

PROVINCIAL CIRCULAR

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

JS – 33/2020

1 March 2020

My Dear Confreres,

Greetings from Valdocco, Turin!

The 28th General Chapter is progressing well and it is a mixture of serious work as well as moments to relax, enjoy and get to know one another from 134 countries of the Salesian world. Due to the epidemic of corona virus which also has struck and affected Italy, the pilgrimage and the sight seeing programmes of the Chapter members are being re-scheduled. On 26th February, we were supposed to have visited Chieri and have our Ash Wednesday celebrations there, but due to this malady, the organizers had to put off the visit to some dates in the future.

However, here in Valdocco, we had a beautiful celebration of the Ash Wednesday, the first day of grace towards transformation, renewal and new life. It was Fr Pascual Chavez Villanueva, our former Rector Major, who preached the recollection talk. He based his reflection on the “Letter of St John Bosco from Rome” and led the Chapter members to reflect seriously on the need of Salesians to find themselves in the midst of the young and accompany them to the fullness of life.

After his talk, the confreres had sufficient time for a personal re-reading of his talk and spending time in adoration or personal reflection. It was wonderful sight to see the confreres availing themselves the Sacrament of confession in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians.

The day ended with the Holy Eucharist in the evening, presided over by Fr Pascual Chavez wherein the imposition of the ashes took place.



“WHAT KIND OF SALESIANS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TODAY?”

From 19th to 21st February, the Chapter members participated in the spirituality days in the morning hours till lunch. The day usually started with the morning prayer which was followed by a well prepared animation talk. The members then were given free time and silent moments for personal reflection and prayer till the Holy Eucharist which was at 12 noon.

My dear confreres, for the circular of March, I am presenting to you and all our communities the **PROFILE OF TODAY’S SALESIAN**, as given by the animator, Fr Eunan McDonnell, Provincial of Ireland.

PROFILE OF TODAY’S SALESIAN

RECOGNIZE

Their eyes were opened and they recognized him (Lk 24:31).

A WORLD ON FIRE

“Today the world is on fire ... what are we doing about it?”¹ These words are as relevant today as when they were spoken by St Teresa of Avila in 1577. Living at the time of the Reformation, of changing political and religious landscapes, how did she respond? by igniting another fire, gathering around her women who lived a life of contemplation through developing friendship with Christ.

What kind of Carmelite was she looking for? “Determined women, so determined that they would frighten men” – after all, she writes, “it was women who remained faithful at the foot of the cross when most of the men had fled.”² She knew they needed this perseverance and endurance if they were to take seriously the inward journey of contemplative prayer, understood as friendship with Christ. This Teresian understanding of prayer, as friendship with Christ, is the basis of a Salesian understanding of prayer as heart to heart.

St Francis de Sales speaks of God as “friend of our heart”³ and Don Bosco experiences The Spiritual Exercises as “a series of meditations and instructions that bring us into God’s friendship.”⁴ It is this friendship with Christ that we are called to nurture and share with the young.

Today the world is on fire - We also live in troubled times where in the Western world a

¹ *The Way of Perfection*, ch.1, par.5 in E. Allison Peers (trans), *The Complete Works of St Teresa of Jesus* Vol. 2 (London: Sheed & Ward, 1963), 5.

² *Ibid*, 229

³ François de Sales, *Oeuvres Éditions Annecy*, Vol. IV: 189. Hereafter, *OEA*.

⁴ (Salesian Central Archives) ACS A 225.02.01; cited in Giuseppe Buccellato, *The Roots of the Spirituality of Saint John Bosco* (Bolton: Don Bosco Publications, 2019), 11.

disturbing split has opened up between contemporary culture and our Christian faith tradition, described by St Pope Paul VI as nothing less than “the drama of our time.”⁵ This is eminently true in the rupture between our inherited religious vision and culture and the lived experience of many young people today. We are living in a time of rapid change, secularization and uncertainty. Many countries that were former bastions of Christian values have gone through such rapid change that “there is a profound redrawing of our moral landscape.”⁶ The recent Amazon fires capture vividly the threats to our world today: climate change, the displacement of peoples, refugees, political instability, ethnic cleansing, wars, religious persecution.

Recognizing this as the world of the young today, we ask: **What kind of Salesians for young people today?**

GENTLENESS AND LOVING-KINDNESS

If ‘determination’ was the supreme quality required of Carmelites so that they would persevere on the road of contemplation, what is foundational for us as Salesians?

