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HEALTH - "Ebola Orphans in Africa: the work and sacrifice of the Salesians". This is the title of an article by Blanca Ruiz published by the agency *Aciprensa*. In it Fr Jorge Crisafulli, Provincial of the Salesians in English-speaking West Africa, reports on the work of the Salesians and the young people who are taking care of the centre for orphans.

"We were already known to the Government of Sierra Leone for the work we do for child soldiers. They asked for our help also in this situation. We thought there would be about thirty or forty children, but after the first month we realized that the numbers were much larger. Now we have a shelter for 120 Ebola orphans," says Fr Crisafulli.

With the help of foreign organizations like *Manos Unidas*, the Salesians of Sierra Leone have transformed a school into a unique kind of orphanage. Because they are dealing with children who have been in contact with people infected by Ebola, precautions and hygiene measures are extremely stringent. Mistakes or carelessness can be fatal.

"Every child has a handle to turn on or off the water in the shower, so no one touches anything that has already been touched by someone else. We work with children who come here with a certificate saying that they are free of Ebola, but we have to follow a strict protocol, because a single mistake can be enough to catch the virus," says Fr Crisafulli.

He says some of these certificates are false, so all the children who come to the Salesian centre undergo a period of quarantine in Zone A. This is a tent where children are isolated from the

rest. This area can accommodate sixty young people, out of a total of 120 in the centre.

Fr Crisafulli says, "Since the virus has an incubation period of 21 days, sometimes it is thought that they are not infected, but it may be just that the symptoms have not yet appeared. All the boys who come to us, no matter where they come from, pass this period in quarantine, cared for by nurses who have survived the virus (...). Their temperature is taken every three hours for the entire twenty-one days they spend in Zone A, and any change is recorded immediately."

The boys who come to the Salesian centre are alone because Ebola has taken away everything. Parents, brothers and sisters have died from the virus. The aim of the Salesians is to reintegrate them into their extended families where uncles, aunts or grandparents can take care of them. "When a child comes to us and is proven to be healthy, social workers and volunteers from Sierra Leone go to his village of origin to find someone of his extended family, so that he can return to them."

But this is not always possible, either because no one is left alive or because their families do not want to take care of the child. "One of the serious problems that we have noticed recently is that sometimes the extended family does not want them, because they want to keep the land of the dead parents that rightfully belongs to the child survivor. So they refuse. They say the child is a witch or a wizard and that it is their fault that the family died, and then they keep the land that rightfully belongs to the young person. For that reason we have hired some lawyers who take care of these problems, so that these children will have a future. "

Fr Crisafulli concludes by talking about the substitute families that accept the children. He speaks also about the training they receive at the centre, and the music, dance and games that help to distract them from their situation. He mentions the introduction of agricultural work which serves to make the young people responsible. Finally, he warns of the need to "work together against the roots of poverty, which are ignorance, lack of education, and corruption. We need to open our eyes and ears and we should all feel jointly responsible."

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