

PROVINCIAL CIRCULAR

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

JS – 78/2023

1 September 2023

My dear Confreres,

Greetings from Don Bosco - Provincial House, Guwahati.

On 8 September, we celebrate the birthday of Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ. The commemoration of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary holds a profound place in our Christian theological contemplation particularly within the tradition of the Catholic Church. While historical veracity regarding the exact date of Mary's birth remains elusive within the Scriptures especially the Gospels, the observance and celebration of this occasion carries a theological depth that transcends mere historical precision. **Fr Don Miller** says "The birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary heralds the joyous dawn of salvation for a world lost in the darkness of sin and death. Her birth is a cause for celebration because it marks the beginning of God's plan to redeem humanity through Jesus Christ."



She is our Mother. From the cross, Jesus told John "Behold your mother!" (Jn 19:26).

In his dream at the age of nine, the majestic person told Johny Bosco that he would give him a teacher. That teacher was Mary. Mary truly proved herself to be, not only the most influential teacher but also a caring mother, wise guide and powerful intercessor, not only to Johny but also to everyone in the Salesian family. In his Spiritual Testament to his Salesians, Don Bosco wrote, "The Blessed Virgin will certainly continue to protect our congregation and our Salesian works if we maintain our trust in her and promote devotion to her."

For Don Bosco, Mary was more than an object of veneration. Mary was for him a living person. He felt her presence in every moment of his life. He emulated her virtue of sensitivity, her obedience to the will of God, and her commitment and fidelity at the hour of the cross. From the very beginning of his life, she showed him the way, inspired his actions, sustained his strength and helped him to obtain his purpose, even in extraordinary ways. For Don Bosco 'Mary did it all!'.

Don Bosco's mother Mamma Margaret cultivated in him devotion to Mary from his childhood. I quote the words of Mamma Margaret to Johnny Bosco on the occasion of his

vestition, "When you were born, I consecrated you to the Blessed Virgin; when you began your studies, I advised you to have devotion to this good Mother. At this point I recommend you to be totally hers. Love companions who are devoted to her, and if you become a priest, always recommend and propagate devotion to Mary". John, after listening to his mother, in tears, thanked his mother and said "These words will not be said for nothing, I will treasure them all my life."

The birth of Mary is often regarded as a beacon of hope and a herald of fresh beginnings. "Mary's birth is the dawn of hope, a prelude to the birth of the Savior who will bring salvation to all." said **Pope Francis**. Just as her birth inaugurated a novel epoch in the narrative of salvation, Mary herself emerged as a conduit through which the divine scheme of redemption would be realized. Her birth evokes the commencement of a new era characterized by divine grace and redemption, foreshadowing the birth of Jesus, the ultimate Redeemer.

Mary's birth is a pivotal precursor to the grandeur of the Incarnation—the pivotal event in which the Divine assumed human form in the person of Jesus Christ. The inception of Mary's life is a prelude to the narrative that ultimately culminates in the birth of Jesus, the apex of God's redemptive plan. Her birth constitutes a vital fragment of the celestial design to usher the Savior into the realm of humanity. **Pope Benedict XVI** said, "In her birth, Mary foreshadowed the Savior's birth, proclaiming the dawning of salvation for all mankind."

The theological resonance of the celebration of Mary's birth is closely intertwined with the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. In the words of **St. Romanos the Melodist** "Today heaven and earth rejoice at the birth of Mary, for she will become the dwelling place of God Himself." Mainly upheld in the Catholic tradition, this doctrine postulates that Mary was conceived free from original sin, thereby consecrated as a pristine vessel for bearing Jesus. The observance of her birth accentuates her exceptional role in the divine narrative and her unparalleled status as the Mother of God.

Mary's birth is intricately interwoven with her profound assent to God's plan for her life. Her fiat—the resounding affirmation of her submission to and alignment with God's will—serves as a quintessential illustration of profound faith and unwavering obedience. **St. Irenaeus** said "This day the knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary." Her birth is a tribute to her earthly pilgrimage that culminated in her monumental role as the Mother of God and her pivotal contribution to the unfolding tapestry of salvation history.

The commemoration of Mary's birth underscores humanity's integral involvement in the divine design. Through her birth, Mary assumes her place within the grand narrative of divine redemption, signifying that God chooses to operate through ordinary human

vessels to manifest His grand designs. Her birth serves as a testament to the sanctity and significance of human existence, along with the potential inherent in each individual to partake in God's unfolding saga.

The observance of Mary's birthday beckons for profound theological reflection upon the interplay of God's redemptive plan, Mary's pivotal role within that plan, and the significance of human collaboration with the divine. It prompts a contemplation of the hope, obedience, and faith that is the hallmark of Mary's life, resonating harmoniously with our individual faith journeys.

