

PROVINCIAL CIRCULAR

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

JS – 35/2020

1 May 2020

My Dear Confreres,

Greetings from Valdocco, Turin!

I owe everyone of you a great debt of gratitude for your generous and valuable prayers. Truly your prayers have brought down manifold blessings upon us.

I am happy to be in touch with many of you in the Province online. The Council meeting, conducted online and attended by all the councillors helped us to take collective decisions. I request your prayers still, as we in the Provincial Council, under my leadership discern God's will for the new Apostolic assignments in the Province. Keeping in mind the tradition of the Congregation and desiring the ever-greater fruitfulness of the mission, we dialogue with confreres and effect this important responsibility before God. I am very grateful to you all for looking at these transitions in the spirit of faith. Everything is done for the general welfare.

NEW APPOINTMENTS: ECONOMER, COUNCILLOR, RECTORS

Rev. Fr Ángel Fernández Artime SDB, our Rector Major, has appointed **Fr Benny Plathottathil Basil** as the Provincial Economist of Guwahati Province for the second term, and **Br Joby Mani** as a Provincial Councillor for the first term (in place of Fr Biju Michael Pulianmackal, who has been elected Regional Councillor of South Asia), for the period 2020-2023. My hearty congratulations to them, and pray for God's blessings as they share the animation and governance role in the Province with the Provincial and other Councillors. May God bless their generosity!

The Rector Major has also appointed **Fr Ethelbert Minj** as Rector of Don Bosco Technical School, Maligaon, Guwahati and **Fr Vincent Xalxo** as Rector of Don Bosco School, Guwahati, for the term 2020-2023. The following Rectors also have been reconfirmed for their second terms, for the triennium 2020-2023: **Fr Sebastian Edathumparambil** (Dimakuchi), **Fr Augustine Karottupuram** (Damra), **Fr Marcus Lakra** (Tangla), **Fr Anugrah Tete** (Barpeta Road), and **Fr Maria Arul Anthuvan Tharsis** (DB Provincial House, Guwahati). We congratulate them, and wish them God's abundant blessings on their pivotal leadership ministry in their communities. I take this opportunity to thank the outgoing Rectors **Fr Sebastian Kuricheal** (DB School, Guwahati) and **Fr Bhaskar Raj Chinthamalla** (DBTS,

Maligaon, Guwahati) for their contribution and dedicated service in their respective communities.

The full list of the new apostolic assignments will be published towards the end of May.

THE RECTOR'S MANUAL: Animating and governing the community - The ministry of the Salesian Rector

Recently, from Valdocco, I had gifted the Rectors/Leaders of communities of our Province, a priceless gift of a book, ***Animating and governing the community: The ministry of the Salesian Rector*** in digital form. This priceless book is now embedded in their smart phones for their easy reference and reading which I am sure will help them to animate the communities according to the mind of Don Bosco and the Church.

The Province needs Rectors who animate and govern the community effectively. The book will be available for each confrere, so that they too will know what are the powers and responsibilities of the Rector/Leader. It has been revised and updated as per the Church's recent documents and suited for today's context.



In the foreword, Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, Rector Major writes, “Our Rectors are key figures in the renewal of the congregation and of our ministry for young people in the educative and pastoral community. They are the key to the much desired ongoing formation that must take place in our religious communities, and by extension also in our educative and pastoral communities.”

HUMAN PANDEMIC–COVID-19 AND THE SALESIAN RESPONSE TO CRISIS

The viral pandemic of Covid-19 and the global lockdown that we are living now, is not just a difficult time but a true crisis. The reported cases have already crossed 30 lakhs (3 million), and the death toll has already risen to 2 lakhs. The situation is grim, and the hope of any resolution is not anywhere in the near future.

I suppose this global experience of suffering is once in a lifetime experience for many of us, but also a frustrating and an irritating one that we want to somehow overcome it quickly. But the only way out of this crisis is through it! Like it or not, we need to endure

this suffering and period, during which perhaps some of our loved ones and some confreres whom we know have been infected with this deadly disease (or passed away).

