

PROVINCIAL CIRCULAR

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

JS – 45/2020

1 December 2020

My Dear Confreres,

Cordial greetings from Provincial House, Guwahati!

GOD’S PLAN AND DESIGN – ALL TOWARDS GOOD

Since the beginning, God’s creation and His plans were consistently pro-life, human focused and insuperable. The book of Genesis puts it well, “God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good” (1:31). Human beings, the crown of God’s creation, lost the garden of Eden due to their disobedience to God’s command. Upon being tempted to listen to the voice of a self-willed dark angel, Eve made a decision to disregard God and made a wrong use of her freedom of choice. The consequences were far-reaching.

Even today, in our life as consecrated religious, disobedience to God’s commandments, to the *Constitutions*, and especially to God’s voice deep inside us, can bring about far-reaching and undesirable consequences. The purpose of our life and mission can get distorted. The antidote, therefore, to such distortion is to examine ourselves often and see whether it is God’s voice or not that we are listening to, or the voice of our self-will—the former leading to life and growth, the latter to corruption and death.

Soon after that first disruption of the cordial relationship between God and His own children, He set in motion the process of reconciliation and redemption. The fulfilment of that redemption began with the birth of the Virgin Mary.

On 8 December 1854, Pope Pius IX promulgated the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Foreseeing her role in the redemption of the human race, Mary was privileged by God to be preserved from all stain of original sin in order to conceive Jesus in her womb. In the fiat of Mary, salvation moved closer to its fulfilment on behalf of human beings.

On 8 December 1841, while the young priest Don Bosco was ready to celebrate the Holy Eucharist, he chanced upon an orphan, devoid of grace, religion and learning. While the sacristan wanted to chase him out for his inability to serve at the altar, Don Bosco discovered in him material for something better than the ordinary. That encounter with Bartholomew Garelli, and Don Bosco’s “YES” to the voice of God within him to be a father



to the fatherless resulted in an enterprise that has continued, from then onwards, to uplift countless needy boys and girls in all parts of the globe.

THE FEAST OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Don Bosco placed great emphasis on purity and holiness of life for his sons and daughters. He repeated often that those who desired to work for the needy and defenceless boys and girls should cultivate the necessary virtues and one of the greatest of these virtues, he said, was the virtue of purity/chastity. Our *Constitutions* 81 is priceless in its expression:

Don Bosco lived chastity as a love for God and for the young which had no limits. He wanted it to be a distinctive mark of the Salesian Society: 'Anyone devoting his life to destitute youth should certainly strive to enrich himself with every virtue, but the virtue he should specially cultivate is chastity'.

Our tradition has always considered chastity a resplendent virtue, bearing a special message for the education of youth. Through it we bear witness to the predilection of Christ for the young; it allows us to love them in an open and uncomplicated way, so that they "know they are loved" and it enables us to educate them to love and to purity.

Mary was immaculate, not only at her conception but throughout her life. It was a rare privilege accorded to her and she did not misuse the privilege. Her life, deeply rooted in God and lived in holiness, is a shining example to all Christians. The fact that her body did not undergo corruption and that God assumed Mary body and soul into heaven tells us that she remained sinless and spotless. Being spotless today would mean being truly chaste and it is a challenge that we could give to ourselves and to our youth. In an era of rampant promiscuity and pornography, and at a time when traditional moral values are being challenged and scoffed at, we too could be endangered unless we remain ever watchful. History shows us that consecrated people too can fall, and have fallen much.

Even now, as Provincial, I continue to cherish the decision of our formation personnel of Savio Juniorate and Bosco Mount not to send the aspirants for winter holidays before 8th December. We were helped to make a good monthly recollection during which we were given very practical and fitting instructions on spending our holidays well. The feast of the Immaculate Conception was duly solemnized and thus we began our holidays on the following day in the best of spirits. This is a tradition that we should continue to honour and uphold.



