

# ST. JOSEPH'S ELEMENTARY, JUNIOR & SECONDARY

KEREN, ERITREA

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## ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St. Joseph's School is located in the town of Keren, 91 kilometers northwest of Asmara, the capital of Eritrea. It has educated thousands of young men and women since it was founded on October 19, 1949, under the leadership of Brother Adriano Celentano, FSC, an Italian missionary. The school opened with 150 grade school students, two Brothers, and two lay teachers. It expanded to a junior high school in 1962 and added the secondary level in 1993. Today, St. Joseph's School educates 1,700 students, including 900 boys and 800 girls, from grades one through 11. They are separated into 28 classrooms of 60 students each.

The school receives thousands of applications each year, but is able to accept fewer than a quarter of those who apply. St. Joseph's is so popular because of the high quality of education it offers. While there are thousands of government schools in the country, St. Joseph's is the only one that offers quality, holistic education. It offers moral education, physical education, and other important values that students do not get in other schools. This is well known in the government and St. Joseph's is continuously encouraged to expand its service. It has repeatedly proven its excellence in recent years by ranking among the top three schools in the country in external exams, both in the middle school and in matriculation.

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## ABOUT THE STUDENTS

The 1,700 students in grades one through 11 range in age from six to 18 years old. Ninety percent of students' families are very poor. They are generally pastoral farmers, a few fishers, and about 10 percent are small business people. In general, especially due to the shortage of rainfall, the territory is not ideal for agriculture. The many years of war and the current political upheaval of the country have made it difficult for the people to lead a dignified economic life. Students who pass the national exam go on to higher studies, while the rest join the national service. St. Joseph's School tries to make sure all students pass the exams and most succeed.

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## ABOUT THE TEACHERS

St. Joseph's has approximately 56 teachers and 14 administrative staff members. The average education level of the teachers depends on the level that they teach. Elementary teachers are required to have a teacher training certificate, junior teachers are required to have a diploma level certificate, and high school teachers must have a bachelor's degree.

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## A TYPICAL DAY AT SCHOOL

Days are busy at St. Joseph's School with the schedule starting at 7:30 a.m. and continuing until almost 6:00 p.m. Forty-minute classes start at 7:30 a.m. and continue in seven periods until 1:00 p.m. After a lunch break, most students return for study sessions in the library, peer education, and discussions from 3:00 - 6:00 p.m. Various sporting competitions also take place during that time. Students in grades eight and 11 who are preparing for the national exams have formal revision classes from 4:00 - 6:00 p.m. Most students go home after 6:00 p.m. except for those who want to use the library, which is open until 9:30 p.m.

In addition to the academics and sports, the school has spiritual groups, including Lasallian Youth, the Association of Christ the Crucified, the Movement of Catholic Renewal, and others. It also offers clubs like book club and culture club, which includes drama composing and staging, singing and dancing, short story writing and reciting, poetry, and more.

## ■ A CHALLENGE TO STUDENTS

Among the challenges students face in getting an education are their poor economic backgrounds. Many students want to leave school and go to another country to help their parents. The future after finishing school is very vague. There is unlimited military and national service. Additionally, many of them do not have enough food at home. The country rations power, which means they only have light every other night and cannot study each evening.

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## ■ USE OF PREVIOUS TWINNING DONATIONS AND MOST URGENT NEEDS

The school has used twinning donations to fund scholarships, pay for training, purchase and maintain computers, buy books and other school materials, and buy gas for the generator. “Indeed the twinning donations are the life of the school. Our school is becoming a very standard school because of the generosity of the twinning donations,” reported Principal Brother Awate Fiseha, FSC.

The most urgent need of the school is to expand its facilities since teaching 60 students per class presents difficulties. Although the school does not have the ability at the current time to build new classrooms, it will be necessary in the future. It also needs donations to cover tuition because most students are unable to pay the minimum tuition due to increasing economic struggles in the country. Another need includes purchasing more computers, because the school only has 25 and computer classes are held for both middle and high school students.

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## ■ MESSAGES FROM ST. JOSEPH’S TO RELAN SCHOOLS

“What we would like our twin schools in RELAN to know about us is that we are so grateful for their generosity and our school is one of the most standard schools in the country due to your generosity,” wrote Brother Awate. “We also want our twin schools to know that our students are very hard working, well disciplined, and very unique due to the holistic education they gain by your assistance. Although we do not have good means of a communication system, we send from our hearts the loving appreciation to each one of you, for you are making a difference in the lives of the thousands of young men and women who are getting education here at St. Joseph’s School. We would like to know anything our beloved twin schools can share about them, such as their school environment, their typical schedule, values taught at school, etc.”

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## ■ CONTACT ST. JOSEPH’S SCHOOL

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\*Please note – The school has very unreliable Internet service. It can take an hour and a half to send one email. The administration typically goes to a nearby Internet café for access, which is still very slow and a difficult to send attachments.