

PROVINCIAL CIRCULAR

Salesian Province of Mary Help of Christians, Guwahati, Assam, India

JS – 27/2019

1 December 2019

My Dear Confreres,

Greetings with love from Provincial House, Guwahati!

On 1st December, we begin the beautiful season of Advent. I wish you a happy and holy season of Advent as we begin our preparations, spiritual or otherwise. Let this beautiful song truly resonate in our hearts, *“Awaken! Remember that God comes! Not yesterday, not tomorrow, but today, now! The one true God, “the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob”, is not a God who is there in Heaven, unconcerned with us and our history, but he is the-God-who-comes”*. Hence let everyone truly prepare oneself well.

LOOKING BACK - LOOKING FORWARD

The calendar year 2019, the first year of preparation for the Centenary of the arrival of the Salesians to the North East India in 1922 will soon make its exit and the new year 2020 will make its entry. We usually commence the new year with much prayer, optimistically, joyfully and with high hopes and expectations that the new year will, once again be good and bountiful to us as individuals and as communities. In 2019, the theme “Missionary Evangelisation and Catechesis” animated us throughout—in retreats, in Provincial and community meetings and particularly during the well-prepared Symposium in preparation for the Diamond Jubilee of the Province.



In 2019, the Rector Major, Fr Angel Fernandez Artime, gave the Congregation and the Salesian family, the beautiful Strenna “So that my joy may be in you” (Jn 15:11) “Holiness for you too” and invited us to re-focus our attention on HOLINESS and share our holiness in joy with everyone especially the youth. St Dominic Savio’s words were truly relevant, “If I do not become a Saint, I have wasted my life”. On 13th October 2019, Pope Francis canonized one more Indian Saint, Mariam Thresia. In our own missionland, some of our confreres, viz., Fr Constantine Vendrame, Msgr Stephen Ferrando, Msgr Orestes Marengo and Fr Francis Convertini are on the way to sainthood. St Paul tells us that it is God’s will, your sanctification.

The Provincial Chapter theme helped us to re-visit and live the profile of a true Salesian, in tune with the changing needs and challenges of the times by reflecting on “What kind of Salesians for the youth of today”, which will also be the theme for the 28th General Chapter of our Congregation (GC 28). The GC 28 is due to take place from 16th February to 4th April 2020 which will enable the entire Congregation to return to the roots of being true Salesians and at the same time, make ourselves ever more relevant and effective to youth of our times.

The celebration of the Diamond Jubilee of the Province (1959-2019) gave us ample opportunity to recall in humble gratitude the wonders that the Almighty has done in the North East. We recalled how we believed that our Blessed Mother, the Help of Christians preceded us to prepare the way for us and how a small band of pioneers, coming to the unknown lands and cultures for the first time, laid a strong foundation of evangelization and catechesis. To celebrate this event meaningfully, we prepared ourselves and our communities through a common novena and the symposium. As a large family of Don Bosco, we celebrated solemnly the Thanksgiving Holy Eucharist and witnessed the beautiful cultural extravaganza as a mark of celebration of God’s entry into our land, the people and the cultures.

As we end the year, it will be good for every individual confrere and the community to make a deep introspection into our personal religious life and apostolate and learn a lesson or two. We need to take stock of events, programmes, our apostolic performances, fidelity to religious life and our contribution for the welfare of the young and how we have accompanied them, individually or as a team.

Such reflections will make us count the innumerable blessings and feel grateful to God, to our Blessed Mother and to one another.

It should also make us to take note our shortcomings, find the causes for such deficiencies and take resolutions not to repeat them in the year ahead. In that way, even the so called mistakes or failures will no longer be something negative because we have learned the lesson and will, in all likelihood not be repeated. This I feel is a good way to end the old and to welcome the new year.

In 2020, the second year of preparations for the Centenary, we shall reflect deeply on Youth Spirituality. As our Province is incharge of animating the Provinces of Shillong and Dimapur on the theme and the celebrations, we are already in the process of preparing ourselves to do a good work of animation. Our Rector Major has already presented to the Congregation and the Salesian Family, the Strenna of the year “Good Christians and Upright Citizens”. We shall have ample opportunity to study and reflect on it.

