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DECEMBER 2024

ING NEWSLINE

SALESIAN PROVINCE OF GUWAHATI



Province Community Day 2024

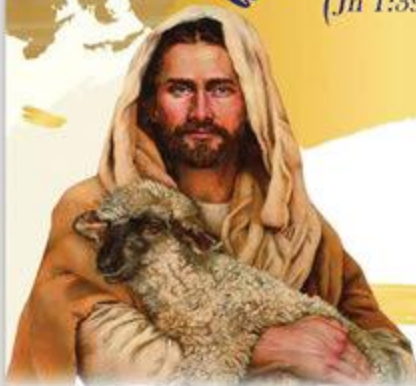


Come and See!
(Jn 1:39)

Salesian Province of Mary Help of Christians, Guwahati

Vocation Camp 2024 ~ 2025

for Boys Class VI Passed and VII Passed



- 1st Vocation Camp : 18 - 21 December 2024 : *Bosco Mount, Tura*
- 2nd Vocation Camp : 28 - 31 December 2024 : *Don Bosco, Tangla*
- 3rd Vocation Camp : 07 - 10 January 2025 : *Don Bosco, Damra*
- 4th Vocation Camp : 11 - 14 January 2025 : *Don Bosco, Kokrajhar*
- 5th Vocation Camp : 16 - 19 January 2025 : *Don Bosco, Baithalango*

For Detail Contact: Your Parish Priest or Fr Marcus Lakra SDB (Vocation Promoter) Mobile: +91 8638677838

ING NEWSLINE CONGRATULATES OUR NEW PRIESTS!



Deacon Jonas Kujur
Date of Ordination: 5 January 2025
Venue: Dimakuchi, Assam



Deacon Jecky G Sangma
Date of Ordination: 11 January 2025
Venue: Ampati, Garo Hills



Deacon Philemon Puma
Date of Ordination: 16 January 2025
Venue: Umswai, Assam



Deacon Birendra Dungdung
Date of Ordination: 18 January 2025
Venue: Singarmunda, Odisha



Deacon Kolombiya Rabha
Date of Ordination: 25 January 2025
Venue: Matia Majerburi, Assam



Deacon Cherak Callistus M Sangma
Date of Ordination: 8 February 2025
Venue: Shallang, West Khasi Hills



Deacon Jerbasius Xalxo
Date of Ordination: 9 February 2025
Venue: Mazbat, Assam

Editorial...



The December issue of *ING Newslines* comes at a time when we are still assessing the impact of the synod on synodality. Its conclusion on 27 October 2024 was a defining moment in the Catholic Church's renewal journey, with its second session solidifying the commitment to "walking together." The synodal process has evolved from a theoretical concept to a lived reality through unprecedented lay participation, including women and youth as voting members. This demonstrates that synodality is more than a buzzword. It is a new way of being Church.

The unique cultural mosaic of our northeastern region presents distinctive opportunities for implementing synodality. Its Indigenous communities possess rich traditions of communal decision-making that naturally align with synodal principles. However, implementing synodality can be challenging. Traditional authority structures must be balanced with new participatory models, while cultural and linguistic barriers require innovative approaches. These challenges present opportunities to develop new leadership models and contribute to the Church's broader understanding of intercultural dialogue.

For us Salesians, Don Bosco's preventive system, which emphasises reason, religion and loving kindness, can provide a natural framework for implementing synodality. It can also create the trust that is so essential for authentic synodal processes. Our Salesian youth involvement and community-building tradition can provide valuable experience in managing diverse faith and cultural backgrounds. We can integrate synodal principles into all our ministries and develop specific action plans at various levels. This transformation has special significance for our province, with its diverse cultural landscape.

For our province, the synodal journey represents an opportunity to deepen the Salesian charism and strengthen our mission. Success requires deep listening to the Holy Spirit, closer walking with those we serve and effective Gospel witness in diverse regional contexts. Our educational institutions, parishes and youth centres should become laboratories of synodality, where young

people can actively shape their faith journey through genuine dialogue and leadership development. Such a transformation demands patience, wisdom, and careful discernment while maintaining focus on our Salesian charism.

This edition of *ING Newslines* begins with a message from the provincial calling upon the Salesians to make their communities like the stable in Bethlehem: simple places where God's presence is tangibly felt, young people are welcomed, and the marginalised discover their dignity as God's beloved children. It then covers significant developments across educational, religious, and community initiatives within our province. Key highlights include updates from Don Bosco College in Chapaguri, developments at the Catholic Mission in Barpeta Road, and celebrations of the Province Community Day. The formation and non-formal sectors show growth through activities at Bosco Mount, Rongkhon, and various skill training programmes throughout the province. The Church section features information about the upcoming Jubilee 2025. Special attention is given to the Brothers' Day celebration.

The issue highlights the broader Salesian activities, including the preparations for the forthcoming General Chapter and SYM FEST 2024-2025 in Chennai. It also brings alive the memory of some of the veteran Salesians through some anecdotes associated with them. Literary contributions are highlighted through a book about Bishop Orestes Marengo and advertisements for two new publications: *Xorogor Poth* and *Seek the Lord*. The newsletter provides practical information about upcoming vocation camps, details the rector major's Strenna for 2025, and congratulates the Deacons of the province on their priestly ordinations. It concludes with seasonal Christmas and New Year greetings to the readers.

As we enter the holy season of Advent, then move on to Christmas, and the year 2024 slowly ebbs away, the editorial team wishes all readers a merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year! May the babe of Bethlehem shower upon you peace, health, and prosperity throughout the coming year!

Fr Joy Kachappilly

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The Message from the Provincial



Dear Confreres,

As we have entered the sacred season of Advent and soon approach the joyous celebration of Christmas, I write to you with a heart full of gratitude and hope. This special time invites us to pause and reflect on the profound mystery of the Incarnation - God's extraordinary choice to enter human history in the most humble of circumstances.

The Christmas narrative continues to challenge and inspire us. In a world that often equates worth with wealth and influence with power, we celebrate a God who chose to be born in a manger. This divine paradox reminds us of the essence of our Salesian charism - to find God in the simplicity of daily life and in the faces of the young people we serve.

Don Bosco's understanding of Christmas was deeply practical and pastoral. He saw in the infant Jesus a model of how God approaches humanity - with gentleness, vulnerability, and an invitation to relationship. Our founder recognised that education and evangelisation must follow this pattern: meeting young people where they are with loving kindness and patient understanding.

As we conclude 2024, I invite each community to consider how we have embodied this Salesian spirit:

- How have we made our presence among young people a sign of God's tender love?
- Where have we created spaces of welcome and family spirit in our institutions?
- How have we accompanied those most in need of hope and support?

The past year has brought our province its share of challenges and graces. We have seen new initiatives take root, witnessed the growth of our youth ministry, and experienced the strengthening of our educational communities. Each of these developments bears testimony to God's faithful presence among us.

In the coming year, let us draw inspiration from our Blessed Mother, who embraced God's plan with complete trust. The new year presents us with fresh opportunities to:

- Deepen our commitment to the preventive system in our educational settings
- Strengthen our formation programmes for young Salesians
- Enhance our outreach to the peripheries of our society
- Foster vocations through joyful witness and intentional accompaniment

We are called to be 'Christmas people' throughout the year. We must become bearers of joy, hope, and God's tender love to all we encounter. Let our communities be like the stable in Bethlehem: simple places where God's presence is tangibly felt, young people are welcomed, and the marginalised discover their dignity as God's beloved children. Our mission should create homes where love prevails, schools where life values are transmitted, playgrounds where friendship and joy are experienced, and parishes where the Gospel is lived and celebrated.

I particularly remember our sick confreres, those facing challenges, and our senior members who have given their lives in service. May the infant Jesus bring them comfort and peace! Let us also pray for the young people entrusted to our care, their families, our lay collaborators, and all members of the Salesian Family. Together, we form one large family united in Don Bosco's charism.

May the articles in this issue of *ING Newslines* help us better understand and appreciate our confreres and communities! Let us journey together with the optimism and trust that characterised Don Bosco, supporting one another in our vocation to be signs and bearers of God's love for the young!

I extend my heartfelt wishes to each of you for a blessed Christmas and a grace-filled New Year! May the Prince of Peace fill your hearts with joy and your communities with renewed vigour for our shared mission!

Fr Sebastian Kuricheal sdb
Provincial

The Salesian Congregation is preparing for a momentous event in its history: the 29th General Chapter (GC29), scheduled from February 16 to April 12, 2025, at the historic Valdocco location in Turin. Under the theme “Passionate about Jesus Christ, dedicated to young people,” this gathering will bring together 269 participants, including 224 Chapter members (209 priests and 15 lay confreres) and 45 support staff. The choice of Valdocco as the venue holds deep symbolic significance, representing a return to the Congregation’s roots and spiritual heritage.

The preparatory phase has seen extensive documentation work, with contributions from provinces worldwide. The materials, comprising 125 files in English, 77 in Italian, 66 in Spanish, and 31 each in French and Portuguese, have been carefully categorised by core areas and juridical issues. Two crucial pre-chapter commissions have conducted intensive work: the Juridical Commission (1-10 September 2024) examined proposals from 85 provincial chapters and produced 15 summary sheets, while the Pre-Chapter Commission (17-28 September 2024) organised language groups to analyse provincial contributions.

The Chapter’s schedule has been thoughtfully structured to balance spiritual development with practical work. It will begin with a three-day retreat led by Fr Pascual Chávez Villanueva and a programme that includes weekly reflections and discernment sessions on Saturdays led by Fr Stefano Martoglio. Sundays will feature excursions designed to foster spiritual and fraternal bonds among participants. A crucial week in March (24-29) will be dedicated to elections, guided by Fr Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori, and the Chapter will conclude in Rome on 12 April 2025, coinciding with the Jubilee Year.

The spiritual dimension of GC29 has received particular attention. A special prayer has been developed and set to music, emphasising the



importance of maintaining a deep connection with the Salesian charism. The Chapter’s methodology follows a three-stage Listening, Interpreting, and Choosing approach inspired by Pope Francis’ 2018 Youth Synod. This approach is enriched by integrating *Lectio Divina* from the Salesian Biblical Association and regular spiritual guidance sessions.

Organisational innovations have been implemented to ensure efficient and sustainable management of the Chapter. These include modern technological solutions for documentation and communication, enhanced translation capabilities, and a comprehensive support system for participants. The preparation process has emphasised practical efficiency and spiritual depth, reflecting the Salesian tradition of combining action with contemplation.

Two sophisticated web portals have been developed: an initial platform for collecting provincial chapter materials and a main portal for chapter management. Each participant will receive a configured tablet and an Application Programming Interface (API) available on the new platform that will allow the real-time translation of contributions. Fr Gianni Rolandi will coordinate the translation services, which will operate in five official languages (Italian, French, Spanish, English, and Portuguese) through on-site interpreters and remote translators.

The working document has already been distributed to the chapter members. The first core area, focusing on the animation and care of each Salesian's real life, emphasises the importance of centring religious life on Jesus Christ. The document acknowledges the strengths and challenges in this area, noting the positive impact of strong Eucharistic and community prayer life while expressing concern about the balance between spiritual and apostolic activities. Special attention is given to the care of vocations, emphasising the need for ongoing formation and accompaniment, particularly during moments of crisis or vulnerability. The document also addresses the critical issue of community life, highlighting the importance of strengthening fraternal bonds while acknowledging the challenges of ageing communities and cultural differences.

Formation and accompaniment emerge as central themes, with the document calling for better integration between initial and ongoing formation. Particular emphasis is placed on developing qualified spiritual guides and implementing comprehensive measures for preventing and responding to abuse cases. The document recognises the need for specialised formation in contemporary issues, including digital culture and ecological awareness, to ensure effective ministry.

The second core area examines the relationship between Salesians, the Salesian Family, and laypeople, emphasising the importance of shared mission and collaboration. The document advocates for enhanced participation of laypeople in both mission and governance, calling for a clear definition of roles and responsibilities. It addresses the challenges of education and evangelisation in contemporary society, emphasising the need to integrate traditional Salesian approaches with new methodologies, particularly in digital spaces and ecological initiatives. Financial sustainability receives significant attention, with the document stressing the importance of maintaining service



to the poor while ensuring responsible resource management.