Let’s return to the dream of nine: “you will have to win these friends of yours not by blows but by gentleness and love.”⁷ The hallmark of Salesian spirituality is gentleness and loving kindness. (Working on the pre-chapter commission, I did a word search on the documents received from the provinces only to find one reference to gentleness. I found that quite interesting.) As Salesians are we rooted in gentleness and loving kindness or have we become uprooted? Let us not forget Don Bosco’s own pre-ordination resolutions: “May the charity and gentleness of St Francis de Sales guide me in everything.”⁸ He specifically chooses St Francis de Sales as patron “because those who intend to dedicate themselves to this kind of work should adopt this saint as a model of charity and affability.”⁹ Here we see how there is a spiritual affinity between the two great saints, an affinity which revolves around gentleness and loving kindness – Don Bosco resonates with St Francis de Sales which explains why it is not an arbitrary choice but a discernment of spirits, revealing that charismatic element that belongs specifically to the Salesian Charism.

As St Francis de Sales reminds us: “There is nothing so strong as gentleness and nothing so gentle as real strength.”¹⁰ So, later in the dream when Mary counsels the young Bosco she states: “Make yourself humble, strong and energetic.” In so doing, she teaches us the link between gentleness and humility. This is simply an elaboration of Salesian gentleness which takes its inspiration from Jesus as “gentle and humble of heart” (Mt 11:29). St

⁵ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n.20.

⁶ J. Sacks, *The Persistence of Faith* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991), 50.

⁷ St John Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory* (New Rochelle: Don Bosco Publications, 1984), 18.

⁸ *MB.1:518*.

⁹ *MB.3:91*.

¹⁰ *The Spirit of St Francis de Sales*, as cited by C. F. Kelley, in *The Spiritual Maxims of St Francis de Sales* (London & New York & Toronto: Longmans, Green & Co., 1954), 124.

Francis de Sales states: “Our Lord, had founded his doctrine on these words: Be my disciples for I am gentle and humble of heart. Why does God attract us? Because he is kind: The spirit of gentleness is the Spirit of God.”¹¹

Salesian gentleness (*douceur*) is the spirit of the beatitudes, a gift of the Spirit that enables us to live in imitation of the humility and gentleness of Jesus. It is not, as sometimes misinterpreted, a way of being nice! Such gentleness requires self-mastery and discipline because it demands that “we suppress the movements of anger, that we are gentle, cordial, and full of meekness towards everybody, that we forgive our enemies, and suffer contempt.” It is the gentleness of the Beatitudes. It is not surprising, therefore, that St Francis de Sales should conclude that such gentleness “is difficult, especially for one who is not a person of great prayer.”¹² If there is an absence of gentleness in our communities, among the young and our co-workers, could this be a reflection of the lack of prayer? I simply raise the question. As Salesians, we are called to be gentle, humble and strong – is this possible without prayer? Gentleness, in short, is an attuning of our will to Jesus who is meek and humble of heart. Don Bosco writes to us:

My sons, in my long experience very often I had to be convinced of this great truth: [That] it is easier to become angry than to restrain oneself, and to threaten a boy than to persuade him.... We must be firm but kind, and be patient with them... This was the method that Jesus used with the apostles. He put up with their ignorance and roughness and even their infidelity. He treated sinners with a kindness and affection that caused some to be shocked, others to be scandalized, and still others to hope for God’s mercy. And so, he bade us to be gentle and humble of heart.¹³

What would our Salesian communities be like if gentleness reigned over anger? What would our relationship with young people be like if they were marked by gentleness devoid of verbal abuse or uncontrolled and unprocessed anger? What would our co-operation with lay people be like without any angry outbursts or passive aggression? Let us make St Paul’s prayer our own for the Salesians today:

Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other’s faults because of your love (Eph 4:2).

INTERPRET

This is my beloved Son, listen to him (Lk 9:35)

What kind of Salesians for young people today?

If you expect me to give an answer to the question you will be disappointed! Like a good Irish man, we answer questions by asking more questions!!! Reflecting on the data

¹¹ Adrienne Fichet, *Premier Proces Remissorial d’Annecy*, 32, as cited by Lajeunie, in *St Francis de Sales*, 2:133.

¹² OEA IV:303.

¹³ *Epistolario*, Torino, 1959, 4, 201-203.

received from the provinces on the profile of Salesians today, the commission noticed a twofold tendency or temptation:

- 1) Presenting an idealized view of the Salesian as a kind of superman, an impossible ideal that no-one could possibly reach;
- 2) or else, presenting quite a negative image which seemed to underscore our failures and inability to live up to the ideal.

As St Francis de Sales reminds us, the truth does not lie at extremes – we must have a balanced perspective which is derived from humility that seeks the truth – the truth is that we are both gifted and flawed, God has blessed us with gifts for his service but there is always room for us to develop and use those gifts more.

Let us not forget that the question: **What kind of Salesians for young people today?** is not addressed to us as individuals but, above all, as Salesians who are entrusted with a community-based mission for the young. “Each of us is called by God to form part of the Salesian Society... we put ourselves and our gifts at the service of the community and of its common tasks” (C 22). Brotherly love, our apostolic mission and the practice of the evangelical counsels are the bonds which form us into one and constantly reinforce our communion. We thus become one heart and one soul to love and serve God and to help one another” (C 3 & 50). The question addresses us as Salesians living, working and praying together in community. It is not a question which is looking for the ideal Salesian (who doesn’t exist anyway); nor a Superman Salesian; nor is the question asking us to take a Salesian selfie! The question is not about the image, the way we see ourselves or the way others see us. This question is very much a question about our identity as Salesians. It seems to me that there is a threefold emphasis in this question: Salesians - young people - today.