HOLIDAYS – CHANGE OF OCCUPATION

Come December and we are here for another set of long winter holidays. Both the students and parents long for Christmas and New Year holidays, as they bring the family members together from near and far.

Don Bosco called holidays as a change of occupation and wanted everyone to keep oneself busy with something beneficial, knowing that the idle mind is the workshop of the devil. Our educational institutions usually remain closed during the winter months and the students return to their homes and families. It is important for us to prepare the minds of our students and instruct them on how to spend the holidays in the grace of God. They can easily be told on how they should make their parents happy, on how they should help the parents in whatever way they can, on how they should not forget the prayers especially the Sunday Mass and the Rosary while on holidays, on how they need to prepare themselves well for Christmas and the New Year by attending the novena for Christmas and the Sacrament of Reconciliation, etc.

Such winter breaks also give us, Salesians, an opportunity to carry out maintenance and renovation works. Many institutions gather students who are weak in studies and give remedial classes.

Holidays are also moments when we can sit down and plan in as much detail as possible the programmes and activities of the next year. The greater the clarity that we have on what we want to do and achieve through education, the greater will be effectiveness and implementation of the same. Hence, it is important for us as leaders of education to plan in as much as detail as possible. In many of our institutions, there is still a greater need for professionalism, the need for greater motivation and focus of teachers and students, the need for work culture and the need to increase the working days.

While the educational institutions cease from much activities, the parishes instead are busy during the Advent, Christmas, and New Year seasons animating the faithful.

During the winter holidays, it is possible for the students who will be writing their SSLC and HSSLC examinations to forget about their books. At the same time, these examinations play a very important role in their career. Young as they are, many of them may not understand the value of studies even during these moments and there are many elements which can distract them from books and study. However it is expected of us, as educators and those who are responsible to them to follow them up, especially those who are slow in learning and weak in certain or in all subjects to give them opportunities to study.

I am truly happy to see many of our schools organizing remedial and coaching classes during the winter holidays and conducting the pre-board examinations. More and more of our centres need to do this service.

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF MARY

Mary is the world's most remarkable model of an Advent figure. At a given moment in salvation history, God asked her to mother his Son. It was a demanding invitation and one which troubled her greatly. When she gave her reply to the angel Gabriel, "Let it be done to me according to your word," the salvation process began and from her humanity came his flesh and blood. To be worthy of such an honour, God graced her with freedom from original sin from the first moment of her conception. Mary had to be immaculate, untouched by sin from the first moment of her birth. The mother who was carrying God's son, not for herself but for a world in need, could have no hand, act or part in sin. Mary became Christ's first disciple and the very model of what discipleship means.

This year on 9th December, we will be celebrating the feast of the Immaculate Conception. A doctrinal feast, the Immaculate Conception celebrates Mary's first moment of existence, in the womb of her mother, St Anne. This feast also celebrates the humility and faith of Mary, a woman who accepted the challenge which God put before her. She is an example of what human life is capable of achieving when touched by the grace of God. Like many a mother she gave a child to the world while remaining unaware of the details of God's plan. We should not think that because Mary was free from sin her life was without struggles. She was subject to the same doubts and anguishes that we all face. Like her son, she shared all our problems and difficulties showing us the value of patience amidst our own trials, by turning sorrow and trouble into hope and joy.



Mary reminds us of the goodness of God which is the source and root of our life. What he wills for Mary he wills for all of us. In sending his Son into our world, God wanted to share the very best of himself with us, by making us his adopted sons and daughters. God calls each of us like Mary to welcome Jesus and to make room for him in our lives. If we give him cooperation in living his word and sharing his cross, he will shape us into a worthy dwelling place for his Son. Mary teaches us what it means to abandon ourselves completely to God's will and to be fully at his disposal. We are fortunate to call Mary our mother and to claim her as the model to imitate to the best of our ability. Of all creatures, she is the closest in love to God, nearest to his heart and everything a human being should be. Her Immaculate Conception calls us to be more freely and totally ourselves according to God's eternal plan.