DON BOSCO

For us Salesians, Don Bosco becomes a shining example how to face and deal with a crisis situation. When the great cholera epidemic of 1854 was raging in Turin and in many parts of Italy, Don Bosco did not sit back or lament about the fact of the fatal disease. He and his collaborators resolved collectively to venture out and came to the aid of the city. The four young men who had accepted Don Bosco's proposal to become Salesians¹ that very year, offered their services for the care of the plague-stricken people in the wards of the city. Don Bosco even made his boys available to take care of the sick and took in young lads orphaned by the epidemic, for which the Mayor of Turin thanked him in words of esteem and admiration. After giving his boys the blessing of Mary Help of Christians and giving them a medal each he took the decision of putting himself and his boys in the frontline.



At the Oratory, to ward off the contagion, Don Bosco had the boys' overcrowded dormitories rearranged, cleaned and supplied with fresh bedding and towelling. Don Bosco himself writes, "There had also been a cholera epidemic. Everyday we counted dozens of deaths. In one month there were eight hundred sick and five hundred dead. The town was short on helpers. With some forty or so of our oldest students I set out with them day after day with all our might to tackle that deadly disease as a 'work of mercy.'"

Don Bosco's attitude can be summarized thus: in times of crisis, **FAITH and ACTION**.

MAMMA MARGARET

We know well that Don Bosco learnt his basics of life and faith at the school of his beloved Mamma Margaret, who showed the young John Bosco how to trust in Divine Providence and be proactive while facing crisis.

¹ On 26th January 1854, Don Bosco selected four young men (among them Michael Rua and Joseph Cagliero) who would in future be known as Salesians. They would take vows and apply themselves to helping and "loving their neighbour."



The famine that followed the political turmoil of Europe in the post-Napoleonic era left indelible memories on Don Bosco's early childhood. The death of his father Francis Bosco, the only breadwinner left the family completely helpless. Even with the little hard-earned money food commodities were scarce. That is when Mamma Margaret said, "Extreme Cases require Extreme Remedies". She brought the family around the family altar, said a prayer and took a decision to kill the calf to satisfy the pangs of hunger of her household.

This required a lot of faith in divine providence for a young widow with three children to feed, to take the risk to slaughter a calf (for those who don't understand the gravity of the decision, killing a calf means to give up on all the benefits it will bring when it grows up, and poor peasants didn't have any other investments or savings apart from these assets). This and many such experiences have been young Johnny's childhood experiences.

Later in life, Don Bosco finds himself in a similar predicament very often and he follows his mother's example proving his faith in testing times by his actions. One such action that he took, already mentioned earlier, is extremely relevant for us even today. After giving his boys the blessing of Mary Help of Christians and giving them a medal each he took the decision of putting himself and his boys in the frontline during the cholera epidemic of 1854. He had his beloved Mother's example, "Extreme Cases require Extreme Remedies." Faith shown in action.

Don Bosco and Mamma Margaret exemplified the words of St James: "Faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead ... Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith" (Jas 2:17-18).

Other Salesian examples from our early history would be Mary Mazzarello, Dominic Savio, and others. They showed a lot of faith and courage to face a crisis and plunged into action as true and compassionate "Good Samaritans."

ST MARY DOMENICA MAZZARELLO

St Mary Domenica Mazzarello, whose feast we celebrate on 13th May, stands out as an icon of courageous faith and unflinching trust in God in the event of a crisis. This was already seen when her family faced a big problem in the beginning of 1858, when she was 21 years of age. Some thieves broke into the house at Valponasca—isolated and distant from the town—ransacked it and made off with seven hundred lire, a fortune in those days. The parents trembled for the safety of the children. While everyone was

upset, especially the parents, who saw the audacity of the thieves and the danger that this act, if repeated would cause adverse effect on the people and the property, decided to move away to Mornese. It was at this point of deep distress and sorrow that she encouraged her parents with the words: “The unfortunate creatures are worse off than we are. Let us not speak evil of them but forgive them and ask God to have pity on them and pardon them” (*Cronistoria*, vol. 1, pg. 76).

