

PROVINCIAL CIRCULAR

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

JS – 41/2020

1 August 2020

My Dear Confreres,

Greetings from Provincial House, Guwahati!

The entire globe still grapples with the dreaded virus. Our people in the North east too are still battling it out. Assam, the gateway to North east India is experiencing its toughest onslaught. Other states too are not having easy sailing in this regard. Despite all stringent ordinances and protocols, issued and enforced by the Administration and even by the Church Authorities, the spread of it seems unstoppable for now. In the media, there are conflicting informations regarding its origin, treatment and prevention, availability of vaccine, etc. The cost of treatment is beyond the possibility of the poor. We continue to pray, take care of ourselves and do our share of responsibility to usher in the new normalcy sooner or later.

Youth from the North east got uprooted from jobs in the cities and are rendered jobless. In addition, a huge number of migrants from the region find no work. They are potential human resources which find no job market. Under such conditions, what they do with their lives is anyone's guess. It becomes imperative for the Government and organizations like ours to respond creatively to such human predicament.

Together with the virus, presently the people in the North east have to face the fury of the flood. Though the flood is an annual feature, this year it seems to be more severe and devastating than other years. Thousands are rendered homeless, loss of life and property are huge and lots of cultivated paddy fields destroyed. In our own little way, let us protect of the Mother Earth, reduce pollution and global warming and ensure that the fury of nature is in some way reduced, both for our generation and for those to come.

Another big concern that India faces today is the belligerent attitude of China at Ladakh. It is unthinkable that when the whole world is fighting the global catastrophe collectively, the Chinese make an attempt at illegal encroachment. Innocent army personnel lost their lives and if the dispute were to escalate, our region would have suffered the most. We pray for peace, even as the country prepares itself to celebrate its independence day.

FREEDOM FROM EARTHLY LIMITATIONS

The feast of the Assumption of our Blessed Mother into heaven reminds us that both Mary and Jesus shared our human existence on earth. The prayer "*Hail Holy Queen*" describes our earthly journey as in the *vale of tears*. Mary walked this pilgrimage in faith. Not only did God give her the privilege of being conceived without the scar of original sin, but she continued her earthly journey, making a day to day choice to cooperate with God's grace,

remain sinless and walk in deep charity. At the completion of her earthly journey, God rewarded her by assuming her body and soul into heaven. We rejoice with her and she beckons us to emulate her example of living our lives worthy of heaven.

SCHOOL AND PARISH MINISTRIES

In this circular I would like to reflect on two important ministries in our Province: the school ministry and the parish ministry. These two are not two parallel ministries, that are completely independent. We know that Don Bosco's Oratory becomes a permanent criterion in all our works. Article 40 of our *Constitutions* states, "Don Bosco lived a pastoral experience in his first Oratory which serves as a model; it was for the youngsters a home that welcomed, a parish that evangelized, a school that prepared them for life, and a playground where friends could meet and enjoy themselves. As we carry out our mission today, the Valdocco experience is still the lasting criterion for discernment and renewal in all our activities and works." Valdocco experience, being our foundation, tells us that the youngsters under our care should have the opportunity to experience all the four elements of our apostolate, though perhaps in varying degrees: home, parish, school and playground. To ensure a proper all round development, I think we need think seriously about all our apostolates, whether we are offering all the above four elements, integrated into our various services and works. We educate by evangelizing, we evangelize by educating.

EDUCATIVE MINISTRY IN OUR SCHOOLS

I take this opportunity to congratulate all the school communities, especially the Principals and other confreres who are directly involved in the school apostolate, for the good results. Perhaps some of us might have expected even better results, and that indicates we may have to work harder and do better in the future. As you know, it is not merely about results or about 100% achievements though it is also one lofty aim. They are secondary compared to the long process of educating, training, teaching-learning, accompanying the stakeholders, etc. The quality of the process will determine whether we get good results or not.

We all need to reflect on why there were failures in our schools, why there were not enough First Divisions in the various results published, why some students seem to be underperforming constantly. There are various points of reflections; in sincerity and good faith we need to take up these points for bettering our educational services. Here too, the focus should be on the process and the quality of the accompaniment. Have we failed in putting systems and processes in place? Have we as Rectors and Principals and as SDBs, given enough time and energy for our students, staff and parents? We have told ourselves often that we give the best to the least. The least, I am proud to say, yes indeed we have but have we given our best – of our time, energy, focus, accompaniment, planning, etc.