Let us now return to the question: What kind of Salesians for young people today?

Are we asking the young? Are we asking our co-workers and members of the Salesian family? Are we asking ourselves? There are many responses and different expectations, but what about God? I honestly believe that this question is changed significantly, when we address it to God and ask:

Lord, what kind of Salesians for young people today?

At first, it may appear that I’m just playing with words, but it does change our focus considerably when we address the Lord with this question. Why? Because the focus is no longer on ourselves. We give the centre back to God and we are invited to listen and ponder, like Mary, so as to be taught by him. We are not being asked to come up with the answer, we are being asked to receive the answer from him. It puts us, like Mary, into the position of receptivity where we seek and surrender to his will. Just as Don Bosco was shown through Mary’s intercession in his dream of nine – “this is your field of work, make

yourself humble, gentle and strong” ..., etc. We, too, as Salesians of today, need to receive our mission from the Lord. No doubt there will be many opinions expressed during the Chapter, but let’s hope that we bring these viewpoints into prayer so that the Lord may surprise us with his perspective.

Lord, what kind of Salesians do you want for young people today?

What does God expect of us? Do we know what God wants us to be? Do we allow God to show us his field of work as he did for the young Bosco? When I bring this question into prayer, Lord, what kind of Salesians for young people today? I’m unable to arrive at an answer, but instead, I experience an invitation – Come to me. This makes sense because if we are to learn from Jesus, gentle and humble of heart, then, we must first respond to his invitation – “Come to me all you who labour and are over-burdened and I will give you rest” (Mt 11:28-30). It is only then that we can learn from him. Responding to the Lord’s invitation is the first, and non-negotiable step, in discovering What kind of Salesians for young people today? When I stay with this invitation – Come to me – there follows a deeper invitation – Remain in me – “make your home in me as I make mine in you” (Jn 15:4.) It is only if we are faithful to this invitation that, like Don Bosco, we will discover “it is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit, and then you will be my disciples” (Jn 15:8).

Biblically, it seems to me that there is a step always before we can see or recognize. That step is to listen to God’s Word. If we take the two disciples of Emmaus, who are deflated because they had hoped and their expectations were not realized, they are unable to see or recognize the Lord. It is only when they enter into conversation with him, listening to the Word that they hear him and, then, “their eyes are opened and they recognize him” (Lk 24:31). In short, we need to hear before we can see; we need to listen to the Word, only then can we interpret and understand.

LEARNING TO LISTEN

Unless you undergo a change of heart and become like children, you will not enter my heavenly kingdom (Mt 18:3).

For us as Salesians, following in the steps of Don Bosco, the world of the young is a privileged place where we encounter God. It is our ‘burning bush’ where God reveals himself to us, but like Moses, we need to take off our shoes, turn aside from our own things to see God doing something new, “I will go and see this amazing sight?” Like Moses, we must allow ourselves to be drawn by God, to have a sense of wonder. This is why it is so important for us to listen to the young, but even more importantly, we need to listen to what God is saying to us through them.

It is the young, especially the poor and those most in need, who teach us how to become childlike. If we are to ‘undergo a change of heart’ and ‘become like children’, then, we need to learn to receive from God. Our God loves to give. Let us now, revisit the question from

a totally different perspective. What if God addresses us in the question:

My Salesian brothers, what do you want me to give you today?

What would you ask for? This is the same question that God addresses to Solomon ‘What am I to give you?’ (1 Kgs 3:5). I wonder how many of us would respond like Solomon: ‘Lord, grant me a listening heart ... so that I can lead your people well, discerning the difference between good and evil’ (1 Kgs 3:9). Without this “listening heart” we will be unable to enter into the realm of the Spirit; Without this “listening heart” we will be unable to see God’s plan because if we do not listen to the Word, we will not see and our eyes cannot be opened.

We have already listened to various voices during our provincial chapters, but God is inviting us now to listen even more deeply at this General Chapter. It is a “provocation” for everyone. It is the voice of the Spirit that impels us to ask ourselves questions, to “examine our own works”, to “revise”, to “repent and convert.” “Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says.” It is the Spirit who speaks also to us and who invites us to listen (Cf. Rev 2:1-29).¹⁴

Mary, Spouse of the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us as our mother and teacher is our exemplar. She teaches us how to prepare ourselves to receive a “listening heart,” because she pondered all these things in her heart. Let us pray that through Mary’s intercession we may receive wisdom from the Holy Spirit to guide us as “we bring out of our storeroom new treasures as well as old” (Mt 13:52).

