



PROVINCIAL DON BOSCO PROVINCIAL HOUSE

Don Bosco Nagar Post, Bandlaguda Jagir, Himayathsagar Road
Hyderabad - 500 086, Telangana State, INDIA.

27 March 2020

Dear Confreres,

Greetings from the Provincial House. I hope you are all fine in these extremely troubled times of the Corona virus pandemic (COVID-19). As our world is going through an unprecedented crisis, let us be filled with:

Faith in the Lord,

Courage to face the situation,

Generosity to reach out selflessly,

Hope that we will overcome this global crisis together.

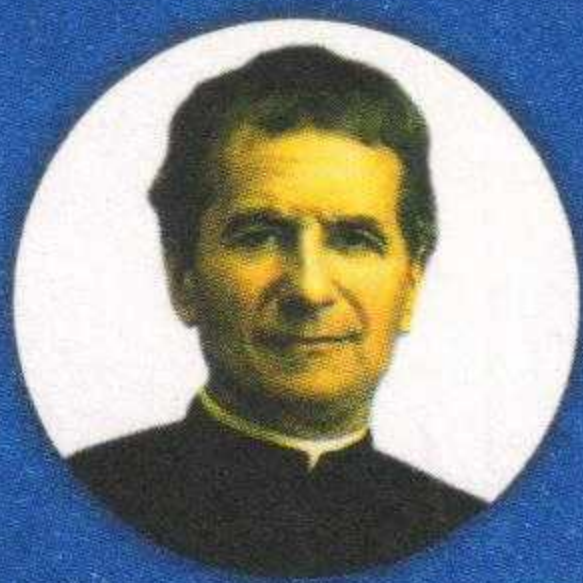
I urge all of you dear confreres to follow the instructions of the Centre and State governments and the Ecclesiastical authorities in tiding over this crisis.

Let us continue to offer our prayers for thousands of people who have lost their lives to Covid-19. For most of them, the end of their life's journey has been too quick. We pray that our merciful God may grant eternal life to them. Let us also pray for the hundreds of thousands of people infected by Covid-19 that they may receive proper health care and be healed.

We hear some of the heroic stories of the self-sacrifice of innumerable doctors, nurses, medical assistants, helpers and police personnel who have been at the service of the infected patients knowing fully well of the real risk of their own contagion, and other stories of patients willing to give preference to the younger ones to be treated first. Fr Giuseppe Berardelli (72), one of the many priests who died in Italy from Corona virus, has noticed the shortage of ventilators and refused it as it could be used to save the life of a younger person.

We see that humanity is at its best and it should be at its best much more in times like these. Let us be positive, not of Corona virus, but in spirit and think of participating in efforts and ways to curb and overcome this crisis.

I have spoken to all the Rectors and In-charges of our Communities (I am using the word house henceforth). All our confreres are safe and are confined to different Salesian houses. The children and young people from most of our boarding homes have gone back to their respective villages and towns. In some of our homes for the young at risk, we have several children and young people



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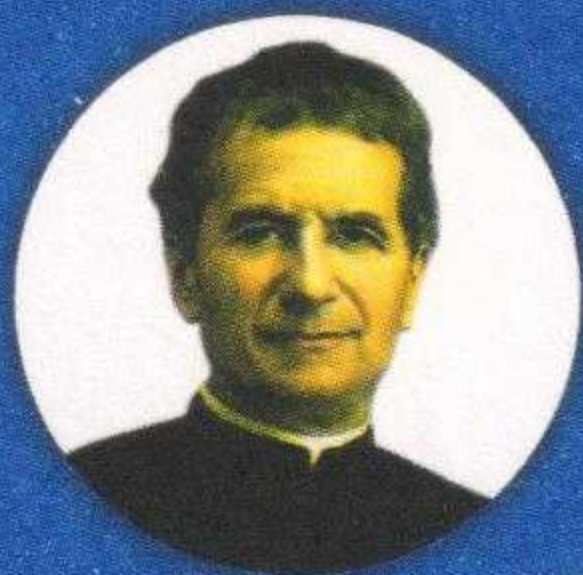
(They have no place to go to. They are our children). They are all safe and looked after well. Due to the lockdown, some seminarians in our formation houses are still with us. They will travel to their homes or places of ministry, when possible.