DON BOSCO MEETS BARTHOLOMEW GARELLI ON 8th DECEMBER 1841 AND THE REST IS HISTORY

For God, nothing happens by chance and without a purpose. On 8th December 1841 when Don Bosco was preparing to celebrate Mass in the sacristy, there appears a boy who was orphaned, illiterate, ignorant of religion, not even wanted by the sacristan, unwanted but a good material to begin with the Salesian apostolate. The dreamer or the visionary accepted the great potential hidden in the



rugged boy, taught him patiently how to serve his Mass, gave him a small catechism lesson and opened the door to familiarization and communication. Article 34 of our constitution says, “The Society had its beginning in a simple catechism lesson. For us too evangelization and catechesis are the fundamental characteristics of our mission”.

The brief intense moment in the company of Don Bosco made Bartholomew the facilitator of so many youngsters to find in Don Bosco and his first oratory, “a home that welcomed, a school that prepared them for life, and a playground where friends could meet and enjoy themselves”. (C 40)

THE SEASON OF ADVENT: PREPARE, FOR BEHOLD, HE COMES

The beautiful season of Advent which we begin this year on 1st December, tells us that “Emmanuel”, “God with us” left his divinity to enter into our humanity to raise us up to a higher place, a higher purpose, to transform our lives, to redirect our lives, to turn us around, plant our feet on higher and solid ground. When we understand the real value of Advent in our lives, we would be led into a much greater understanding and appreciation for Christmas; and when we have a greater understanding and appreciation of these two seasons, we will find ourselves in the place where we can no longer think only of “cards and cribs and cakes” but move beyond it to recognizing God in ourselves and especially in the working of God in history and the people.



Christmas is about a definitive moment in time, in human history, when God showed that He cared for every one of us by entering into our humanity so that He could walk with us, so that He could live with us, so that He could lead us, carry us, lift us to that better place. It is therefore not just about holidays, but rather about the love of our God who wanted to become one with us so deeply, that he gave up his divinity to enter into our wretched humanity. Our greetings therefore as they relate to these two seasons should stay clear of a happy holiday syndrome. Our greetings should clearly speak of, and include the real reason for the seasons of Advent and of Christmas – Jesus Christ.

CHRISTMAS: PRICELESS GIFT WRAPPED IN A MANGER

Christmas—the birth of God in a poor manger—is the most celebrated feast in this world. Christmas offers us all an opportunity to recapture glimpses of childhood’s sacred memories. There is a timelessness about gazing into the crib and coming face to face with the truth that God came down from heaven and dwelt among us as a helpless baby. The gospel story tells us that at Bethlehem on a starry night the Son of God was born. A burst of light startled the shepherds, and angels sang at his birth. It’s the simplicity of this happening that captures the imagination. Christmas is more than a story that is told—it’s about a birth that brings heaven right down to earth. Love came down at Christmas, broke the sacred barrier between creature and Creator and gave an eternal value to our lives. God has given us the gift of reaching beyond ourselves and discovering the joy of heaven.



There was nothing romantic about the first Christmas. Christ’s birth was a hard and bitter experience for Joseph and Mary, two poor people with doors slammed in their faces. They were the picture of poverty with neither room nor lodgings; forced to shelter in a stable outside the entry walls, where animals gave up their manger for the child Jesus. The

Christ who was to die on Calvary outside of Jerusalem was born outside of Bethlehem. The message is clear from the very beginning that the love of God is available to all, but especially the poor, the weak, the disadvantaged. The stable is an indication of our need to see grace and goodness in the most deprived of people. As we kneel before the crib, we can pray for the vision during this short life of ours to see things God’s way and for the courage to act according to his will.

Christmas means something only in so far as we welcome the Lord as he comes to us in the wonder of every human being and as he reveals himself in the value and dignity of every person with whom we live and work. One of the things that makes Christmas very special is being remembered by friends. It's essentially a family feast and an occasion for exchanging gifts and sharing the warmth of our homes in the company of friends. Our hearts and our thoughts are especially with family members who are absent and unable to take part in our festivities. God's presence and love can be experienced in healing misunderstandings, patching up quarrels and letting bygones be bygones. Sometimes removing bitterness can be extremely difficult, but forgiving and forgetting will enable us to enjoy our Christmas happiness to the full.