A YEAR OF PANDEMIC YET OF BLESSING FOR ECOLOGY, DOMESTIC CHURCH AND OUR CREATIVE RESPONSE

We are journeying fast towards the end of the solar/Gregorian calendar year. No doubt, 2020 will go down in history as the “Corona year” and we are fortunate to have survived it. A few others were not so fortunate. It was also painful for some families to see their loved ones die without the Sacraments and with no family members around them in their final exit. No traditional burial was possible.

Countless people, particularly the rural and semi-skilled migrant workers, lost their jobs; family hardships became more acute; poverty spread its tentacles far and wide; factories and industries saw their revenues dipping; people lived in fear, while trouble-mongers devised and circulated fake news and misinformation. The young, especially students, lost a year of learning at school, in spite of the online learning that a small percentage of them could benefit from.

In many parts of the world, the year saw the coming alive of the domestic or family church in the absence of the formal parish church activities due to the pandemic protocol. I personally got to know families praying and reading the Bible together. On the other hand, it was heard that family violence too increased during the lockdown. Even among the religious, patience seemed to have run out in some cases.

Environmentally, our globe experienced a greener year. Vegetation and nature seemed to have breathed a sigh of relief. Air, water and sound pollutions came down considerably. The sky seemed brighter. Animals and birds seemed to enjoy more freedom and their habitation safer from the human predators.

Almost every community in the Province organized well the relief services, consisting of awareness programmes, livelihood generation programmes, sanitization materials, food articles, resource mobilization, etc. As a whole we were able to reach out to a large number of needy families and persons in our area.

Bosco Reach Out opened a “migrant desk” and our communities cooperated by sending the list of migrant youth with information about their skill specialization for further training and job placement as and when possible.

Our aspirants at Sirajuli and Bosco Mount had to be sent home in March to prevent any mishap from Covid-19. The government was also firm on everyone following a strict protocol to prevent the transmission of the virus, and this prevented our formation houses from functioning. Lesson guidelines and help materials were sent to those who were able to receive them through the social media. Being from the rural setting, most of the boys could not avail themselves of this opportunity unfortunately. I am grateful to the communities which housed the aspirants in their communities during these lockdown days, conducted classes for them and kept them busy. I am confident that our apostolic

boys and aspirants would have understood that we care for them and love them. It is a life lesson that they will not easily forget.

Fortunately, we were able to keep the Class XII students both at Sirajuli and at Bosco Mount and conduct regular classes for them and give them the required religious training. Class XI aspirants and the preparatory students joined Sirajuli in August, and the Class X students Bosco Mount. Efforts are being made to bring back the rest. The community at Sirajuli has made an admirable decision to keep back the aspirants during the Christmas and the New year holidays. They will be sent for holidays after their selection and board examinations.

SOME CHALLENGES AND GREY AREAS

Allow me also to express a few of my concerns, even as I appreciate you for all that you have done to combat and withstand the dreaded corona disease.

We encouraged the faithful to bring alive the domestic or family church to make up for the inability of the parish churches to minister to them during the lockdown. I know that the faithful heeded enthusiastically this clarion call. What about us? Have we and our religious communities grown in religious discipline? Certainly, we cannot be less than the faithful in this regard.

Despite an abundance of time at our disposal, good net connectivity and constant animation on the benefits of community planning, there were communities which failed to prepare the monthly calendar regularly. Community planning is one of the best instruments for the effective implementation and monitoring of the Salesian Educative and Pastoral Planning (SEPP). In it, we find animation and review meetings of the House through its council meetings, managing committee meetings, *lectio divina*, dates for assessment of clerics, day of the community, assembly of confreres, monthly recollection, etc.

It looked to me that some communities did not utilise profitably the lockdown period to maintain well the House and the campus. Civil and ecclesiastical authorities had time and again reminded us about cleanliness being one of the ways to re-vegetate our natural home. There is no denying the fact that communities and confreres had more than sufficient time at their disposal for engaging in even time-consuming tasks such as stacking well the books and renewing their library setting. However, the results were not that encouraging. It pained me to see that the library of a particular community was in shambles. Even a gentle encouragement and reminder did not have the desired effect.