ORDINATION OF DN SOMESH TUDU TO BE SOLEMNISED AT KUMARIKATA

On 17 September 2023, Rt Rev John Moolachira, Archbishop of Guwahati will ordain Dn Somesh Tudu to the Holy Orders at St Joseph's Parish Kumarikata. It will truly be a day of thanksgiving and celebration, when the Lord will lovingly say to him "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek" (Ps 110:4). The Salesian parish community of Kumarikata, together with the Salesian communities around, have enthusiastically agreed to host this extraordinary event and have already organised the first meeting of the Ordination Committee to assign responsibilities, during which I was also present.



Deacon Somesh Tudu studied theology in Ratisborne, Jerusalem. After his brief diaconal experience at Amguri, Kokrajhar, he returned to Ratisborne to complete his pastoral course. Presently, Dn Somesh is at Don Bosco Institute, Kharguli, working with and for the young.

Ordinations should make us reflect on and pray for more religious vocations, even as we guide every youth to God's plan. They should motivate us to promote vocations in word, in deed and through our life's example. Today the Church and the Congregations are experiencing scarcity of vocations, especially of quality vocations. At times, the life of priests and religious leave much to be desired. The faithful and people around notice our compromises and lack of fidelity but watch helplessly, as fraternal corrections and interventions could be disastrous. Vocation to priestly and religious life need to come through attraction to the life that we truly live - personal, community, pastoral, educational, sacramental, emotional, sexual, emotional, leadership etc.. It should not be through superficial recruitment.

Despite steep decrease in vocations to religious life worldwide, our North East India can still boast of young, expressing genuine desire to answer God's call. Marriage trainings

prepare the newly married to make Catholic homes fertile grounds to develop strong faith. Our animation in the parishes and in educational institutions further strengthen the faith and their discernment process. Our accompaniment of such boys in the hostels, in apostolic schools, aspirantates and educational institutions lay stronger foundations to such desires. Love needs to play a vital role. It looks to me that those who love their own vocations would love to promote vocations and would lovingly follow up the candidates. Unfortunately our accompaniment seems to be weak and our compromised lives no longer attract vocations despite the young feel called to such life.

The Lord of the harvest has blessed our province with 8 deacons this year. As we pray for Dn Somesh Tudu, whose ordination is approaching fast, let us pray for all the other deacons who too are preparing themselves well to receive from the Lord this great gift. Let us continue to pray for the perseverance of our candidates in different stages of formation and let such ordinations remind us about our own ordination and help us to live our priestly life with greater fidelity and zeal.

BONDING TOGETHER, SHARING OPINIONS, DELIBERATIONS AND GROWING TOGETHER THROUGH REGIONAL ASSEMBLIES

Apart from Provincial animation and governance, the Province is animated region-wise through regional meetings. As per the report of the Extraordinary visitation, such animations are appreciated, relevant, effective and fruitful. The opportunity to assemble together is itself a bonding and positive step. Apart from the animation, we review our ministry and take decisions to respond to the challenges that we face. The five regions, namely the Kamrup Metro, the Garo Hills including Shallang, the Bodoland Territorial region, the Assam plains and the Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao region seem vibrant and exhibit many potentialities and strengths. They also have multiple challenges in catechesis, education, vocation promotion, in personal and community witness to holiness of life, credibility, transparency in financial administration, community living, and in our ministry to the poorest, etc.

THE WAY FORWARD:

GARO HILLS - TURA

1. House Councils will seriously plan to improve the standard of sub-centre schools
 - through frequent training of teachers
 - through regular supervision of teachers by designated school authority
 - through enhanced payment of the Staff
 - through revamping the infrastructure/building etc., and
 - through greater enrollment of local Catholic and other youth in the school.

2. The communities will admit more boys mainly the Catholics into the hostels. Every effort will be made to make hostels
 - provide nutritious and wholesome food,
 - centres of spiritual growth (well animated for prayers, recollection, retreat),
 - give maximum attention to study and character formation,
 - nurseries of vocations through follow up of aspirant, and
 - accompanied by Salesian presence.
3. In Parishes, the Marriage Courses will be organised three times in a year and for a longer duration.
4. To foster holy families, the present-day youth will be animated about the sanctity of marriage and family life. This guidance will come from the community, particularly from the Rector and Parish priests.
5. The parishes will conduct animation programmes for couples in their third/fourth/fifth year of marriage.
6. The Community at Mendal will draw up detailed plan to launch the production unit in VTC. Initially, the centre will supply uniforms for Class XI students of our schools. Later those of other classes will be produced there.
7. The Heads of educational institutions need to update themselves in administrative skills. Unless strictly required, they must not be absent from the institution.
8. Inter school competitions will be organised for our students in basketball, football, singing and speech competitions within this year.