The third core area focuses on governance structures, proposing several significant changes to enhance the Congregation's effectiveness. This includes a detailed examination of the General Council's composition, regional organisation, provincial and local administration, and the role of various secretariats. The document presents important considerations regarding leadership roles, particularly in light of the recent papal instruction allowing non-clerics to hold certain leadership positions. This raises fundamental questions about the Salesian tradition and identity, requiring careful discernment.

The document emphasises decision-making processes at various levels, from local communities to provincial administration. It emphasises the need for greater clarity in authority structures and responsibilities, particularly in interprovincial bodies and formation houses. The role of lay people in governance structures is also given particular attention, reflecting the Congregation's commitment to shared responsibility in the Salesian mission.

Throughout the document, the emphasis is on balancing fidelity to the Salesian charism with the need to respond effectively to contemporary challenges. This includes adapting formation programmes, developing new approaches to youth ministry, and embracing digital technologies while maintaining the essential elements of Salesian identity. The document

concludes by calling for careful discernment in implementing changes, particularly regarding governance structures and leadership roles, while focusing on the Congregation's primary mission of serving young people.

As the supreme authority of the Congregation, GC29 represents a crucial moment for discerning God's will in contemporary times. It is a powerful symbol of unity in diversity, bringing together Salesians worldwide to reflect on their mission and charism. The careful preparation, integration of modern technology, and emphasis on spiritual guidance demonstrate

the Congregation's commitment to maintaining its foundational values while adapting to contemporary challenges in service of young people.

This General Chapter occurs during a significant period coinciding with the continuation of the 200th anniversary celebrations of Don Bosco's dream at nine years of age and the 2025 Jubilee Year. These concurrent events add deeper meaning to the Chapter's work, connecting it to the Congregation's historical roots and the broader Church's spiritual journey.

HIGHER EDUCATION SECTION: DON BOSCO CENTRE, CHAPAGURI

Fr Abhilash Vadakkekara

In India, higher education, particularly at the college level, represents a complex tapestry of opportunities and challenges. The country boasts over 1,000 universities and 40,000 colleges, making it one of the largest higher education systems globally, yet access and quality remain significant concerns. While prestigious institutions like the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) maintain rigorous standards and produce globally competitive graduates, many other institutions struggle with outdated curricula, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of qualified faculty. The system is characterised by intense competition for limited seats in premier institutions, with millions of students annually facing the pressure of entrance examinations. In recent years, there has been a push towards modernisation through initiatives like the National Education Policy 2020, which aims to introduce more flexibility, interdisciplinary approaches, and industry-relevant skills into the curriculum. However, challenges persist in bridging the gap between academic training and employability, with many graduates requiring additional skill development to meet industry requirements.

The Salesians of Don Bosco have made significant contributions to India's higher education landscape since establishing its presence in the country in 1906. Through their network of institutions, the Salesians have particularly focused on providing quality education to underprivileged youth, combining academic excellence with character formation and practical skills development. Several Salesian higher education institutions have emerged as centres of academics, particularly in technical education, social work, and humanities. The distinctive educational approach, the preventive system, creates an environment that nurtures intellectual and personal growth. The institutions have successfully bridged the urban-rural educational divide, offering modern educational facilities and opportunities in less-developed regions.

The Salesians established one similar institution of higher education at Chapaguri, Bongaigaon. Its origin goes back to 2015 when the Don Bosco Centre, Chapaguri, Bongaigaon, was opened to train young people from disadvantaged sections of society with skills for livelihood. The centre was built through the kind assistance of Bosco Reach Out (BRO), the social service wing of the



province of Guwahati. Shri Kampa Borgoyary, the then Deputy Chief of Bodoland Territorial Council, laid the foundation stone. Shri Manish Thakur IAS, Commissioner and Secretary, Higher Education, Government of Assam, inaugurated the building while Most Rev. Thomas Pulloppillil, Bishop of Bongaigaon, blessed it on 1 August 2015. The institution was a tribute to St John Bosco on the occasion of the bicentenary of his birth. It was dedicated to the youth of the region by Rev. Fr Thomas Vattathara, the then Salesian Provincial, in the presence of Rev. Fr Thomas Kunnappillil, the then Director of BRO. The first Salesians appointed to the centre were Rev. Fr Joseph Thelekkatt and Br Edward Kujur. Fr Joseph was the Director while Br Edward was the Programme Co-ordinator.

The centre ran skills development courses, such as short-term computer courses, spoken English courses, and hospitality courses, in collaboration with Bosco Reach Out and Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY), an initiative of the Government of India for skills development.

In 2016, the skills development courses gave way to a Junior College named Don Bosco Junior College, Bongaigaon. Fr Alex Kattakayam was appointed the first principal, and Fr Justin Narzary was appointed the vice

principal. The college was affiliated with the Assam Higher Secondary Education Council and offered Arts, Science, and Commerce streams. When Fr Joseph Thelekkatt was transferred in March 2017, Fr Alex was appointed in charge of the centre.

In 2019, the province of Guwahati entered higher education with a Don Bosco degree college at Bongaigaon, beginning with the arts stream for undergraduates. The college is affiliated with Bodoland University (BU) and follows the Choice-Based Credit System (CBCS). Fr Alex Kattakayam was appointed the principal, and Fr Paul Rabha was appointed vice principal. The college is run in collaboration with the Salesian Sisters, and Rev. Sr. Grace Pemila was appointed vice principal. Shri Sarbananda Sonowal, Chief Minister, Assam, formally inaugurated the college on 4 November 2019. Most Rev. Thomas Pulloppillil, Bishop of Bongaigaon, blessed and Rev. Fr Januarius S. Sangma, the then Salesian provincial, dedicated to the youth of the region in the presence of a galaxy of luminaries from various walks of life.

The vision of the college is “the glory of God is human fully alive.” The college offers quality education to each student, with a free, cheerful, and friendly learning environment to acquire knowledge, expertise, values, and interpersonal skills to face life’s challenges. To achieve this

mission, the college aims at an integral and holistic approach to the all-round development of the human person by inculcating in the students the virtues of piety, integrity, freedom, accountability, self-reliance, discipline and altruism. The motto of the college, namely, “Inform, Inspire, Involve and Innovate,” puts succinctly the distinctive educational philosophy and processes envisaged in grooming the students into confident, competent and compassionate human beings capable of making their innovative contributions to human progress and societal well-being.

Today, the centre consists of a Junior college, a degree college, a hostel for boys and a hostel for girls. It runs with a vision to assist the young in the pursuit of ‘virtue and knowledge’ by enabling them to be ‘fully alive’ and live life to the full. It offers a quality education that provides each student with a free, cheerful, and friendly learning environment to acquire knowledge, expertise, values, and interpersonal skills to face life's challenges. It also attempts to impart an integral and holistic approach to the all-round development of the human person by inculcating in the students the virtues of piety, integrity, freedom, accountability, self-reliance, discipline and altruism.

Thirty-five teaching and seven non-teaching staff members serve the college. Most of the teachers are qualified. They are committed to the bright future of young people and spare no effort to ensure that the students achieve excellence. However, it is not easy to recruit good, qualified teachers, as many of them easily get government jobs.

The college offers facilities for games. The campus has a football field, basketball court, volleyball court, and other facilities to help young minds develop physically. Well-furnished science and computer labs also give the students hands-on training and practical knowledge about the subjects they are taught.

At present, the hostel boys are accommodated in the Higher Secondary building. On 17



December 2022, Rev. Fr Benny Basil Plathottathil, the then provincial economist, laid the foundation for the boys’ hostel. The building is expected to be completed by 31 December 2024.

The collaboration of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians consists of two sisters working in the college - one as a vice principal and the other as a lecturer - and running a hostel for the college's female students. There are 75 girls residing in their hostel.

Given the implementation of the New Education Policy, the management intends to introduce more departments and short-term vocational courses in the college. In the future, more infrastructure development will be needed. The college will soon require more classrooms, a well-furnished library, and an auditorium.

The college has sufficient students for higher secondary (XI and XII), but it needs more students for the Degree Programmes. Students prefer Government colleges for graduate Studies. This is an issue all private institutions in the Bodoland Territorial Region face.

The present students’ strength is 729. Among them, 110 Catholic students are studying in the college. Below is the breakdown of students belonging to different categories.

Degree: 176	
Male	91
Female	85
ST	147
OBC	18
SC	02
Hindus	96
Christians	77
Muslims	3

HS: 553	
Male	291
Female	262
ST	451
OBC	62
SC	15
General	25
Hindus	357
Christians	191
Muslims	5

In recent years, several changes have occurred in the Salesian personnel working in the college. In December 2019, Rev. Fr Damien Basumatary joined the Centre as its Director. When Fr Alex Kattakayam was transferred, Fr Abhilash Vadakkekara became the principal and was in charge on 3 July 2022. Fr Alex left for Garobadha on 8 July 2022. Fr Damien Basumatary left the college in June 2022. Fr Paul Rabha left the college on 1 July 2023, and in his place, Fr Sebirence Islary joined the college on 24 June 2023. Fr Cyriac Vettickathadam joined the college on 18 June 2024 as its campus minister.

Despite the various debilitating issues, the college is forging ahead, initiating new avenues in higher education and experimenting with new possibilities in skill-based hands-on training to help the rural youth of the region become passionate harbingers of change and transformation. It is not a mere academic institution pursuing excellence but an incubator nurturing students for integral growth and eventual launch into their trajectories and orbits with apt attitudes and values to pursue their dreams!

The Catholic Legacy of Barpeta Road: Mission Through Time

Fr Amit Chama Lakra

The Catholic Mission of Barpeta Road is the second-oldest institution in the province after Don Bosco School, Guwahati (1922). The region is an ethnic mosaic consisting of the Bodos, the Santals, the Adivasis, the Garos, the Rabhas, and others. It is one of the important traditional cultural centres of the Assamese people. The Catholic Mission was officially established at Barpeta Road in 1936. Its primary aim was to boost the evangelisation work among the Bodos.

Before the work of Catholic missionaries among the Bodos, the Baptists and the Lutherans had established contacts with them. As early as

1909, the American Baptists and, a few years later, the Lutherans baptised some Bodos in the Goalpara area and set up a few Christian communities among them. The Salvatorian missionaries who pioneered the Catholic mission work in Assam (1890-1915) made efforts to reach out to the Tea Garden workers of Assam.

But it was with the arrival of the Salesians of Don Bosco in Assam in 1922 that greater attention was given to evangelisation work among the indigenous people of lower Assam. Guwahati was established as the Mission Centre

in 1922, which looked after the entire region of the present-day State of Assam. The first contact of Catholic missionaries with the Bodos began in 1928. In that year, Fr Leo Piasecki baptised a few Bodos in the Udalguri area. In 1931, Assam was divided into two Mission districts, namely Guwahati and Dibrugarh. In 1932, Fr Vincent Scuderi, who was in charge of the Mission district of Guwahati, baptised some Bodos in Bengtol region. In 1933-34, Fr Aloysius Ravalico and Fr Anthony Alessi baptised some Bodos in the Mongoldoi area. Fr Orestes Marengo, Fr Theodosio Bonomi and Fr Guido Colussi toured several villages of Bodo settlements and baptised several of them.

In 1936, Barpeta was detached from the Mission district of Guwahati. Fr Michael de Valle and Fr Thomas Lopez were given charge of developing the Mission of Barpeta. That was the official beginning of the Catholic Mission of Barpeta. In 1939, Fr Ernest Zanon assumed charge of the Barpeta Mission. Fr Zanon learnt the Bodo language and printed the prayer book and catechism book in the Bodo language. Fr Marengo had prepared the catechism earlier. For a short period (1946-47), Fr Zanon left Barpeta for Sonada. In 1947, he returned to Barpeta and worked hard for the growth of the Church in the region. Fr Felix Bollini, Fr Leander Aiuso, Fr Patrick Burns and others assisted in developing the Barpeta Mission.

In 1953, Fr Remus Morra took over from Fr Zanon as rector of Barpeta Mission. With Fr Morra's arrival, the Mission established the well-known dairy farm. The purpose was to support the boarding and the Mission and teach people the usefulness of animal husbandry as a means of livelihood. Fr Morra served Barpeta Mission for several decades. He died at Barpeta on 29 April 1985 at the age of 67.