Incidentally it was in the context of another crisis that Mary Domenica Mazzarello discovered and discerned her special vocation to religious life. In 1860, when Mornese was ravaged by typhoid fever, Mary Domenica felt called to a new way of life. The typhoid fever had already claimed several victims. Her uncle’s family was struck down by the illness and was forced to seek help from people. Fr Dominic Pestarino, the Parish Priest and the “father of the Mornesini,” was much troubled and asked her parents to allow her to help the uncle’s family in this time of crisis. But they refused resolutely. Her father said that Mary—23 years of age by then—the eldest of a large family, was his right hand and the support of the family. The refusal was also because they were almost certain that she would succumb to the infection. However, as Mary Domenica was already a member of the Pious Union of the



Daughters of Mary Immaculate, she was obliged to assist the sick of the town by its rule, finally obliged to the request of Fr Pestarino with these words, “If you wish me to go I will go, although I am certain I shall catch the infection.” Her father Joseph Mazzarello who was resistant to the idea of the assistance requested finally said, “I will never send Mary into that house, but if she wants to go I shall not oppose her wishes” (*Cronistoria*, vol. 1, pg. 80).

Mary Domenica assisted the typhoid stricken family of the uncle and herself became the victim no sooner did she come to their assistance. It is interesting to know from Joseph, her cousin who wrote in 1913 of the way Mary Mazzarello reached out to them in their illness, “Everything she did was carried out with such seriousness and discretion, and in a manner so pleasantly simple, that our own morale was stimulated. She seemed like one of those Sisters of Charity who are dedicated to hospital work. You should have heard her pious words when preparing us for confession, and how helpful she was in enabling us to suffer in resignation to God’s will” (*Cronistoria*, vol. 1, pg. 81).

Mary Domenica did recover from the malady, but bore the brunt of its consequence as she was totally deprived of her earlier physical strength. However, this did not deter her in her pursuit to venture courageously into other enterprising pastoral activity to help young girls of the locality to save their souls. She gave up heavy field labour and started dressmaking, a mission that is continued even today and which has turned into a workshop for thousands of women for their livelihood and a fertile ground for Christian apprenticeship.

ST DOMINIC SAVIO

Another Salesian model in times of crisis is the teenage saint St Dominic Savio, whose feast we will celebrate on 6th May, he, a sign of the wonders that grace can achieve in youngsters. In Dominic Savio we see that the youngsters are not merely recipients of our service, but collaborators and co-workers in the Salesian mission.

Of the many incidents from Dominic's life, we will remember how he stopped a fatal clash of his two angry companions, who were about to injure each others. Don Bosco writes:

An incident took place which shows clearly the heroic stuff of which Dominic was made, something hard to believe in a young man at his age. Two of the boys fell out very badly. It began by them insulting one another's families. They became so angry with each other that they determined not only to have a fight but to have a stone fight. Dominic got to hear of it, but he wondered how he could manage to stop the duel, as the boys were both older and much stronger than he was. He tried to reason with them and persuade them to give up and become friends again. They refused. He wrote a letter to each of them. He threatened to report them, and thereby get it stopped, but this only increased their anger and determination to have it out at all costs.

Dominic was very worried both on account of the serious injury which was likely to happen and also for the serious offence against God. Dominic had no idea what to do but divine inspiration led him to act thus: he waited for them after school and since he was able to speak with both parties he said: "Since you are determined to see your wretched argument through to the end, I want you to agree to just one condition." "We agree," they said "as long as you don't stop our challenge." "He's a rascal" one of them said of the other, while the other one said he could never be at peace with his opponent until he had bashed his head in. Savio was quite scared by this fighting talk but was determined to stop worse things happening, so he controlled himself and said: "The condition I want to impose will not stop you from facing up to each other."



“What’s the condition?”