Fr Joseph Abraham's condition is stable and he is making a slow but gradual improvement. Let us accompany him with our prayers. Fr TD John is in St. Joseph's, Katpadi. His operation was successful. He needs to visit CMC, Vellore for radiation and chemotherapy. Let us assure him of our prayers. Fr TV Thomas, Fr Y Selvaraj and Fr Chacko need our support and prayers. Please remember them in your daily moments of prayer. Our confreres abroad and the missionaries from our Province are all fine. I have spoken to all of them. They are all well protected and safe at the moment. Let us be united in prayer.

Nearly 48 members of the General Chapter are still stranded in Italy at Valdocco. 25 Salesians from the South Asia Region are among them. I have spoken to a few confreres there. They are all fine and looked after well by the Valdocco house and the Salesian Province there. All of them are safe. Let us pray that they may be able to travel safely to their respective Provinces as soon as possible. Several Salesians have contracted the virus in Italy and in Spain. Over 20 Salesians including a Salesian bishop have succumbed to the virus. Let us pray for them that they may be welcomed home into heaven and that they may intercede for our suffering world.

This moment of crisis cannot lead us to a war of words on who caused it, but rather must enable us to try to address the situation positively and pro-actively. I would like share a few guidelines that might help us in this time of untold pain, suffering and fear.

1. We have realized that we, as humans, are fragile and weak. We need to turn to the Lord in prayer. The Lord says, "whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it and it will be yours" (Mk 11:24), "for nothing is impossible with God" (Lk 1:37). As Salesians, we have a great opportunity to spend time in prayer. Some houses have already started one hour of adoration daily in addition to the regular moments of prayer. I welcome all the houses to organize special moments of prayer, adoration and the novena to Mary Help of Christians to protect our world from this pandemic. It is a time for us to grow in deeper intimacy with the Lord personally and as a family and pray for humanity that is increasingly losing its hope. The Lord will take care of us. It is also a great opportunity to revive the habit of personal prayer which is the safest form of prayer under



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the present circumstances. Please ensure that there is at least two metre distance from each other in various moments of prayer and that you follow the norms of social distancing.

2. The Lockdown has forced us to stay home in our respective places. I strongly recommend that we do not venture out except for the most essential necessities of life. I also recommend that our domestic staff too should be afforded the opportunity to stay home both for their own safety and for our protection. Staying home gives us an opportunity to press the reset button of our life in common. We have ample time at our disposal. Perhaps some of us are re-discovering each other's uniqueness as we are spending more time with our confreres. Try to understand and appreciate each other. What is happening around us should help us to put aside our pettiness, misunderstandings and embrace life in its richness. During the moments of togetherness in the house, please maintain safe physical distance but at the same time strive towards deeper communion and understanding.
3. Kindly have special regard for the sick and elderly confreres and take care of them. Please ensure that these confreres are not exposed to persons from outside.
4. I strongly recommend that you take care of your health. Please ensure that you have simple but nutritious food. Ensure that the children and young people in our houses too are provided with nutritious food. Enhancing or strengthening our immune system is important to fight the virus if contracted by any chance. Please make sure that we do not waste any food.
5. Please take care of personal hygiene. Follow the directions given by the government as well as the health department. Please ensure the hygiene of the children and young people under our care. Please provide sufficient number of soaps and sanitizers and instruct them to stay clean and keep their surroundings clean.
6. I recommend that you dear confreres and especially the administrators remain extremely cautious and judicious in spending money. Except for the essential spending on food and medicine, all the other purchases should be put on hold for the time being. It is possible to live with bare minimum. On our return from Italy, I saw that all the shops in the airport were closed down except for a coffee shop. Perhaps except for that coffee shop that was kept open, none of the other shops was essential. We can live meaningful lives with minimum. Austerity has greater value and significance under these circumstances.