Over time, the vastness and the Catholic population of Barpeta Mission were reduced with the creation of several new parishes. Today, the original territory of the Barpeta Mission

comprises the diocese of Bongaigaon and several parishes in the Archdiocese of Guwahati. The following parishes of Bongaigaon diocese were carved out the Barpeta Mission: Bengtol (1966), Doomni (1972), Soraibil (1973), Baganpara (1980), Gosaigaon (1984), Barama (1985), Dotma (1986), Bashbari (1989), Bongaigaon Bhowlaguri (1994), Balamguri (1995), Garubhasa (1996), Kokrajhar (1999), Rangalikhata (1999), Chapaguri Cathedral (2000), Bijni (2000), Kwilamwila (2001), Khagarpur (2001), Kathalguri (2002), Bahalpur (2003), Gauripur (2003), Sorupeta (2004), Magurmari (2005), Kachugaon (2005), Manas Bansbari (2005), Mushalpur (2005), Nalbari (2008), Baghapara (2010), Bahari (2010), Dadgari (2010), Panbari (2013), Baradi (2016), Tungkubari (2026), Basugaon (2016), Subankhata (2018) and Borpara (2020). The parishes of Kumarikatta (1977), Goreswar (2009), Tamulpur (2002), Nagrijuli (2004) and Sukanjuli (2020), now belonging to the Archdiocese of Guwahati were also part of the original Barpeta Mission.

According to the 2024 parish statistics, 35 families live in the parish, which has a Catholic population of 115.

When Fr Kuriala Chittattukulam was the parish priest, a centre was opened to train the young girls of the parish in various trades, which would fetch them employment. Later, this initiative was abandoned. In 2013, the province started an Apostolic School to educate and to form the young candidates aspiring to become Salesians. However, this project was abandoned in 2020. The buildings used by the hostel children and the apostolic boys were converted into a school building to house the CBSE school.

The Salesian presence at Barpeta, which began in 1936, was officially recognised as a canonical community in 1975 under the patronage of St Francis de Sales. The Salesians who worked as parish priests are Fr Vincent Scuderi, Fr Ernest

Zanon, Fr Remus Mora, Fr Joseph Parippil, Fr Kuriala Chittattukalam, Fr John Chellanthara, Fr Chacko Kuthur Vellattukara, Fr Michael Bhengra, Fr Muct Tirkey, Fr Santosh Minj, Fr Andreas Panna, Fr Marcus Lakra, Fr Francis Basumatary, Fr Anugrah Tete and Thadeus Kujur. Other Salesians who served the Barpeta Mission in various capacities: Fr Isidorus Fioredda, Br Maurice Dhan, Fr Joseph Zubizarreta, Fr Chandy Edamala, Br Tarcisius Kujur, Fr Cornelius Panna, Fr Louis Kerketta, Fr George Kuzhipallil, Fr John Bosco Minj, Fr Thomas Punnolikunnel, Fr Jose Valiaveetil, Fr Vincent Xalxo, Br Alexius Condpan, Fr Barnabas Mardi, Fr Nicodem Aind, Br Aloysius Indwar, Fr Justin Narzary, Fr Threnius Sangma, Br Aloysius Indwar and Fr Victor Tigga.

In 2014, a Skill Training Centre was constructed on the campus to empower and provide employment to young people in the region. However, the outbreak of Covid 19 and the subsequent lockdown discontinued the Centre's activities in 2020. Several attempts have been made to revive the Centre, but they have yet to materialise.

Today, the centre runs two schools. The Assamese-medium school, opened in 1943 by Fr Zanon to educate the children of the locality, was provincialised in 1991. Its present strength is 550. Three hundred boys and 250 girls study there. Fourteen teachers and five non-teaching staff work there.

To provide English education to the students of the locality, St Joseph High School was opened under the State Education Board of Assam (SEBA). However, in 2018, with the intention of affiliating it with the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), the name of the school was changed to Don Bosco School. Fr Threnius Sangma became its first principal. Within a brief period, Fr Threnius was transferred, and Fr Kuriala Chittattukalam was appointed the principal. However, in July 2019, Fr George Mudakkampuram was appointed the principal. Fr Kuriala continued to assist Fr

George and supervise the orderly closing of St Joseph High School. Later, Fr Kuriala was transferred to the Don Bosco Institute in Guwahati.

Since Fr George's arrival, the emphasis has been on improving the school's infrastructure. With its magnificent front view, spacious corridors, hall, and well-designed classrooms, the school is becoming an important educational hub in Barpeta. It has obtained affiliation from CBSE and is progressing in every field.

At present, Don Bosco School has 880 students, 568 boys and 312 girls. Six Catholic children also attend school. Thirty-two teachers work in the school. However, as there are not enough rooms and labs, the process of upgrading the school into a higher secondary school is going slowly. The entire campus is litter and plastic free. Another unique practice in the school is a five-minute meditation for all the students in their respective classes before taking attendance.

Fr George Mudakkampuram and other members of the community initiated the renovation of the Salesian residence this year (2024), which involved changing the roofing and remodelling the rooms.

At present (December 2024), the Salesian community of Barpeta consists of Fr Jonas Toppo (Rector and parish priest), Fr George Mudakkampuram (principal, CBSE school) and Fr Zacharias Minj (headmaster, provincialised school).

The Missionary Sisters Mary Help of Christians reached the Mission in 1954. St Mary's Convent, which belongs to them, was officially inaugurated on 16 October 1954. The Sisters run two schools for girls, one in Assamese and the other in English, and a hostel for girls. In 1993, the Sisters of the Secular Institute of Disciples of Don Bosco started a house at Manas Bashbari, one of the then sub-centres of the parish, but now it is a parish. They run a dispensary and are involved in evangelisation and catechesis.

Province Community Day Celebrated

Fr Pradeep Ekka

Article 42 of the Regulations of the Salesian Society states that once a year, the local and provincial communities gather around the rector and provincial to celebrate the community feast day as a sign of fraternal communion and an expression of gratitude. In keeping with this directive, the Salesian Province of Mary Help of Christians, Guwahati, celebrated Province Community Day with the theme “Walking in the Footsteps of Don Bosco: A Call to Holiness” at Don Bosco Provincial House on 31 October 2024.

At 9.30 am, all the confreres gathered in the Mario Hall for the inaugural programme. Fr Anmol Soreng compered the event. The young Salesians studying at Assam Don Bosco University sang a hymn to the Holy Spirit. Fr Sebastian Kuricheal, provincial; Fr Jose Varickasseril, animator; Br Joby Mani, Fr Jogesh B. Sangma, Fr Marcus Lakra, and Fr Thomas Anikuzhikattil lighted the lamp. Fr Sebastian Ishorary read a gospel passage from John 15:12-17, and Fr Francis Kalariparambil led the gathering to a prayer. Fr Sebastian Kuricheal, provincial, delivered the welcome speech, setting the tone for the celebration.

At 10.00 am, Fr Jose Varickasseril, professor at Sacred Heart Theological College, Shillong, and Assistant Parish Priest of St Dominic Savio parish, Mawlai, gave an animation talk on the

theme. Fr Bivan Mukhim, vice provincial, introduced him to the gathering. Fr Varickasseril developed the theme based mainly on the Biographical Memoirs of St John Bosco and other Salesian literature. He traced the origin of celebrating the community day to the Salesian tradition of gathering confreres for annual conferences of St Francis de Sales, a practice Don Bosco started in 1865. These conferences typically occurred around the feast of St Francis de Sales in January/February (and even later, depending upon Don Bosco’s commitments). They were marked by cheerfulness, brotherhood, and unity. The gatherings allowed directors to share reports about their houses and receive guidance from Don Bosco. This tradition continues today in the form of provincial community days.

The province of Guwahati, established on 17 October 1959, is the third Salesian province in India. Its remarkable growth has led to the creation of two more provinces: Dimapur (1981) and Shillong (2012). The original province began with six regular communities and 24 parishes staffed by European and Indian Salesians. This diversity was seen as a strength, reflecting Don Bosco’s vision of unity in diversity.

The missionary dimension is fundamental to the province’s identity. Don Bosco was passionate about missions, sending eleven missionary expeditions during his lifetime, totalling 158 Salesians. His successors continued this tradition, and subsequent Rectors Major sent thousands more missionaries worldwide. Don Bosco emphasised that missionaries should maintain their identity as Catholic priests and Salesians while adapting to local conditions. He was also sensitive to family concerns while selecting missionaries, as demonstrated when he considered the feelings of the elderly parents of





Fr Bonetti for not choosing him as the leader of the first missionary expedition.

The talk highlighted several key themes from Don Bosco's teachings on vibrant fraternal communities that remain relevant today. The first is the spirit of hard work. Don Bosco saw idleness as the root cause of all evil and praised those who worked diligently. However, he also emphasised the importance of caring for confreres' health and not overworking them. He believed that hard work was the best way to gain society's goodwill and attract vocations to the congregation.

Genuine fraternal love was another crucial element for Salesian communities. Don Bosco stressed the importance of respecting every member of the congregation while concerned about its well-being. He warned against grumbling and complaining, seeing them as destructive to community life. He advocated the need to show appreciation to confreres, believing these strengthened bonds of brotherly love. When corrections were needed, he recommended making them during private manifestations rather than immediate public reprimands.

Piety and integrity were emphasised as essential characteristics of fervent religious communities. Don Bosco particularly stressed the importance of practices of piety, especially

the monthly exercise for a happy death. He advocated moderation in all things, including penances, and emphasised the importance of moral integrity, particularly chastity. Regarding poverty and frugality, he encouraged thrift while ensuring that basic needs were met.

Fidelity to the rules was another cornerstone of Don Bosco's teaching on community living. After obtaining final approval for the congregation's rules in 1874, Don Bosco emphasised that their observance was crucial for the congregation's prosperity and happiness. He insisted that directors make the constitutions better known and demand adherence to their directives, stating that the only way to keep a congregation alive was to observe them.

The recruitment and nurturing of vocations is another major priority for the growth of Salesian communities. Don Bosco identified three necessities for priestly vocation: inclination, intellectual capacity, and good morals. He encouraged frequent reception of Sacraments, showing loving kindness to boys, and maintaining reverent liturgical celebrations as ways to foster vocations. He also promoted vocations to lay brotherhood and advocated for equal treatment of priests and lay brothers in the congregation.

The talk concluded by drawing parallels between the early Christian Church described in Acts of the Apostles and today's religious life. It emphasises how the characteristic features such as unity, leadership, love for those in need, missionary zeal, and willingness to suffer for the faith found in the early Church continue to provide a model for contemporary Salesian life. The province of Guwahati, with its various apostolic activities - parishes, schools, universities, youth programmes, and formation houses - is seen as a modern expression of Don Bosco's mission to serve the young and spread the Gospel.



Fr Jose wished that the province of Guwahati may face its future with hope, drawing inspiration from Don Bosco's example and the early Church's missionary spirit. As the province approaches its platinum jubilee in 2034, it may focus on evangelisation while adapting to contemporary needs through education, pastoral care, and youth development. He also stressed that this mission requires unity of purpose, hard work, faithful observance of religious life, and constant attention to fostering new vocations.

At the end of the one-hour animation talk, with prepared text and copies distributed to all the participants, Fr Cletus Sebastian Pattankulam proposed a vote of thanks, showering deep appreciation for the manner in which Fr Varickasseril conducted the animation. After the animation programme, the participants dispersed for coffee.

Following the coffee break, the felicitation programme commenced in Mario Hall. Fr Pradeep Ekka hosted it. It included an opening song by young Salesians and a presentation by Fr Romanus Barwa. Fr Ethelbert Minj shared his insights on the province as a member of the provincial council.

The day's spiritual highlight was the Holy Eucharist celebrated at St Joseph's Co-cathedral, with Rev. Fr Sebastian Kuricheal, provincial, as the principal celebrant. Fr Nicodem Aind, a provincial councillor,

welcomed everyone to the Eucharistic celebration, and the young Salesians from the Assam Don Bosco University led the singing. Br Athanasius Kerketta read the first reading while Fr Paul Minj led the prayers of the faithful.