“I’d simply like to indicate the place where you can start throwing stones at each other.”

“You’re trying to trick us or stop us.”

“I will be with you and I won’t try to trick you. Don’t worry.”

“Maybe you’re going to call someone.”

“I should, but I won’t. Let’s go. I’ll be with you. Just give me your word.”

They promised and immediately set off for the Cittadella fields past Porta Susa.

Dominic had his work cut out stopping them from coming to blows as they went to the spot. Once they had got there, Savio did something certainly nobody would have thought of. He let them take up positions opposite one another. They already had stones in their hands, five each, when Dominic spoke to them as follows: “Before you start I want you to fulfil your promise”, and having said that he took out the small crucifix hanging around his neck and, holding it high, said, “I want each of you to look at this crucifix and throw the first stone at me, saying clearly these words: ‘Jesus Christ who was innocent died forgiving his enemies; I, a sinner, am going to offend him by this deliberate act of revenge.’”

Then he ran to the angriest boy and, kneeling before him said: “Throw the first stone at me: throw it strongly at my head.” The boy, who wasn’t expecting anything like this, began to tremble and said, “No, no, I have nothing against you, and would be only too willing to defend you against anyone else if they attacked you.”

When Dominic heard that he went to the other and said the same things. This boy too was upset and trembling he said that he was his friend and would not do anything bad to him.

Then Dominic rose to his feet and standing between them with his crucifix and a stern look on his face said: “How is it that you are ready to tackle even serious danger to defend me, just a poor creature, but you are not ready to forgive an insult that happened at school to save your own soul? Your soul cost the Saviour’s blood, and yet you are ready to lose it through this sin?” He fell silent at that point, holding the crucifix up high above his head.

The boys gave in at the sight of such courage and kindness. ... Dominic never mentioned anything about this incident and nothing would have been known of the part he played in it if the boys concerned had not related all that happened to their companions.

Guided by Don Bosco, Dominic became a saint by cultivating a strong friendship with Jesus and Mary, seeing in fidelity to his everyday duties a response to God’s will, being

at the service of his companions with a great spirit of dedication and with a love that was able to bring joy and a readiness to do good.

As Cardinal Tettamanzi said, “In the face of the old and the new needs of the young, always be ready to respond without hesitation or uncertainty. Put before them a plan of life such as Don Bosco did with Dominic Savio. Help the young people to accept life as a gift and to live it with true freedom and joy. Tell them that what will give them strength and guarantee their growth is friendship with Jesus, and having experience of God. And, finally, teach them to open themselves to responsibility, to service, to solidarity, to charity.”²

Though stranded, I feel fortunate and privileged to be in the chapel where Dominic Savio had his ecstasy, where Mamma Margaret prayed, where Michael Rua celebrated his first Mass, where the pioneers to Assam Missions celebrated their final Mass on 20th December 1921 in the little room of Don Bosco before their departure to our lands, and where the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians stands majestic and hosts the mortal remains of Don Bosco, Mary Mazzarello, Dominic Savio and many other former Rectors Major. It is nothing but God’s providential grace.

RELIGIOUS PROFESSION & OUR BLESSED MOTHER, THE HELP OF CHRISTIANS

In the month of May, thirteen (13) of our novices (9 at Sunnyside and 4 at Dhajea) will be taking their first vows while eight of our brothers (5 in the Province, and 3 in SHTC) will be making their perpetual professions. And twenty (20) of them will be renewing their professions in the Province. Our Clerics in Dimapur (6), Shillong (1), Sonada (4), Nashik (1) and Ratisbonne (1) have also been admitted and are renewing their vows. In fact, many of us have made our religious professions in the month of May, particularly on the feast of Mary Help of Christians.

Let this feast be an occasion to renew our commitment to God in the Salesian way of life.

