC
Photos by Fr. Eddie Chincha, SDB*





Young Adult Retreat

June 5-8, 2025

Camp Auxilium in Newton, NJ

Ages 18-30

for more information:

email vweekley@salesianym.com



Educational Insight

Don Bosco: The Times, The Man, The Facts



Don Bosco's Initial Difficulties

We are told, among other things, that when Don Bosco returned to Valdocco from Becchi after his convalescence in the summer of 1846 he had no means of sustenance. But Don Bosco knew very well that he did not want to give up his work, and he earnestly strove to persuade his mother to come with him to Turin.

Some Facts

Among other things it was true that Fr. Cafasso helped Don Bosco. In a Memoir of the Oratory compiled by Fr. Borel, there are records of expenses and contributions received from 1844- 1849. In fact, there were generous donations from Fr. Cafasso (cf. ASC 123 Borel- FDB p. 164, N. 552, it E 4).

Don Bosco Insights



In 1844 Don Bosco had a mysterious dream concerning his Oratory's future. (MO 239ff) He realized later that it was true he would be in serious difficulty for two years. He would have a 'wandering Oratory,' from the Refuge (of Marchioness Barolo), to the church of St. Peter in Chains, later to the Dora Mills and after that to the Moretta house and finally to the meadow of the Filippi brothers from where he was asked to leave with no other place to go to. He then prayed to the Lord: "Dear Lord, why don't you show me a clear location where I can gather these youngsters? Or tell me what I ought to do" (MO 255).

Fr. Borel advised Don Bosco:

"Let us cut our losses now and salvage what we can. Let us send away all the youngsters except for about twenty of the youngest. While we continue to teach them catechism, God will open the way and the opportunity to do more."

"There's no need to wait for another opportunity," said Don Bosco, "The site's ready: a spacious courtyard, a house with many children, a portico, a church, priests, clerics, all at our disposal."

"But where are these things?" Dr. Borrelli (Fr. Borel) broke in.

"I don't know where they are, but they do exist and they are ours."

At this Dr. Borrelli (Fr. Borel) burst into tears, "Poor Don Bosco!" he exclaimed. "You're losing your mind!" He took Don Bosco by the hand, embraced him and went off leaving Don Bosco alone in his room." (MO cf. 246)

Evidently, there were moments of grave perplexity but never the intention to uproot himself from there at all. Then there opened to him a small window of light. One day while he was beseeching the Lord a certain Pancrazio Soave came to him in the Filippi field where the boys had already trampled down the grass so thoroughly that they had to be dismissed. This man (Soave) came to know that Don Bosco needed a place for his "Oratory", but he confused it for his "laboratory" and he agreed to lease him a shed that was attached to a field that was owned by a certain Francis Pinardi of Arcisate.

Photographs of St. John Bosco (p. 31-32), along with a painting of Don Bosco's Dream of Nine Years Old Courtesy of www.sdb.org





Courtesy of www.sdb.org

Don Bosco accepted the place on April 5, 1846, through the agreement signed by Fr. Borel on the contract that leased the Pinardi shed.¹ There was hope and even a certainty of a grand Oratory in the future, like the one he had seen in his dream. Not even when everyone had abandoned him and not even when he was asked to leave the Filippi field had he reached the last stage of his painful pilgrimage.

The Pinardi Shed

The Pinardi House lay on an isolated stretch along the Giardiniera Road in the midst of the fields of the Valdocco district and some distance from both the Moretta house and the Filippi field. The house that Francis Pinardi acquired on July 14, 1845, from the Filippi brothers had two floors with some land around it. That same year he leased it out to Pancrazio Soave of Verolengo (TO) on November 10. There he opened a workshop on the ground floor and sublet the rooms above. Only the roof of the Pinardi shed was preserved and under it he built a storeroom. The place below the roof he later transformed into a large room that became the Pinardi chapel. After some time Don Bosco, with the help of Fr. Cafasso and some other benefactors was able to rent out some more rooms and eventually the whole house on February 19, 1851 together with the surrounding land.

In truth, the sale of the house by Mr. Pinardi was made to four people together: to Don Bosco, to Fr. Borel, to Roberto Murialdo (brother of the Fr. Leonardo), and to Fr. Cafasso for a total some of 28.500 Lire, for the land and the structure.

On January 26, 1853, Fr. Borel and Fr. Murialdo renounced their rights of ownership and handed it over to Don Bosco and Fr. Cafasso. On 10th October 1856 this was confirmed in their handwritten will: "I leave to the priest, John Bosco of Castelnuovo d'Asti and domiciled in Turin the ownership of the workshop attached to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in the main region of Valdocco, together with 5000 lire. The remission of the same is to be made to the inheritor on my demise. Notwithstanding what was written before on the subject." (G.Cafasso, Epistolario e Testamento)...(Effeta Editrice 2004, p. 173)

It was the first house of Don Bosco and from there, there are now more than 2000 houses in 128 countries on all the 5 continents.

Viva Don Bosco!

Fr. Franco Pinto, SDB

Footnote:

1. *It was leased in the name of Fr. Borel as Don Bosco had no money at all.*

Don BOSCO Insights



**Joy is the surest
sign of God's presence.**

Luc. Gio. Bosco



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