It is interesting to note that Solomon receives his ‘listening heart’ when he is asleep; St Joseph discovers God’s will and changes his own plans when an Angel visits him in his sleep; We have countless examples of God revealing himself to Don Bosco in his dreams as he slept. Perhaps we should spend less time talking and more time asleep in this Chapter! It seems to me that when we are asleep, we offer God less resistance. Sometimes it may be our very words, and discussions that get in the way of what God wants to tell us. A “listening heart” enables us to set aside our agendas in order to receive God’s direction. If, and when, we listen to God the script changes. No longer do we go by our expectations, but discover, God is presenting us with even greater possibilities than we could have imagined. Possibilities that were never in our original script.

When we speak we already know what we want to say, but when we truly listen, we are changed, because we may learn something new. Salesian spirituality offers us the following challenge: Do I listen to reply or to understand? As Pope Francis reminds us:

Only if we are prepared to listen, do we have the freedom to set aside our own partial or insufficient ideas... In this way, we become truly open to accepting a call that can shatter our security, but lead us to a better life. It is not enough that

¹⁴ CG28 outline of reflection on the theme, see 2.2.2. Preparation process for the GC28.

everything be calm and peaceful. God may be offering us something more, but in our comfortable inadvertence, we do not recognize it.”¹⁵

CHOOSE

His mother said to the Servants: “Do whatever He tells you” (Jn.2:5).

Mary is able to direct the servants because of her “listening heart” – she is able to ponder on the events of life, to see and respond with compassion to the married couple in their need, and direct the servants to their Lord and Master. It is the same pattern in Don Bosco’s dream when she shows him his field of work. Like Don Bosco, we are invited by her to cultivate a ‘listening heart’ so as to discern God’s plan for us. This period of waiting can be difficult for us as Salesians who like to be active. However, it is an essential passage in the discernment process to wait in this place of not knowing. In this place we ‘desire nothing, ask for nothing, refuse nothing’ (St Francis de Sales). However, having received the promptings of the Holy Spirit our listening heart, like Mary, begins to see and we are invited to respond with compassion. Our waiting turns into action as with the same zeal as the lover in the Song of Songs who will “run the way of the beloved” - the eager waiting is replaced by doing the will of God.

Let’s return to an incident in the life of Jesus. The disciples come to him and they tell him – “Everyone is looking for you?” How does he respond? Not the way they expect – “Let’s go to the rest of the villages so I can preach there also. This is why I’ve come?” Why does he not stay with those who have just received the good news – the answer lies in what he did before he replied to his disciples – “While it was still night, long before dawn, he got up and went out to a secluded spot and prayed.” (Mk 1: 35) It is prayer to his Father that allows Jesus to have “a listening heart”, to discern the Father’s will and allow himself to carry out his Father’s mission. Perhaps for us Salesians, we should never use the word discernment without it being prefaced with the word prayerful. After all, discernment is not just simply reasoned arguments. Gathering information, understanding the context, listening to and analysing the situation of the young is important, but it is not enough. We cannot arrive at God’s plan for us at the purely rational level of reflection and discussion. It requires prayer. In particular, contemplative prayer from where our mission arises. Discernment, for us, is always prayerful discernment.

PRAYERFUL DISCERNMENT

Fidelity to prayer enabled Don Bosco to return to his heart and discern the inspirations that God’s Spirit breathed within him. The recurring Shepherd dream was a touchstone of his spirituality but even after three years of ordination, in the last year of the Convitto, he nurtured the desire of entering the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and to dedicate his life to the preaching of the Ignatian Exercises.¹⁶ Giulio Barberis notes that he brings this plan

¹⁵ *Christus Vivit*, n.284.

¹⁶ *Memorie Biografiche*, Vol.2, 203-207.

to Don Cafasso for discernment who rejects his proposal outright. He experiences it as “a terrible blow.” However, Don Cafasso, also a man of prayer, has tuned into Don Bosco’s deeper inspiration that has been surfacing through in his dreams.

Much earlier, in his very first year of philosophy, Don Bosco had brought to Don Cafasso a dream that perplexed him. He saw himself dressed as a priest in a tailor’s shop, not sewing new clothes, but mending old ones torn and full of patches.¹⁷ Don Bosco had communicated to Don Cafasso his ‘inclination’ to work with the young as ‘an inner urge’: “I feel inclined to work for boys... At this moment I seem to find myself in the midst of a crowd of boys asking me to help them.”¹⁸ It is in listening to this ‘inner urge’ or ‘voice’ that Don Cafasso realizes he is being called by God to a specific mission (not to the Franciscans or Oblates of Mary Immaculate). The symbolism of mending old clothes is not lost on Don Cafasso who clearly sees in it, his call to poor and abandoned young people.