As our *Constitutions* state, the religious profession makes us live as disciples of our Lord Jesus by the grace of the Father, who consecrates us through the gift of his Spirit and sends us out to be apostles of the young. Through our religious profession we offer ourselves to God in order to follow Christ and work with him in building up the kingdom. Our apostolic mission, our fraternal community and the practice of the evangelical counsels are the inseparable elements of our consecration which we live in a single movement of love towards God and towards our brothers. (C 3)

² From the homily of Card. Tettamanzi, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the canonisation of Saint Dominic Savio, at the Mass in the Duomo of Milan, in the presence of the Saint’s casket, 9 March 2004.

Our religious vocation is closely tied to the maternal intercession and intervention of our Blessed Mother. It was our Blessed Mother who showed Don Bosco his field of labour among the young, and it was she who was his constant guide and support, especially in the foundation of our Society. We believe, as our *Constitutions* state, that she is present among us and continues her mission as Mother of the Church and Help of Christians. And that is why we entrust ourselves to her, the humble servant in whom the Lord has done great things, that we may become witnesses to the young of her Son's boundless love.

In our Salesian mission, Mother Mary comes to our aid even as we walk side by side with the young so as to lead them to the risen Lord, and so discover in him and in his Gospel the deepest meaning of their own existence, and thus grow into new persons. For this reason, we make her known and loved as the one who believed, who helps and who infuses hope.

Mother Mary lived her “Yes” to the full. She therefore becomes our concrete and sublime model, and makes us understand that nothing is impossible for God. She makes us understand that it is especially humility of heart which attracts God's kindness. When the angel informed of her cousin Elizabeth's pregnancy and that God had done great things to her cousin, she went in haste to the hill country of Judea to be at her side, and praise God for His marvel. As Mary is our model in contemplation, she becomes our model also in action. We can, with her help, understand and proclaim the providential design of our God, to be proactive on our feet, and go out in haste to help the needy.



Mary faced her life's journey with great realism, humanity and practicality. Three words sum up Mary's attitude: listening, decision, action. They are words that point out a way for us too as we face what the Lord asks of us in life. Listening, decision, action.

1. **Listening.** What gave rise to Mary's act of going to visit her relative Elizabeth? A word of God's Angel. “Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son ...” (Lk 1:36). Mary knew how to listen to God. It was not merely “hearing,” but it was “listening,” that consists of deep attention, serene acceptance and total availability to God. It was not in the distracted way with which we sometimes face the Lord or others: we hear their words, but we do not really listen. Mary is attentive to God. She listens to God.

However Mary also listens to the events, that is, she interprets the events of her life, she is attentive to reality itself and does not stop on the surface but goes to the depths to grasp its meaning. Her kinswoman Elizabeth, who is already elderly, is expecting a

child: this is the event. But Mary is attentive to the meaning. She can understand it: “With God nothing will be impossible” (Lk 1:37).

This is also true in our life: listening to God who speaks to us, and listening also to daily reality, paying attention to people, to events, because the Lord is at the door of our life and knocks in many ways, he puts signs on our path; he gives us the ability to see them. Mary is the mother of listening, of attentive listening to God and of equally attentive listening to the events of life.

2. Decision. Mary’s life was one of contemplation and decision, not breathlessness or restlessness. As St Luke emphasizes, she “kept all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Lk 2:19, 51). Moreover, at the crucial moment of the Angel’s Annunciation, she also asks: “How shall this be?” (Lk 1:34). Yet she does not stop at the moment of reflection either. She goes a step further: She decides. She does not live in haste but “goes with haste” only when necessary. Mary does not let herself be dragged along by events; she does not avoid the effort of taking a decision. And this happens both in the fundamental decision that was to change her life: “I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done according to your word” (Lk 1:38), and in her daily decisions, routine but also full of meaning. The episode of the wedding of Cana might come to our mind (Jn 2:1-11): Here too one sees the realism, humanity and practicality of Mary who is attentive to events, to problems.

She sees and understands the difficulty of the young married couple at whose wedding feast the wine runs out; she thinks about it, she knows that Jesus can do something and decides to address her Son so that he may intervene: “They have no more wine” (Jn 2:3). She decides.