Fr Sebastian Kuricheal based his homily on the two readings of the Mass of Don Bosco, namely, Ezek 34:11-12, 15-16, 23-24, 30-31 and Mt 18:1-5. He began his homily with brief statistics of the province. It was established in 1959 and currently comprises 38 institutions and 264 members. The provincial felt that this annual gathering should strengthen bonds between communities and reaffirm their commitment to Don Bosco's charism, providing an opportunity for members from various houses and institutions to share experiences and celebrate their common mission.

Drawing from the prophet Ezekiel's imagery of God as the ultimate shepherd, Fr Sebastian connected this metaphor to the province's 64-year mission of shepherding young people through education and evangelisation. The province's institutions serve as fields where Salesian shepherds cultivate souls through educational initiatives, outreach programmes, counselling, support services, and skill development, all aimed at empowering the marginalised youth.

The province's work is built on two main pillars: education and evangelisation. The educational approach focuses on academic excellence, value

formation, practical skills development, and personal growth through extra-curricular activities. Evangelisation efforts include pastoral care, religious education, social outreach, and interfaith dialogue, all working together to fulfil Don Bosco’s vision of forming “good Christians and honest citizens.”

The provincial emphasised the importance of maintaining a childlike faith and humility in the confreres’ work, as Don Bosco himself exemplified. Fr Sebastian invited the confreres to adapt to modern challenges by embracing technology, addressing mental health needs, promoting environmental stewardship, and pursuing social justice initiatives. To maximise the impact, the province must actively collaborate with lay partners, members of the Salesian Family, other religious congregations, NGOs, and government agencies.

Looking toward the future, the provincial stressed the importance of nurturing new vocations and reinvigorating vocation

promotion efforts. He acknowledged the province’s rich history while emphasising the need to continue evolving and expanding its reach. Fr Sebastian ended his homily with a call for a renewed commitment to Don Bosco’s vision, encouraging members to be good shepherds and joyful educators while serving the young and marginalised under the guidance of Mary Help of Christians, our patroness.

At the end of the Holy Eucharist, Br Joby Mani, a provincial councillor, proposed the vote thanks to all those who contributed to its prayerful celebration. All the participants gathered around the altar for a photo session and then proceeded to the refectory.

The celebration concluded with a cake-cutting ceremony and a fraternal meal at the Provincial House refectory. This fostering of unity and camaraderie among confreres echoed the sentiment that living and working together is fundamental to the Salesian vocation (Constitutions, 49).

Apostolic School: Bosco Mount, Rongkhon

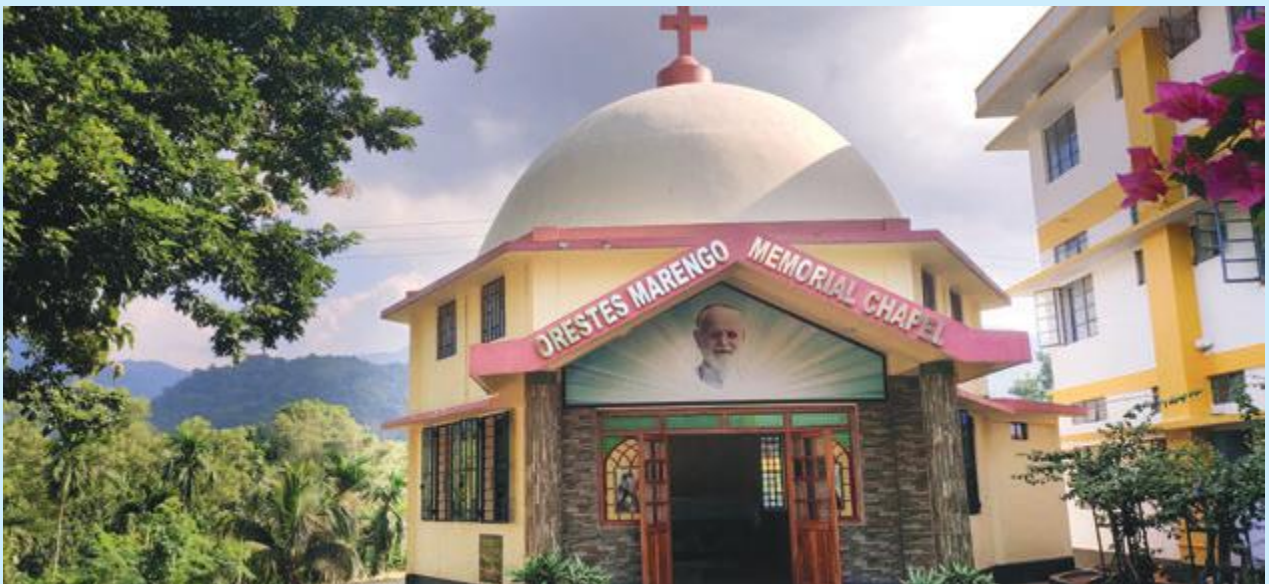
Fr Joy Kachappilly



Bosco Mount, Rongkhon, situated about six km from Tura, is the Aspirantate house of the Salesian Province of Guwahati. It started functioning with the first batches of post-matric, Class XI and Class XII students in 1986. Since then, Bosco Mount has been the nursery of Salesian vocations for the province.

Savio Juniorate, Shillong, opened in 1962 and served as the Aspirantate of Guwahati province for several years. It prepared candidates for Salesian life from Class VII to pre-novitiate. For several decades, after completing Class XII at Savio Juniorate, the aspirants proceeded to the novitiate.

The total number of boys from Class VII to pre-novitiate at Savio Juniorate used to be about 200.



It became overcrowded, and the candidates needed different levels of attention in formation. The need to give more attention to the high school students was also keenly felt. Hence, in 1981, students studying in classes VII and VIII were shifted to St Joseph's Umran. However, Misereor, which had funded Umran as an agricultural school, objected to using it as an aspirantate. Hence, the province had to take the aspirants back to Juniorate.

In searching for a place, the confreres welcomed the decision to start the pre-novitiate house in Garo Hills, especially those working in the region. When the provincial council decided to start the house in Garo Hills, Rev. Fr Mathai Kochuparampil, the then Provincial, requested the Bishop of Tura for a plot of land. There was some hesitancy from the diocese to part with a plot of land beyond Tura on the way to Garobadha. Eventually, Fr Antony Buccieri was asked to purchase a plot, and the present site was bought.

The foundation stone for the building was blessed on 16 August 1984 by Bishop Orestes Marengo. The canonical approval for the house was obtained in 1985. The building was blessed on 17 October 1986. However, the first batch of 7 boys entered the unfinished building on 24 January 1986, along with Fr Francis Fernandez (Dean of Studies), to prepare for the others who came on 6 February 1986. There were 74 boys,

and the first rector was Fr Joseph Kizhakkechennadu (1986-1989). Others who served as rectors in the following years are Fr Roland Kharkrang (1989-1993), Fr Thomas Chengniyaden (1993-97), Fr John Mundaplackal (1997-2000), Fr Jose Vettath (2000-2004), Fr Milon Narjary (2004-2007), Fr Januarius S. Sangma (2007-2008), Fr Milon Narjary (2008-2014), Fr John Chellanthara (2014-2018), Fr Abhilash Vadakkekara (2018-2022) and Fr Mackley Gomes (2022-2024). In 2024, when Fr Mackley was transferred to Snehalya, Fr Benjamin Daimari was appointed the rector.

Other confreres who worked in Bosco Mount are Fr Henry Frassy, Fr Joseph Kunnathukizhakethil, Fr Abraham Vetticad, Fr Thomas Pampadiyil, Fr George Plathottam, Fr Joseph Pananthanath, Fr Edmund Lakra, Fr Anthony Buccieri, Fr Thomas Kunnappillil, Br Eligius Khaiñ, Br Carmel Muscat, Fr Jose Anikuzhikkattil, Fr Isaac Mattappillil, Br Mathew Vazhamplackal, Fr Jose Vettath, Bishop Orestes Marengo, Fr Quirinus syiemlieh, Fr Jonas Toppo, Fr Milon Narzary, Fr Busolin Battista, Fr Marianus Paul Kujur, Fr Anthony Marak, Fr Alex Kattakayam, Fr Michael Bhengra, Fr Francis Hembrom, Fr Peter Khongshun, Fr Dennis Toju Sangma, Fr Gedwin Warbah, Fr Jeevan Lakra, Fr Jose Veliyavettill, Br Mathew Vazhamplackal, Fr Nicodem Aind,



Fr Jose Mariadas Kallinickal, Fr John Vadakkekuzhikattil, Fr Victor Ampanattuvilla, Fr Albert Thyрниang, Fr Xavier Tete, Fr Augustine Edasseritthottathil, Fr Francis Kalariparampil, Fr Zacharias Minj, Fr James Thyрниang, Fr Faustin Robert Lalfakzuala, Fr Hubert Marak, Fr Jose Nadackal, Fr Mackley Gomes, Fr Justin Narzary, Fr Prasad Kalaparthу, Fr Thomas Kochupurackal, Fr Sanjay Aind, Fr Daniel Sangma, Fr Anil Jerome and Fr Kishor Moshahary.

In December 2024, the perpetually professed members of the community consist of Fr Benjamin Daimari (Rector), Fr Quirinus Syiemlieh (Administrator), Fr Anmol Soreng (Dean of Studies), Fr Anthony A. Sangma (Catechist) and Fr Roland Aloysius Halge (Confessor).

As per the recommendation of GC 24, the Ratio (Principles and Norms for the Formation of Salesians of Don Bosco) was revised in 2000. It states that the pre-novitiate should be a separate phase of formation and have an identity of its own. Hence, Bosco Mount was considered an Aspirantate with post-matric, Class XI and XII students. A separate pre-novitiate was opened in 2007 at Mariamnagar, and when the province was bifurcated in 2012, Guwahati province opened its pre-novitiate at Dotma. However, since 2019, high school students have been enrolled in Bosco Mount as aspirants, and

higher secondary students have been shifted to Sirajuli. It has now become an Apostolic school.

At present, 118 aspirants are studying at Bosco Mount. Twenty students are in class 10, twenty-five in class 9, thirty-four in class 8, and thirty-nine in class 7.

The Salesian presence of Holy Cross Parish, Rongkhon, is attached to Bosco Mount. The confreres of Bosco Mount regularly help the parish, and the aspirants conduct oratories in various centres. Holy Cross Parish, Rongkhon, became an independent community in 2016.

The idea of building a cemetery for the confreres who worked in the Garo Hills region crystallised with time. The little hillock of Bosco Mount was chosen for this purpose. From 2018 to 2020, the building was renovated to accommodate more boys and give the entire house a facelift.

On 4 December 2022, Most Rev. Andrew R. Marak, Bishop of Tura, blessed the Bishop Marengo Memorial Chapel. It attracts people from various parishes, women's groups, youth groups, and hostel boys and girls from different institutions. They visit the chapel, pray the rosary or engage themselves in other devotional practices. Some groups organise Holy Eucharist in the chapel, asking the intercession of the Servant of God, Bishop Marengo, for their various needs.

Skill Training Programmes in ING since 2012

Br Joby Mani

Don Bosco began his work with the poor and the abandoned young people of Turin in 1841 when he began to gather them for recreation, religious instruction, Holy Mass and prayers. He eventually acquired a permanent place in the suburb of Valdocco and named it the Oratory of St Francis de Sales. The oratory developed over some time to include a youth centre, a school, workshops for various trades and boarding facilities. At a time when Italy was at the height of industrialisation, and young people flocked to the cities in search of work, Don Bosco emphasised the need to teach these young people some trade so that they could live honourable lives. Thus, technical education became a distinctive mark of Don Bosco and his followers. Wherever the sons of Don Bosco went, they always opened workshops and technical institutes.

True to its charism, when the Salesians came to the northeast, they began a carpentry workshop in Guwahati. By 1928, the workshop was enlarged and became a technical school. Due to a lack of room, the technical school was shifted to Maligaon in 1969. The school envisaged training the students, particularly boys from the Assam plains, in various technical skills. The curriculum to be followed was the same as that of the government ITI, and it was hoped that in the near future, it would seek official recognition. However, the school never received official permission. Hence, non-formal technical education was started in various trades. The school has hostel facilities for about 120 students. Day scholars were also to be admitted for the training. Today, the school offers non-formal training in various trades to those students who are school dropouts and short-term skill training courses through



Barpeta Road

proficiency in life skills and computer applications, leading to campus recruitment and immediate employment.

