

PROVINCIAL CIRCULAR

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

JS – 85/2024

1 May 2024

My dear Confreres,

Greetings from the Provincial House, Guwahati.

CARPE DIEM - SEIZE THE DAY/OPPORTUNITY TO BE RE-IGNITED AND RE-KINDLED - NOW OR NEVER

The 22nd Provincial Chapter of the province has come to a successful conclusion on 13 April 2024. It was a journey worth taken by the province. The way forward is carefully spelled out, which could transform and take the province to greater heights if they are lived out radically. Cardinal Angel Fernandez Artime, Rector Major and his council felt that at this moment of our congregation's journey (history), we, the Salesians worldwide need to examine our "Passionate love for Jesus Christ and our dedication to the young" closely and re-ignite our first love for God. It is because in many, there are deviations, aberrations, infidelity and compromises. If God is accorded the top priority, the rest will fall in line gradually.

In the province, the Provincial and the council felt that there is an urgent need to '**RE-KINDLE THE FLAME**' in everyone - young or old. Fr Joy Kachappily, the Moderator synthesised and contextualised the theme and animated the regions in depth. Everyone without exception participated in the animation and the confreres who assembled for such meetings not only studied the theme but also assessed the fidelity of the individual, the community and the province to our religious vows. Everyone got the opportunity to express in writing and speaking the concerns of the province.

After the regional assemblies, all the communities were circulated a set of questions to be studied and discussed, with special reference to the community. The rector or the leader led the confreres in examining our lives based on the theme. Unlike the regional assemblies, the confreres in the communities were smaller in number which gave them the adequate opportunity to share their observations. I am informed by the moderator that there were few communities which did not participate in this. It is lamentable. They did not have the meeting and not contribute to the chapter reflections, which would have been their own assessment of themselves in the community.

Seventy one chapter members lived the chapter days in fraternity, in prayer (morning prayer, Holy Mass, Rosary, evening prayer and good night) and in study, reflection, group and assembly discussion of the working document which was prepared well in advance taking into consideration the points that came from the communities and the regions of the province.

The members of the Salesian family visibly showed their closeness to us through their participation in the chapter on two occasions. Their participation in the inauguration of the Chapter and the panel discussion sessions were moments of great encouragement. On both occasions, they impressed us with their talks, which were prepared well and factually accurate. They all appreciated the Salesians for the great missionary and evangelising works that we do and say that we continue to be trend-setters and achievers in many spheres of the mission. They expressed their gratitude for the spiritual and charismatic assistance that we render to them. During the panel discussion, they pointed out the gray and challenging areas in collaboration. The observations that we listened to during this chapter need to be seriously examined and if true, carried out so as to make our collaboration more fruitful.

One of the significant points that the Rector Major spoke to us in ACTS 441 was that we should not get lost in the nicety of words, instead we should speak what needed to be spoken even though it might jolt or discomfort us. I felt happy that adequate time and opportunities were given to everyone to voice their appreciation and concern in the regional meetings, in the community discussions and during the chapter for the chapter delegates. Despite certain apprehensions, the confreres were given blank papers to write their views, without writing the names. I noticed that during the floor discussions, the chapter members spoke maintaining decorum and maturity. It is important that whenever we speak in public, we speak with respect, speak the truth and the complete truth. At times we speak condemning others harshly, while all the while, the confreres easily notice in you those of which you are guilty of and deficient.

One of the best moments of our chapter was the presence of boys and girls around us. They are but just replica of the boys and girls who are out there waiting for us. We cannot disappoint their aspirations in life. Let us remember that even when they are not around us, we are disappointing them if we are not faithful to our sacred duties - duties of prayer and study, relentless work, be prophets of fraternity, sincerity, transparency, accountability, patience, forgiveness and self improvement. We need to be role models. When we are around them or they around us, one can notice their joy and happiness. The young love to be encouraged, appreciated, and taken note of. One can see how happy they are to serve us, welcome us, and entertain us through cultural extravaganza. They love to pray with us, for us and listen to us. We also need to listen to them.