Let us not complicate matters. It is quite simple. It is very clear that Don Bosco participates in the mission of the Good Shepherd “to seek the lost who have strayed, bring back the scattered, bandage the wounded and strengthen the weak (Ezek. 34:16). It is the same Lord “who consecrated us through the gift of his Spirit and sends us out to be apostles to the young” (C 2).

ACTIVE CONTEMPLATIVES

If you permit me, I will share with you a personal testimony. After my first year of finding my feet as a provincial, I undertook my annual directed retreat (by the way, I would strongly recommend a directed retreat, in addition to our Salesian retreat, as a choice that would be extremely beneficial for ongoing formation). Not long into my directed retreat, however, I was disturbed by the following question:

Had I become more servant than friend of God?

A few days into the retreat, and having great difficulty trying to settle into a more contemplative mode, I went for a walk along the seashore. I caught sight of a dog on the strand, bounding up the steps in my direction and dragging his unfortunate owner behind him. He continued his journey, but I was left with the thought: Had I been like this dog for much of my first year as provincial? I continued to nurse this thought on my homeward journey, which was much more pleasant as I now had the wind to my back, coaxing me along. Suddenly, a small group of seagulls appeared gliding effortlessly just above my head. I admired, and even envied them. How easy it appeared for them to allow themselves to catch the breeze and allow themselves to be carried. What a difference to the panting dog on the leash. The contrast was not lost on me. I had spent much of my first year trying to make things happen, but busyness is no guarantee that you are doing

¹⁷ *B.M.*, Vol.1:285.

¹⁸ *EBM II*, 177.

God's will. There is no point at flapping wings frantically or pulling on the leash if one is going in the wrong direction. It provoked the following questions:

Am I truly following the Lord or am I rushing ahead and asking the Lord to follow me? Whose kingdom is being built? Whose plans are being realized?

I realized instantly that I needed to get off the treadmill of Salesian activity where I was trying to make things happen and instead, learn to catch the breeze of the Spirit to let God's will be done. For this to happen, I had to make a choice: I had to choose to prioritize two periods of meditation every day, one in the morning and the other at night.

If we have been living off the fumes of analysis, planning and being goal-oriented, it is going to be much more difficult for us to catch the breeze of the Spirit. It requires a "listening heart", a contemplative spirit. We cannot make this happen, but we can dispose ourselves through meditation and contemplation to receive a "listening heart." Moving out of analysis into awareness requires a different interior space. It is a contemplative mode that will not be rushed, but learns to wait on God's rhythm and God's time. Without it, we run the risk of drawing up plans and goals that are ours and not God's. We do not do discernment out of our goals. It requires a listening space where, to our surprise, we discover God has his plans for us. When David said he was going to build the temple for the Lord, his prophet Nathan originally agreed. However, once he slept on it (notice again how God breaks through when we are less resistant) he delivered God's message – who are you to build me a house, I will build you a house for you and your ancestry (2 Sm 7:10-11).

THE CONTEMPLATIVE CHOICE

As I indicated above, we cannot create a "listening heart" because it is a gift from God, the gift of contemplation, but we can prepare our hearts through meditation and contemplation to receive it. It is only in this way, as St Francis de Sales counsels, that we can "belong to God in the midst of so much busyness." If Jesus tired out by his mission felt the need to withdraw so as to commune with his father in prayer, then, surely, we need to do likewise? If St Francis de Sales from his early student days developed the contemplative practice of 'sacred sleep' so as to listen to the heartbeat of God, should we not do likewise? When asked how much meditation is needed if you are busy working for the Lord, he answered, "half an hour is needed but if you are busy, then, an hour."

DON BOSCO'S TESTIMONY

What about Don Bosco? As Blessed Philip Rinaldi reminds us: "If you want to live according to Don Bosco's spirit you must never lose sight of his interior life... continuously united to God in prayer." Don Bosco privileged times of solitary communion with God, encouraged retreats and periods of silence among his boys, and undertook the Spiritual

Exercises annually at the Santuario di Sant' Ignazio.¹⁹ Cardinal Cagliero states eloquently: "The love of God shone in his face and from his whole person and from all the words that came from his heart when he spoke about God from the pulpit or in the confessional, in public or private conferences, or in friendly conversation. This love was the only yearning of his heart, and the most ardent desire of his entire life."²⁰

When he spoke about God ... this love was the only yearning of his heart. It is obvious that Don Bosco communicated a living God because he was in a life-giving relationship with God. This is only possible through prayer as friendship with Christ which nourishes the fire between us. Without this intimacy nurtured by prayer, 'the more God vanishes into the distance. He slowly becomes a meaningless and lifeless "idea" ... if we stop praying for a long period of time, God "dies!" ... not in himself, but He dies in our hearts. God "dies" like a withered plant we have neglected to water.'²¹

The inward breath of prayer and the outward breath of activity allowed Don Bosco to carry out the work of Martha with the heart of Mary.²² As his friendship with Christ deepened through prayer, his tireless activity increased as an expression of his love for God. I believe that our fundamental Salesian heresy is to look to Don Bosco in an attempt to imitate the work he did without having the union with God that he enjoyed. We, often, are simply active, whereas, for Don Bosco, his work was an overflow of his relationship with God (ecstasy of action).