The world of the rich seemed to have become richer, and the poor became poorer. We are to be always on the side of the poor which we profess and live. We also need to live poorer if we are to be of witness value. In our constructions, purchase of vehicles, mode of transport and frequency of travel, in our meals and celebrations, there is a need to become

more sober, and to maintain greater moderation and simplicity. We need to keep our eyes open to the exploitation that the poor are undergoing, especially the farmers, and the women especially the young girls. A closer contact with them will automatically encourage us to maintain a simpler life style. There is every danger that we will preach about poverty and concern for the poor but without making any effort to feel the pulse of the poor who look up to us to rescue and empower them.

This year the education department of MBOSE has decided not to conduct the selection examination for Class X and Class XII. There is every possibility that there might be some concessions in the final board examinations, and many of our children may get through the exams, and this would be to their advantage. However, let me state that in the last Board examinations, both in Assam and Meghalaya, the results could have been better. Some schools recorded many failures; the others which did better had only single-digit first divisions. You will all agree that our boys and girls are intelligent enough. We have experienced teachers and the parents are very cooperative. With all the tremendous power vested in us, why are some of our schools not performing consistently well? I had suggested to some schools that they cut down on the co-curricular activities, concentrate more on the teaching and learning aspects and increase the number of class days. Most of our students fall back to village and rural higher secondary schools; and many of the Catholic students seem to get through because of concessions and not on merit. We need to pull up our socks in this regard.

In a community of four Salesians, three complained to me about the leader - that he did not consult them, that the House Council was not regular and that decisions were individualistic rather than communitarian. I could only respond that enough reminders have been given about all these, and that there only remained the hope that when their turn would come, they would not fall into the same rut, but live according to the norms of the Province. Please do not misunderstand me. Let us start anew. Let each of us—both leaders and community members—give more importance to religious and community discipline. It is an absolute must, if we are to live a faithful religious life.

LOOKING AHEAD

As the mission is entrusted to the community, everyone must feel responsible for and own up the mission and apostolate of the community. Our Congregation is worried about individualism and personal initiatives which, in the past, have created enough havoc and destruction in the Province, nay even in the Congregation. None of us is as good as all of us together, and collective wisdom is still the best. We need to live as a family, and plan and execute all our activities as a community. The Rectors and Leaders are entrusted by the Congregation with the very important task of leading the community towards oneness; they should, therefore, draw up monthly and annual plans, seeking suggestions from the community members and the House Council.

In the year of the *Laudato Si'* and beyond, it is essential that we be in the vanguard of defending nature, the environment and ecology, and be leaders in cleanliness in all spheres of life—earthly and spiritual—like Pope Francis who has been responsible in waking up the world concerning the conscious or unconscious destruction of Mother Earth. Our Rector Major and our Green Alliance programme have been a laudable response towards the call of the Holy Father. It is good to own it up and ensure that Salesians and members of the Salesian Family make the programme percolate down to the grassroots.

All our communities need to pay special attention to the identification of the migrant and jobless youth. Soon the Province will have a 3-5 year plan for the migrant youth. The pain and the struggles of the displaced migrant youth are real and depressing. Fortunately, many NGOs, the Church and even the SPCSA are initiating measures to alleviate their difficulties and we shall make our own contribution to these initiatives.

One of the lofty goals that each community needs to adopt is “zero compromise” on quality education. Every community, together with the Principal, must give their hearts and minds to this. Failures—and in some schools they are a big number too—should prick our conscience and motivate us towards greater efforts in preparation for the next set of examinations. Some avoid meetings; others do not follow willingly the common recommendations; yet others often blame the students for their failure. I strongly recommend a self-assessment of our investment of time and planning. Thus, we can ground the students strongly in the present and prepare them well for the future.

Every community could conduct a serious brainstorming and make appropriate decisions regarding a profitable use of the land, especially in view of poverty alleviation. We need to plan and implement programmes with a view to enabling the people, particularly the youth, to be agents of their own economic and social well-being.