BODOLAND TERRITORIAL REGION

1. To develop Malivita as a sub-centre of excellence. It is a good centre for vocations and evangelisation. The road connectivity will improve greatly soon.
2. Proposal for a Salesian Cemetery, for which land is available at Bengtol or Dotma.
3. Communities are reminded to be prepared for the implementation of NEP.
4. Proposal to buy land along the National Highway as Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon are likely become twin cities in the future.
5. Our lands are to be made use of well. Land near Amguri could be used for car wash, outlet for the sale of our products and some stationery shop.
6. A committee will be set up by the Provincial to study and suggest ways and means to get more enrollment in the college in Chapaguri
7. Salesian parishes of the region need to take Vocation promotion seriously.
8. To organise the teachers training especially for the lower section teachers at regular intervals.

KARBI ANGLONG AND DIMA HASAO REGION

1. Resolved that the contribution of vehicle fund will continue. It was however decided that henceforth the fund will be sent directly to the community, whose turn it is to get such fund.
2. The region has initiated the ministry for migrants. The Satgaon community has created awareness on migration, collected census from localities, given counselling and guidance before they migrated and is devising the follow up strategy.
3. The coaching classes for Class X and XII will continue to be organized well. Each community will contribute Rs 10,000.00 annually towards this venture. From this fund, the communities that need assistance for coaching classes will be helped out.
4. The region will continue to work towards settling all issues connected with land grabbing and encroachment at Umrangso and Diphu.
5. The region needs to do Vocation promotion on a war footing.
6. The region will organise common training of teachers and bring together the students for some personality development and other programmes.

ASSAM PLAINS REGION

1. Proposal to buy land for Higher education institution (College) in the region.
2. Proposal to keep the money from the sale of the Horotola, Parkijuli land for the establishment of the Higher education in the region.
3. To ensure that Catholics benefit maximum from our institutions.
4. In the past, the region promoted numerous and quality vocations for the province. The confreres today need to continue this and work hard on vocation promotion.
5. Proposal to acquire land near Biswanath charali for future expansion.
6. Proposal to start a Salesian cemetery in the region.

KAMRUP METRO REGION

1. The parish in Maligaon will start the Association of Salesian Co-operators (ASC) before the next Regional meeting in November.
2. The Youth Ministry commission will, in collaboration with St Joseph's Co-Cathedral, organise youth programmes for the city youth on a regular basis.
3. Proposal to revamp the Social Communication department of the province.
4. Explore the possibility to make our facilities available to youth of the city, with due care to ensure discipline and respect for the facilities.
5. To keep improving the evening school at Don Bosco Pan Bazar.

I am grateful to all the confreres who turned out in huge numbers for the meetings and participated in them actively. A glance at the **Way Forward** shows how the regions have different possibilities and challenges. Now we need to implement the resolutions. In our next regional meeting, we shall have monthly recollection, confession and Mass. I shall appoint the animators for the recollection talks.

ADMINISTRATORS' MEETING - A WAKE UP CALL



On 17 August, the Administrators of the Province assembled in the Mario Hall for a day of animation, reflection, discussion and deliberation on administration. It was an enriching and well participated day. While Fr Jayaprakash, Economist of the Province presented via powerpoint, revisions on general administration, based on the hands-out given out by the Chartered Accountant, Mrs Dipsha D'Souza, Chartered Accountant took sessions on the new financial legislations, FCRA, Provident Fund, GST, accounting and other financial matters which were informative and enlightening.

A few highlights of what the Chartered accountant put across to us were:

- It is important to update ourselves on the latest legislation, enactments and rules on finance, financial administration and amendments of the Government and work towards full compliance.
- The Provident fund is mandatory for all employees from the day of joining in duty.
- Salesian institutions are Charitable organizations. Hence, they need to carry out activities within the purview of their objectives and should not undertake any other activity beyond it objectives, lest they infringe laws.
- The Chartered Accountant is of the opinion that the rules are meant for all and are not against or in favour of one group or minorities. However, due to various factors, there is scrutiny of institutions today. We therefore need to comply with rules strictly.
- The accounting needs to be done professionally and if the fathers/brothers (Salesians) cannot do it, they should appoint competent lay accountants for it.

- She emphasised on depositing all money in the bank and operation through cheques and joint/triple signatures.