I wish that this chapter becomes a turning point for every confrere, community and the province. Let this chapter be not another occasion to draw up a beautiful document. A few take away from this chapter, without much elaboration could be:

1. Give top priority to God which is manifested in our union with Him in prayer and work, in spirit and in our life guided radically by the teachings, principles and values of Jesus Christ. Remember that the community that prays together will stay together. All must be faithful to the practices of piety and the vows.

2. Give top priority to youth especially the poorest in all our ministries. In all our educational institutions and parishes, let the youth especially poorer among them find a warm welcome at any time of the day and year and let them receive the best attention and facilities from the Salesians.
3. Accord top priority to building an exemplary personal and community life. While everyone has his own role, the role of the Rector is paramount. He takes the place of Jesus Christ, Don Bosco, Rector Major and Provincial. Every Rector must have the objective of making his community, the best in the province. Let each confrere build the community and not destroy it through underperformance, selfishness, individualism, gossip, and prejudice. I always feel bad to know that we are ready to find fault and criticize and not appreciate and praise.
4. Revive drastically the SEPP, the EPC, the House Council, the day of the community, the assembly of confreres etc. The rector must make sure that each one makes the annual retreat, join the exercise for a happy death monthly, and join the House council meetings, for which the agenda is prepared and circulated in advance.
5. Salesians of ING still need to pledge and commit ourselves to work together despite issues and challenges. Many communities are still struggling in this. We should be renowned for togetherness and team work. The Salesian family and the laity are our first collaborators and are our resources to enhance our charism. They have their own uniqueness and capabilities, which no one should downplay.
6. Our competence and quality brand are noticeably on the wane in many. Let us not point accusing fingers at others but let us examine ourselves closely. Let us ensure that we have a stringent planning mentality and execute our mission to the best. Our vocations must come by attraction rather than through recruitment. Our hostels, parishes and educational institutions need to become nurseries of vocations and each Salesian must be a vocation promoter.

Let us not wait for our chapter documents to be approved by the Rector Major. Instead let us already put them into practice. We need to change, if we want others and the young to change. The change must come from all of us individually. No one likes stagnation. Our life should not stagnate, instead it should grow. Self-examination is very important. Socrates rightly said, that "an unexamined life is not worth living".

In multiple ways, our province is healthy and full of resources. If we pull ourselves together, synergy can come into play strongly. As we take legitimate pride in all that we are and our miraculous growth, we shall do well to look at ourselves and pick up courage to rectify all that are pulling us down. There are certainly many many elements that can pull us apart, unless we especially those in authority take note of them and nip them in the bud with courage and determination.

LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING AHEAD

Socrates' maxim "Know Thyself" urges us to delve into the depths of our being and unravel the mysteries within. This injunction serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of introspection and self-awareness in navigating life's complexities. "To know thyself is the beginning of wisdom." This profound statement highlights the transformative power of self-discovery. By understanding our own strengths, weaknesses, and motivations, we gain clarity and insight into our purpose and potential. Thus "Know Thyself" also can lead us to "Know Thy Motivations".

Self-knowledge is not merely an individual endeavor; it is also a pathway to empathy and understanding towards others. Heraclitus, the Greek philosopher, said, "Self-discovery is an essential journey, for in knowing ourselves, we come to understand the shared humanity that binds us together." Besides, self-awareness is integral to ethical living. By examining our beliefs and values, we can make conscious choices that align with our principles and contribute to the greater good.

In our Salesian plan of life, we do self examination and evaluation on a daily basis (the prayer and meditation and the examination of conscience), on a monthly basis (the exercise for a happy death) and on a yearly basis (the annual spiritual retreat). They may not be totally complete and adequate, but certainly, they are a big help towards self discovery when they are done with focus and seriousness.

Another aspect of our efforts to "Know thyself" is our need to discover the hidden or gray areas of our life. What is hidden in the unconscious controls our life and action consciously or unconsciously. The discovery of such elements operating in us will assist us to live our lives to the full and if they are affecting us negatively, such exercise helps us to take corrective measures. We Salesians are professedly in the helping profession. In order to assist people holistically it is essential that we ourselves are liberated. Hence knowing ourselves especially in the area where we are vulnerable is crucial. We are always liable to be wounded and our wounds, unhealed could haunt us and make us do things as wounded creatures which could affect others negatively. Hence healing and letting go off the past wounds and injuries are essential. Our own personal efforts could help us but at times, the assistance of others especially those who are trained in this areas becomes a necessity.