SALESIANS TODAY

Do we communicate the living God to others?

As Saint Pope John Paul II declares:

The future of mission depends to a great extent on contemplation. Unless the missionary is a contemplative he cannot proclaim Christ in a credible way. He is a witness to the experience of God, and must be able to say with the apostles: "that which we have looked upon ... concerning the word of life ... we proclaim also to you (1 Jn 1:1-3)."²³

Why is it so important for us as Salesians today to have a 'listening heart' or a contemplative spirit? Our world today values the human, but loses sight of the transcendental. Our Salesian tradition also cherishes the human and we believe grace builds on nature. That is why in much of the feedback received, we recognize the value and importance of counselling to respond to the difficulties that young people experience.

¹⁹ G. Buccellato (ed) *San Giuseppe Cafasso: Il Direttore Spirituale di Don Bosco* (Roma: LAS, 2007) 28.

²⁰ Ibid, 220.

²¹ Ignacio Larrañaga OFM Cap, *Sensing Your Hidden Presence: Toward Intimacy with God* (Quebec, Editions Paulines, 1992), 27-28.

²² See *Introduction to The Devout Life*, Part III, n.10.

²³ *Redemptoris Missio*, n.91

However, if we remain at this level we will have failed the young people of today. The deepest thirst and hunger is spiritual. The psychological is important, but it is no substitute for the spiritual. If we do not make this journey within ourselves to the spiritual through prayer, meditation and contemplation we will be unable to accompany the young on their journey. If we fail in this respect, we will be judged by future generations as having mistaken the real and the spiritual by being in touch with the psychological and that is not deep enough.

This brings us back to ourselves as Salesians today. Are we, like Don Bosco, Spirit-led and Spirit-filled? It is from this “active presence of the Holy Spirit that we draw strength for our fidelity and support for our hope” (C 1). What is important for us as Salesians is ‘not to rush into a multitude of exterior works but to discover and to practice the attitudes and behaviours that open us up to the work of the Spirit. All the rest will flow from that, and we will be in a position to accomplish the “good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” (Eph 2:10) The spiritual life is not so much about doing as letting be done, letting God act in us, work through us.’²⁴ It is through union with God arrived through his fidelity to contemplative practice that “the Spirit formed within Don Bosco the heart of a father and teacher, capable of total self-giving: ‘I have promised God that I would give of myself to my last breath for my poor boys’”(Const.1).

Let us pray

Gracious Father, grant us a spirit of wisdom and perception to see, and respond to, the needs of young people today, especially those most in need.

Lord Jesus, Shepherd of our hearts, renew in us the same spirit of dedication which ignited the heart of St John Bosco, apostle to the young.

Spirit of Love, cover us with your shadow. Set our hearts on fire with your love filling them anew with the power and zeal of Pentecost.

Mary, Spouse of the Holy Spirit, obtain for us the grace to do the will of God and to become another humanity for Jesus where he can renew his whole mystery.

Live Jesus.

May Jesus live in us, work with us, and love through us, so that we may truly become signs and bearers of God’s love for the Young.

May the Father be glorified in the work he has called us to do through the power of his Spirit and in the name of Jesus, his Son.
Amen.

²⁴ Jacques Philippe, *Fire and Light: Learning to Receive the Gift of God* (New York: Scepter, 2016), 3.

FR JOSE CHIRACKAL, AUXILIARY BISHOP ELECT OF TURA

Pope Francis has appointed Rev. Fr Jose Chirackal, of the Clergy of Tura, as Auxiliary Bishop of Tura. This was announced in the Vatican on Monday, 24th February, 2020, at noon, corresponding to 16:30 hours, Indian Standard Time.

Fr Jose Chirackal, born on 14th July, 1960 in Karukutty, Kerala, was ordained priest on 29th December, 1987, for the Diocese of Tura. He has a Licentiate and Doctorate in Canon Law from Università Urbaniana, Roma, in 1995. He served the Diocese of Tura in the following ministries: 1988-1991: Asst. Priest, St Joseph's Church, Selsella; 1991: Acting Headmaster, Sacred Heart School, Dalu; 1995-2004: Rector, St Peter's Minor Seminary, Tura; 2004-2009: Diocesan Procurator and Chancellor; 2004-2011: Judicial Vicar and Diocesan Spokesperson; 2009-2011:



Parish Priest, Cathedral of Mary Help of Christians, Tura; 2011-2014: Rector, Oriens Theological College, Shillong, and Secretary, North East Regional Commission for Vocations and Formation; 2014-2019: Diocesan Procurator, Diocesan Spokesperson and Defender of the Bond. Since July 2019: Parish Priest, St. Luke's Church, Walbakgre, Tura and Director of Pastoral Centre. He has been member of the College of Consultors, and visiting professor in Oriens Theological College, Shillong, for many years.