However, with the establishment of DB Tech India in 2006, the technical education scenario in the province made tremendous progress. With a view to extend and strengthen their services and to facilitate networking among them, all the Don Bosco Technical Institutions, both formal and non-formal in India, came together to form an apex body called Don Bosco Tech (DB Tech). A network of over 330 skill training centres spread across 28 States of India. It provides employment-linked, market-driven vocational courses of short duration to the economically and socially marginalised youth. It is probably the largest non-governmental organisation engaged in technical training in India and has a 100-year-long history of imparting technical and vocational training. A unique feature of DB Tech is that it has institutions under it for both formal and non-formal technical training. While Engineering Colleges, Polytechnics, ITIs and similar institutes are open to those who have the educational qualifications, the non-formal institutes offer job-oriented training (functional vocational training) for the numerous marginalised and neglected youth - school dropouts and others who do not qualify for the formal courses.

Similarly, the Government of India, with a view to transforming India into a more competent, up-skilled, and productive country, initiated several schemes for the benefit of the youth. Some of the



Maligaon

major schemes are as follows: Skill India, launched in 2010 by the UPA Government, was re-launched on 15 July 2015 with the aim of training over 40 crore people in different skills by 2022. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) was launched on 25 September 2014 in order to transform rural poor youth into an economically independent and globally relevant workforce. Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PKVY) is a skill development initiative scheme for the recognition and standardisation of skills with the aim to encourage aptitude towards employable skills and to increase the working efficiency of probable and existing daily wage earners by giving them monetary awards and rewards and by providing quality training to them. Stand-up India was launched on 5 April 2016 as a part of the Government's efforts to support entrepreneurship among women and people who belong to scheduled tribes/castes. Many of these schemes are implemented with the help of State Governments.

By availing of the various government schemes and CSR programmes, in collaboration with DB Tech, the province of Guwahati set up a number of Skill Training Centres in different areas of the province in the past few years. Both Don Bosco Institute, Guwahati and Bosco Reach Out, Guwahati, took the lead in implementing these training programmes in many of these Centres. The Salesian presences of Rongjeng, Garobadha, Don Bosco School, Tura, Damra, Mendal, Shashipur, Maligaon, Barpeta Road, Amguri, Bosco Barefoot College, Boko, Don

Bosco Institute, Guwahati, and Don Bosco Social and Technical Training Institute, Tezpur. Most of these presences made use of the existing facilities in order to accommodate the training programmes. However, new buildings were constructed in Mendal, Barpeta Road, and Amguri for skill training. Some of the courses that our Centres offered to the students are Web Design & Development, Automobile Repair, Electrician & Wireman, Carpentry, Tiles Making, Hospitality (Housekeeping, F&B service, Front Office), Machinist, Tailoring, Welding and Fabrication, Motor Vehicle Driving; Short Term Computer Training (CCA, DCA, MS-Office, Hardware, DTP, TallERP (GST). Spoken English, Beauty and Spa Therapist, BPO (Call Centres), RACW (Refrigerator, Air Conditioners, Washing Machine) Repair and Maintenance, etc.

Taking advantage of the opportunities offered by DB Tech and other donor agencies, Don Bosco Technical School, Maligaon, runs several long-term and short-term courses. The programmes span multiple disciplines: computer training (including web development and DCA), automotive training (through partnerships with Yamaha and Tata Motors), skilled trades (electrician, welding, machinist), and service industry training (hospitality and Spoken English). The computer programmes range from six months to one year, while other programmes like the Yamaha two-wheeler training last ten months plus six months of job training. Each programme emphasises practical, hands-on learning and aims to prepare students for



Amguri



Don Bosco Institute, Guwahati

immediate employment in their chosen field. Besides DB Tech, the institution partners with major companies like Yamaha and Tata Motors to provide industry-relevant training and certification, particularly in their automotive programmes. Beyond traditional training, it maintains active community engagement through extension services to NGOs and community-based organisations while also operating small-scale production units in welding, sheet metal works, and lathe machining. Through its dedicated Placement Cell, the institution facilitates job placements. It builds strategic partnerships with employers and financial institutions, ensuring that graduates have strong career prospects through either employment or self-employment opportunities. Over the past few years, the campus has received a fresh look, with the construction of a three-storey building to house the skill training programmes and the renovation of the existing structures.

Prior to imparting vocational education at Don Bosco Institute, Guwahati, vocational training was imparted at Bosco Barefoot College, Boko, for tapping the talents of Rural youth for self-employment under the title Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM). Trades in which training was imparted include Agriculture, Animal husbandry, Livestock and poultry, Electrical Wiring, Muga farming, Carpentry, Masonry, Candle making, spice making, Tailoring, mushroom cultivation, Vermin compost, Weaving, Beekeeping, Bamboo and cane work and screen printing.

Various governmental and non-governmental organisations like UNESCO, DRDA, RGVN, SIRD, Community Polytechnique cell, Block Office, etc., collaborated with DBYES in imparting training. With the success of BBC, Boko DBI ventured out to establish four more Vocational Training cum Production Centres at Amguri, Gossaigaon, Bhooteachang and Barpeta Road to impart vocational Training in skills like tailoring, weaving, carpentry, tiles making, welding, electrician, motor mechanic and driving, etc. and giving them placement and avenues for self-employment.

Over the past years, Don Bosco Institute has collaborated with various agencies (National and International), Governmental and nongovernmental organisations like Cordaid - The Netherlands, ChildAid Network, Germany, Australian Salesian Mission, Salesian Mission USA, Missio Germany, DB Tech, NERLP, ADB, AGCL, Employment Generation Mission, Assam, Assam Skills Development Mission, Assam State Rural Livelihood Mission, State Institute of Rural Development, Meghalaya, SIDBI, NEDFI etc. towards imparting vocational education to the youth of northeast and Assam in particular. Skills imparted include Aviation (Air Hostess, Grand Staff); Hospitality (Front Office Management, Food and Beverage, Housekeeping); Beautician and Spa Therapist; RACW (Refrigerator, AC, Washing Machine), Sales & Marketing, Welding and fabrication, Tiles Making, Tailoring (ISMO), Weaving, Motor mechanic, Motor Driving, Electrical Wiremen, etc. The Institute has been able to train more than 20,000



Mendal

DBSTI, Tezpur

Jorapara

young people and give them placement in reputed companies, thereby helping them to be sustainable and lead decent lives.

Similarly, Don Bosco Social and Technical Institute, Tezpur, established in 2013, offers Certificate courses in Tourism Management in collaboration with Tezpur University, Primary Teacher Training, Computer Programmes like CCA, DTP, Tally, Hardware, Diploma in Computer Application, etc., Spoken English, Guitar Course, Tailoring, and Food and Beverage to young people who frequent it.

Bosco Reach Out, the social service wing of the province, undertakes several rural development and skill-building initiatives in the region. The programmes include the SFURTI cluster development project supporting tribal weavers and artisans in Goalpara, horticultural training for youth in North Garo Hills, skill development programmes for COVID-19-affected migrant workers in carpentry and other trades, weaver skill upgradation initiatives, agricultural exposure visits, sustainable livelihood training at Don Bosco Skill Development Centre, integrated farming system training for marginal farmers, and computer literacy programmes for tribal youth in Umrangso, Dima Hasao and Jorapara, North Garo Hills districts. These initiatives collectively aim to enhance rural livelihoods, promote traditional crafts, develop agricultural skills, and provide technological literacy to marginalised communities, with a particular focus on tribal populations, women, and unemployed youth.

All the courses offered in these centres help young trainees to enhance their workplace skills and effectiveness as employees. Many of our centres are not considered just vocational training centres but as all-inclusive skill training providers. Over the years, the centres have enhanced their efforts towards complete skill training initiatives for unemployed youth of all categories by developing specific curricula and plans for employment opportunities. This has resulted in offering many new and attractive skill training courses that are of varied interest to a diverse group of people in the region. Together with the skills, the trainees are also given opportunities to improve their physical, social, psychological and religious proficiencies so that they are better prepared to face the world.

Unfortunately, with the outbreak of Coronavirus and subsequent lockdown, coupled with other issues, the flourishing skill training programmes in the different centres of the province took a beating. Many of the centres could not be revived. For instance, since 2020, the skill training programmes in Barpeta Road have been closed down, and even today, they have not yet been reopened. The Bosco Barefoot College in Boko is in a dilapidated condition. Still, a modest number of skill training programmes are taking place in centres at Mendal, Jorapara, and Amguri, DBSTI in Tezpur, and DBI and Maligaon in Guwahati. However, with new DB Tech projects on the anvil for lower Assam, skill training in the province is poised for a resurgence.

Great Jubilee 2025

Fr Charles Deepen Lakra

The Jubilee Year 2025, announced by Pope Francis, marks a momentous occasion in the Catholic Church's history. It continues a tradition that dates back to 1300 when Pope Boniface VIII proclaimed the first Holy Year. This Jubilee, themed “Pilgrims of Hope,” represents a special year of grace and spiritual renewal for Catholics worldwide. The significance of this event extends beyond mere celebration, embodying fundamental aspects of Catholic theology, social teaching, and pastoral practice.

Historical Context and Meaning

The Catholic Church’s concept of Jubilee draws inspiration from the Old Testament, where every 50th year was declared a time of forgiveness, liberation, and renewed relationship with God and neighbour. In Jewish tradition, this meant the freeing of slaves, the forgiveness of debts, and the restoration of land to its original owners. The Catholic Church adapted this concept into a spiritual time of renewal, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

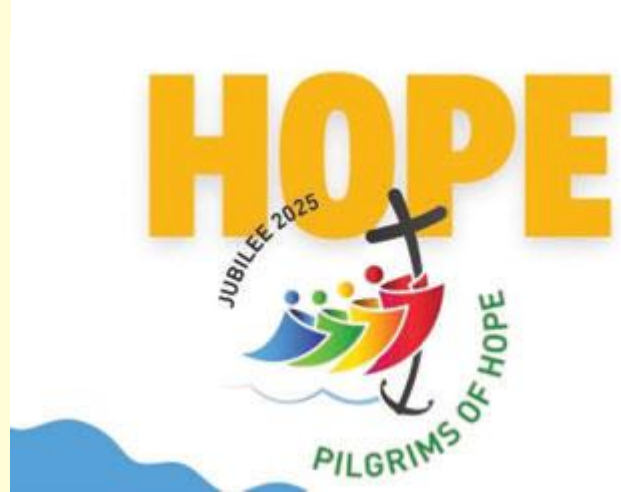
The modern Catholic Jubilee tradition has evolved to occur every 25 years, with special Jubilees called by popes for extraordinary occasions. The 2025 Jubilee follows the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy in 2015-2016, demonstrating the Church’s ongoing commitment to spiritual renewal and social justice in contemporary times.

The Nature of Jubilee 2025

Several key elements characterise the fundamental nature of Jubilee 2025:

Spiritual Renewal

At its core, the Jubilee emphasises personal and communal spiritual transformation. It calls for a



deeper engagement with faith through prayer, sacramental participation, and works of mercy. The focus on being “Pilgrims of Hope” emphasises the journey-like nature of faith and the forward-looking perspective essential to Christian life.

Reconciliation and Forgiveness

A central aspect of the Jubilee is the emphasis on reconciliation - with God, within the Church, and between peoples. The Church offers special opportunities for the forgiveness of sins through plenary indulgences and enhanced availability of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Social Justice and Solidarity

Following Catholic social teaching, the Jubilee emphasises concrete actions to address social inequalities, environmental concerns, and global challenges. This includes initiatives for debt relief, environmental protection, and support for marginalised communities.