RECTORS AND LEADERS MEETING: “WE ARE DISCIPLES OF THE LORD”

On 24 August, all the Rectors and leaders of the province assembled in the Provincial House, Guwahati for a day of animation, information sharing and deliberations. All the communities attended the programme. I thanked the Rectors/leaders for their animation and governance of the communities. Without prejudice to anyone, I expect Rectors and leaders to do more in ensuring religious fidelity in the community. The health of the province is strongly linked to the health of the local communities.

Fr Joe Mannath from Don Bosco Renewal Centre, Bangalore took the morning sessions and inspired the assembly with his lucid and clear exposition of the role and responsibility of leaders, and the spiritual heads of communities. Fr Joe made use of the white board, explanations, powerpoints and hands out to drive home some of the duties and responsibilities of the Rectors and leaders and many other relevant topics which are very relevant and needed today.

Leaders, whatever the age and the position they are, need to work continuously on personal growth, be responsible for the health of the community, ensure fidelity to the mission and do administration and governance as leaders.

There is a need to understand the difference between counselling, spiritual direction and confession. In today’s context, they are all the *sine qua non*, both for lay people as well as the religious. They promote mental, physical, emotional and spiritual health. Among the qualities that are required to do all these are warmth, genuineness, empathy, respect, listening, confidentiality, acceptance, affirmation, caring confrontation and inter personal communication.

Speaking on “The Religious Superior”, he dealt at length on credibility which comes from character and competence. “A good character (honesty, personal integrity, justice in dealings, respect for people, etc) wins us the trust and respect of people” he said.

Session on “Leadership Lessons from Pope Francis” brought home the following:

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| ✧ Lead with humility | Smell like your flock |
| ✧ Who am I to judge? | Don’t change - reinvent |
| ✧ Make inclusivity a top priority | Avoid insularity |
| ✧ Choose pragmatism over ideology | The optics of decision making, |
| ✧ Run your organisation like a field hospital | Live on the frontier |
| ✧ Overcoming Vs Sidestepping adversity, and | Pay attention to non-Customers. |

Fr Joe Mannath presented Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador as one of the ideal leaders for Church leaders. He was the voice of those who had no voice. He was shot, by

orders of the government, while celebrating Mass in the chapel of the hospital for incurables, where as Archbishop, he lived.

The previous day he had preached what was to be his last Sunday sermon in the cathedral. In it he made an appeal to the ordinary soldiers in the army and low ranking policeman, calling on them not to obey immoral orders from their officers.



His words were moving. “Brothers, you come from our own people. You are killing your own brother peasants, when any human order to kill must be subordinate to the law of God which says, “Thou shall not kill”. No soldier is obliged to obey an order contrary to the law of God. No one has to obey an immoral law. It is high time you recovered your consciences and obeyed your consciences rather than a sinful order. The Church, the defender of the rights of God, of human dignity, of the person, cannot remain silent before such an abomination. We want the government to face the fact that reforms are valueless if they are to be carried out at the cost of so much blood. In the name of God, in the name of this suffering people whose cries rise to heaven more loudly each day, I implore you, I beg you, I order you in the name of God: stop the repression”.

The following day, a sniper was sent to shoot him while he was offering Mass. Little did the authorities realise that, instead of silencing his voice, this would spread it to the four corners of the earth and that his message would give hope and inspiration to thousands.

The post lunch session consisted of informations on the itinerary of Rev Fr Stefano Martoglio, Vicar General, the financial matters, the vocational guidance and revamping of the youth Ministry in the province.

The assembly of Rectors and leaders took two important decisions, that is, that all the communities of the province will use the ACME-ERP for auditing and accounting purposes and that for the sale of stationery and uniforms etc, the communities will outsource the same. Fr Economer will soon make a clarification of some points which

could not be clarified in the meeting. The assembly felt that our communities could keep working hard towards compliance to both province and government directives.

HEARTY WELCOME TO FR STEFANO MARTOGLIO - VICAR GENERAL

It will be a special honour and privilege for the confreres and the Salesian family of the Province to welcome Rev Fr Stefano Martoglio, Vicar General of the Congregation to the province on 16 October 2023. He will be accompanied by Fr Biju Michael, General Councillor for South Asia and Fr Patrick Alexander, Secretary and will remain on in the province till 22 October. He will pay his maiden visit to the five regions of the province for the animation and consultation for the new Provincial. Provincial Councillors will organise the regional programme of the visitation.



The Province will celebrate the jubilee of confreres, with Fr Stefano present in the Province. He will be the main celebrant and one of the jubilarians will give the homily.

The details of his itinerary and other informations will be sent to all the communities soon. I request everyone to pray for the success of the animation and consultation and give a befitting hospitality to our dear Fr Stefano.