We wish God's blessings on him, and pray for his important ministry as Auxiliary Bishop. We take this opportunity to congratulate him on his appointment.

NEW SMI PROVINCIALS

Sr Mary Mathew SMI has been appointed the Provincial Superior of Guwahati and Sr Reena Joseph SMI has been appointed the Provincial Superior of Kolkata. They will take charge on 24th May, 2020. We congratulate them and pray for God's blessings for their leadership ministry.

CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS OF ST PETER'S CATHOLIC CHURCH, AMKACHI VILLAGE

The Centenary of the arrival of Catholic faith at Amkachi Village, under Amkachi (Umpanai) Parish (1919 – 2020) was celebrated with due pomp and ceremony from 21st to 23rd February, 2020. On 21st February, Fr Joseph Teron, Vice Provincial, inaugurated and blessed the Centenary Pandal, followed by recalling of the history of the Church of

the village. On the following day Centenary Flag was hoisted by Mr Uphing Dominic Maslai, local MAC, and the Centenary Monument was unveiled by Fr Joseph Teron. Also, to mark the occasion two white pigeons were released, 100 balloons were flown and 100 lamps were lit. The evening had its events of candle lit Marian procession and spirited Quiz Competitions and was blessed with the visit of Most Rev. Dennis Panipichai DD, Auxiliary Bishop of Miao, Fr Varghese Palathingal, former Provincial of Dimapur Province, Fr Tomy Anikuzhikattil, Fr Aloysius Hemrom, Fr Lawrence Nongkse and Br Paschal Dkhar.



The peak of the celebrations was on Sunday, 23rd February, with over three thousand people, starting with the reception of the Main Celebrant and Chief Guest, Most Rev. Paul Mattekatt DD, Bishop of Diphu, with traditional dances, people lined up on both sides of the entry road. The renovated Village Chapel was blessed by the Chief Guest, followed by a solemn Eucharistic Celebration, during which there were 20 first Holy Communions and 41 Confirmations. It was then followed by a short Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, felicitation programme and a fraternal meal for all. The day concluded with an extravaganza cultural nite.

It is significant to recall that the Catholic faith came to the village with a couple, namely, Mr Johan Rah Hanse and Mrs Agnes Kache Teronpi from this village, receiving baptism from the hands of Rev. Fr Grignard Lefebvre SJ at Roman Marjong village (now under Umswai Parish) on 16th February, 1919. Then after a gap of four years, another couple, namely, Mr Sarso Terang and Mrs Basapi Kramsapi, received baptism in Amkachi village itself from the hands of Msgr Emmanuel Bars SDB on 20th February, 1923, at the end of the Second Sobha held at Roman Marjong, dated 19th February, 1923. From then on the Church at Amkachi grew from strength to strength and now we have 130 Catholic families, with Amkachi Parish established in 1999 and Jyothir Bhavan (SABS Convent) established in 1990, and Don Bosco High School, founded by Rev. Fr Michael Balavoine, way back in the 1960s.

INAUGURATION OF “Atal Incubation Center” in Don Bosco Technical School, Maligaon

Dr Rajiv Kumar, Vice Chairman of Niti Aayog (formerly known as Planning Commission), Government of India, inaugurated the Atal Incubation Center in collaboration with

SELCO Foundation - Bangalore, in Don Bosco Technical School, Maligaon on 24th February, 2020. He unveiled a plaque to mark the occasion. Fr Benny P. Basil, Economist participated in the meeting that was held in DBTS community with other stakeholders such as SELCO Foundation and Tata Trust who are partners in this venture.

“Atal Incubation Centre” is a flagship initiative of the Government of India to promote a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship in India. It is an umbrella structure which has been mandated to promote innovation and revolutionise entrepreneurial ecosystem in the country. It provides platform and collaboration opportunities to various stakeholders in the entrepreneurial space.

This collaborative project will enhance the youth and the people, especially women, to earn their living with self-employment, who are given training in different fields of textiles, crafts, solar energy and other home projects.



BLESSING AND INAUGURATION OF THE EXTENSION OF DON BOSCO SCHOOL BUILDING IN AMGURI – KOKRAJHAR

The Blessing and inauguration of the school building extension with additional five class rooms and a training hall was held at Amguri on 29th February, 2020. Fr Damian Basumatary, Provincial Council Member blessed the building and Dr Martin Kasper, the President of Child Aid Network (CAN), Germany inaugurated it. It was largely supported by CAN in aid of deprived children of Kokrajhar region.