Major Programmes and Initiatives of Jubilee 2025

I. Preparatory Phase (2023-2024)

- A. Theological and Pastoral Preparation
 - a. Diocesan Formation Programmes
 - Training sessions for clergy and lay leaders
 - Development of parish-level catechetical materials
 - Workshop series on Jubilee themes and spirituality
 - Special retreats and spiritual exercises
 - Formation of parish Jubilee committees

- b. Educational Initiatives
 - Publication of study guides and theological resources
 - Online learning platforms for Jubilee themes
 - Multimedia materials for different age groups
 - Webinars and virtual conferences
 - Translation of materials into major languages

B. Logistical Preparation

- a. Infrastructure Development
 - Renovation and preparation of major basilicas
 - Enhancement of pilgrim facilities in Rome
 - Implementation of crowd management systems
 - Development of pilgrim rest areas
 - Upgrade of sanitation and medical facilities
- b. Volunteer Programmes
 - Recruitment and training of official Jubilee volunteers
 - Development of volunteer management systems
 - Creation of specialised volunteer teams:
 - Pilgrim assistance groups
 - Language support teams
 - Medical support units
 - Cultural and historical guides
 - Liturgical service teams

II. Core Jubilee Programmes (2025)

A. Liturgical and Spiritual Programmes

- a. Opening Ceremonies
 - Solemn opening of the Holy Door at St Peter's Basilica. It will take place on 24 December 2024. Following the Opening of the Holy Door at St Peter's Basilica, the Holy Doors at the other three major basilicas of Rome will be opened in subsequent days: St John Lateran (25 December 2024), St Mary Major (26 December 2024) and St Paul Outside the Walls (27 December 2024).

- The coordinated opening of Holy Doors worldwide will take place on 29 December 2024.

- Special Papal Mass and blessing
- Global prayer vigils
- Inaugural processions and celebrations

- b. Regular Spiritual Activities
 - Daily Masses in multiple languages
 - Perpetual adoration chapels
 - Scheduled confession times
 - Guided meditation sessions
 - Traditional pilgrim devotions

c. Special Celebrations

- Monthly papal audiences dedicated to Jubilee themes
- Seasonal liturgical celebrations
- Youth gatherings and festivals
- Cultural and artistic events
- Interfaith prayer services

B. Pilgrimage Programmes

- a. Traditional Roman Pilgrimage
 - Guided visits to four major basilicas
 - Organised walking routes through Rome
 - Historical and spiritual commentary
 - Prayer stations and reflection points
 - Cultural heritage experiences
- b. International Pilgrimages
 - Coordinated pilgrimages from different countries
 - Special programmes for national groups
 - Cultural exchange opportunities
 - International youth pilgrimages
 - Elderly and disabled pilgrim services

C. Social Justice and Charitable Initiatives

- a. Global Outreach Programmes
 - International debt relief campaigns
 - Environmental protection projects
 - Refugee support initiatives
 - Food security programs
 - Healthcare access projects
- b. Local Community Service
 - Parish-based charitable projects
 - Support for local vulnerable populations
 - Community development initiatives

- Educational support programmes
- Housing assistance projects

D. Digital and Virtual Components

- Online Platform
 - Virtual pilgrimage experiences
 - Live-streaming of major events
 - Interactive prayer and reflection tools
 - Digital confession preparation guides
 - Online community forums
- Mobile Applications
 - Jubilee event schedules
 - Pilgrim guidance systems
 - Prayer and meditation resources
 - Digital pilgrim passport
 - Community networking tools

III. Special Events and Celebrations

A. Thematic Gatherings

- Youth Events
 - International youth festival
 - Young adult faith conferences
 - Youth service projects
 - Cultural performances
 - Sports and recreation events
- Family-Focused Programmes
 - Family pilgrimage packages
 - Intergenerational activities
 - Marriage renewal ceremonies
 - Family counselling services
 - Children's spiritual programmes

B. Cultural and Academic Events

- Symposia and Conferences
 - Theological conferences
 - Social justice forums
 - Interfaith dialogues
 - Cultural heritage seminars
 - Environmental stewardship workshops
- Artistic Celebrations
 - Sacred music concerts
 - Religious art exhibitions
 - Theatre and dance performances
 - Film festivals
 - Literary events

IV. Post-Jubilee Implementation

A. Documentation and Archive

- Recording and Preservation
 - Collection of testimonies
 - Photo and video documentation
 - Publication of proceedings
 - Archive of digital content
 - Creation of commemorative materials

B. Legacy Programmes

- Continuing Initiatives
 - Ongoing charitable projects
 - Permanent prayer programmes
 - Community service networks
 - Educational resources
 - Digital platform maintenance
- Evaluation and Planning
 - Impact assessment studies
 - Best practices documentation
 - Future planning recommendations
 - Resource allocation strategies
 - Long-term program sustainability

V. Programmes in the Local Churches

In the **Archdiocese of Guwahati**, the Archbishop has designated St Joseph's Co-Cathedral, Panbazar, St Francis De Sales Shrine, Narengi, Don Bosco Shrine, Gojapara and Sacred Heart Church, Nagaon as special places of prayer and pilgrimage. In the other dioceses where our province is situated (Tura, Diphu, Bongaigaon and Tezpur), bishops have not yet designated churches for pilgrimages.

Conclusion

Jubilee 2025 represents a significant moment in the life of the Catholic Church. It combines traditional spiritual practices with contemporary concerns and methods. Its comprehensive spiritual renewal programme, social justice initiatives, and cultural engagement offer opportunities for meaningful participation at both individual and communal levels. As the Church moves forward in the 21st century, this Jubilee serves as a reminder of the enduring relevance of faith traditions while addressing modern challenges and opportunities for spiritual growth and social transformation.

The Salesian Brothers' Meet at Kokrajhar

— Br Athanasius Kerketta —

On the sidelines of the feast of St Artimedes Zatti, which was celebrated on 13 November, the Salesian Brothers of the province gathered at Don Bosco School, Kokrajhar, on 16-17 November 2024 for their annual meeting. The programme commenced with the arrival of Salesian Brothers, FMA Sisters, Salesian Cooperators, and three Pre-Novices. The event was held in the multipurpose hall of Don Bosco School, Kokrajhar. Br Paul Makri, convenor of the meeting, welcomed the gathering with introductory remarks. It was followed by the reading of the Word of God by Br Firstjoy Sutong from the Gospel of St John 15:12-17, emphasising the commandment of love. Br Paul Makri led the opening prayer. Br Joby Mani, Fr Francis Basumatary, Cooperator Monoronjon Basumatary, Sr Albina Guria FMA, Br Bryce Fernandez, and Br Athanasius Kerketta lit the ceremonial lamp, marking the commencement of the meeting. Fr Francis Basumatary, rector of Kokrajhar, extended a warm welcome to all participants, highlighting Kokrajhar's reputation as a city of peace. Speaking of the diversity of the parish, Fr Francis said that it comprises Bodo, Santhal, Garo, and Adivasi Catholics. He also shared the life history and work of St Artimedes Zatti.

Br Joby Mani animated the meeting with insightful thoughts on the theme "Lay Religious and its Challenges in the Present Context." He began by recalling the memory of Br Angelus Tete, who attended the previous meeting in Sirajuli but passed away on 22 March 2024.

In his animation talk, Br Joby said that the laity and lay religious hold a vital position in the Church's mission of evangelisation, participating actively in Christ's work through their unique vocations. Their role extends beyond mere attendance at liturgical



celebrations, as they collaborate meaningfully with clergy in apostolic endeavours, decision-making processes, and the liturgical life of the Church. Through their daily witness of Gospel values in their communities and workplaces, they become living testimonies of Christ's love, engaging in charitable works and actively participating in Catholic organisations that serve the broader community and advance the Church's mission.

Br Joby was of the opinion that the universal call to holiness, which extends to all baptised faithful, should find special expression in the distinct role of the laity and lay religious, who are uniquely positioned to sanctify the secular world. Through their professional commitments, family responsibilities, and daily activities, they transform ordinary work into extraordinary opportunities for evangelisation and spiritual growth. This sanctification of secular spaces requires a deliberate and conscious effort to maintain a personal relationship with Christ, achieved through regular prayer routines and spiritual practices that prevent their faith from being overwhelmed by worldly concerns. The integration of faith and daily life becomes possible when lay people



and lay religious maintain this vital connection to their spiritual foundation.

For lay religious, in particular, ongoing formation and spiritual direction are essential elements that sustain their vocation and ensure their continued growth in holiness. Regular spiritual direction provides necessary guidance and accountability, helping them navigate the challenges of maintaining their religious commitment while engaged in secular activities. This commitment to personal spiritual development, combined with daily prayer routines and devotional practices, enables them to fulfil their unique calling to transform the temporal order according to God's plan. Through these intentional practices and their faithful witness in the world, lay religious and the laity become effective instruments of evangelisation, bringing Christ's presence into every sphere of human activity.

Br Joby also highlighted the challenges and opportunities that the Salesian Brothers experience in the province. They face significant challenges in their vocational journey, beginning with the complex process of discernment in a culture where priestly vocations are often more highly valued. Formation and education must be carefully balanced to meet both spiritual and professional requirements. At the same time, the pervasive influence of clericalism can sometimes lead to

feelings of exclusivity or marginalisation within religious communities. Brothers must navigate the delicate balance between their faith commitments and secular responsibilities, particularly in educational institutions and technical training centres where they serve. The rapidly changing needs of young people in northeast India, coupled with diverse cultural contexts and increasing technological influences, require Brothers to adapt their evangelisation approaches and ministry styles constantly. Additionally, maintaining a consistent prayer life amidst busy schedules and overcoming periods of spiritual dryness pose ongoing challenges to their religious commitment.

However, these challenges also present unique opportunities for growth and innovation in the Salesian mission. The Brothers' position as religious educators and mentors allows them to demonstrate authentic ways of integrating faith and work, offering young people practical models of Christian living. Their involvement in technical education and skill development programmes provides natural platforms for evangelisation and youth ministry. At the same time, their status as non-clerical religious enables them to build closer relationships with lay collaborators and young people. The province's multicultural context offers rich opportunities for developing new forms of

ministry and fostering genuine collaboration across different cultural and religious boundaries. The emphasis on co-responsibility in mission has opened new avenues for Brothers to take leadership roles in various apostolates. At the same time, their unique vocation allows them to witness the universal call to holiness in ways that particularly resonate with young people seeking authentic models of Christian discipleship.

Br Joby moderated the second session, which began at 11.00 am. It was solely attended by the Salesian Brothers and the three Pre-Novices. Perpetually professed members shared their vocation stories, ministries, and fields of work.

The Brothers also reviewed the deliberations of the 9th Congress of the Salesian Brothers of South Asia held at Nitika Don Bosco, Kolkata, from 30 December 2023 to 3 January 2024 and proposed various responsibilities to the provincial and council, including sending Brothers for training and studies. They then dispersed for lunch.

After lunch, the Brothers proceeded to the Pre-Novitiate at Dotma for an interactive session with the pre-novices. During the session, the temporary professed Brothers shared their vocational journeys, experiences, and life stories. The session was followed by tea. Afterwards, the Brothers returned to Kokrajhar for the 6.30 pm Holy Mass, celebrated by Fr Edward D'Souza.

The following day, all the Brothers attended the Holy Eucharist at the parish church and were warmly felicitated by the Parish Council. After the Mass, breakfast was served at the convent, and subsequently, the Brothers departed for their respective destinations.

The Salesian Brother, in the mind of Don Bosco, represents a unique and integral part of the

Salesian religious community, serving as a consecrated lay religious member alongside priests and deacons. This arrangement reflects Don Bosco's original vision of complementarity within the community. Brothers take religious vows and share fully in the community's life, prayer, and work, demonstrating that the Salesian vocation encompasses both ordained and non-ordained members working in harmony. The Brother's vocation is characterised by a deep faith life, emotional warmth, joyful spirit, and humble service in various roles. Their presence brings a valuable secular perspective to daily community life, often attending to practical details that enable other community members to focus on their primary duties. One of their most distinctive contributions is their embodiment of fraternity within the community. Young people and lay associates particularly relate to the Salesian Brothers as dedicated religious people who combine professional expertise with pastoral care. Their vocation demonstrates that consecrated religious life can be fully lived out in a non-ordained state, enriching the community through their unique combination of practical service, fraternal presence, and spiritual commitment. This integration of roles helps maintain the complete vision of Salesian consecrated life as envisioned by their founder.

In the province, there are fifteen Salesian Brothers. Of these, ten are perpetually professed and five are temporary professed. The perpetually professed Brothers are Br Joby Mani, Br Michael Kindo, Br Benedict Sangma, Br Sunil Kerketa, Br Nirmal Ekka, Br Benjamin Induar, Br Firstjoy Sutong, Br Bryce Fernandez, Br Paul Makri and Br Godfrey Ekka. The temporary professed Brothers are Br Bajanai Lating Kupar, Br Peter Mark, Br Sanjit Topno, Br Athanasius Kerketta and Br Philip Amsong.