As a conclusion to my reflection on this year, I wish to state that my reflections come from my heart as the Provincial and, in these, I have only had the good of the Province uppermost in my mind, and never the intention to offend anyone.

PROPER PLANNING OF HOLIDAYS

The seasons of Christmas, the New Year and the annual *sobhas* are moments when, if properly animated, a creditable amount of animation and catechesis could take place. These are the days when, like in the Lenten season, people flock to the Church and the *sobhas* to attend the services and receive the sacraments, especially Confession and the Holy Eucharist. Consequently, the priestly ministry is in high demand. In the recent past I sadly noticed, in two *sobhas*, the absence of the confreres of the community. If the confreres are not



involved in such a major annual event for the faithful, what is the meaning of our commitment and community mission? It is in this context that I am requesting the Rectors, Parish Priests and Leaders of Communities to have a clear understanding about holidays, ensuring that the holidays are not availed of by anyone when our presence is greatly required by the community and the faithful.

VOCATION CAMPS

With the unpredictability of the pandemic in the coming months, especially with the inputs which say that the virus spreads faster during the cold season, there is a possibility that our usual annual vocation camps may be cancelled. In the communities which we—the Vice Provincial, the Economer and I—have visited, we have strongly recommended that the community conduct the vocation camp for their own parish and the neighbouring diocesan and non-Salesian parishes. Obviously, the number of candidates would be smaller and consequently, the camp could be managed without much difficulty and inconvenience. Keeping in mind that within another two years we will be celebrating the Centenary of the arrival of the Salesians to Northeast India, it is important that we promote vocations from our region and beyond. It will be a gift of exceptional value if we are able to send a very big number of missionaries *ad gentes* as a sign of our gratitude to God for the missionaries who came to our land and preached the Good News to us, and built up the Church here.

PREPARATION FOR THE CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS – CATECHISTS AND TOURING SISTERS' TRAINING AT DAMRA AND GAROBADHA

Since the inception of the Salesian missions in the Northeast, catechists have contributed significantly towards evangelization, catechesis and the follow up of our people. There have been many holy, committed and competent catechists who spent their lives for the growth of the faith and of the Church. They also took care of the missionaries and acted as their interpreters.

Times have changed, our people have become more educated, and we need to pass on to the faithful the Church's contemporary teachings on faith and morals. The better equipped our catechists and touring Sisters are to motivate and catechise the people, the higher the quality of spiritual life of the people. It is also our experience that often vocations come from the families of catechists and *procharoks*.

A training for the catechists and touring Sisters of the Province is the offshoot of the symposium that was held at DBI in 2019 as part of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations and preparation for the Centenary. I am grateful to Fr Francis Hembrom, the delegate, who together with the regional co-ordinators – Fr CA John (Rabha) and Fr Amit Lakra (Garo) – organized the training for the Rabha and Garo speaking catechists and touring Sisters. I thank all the resource persons and the Salesian communities of Damra and Garobadha for hosting the events. Similar training sessions will be conducted in Bodoland, the Assam plains and in Karbi Anglong.

MEETING OF ADMINISTRATORS

The Meeting of Administrators was held at Provincial House, Guwahati on 24 November 2020. In the morning Mr Harris Agrawala animated the session and interacted with the confreres. The post-lunch session was an interactive and sharing session with regard to the Administrative Matters of the Province in which Fr Provincial, Fr Vice Provincial, and Fr Economer participated too.

NEW PRIESTS' DAY 2020

For various reasons we could not have the New Priests' Day earlier this year. But it is never late to congratulate the confreres who were ordained priests this year, and we shall celebrate the gift of the priesthood to them on 15 December 2020. It will be in the morning after the conclusion of the spiritual retreat (9-15 December), at the Provincial House. I cordially invite you all for the celebration; your presence and participation will serve as an encouragement to our new priests.