As the Provincial, I am often reminded of what Yahweh said in the book of Prophet Ezekiel against the shepherds. Yahweh said, "Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! ... You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were

scattered they became food for all the wild animals ... Therefore I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock ... I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves ... I myself will search for my sheep and look after them" (Eze 34 : 1 - 11). We Salesians need to prove ourselves to be true and worthy Shepherds and not the hired ones. While we loose ourselves for the sheep, we need to ensure that they grow in all aspects of life.

We Salesians are a big force to be reckoned with. We are blessed with resources - human and material and our accomplishments can be overreaching, provided we collectively pull in the same direction and not in opposite directions. The strength of teamwork lies in its capacity to unite diverse talents and perspectives towards a common objective, amplifying collective achievements beyond individual capabilities. Through effective collaboration, communication, and mutual support, teams navigate challenges with resilience and innovation, fostering a sense of belonging and teamwork. As Helen Keller once said, "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." This underscores the transformative power of teamwork in achieving shared goals and surpassing expectations.

It is said that "Great minds discuss ideas, while small minds discuss people". This brainy saying tells us the importance of meaningful conversations whenever we come together. It suggests that individuals with intellectual depth prioritize discussing concepts, innovations, and solutions, while those with limited perspective tend to engage in gossip and focus on individuals rather than ideas. This insight highlights the futility of gossip, which contributes so little to constructive dialogue and personal or collective advancement. If we learn to put our different intellectual and spiritual energies together and thus forming a synthesis or synergy, and involve in positive thinking on ideas, innovations and creativity, our mission will still soar higher.

The supreme Pontiff told the Salesians not to disappoint the aspirations of the young and be holy and saints. In our journey towards holiness and fulfillment of our vows, we need to remember the profound significance of humility. Humility allows us to accept both our own failures and those of others with grace and understanding. It is through acknowledging our shortcomings that we can truly grow and evolve. As we strive for holiness, we need to concentrate all our efforts on God and the sacraments, drawing strength and nourishment from these divine sources. By centering our lives on God's grace and guidance, we can continue to grow in holiness and fulfill our mission with humility and devotion.

In the spirit of Don Bosco's unwavering dedication to the youth, we emulate his example by extending our hearts and hands to the young among us. Just as he did, we need to give generously of our time, listening to them with patience and without prejudice. The world of the young today is deeply challenging and our presence gives them hope and courage. Embracing a culture of family spirit, love, joy, and optimism, we create an

environment where the young feel valued and understood. By recognizing the unique challenges they face in today's world, we can become trusted counselors and steadfast companions in their journey of life. We need to invest ourselves wholeheartedly in their growth and well-being, for in nurturing the youth, we nurture the future.

The province can visibly see the young - boys and girls in our Salesian institutions who are willing to follow us in religious life. While in many parts of the world, there is a downward trend in vocations, we still have a storehouse from where to tap them. However vocations rarely come as finished products. They need to be groomed and accompanied closely. We need to promote them, more through our life's example. Our families are well-rooted in faith and are willing to become holier despite the challenges of this materialistic and pleasure loving world.

People admire authentic human beings. Living authentically means being true to ourselves, to the vocation that we have freely chosen and embracing our uniqueness despite societal pressures. It involves self-awareness, as Carl Jung noted "The privilege of a lifetime is to become who you truly are." Authenticity requires vulnerability, as Brené Brown highlights: "Authenticity is the daily practice of letting go of who we think we are supposed to be and embracing who we are." In simple words, authenticity is about living with integrity.

GRATITUDE

Looking back at my journey as the spiritual leader and reminiscing how I tried my best, I cannot but simply bow my head to the Almighty. It is He who steered the ship of the province. I would like to say to Him again and again, "O Lord, I am nothing without you". I made all efforts to give primacy to Him, who told me again and again, that "My strength is sufficient for you" (2 Cor 12:9).