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7. Kindly pay the salaries of our staff **on time**. Even though they are not present for work during the Lockdown, I recommend that you support them in this period of uncertainty and anxiety, considering the situation in which the entire humanity finds itself.
8. Kindly use the time available to prepare the SEPP and the Budget of the House for the next academic year. The administrators are gently reminded to follow the directions given by Economer's Office regarding the accounts and the updating of various documents. Kindly ensure that we give importance to the EPC - Educative Pastoral Community. It is important to involve the lay mission partners in our apostolate.
9. Kindly spend time in reading and updating. There is a lot of time at our disposal. I recommend that you read especially the Salesian literature. Kindly make efforts also to put the house library in order.
10. As the days go by, there might be even bigger problems, especially for the poor. I recommend that our houses have a meeting of the confreres to take note of the needs of the poor people of our neighbourhood and reach out to them by providing food and even monetary help so that they can purchase provisions and medicine. If you have identified very poor families, kindly reach out to them. If you do not have sufficient resources, please contact Bosco Seva Kendra Office. Fr Sudhakar, the Executive Director, will be at your service. PARA is reaching out to the poor and homeless in Rajamundry by providing food for them. If any house has any plan, kindly inform BSK so that we as a Province can better coordinate and share our resources to help those most in need.
11. In response to this pandemic, the Development Office (BSK) has made an immediate comprehensive plan. We are making masks in different tailoring centres of our Province and we are distributing them to people. BSK is making **Hygiene and Health Safety Kits** (liquid hand wash, masks, soaps, sanitary napkins, milk biscuits), **Nutrition and Food for Migrant Workers** (rice, dal, cooking oil, onions, soaps, hand sanitizers), **Food and Healthcare for Orphans** (food, medicine, soaps, sanitizers). Kindly share this information with our parishioners and friends who will be able to send monetary help to BSK. The brochure with details is attached to this mail and shared on the Province whatsapp as well. Please approach BSK for these kits to be distributed to the poor, the migrants and the homeless.
12. Kindly use the electronic media available to us to promote good news, solidarity, support and encouragement. It is not a time to promote negativity, discouragement and criticism that will not be constructive. Please do not misuse the electronic media and the social networks. The immediate information concerning the Salesian world, our Province, the



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Salesian presences, Salesians, our staff, children and young people will be made known to you through the Province whatsapp and email service.

13. Be creative. If you have any creative and practical ideas in responding to this pandemic, kindly share them. The writers, composers and musicians among us can create and share content that will be uplifting and unifying our efforts in fighting this crisis together.
14. If the situation demands, as able men of God consecrated for the service of others, we should be able to get into volunteering. Let us not just remain good admirers of the volunteers and people who reach out. We should be willing to step out of our comfort zones and render our service wherever possible.
15. Another possibility of service could be that we place our institutions at the service of the civil society and the government. In a few places we have already made our buildings available for people and our play-grounds are being used as vegetable market as part of the effort to create more physical space between people and reduce the risk of contagion.

Dear Confreres, last evening I had gone up to the terrace. There was freshness in the air, the sky was clear and blue and I could see the crystal clear horizon where the blue sky was meeting the last building of the city. While we are together waging a war on the virus, the invisible enemy of humanity, the mother earth is at peace, healing herself from all the wounds that we have caused her. Staying home, and in families, all of a sudden we began to feel the need for each other. There is more love and more closeness to each other. We no more seem to be in a hurry. We have slowed down. The 'instant culture' is being dissolved as quickly as its own definition.

We are in the season of Lent. We are meditating on the passion and death of Jesus. We do not debate if the death of Jesus was caused by the betrayal of Judas. The death of Jesus had the greater purpose of saving the entire humanity. His resurrection offers a new beginning and a new life to every person in every way. Going beyond the debate about the present crisis of the Corona virus pandemic, let us truly hope for a renewed earth and a new way of being and living: moving from consumerism to simplicity, individualism to sharing and solidarity, hatred to love, restlessness to peace, selfishness to compassion and despair to hope and happiness.

Yours in St. John Bosco,

Fr Thathireddy Vijaya Bhaskar SDB
Provincial