A Salesian school is not one alongside many other schools. To aim for and achieve better

results in our schools, does not mean that we should be involved in a rat race or a cut throat competition which this world seems to be encouraging. Not so. We need to move from a mentality of competition to the attitudes cooperation and compassion in our education ministry. We need to encourage everything that is good and truthful wherever we find them. A Salesian school should be a model for compassion and collaboration, not merely for 100% results which is also important and possible.



Ours is a ministry, in which the community as a whole is involved. The Principal and Vice Principal have very important roles in the school, but that does not mean that they are the only ones who are responsible for the ministry.

The rest of the community is involved in the school in various ways. For instance, the Rector is involved in a big way by animation of the staff and the students, who is present in the assemblies and other main events of the school, and coordinates the efforts of the community and the school, making the education ministry truly a collaborative effort of the community.

The Parish Priest could be involved in catechism classes and assemblies, meet the students who are from his parish, and dedicate some time for pastoral ministry also in the school. Very many times the finer details of our roles may not be clearly defined, though all of us do have clear mandates or portfolios from the Provincial. We should make it a point not to create individual departments, where other confreres are expected not to interfere in one's life and ministry. Therefore, the community as a whole should prepare the educative pastoral plan of the community keeping in mind all the activities, involving all the confreres and lay collaborators of the various sectors. The House Council or the Assembly of Confreres should take up a periodic discussion and evaluation of the educative pastoral plan for making our services better.

Article 44 of our *Constitutions* states clearly that the mission is given to the community: "The members have complementary functions and each one of their tasks is important. They are aware that pastoral objectives are achieved through unity and joint brotherly responsibility. The Provincial and the Rector, as promoters of dialogue and team work, guide the community in pastoral discernment, so that it may accomplish its apostolic plan

in unity and fidelity.”

The school ministry is not limited to our office works at the school. The pastoral dimension of our education ministry can be enhanced by our regular family visits to our students, especially the weak and the poor students. In our educative enterprise, let us not forget to give first place to the weak students and the poor students. They are our assets, they are our blessing. I admire and appreciate the Principals and confreres who throughout the year identify and accompany the weak and poor students, both boys and girls, and take the initiative to keep them in the hostel during the months of December and January, and organise their study through extra classes and tests before Christmas and soon after the new year. Such initiatives produced positive results.

As the last Synod of Bishops, “Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment,” has pointed out clearly, we need to accompany the young not only to finish their schooling, but help them arrive where God wants them to be. This is vocational discernment. It is about guiding the youngsters to where God wants them to be at the moment, and move towards in accomplishing God’s will in their lives. This applies to each and every youngster who walks into our centres, this applies to each and every student who comes to our school.

At the same time, let us remember that our education ministry in schools is not a preparation for future, though partly it is so. The focus is not the future, but the present. As Hannah Arendt said, education is located between the past and the future, between stability and change, between tradition and innovation. It will be a fallacy to say that the youngsters are the future of the society. No, they are not the future, they are the present.

Pope Francis says the young people are *the now of God*, and that their youth is not an *in-between time*. He insists on the need to embrace their creativity. He says, “We have seen how in these days young people from different cities of the world have taken to the streets to defend the environment, to defend the earth. The young have an unimaginable power, they are creative. Some young people have given their lives for the sake of missionary outreach. Young friends, don’t wait until tomorrow to contribute your energy, your audacity and your creativity to changing our world. Your youth is not an ‘in-between time’. You are the now of God, and he wants you to bear fruit. For ‘it is in giving that we receive’. The best way to prepare a bright future is to experience the present as best we can, with commitment and generosity.”

Dear confreres, all of us have good ideas and good will in order to contribute to the improvement of our school ministry. But let us remember we are not a Congregation of English Medium Schools, no, we are apostles of one Master who wants us to carry out the one mission of love that he has entrusted to us. We are not called to do good things, but we are called to do God’s things wherever we find ourselves. We need concrete action plan in our ministry, ideas are not enough. We cannot change the world with only ideas in our

minds. We need conviction in our hearts.

When a confrere is appointed as Principal in a certain school, he is not merely appointed to run the school or manage the school. Our mission is not merely management. That could be done even by others. But a confrere is sent as an apostle, as a man of God who will bring God's light into the hearts of many people—staff and students—there. The light should enlighten our own minds and hearts, first. It should cleanse us of our wrong and incomplete motives in serving the Lord. And then, that same light can become about the needed change and transformation among those we serve. Therefore, we should not be mindlessly moving from one task to another. The stronger we are in our spiritual life, the better it will be for us to contribute the best in our school ministry. The fraternity and understanding that we are able to cultivate in our community life, will help us in turn to give our best and all our energies in the school ministry.