It is difficult in life to take decisions. We often tend to put them off, to let others decide instead, we frequently prefer to let ourselves be dragged along by events, to follow the crowd and the current fashion; at times we know what we ought to do, but we do not have the courage to do it or it seems to us too difficult because it means swimming against the tide. In the Annunciation, in the Visitation and at the wedding of Cana, Mary goes against the tide. She listens to God, she reflects and seeks to understand reality and decides to entrust herself totally to God. Although she is with child, she decides to visit her elderly relative; again, later, she decides to entrust herself to her Son with insistence so as to preserve the joy of the wedding feast.

3. Action. Mary set out on a journey and “went with haste” (Lk 1:39). In spite of the difficulties and the criticism she would have met with because of her decision to go, nothing could stop her. And here she leaves “with haste.” In prayer, before God who speaks, in thinking and meditating on the facts of her life, Mary is not in a hurry, she does not let herself be swept away by the moment, she does not let herself be dragged along by events. However, when she has clearly understood what God is asking of her,

what she has to do, she does not loiter, she does not delay, but goes “with haste.” St Ambrose commented: “There is nothing slow about the Holy Spirit.” Mary’s action was a consequence of her obedience to the Angel’s words but was combined with charity: She went to Elizabeth to make herself useful; and in going out of her home, of herself, for love, she takes with her the most precious thing she has: Jesus. She takes her Son.

In contrast, we sometimes stop at listening, at thinking about what we must do; we may even be clear about the decision we have to make, but we do not move on to action. And above all we do not put ourselves at stake by moving towards others “with haste” so as to bring them our help, our understanding, our love; to bring them, like Mary, the most precious thing we have received, Jesus and his Gospel, with words and above all with the tangible witness of what we do. May Mary, our Blessed Mother, make us like her “men and women of action.”

MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS

In history, we as Christians have experienced the protection of the Virgin Mary at various times of our necessity. Perhaps today, this time in history needs the protection of our Mother, not just for Christians but the whole of humanity. The title “Help of Christians” is an indication of the special intervention of Mary in the most difficult trials of our personal life, of the Church and of the whole human family. We need her protection and consolation. We need her intervention in this critical period of human history. It is right and fitting that we take Mary our Help into our confidence. We need to take her into our lives.

Besides the ever-changing political and global situation especially Covid-19, we need to be more concerned about another thing. In an age of rationalism and secularism—even an age of spiritual consumerism and pragmatism, when many Catholics are abandoning devotions in the name of superstitions, here comes a feast to remind us of Don Bosco’s Madonna, the Immaculate Help of Christians. In times like the present, which are not easy, Mary guides and protects. Don Bosco was firmly convinced that Mary was at his side and that she guided and inspired his life.

Don Bosco was a person beyond his times—intelligent, charismatic, prodigious, adventurous, smart, and certainly a genius. He found meaning in being a Marian devotee. Moreover, his life was spent in spreading her devotion. He was not merely a devotee of Mary, but an apostle of Mary, especially under the title “Help of Christians.” He entrusted himself, and all his works to her, the Mother of God.

Don Bosco’s personal devotion to Mary transcended all titles, though later he would choose two specific titles “Immaculate Conception” and “Help of Christians.” Or let us say, Don Bosco was devoted to Mary under many titles though at various times of his life there was greater emphasis placed on one or the other. At any rate, his devotion to her

was based on Church's tradition (Mother of God) and also on traditional popular devotion (Our Lady, the Madonna). In the dream at the age of nine it was not a Madonna under a specific title that appeared to Don Bosco, but simply the Madonna, Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

From the beginning, Don Bosco placed his work under the protection of Mary. The Virgin indicated to him his field of action among the young, and she guided and supported him. In 1862, Don Bosco confided to the young Giovanni Cagliero: "Mary wants us to venerate her with the title of 'Mary Help of Christians.' The times are sad and we need the Holy Virgin to help us defend the Christian faith." How true for us!



