

St Joseph's Boys Village

[Batlagundu]

A De La Salle Brothers Home
for underprivileged boys.

Rev. Bro. James Kimpton F.S.C.

25th April 1975.

Dear Friends,

I have been writing to you for several years now and I have never told you what I am doing. I tell you about the people for whom I work. I have told you some of the tragic stories that come into my life, but I am sure that you must be a little mystified, wondering what I am really doing.

I am a De La Salle Brother, and have been working in the East since 1952. All my work has been among the very poor, and this seems to get more so as the years go by. This is the fifth project for the poor which I am pioneering, and is certainly among the poorest of the poor. I am basically running a home (and I want it to be really that, in the fullest sense of security, warmth and care) for the most destitute of boys aged from 10 to 14 years. We live among the villages and so I am trying to make this place as village-like as possible - open, simple, not too aseptic. We live like the village people, and our buildings are based on those of the surrounding villages. My own 'house' measures 10' by 10', is made out of mud and stone and has a coconut leaf roof - it is just a room with a roof and electric light (that is a concession). From here we run a dispensary for the very poor, who can come for free treatment. I act as the doctor/nurse, and thank God for the weeks I spent in the General Hospital of Chester. We have also adopted a village some 8 miles away, who live on the brink of despair in their utter poverty. The boys from here are very involved in this, and we all go off there to help out where we can. At present we are deepening their only well and sole supply of water. At present it has less than 1 foot of water in the bottom. We have twice given them supplies of grain, and the boys took each child there a set of clothes. This has been possible only by begging from our friends. We also have a guest room here for poor travellers who go along the main road past our gate. We often give food and shelter to families who seem to walk enormous distances (50 miles is not at all exceptional) looking for a place to settle - more so now that there is a famine all round us and many villages are being abandoned because of the complete absence of water.

I also keep an eye on Boys' Town in Madurai, 40 miles away. I worked there for 10 years until last May when I came here. That is a much bigger project, with 160 boys, and it is very well established. I also help out in one or two other orphanages, and also find it a joy to assist Mother Theresa's Sisters in Madurai. I have been involved in that project since its inception, and in actual fact, even before the Sisters came there.

From here also, we are running a farm of 25 acres. This is meant to bring in finance for our young men who are training to be Brothers, and who will continue the work we are only just starting in India. We took possession of this farm in January, thanks to the kindness of the people of Spain. I am hoping that by the end of this year I will have enough income from the farm to maintain our training centres. It all depends on the monsoons. We have been having a very long drought now for more than one year. The monsoons were a complete failure and nothing is growing for mile after mile. This should be our main growing season, and the fields should be chock - a - block with grain. They are dry, brown and cracked. Whole districts look like a desert, and the top soil blows away in great clouds of dust. It is all very worrying when there are so many dependant on us for their survival. All our economy is farm-based, and when the farm produces very little, then we do lean heavily on Providence for our existence.

Let me again thank you all who help us in any way. We are all very, very grateful for your continued friendship, and concern and help.