VATICAN INSTRUCTION ON PARISHES

The Congregation for the Clergy from the Vatican released a new “instruction” on Monday, 20 July 2020. It is entitled “The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community in the Service of the Evangelizing Mission of the Church.” The file is attached along with this Circular.

The document does not promulgate any new legislation. It proposes methods to better apply existing rules and canonical norms. The aim is to encourage the co-responsibility of the baptized and to promote pastoral care based on closeness and cooperation between parishes. It stresses the urgency of missionary renewal and a pastoral conversion of the parish. The Instruction consists of eleven chapters and can be divided into two parts:

- a) the first part (chapters 1-6) offers a broad reflection on pastoral conversion, missionary outreach, and the value of the parish in the contemporary context;
- b) the second part (chapters 7-11) dwells on the subdivisions of parish communities, various pastoral roles that make them up, and the ways in which the governing norms are applied.

SALESIAN PARISHES

As we have been discussing above on a single mission of the community with regard to the educative ministry in our schools, the parishes too are not the sole property of Parish Priests and Assistant Parish Priests. The pastoral ministry is much beyond celebrating Masses and other Sacraments or conducting *Sabhas* and other events in the parish life. As we are not called to be a Congregation of English Medium Schools, in the same way we are not called to be a Congregation of Parish Priests. We are called to be apostles of love, we are called to instruct and help people with the enduring message of the gospel that God loves us unconditionally, that we all are the beloved children of one God. Our pastoral activity is an educative activity, not merely an evangelizing activity.



Article 42 of our *Constitutions* says, “In parishes and mission residences we contribute to the spreading of the Gospel and to the advancement of the people. We collaborate in the pastoral programme of the particular Church out of the riches of our specific vocation.”

Most of our parishes in the Province are to be found in situations of first evangelization. In many places the parish entrusted to the Salesians also has a school or boarding, with particular attention being given to young people who are poor. Perhaps this is the strength of our Province. We are called to do our evangelization ministry hand in hand with our educative ministry.

Fr Pascual Chavez, our former Rector Major, said that in spite of the considerable number of parishes entrusted to the Congregation, often this area of the Salesian apostolate is not given the appropriate attention, accompaniment and coordination by us. We as a Province need to be committed in bettering our services in the parishes, by way of common sharing and planning in our community meetings and regional meetings.

Perhaps in our school ministry or other services, we can see the results of our work in a concrete way. But in parish ministry we may not be able to see the results in a concrete manner. Therefore, there should not be a clamour for immediate or sensational results of our work.

In parish ministry, sometimes we do not seem to have long term strategies and plans. All we could see is that we are moving from one programme to another. This could become disastrous if it means only managing or running the parish and its life. The neglect of family visits and village visits is a relevant case in point. The touring programmes seem to include merely the celebration of the Sacraments or house blessings. These are the bare minimum that we could do. But perhaps, these are only symptoms of the deeper problem that we could be encountering in our parish pastoral ministry. Many Salesians—young and old—do not seem to take a liking for parishes, as contrasted with school ministry.

The absence of catechesis by way of catechism classes both in the parish centres and in the subcentres need to be taken note of by all of us. This is not to point out the problems

that we are facing in our Province. But all these could become greater possibilities indicated in our pastoral plan.

Therefore, there are some issues that must be examined urgently with regard to our parishes. First of all, we need to ensure the Salesian identity in the apostolate carried out in the parish. This demands that certain charismatic choices are made in the life and mission of the parish community. In particular, we need to build up the parish as a community of the faithful animated by the Salesian religious community; a community organised into groups and small communities in which there is greater communication, a more intense commitment, a more real participation and a visible relationship between all these groups and the human and social context of the parish.

We need to offer everyone a systematic programme of evangelization and of education to the faith, promoting a more missionary style of apostolate, which tries to reach out to everyone, especially the young and those at a distance, in this way often becoming the first place of a sympathetic and meaningful contact with the Church, with a project of evangelization and first proclamation of the gospel for those at a distance, and a continuous and progressive programme of education to the faith, especially for the young and for families.

We need to promote an clear preference and option for youth in our parishes. This will ensure that the youth apostolate is not only one sector among others but the characteristic which is the special feature of all the life of the parish, so that the young find themselves “at home” in the Salesian parish. In such settings, the youth could be exposed to the vocational dimension of their lives including vocation to priestly and religious life.

Another important challenge consists in promoting a more missionary and Salesian pastoral methodology with great educative sensitivity capable of accepting people wherever they are so as to arouse in them the desire to be open to the faith and to become involved in a continuous and gradual progression in the Christian way of life, in harmony with the concerns and experiences of their daily lives, in a special way the young, discovering in them the seeds of the Gospel and the action of the Spirit.