Christmas is also about kindness, about giving and about the returning of love for love. It's the time of year when our hearts are in the right place and when we realize it is more blessed to give than to receive. We become alive and sensitive to the many needs of the poor who are crying out for our generosity and caring. Spare a thought also for those people who find the going tough and whose lives at this particular time are in the shadow of the crib because of a cross or a recent death. Our joy highlights their sadness. May your Christmas be a holy one because if it is, it will be a happy and joyful one.

NOVENA IN PREPARATION FOR CHRISTMAS

One of the events of the Church that the Catholics especially the youth enjoy is the Christmas Novena, the nine-day spiritual preparation to celebrate Christmas. It can happen that Christmas festivities begin even during the season of Advent and so without proper guidance and animation, it will continue to be so. The Novena should not be for the sake of routine and is delegated to some boys or catechists. It can be done so with only much instruction and keeping in mind their ability to create devotion and proper animation.

I remember once when I was conducting a novena, outside the church there were many boys and girls who were disturbing us by burning crackers and playing games. One of the elders was very upset with the behaviour of those youth. I reminded him saying that the best novena that he could make was to come out of the church and organise a few more capable elderly men and women and ensure that those youth participated in the novena. In some cases, it is good to be firm and teach the children and youth about the proper way of preparing themselves for the celebration.

The novena materials are very rich for spiritual preparation but they may need to be conducted with much preparation and instructions. Usually, many people would like to avail the Sacrament of God's mercy (Confession) during this time and so it is important that confessors are available around.

We need to remember that the Advent and the Novena are moments also for the priests and religious to prepare ourselves for the meaningful celebration of Christmas. As we prepare the people and beautify the place, it is important to remember our own preparations.

Soon the annual *sobhas* also will come. *Sobhas* are again the most happy days and also for us, tiring days. In my opinion, in some parishes, there may be a need to prepare much better the organizational part and the instruction of the people. Some things have to be changed and people will have to be told seriously on how to participate in the *sobhas*. Otherwise, nothing concrete and constructive can happen, and they merely become another social gathering.

VISIT OF CARDINAL CHARLES BO SDB

His Eminence Cardinal Charles Maung Bo SDB, Archbishop of Yangon, Myanmar and the President of FABC, accompanied by Fr George Plathottam, reached Guwahati on 8th November 2019, on his way to Shillong for the Eucharistic Procession. A special dinner was hosted in honour of Cardinal Charles Bo, in which Archbishop Thomas Menampampil too joined. The next morning, on 9th November, Cardinal Charles Bo celebrated the morning Mass at Little Flower Convent and Generalate, Hatigaon and from there went to visit Assam Don Bosco University, Tapesia Campus.



On his return from Shillong, on 12th November, Cardinal Bo gave a conference to the Salesian Family Members of Guwahati Region. He spoke on the difficult political situation of his country Myanmar and the various peace initiatives taken by the Catholic Church in Myanmar. There are around 750,000 Catholics in Myanmar—approximately 1% of the total population. (Wikipedia) Myanmar has sixteen dioceses including three archdioceses. On the day he left Guwahati, he celebrated the Holy Eucharist with Most Rev. John Moolachira, Archbishop of Guwahati, and the confreres of Provincial House. We accompany Cardinal Bo with our prayers for his country and the Catholic Church in Myanmar.

BLESSING AND INAUGURATION OF DON BOSCO SCHOOL, BHOOTEACHANG

On 14th November 2019—the Children’s Day, the new Don Bosco School building at Bhooteachang, built with major contribution from DBI, was blessed by Most Rev. Michael Akasius, Bishop of Tezpur and inaugurated by Fr Joseph Teron Langne, Vice Provincial, in the presence of Fr Benny P. Basil, Economer, confreres, Sisters, staff, youngsters and well-wishers. We thank Fr Benny P. Basil, Economer, Fr John Parankimalil, Fr Marcus Lakra, and the communities of Don Bosco Institute, Guwahati and Tangla for their various efforts in supporting this project at Bhooteachang. This school is run for us by the Sisters of St Ann of Luzern (SAL).