It is said that instead of installing a lightning conductor, Don Bosco would place the statue of the Virgin Mary on top of his buildings. His trust in her intercession and guidance and protection was more than proverbial. Don Bosco's gigantic ventures always had a connection with Mary. He considered Mary as the real Founder of our Congregation and of the whole Salesian Family.

To show his gratitude to the Madonna, Don Bosco wanted a church to be built in his Oratory at Valdocco in her grateful memory. Without resources, but convinced that "it is Mary who wants the Church and will find a way to pay for it," Don Bosco set out to build the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians. On 9 June 1868, the new church was consecrated, which today is the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians.

Those who visit that Basilica can see the great painting conceived by Don Bosco. The image of the Help of Christians is different from those made in Europe up to that time. For Don Bosco, Mary was not the armed warrior, ready to take down her enemies, nor a cold queen, richly dressed. Don Bosco developed a "positive" idea: the arms of Mary and her son Jesus are widely open, her serene face transforms her into a friendly queen, maternally present and affectionate.

Don Bosco himself described the painting, painted by Tommaso Lorenzone, thus: "The Virgin Mary appears surrounded by a sea of light and majesty. Angels surround her and give her gifts, as their queen. With her right hand she holds the scepter which is a symbol of her power, with the left she supports the Child who has open arms, thus offering thanks and His mercy to those who resort to His august Mother. Next to and

below are the holy Apostles and Evangelists, who look to the Holy Virgin. The setting: the city of Turin, with the Sanctuary of Valdocco in the foreground and Superga in the background.” Those were the words of our Father Don Bosco himself.

Now, if the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians at Turin is the material monument of Don Bosco to Mother Mary’s intercession and instrumentality in his life, the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians is the spiritual and living memorial to her. Towards the end of his life, he told the Sisters, “Mary is walking on the corridors of the convent.” This was not a metaphor, not a figure of speech, but he insisted, “She is really walking on the corridors.”

Even today, Don Bosco’s Madonna wants to walk with us and protect us and help us, especially at this time of crisis. Let us entrust ourselves and all the pandemic victims to her special intercession.

NB: As 24th May this year is Ascension Sunday, we will be shifting the Solemnity of Mary Help of Christians to 25th May.

RIP: FR VARGHESE KIZHAKEVELY, VG OF GUWAHATI ARCHDIOCESE

It is with deep sadness that we received the passing away of Rev. Fr Varghese Kizhakevely, the Vicar General and Procurator of the Archdiocese of Guwahati, on 21st April 2020 at Green Garden Hospital, Cherthala (Kerala) run by ASMI Sisters. Archbishop John Moolachira writes, “He was under treatment for cancer at Caritas Hospital, Kottayam since July 2019 and he had great hope of complete recovery. For the last couple of months we were suspecting the worst as the sickness did not show any slowdown. During the last stages the ASMI sisters cared for him. The love, attention and care given, especially by his nephews, nieces and other family members during the time of his treatment was exemplary and inspiring. The archdiocese could only support him from far, and the family, to our comfort, told us that they would care for him and we need not worry. The archdiocesan family is sorry that we have nobody by his side at the moment of his death or even be present for the final rites.”

Fr Varghese was instrumental in finding resources to build up the infrastructure of the Archdiocese. He assiduously undertook regular journeys to Europe, visited prospective donors and even successfully persuaded them to support various projects of the Archdiocese. He was also instrumental in building three hospitals in the Archdiocese: one in the city of Guwahati and the other two in the two extremes of the Archdiocese. He persuaded several women and men congregations to come to Guwahati and participate in the evangelization mission of the Archdiocese.

May our Merciful Lord grant him eternal rest and bliss in His kingdom! We offer our heartfelt condolences to Most Rev. John Moolachira, Archbishop of Guwahati, Most

Rev. Thomas Menampampil, Archbishop Emeritus of Guwahati, all the clergy of the Archdiocese and the family members of Fr Varghese.