SPCSA COUNCIL IN SRI LANKA

The SPCSA council will be held in the Vice Province of Sri Lanka. It begins on 31 August and ends on 5 September. Fr Biju Michael, President of the Council and 12 Provincials of South Asia will participate in it. Let us pray for the successful outcome of the meeting. While the region can boast of its vibrancy and lots of initiatives and programmes on behalf of the poor and the mission of evangelisation, the region also has its own challenges and issues especially the dwindling of vocations.

I will leave the province on 30 August and will return on 6 September. On arrival, I will participate in the CRI and Pastoral council meeting from 6 to 11 September 2023. Let us pray also for the success of these two important meetings. In my absence, for ordinary administrative purposes, kindly approach Fr Joseph Teron, Vice Provincial, though I too would be able to communicate with you all through the mail and the whatsapp.

CONDOLENCES:

Mr. Dominic Khonsiim Timung

Fr Joseph Teron, our Vice Provincial, sadly lost his brother-in-law, *Mr Dominic Khonsiim Timung*, aged 63, who passed away on 7 August 2023 in his residence at Hamren due to Gall bladder cancer and malignant tumour in liver which had spread from gallbladder. We

offer our sincerest and heartfelt condolences to Fr Joseph Teron and the bereaved family members on this loss. May the Lord be their strength and consolation! And may He grant eternal rest to the departed soul!

Mr Sibaprasad Rabha

Mr Sibaprasad Rabha, aged 36 years, the elder brother of Dn John Chandra Rabha, passed away on 8 August 2023 at GMCH, Guwahati. The exact cause of his death could not be determined as he passed away on the way to the Hospital. He leaves behind his wife, 7 year old son and 3 year old daughter. May the good Lord grant him eternal rest in His kingdom! We offer our sincere condolences to Dn John Chandra Rabha and the family and pray for them

CONCLUSION:

I assure you all my fraternal remembrance during the Holy Mass of the nativity of our Blessed Mother Mary. Fr George Chalissery reminded us in his report of the Extraordinary visitation that we need to celebrate the Marian and other Salesian Saints and Blesseds with due solemnity and preparation.

He also reminded us to promote the Sainthood of some of our own confreres who worked in our land of North east India, like Venerable Stephan Ferrando, SOG Bishop Marengo and Constantine Vendrame.

Let us pray for our deacons who are preparing themselves for the ordination. Let us look after well the confreres in initial formation especially those who are doing their college/university studies and the practical training. They need to be loved, appreciated, encouraged and if needed, give a fraternal correction. Let us look after our boys and girls in our institutions well and ensure that we find ourselves in their midst during the informal recreations. Let our hostels be nurseries of vocations and let us be generous in giving them wholesome food. Finally let us pray for the families of our youth and promote many good religious and priestly vocations from them.

Yours affectionately in Don Bosco,



Fr Januarius S Sangma, SDB
Provincial

SEPTEMBER 2023

Date	Day	PROGRAMME
1	Fri	Sri Lanka : SPCSA
2	Sat	Sri Lanka : SPCSA
3	Sun	Sri Lanka : SPCSA
4	Mon	Sri Lanka : SPCSA
5	Tue	Sri Lanka : SPCSA
6	Wed	Guwahati - CRI Meeting
7	Thu	Guwahati - CRI Meeting
8	Fri	Guwahati - CRI Meeting
9	Sat	Guwahati - Pastoral Conference
10	Sun	Guwahati - Pastoral Conference & Centenary Celebration - FMA Shillong
11	Mon	Guwahati - Pastoral Conference
12	Tue	Guwahati
13	Wed	Guwahati
14	Thu	Guwahati
15	Fri	Guwahati : Holy Mass in St Mary Mazzarello's Shrine, St Mary's Convent
16	Sat	Guwahati : Holy Mass - FMA Provincial House with Mother General > Kumarikata
17	Sun	ORDINATION OF Dn SOMESH TUDU - Kumarikata
18	Mon	Guwahati : Junior Priests' Meeting
19	Tue	Guwahati : Junior Priests' Meeting
20	Wed	Guwahati : Junior Priests' Meeting
21	Thu	Guwahati : Junior Priests' Meeting
22	Fri	Guwahati : Junior Priests' Meeting
23	Sat	CONVOCATION - ADBU Tapesia - Trimonthly recollection (evening)
24	Sun	Trimonthly recollection
25	Mon	Guwahati
26	Tue	Provincial Council Meeting, Provincial House
27	Wed	Provincial Community Day, Provincial House
28	Thu	Guwahati
29	Fri	Guwahati
30	Sat	Guwahati