My mother inculcated love and devotion to Mother Mary while we were still young and growing up in our humble family. Cultivation of right values did help and Mother Mary never failed to intercede for me in the fulfillment of my mission. The sleeping St Joseph too looked after the province. Each time I left the Provincial house, I went to him and told him to do so. St John Bosco, a passionate lover of youth was indeed my model.

Cardinal Angel Fernandez Artime encouraged and motivated me to take up this "stressful" work. All the General councillors guided and mentored me throughout. The two Regional Councillors with whom I worked - Fr Maria Arokiam and Fr Biju Michael were not only the idols but were always there to assist and support me. The Provincials of South Asia were truly brothers and companions whose closeness and appreciation are sources of strength and optimism.

The Archbishops and the Bishops, all the heads of religious congregations both male and female and the priests, brothers and sisters whomever I met at different places and

occasions were sources of encouragement and motivation for me. I have learned much from them from my interactions and association with them.

My dream Provincial team and the Secretary cruised through the six years of adventure collectively and with unity of purpose. Each one came to the council with ability and specialisation in varied fields, uniqueness, having multiple qualities of head and heart and so animation and the governance of the province sailed through smoothly, with occasional turbulence which had to be there, now and later. Everyone kept the good of the province in mind and worked tirelessly for its progress.

The Salesian family both religious and laity assisted me in ways that cannot easily be described adequately. Knowing them from close quarters, especially of the holiness, goodness, authenticity and pride of our lay Salesian family has been the happiest part of my life. They are simple, humble, effective in the mission and are radically faithful to the charism. In the villages, they seemed to do more works than we Salesians do.

I always had a positive and loving attitude towards all confreres - young and old. If the province in this last six years remained stable, progressive and good, it is due to the goodness and collaboration of the confreres. In general, our communities are prayerful, hospitable, disciplined and centred on youth especially the poor. As a human institution, there will always be rooms for improvement which cannot be enforced easily by the Provincial but will need to come from individual confreres.

I was fortunate to have met varied and rich set of young people in all our institutions. They want to be good and we should never condemn them without knowing the difficulties that they go through and the challenges are truly tremendous. I was happy to pray for them, talk to them, interact with them and in some cases assisted them in whatever I could. Empowering every boy and girl and helping them to find their vocation in life should be our contribution for the betterment of the world.

I owe a debt of gratitude to the community of Provincial house under the leadership of Fr Charles Deepen Lakra. I enjoyed family spirit, fun and laughter, flow of information, and prayer life in the community. I am grateful to the support staff for the love and care that they showed me.

My family of brothers, sisters, nephews, nieces, grandsons and grand daughters, uncles and aunties, well wishers, friends and benefactors are always strongly behind me in prayer or otherwise, in good times as well as in the bad. I have many people, boys and girls who depend on me for care and not necessarily for finance. I cannot imagine my life and happiness without them being with me in my life.

I affectionately remember all the confreres who passed away during my tenure and whom I was privileged to bury, as lovingly as possible. May they rest in peace and pray for us.

APOSTOLIC SCHOOL AT SASHIPUR

25 apostolic boys began their formation in the newly renovated building at Sashipur which I blessed on 20 April 2024. One priest confrere and two clerics will accompany and form them through the years. In the community, there will also be the Principal and the Vice Principal of the ICSE school, in which the boys will do their schooling. I thank Fr Economer and the community of Kumarikatta - Sashipur for carrying out the work of renovation and other facilities within a short span of time.

Over these past few years, our vocation camps for pre-SSLC and post SSLC and above have been showing the participation of an increased number of boys, thanks to the hard work of the communities, the vocation promoters, due to which we, in the council thought of opening another apostolic school at Sashipur where the building was lying un-utilised and is ideally located too.

Like any one of us, our candidates come to us as raw materials. We need to be patient with them and tap the best human resources that they are, through our dedicated, patient and loving accompaniment. If there is no love, there is no formation.

Our hostels, parishes and educational institutions need to promote vocations. Rather, our lives, our self sacrificing work, and our humble and prayerful life should attract vocations who could soon take our place.

Our catechists and touring sisters need to be instructed to care for the families and from the good catholic families we need to promote vocations to the salesian family.