CONDOLENCES

We offer our heartfelt condolences to the Provincial & confreres of the Province of Hyderabad at the passing away of **Fr Anthony Selvaraj Yeddanapalli**, aged 86 years, on 9th April 2020. May the Lord grant him eternal rest!

We also offer our condolences to the Provincial of Mumbai and the Mumbai Province confreres at the demise of **Br Michael Condillac** on 12th April 2020. He was 78. May the merciful Lord grant him eternal bliss in His Kingdom!

THANK YOU

My circular would be incomplete if I did not acknowledge the relevant initiatives and activities undertaken by the confreres themselves during these days of lockdown and coronavirus crisis. Therefore, I take this opportunity to thank all the confreres and communities for their intervention and contribution during this Covid-19 crisis. I encourage all of you to keep up the good work until the crisis is over, without counting the loss of money or seeking undue publicity. Thanks very much, dear confreres and friends, for your selflessness and timely actions to help the poor. May God bless all your endeavours!

MAY DAY - HAPPY FEAST EVERYONE, OUR DEAR COLLABORATORS

May 1st is the International Workers' Day, when we also celebrate the feast of St Joseph, the Worker. St Joseph is our model of work, teaching us the dignity of labour and every activity towards building God's kingdom. We wish all our Staff Collaborators a very happy feast day, telling each one of them that we truly appreciate their contribution. I invite each community to appreciate and pray for our collaborators in a special way on this day and keep improving our appreciation which includes a decent remuneration.

BUDGET 2020

As I thank all the communities for having submitted their Budgets for the financial year 2020-21, I would like to inform you that I am delegating Fr Joseph Teron Langne, Vice Provincial, Fr Benny P. Basil, Economist and Mr Netra Subba to study and pass the budgets of our various centres and communities. They will do the work as per the usual procedure that we follow, and will also be taking me into confidence (via online) before the final decision of the passing the budget is taken. We are slightly diverting from the usual methodology due to the difficulties that have come on our way due to Covid-19.

CONCLUSION

Today when the Church and the Congregation are insisting that we lay great emphasis on family apostolate, the family of Charles and Bridget, the parents of St Dominic Savio

could be presented as one of the models on how families shape and influence the future of children. “Like devoted parents, the careful upbringing of their boy was their chief solicitude,” wrote Don Bosco in his booklet entitled *The Life of Dominic Savio*, “and considering his tender years, Dominic soon displayed an excellent disposition, and piety seemed to be part of his very nature. Morning and evening prayers at once impressed themselves on his childish mind, and at four years of age, he could recite them all quite readily; he was always attentive to his mother’s wishes, and only left her to say his prayers in some quiet corner, where he was undisturbed.”

Mamma Margaret remarked to Don Bosco about Dominic, once, saying, “You have many good boys, but none can match the good heart and soul of Dominic Savio. I see him so often at prayer, staying in church after the others; every day he slips out of the playground to make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament. When he is in church he is like an angel living in Paradise.”

Finally, Dominic Savio’s famous self-abandonment of himself to Don Bosco to manoeuvre him to Sainthood and thus, become the Saint of the Preventive system should make us value ever more this great heritage. Indeed it was Don Bosco who gave an invitation to all his boys in the oratory to be one in his well prepared sermon on Sainthood – That it is God’s will that each one should become a saint, that it is easy to become a saint and that there is a great reward waiting in heaven for those who try to become saints. This inspired Dominic to take a conscious decision to become a saint.

I wish everyone of us a happy and meaningful month of May, the month of our Blessed Mother. May Mary the Help of Christians be our model and guide. My fraternal greetings to confreres for their profession anniversaries. We wish our dear clerics and brothers adventurous voyage as they commit themselves in perpetuity to the Lord in the service of youth. We are encouraged by the clerics and brothers who are making their renewals and particularly we thank God for the gift of the newly professed members to the Province and the Congregation. We shall pray for each one of them on 24th May in a special way.

May God bless you and all your intentions!

Yours affectionately in Don Bosco,



Fr Januarius S Sangma, SDB
Provincial