VOCATION CAMPS: GOD STILL CALLS – THE NEED IS TO DISCERN AND ACCOMPANY PATIENTLY

Fr Joseph Teron, Vice Provincial and the regional vocation promoters have published the dates for vocation camps in different parts of the Province. I thank them and all the Rectors/Leaders of Communities for taking great interest in praying for and promoting vocations to the Salesian way of life, both clerical as well as brotherhood. The Lord exhorted us that the harvest is indeed plentiful but the labourers are few. Pray therefore to the Lord of the harvest to send many more good and zealous vocations. As we pray, we need to promote, encourage, invite and accompany vocations. It is good to remember that the life that we live as individuals and as communities are the best means of vocation promotion. If our communities are welcoming to the youngsters and if in the community there is a prayerful and genuine family spirit, the youngsters around us will certainly have a desire to become a member of such movement.

In the spiritual testament of Saint John Bosco, he wrote:

“... our work, the good and austere behaviour of our confreres will draw and almost compell their pupils to follow their example. Let the preventive system be practised even at the cost of personal and financial sacrifice and we shall have vocations in abundance.”

I request everyone to familiarise himself with the vocation camp days and let each Salesian in the province – priests, brothers and clerics promote one vocation at least to any of the camps that have been planned.

	Region	Dates	Venue
1	Assam Plains	27 th to 31 st December	Tangla
2	Karbi Anglong Region	7 th to 10 th January	Sojong
3	Garo Hills Region	11 th to 14 th January	DB Junior College, Tura
4	BTAD Region	20 th to 23 rd January	Bengtol

NB: Those from Guwahati Region are requested to join any of the above camps, according to their convenience.

PRINCIPALS - ON A PILGRIMAGE TO THE HOLY LAND

While giving the utmost importance to religious and spiritual formation of the young, “we work together with young people to bring all their talents and aptitudes to full maturity” (C 32). “Faithful to the intentions of our Founder, our purpose is to form, “upright citizens and good christians” (C31).

To accomplish this important objective, for the good of the individual youngster, the family and the society, we have so many educational institutions, most of which are excellent as far as the quality of education and infrastructure are concerned. But indeed we need to do more and one of the ways to do more is that we take education, more and more as the matter of the heart. Our own hearts must truly be the hearts of genuine educators.

We cannot but acknowledge that Jesus is the educator par excellence and our model in tireless teaching and bringing about transformation. As we grow into him daily in our own settings, visiting the places where he lived his earthly life, where he taught and worked could greatly help us in many ways. Keeping in mind how such a pilgrimage would do tremendous good, the Principals of our educational institutions will go on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land from 6th to 19th December 2019.

As we wish them a fruitful and enjoyable trip to the land of our Lord and Master, we assure them of our prayers. I thank Fr Biju Michael, Council Member, assisted by Fr Teron, Vice Provincial and Fr Benny Alex, Economer for taking the initiative to organize this pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

MASS AT CEMETERY & TRI-MONTHLY RECOLLECTION FOR BROTHERS

On 30th November 2019, I presided over the Holy Eucharist at Uzan Bazar Cemetery, Guwahati and prayed for all the departed confreres of our Province, especially those whose mortal remains were buried there. Many confreres from Guwahati communities and the Brothers who had come for the Tri-monthly Recollection and Animation to Provincial House also participated in the Mass. I thank Fr Vincent Xalxo and his team

for arranging for the Mass. May the Lord give eternal rest to all our dear departed confreres.



REST IN PEACE, DEAR FR PAUL VADAKUMPADAN

The passing away of Fr Paul Vadakumpadan is a big loss not only for the Salesian Province of Shillong, but also for the North East and all the Salesians. The sudden discovery of cancer in its final stage shook us all. But even then we never imagined such a quick end to his life. He perhaps had enough time to prepare himself for the inevitable, and we too had enough time to accept his condition knowing well that we were moving towards of point of no return.

In the person of Fr VV Paul, we have lost a simple person—a committed religious and a dedicated priest and missionary. We have lost a great mind, a great visionary—professor, missiologist, writer, thinker and an effective preacher. He made the message of Jesus attractive through his writing and preaching. Being a missiologist and a missionary, his task was cut out: “To take Jesus to people, and take people to Jesus.”