The communities should be willing to spend money on candidates, opting to join us. We should not forget that almost all of us directly and indirectly received support in our stages of formation.

"The harvest is plentiful. Labourers are few. Therefore pray" is what Jesus clearly told us. Let us do it. Pray for the vocation of the Salesian brother.

CONDOLENCES

Our deepest sympathies, condolences and prayers to Fr Paul Olphindro Lyngkhot and confreres of the Shillong province at the premature and sudden demise of Fr Mathew Payyappily (Mattachan) on 15 April 2024.

Our heartfelt condolences and assurance of prayers to Rev Fr Roshan Miranda and his family, who lost his dear father Mr Tudor Miranda on 23 April 2024.

To our dear Fr Amit Tete and his family, we offer our heartfelt condolences and prayers at the sad demise of his mother Mrs Carmela Dungdung on 27 April 2024.

CONCLUSION

In front of the altar of the Provincial House, I have written at the start of my provincialship, **“Living the authenticity of the Gospel way of life, traced out by our founder.”** Living is what we need to do. Live fully and we should not be dead spiritually, emotionally, intellectually and in service. Live for God, for others and for values and for humanity. People love authenticity and they expect from priests and religious, sincerity, honesty, transparency, genuine love, mercy and peace.

Gospel should be our constitution. Our constitution is heavily based on the Scriptures, Bible and the Word of God. Our life should be guided and lead by God and the magisterium.

We study and imitate our founder St John Bosco. It is clear that he had God and Marian experience, so early in life and his growth into Jesus, Mary and his mission of saving souls of the young, rather than diminishing, continued to grow in leaps and bounds. His first love became stronger and stronger as he and his mission became older and older.

To end, I say that I am nothing without Him (God). I bow my head to him and sing His praises now and forever. He leaded me along the path that I should walk.

My heartfelt gratitude to my brothers and sisters, Archbishops, Bishops, my superiors, confreres, aspirants and apostolic boys, the young in all our centres and beyond, for the love and appreciation, you have showered on me abundantly. May God will bless you all.

Last and not the least, I seek forgiveness for the hurts that I have caused. I forgive all those who in one way or the other offended me too.

Yours affectionately in Don Bosco,



Fr Januarius S Sangma, SDB
Provincial



*THANK YOU SO MUCH
EVERYONE*

MAY 2024		
Date	Day	FR PROVINCIAL'S PROGRAMME
1	Wed	Goa : Blessing of the new Provincial house
2	Thu	Goa >> Guwahati
3	Fri	Guwahati : First Friday Mass for DB School students (Catholic students)
4	Sat	Guwahati : Mass CRI >> Shillong
5	Sun	Sohra: Vestition of the Novices (10.00 am)
6	Mon	Shillong
7	Tue	Guwahati : Senhalaya (6.30 pm)
8	Wed	Guwahati >> Sirajuli
9	Thu	Sirajuli
10	Fri	Tangla - Dimakuchi - Doomni
11	Sat	Bongaigaon : DBC Governing Body Meeting
12	Sun	Guwahati
13	Mon	Guwahati : Holy Mass in the Shrine of St Mary Mazzarello
14	Tue	Guwahati : Monthly recollection, Bishop's House, Guwahati
15	Wed	Guwahati
16	Thu	Tura : Celebration of 90 Years of SDB in Garo Hills
17	Fri	Retreat for Clerics/Brothers
18	Sat	Retreat for Clerics/Brothers
19	Sun	Retreat for Clerics/Brothers (Holy Mass : Adinggre - Guwahati)
20	Mon	Retreat for Clerics/Brothers : International Teachers' Conference, DBI
21	Tue	Retreat for Clerics/Brothers
22	Wed	Retreat for Clerics/Brothers: Blessing & inauguration of DB College Diphu
23	Thu	Guwahati : Renewals
24	Fri	Guwahati : Perpetual Vows - Provincial House (10.30 am)
25	Sat	Guwahati : Installation of the new Provincial (6.00 pm)
26	Sun	
27	Mon	
28	Tue	
29	Wed	
30	Thu	
31	Fri	