SYM FEST 2024-25

Young People as Agents of Change

Fr Bivan Rodrigues Mukhim

The Don Bosco SYM FEST 2024-25, an impressive gathering of about 1500 young people, is scheduled to take place from 29 December 2024 to 1 January 2025 at Sacred Heart College, Tirupattur, Chennai province. The event, centred around the theme “Young people as Agents of Change: Anchored in Hope,” aims to bring together 100 young people each, aged 18-30, from all the Salesian provinces across India and the South Asian countries of Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, accompanied by 10 SDB and Lay animators, and 35 young people from each of the seven FMA provinces. It will embody the continuing legacy of St John Bosco’s vision for the transformation of youth.

The Salesian Youth Ministry (SYM) is based on the legacy of Don Bosco, who established the Salesian Congregation in 1859. Born in 1815, Don Bosco dedicated his life to supporting young people, particularly those at risk. The Salesian Congregation operates in over 136 countries worldwide.

At the core of SYM lies the transformative educational philosophy known as the preventive system, which integrates reason, religion, and loving-kindness to create a nurturing

environment for young people’s growth. This ministry operates through a network of educational institutions, youth centres, parishes, and social outreach programmes worldwide, focusing on forming “honest citizens and good Christians.” The ministry’s approach is particularly distinctive in its emphasis on creating a family-like atmosphere where young people feel welcomed, valued, and supported in their journey toward personal and spiritual maturity.

Central to the Salesian Youth Ministry’s mission is its commitment to serving the most vulnerable and at-risk youth, following Don Bosco’s example of reaching out to marginalised young people. The ministry implements it through a holistic development framework encompassing spiritual formation, academic education, professional training, social skills development, and character building. Programmes are designed to be dynamic and engaging, incorporating elements of play, celebration, and creative expression alongside formal learning and spiritual guidance. This comprehensive approach helps young people discover their potential, develop their talents, and become active agents of positive change in their





communities while staying true to the Salesian tradition of joyful spirituality and practical Christianity.

The festival's programme has been thoughtfully structured to provide a comprehensive experience of growth, learning, and celebration. The opening day will feature a grand inauguration ceremony, a solemn Eucharist and various province-wise competitions. The second day focuses on educational sessions covering topics such as the Salesian Youth Movement in South Asia, youth and integral ecology, and the impact of social media on young people. The third day, coinciding with New Year's Eve, will include sessions on life choices, constitutional living, and a peace and unity rally, culminating in cultural exchanges and welcoming the New Year with a Eucharistic celebration. The final day will conclude with evaluations, a closing ceremony, and prize distribution.

SYM FEST operates to develop "able and noble youth for an empowered and enriched human society." This vision is supported by a comprehensive framework of objectives, including holistic youth development, spiritual growth facilitation, relationship building, social engagement, life skills development, civic participation, and environmental stewardship. The event emphasises five key pillars of SYM spirituality: extraordinary execution of daily duties, celebration of joy and optimism, personal relationship with God, community approach with synergy, and social and political commitment.

The implementation of SYM's objectives is organised through four regional divisions: the southern region (INK, INM, and INT), the northeast region (ING, INS, and IND), the western region (INB, INP), and the central region (INH, INN, and INC). Each Salesian institution functions within the framework of Don Bosco's oratory, serving as a welcoming home, a spiritual centre, an educational institution, and a playground for fostering fraternity and equality.

The event is meticulously organised under the leadership of Fr Don Bosco Lourdusamy, president, and Fr Patrick Lepcha, chief organiser. They are supported by a comprehensive team that includes programme secretaries, finance teams, accommodation coordinators, and various other functional teams. This organisational structure ensures the smooth execution of all event aspects, from logistics to spiritual activities.

SYM FEST 2024-25 aims to create a lasting impact by equipping youth with values of justice, peace, and harmony. The event is designed to develop leadership and organisational skills, foster community-centred approaches, build resilience, and create effective change-makers for societal transformation. Through cross-cultural interactions and national integration activities, participants are expected to emerge as transformed individuals ready to contribute positively to society.

As the event approaches, the organising team, led by experienced coordinators and supported by dedicated volunteers, stands ready to create a transformative experience for all participants. The festival represents a movement towards building a new generation of youth leaders anchored in hope and prepared to be agents of positive change in their communities and beyond.

All in the Family

Excerpts from *All in the Family 0.2*

Fr Felix Bollini was at the Golaghat railway station on our First Independence Day on 15 August 1947, when spirits were high, and slogans aimed at foreigners were not so complimentary. One young lad, not knowing that Fr Bollini was an Italian and thinking him to be an Englishman, shouted: “Foreigner, go back.” Fr Bollini, without flinching, said to the young man: “You are free today, but I have taught your father (mentioned the name of the father of the young man) to be free long before this. When you go back home, ask him.” The exuberant crowd quieted a little before marching off the platform.

Fr Felix Bollini was the Prefect at Don Bosco Technical School, Shillong. It was his turn for the goodnight talk to the community. Towards the end of the night prayer, Br John Colombi sidled to Fr Bollini and whispered: “Please do not say anything about my birthday tomorrow.” “Oh! Is that it? All right, all right, Brother,” assured Fr Bollini. Dutifully, Fr Bollini walked up and said: “Br Colombi told me not to tell you anything about his birthday tomorrow. So, I shall not.”

Fr Remus Morra was the parish priest of Barpeta Road for many years. Why would he often skip going to Tezpur for the customary monthly recollection at the Bishop’s House? “It is too much to go to Tezpur only for venial sins,” used to be his reply. “And if I have mortal sins, something may happen to me on the way. Then?”

One morning, in the Mission at Barpeta Road, Fr Remus Morra and Fr Joseph Zubizeretta were having their breakfast. One of the boarding boys came rushing into the refectory and shouted: “Father, please come to the church; something strange is happening.” Fr Morra rushed out, followed by Fr Zubizeretta. They found a man sharpening a knife and a boy all bound, hands and feet, lying at the altar of Our Lady. It was later found that the man wanted to sacrifice his son. Fr Zubizeretta, a strong man, hit the man and overpowered him while Fr Morra snatched the boys away. The police, who were sent, came and took the man into custody, and the mother of the boy took her boy. Later, the man and the boy were baptised. The boy was christened Balidan (sacrifice).



Fr Felix Bollini



Fr Remus Morra

Fr Ernest Zanon had completed his term as rector in Don Bosco, Guwahati, and was transferred to Dibrugarh. Fr Patrick Burns was appointed to succeed him in Guwahati. On the morning of departure, Fr Burns accompanied Fr Zanon to the railway station to see him off. The train whistled, the signal changed to green, and the train was about to roll out. Just before stepping onto the train, Fr Zanon put his hand into his cassock pocket, pulled out a bunch of keys and handed them to Fr Burns with some instructions. Then, he warned him, saying: “Remember not to delay handing the same keys over to your successor.”

Fr Joseph Arokiaswamy had Fr Noel Kenny as his vice-principal for many years. One evening, at the table, they debated a point of grammar, whether it should be “A History,” as Fr Joseph said it should be, or “An History,” as preferred by Fr Kenny. Neither could convince the other. Finally, Fr Kenny said: “You may be right. But I prefer “An.”

Immediately, Fr Joseph shot back: “If you prefer An (Anne), you may go to St Mary’s.” Fr Joseph was punning on the words ‘An’ and Mother ‘Anne,’ the principal of St Mary’s College, Shillong.

Once, Fr Joseph Arokiaswamy, acclaimed principal of St Anthony’s College, Shillong, was going down by car from Shillong to Guwahati. At one point, the car stopped short in the middle of the road to give right of way to a lizard that was in a hurry going about earning its livelihood.

Looking straight ahead of him, Fr Joseph commented: “That lizard is a female.” Astonished at such a deep knowledge, a back-seater asked how Fr Joseph was so sure of himself. “Did you not see it flicking its tongue?” was all that Fr Joseph said.

Masood Khan, a student at St Anthony’s College, Shillong, when Fr Joseph Arokiaswamy was the principal, and his friends were taking a break between their examinations just outside the college building. Masood was smoking a cigarette. Out of nowhere, the principal appeared and stood behind him. Masood expected fire and brimstone to rain down. All that Fr Joseph said was: “How is it going, my son?” Masood found his feet again on firm ground. All that Masood could say about that moment was: “It made me feel so good.”



Fr Patrick Burns



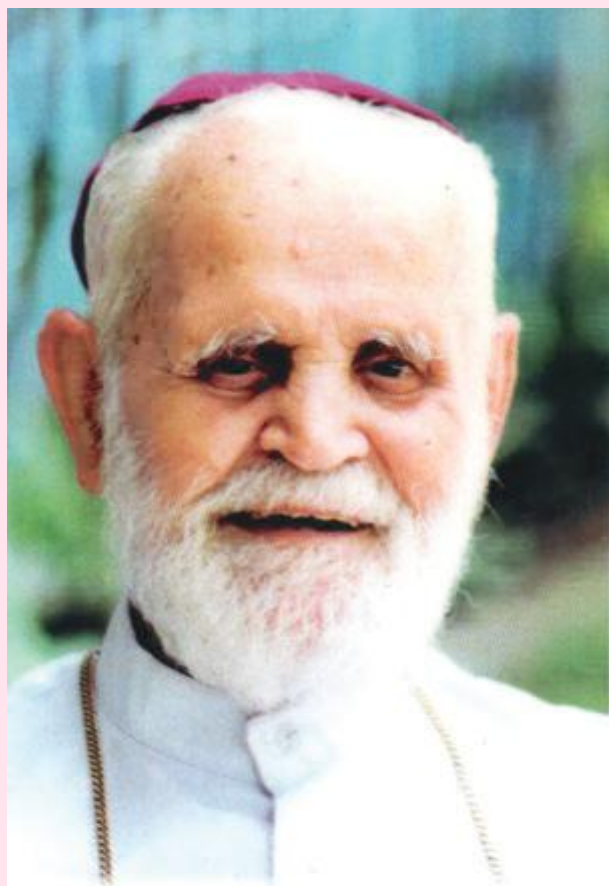
Fr Noel Kenny



Fr Joseph Arokiaswamy

Romanus Barwa, ed., *Memoirs of Bishop Orestes Marengo: Northeast India's Incomparable Missionary*, vols 1 & 2 (Guwahati: Don Bosco Publications, 2024).

Fr Bromio Ch. Marak



Servant of God

Bishop ORESTES MARENGO sdb

Born in Italy in 1906 the Servant of God, Orestes Marengo reached the North East in 1923. He died at Tura in 1998, having lived 75 years of faithful missionary life, endearing himself to one and all.

Memoirs of Bishop Orestes Marengo: Northeast India's Incomparable Missionary is a precious book in two volumes to understand the person of bishop Marengo and to have a firsthand report on the missionary adventures of early Salesians in northeast India. Bishop Marengo wrote down his missionary memories at the urging of his superiors and friends despite never having kept a diary or chronicles. He expressed hesitation about the task, noting that writing has always been more challenging for him than physical labour. The memories are recorded purely from recollection, which may result in some critical details being omitted while less significant ones included. Though the writing lacks chronological and logical order, he hopes it might inspire others to develop an interest in missionary work or pursue a missionary vocation.

Fr Romanus Barwa, who edited the *Memoirs* to mark the centenary of the arrival of bishop Orestes Marengo to northeast India, recounts the personal memories and testimonials about bishop Orestes Marengo's ministry in Dokmoka during the 1950s, as told through family stories and community recollections. The narrative begins with an account of Fr Romanus' grandfather, Mr Mathias Barwa, who fondly remembers helping bishop Marengo across the Dikrutpi River during his missionary journeys from Tezpur to Dokmoka via Salana Mission Centre. He shares two significant stories that demonstrate why bishop Marengo is revered among the Adivasi community: one about his apparent ability to bring rain during a drought through his prayers and another about his remarkable memory in his later years when,

despite being nearly blind, he could still recall the names of people he had baptised decades earlier. Throughout these volumes, bishop Marengo is portrayed as a profoundly devoted shepherd who formed strong bonds with the Adivasi community, particularly those who had migrated from Rangamati Tea Garden, and whose ministry left an indelible mark on the people of Dokmoka.