We offer our condolences to the Provincial and confreres of Shillong Province. We also pray for the repose of the soul of Fr VV Paul. May he rest in God’s peace!

AWARDS AND APPOINTMENTS – OUR HEARTIEST CONGRATULATIONS

- Delhi-based International Human Rights Council has announced an *Ambassador for Peace* Award for retired Archbishop Thomas Menampampil of Guwahati. The award will be conferred in due solemnity on 9th December 2019 in New Delhi in the presence of invitees from all over the country and abroad. One of the earlier recipients of the award is the Dalai Lama among many other internationally known figures.

- The Business School Affaire and Dewang Mehta National Education Awards presented to Fr Stephen Mavelly, the Vice Chancellor of Assam Don Bosco University with the Award for *Outstanding Contribution to Education* on 22nd November 2019 at Taj Lands End, Mumbai.
- During the General Assembly of Don Bosco Higher Education India (DBHEI) in Tiruchy, Fr Bivan Rodrigues Mukhim, Principal of Don Bosco College Tura was nominated as one of its Executive members.
- Snehalaya has been selected for the award as the best NGO, Leading and Leadership for its service. The award will be given on 13th December 2019 in Guwahati by World Federation CSR Professional.

CONCLUSION

With assurance of prayers, I wish everyone of you, a Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year 2020. May God bless you all!

Yours affectionately in Don Bosco,



Fr Januarius S. Sangma SDB
Provincial



PROGRAMME OF THE PROVINCIAL TEAM

DECEMBER 2019

Date/Day	Provincial	Vice Provincial	Economer
1 Sun	Garobadha: Blessing of Chapel	Baithalangso / Bordongka	Guwahati
2 Mon	Tura: Bosco Mount	Guwahati	Guwahati
3 Tue	Tura: Platinum Jubilee of St Xavier's Tura	Guwahati	Doomni
4 Wed	DBC, Tura: GB Meeting	DBC, Tura: GB Meeting	Guwahati
5 Thu	Diphu: Jubilees of confreres	Diphu: Jubilees of confreres	Guwahati
6 Fri	Guwahati - Holy Land Pilgrimage for Principals	Holy Land Pilgrimage	Holy Land Pilgrimage
7 Sat	Hatigaon - Final Profession	-do-	-do-
8 Sun	Guwahati	-do-	-do-
9 Mon	Guwahati - Feast of the Immaculate Conception	-do-	-do-
10 Tue	Guwahati	-do-	-do-
11 Wed	Guwahati	-do-	-do-
12 Thu	Guwahati	-do-	-do-
13 Fri	Barpeta Road > Bongaigaon	-do-	-do-
14 Sat	Ramfalbil: Parents Day > Guwahati - Bday of Archbishop	-do-	-do-
15 Sun	Guwahati, DBI: Holy Mass	-do-	-do-
16 Mon	Christmas Novena: Co-Cathedral	-do-	-do-
17 Tue	Guwahati	-do-	-do-
18 Wed	Guwahati	-do-	-do-
19 Thu	Guwahati	-do-	-do-
20 Fri	Guwahati: Provincial Council Meeting, 9.30 am - 2.00 pm	Guwahati: Provincial Council Meeting	Guwahati: Provincial Council Meeting
21 Sat	Umswai: Release of Tiwa Bible	Umswai	Umswai
22 Sun	Satgaon Parish	Amkachi	Amkachi
23 Mon	Satgaon Parish	Guwahati	Guwahati
24 Tue	Christmas Vigil	Satgaon: Christmas Vigil	Guwahati
25 Wed	Ghy Co-Cathedral: Holy Mass	Satgaon: Christmas Day	Guwahati
26 Thu	Christmas Holidays	Guwahati	Dimakuchi
27 Fri	Christmas Holidays	Tangla: Vocation Camp	Guwahati
28 Sat	Christmas Holidays	Tangla: Vocation Camp	Bosco Reach Out
29 Sun	Christmas Holidays	Mucheke (Nongpoh Parish)	Diphu
30 Mon	Guwahati	Tangla: Vocation Camp	Diphu
31 Tue	Guwahati	Tangla: Vocation Camp	Guwahati