Present on the occasion were Fr PA Peter, Rector, and Fr Ignatius Gari, Principal of Don Bosco School, Amguri, the confreres of the region and the pre-novices from Dotma.

The students of the school put up a cultural programme and felicitated the guests on the occasion and thanked Fr Provincial in absentia for taking up the initiatives for bringing up the school at Amguri in BTAD region.

AWARD TO SNEHALAYA

Snehalaya was awarded the NGO Leadership Award by the World Federation of CSR Professionals on the occasion of World CSR Day on 26th February at Taj Vivanta Hotel, Guwahati. Fr Thadeus Kujur, Rector and Director of Snehalaya, received the award on behalf of Snehalaya. We congratulate him and all the confreres, collaborators and staff of the different centres of Snehalaya for their sacrificing work for the young at risk.



AWARD TO FR DENIS SOLOMON

Fr Denis Solomon, Principal of Don Bosco School, Amkachi, was among the Exclusive Social Awardees 2020, and awarded for his 22 years of par-excellence of Humanitarian Service in the North East by the Lata Foundation. Congratulations to him!

RIP: BR DOMINIC INDUAR SDB

We offer our condolences to the Provincial and confreres of the Province of Shillong on the passing away of Br Dominic Induar SDB. He was not well for some time, and had been hospitalized for a month. He passed away on 28th February 2020. He was 73. Br Dominic Induar served in Bhutan with earlier missionaries and also worked in Don Bosco Technical School, Maligaon for many years as Superintendent of the workshop. Fr Benny, Economer along with other confreres of the Province represented at the funeral which was held on 29th February. May the Lord grant eternal bliss to Br Dominic in His heavenly kingdom!

Yours affectionately in Don Bosco,

Fr Januarius S. Sangma SDB
Provincial



PROGRAMME OF THE PROVINCIAL TEAM

MARCH 2020

| Dt | Events | Provincial | Vice Provincial | Economer |
|------|---|--------------|---|----------------------------------|
| 1 S | 1st Sunday of Lent | Turin: GC 28 | Rongkeri: Sobha of Sojong Parish | DB School Ghty |
| 2 M | | -do- | Ghy: NSS, DBI / Inaug of FMA Memory Chapel, Maligaon | Maligaon |
| 3 T | | -do- | Mendal: Inaug of Intensive Course for new Pre-Novices | Bongaigaon |
| 4 W | | -do- | Mendal | Guwahati |
| 5 T | | -do- | Guwahati | Guwahati |
| 6 F | | -do- | Sonapur: Silver Jubilee of Rongphar Catholic Church | Satgaon |
| 7 S | | -do- | Sonapur: Rongphar | Baithalangso |
| 8 S | 2nd Sunday of Lent | -do- | Sonapur: Rongphar | Guwahati |
| 9 M | Month's Mind: RIP Br Aloysius Induar— Mass at Uzan Bazar Cemetery, 4.00 pm | -do- | Ghy: School Management Workshop / Month's Mind Mass | Month's Mind: Br Aloysius Induar |
| 10 T | | -do- | Guwahati | Guwhati |
| 11 W | Salesian Missionary Day (monthly commemoration) | -do- | Guwahati | Mendal > Bosco Mount |
| 12 T | | -do- | Guwahati | Dotma |
| 13 F | | -do- | Guwahati | Kokrajhar |
| 14 S | Trimonthly recollection for Brs, Cls | -do- | Trimonthly recoll: starting with lunch | Guwahati |
| 15 S | 3rd Sunday of Lent | -do- | Trimonthly recoll: ending with lunch | Guwahati |
| 16 M | | -do- | Sirajuli : Vocation Camp for Post Matric / HS Boys | Guwahati |
| 17 T | | -do- | Sirajuli : Vocation Camp | Guwahati |
| 18 W | | -do- | Sirajuli : Vocation Camp | Guwahati |
| 19 T | Feast of St Joseph | -do- | Sirajuli: Vocation Camp | ADBUI |
| 20 F | | -do- | Guwahati >> Chennai | Bengtal |
| 21 S | | -do- | Chennai: National Consultation, Migrant Ministry | Malivita |
| 22 S | 4th Sunday of Lent | -do- | Chennai >> Guwahati | Development Meeting, Delhi |
| 23 M | | -do- | Mendal: Classes | Delhi |
| 24 T | Commemoration of Mary, Help of Christians | -do- | Mendal: Classes | Delhi |
| 25 W | The Annunciation of the Lord | -do- | Amguri | Delhi |
| 26 T | | -do- | Dotma | Delhi |
| 27 F | | -do- | Dotma | Guwahati |
| 28 S | | -do- | Guwahati | Bosco Reach Out |
| 29 S | 5th Sunday of Lent | -do- | Guwahati: Holy Mass at DBI | Guwahati |
| 30 M | | -do- | Guwahati | Guwahati |
| 31 T | Commemoration of Don Bosco | -do- | Guwahati | Guwahati |