PRIESTLY ORDINATION 2021

<i>Sl No</i>	<i>Name of the Deacon</i>	<i>Place of Ordination</i>	<i>Date of Ordination</i>
1	Justin Chinnaparaj	Holy Family Church, Rongjeng	Yet to be finalised
2	Narendra Lakra	St Padre Pio Church, Haldijharia	22 January 2021
3	Anmol Soreng	St Joseph's Church, Simdega	19 January 2021
4	George William	Yet to be finalised	Yet to be finalised

CONGRATULATIONS

Cl Jeniberth A Sangma secured 6th rank in Nagaland University for the subject of Sociology in the final semester of BA studies, securing 6.63 CGPA. Congratulations to Br Jeniberth! He passed out of Salesian College, Dimapur recently completing his BA and post-novitiate formation.

CONDOLENCES

Mr Dominic Kujur, 75, the father of *Cl Jonas Kujur* (Tura, Don Bosco Boys' Home), passed away at Dimakuchi on 19 November 2020. Mr Dominic was sick for about three and a half months, with typhoid and blood infection. We offer our condolences to Cl Jonas and all the family members. May the soul of the departed rest in peace.

We offer our heartfelt condolences to the Provincial and confreres of the Salesian Province of Calcutta (INC), who once again lost two confreres one after another. **Fr Sebastian Alancheril** passed away on 25 November 2020 at Provincial House, Kolkata, due to cardiac respiratory failure. He was 90. He was Vice Provincial of INC from 1982 to 1984, and Provincial from 1984 to 1990. **Fr Varghese Kalluvachel (KC)** passed away on 26 November 2020 in Caritas Hospital, Kottayam, Kerala. He died due to chronic liver disease. He was 66. May the Lord grant eternal rest and peace to them both.

CONCLUSION

Dear Confreres, we have just begun the Advent Season, and started our preparations for Christmas. May these holy seasons of Advent and Christmastide bring true joy, happiness and peace into our hearts! Though we shall be celebrating it in the backdrop of the Covid pandemic and other tragedies that we have experienced this year, may the celebration of Christmas remind us of God's coming into our lives and into our history. As Rabindranath Tagore wrote, "He comes, he comes, he ever comes."



I wish you a Merry and Joyful Christmas; and a very Happy New Year. We don't know if the pandemic will continue or not; we don't know if normalcy will soon return or not, but only one thing is sure: The Lord is always with us. He says, "Behold I make all things new." Even as we endeavour to take "New Year resolutions" for the year 2021, let us be reminded that it is not optimism that will help us, but our certain faith and hope that God loves us no matter what, and that God is present with us no matter what.

May God bless you all! Have a wonderful Christmas and New Year celebrations!

Yours affectionately in the Lord,

Fr Januarius S Sangma, SDB
Provincial



PROGRAMME OF THE PROVINCIAL

DECEMBER 2020

1	Tue	Visitation: Bosco Mount Tura
2	Wed	Tura >> Guwahati
3	Thu	Guwahati – Office Work
4	Fri	Guwahati – Office Work
5	Sat	Umswai: Sobha - First Holy Communion
6	Sun	Umswai: Sobha
7	Mon	Guwahati : FMA Jubilee celebrations
8	Tue	Guwahati
9	Wed	Guwahati: Spiritual Retreat starts in the evening
10	Thu	Retreat
11	Fri	Retreat
12	Sat	Retreat
13	Sun	Retreat; Blessing of St Ann's Convent, Baithalangso
14	Mon	Retreat; Guwahati – Birthday of Archbishop
15	Tue	New Priests' Day and Conclusion of the retreat
16	Wed	Christmas Novena: Co-Cathedral
17	Thu	Guwahati
18	Fri	Guwahati
19	Sat	Boko: Priestly Ordination
20	Sun	Guwahati >> Diphu
21	Mon	Diphu >> Haflong
22	Tue	Haflong
23	Wed	Guwahati
24	Thu	Christmas Vigil: Sirajuli Aspirantate
25	Fri	Christmas. Guwahati: Holy Mass, Co-Cathedral
26	Sat	Kokrajhar >> Dotma
27	Sun	Dotma >> Ramfalbil
28	Mon	Guwahati
29	Tue	Guwahati
30	Wed	Tura
31	Thu	Tura