There is a need to help the parish community to draw up the unified, global and shared pastoral plan, which gives unity and continuity to all the initiatives which it has to offer. To make progress in this direction it is essential that attention we give attention to our own pastoral formation, especially those who are dedicated to the animation of the parish and that of their lay collaborators, especially the Catechists.

We as Provincial and the Council are committed to have a Province coordination procedure capable of accompanying and supporting the parish communities in their lives. We have already asked some parishes to take up the animation of their Catechists by way of funding these initiatives. Much has to be done in this regard, but I invite your kind and

relevant contributions to make our parish ministry better. We are already doing many good things in our parishes, but we may have to coordinate our efforts and put some systems in place.

SITUATION OF COVID INFECTED CONFRERES AT TEZPUR, KOLKATA & CHENNAI

Fr Cletus Pattamkulam and three other collaborators at DBSTI, Tezpur were found to be Covid positive. I am in touch with Fr Cletus, who says all of them are recovering well. We pray for them that they may recover faster, and be able to get back to their normal life soon.

We need to intensify our prayers for the confreres of the Provincial House at Kolkata who have been infected with Covid-19. Many of us must be getting periodic information on our WhatsApp groups. As many as nine confreres are suffering from this deadly viral disease, including Provincial, Vice Provincial and Economer. We pray for their speedy recovery in a special way. I have assured Fr Joseph Pauria, Provincial of Calcutta, our special prayers for them from the part of our Province. Let us continue to keep this intention in our community and personal prayers.

Meanwhile we received the news that Chennai Province confreres, Fr KM Jose, Provincial, Fr Don Bosco Lourdusamy, Vice Provincial, and Fr Joe Andrew, who were infected with Covid-19 are better now. Fr KM Jose and Fr Joe Andrew have fully recovered; and Fr Bosco has been moved from the Covid-19 ward to the regular rooms as he is steadily progressing. In a week or two he should be returning to Citadel, their Provincial House. We continue to pray for them too.

SPIRITUAL RETREATS – HAPPY NEW LIFE



<i>Sl. no.</i>	<i>Venue of Retreat</i>	<i>No of participants</i>	<i>Preacher/Animator</i>
1.	Don Bosco Parish Kokrajhar	21	Fr Lukose Cheruvalel
2.	Don Bosco Parish Tangla	15	Fr Francis Fernandez
3.	Don Bosco College Tura	26	Fr Zacharias George

By the grace of God we were able to complete three Province retreats, amidst uncertainties and lockdowns. I thank all the confreres who made these three retreats successful by their hard work and sacrifices. Thanks to the organizers and the animators of this retreat. We

wish all the confreres who participated in them a “happy new life.”

CONDOLENCES

We offer our deepest condolences to Fr Joseph Pauria, Provincial of Calcutta, and the confreres of Calcutta Province at the loss of two confreres recently, one due to Covid-19.

Fr Mathew Manianchira passed away at Provincial House, Kolkata on 17 July 2020 due to cardiac arrest. He was 75. We offer our condolences to his family members, particularly to Fr MC Joseph and Fr MC Cyriac, his brothers.

Fr Jose Aymanathil passed away on 19 July 2020 in Fortis Hospital, Kolkata. He was 73. Fr AC Jose was admitted for prostate related problems and was diagnosed with Covid-19. He passed away while undergoing treatment.

We pray for the repose of their souls, that the good Lord may grant them eternal bliss.

We received the sad and shocking news of the passing away of **Fr Joseph Kaippallimyalil** (Jose Chacko), of the Province of Dimapur, on 27 July 2020. He passed away at Sanjivani Hospital, Dibrugarh due to a massive heart attack. He was 56. Earlier he was being treated at Injan hospital (Diocesan Hospital) in Arunachal Pradesh. We offer our heartfelt condolences to Fr Jose Kuruvachira, Provincial, and the confreres of Dimapur Province, and all the family members of Fr Jose Chacko. May God grant him eternal rest and peace.

CONCLUSION

Let us continue to pray that the crisis of Covid-19 may be overcome soon. Let us pray for the protection of all the people all over the world, especially our own family members, confreres, collaborators and well-wishers; and in a special way, let us pray for all the medical workers, doctors, nurses, and others who are the forefront dealing with this disease. I earnestly request all of you, my dear confreres, to strictly follow the guidelines issued by the government authorities for our own protection and for the safety of others too.

May God bless you! May our Blessed Mother, assumed into heaven, intercede for our country as we will be celebrating the Independence Day of our country, and also ask her special protection over our Province during these times of Covid-19.

Yours affectionately in the Lord,



Fr Januarius S Sangma, SDB
Provincial