The entire work is published in two volumes. The first volume chronicles bishop Marengo's early life and ministry, beginning with his work as a regent brother in Guwahati and later as a priest. His dedication to missionary work was evident in his extensive travels to the Bhutan Hills and Kumarikata region, where he focused on ministering to the marginalised, particularly the migrated Adivasi community. As the first bishop of the Tezpur diocese, he significantly expanded the Church's presence by establishing new mission centres and strengthening existing ones while successfully engaging with the Bodo community.

The second volume specifics his pivotal roles as the first bishop of Dibrugarh and apostolic administrator of Tura, where bishop Marengo faced considerable challenges with limited priestly personnel. Despite opposition, he successfully strengthened the Adivasi communities' faith in Dibrugarh, expanded missionary work into Nagaland, and gained access to the previously closed territory of Manipur. In Tura, he focused on developing the faithful and the clergy, establishing new mission centres, and addressing social issues like hunger and poverty. His final role as diocesan procurator involved providing financial support for the diocese's growth and development.

Let us briefly summarise the two volumes under the following heads:

Early Life and Formation (1906-1932)

Bishop Marengo's early life was deeply influenced by Salesian spirituality, beginning

with his mother's attendance at Don Bosco's funeral. Growing up in his hometown, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians played a crucial role in shaping his religious formation. At the same time, his parish priest, Mgr Falletti, strongly supported the Salesians. Witnessing Cardinal John Cagliero's visit in 1918 left an indelible impression on young Marengo.

His education at Valdocco from 1919 to 1923 proved transformative, as he studied near the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians. During this period, he encountered influential Salesian figures, including Fr Paul Albera, the then Rector Major, Fr Philip Rinaldi, and Fr Peter Ricaldone, who were then members of the General Council. Br Palestrino and Fr Piscetta particularly exemplified the Salesian virtues that would shape his future ministry. Although he initially desired to serve as a missionary in Ecuador, divine providence directed him toward Assam instead.

In December 1923, Marengo embarked on his missionary journey, travelling from Italy via Venice to Bombay, then Calcutta, and finally reaching Guwahati. He arrived in Shillong on 22 December 1923, where the existing Salesian community and other religious congregations warmly welcomed him. His formation years began with his novitiate in January 1924, during which he balanced his philosophical studies with teaching duties and assistance in schools. He completed his practical training at Don Bosco Guwahati, working primarily with Adivasi students, before finishing his theological studies in Shillong and being ordained to the priesthood in 1932.

Early Ministry and Mission Work (1932-1945)

Following his ordination, Fr Marengo's first assignment as a priest was in Guwahati, where he undertook extensive touring to visit scattered Catholic communities, with a particular focus on Adivasi communities in tea gardens. His

ability to learn multiple languages enabled him to serve different ethnic groups effectively. In 1933-1934, he was assigned to the Dibrugarh Mission, where he served approximately 15,000 Catholics across more than 100 communities. His work involved regular visits to tea gardens and villages, improving census and documentation of the Catholic population, and working closely with tea garden managers to serve Catholic workers.

From 1936 to 1945, Fr Marengo took on formation work, being appointed novice master at Bandel. He later moved to Sonada with novices and philosophy students, where he maintained a strong missionary spirit while focusing on formation. During World War II, he even contributed to the education of Italian prisoners, demonstrating his commitment to service regardless of circumstances.

A special focus on the Adivasi Catholics from the Chota Nagpur region marked his ministry among different communities. He helped these communities maintain their faith while adapting to their new environment, addressing challenges such as alcoholism and poverty, and supporting education for Adivasi children. His work with the Bodo community proved remarkably successful, as he learned their language and customs, helping to establish strong Christian communities while maintaining a careful balance between Christianity and traditional culture.

Episcopal Journey and Leadership in Dibrugarh and Tezpur (1951-1969)

A significant turning point came in 1951 when Fr Marengo was appointed bishop of Dibrugarh, though he reluctantly accepted this responsibility. After expressing his hesitation to his superiors, he sought guidance from rector major Fr Peter Ricaldone, whose encouragement ultimately led to his acceptance. His episcopal ordination took place on 24 December 1951 in Turin, attended by his

mother and former teacher, Sr Catherine Zannone. He officially took charge of the Dibrugarh diocese in May 1952, facing immediate challenges that included establishing new mission centres, addressing personnel and resource shortages, navigating government restrictions, and learning multiple languages. In 1964, when the diocese of Tezpur was established, bishop Marengo was appointed its first bishop.

His approach to leadership was characterised by collaboration, adaptability, patience, and forward-thinking. He demonstrated remarkable administrative skills while maintaining deep spirituality and cultural sensitivity. These qualities proved essential as he worked to establish six new mission centres, build convents and girls' schools, renovate the Tezpur cathedral, and expand educational institutions. He successfully managed the transition from foreign to Indian clergy, developed collaborative relationships with diocesan priests, maintained good relations with government officials, and built essential financial support networks.

Mission Work in Manipur and Nagaland

One of bishop Marengo's most significant achievements was opening previously restricted areas in Manipur and Nagaland to Catholic missionaries. This required careful navigation of government regulations and building relationships with officials, particularly Chief Commissioner Mr Mathew. His work among different tribal groups proved highly successful, especially with the Tangkhuls, who were among the first major tribal groups to accept Catholicism. Young people from this community helped spread the faith, while preparation of prayer books in local languages strengthened their religious formation.

The Lotha tribe saw significant development under Fr John Larrea, who is called "The Lotha Father." His work included developing catechism and prayer books, establishing

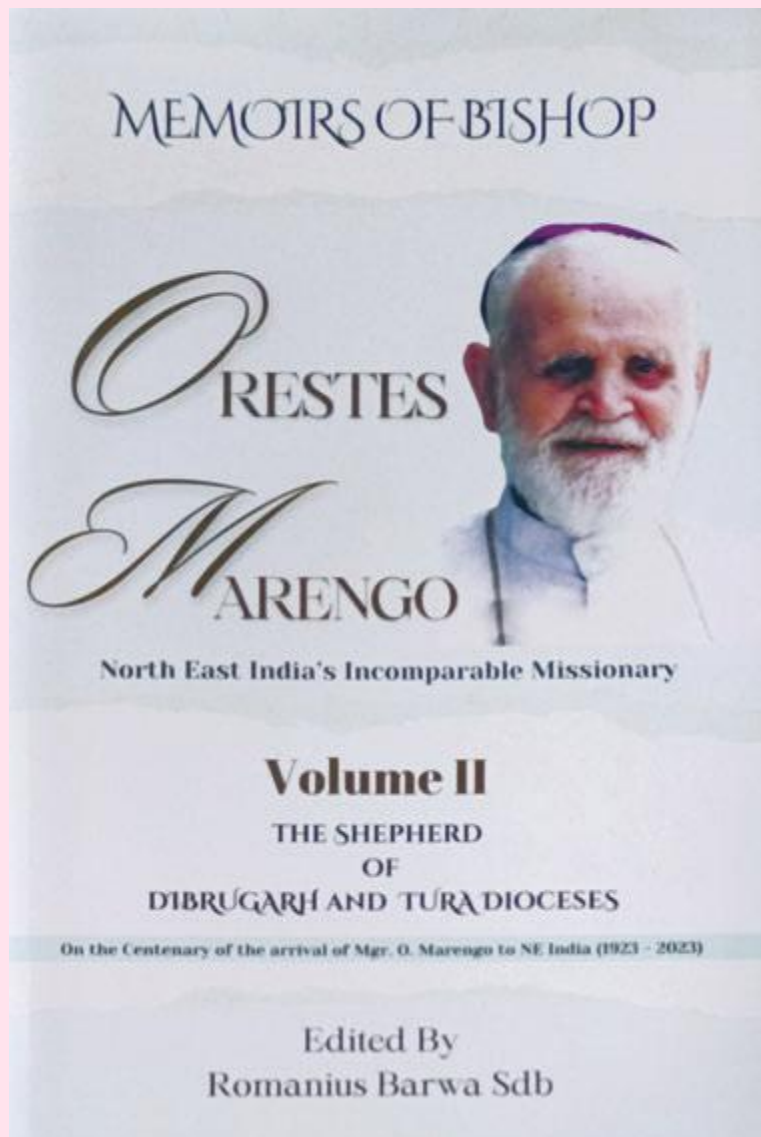
boarding schools, and gradually overcoming initial opposition. The Mao tribe proved particularly receptive to the Catholic faith, with entire villages converting to Christianity. This led to the establishment of schools and institutions, resulting in the development of strong Catholic communities.

However, these successes came with significant challenges. American Baptist missionaries initially resisted Catholic presence, publishing anti-Catholic literature and creating tensions in communities. These relations gradually improved with the growth of ecumenical spirit. Political issues, particularly the Naga independence movement, affected mission work, while government restrictions on movement and security concerns in border areas required careful navigation of complex political situations.

Apostolic Administrator of Tura Diocese (1969-1979)

The development of the Tura Diocese represented another major phase of bishop Marengo's work, with the establishment of several key mission centres. Baghmara, despite its challenging border location and natural disasters, served a sizeable Catholic population with schools and convents. Rongjeng, under Fr Busolin's leadership, developed educational institutions and served numerous communities despite resource constraints. Williamnagar became a strategic centre with robust educational institutions serving a growing Catholic population.

The work in the Garo Hills presented unique challenges, including widespread poverty among tribes, limited economic opportunities, and dependence on *jhum* cultivation. Infrastructure challenges were significant, with poor roads, limited electricity and water access, and inadequate medical facilities. The rugged terrain and climate extremes further complicated mission work. Personnel shortages



remained a constant challenge, with ongoing needs for priests, religious sisters, and local vocations.

Key mission activities centred on education, with schools established at all levels and hostels built for students. Social services included medical care through dispensaries, relief work during disasters, and community development initiatives. Pastoral care involved regular visits to communities, sacramental ministry, training of catechists, and spiritual formation programs.

Support Systems and Lasting Legacy

Bishop Marengo's work was supported by various religious congregations, with the Salesians forming the primary workforce. At the same time, the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians focused on education and healthcare, and the Sisters of Christ Jesus engaged in various ministries. Individual missionaries made unique contributions, including Fr Aloysius Ravalico, a pioneer in Manipur, Fr John Larrea, an expert in tribal ministry, and Fr George Stadler, a worker among the poor. Financial support came from European and American donors, charitable organisations, and local benefactors.

His lasting legacy includes the opening of new mission territories, the establishment of educational institutions, the building of strong local churches, and the training of local leadership. His contributions to language work, infrastructure development, and community building created a strong foundation for the future. Perhaps most importantly, he prepared for local leadership, established sustainable institutions, built strong communities, and created support networks that continue to benefit the region today.

Bishop Marengo's memoirs provide a comprehensive view of Catholic missionary work in northeast India during a crucial period of transition. The volumes document the challenges and achievements in establishing and developing the Church in the region, offering valuable insights into the complexities of missionary work and the importance of cultural sensitivity, adaptability, and persistent dedication in building lasting religious and social institutions.



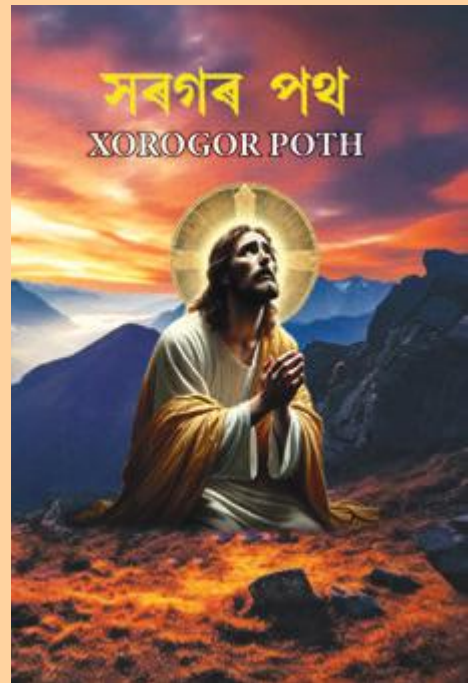
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M E R R Y

Christmas

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